Attractions of Monasticism:
A Comparison of Four Late Antique Monastic Rules

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Chapter One
Solitude Versus Community

Salvation has long been the quest of countless individuals. In the early medieval period, certain followers of western Christianity concerned themselves with living ascetically ideal lives in order to reach redemption. This type of lifestyle included a withdrawal from society. To many, solitude could lead to the eventual obtainment of the ascetic goal. Solitude, however, was not the only requirement for those who desired a spiritual lifestyle. Individuals who longed for purity of heart and Christian reward would only yield results by keeping several other aspects of Christianity in mind, “Key notions…are…the importance of scripture, both as a source of ideas and, through recitation, as a means to tranquility and self-control; the value ascribed to individual freedom…and the awareness of God’s presence as both the context and the focus of work and prayer.”1 Together, a solitary lifestyle and the freedom that accompanies it, the importance of scripture, and the everlasting presence of God came to characterize the existence of those who strove to work towards complete austerity.

In this thesis, I hope to explore one fork of the ascetic path – monasticism. Communal monastic living proved to be popular in the late antique and early medieval periods. The prominence of the institution spurred the creation of many different organizational methods throughout the western world. Often, a monastery’s way of life was written in a rule, or manual, that detailed a monk’s schedule, responsibilities, and sanctions. Monastic communities used the rules to guide their organization and structure, “Without a rule no monastery can endure. Its spirit governs the attitude of the monks; it

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also defines the characteristics of their art.\textsuperscript{2} A study and analysis of monastic rules reveals what was expected of monks.

With each month of study during the past year, I became increasingly interested in monasticism because of its unique characteristics. Living as a monk goes against what I and many others would consider a normal life. As a senior in Rutgers College, I care about my own physical and mental well-being and expect others to hold the same values. To me, a well ordered life entails building upon my sense of personal worth. I hope to develop intellectually and socially for the remainder of my life as I encounter wider circles of people and new ideas.

A monk, however, gives up the ability to direct the course of his or her life. Instead of working towards self-improvement, as I do on a daily basis, a monk’s chief concern is self-denial. Monasticism goes against everything I have chosen to dedicate my life to. I am repelled by the low status of women and distressed by the suppression of individuality seen in monastic rules. As a Ukrainian Catholic, however, I am intrigued by the dedication of monks and their steadfast belief in Christianity.

Despite my concerns about monasticism, the purpose of my thesis is not to attack this fundamental institution. I am genuinely curious to discover the reasons medieval Christians found monasticism attractive. Monks have given up technological advantages to live within monasteries since the late antique period. They exchange family, opportunity, and exploration for self-denial and difficulty. Most of the research I encountered focused on reporting how monasteries functioned. I, however, would like to reveal why monasteries were viewed as attractive institutions. I was motivated to explore monasticism in this thesis because of a genuine interest in discovering the many

\textsuperscript{2} Wolfgang Braunfels, \textit{Monasteries of Western Europe}, 9.
inspirations of a monk. In order to do so, I have organized my thesis into five chapters. Chapter One, *Solidarity versus Community*, presents two modes of asceticism, eremitism and monasticism. Chapter Two, *Schools of Art*, introduces four monastic rules that played prominent roles in the development of medieval monasticism - the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, John Cassian’s *Institutes*, the *Rule of the Master*, and the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Chapter Three, *Terms of Association*, compares the four rules by means of six areas of exploration - admission, daily structure, clothing, bathing, obedience, and sanctions. Chapter Four, *Benedictine Appeal, Influence, and Legacy* discusses the importance of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* while Chapter Five, *Conclusion*, offers closing remarks about self-fashioning and monastic choice. A discussion of monastic inspiration is included within each of the chapters and begins with an analysis of two ascetics, Antony and Pachomius.

To properly begin a discussion of monasticism, one must understand why communities of monks came to be established. The West Roman Empire began to decline in the fourth century after a series of invasions by Germanic warlords and was “succeeded by a cluster of unstable barbarian kingdoms.”3 The deterioration of the empire continued throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, “Italy had been subjected to a century of settlement by the Ostrogoths, at the end of which the peninsula was plunged into a prolonged and destructive war by Justinian’s effort to recover it for the East Roman Empire. Siege and counter-siege had gone far to reducing the city of Rome to ruins, inhabited by a much shrunken population.”4 It is within this context that monasticism began to flourish. The *Rule of Saint Augustine*, John Cassian’s *Institutes*, the

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Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict were each written in reaction to the social crises plaguing the Mediterranean throughout the late antique and early medieval periods. Monastic communities were inhabited by monks who turned to organized Christianity for guidance during prolonged and universal political trauma.

All medieval monastic communities had a vested interest in asceticism, practicing extreme abstinence and self-denial in the hopes of reaching spiritual salvation. Two means by which to achieve spiritual perfection arose towards the end of the third century. Devout Christians chose to either live alone or within the confines of a monastic community. Both of these options required maintaining an ascetic lifestyle composed of “renunciation of marriage, personal property, and the ordinary pleasures and comforts of life, in order to discipline the senses and free the mind for supernatural contemplation.”

Monks held wide, deep-seated social values based upon the teachings of Christianity. As monasticism became increasingly popular, Christian morality spread and appealed to those who became disenchanted with their current way of life, “By the fourth century, the desert of Nitria, on the western edge of the Nile delta, and the wilderness of Judea were peopled by scattered colonies of hermits. For the most part these people were not clergy but lay Christians, who had migrated into the solitude of the waste places from the urban society of late antiquity.” After the legalization of Christianity by Constantine in 313, large numbers of people converted to the religion. The growing vigor of asceticism exemplified the sincere interest people had in learning about Christ’s sacrifice, “Then faith increased greatly in the holy Churches in every land, and monasteries and places for ascetics began to appear, for those who were the first monks had seen the endurance of

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the martyrs.”7 Two types of asceticism, anchoritism and cenobitism, were employed as a means by which to follow Christianity in its purest form. Large numbers of people with a desire to achieve the highest level of spiritual achievement created institutions throughout the Christian world that allowed them to do so. For this reason, an assessment of monasticism and the individuals that took part in it is a helpful means by which to explore a large and influential component of medieval history.

A Christian who chose to become an anchorite renounced all aspects of secular life. Instead, he or she lived in seclusion as hermits and refrained from contact with the outside world, “These were the new confessors, ‘the athletes of God’, who had renounced the security of property and the ordinary comforts of hearth and home to conquer the spirit of the world and scale the heights of contemplative prayer.”8 Similarly, cenobites surrendered personal property in exchange for Christian commitment. In contrast with anchorites, however, cenobites lived in communities and interacted with other monks. The rigorous demands associated with anchoritism and cenobitism required specialization and devotion from the individuals who chose to take up these forms of Christianity. Most Christians were unwilling to give up all possessions, property, and a comfortable lifestyle in order to reach personal salvation. Those who decided to live in solitude or in a monastic community desired atonement for sins and believed asceticism was necessary in order to reach that goal. Solitary and community living were formations established early on in the history of Christianity. These institutions gave individuals the opportunity to learn how best to serve God. Becoming a monk, however, did not secure instant virtue, “So purity of heart was not a guarantee of spiritual achievement or a quality of the

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monk’s final state of perfection, but rather a condition upon which that achievement was based. We have to take one final step in our inquiry, therefore, and ask what, given watchfulness, did purity of heart make possible?”\textsuperscript{9} Numerous monastic communities and orders were established and countless individuals chose to live in seclusion throughout Egypt and the western world. Monks were required to adhere to a strict schedule and relinquish personal desires. Nevertheless, the practice flourished as individuals continued to be attracted to an organized life of religious asceticism.

Monks could practice asceticism by living in solitude or within a community. An eremitic monk lived alone in a secluded location and dedicated his or her life to contemplation and prayer, “In the solitude, beyond the frontiers of human society and freed from its distractions and temptations, a man might through grace achieve that detachment from created things that led him in prayer to the supreme encounter with God.”\textsuperscript{10} Hermits believed isolation from communities could lead to salvation.

The eremitic lifestyle in the third and fourth centuries is best exemplified by Saint Antony (251-356), often referred to as the Father of the Hermits. A detailed discussion of Saint Antony and his life assists the reader in understanding his motivations for becoming a hermit. Saint Antony was an Egyptian monk of “good birth and good means” whose parents were Christian.\textsuperscript{11} They often went to church as a family and Antony is said to have meticulously listened to the texts that were read and diligently paid attention to every spoken word. Although his parents were wealthy, Saint Athanasius, (c. 295-373) the author of Saint Antony’s biography, noted that Antony was more than satisfied with what was available to him and never asked for anything more than was necessary, “Nor

\textsuperscript{9} Rousseau, \textit{Pachomius}, 144.
\textsuperscript{10} C. H. Lawrence, \textit{Medieval Monasticism}, 3.
\textsuperscript{11} Saint Athanasius, \textit{St. Antony the Hermit} (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1924), 1.
again, though he found himself in a fairly rich home, did he worry his parents for rich and varied food, nor care for the enjoyment of it; he was satisfied with what was there, and asked no more.”¹² This statement foreshadows the type of austere lifestyle Antony would lead and promote when he became an anchorite. After Antony’s parents died, he was left at the age of twenty to care for a young sister. He chose to commit himself to an eremitic life after being inspired by words he heard in church.¹³

Less than six months after the death of his parents he was going out to church as usual, and collecting his thoughts he pondered as he went how the Apostles, leaving all things, followed the Saviour; and the people in the Acts who sold their possessions and brought the price and laid it at the feet of the Apostles for distribution among the needy—what good and great hope was laid up in heaven for these. With these thoughts in his mind he entered the church; and it so fell that the Gospel was being read then, and he heard the Lord saying to the rich man (Matt. Xix 21): If thou wilt be perfect, go sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and come follow me and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.¹⁴

Upon hearing this passage, Antony believed that God was speaking to him and that this reading was specifically chosen to guide him towards a withdrawn, Christian life. He gave the members of his village the property that had belonged to his parents and sold all personal belongings. Most of the money acquired from the sale was given to the poor while some was kept to care for his sister. Although Antony began to purify his life by casting off some of his possessions, this was not enough. As he entered church for a second time he heard the following words, “Be not solicitous for the morrow”.¹⁵ Once again, he believed God was speaking to him and quickly gave away the remainder of his

¹² Saint Athanasius, St. Antony the Hermit, 1-2.
¹³ Saint Athanasius, St. Antony the Hermit, 2.
¹⁴ Saint Athanasius, St. Antony the Hermit, 2.
¹⁵ Saint Athanasius, St. Antony the Hermit, 3.
money to the poor while leaving his sister under the supervision of virgins.\textsuperscript{16} In such a way, Anthony’s eremitic life began.

At first, Antony lived in discomfort, refraining from communication or interaction with anyone. This was standard practice for those who wanted to undertake an ascetic life, “For as yet monasteries were not so universal in Egypt, and no monk yet knew the great desert; but each who wished to attend to his soul exercised himself alone not far from his own village. Now there was at the time in the neighbouring village an old man who had practiced the solitary life from youth. Antony, seeing him, was eager to imitate him, so he too at first began to stay in the places near the village.”\textsuperscript{17} Antony put all of his mind, desires, and energy into living as a solitary and concentrated on religious reflection while constantly praying and working with his hands. The money he made from the menial work he did was given to the poor or used to purchase his only source of sustenance – bread. Antony sought out other hermits and questioned them in an effort to gain more knowledge about his chosen profession. From each individual he spoke to, Antony was able to absorb good qualities and incorporate them into his own style of living. Despite differences in talent, each hermit Antony spoke to was connected by a common thread - “reverence for Christ and the same love for each other.”\textsuperscript{18} The individuals he met in his travels as well as the villagers who witnessed Antony’s transformation were all aware of the drive Antony had to succeed as a hermit.

Despite a successful transition into eremitic life, Antony faced temptation. On several occasions, the devil appeared to Antony with reminders of the life he had given up: his property, his sister, his money, and the relaxed lifestyle he used to lead. When

\textsuperscript{16} Saint Athanasius, \textit{St. Antony the Hermit}, 3.
\textsuperscript{17} Saint Athanasius, \textit{St. Antony the Hermit}, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{18} Saint Athanasius, \textit{St. Antony the Hermit}, 5.
such thoughts did not provoke Antony to waiver from his cause, the devil turned to temptations he knew few men could resist.

But when the enemy saw himself powerless in face of Antony’s resolution, and that rather he himself overthrown by his firmness and routed by his much faith and beaten by Antony’s constant prayer, then, placing his trust in (Job x1 II) “the weapons that hang at his waist” and glorying in these (for these are his first snare against the young), he advances against the young man, disturbing him by night, and so besetting him by day that even onlookers could see the struggle that was going on between the two.¹⁹

And yet, Antony turned to prayer and was able to deflect the Devil’s temptations. By thinking of Jesus Christ, the nobility he offers to all who believe in him, and the dignity located within each person’s soul, Antony remained steadfast.

After overcoming his first battle with the devil, Antony decided to move away from the village and reside within far-away tombs. An acquaintance accompanied Antony on his relocation and sealed the door to Antony’s new living quarters. This acquaintance was also given the responsibility of bringing bread to the hermit “from time to time”.²⁰ The devil followed Antony to the tombs and continued the effort of tempting the hermit into sin. Once again, Antony was able to divert the temptations being directed at him and remained adamant in his love and devotion to Christianity. After living in the cave and enduring the devil’s pain for quite some time, Antony decided to move to the desert at the age of thirty-five, “So with firmer and firmer resolution he went to the mountain, and finding beyond the river a fort long deserted and now full of reptiles, he betook himself there and dwelt in it.”²¹ In this location, Antony spent almost twenty years of his life. During this period, the hermit insisted upon complete solitude; he rarely

le left his living quarters. As news of Antony’s living arrangements and religious zeal spread to others, followers and supporters longed to emulate the way in which he displayed his dedication to Christian principles.

After that, many longed and sought to copy his holy life, and some of his friends came and forcibly broke down the door and removed it; and Antony came forth as from a holy of holies, filled with heavenly secrets and possessed by the Spirit of God. This was the first time he showed himself from the fort to those who came to him. When they saw him they marveled to see that his body kept its former state, being neither grown heavy for want of exercise, nor shrunken with fastings and strivings against demons. For he was such as they had known him before his retirement...He was not bashful at seeing the crowd, nor elated at being welcomed by such numbers; but was unvaryingly tranquil, a man ruled by reason, whose whole character had grown firm-set in the way that nature had meant it to grow.  

Although Antony was not the first anchorite to live in such a manner, as exemplified by his seeking out of other hermits while still living within the vicinity of his village, his biography and well publicized story assist in making Antony’s chronicle the best known of the early hermits. After he emerged from his solitary life in the abandoned fort, Antony became a captivating instructor and leader of monasticism.  

Eventually, Antony’s fame became so widespread, it was necessary for the popular hermit to retreat into seclusion once again. He moved to an isolated tract of land near the Red Sea and died in 356 at the age of 105. His influence upon others is undeniable, “That he was everywhere spoken of, and by all admired, and sought even by those who had not seen him – these things are proof of his virtue and of a soul dear to God.” The title often used to refer to Antony – Father of the Hermits – perfectly exemplifies the undeniable

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25 Saint Athanasius, *St. Antony the Hermit*, 120.
influence he had upon the early monastic system, “And so from that time there were monasteries in the mountains, and the desert was peopled with monks, who went forth from their own and became citizens of the kingdom of Heaven.”26 The psychological and physical difficulties that inevitably accompany a solitary lifestyle make Antony’s unique life even more worthy of praise. These difficulties, however, also directly resulted in the formation of a different style of asceticism in the third and fourth centuries – community living.

Like hermits, monks living in monastic communities practice asceticism. Unlike hermits, however, the foundation of cenobitism is community interaction. To live alone is a demanding lifestyle that goes against a human’s natural instinct to form associations and friendships. For this reason, as asceticism grew in popularity, a contrasting way by which to express religious dedication was followed by those who found comfort and support in the company of peers, “It was easier and safer to pursue the ascetical life of prayer with the support of a community engaged in the same task and within the reassuring framework of a Rule. This, the fully shared life of monks living in an organised community, appeared in upper Egypt almost as soon as the anchoritic movement.”27 Just as Saint Antony is viewed to be the father of the hermits, Pachomius (c. 292-346) is often considered to be the father of cenobitic life. A familiarity with the life of Pachomius gives readers the opportunity to understand how and why a Christian went about joining a monastic community. The biographies of Antony and Pachomius give non-monks a chance to become better acquainted with a monk’s motivations and journey to a monastery.

26 Saint Athanasius, St. Antony the Hermit, 23.
27 C. H. Lawrence, Medieval Monasticism, 7.
Unlike Antony, Pachomius was born to pagan parents in 292. Pachomius’s youth was characterized by several strange encounters that solidified his inborn religiosity. His parents were practicing pagans who introduced Pachomius to the activities they took part in. Pachomius’s unintentional responses to these encounters clearly display the natural affinity he had towards Christianity.

As a child his parents took him with them somewhere on the river to sacrifice to those [creatures] that are in the waters. When those [creatures] raised their eyes in the water, they saw the boy, took fright and fled away…Another day they brought him with them to the temple, where they were going to offer a sacrifice. After the sacrifice they gave him a drink of the wine they had poured out for the demons. But at once he vomited it out vigorously. And his parents were distressed about him, because their gods were hostile to him.28

Neither Pachomius nor his parents understood the motives that brought about such aggressive reactions. Pachomius had not yet been exposed to Christians and was unaware of their beliefs and practices. The war of 312/13 between Licinius and Maximin Daia, however, changed the course of Pachomius’s life as he witnessed the power of Christianity for the first time. Pachomius was conscripted to fight in the war at the age of twenty. While being kept in prison in Thebes, he encountered the generosity of Christians who assisted him and other soldiers. When he asked one of his fellow soldiers why these individuals would go out of their way to aid those whom they had never met, he was informed of the love these individuals felt towards God. The God of the Christians, Pachomius was told, encouraged them to act kindly. Upon hearing this information, Pachomius vowed to serve humankind for the remainder of his life if set free from prison.

In 313, as Constantine defeated the enemies and released all those who had been detained as a result of the war, Pachomius kept his promise and was baptized.  

   After being discharged, many of Pachomius’s fellow soldiers traveled south of Thebes towards their homes. Pachomius, opting not to return to his past life and family, followed the soldiers to southern territories. He traveled to Seneset, a land with few inhabitants and felt compelled to pray in a small temple located within the village. As he prayed, the spirit of God overcame him and he was told to settle Seneset. Remembering his promise to uphold Christian beliefs, Pachomius had no reservations about settling down in Seneset as God had directed him. Pachomius grew vegetables and palm trees used as sustenance for himself and for the wanderers and poor whom he came across while going about his daily activities. Pachomius was generous and caring to everyone he encountered, so much so, they often decided to sever ties with the past and begin new lives with Pachomius, “It was his custom to converse with lots of people. And they would give up their homes to come and live in that village because of his way of encouraging them. It was really because of his attitude that many men made their dwelling in that place.”

   Pachomius’s dedication towards providing sustenance to others quickly spread to regions neighboring Seneset. As people heard about Pachomius and the community that was rapidly growing around him, large numbers of Christians opted to live in his vicinity.

   After three years, however, too many people gathered in Seneset and Pachomius began to feel stifled. He was inconvenienced by the large number of individuals who relied upon him for sustenance and spiritual support. At one point, an outbreak of

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31 All of this information was taken from Armand Veilleux’s *Pachomian Koinonia*. 
pestilence required that he nurse every individual who was afflicted with the disease. Instead of concentrating on the tenets of Christianity, Pachomius was overburdened with caring for all those experiencing painful symptoms. He was no longer able to have a moment to himself. Independence and reflection were the predominant reasons Pachomius initially settled in Seneset and after three years, the opportunity for spiritual contemplation was lost in the chaos of daily life. Because of these frustrations, Pachomius decided to become a monk. Pachomius yearned to live among people who shared his ambitions and values. He knew that within a monastery, monks were equal and relied upon the work of all residents. Pachomius would not be expected to care for the sick on his own. Daily tasks would be delineated to all monks and interspersed with prayer and religious contemplation. To Pachomius, becoming a member of a monastic community was a goal he wanted to attain.

In 316, Pachomius went out in search of a revered, old monk named Apa Palamon and chose to live as directed by this spiritual advisor. Palamon stressed to Pachomius that an ascetic lifestyle was much more difficult than could be imagined and noted that countless individuals had attempted to become monks but were forced to turn away in shame for lack of motivation, spiritual dedication, and stamina. Palamon did not embrace the eager pupil but turned him away, encouraging him to take part in self-examination before making such a drastic and life-altering decision. Palamon wanted to be sure that Pachomius was physically and mentally prepared to take on the challenge of becoming a monk. As a monk, Pachomius was told he would have to spend most of each night in vigils reciting the words of God and most of each day taking part in manual labor. Anything made that Pachomius did not need to survive was to be immediately given to

32 All of this information was taken from Armand Veilleux’s *Pachomian Koinonia.*
the poor; nothing beyond necessity was to be saved. Fasts were kept until the evening. In
the summer, monks were permitted to eat once each day. In the winter, however, food
could only be consumed every second or third day. Sixty prayers were expected to be
said during the day hours; the night hours were consumed with fifty prayers. After
Pachomius was told what the life of a monk consisted of, Palamon emphasized the need
for the eager pupil to test his soul for a few days. Much to Palamon’s surprise, Pachomius
informed the monk that he had already tested his will and was ready to join in his
company.33

Pachomius strictly followed the practices laid out by his monastic tutor. While
contemplatively strolling across the desert one day, however, a spirit compelled him to
walk ten miles to a deserted village, Tabennesi. God inspired him to pray in the vicinity
of the village, just as he had been compelled to settle in Seneset and provide for all who
required his assistance. As Pachomius prayed, a voice told him to build a monastery on
that site, “He came into that place, stretched out his hands and prayed to the Lord Jesus
Christ that He might teach him His will. And as he lengthened his prayer, a voice came to
him from heaven, ‘Pachomius, Pachomius, struggle, dwell in this place and build a
monastery; for many will come to you to become monks with you, and they will profit
their souls.’”34 The calling from God required a change in the relationship that had grown
between tutor and pupil. Pachomius and Palamon were to be seen as equals, “The
experience demanded a change in Pachomius’s relationship with Palamon. They made a
formal agreement to remain in touch with one another. Palamon clearly acknowledged in

33 All of this information was taken from Armand Veilleux’s Pachomian Koinonia.
34 Armand Veilleux, Pachomian Koinonia, 39.
Pachomius a new equality with himself, and therefore a certain independence.”35 Shortly after their mutual understanding was reached in 323, Palamon died. Subsequently, Pachomius became the head of his own monastery. In 324, three men came to Pachomius and asked to become his disciples. As Palamon had tested him, Pachomius made sure these men truly had the will and strength to become monks. News of Pachomius’s piety spread to others in Egypt as more and more men came to live in Tabennesi in his presence. Only those with the intention to become skilled, devout monks were allowed entrance into the monastery.36

When one hundred monks resided within Tabennesi, Pachomius decided to build a church within the monastery. Such a large number of residents also required the appointment of brothers to positions in order to assist in the daily operations of such a large scale establishment.

He appointed some from among the capable brothers as his assistants to take care of their souls’ salvation. [He appointed] one [of them] at the head of the first house, that of the lesser stewards, with a second to help him in preparing the tables and in cooking for [the brothers]. [He appointed] another brother also, with his second – men who were faithful on every score – to look after the food and care of the sick brothers…In each house the brothers in service were replaced every three weeks, and a new class was appointed.37

Due to Pachomius’s popularity, the monastery at Tabennesi became extremely crowded. In 329, he received another vision from God instructing him to build a monastery for himself downriver from Tabennesi at Phbow. The monastery at Phbow was one of many monasteries that Pachomius founded and reorganized throughout Egypt. After becoming a monk at the age of twenty-one, Pachomius died on May 9, 346 at the age of sixty. Some

36 All of this information was taken from Armand Veilleux’s *Pachomian Koinonia*.
believe Pachomius was taken from earth at an early age to prevent him from undergoing even more suffering, “Actually, when the Lord saw that he had crucified his flesh in everything so as to do His will, he wished to give him rest. He took him to himself and did not allow him to reach such a great age that he would suffer the weakness of the body more than he wanted.”38 His death at an early age, especially when compared to the longevity of Saint Antony, added to his religious notoriety, “By that time, if we may trust Palladius, 30,000 monks acknowledged Pachomius as their leader; and the number had probably more than doubled by the end of he century.”39 Such a large following is a testament to the popularity of Pachomius and the respect her garnered.

Saint Antony and Pachomius proved to be important leaders in the early history of asceticism. Both took up lifestyles of complete Christian immersion. Saint Antony and the hermits stressed the need to live in seclusion in order to carry out the spiritual and physical acts necessary to prove devotion to God, reach spiritual purification, and atone for sins. Pachomius, however, displayed that communal living could also bring out the best in followers of Christianity. These two leaders can be used to juxtapose the two schools by which individuals could be educated in the Lord’s service.

Although Antony came into contact with other individuals, his chosen way of life did not stress community living and stability of place. Antony’s solitude did not allow for the building or maturing of relationships and his spirituality was solely dependent upon his own will and desire to keep temptation at bay. In addition to fighting religious demons, Antony had to find ways in which to ward off temptation. Naturally, humans are social creatures who thrive upon communication with others. Living in solitude adds yet

38 Armand Veilleux, Pachomian Koinonia, 179.
another difficulty in the already arduous task of asceticism and strict spirituality. The support and positive reinforcement of peers that humans thrive upon was not available for Antony. His success was entirely dependent upon himself. If not for his biographer, it would have been a rare occurrence for Antony’s name to pass down through history. His exceptional talents and wide-reaching influence are responsible for his renown.

This period in religious history was a formative one for communal living. The principles of obedience and stability of place became crucial priorities for Pachomius and those that resided within monasteries. Pachomius created new monasteries as directed by God and according to need. Once these were created, however, only overcrowding was deemed a legitimate excuse for movement. In fact, in most cases, God told Pachomius when to move to a new location. Sanctity of place and the creation of buildings that took on divine characteristics added to the influence and popularity of community living. In addition, monks were able to learn from one another merely by observing the actions of their peers. This allowed for successful instruction to those that wished to become monks. Palamon described his daily activities to Pachomius who then did the same to his disciples. In this way, new monks could learn from the behavior of their elders and successfully carry on the daily activities of monastic service.

The biographies of Antony and Pachomius display aspects of asceticism that are crucial to the success of eremitism and monasticism. A solitary lifestyle and the freedom that accompanies it, the importance of scripture, and the everlasting presence of God came to characterize the existence of both leaders. Although the structure of their ascetic experiences was different, Antony and Pachomius achieved their desired objectives – they both lived lives that could lead to salvation. Antony and Pachomius came to prescribe
different means to achieve their ends as a result of their individual experiences. Antony believed God told him to become a hermit. Pachomius was encouraged by a monastic tutor to join a religious community. The people we meet and the encounters we have can change the course of our lives. This fact of life was true for Antony and Pachomius.

An array of motivations, as demonstrated by Antony and Pachomius, spurred people to join monastic communities in the early medieval period. A desire for wisdom was just one of the reasons individuals chose to become monks. For many, the path to enlightenment could be found in an ascetic lifestyle as demonstrated by the many Christians who had become monks before them, “During this period of conflicting values and spiritual ferment, many sensitive persons seem to have been strengthened by the experience of others who had taken the decisive step and found [what they considered to be] the true path. Gregory’s idealized portrait of St. Benedict, with is sympathetic portrayal of Western monasticism, became one of the most influential of these works which taught by example.” Additional, monasticism was seen as a way to emulate the lives of the early Christian Fathers, especially as the number of individuals who converted to Christianity in the centuries after its acceptance and legalization in Western Europe significantly increased. Becoming the best Christian possible was the goal of all monks, “Some part of everyone knows the longing for unconditional self-commitment, which gave these works [monasteries] birth; renouncing the world, living in an isolated community, in which each day is to be imbued with special meaning by that ultimate Truth of daring ideal, that through unceasing meditation upon God and his incessant praise one’s self may be forgotten and yet found.” This statement encapsulates the

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40 Gregory the Great, *Dialogues, Book II*, xix.
appeal monasticism had to so many people; becoming a member of a monastic community gave Christians the opportunity to search for wisdom.

I will focus on the monastic approach to asceticism in more detail for the duration of this thesis. The influence of an eremitic lifestyle is a significant component of religious history in the medieval period. Yet, the monastic system, including the many rules that sprung up in reaction to it, best represents, to me, the ideal way in which to carry out the goals of asceticism. The popularity of monasticism directly resulted in the creation of different sects led by independent modes of organization. “The first result [of the growth of asceticism] was an increase in formality, reflecting the growing complexity of relationships among ascetics, and a growing sense that they had to define the extent to which they could encroach upon each other.”⁴² An increase in monastic formality led to the creation of numerous governing rules. Four of these will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴² Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, 49.
Chapter Two
Schools of Art

Pachomius popularized the practice of voluntarily choosing to become an active member of a strictly devout religious community in the early fourth century in Egypt. Monastic life began to appear in the West, however, around the year 370. In monasticism several priorities were emphasized to all who committed themselves to such a life, “The distinctive things about the life of the monastery were its fellowship – the daily round of collective worship in the oratory at the common meal – and an insistence upon total obedience to the commands of the superior…Another axiom of the founder was the virtue of work.” Additionally, monks were required to surrender their property, suppress all sexual desire, and work for the betterment of the community. For the remainder of the medieval period, cenobites gathered throughout Europe in various communities. Often, those who led these brotherhoods and sisterhoods became prominent figures in religious history. The most noteworthy of these leaders created and enforced organizational tools that clearly defined the daily activities and religious practices of each association – the rule.

Four rules in particular had indisputable impacts upon western monasticism. Collectively, the Rule of Saint Augustine, John Cassian’s Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict exemplify different modes of Christian monastic organization created and used throughout the early medieval period. The diversity of each rule’s date and origin reflects the universal crisis that plagued the Roman Empire in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. The authors of these rules responded to the cultural and

political trauma by creating manuals that would lead Christians to salvation. Monasticism was deemed appealing because of the basic necessities provided to the residents by the monastic community. Monks were given guidance on earth and the tools necessary to reach eternal deliverance. These promises were not exclusive to the western rules, however. The dominant monastic rule in the Orthodox world, the *Rule of Saint Basil*, provided many Christians with leadership and regulation during this turbulent period. This thesis will refrain from exploring the teachings of Saint Basil and will instead focus on western Christianity.

Each school of asceticism is characterized by a religious manual whose unique formation is an effective means by which to differentiate one rule from another. A study and analysis of what was written in these rules can assist in determining which rule was the most appealing to monks. As a result of their differences within the larger context of monasticism, each rule can be described as a school of art, building upon and reacting to what came before it while influencing those that succeed it. Each rule idealized asceticism. The ways in which they prescribed ascetic methods, however, were distinct.

A brief description of the lengths and organizational structures of the rules will assist the reader in envisioning their differences. *The Rule of Saint Augustine* is the shortest of the four rules. It is composed of thirteen (13) pages and organized into eight sections entitled: The Basic Ideal, Community Prayer, Community and Care of the Body, Mutual responsibility in Good and Evil, Service of One Another, Love and Conflict, Love in Authority and Obedience, and Concluding Exhortation. John Cassian’s *Institutes* is significantly longer with two hundred sixty-three (263) pages. In addition to a preface, the rule is organized into twelve books entitled: The Garb of the Monks, The Canonical
Method of the Nighttime Prayers and Psalms, The Canonical Method of the Daytime Prayers and Psalms, The Institutes of the Renunciantns, The Spirit of Gluttony, The Spirit of Fornication, The Spirit of Avarice, The Spirit of Anger, The Spirit of Sadness, The Spirit of Acedia, The Spirit of Vainglory, and The Spirit of Pride. The Rule of the Master is one hundred ninety-seven (197) pages long and is divided into a prologue and ninety-five (95) chapters. The Rule of Saint Benedict is composed of eighty-seven (87) pages and consists of a prologue and seventy-three (73) chapters. Although the structures and compositions of the rules varied, the goal of each was the same. The Rule of Saint Augustine, John Cassian’s Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict each strove to lead their followers to salvation.

The Rule of Saint Augustine was written in about 397. This rule is known as the oldest in Western Europe and significantly impacted the formulation of organized Christian ideals while stressing the importance of leading a devout lifestyle. The message emphasized beyond others affirms that effective community life requires actively taking part in acts of Godly love and displaying unceasing Christian devotion. Augustine wrote his rule about ten years after his baptism in 385. In addition to being known as a Christian convert, Augustine was a bishop, scholar, and religious philosopher. Before 1000, the Rule of Saint Augustine was viewed as one of several rules that could be used to inspire and teach Christians, “This ‘tradition of the Fathers’ as a whole was offered to the religious of that time as a source of inspiration.”45 In this way, different documents were available for those who desired spiritual direction in their lives. Only between the ninth and eleventh centuries did the Rule of Saint Augustine begin to be seen as an independent rule.

The Rule of St Augustine was one of the great discoveries of the late eleventh century. In the Western monastic tradition its impact was rather like that of the discovery of America on the people of a later age: it had been there all the time, and though it was not precisely what they had been looking for, the world never looked quite the same afterwards…The Augustinian Rule influenced all subsequent thinking about the monastic life.⁴⁶

From the eleventh century onwards, the *Rule of Saint Augustine* was considered to be a “…first-rate authority for the organisation of the apostolic life as it had been lived by the greatest of the Western Fathers at the end of the patristic age.”⁴⁷ Augustine’s legacy continues to influence even modern Christians. Many congregations that devote themselves to nursing and caring for the sick, for example, have chosen The Rule of Augustine as the sole source of inspiration and dedication for their communities.

The concise text of the *Rule of Saint Augustine* is composed of summaries of oral conferences Augustine held for his monks.⁴⁸ Augustine organized the rule into eight sections – The Basic Ideal, Community Prayer, Community and Care of the Body, Mutual responsibility in Good and Evil, Service of One Another, Love and Conflict, Love in Authority and Obedience, and Concluding Exhortation. This added regulation ensured Augustine’s work would be viewed as a rule, and not an anthology of stories. The use of short sentence structure and minimal elaborative detail requires a previously acquired knowledge of Augustine’s beliefs and writings, “…a certain familiarity with Augustine’s other works is necessary in order to penetrate to the deeper meaning of the Rule’s short sentences. Parallel texts from other works can clarify the Rule and give insight into it. For Augustine’s followers the Rule was certainly a summary designed to

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refresh the memory.”49 The reader, prior to his or her introduction to Augustine’s rule, presumably knew the ideas Augustine chose to include within the text. Unlike rules written after Augustine’s work, few concrete regulations or detailed guidelines are included within the text. Left out of the rule was a detailed schedule of prayer, a feature elaborated upon by Cassian, the Master, and Benedict. Additionally, Augustine did not discuss the daily variations in prayer or differing regulations for holy days. Taking the place of detail is an emphasis upon the human heart and the power of God, “You are all to live together, therefore, one in mind and one in heart (cf. Acts 4:32), and honour God in one another, because each of you has become his temple (2 Cor. 6:16).”50 This simple declaration effectively summarizes the mindset expected of Augustine’s monks. The fulfillment of these expectations through the practice of Christian love will lead to a successful community life for the monks who choose to adhere to the *Rule of Saint Augustine*.

Augustine’s use of scripture appealed to Christians who took up asceticism to please God. His rule incorporates thought-provoking passages that inspire individuals to follow a life of Christianity. For example, a passage reminding monks to refrain from contact with women states, “For it is not only by affectionate embraces that desire between man and woman is awakened, but also by looks. You cannot say that your inner attitude is good if with your eyes you desire to posses a woman, for the eye is the herald of the heart.”51 In addition to moral argument, Augustine referred to passages from scripture frequently within the text; the Old Testament is specifically referred to eight times while the New Testament is mentioned twenty-seven times. The references are

interspersed throughout the rule and are used to build upon different topics. The clear, biblical foundation of the rule guarantees the pertinence and continuity of Augustine’s words despite changing social and political circumstances and accounts for its lasting power throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries on through today.

Augustine believed that a person should be animated by the love and Christian commitment that one feels within his or her soul. The extent to which a monk appreciates God and his community is of highest concern to Augustine. Unlike the rules that followed, almost a total absence of daily scheduling characterizes Augustine’s guidelines. Emphasis is placed on community life victoriously superseding self-seeking and self-inflating behavior. Attention is placed and directed, as it should in Augustine’s eyes, to the building up of relationships consisting of love. For this reason, the Rule of Saint Augustine calls for the evangelical equality of all Christians. Augustine concludes his rule by urging followers to read the work once a week in order to monitor personal behavior and the demeanor of others effectively. Unlike the other rules that will be discussed in of this thesis, Augustine chose to create two rules – one for men and one for women. The content and organization of the male and female rules is nearly identical. The masculine version states, “When you see a woman, do not keep provocatively looking at her.” 52 The feminine version states, “When you see a man, do not keep provocatively looking at him.” 53 The differences lie in the pronouns and nouns; the masculine version uses words such as he, him, and brother while the feminine version uses she, her, and sister.

Interestingly, the succeeding rules refrained from creating versions for each gender. Undeniably, the authors of the Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint

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52 Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, The Rule of Saint Augustine, 16.
Benedict were aware of Augustine’s work. Yet, they chose to abstain from creating a separate rule for women and used language that assumed the masculinity of monks. A discussion of apparel, which will be dealt with in a later chapter, solidifies the idea that the authors of the Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict assumed monks to be male.

The Rule of Saint Augustine is vague on practical details. Good will is stressed although a discussion of liturgy is lacking. The community is governed by a superior who must be obeyed as a father, “…give him due respect on account of his office, otherwise you offend God in him. This is even more true of the priest who bears responsibility for you all.”54 The superior has a responsibility to make sure the monks put Augustine’s rule into practice. If the superior encounters a problem, he must turn to the priest “whose authority in some respects is greater than his [the superior’s] own.”55 This structure guarantees the success of the monastic community.

As Augustine’s rule began to spread in the first years of the fifth century, a Scythian named John Cassian wrote his own monastic treatise, the Institutes. He was born in the year 360 in Dacia, now Romania, and in 385, left a monastery he had been living in, located in Bethlehem, to tour various monastic settlements in Egypt with a companion, Germanus. “He stayed at Nitria and Scetis, and sat at the feet of the veterans in their cells. He was a good listener, and years later, when the violent controversy over the theology of Origen had driven him from the East, he settled in the south of Gaul and sat down to distil the wisdom of the anchorite-abbots for the benefit of Western

54 Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, The Rule of Saint Augustine, 23.
readers." This particular treatise was created for a community of monks he helped
found at Apt in Provence, France. Together with his *Conferences*, the *Institutes*
furthered the monastic cause among lay people and became the texts of a separate school
of asceticism. John Cassian was ordained by John Chrysostom to a diaconate shortly after
400 and founded two monasteries in Marseilles before he died in the early 430s.

Cassian’s work is a candid account of his personal opinions about how best to
achieve the monastic ideal of spiritual purification, atonement for sins, and devotion to
God. His approach in the *Institutes* reflects his own personal experiences, “For the whole
of it consists in experience and practice alone, and just as such things cannot be handed
on except by an experienced person, so neither can they be grasped or understood except
by someone who has striven to learn them with zeal and effort.” Cassian admits that he
may not remember everything he encountered from his travels, but he says that he will
strive to do the best he can to incorporate as much information as possible into his rule.
He created the *Institutes* for the monastic community he helped found at Apt in
Provence and mentions that he looked at and learned from actual monks before writing
his account. In his own introduction, Cassian forewarns his audience of the liberties he
chose to take while creating the text for the *Institutes*.

I shall take it upon myself, however, to inject some moderation
into this little work. Thus, what I discern in the rule of the
Egyptians to be impossible or hard or arduous for this country,
because of either a harsh climate or difficulty and diversity of
behavior, I shall temper somewhat by recourse to the customs of
the monasteries in Palestine and Mesopotamia, for, if reasonable

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possibilities are offered, the same perfection of observance may exist even when there is unequal capability.\footnote{Boniface Ramsey, \textit{John Cassian: The Institutes}, 14.}

Cassian is aware that monasticism was formulated in Egypt and subsequently brought to Europe. He is careful to write a rule that will appeal to individuals without turning them away, “In this [rule] you are not looking for a pleasing style, with which you yourself are particularly gifted; rather, you are concerned that the simple life of holy men be explained in simple language to the brothers in your new monastery.”\footnote{Boniface Ramsey, \textit{John Cassian: The Institutes}, 12.} He writes a rule that, in his eyes, will appeal to the ordinary individual seeking Christian organization and affiliation. Unlike Augustine, Cassian includes ample detail to teach his readers and does not expect those who encounter his rule to have any sort of previous background in monasticism. Like Augustine, however, Cassian does believe that a monk’s actions reflect his values. He begins his rule with a discussion of apparel, “After having exposed their outward appearance to view we shall then be able to discuss, in logical sequence, their inner worship. And so, it is proper for a monk to dress like a soldier of Christ, ever ready for battle, his loins girded.”\footnote{Boniface Ramsey, \textit{John Cassian: The Institutes}, 21.} Monks were not expected to literally act as soldiers. A “soldier of Christ” fought to uphold the tenets of monasticism through prayer and religious dedication. To Augustine and Cassian, dedicating oneself to monasticism required an internal and visibly external commitment.

Cassian notes that his work is indebted to those who practiced asceticism before him, “Coming after these men’s overflowing rivers of eloquence, I would not unjustifiably be considered presumptuous for trying to produce a few drops of water were I not spurred on by my confidence in your holiness and by the assurance that these trifles,
such as they are, will be acceptable to you…” He makes it very clear that he is recording and reflecting upon what others have been doing for years, “We know that in this way different canons have been established in different places, and we have seen nearly as many models and rules being used as have seen monasteries and cells.” The work of Cassian’s predecessors has influenced his Institutes.

An organizational method is not easily recognizable and seems to be imposed upon the rule by a modern publisher. Twelve books comprise the Institutes. The goal of each book, however, is not the same, “The purpose of the first four books (dealing with the institutes and rules) and that of the remaining eight (dealing with the vices) are quite different from one another, and no attempt is even made to reconcile them. At the beginning of the fifth book, which initiates his discussion of the vices, Cassian simply states that he has accomplished the first of his tasks and is now embarking on the second. The joining of two (or more) apparently unrelated themes in a single work was not unknown in Christian antiquity…” Numerals are arbitrarily placed within paragraphs to denote a change of topic. The structure and wording of the Institutes is extremely dense and can be mistaken for a story recording Cassian’s travels and experiences. The importance of the Institutes is due to the feelings it evokes within followers rather than the effectiveness of the scholarly composition, “You are setting out to construct a true and spiritual temple for God not out of unfeeling stones but out of a community of holy men, one that is not temporal and corruptible but eternal and impregnable…” The

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63 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 13.
64 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 37.
65 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 4.
66 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 11.
language of the *Institutes* is powerful and encourages Christians to become members of a monastic community.

By addressing eight principle vices and the ways in which to counter them, Cassian displays obedience as the single most important virtue of the *Institutes*. This monastic requirement is a connecting thread included in both the *Rule of the Master* and its offshoot, the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. In fact, both authors turned to the *Institutes* when seeking background information they were not able to acquire firsthand, “Cassian was the maestro whose writing taught St. Benedict and his successors the ascetical lore of the East.”67 In this way, the next two rules are associated more closely to the work of Cassian than the *Institutes* is to the *Rule of Saint Augustine*.

A third school of monasticism can be found in the manual known as the *Rule of the Master*. An unknown abbot wrote the *Rule of the Master* in the first quarter of the sixth century in a region to the southeast of Rome. It is significantly larger in size and scope than the *Rule of Saint Augustine*. The amount of detail, both in subject and language, stands in stark contrast to Augustine’s brief summaries of conversations he had with other individuals, “The Regula Magistri…is a veritable rule of life encompassing the entire existence, material and spiritual, of the monastic community and the individuals within it.”68 Almost every imaginable situation or crisis that a monk may encounter is discussed. Even unlikely scenarios, such as whether brothers who have suffered pollution, or defilement, during sleep should receive communion, is mentioned in this rule. The author has written in such a manner as to ensure that every individual following his mode of monasticism adheres to identical schedules. According to Adalbert de

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Vogüè, such diligent care for technicality is unique to the *Rule of the Master*, “Ordinarily nothing is less organized than a monastic rule. Material is usually arranged according to simple associations of ideas. Here on the contrary we can trace an overall plan and recognize a logical order which is explicitly and repeatedly announced. This methodical order conveys a well thought-out concept of cenobitism.”⁶⁹ Those interested in founding a monastery could, essentially, obtain a copy of this rule and effectively run the institution as the author of the *Rule of the Master* had intended. The *Rule of the Master* is a comprehensive resource for guiding communities through the monastic system.

Excluding the prologue, most sections in the *Rule of the Master* begin with questions raised by the master’s disciples. For example, the question featured in Chapter IX asks how disciples observing silence are to request assistance or clarification from the abbot.⁷⁰ Following each subject heading is an inescapable feature of the rule, a singular phrase that is repeated before every explanation. This phrase, *the Lord has replied through the master*, legitimizes to readers the authority of the master’s rule. The Master continuously emphasizes the divine inspiration of the rule’s written words.

You, therefore, who hear me speaking, listen through what is written here to what is being said to you not by my mouth but by God. Now, while you are still living, he is instructing you about that of which after death you will have to give him an account. For while we are yet alive we are being given time, because God’s fatherly love daily awaits our amendment and wants us to grow better from day to day.⁷¹

The *Rule of the Master* does not leave much room for personal interpretation. Many imaginable circumstances are discussed, leaving the reader to feel as if God and the master have provided for numerous incidents that may arise within the walls of a

monastery. Unlike the *Rule of Saint Augustine* or Cassian’s *Institutes*, there is hardly any room for interpretation or misunderstanding. An individual interested in starting a monastery based upon the words of the Master could easily do so. In this way, each community following the Master’s guidelines would resemble its monastic peers. Because the rule is organized as a set of questions with detailed answers, it certainly must have appealed to Christians who were unfamiliar with monastic life. Yet, the sheer scope and thorough nature of the work does not leave room for individuals to personally interpret how best to manage their monastery. The *Rule of the Master* provides an abbot with more specific requirements than the *Institutes* or the *Rule of Saint Augustine*.

While the hand of God in the rule is made clear through the use of the phrase, *the Lord has replied through the master*, the author does not hesitate to inflict a sense of fear upon his readers. Those who live as the rule dictates will be privileged enough to bask in the eternal glory of the saints. Those who refuse to put the rule into practice, however, will be forced to live in the eternal fires of hell.\(^7\) Conversely, eternal rewards and punishments are not discussed in detail in the *Rule of Saint Augustine*. Cassian, however, refers to eternal compensation, especially in the chapters that focus on vice. For example, in the chapter entitled *Twelfth Book: The Spirit of Pride*, Cassian writes, “For if we recall that even that thief was given entry to paradise on the strength of a single confession, we shall realize that he did not arrive at such blessedness as a result of his running but that he received it as a gift from a merciful God.”\(^7\) Cassian emphasizes reward while the Master prefers to impose a sense of fear upon monks.

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The *Rule of the Master* stresses the importance of truth and the achievement of this goal through practice. Even before the daily guidelines are stated, an extensive prologue and explanation of the rule’s theme assists in reminding monks of their responsibilities including frequent prayer, indifference to material things, and personal betterment. The author states that the abandonment of an individual’s actual parents is necessary in order to embrace one’s divine parent - God. Consequently, as children of God, monks should share in their brother’s suffering on the cross. Monks must earn the right to indulge in the benefits of being a child of God through a continued sense of anguish and repentance, “And if we desire to escape the punishment of hell and attain eternal life, it is now, while there is still time, while we are yet in the body and while we have the chance to put all these things into effect by the light of this life, that we must hurry and do what will profit us forever.”\(^{74}\) In order to be true monks, conduct must resemble that of God, an idea found in both Augustine and Cassian.\(^{75}\)

The *Rule of the Master* is more than a monastic manual. It details a way of life some sixth century Christians chose to take part in. Additionally, it serves as a historic resource for those attracted to the fundamentals of asceticism. This is especially true for religious historians interested in learning about the different classifications of monks. The author of the *Rule of the Master* cites four different categories of monks: cenobites, anchorites, sarabaites, and gyrovagues. Cenobites, living in monasteries or in communities in the desert, and anchorites, living in seclusion in the desert, were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. According to the author, the third grouping of monk, sarabaites, is to be despised, “Two or three together, or even alone, without a


shepherd, enclosed not in the Lord’s but in their own sheepfold, they have as their law the willfulness of their own desires; whatever they think and decide, that they call holy, and what they do not want, that they consider forbidden. And while they want to have cells, chests and various things according to their own judgment, they are unaware that they are losing their own petty souls.” \(^{76}\) The last category of monk, gyrovagues, takes advantage of generous monasteries and forces hosts to celebrate the visit with special meals and beverages. The abbot of the monastery has no choice but to follow in the word of God, who commands monks to be hospitable to guests, “And when after the double excess of food and drink they are stuffed to the point of vomiting, they attribute to their laborious journey all that their gluttony has got them.” \(^{77}\) By highlighting the negative attributes of sarabaites and gyrovagues, the author aptly juxtaposes the lifestyle a monk should refrain from with the proper way in which live, as exemplified by a strict follower of the rule.

Saint Benedict also explored the proper way in which to live by developing his own school of monasticism. Saint Benedict was born in 480 in Nursia, Italy during a time of great turmoil in the country. During the fifth and sixth centuries, the Roman Empire began collapsing after a series of sacks, invasions, and war. Benedict arrived in Rome from Nursia while Theodoric, an Ostrogoth, had control of the city (493-526). It was during his stay in Rome that Benedict became repulsed by the pagan qualities of Rome’s inhabitants and the rampant corruption of both Romans and the barbarians. He opted to live in solitude in Subiaco and reflect upon his faith in Christianity as an anchorite. Benedict spent three years living in a cave, known only to a monk who delivered food to


him through a hole. Isolation convinced him of God’s power and love and Benedict went on to establish numerous monasteries. His transition from an anchorite to a cenobite exemplifies the constant nature of the ascetic ideal. Although Benedict’s living arrangements changed, his faith and devotion did not. Under Benedict, each monastery was governed by a structured system of organization known as the Rule, “In the unsettled, strife-torn Italy of the sixth century, Benedict’s Rule offered definitive direction and established an ordered way of life that gave security and stability.”

Saint Benedict wrote this guidebook in the beginning of the sixth century while in Italy. The Rule of Saint Benedict dictates exactly how monks and abbots should live including when to speak, eat, work, and pray. In addition, the order of the psalmody and the number of psalms for each day was meticulously planned out. The purpose of Benedict’s rule was to work towards perfection; those who strove for this goal would be rewarded in heaven. Benedict himself stated, “Then with Christ’s help, keep this little rule that we have written for beginners. After that, you can set out for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues we mentioned above, and under God’s protection you will reach them.”

The Rule of the Master greatly influenced Saint Benedict who used it as his chief literary source forty years after its creation. Benedict looked towards the Rule of the Master for ideas about basic principles, organizational details, and scriptural references. For this reason, Benedict is greatly indebted to his predecessor’s rule; he shaped his own to show deference to an earlier mode of monastic organization. Similarly, Cassian admitted to building upon monasticism he had seen and heard about. Both Cassian and

78 Timothy Fry, The Rule of St. Benedict, 11.
Benedict pay tribute to the monastic foundations that existed before and during their lifetimes; learning from others enabled them to create their own best rules.

Duplications in content and subject matter exist between the rules of Benedict and the Master. Benedict strays from his predecessor in presentation. Yet, as seen in the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, Cassian’s *Institutes*, and the *Rule of the Master*, the *Rule of Saint Benedict* continues to allude to monks as God’s soldiers on earth. Like Cassian and the Master urged before him, Benedict called for the abandonment of self-will. Benedict bluntly states, “This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.”

The direct message of this sentence, located within the first paragraph of Benedict’s rule, perfectly characterizes the goal and tone of the entire work. A Benedictine monastery served as a fortress where Christianity was defended and perfected, “His monastery was not a place of quiet retreat or leisure, nor a school in the academic sense; it was a kind of combat unit, in which the recruit was trained and equipped for his spiritual warfare under an experienced commander – the abbot. The objective was the conquest of sensuality and self-will so as to make a man totally receptive to God.”

With the use of this tactic, Benedict was able to spread the appeal of monasticism to those interested in defending Christianity. To achieve the ideal of asceticism, Benedict made his rule an instrument. Chapter Four will further discuss tools the *Rule of Saint Benedict* used to attain success.

The guidelines set out in the Rule are easily applicable not only to those residing within monasteries but also to individuals willing to adhere to poverty, chastity, and

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obedience. In 1981, for example, Pope John Paul II recognized the effectiveness and helpfulness of the Rule, “[Saint Benedict] wrote his Rule primarily for monks, but its sound principles for working together and living together have proved relevant to people of all classes of society through fifteen hundred years.” These exact qualities have led to the rule’s preservation and dissemination since it was first written in the sixth century. People continue to find the strict, yet simple, organization appealing. Many Christians strive to achieve spiritual, physical, or emotional perfection. The Rule of Saint Benedict can assist those who wish to apply structure and a daily routine to an otherwise unpredictable life.

Benedict considers his work to be a means by which to regulate the lives of those who obey his rule. Regulation requires the surrender of self-will and acceptance of obedience. Although living by the rule requires dedication, the reserved language of the Rule of Saint Benedict exudes a sense of calm, unlike the urgency one feels when reading the intricate wording of the Rule of the Master. An individual is compelled to believe in the necessity of immediately leaving the familiar and joining a monastery through the forceful and affective language of the master’s work. While the master uses negative language to entice individuals to act a certain way, Benedict offers a straightforward positive approach. For example, reverence in prayer is a topic that the Master and Benedict both choose to discuss. The Master uses descriptive imagery in order to get his point across, “Therefore there must be no duplicity in prayer. Let one person not be found in the mouth, yet another in the heart. Prayer must not be protracted by an abundance of

words; as the holy gospel says, those who do this become hypocrites.”\(^\text{84}\) Conversely, chapter twenty in the *Rule of Saint Benedict* refers to reverence in the following manner, “Prayer should therefore be short and pure, unless perhaps it is prolonged under the inspiration of divine grace. In community, however, prayer should always be brief; and when the superior gives the signal, all should rise together.”\(^\text{85}\) Benedict’s description is much easier to understand due to its unambiguous wording. His cautious language prevents monks from extracting double meanings or inconsistencies from the text. The juxtaposition of similar topics reflected upon by the Master and Benedict is an effective means by which to get a sense of their differing styles.

The authors of the *Rule of Saint Augustine*, John Cassian’s *Institutes*, the *Rule of the Master*, and the *Rule of Saint Benedict* all had similar goals. Each wanted to write a practical rule that could govern monasticism in their local communities. The authors did not expect their rules to achieve worldwide status. They were primarily concerned with creating effective guidelines. The authors believed that monks could achieve salvation if they adhered to the regulations described in their own texts. Although the authors each strove to achieve the same objective, they did so in different ways. Asceticism was not an end in itself but a means by which a monk could reach salvation. Augustine, Cassian, the Master, and Benedict believed that toiling on earth and practicing obedience in mind and body would bring about eternal reward. Conditions after death would be a direct reflection of the work done during life. The rules belong to contrasting schools within the larger framework of asceticism. Yet, the desire to become a member of a monastic community links the individuals who choose to live by any of the four rules. For this

\(^{85}\) Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 207.
reason, each rule can be compared to a school of art. Individually, they build upon the works that preceded them while displaying new characteristics that add to their novelty. Collectively, the rules exemplify the scope of monastic organization.
Chapter Three
Terms of Association

As with most modern organizations, each monk in a medieval monastery was required to fulfill certain conditions of membership in order to be in good standing. A monk in the early medieval period was expected to adhere to a distinct code of conduct. These guidelines, as described in each rule, ensured the religious stability of the monastery’s inhabitants. Often, the conditions set in the rules denied the free will that would have allowed monks the opportunity to make idiosyncratic interpretations of what was required of them. Strict unthinking adherence to a predetermined daily schedule was imperative in most of the rules. Yet, many monks found the objectives of observing the rule appealing; those residing within a monastic community received food, lodging, and protection in exchange for obedience and the abandonment of self-will.

In Chapter Two, the same areas of interest were addressed in each of the four rules. Adherence to the conditions laid out for the individual areas was absolutely necessary in order to ensure the overall stability of each monastic system. An exploration of admission, daily structure, clothing, bathing, obedience, and sanctions will assist in being able to differentiate between the four rules discussed in this thesis. Collectively, these six topics give readers a thorough understanding of daily activity in a monastery. Although they do not cover the breadth and scope of the subjects discussed in each of the rules, a reader can begin to realize what monastic life entailed. These subjects were chosen over others because of their appeal to modern readers of the rules. Daily structure, clothing, and bathing habits starkly contrast with most twenty-first century lifestyles. In this way, these particular subjects give readers the opportunity to fully comprehend the requirements of an ascetic. The Rule of Saint Augustine, John Cassian’s Institutes, the
Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict each focused on the above-mentioned topics, among others, within their texts. An exploration of the authors’ approaches to the six subjects will be used to discover crucial differences and similarities between four early medieval texts. In this way, points of comparison can shed light upon the rules’ different terms of association.

**Admission**

Admission to a monastic community was not instantaneous. Monks had to be mentally and religiously prepared in order to devote themselves to an ascetic life. Although monasticism was an option for all Christians, it took exceedingly devote individuals to commit themselves to such an extreme form of religious living. By joining a monastery, monks were solidifying their desire to dedicate the remainder of their lives to God’s service. The second and third sentences of the Rule of Saint Augustine aptly describe what Augustine and communities living under his rule required, “Before all else, live together in harmony, being of one mind and one heart on the way to God. For is it not precisely for this reason that you have come to live together?”

Augustine understood the importance of a monastic community composed of like-minded individuals working towards the same goal of salvation. For this reason, Augustine stressed the necessity of living in concord with monastic peers at the very beginning of the rule. To him, admission to a monastery required understanding that harmonious living with others was necessary.

Additionally, admission into an Augustinian monastery required the abandonment of all personal belongings, “Those who owned possessions in the world should readily agree that, from the moment they enter the religious life, these things become the

86 Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, The Rule of Saint Augustine, 11.
property of the community." By sharing amenities, monks were able to focus upon scripture and their daily tasks without becoming distracted by personal property. Although the rejection of personal effects was stressed in each of the rules, Augustine included an interesting clause in his guidelines for admission. Surprisingly, the superior of an Augustinian monastery was not required to provide each monk with the same amount of food and clothing. Behind this decision was the reasoning that individuals were not equally able-bodied, “He [the superior] does not have to give exactly the same to everyone, for you are not all equally strong, but each person should be given what he personally needs.” As a result, monks received what was necessary for survival relative to their physical and mental abilities. Admission to a monastery organized by Augustine’s precepts required casting off personal desires in order to accept communal responsibilities. Similarly, in John Cassian’s Institutes, the author presents a strict code regarding personal belongings, “Hence, when someone has been received, all his former possessions are removed from him, such that he is not even permitted to have the clothing that he wore….Thus he may know not only that he has been despoiled of all his former things but also that he has put off all worldly pride and has stooped to the poverty and want of Christ, and that now he is to be supported not by wealth obtained in worldly fashion or stored up by his former lack of faith but that he will receive the pay for his soldiering from the holy and gracious supplies of the monastery.” Both Augustine and Cassian believed it was imperative for individuals to dispose of their past life’s remnants. Only by doing so could the monk effectively and seriously embrace monasticism.

87 Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, The Rule of Saint Augustine, 11.
89 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 80.
In Cassian’s *Institutes*, the requirements for admission went beyond breaking away from one’s past. Sanctions were much more concretely described by Cassian. Those who wanted to join the monastery were required to stay outside the walls of the community for at least ten days after expressing interest. Upon acceptance to the monastery, all personal possessions were submitted to the abbot. Newly admitted monks had to adhere to strict guidelines that were not solely interested in mental preparedness. Cassian addressed the specific components in a detailed passage.

So, then, whoever seeks to be received into the discipline of the cenobium is never admitted until, by lying outside for ten days or more, he has give an indication of his perseverance and desire, as well as of his humility and patience. And when he has embraced the knees of all the brothers passing by and has been purposely rebuked and disdained by everyone, as if he wished to enter the monastery not out of devotion but out of necessity, and has been visited with numerous insults and reproaches and has give proof of his constancy, and by putting up with taunts has shown what he will be like in time of trial, and when the ardor of his intention has been proven and he has thus been received, he is asked with utmost earnestness if, from his former possessions, the contamination of even a single copper coin clings to him.90

For Cassian, it was crucial for monks to prove their worthiness and devotion to the monastery in a physical way. The potential monks had to live outside the walls of the monastery for an extended period of time without complaint. Monks had to show devotion to their peers by embracing those who had purposefully ignored or scorned them while residing outside the walls. Those interested in joining the community had to renounce all possessions. By actively displaying their desire to adhere to such a lifestyle, Cassian knew that the potential monks would be able to handle the rigors of organized religion. The behavior of these individuals could effectively reflect how they felt about

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God and Christianity internally. This admissions process of living outside the walls and being tormented by other monks went beyond the terms endorsed by Augustine.

Although Cassian and Augustine both believed in the importance of community and material purification, Cassian’s doctrine, as a whole, was much more detailed than the *Rule of Saint Augustine*. While the *Rule of Saint Augustine* numbers thirteen pages, the *Institutes* is composed of two hundred thirty two compact pages of text. A thorough explanation of the entrance process is a reflection of Cassian’s desire to provide as much detail as possible. Augustine’s rule should not be deemed ineffective despite its use of concise language. General outlines reflect the confidence he had in the good intentions of each monk. To Cassian, however, an organized process with specific levels that required completion was the only way by which to prove the devotion of a potential new monk, “With these *Institutes*, then, as with the rudiments of the alphabet, they initiate those whom they strive to expose to and to direct toward perfection. In this way they discern clearly whether they are grounded in the humility that is deceptive and imaginary or in one that is real.”\(^{91}\) Therefore, such entrance qualifications were considered to be an unbiased way by which to learn if a monk was willing to devote himself to the monastic community. What is outlined below, to Cassian, was standard and necessary procedure for each potential new monk.

Cassian’s multi-layered approach to endorsing a monk continued even after an individual was tested physically and mentally. The ultimate objectives were an understanding of how the monastery was organized and a respect for the monastic institution. A newly admitted monk was assigned to an experienced member of the community from whom he was expected to learn several crucial guidelines. The elder did

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\(^{91}\) Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes*, 82.
not live within the walls of the monastery. Instead, he tended to the needs of visitors and travelers from a location near the entrance to the complex and was, “…particularly devoted to welcoming them and to being hospitable to them.”\textsuperscript{92} The potential monk assisted visitors and travelers for a year and his behavior and interaction with others was observed. It was crucial for the monk to refrain from complaining or displaying any disappointment or frustration in his activities. After this apprenticeship, the potential monk was assigned to another leader who was personally responsible for teaching ten new members about the events laid out in Exodus. The older monk stressed the need to separate oneself from all types of desire in a time-tested and effective way - the older monk consistently demanded loathsome activities or objects from the monastic applicants. In this way, the younger monks became repulsed by what was being asked of them and developed a hatred of sin and desire. This practice was deemed necessary because, “…a monk, and especially the younger men, cannot restrain their yearning for pleasure unless they have first learned to mortify their desires through obedience. And so they assert that someone who has not first learned to overcome his desires can never extinguish anger or sadness or the spirit of fornication, nor can he maintain true humility of heart or unbroken unity with his brothers or a solid and enduring peace, nor can he even stay in the cenobium for any length of time.”\textsuperscript{93} After proving disinterest in desire, a potential monk was given the privilege of joining the monastic community.

Those who had previously entered the monastery diligently observed each new monk. A monk’s activities became the common knowledge of the entire community and permission was required from a superior to do anything that strayed from prayer or work.

\textsuperscript{92} Boniface Ramsey, \textit{John Cassian: The Institutes}, 81.

\textsuperscript{93} Boniface Ramsey, \textit{John Cassian: The Institutes}, 82.
Meticulous monitoring was also described in the *Rule of the Master*. Monks were not expected to live without some type of guidance in matters of spirituality and daily routine and were constantly under surveillance, “Therefore all who still have folly as their mother ought to be subject to the authority of a superior so that, guided on their way by the judgment of a teacher, they may learn to avoid the way of self-will.” Support in the form of interaction with more experienced monks was provided both during the admissions period and throughout the duration of one’s life in a monastery.

The *Rule of the Master*’s sanctions are more detailed than Augustine’s but not nearly as dense as Cassian’s. When compared to the *Rule of Saint Augustine* and the *Institutes*, the *Rule of the Master* presents points about admission that resemble Augustine in requirements but Cassian in language. Once again, it is absolutely necessary to refrain from pleasure and vice at all times. The abbot provides assistance, similar to the older mentors who guide the newest monks in Cassian’s rule. A statement in the *Rule of the Master* recalls the abandonment of self-will that had been stressed in both of the previous rules, “Not living according to their own discretion or obeying their own desires and pleasures, but walking by the judgment and command of another…” Monks should not be tempted to live as they please but, instead, follow in the footsteps of brothers who can assist them in the often difficult transition from the outside world to the secluded monastery. Although the *Rule of the Master* mentions tests of Christian endurance, it does not specify how each monk will be evaluated, “In the monastery their will is daily thwarted for the sake of the Lord, and in the spirit of martyrdom they patiently endure

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whatever commands they receive to test them.”96 This statement does not go into as much detail as the Institutes’ long passages did and so, the reader is left questioning exactly how such a test of admission will be administered or evaluated.

The monks in the Master’s community are required to uphold certain tenets that they must display before entering the monastery and maintain throughout the duration of their monastic lives. Such tenets include: abiding by the Ten Commandments, chastising the body for the sake of the soul, fleeing pleasures, making oneself a stranger to worldly activities, speaking the truth in heart and mouth, and placing one’s hope in God.97 Additionally, specific regulations were established that dictated the schedule of daily prayer and manual labor. Despite the obvious importance of requiring such lofty ideals and mandatory endeavors of its monks, the Rule of the Master does not discuss how the abbot is to ensure that each individual is sustaining the pledge to hold his or her life to a high standard. Surveillance of the monks was certainly implied by the Master. Specific guidelines, however, were left out of the description. Like Augustine, the Rule of the Master assumes that monks will live virtuous lives without having to be forced or policed to do so.

The Rule of Saint Benedict is largely indebted to the Rule of the Master in content and organization. Benedict included topics that were nearly identical to what the Master wrote about. For example, Benedict began his rule with a prologue and a discussion of bad monks, as did the Master. As a result of copied content, Saint Benedict wrote about admission in much the same way as the author of the Master. More so than the other rules, however, the Rule of Saint Benedict stresses the need for individuals to take part in

acts of kindness, “If we wish to dwell in the tent of this kingdom, we will never arrive unless we run there by doing good deeds.”\textsuperscript{98} These acts of kindness were required of all monks, before and after admission to a Benedictine monastery. Although requirements for initial admittance to the monastery were not included within Benedict’s text, an entire passage was dedicated to those who wished to rejoin the monastery after being excommunicated.

If a brother, following his own evil ways, leaves the monastery but then wishes to return, he must first promise to make full amends for leaving. Let him be received back, but as a test of his humility he should be given the last place. If he leaves again, or even a third time, he should be readmitted under the same conditions. After this, however, he must understand that he will be denied all prospect of return.\textsuperscript{99}

These fluid guidelines gave individuals the ability to make amends with the monastic community despite being unable to grasp the responsibilities at first. By giving monks the opportunity to remain in a Benedictine monastery despite hesitations, the author ensured that individuals were not cast out of the community without fully comprehending the repercussions of their actions.

The results of comparing treatment of admission reveal that each author approached entrance to the monastic community differently. The tenets they chose to include within the framework of their monastic systems reflect variations in decision-making. The general description of admittance by Augustine contrasts sharply with the specifications of Cassian. This comparison reveals that important differences in the way the rules treated admission exist.

\textsuperscript{98} Timothy Fry, \textit{The Rule of St. Benedict}, 17.  
\textsuperscript{99} Timothy Fry, \textit{The Rule of St. Benedict}, 53.
Daily Structure

In addition to variations in what is deemed compulsory to joining a monastic community, daily activities and schedules are diverse as well. A common thread that runs through all four of the rules is prayer. Prayer took up the majority of a monk’s day and the importance of prayer is addressed by each of the authors. The amount of detail, however, differs. A monk’s daily structure was completely dependent upon his or her prayer schedule. Aside from prayer, the rules chose to highlight various activities. An assortment of topics is included within this section to demonstrate to the reader that the daily structure of a monk was dependent upon the rule he was governed by. Regardless of these structural differences, the goal of each rule was salvation.

Augustine used brevity when describing the daily structure of monks. As with regulations for admittance, generalizations were utilized to describe a monk’s agenda. From the text, one can gather that appointed times for prayer were enforced. These times, however, are not mentioned within the rule itself. Additionally, monks were reminded of the holiness of the sanctuary, “The place of prayer should not be used for any purpose other than that for which it is intended and from which it takes its name. Thus if someone wants to pray there even outside the appointed hours, in his own free time, he should be able to do so without being hindered by others who have no business being there.”

Unlike the other monasteries, Augustinian communities were typically located within or near bustling areas. For this reason, the author had to include guidelines about how to act when among lay people. Although restrictions were placed on leaving the monastery, Augustinian monks had tasks to complete within cities that required absence from the monastery such as caring for the poor or sick. When leaving the grounds of the

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monastery, monks were required to stay together until they had reached their desired location. The rule reminded monks to behave properly and to refrain from drawing attention to themselves. It was prohibited to speak to, or even look at, the opposite sex. Despite this prohibition, or because of it, the rule included detailed information on how to react to desires of the flesh, “If you notice in a brother this provocative look I have spoken of, then warn him immediately, so that the evil that has taken root may not worsen and so that he may promptly improve his behaviour.”101 Every monk was under continuous surveillance by everybody else. Monks did not have any privacy and lights remained on in the dormitory. The members of the monastery enforced the guidelines laid out in the rule. Every activity a monk took part in was closely monitored by peers and a superior who was worthy of respect, “Obey your superior as a father, but also give him due respect on account of his office, otherwise you offend God in him. This is even more true of the priest who bears responsibility for you all.”102 The use of a leader and an emphasis on courtesy unites each of the four rules.

Cassian included an extremely specific schedule of daytime and nighttime prayers and psalms in the Institutes. The basis for this mode of organization was the most ancient of canonical practices, “Hence I consider it necessary to lay out the most ancient constitution of the fathers, which is being observed by the servants of God even until now throughout Egypt, so that the uninstructed infancy in Christ of your new monastery may be initiated in the most time-tried customs of the most ancient fathers.”103 By referring to and upholding these Christian traditions, Cassian stressed the importance of the rule’s schedule. The order and number of prayers was strictly laid out in addition to the seating,

102 Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, The Rule of Saint Augustine, 23.
103 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 37.
standing, or kneeling arrangements of the monks. For example, from Saturday to Sunday evening and during the entire season of Pentecost monks were prohibited from kneeling while taking part in the nighttime prayers.\textsuperscript{104} A significant portion of the Institutes is dedicated to laying out the guidelines for reverence. Prayer is clearly the most prominent component of a monk’s schedule. Cassian did not devote a comparable amount of text to any other pursuit or task. As one would deduce, those living within the walls of a monastery were expected to be extremely pious at all times. Prayers were repeated on a daily basis. Because of this repetitive schedule, monks inevitably memorized the words of prayers and psalms and were able to reflect upon the deeper meaning of their recitations.

In the Rule of the Master, more daily activities are explored than in either the Rule of Saint Augustine or the Institutes. Psalm organization and specifications are certainly mentioned, however, topics such as journey etiquette and caring for the sick are included within the text as well. The time and place for sleep is addressed in addition to the order in which individuals are allowed to sleep.

The beds are to be arranged in order in a circle within a single room, as is done in a dining room. Let the abbot have his bed in the center of this circle, so that by seeing to the silence and reverence of everyone around him he may, as a careful and solicitous shepherd, watch over the whole flock of his sheep gathered into one sheepfold. There is to be a lamp hanging in this room…When everyone has settled down, the aforesaid extinguish it, in case a shortage of oil should make itself felt in the monastery.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{104} Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 48.
\textsuperscript{105} Luke Eberle, The Rule of the Master, 190.
Waking from sleep was also deemed important enough to necessitate mention in this rule within its own chapter. In the *Rule of the Master*, almost every hour of every day is accounted for.

The ideal way by which to display necessary information about the daily routine of a monastery can be found in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* includes an extremely specific guide for daily organization. Daily responsibilities differ according to the time of year.

We believe that the times for both [manual labor and prayerful reading] may be arranged as follows: From Easter to the first of October, they will spend their mornings after Prime till about the fourth hour at whatever work needs to be done. From the fourth hour until the time of Sext, they will devote themselves to reading. But after Sext and their meal, they may rest on their beds in complete silence; should a brother wish to read privately, let him do so, but without disturbing the others. They should say None a little early, about midway through the eight hour, and then until Vespers they are to return to whatever work is necessary.\(^{106}\)

A different schedule of events applies to the period of time from the first of October to the beginning of Lent. The monks read until the end of the second hour at which time Terce is said. Working at assigned tasks is done until a signal denotes None. A second signal announces the meal. After the meal, monks must dedicate themselves to reading or to practicing the psalms.\(^{107}\) On Sundays, every monk is expected to read throughout the course of the day unless he or she has been assigned a special task. Benedict also includes a Lenten schedule in his rule, “During the days of Lent, they [monks] should be free in the morning to read until the third hour, after which they will work at their assigned tasks


until the end of the tenth hour.” Additionally, monks are assigned a book at the beginning of Lent. They must read the book in its entirety by Easter.

Benedict also included brief discussions of special events and unique circumstances that could occur at the monastery. These topics include: how to act while on a journey, the reception of guests, what to do with gifts or letters that arrive at the monastery for specific monks, and the reception of visiting monks and priests. Benedict stressed the need to take part in manual activities so that monks could experience life as their Christian predecessors did, “When they live by the labor of their hands, as our father and the apostles did, then they are really monks.” The clear and concise passages ensured that individuals would be able to easily understand and interpret what was required of monks and abbots on a daily basis in a Benedictine monastery.

For each rule, a large component of a monk’s daily activity consisted of prayer. Specific schedules for devotion were included in the rules of Cassian, the Master, and Saint Benedict. The results of this comparison reveal the importance placed upon Christian commitment expressed by worship and manual labor.

**Clothing, Bathing, and Nudity**

Surprisingly, guidelines for clothing and bathing were included within each of the four rules. Although the topic may initially seem to be frivolous and unnecessary, its importance has had far reaching implications which have made an impression upon society’s view of monastic communities. Each rule forbade physical exposure. Strict protocols for clothing and bathing resulted from the prohibition of nakedness. For Augustine, the personal strength of the individual monk determined the amount of

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clothing and bedding one could receive, “There are some who, before entering the religious life, were accustomed to living comfortably, and therefore they receive something more in the way of food and clothing: better bedding, perhaps, or more blankets. The others who are stronger, and therefore happier, do not receive these things.” Despite Augustine’s unique exception, two sentences written by the author can be used to characterize each rule’s position on clothing, “Do not attract attention by the way you dress. Endeavor to impress by your manner of life, not by the clothes you wear.” It was one individual’s responsibility, according to Augustine, to care for the community’s clothes and protect them from damage and moths. This individual worked in the storeroom and handed out the apparel randomly. Monks only received what was necessary for survival and were required to relinquish to the abbot any clothes that had been given to them from an outside source. Only in the Rule of Saint Augustine was washing clothes permitted as long as the superior granted permission. Even more surprising, bathing was allowed in an Augustinian monastery, “Because bathing may be necessary for good health, the opportunity to visit the public baths may never be refused…Even if a person is unwilling, he shall do what has to be done for the good of his health, if necessary at the command of the superior.” The Rule of Saint Augustine was the only text with such a positive and practical view of bathing.

The clothing worn by monks were highlighted in detail in the Institutes. Cassian included this information in the very first book and opened the discussion with the following note.

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114 The Institutes is composed of a total of twelve books.
As we start to speak of the Institutes and rules of monasteries, where could we better begin, with God’s help, than with the very garb of the monks? After having exposed their outward appearance to view we shall then be able to discuss, in logical sequence, their inner worship. And so, it is proper for a monk always to dress like a soldier of Christ, ever ready for battle, his loins girded.\textsuperscript{115}

Clearly, what monks wore was deemed relevant and worthy of analysis by Cassian. The articles of clothing included a garment for covering the body from nakedness without spurring vanity, small hoods to cover the neck, cords of wool to ensure that the garment was held tight to the body during daily activity, short capes, and sandals.\textsuperscript{116} Cassian also noted that adaptation was encouraged and possible for monasteries whose climate required additions.

In the Rule of the Master, specifications are made for winter and summer clothing while bathing is completely left out of the discussion. Interestingly, the Master accounts for perspiration in the summer; monks were given a linen handkerchief to keep themselves dry. Each article of clothing not in use is kept in a locked chest. Only the dean has access to the keys that open these chests. Monks fulfilling their weekly service in the kitchen are given “…tunics of sackcloth and cowls of matting. Such materials may, especially within the monastery, without embarrassment endure the indignity of dirtiness as well as the heat of the fire and the various soilings of the kitchen.”\textsuperscript{117} The Master provided additional clothing to monks who worked in the kitchen in anticipation of the filth that accompanies the preparation of food and maintenance of the kitchen. This accommodation for kitchen workers shows that cleanliness was indeed a cherished virtue.

\textsuperscript{115} Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 21.
\textsuperscript{116} Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 23-25.
\textsuperscript{117} Luke Eberle, The Rule of the Master, 246.
Just as monks were expected to adhere to the regulations set out for prayer, cleanliness was to be maintained while completing assigned tasks.

As previously discussed, the *Rule of Saint Benedict* emulates many of the Master’s chapters. This holds true for clothing and footwear as well. Climate is noted as the prominent dictator of daily and seasonal apparel. Unlike the *Rule of the Master*, however, Benedict’s winter and summer specifications are succinctly described, “We believe that for each monk a cowl and tunic will suffice in temperate regions; in winter a woolen cowl is necessary, in summer a thinner or worn one; also a scapular for work, and footwear – both sandals and shoes.”\(^{118}\) It was possible for old clothing to be replaced by new additions to the wardrobe. The replaced clothing was then packed away or distributed to the poor. The amount of personal belongings each monk was entitled to was taken very seriously. For this reason, the abbot frequently inspected the beds of his monks for contraband. A monk found to possess more than the specified amount of items was punished severely, “In order that this vice of private ownership may be completely uprooted, the abbot is to provide all things necessary: that is, cowl, tunic, sandals, shoes, belt, knife, stylus, needle, handkerchief and writing tablets. In this way every excuse of lacking some necessity will be taken away.”\(^{119}\) The entire monastic community took punishments, especially for possession of forbidden clothing and vanity, very seriously. Universal surveillance of monks by monks ensured the community’s obedience.

The *Rule of Saint Benedict* addresses bathing in two chapters: Kitchen Servers of the Week (Chapter 35) and The Sick Brothers (Chapter 36). Every Saturday, the brother performing his kitchen duty completes the community’s washing. This monk washes the

\(^{118}\) Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 76.

\(^{119}\) Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 76-77.
towels brothers use on a daily basis for wiping their extremities. Additionally, the monk beginning his week of duty and the monk ending his week of duty wash the feet of the entire community.\textsuperscript{120} Baths are permitted for sick monks. Healthy monks are encouraged the refrain from frequent bathing, “The sick may take baths whenever it is advisable, but the healthy, and especially the young, should receive permission less readily.”\textsuperscript{121} Unlike Augustine, Benedict did not allow or encourage regular bathing.

Nakedness was strictly prohibited by each of the rules. Guidelines for clothing and bathing were set in place in order to prevent vanity. The results of this comparison disclose the importance most rules placed upon equality among the monks. The exception lies in Augustine, who distributed clothing and bedding according to a monk’s personal strength.

**Obedience and Sanctions**

Obedience was, by far, the most important virtue a monk was required to uphold. Each of the four rules notes the importance of compliance countless times. Punishments were instituted for those who strayed from the established monastic tenets. For this reason, the last two points of comparison will be discussed simultaneously. The creation of punishment would not have been necessary if abiding by the rules was not taken seriously. Therefore, the goal of obedience spurred the creation and enforcement of penalties.

The *Rule of Saint Augustine* emphasizes mutual responsibility. A monk received the necessities for survival in exchange for Christian love and devotion. If an individual’s behavior was deemed irrational or unnecessary, the abbot had a duty to penalize the

\textsuperscript{120} Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 58.
\textsuperscript{121} Timothy Fry, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 59.
behavioral infringement. Due to the brevity of the Rule of Saint Augustine, degrees of criminality were not discussed. A discussion of punishment was brief and applied to all violations, “It is primarily up to the superior to see that all that has been said here is put into practice and that infringements are not carelessly overlooked. It is his duty to point out abuses and to correct them. If something is beyond his competence and power, he should put the matter before the [head] priest, whose authority in some respects is greater than his own.”122 Similarly, the abbot in Cassian’s rule had the authority to inflict punishment upon the non-compliant. If a monk was found to commit any of the eight principle vices – gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, anxiousness, vainglory, or pride – he or she would be greatly penalized.

But if, contrary to the discipline of this rule, any persons are discovered to have committed one of these forbidden acts, they are declared to be insolent, breakers of the law, and guilty of no small fault, and they may even be under suspicion of wickedly scheming and plotting. Unless they have absolved this fault by a public repentance in the presence of all the brothers, none of them is allowed to take part in the brothers’ prayer.123

By taking part in wrongful acts, the monks were blatantly disregarding the importance of obedience to the monastic community. For this reason, each rule took religious and moral misbehavior very seriously. The Rule of the Master gives individuals displaying derelict behavior the ability to be warned up to and including three times. If, after receiving three warnings, the monk has not yet made amends for his faults, “The one in authority [abbot] will make a judgment according to the nature and gravity of the fault and, so that he will know that it is God he despises, will sentence him to the excommunication he deserves to

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123 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 47.
have pronounced for the contempt shown a superior…” 124 Excommunication was not taken lightly by any of the rules. Benedict strayed from the suggestion of the Master and provided monks with only two private warnings before they were eligible for public discipline. If making a public spectacle of their misdeeds was not enough of a cause to reform, the monks could then be excommunicated. 125 For Benedict, excommunication was not a blanket punishment that could be applied to all transgressions, “There ought to be due proportion between the seriousness of a fault and the measure of excommunication or discipline. The abbot determines the gravity of the faults.” 126 Less serious lapses in judgment were countered with exclusion from the common table including solitary meals and being forbidden from reciting scripture to the rest of the community. Serious faults required exclusion from the oratory, in addition to the table. Other monks were forbidden from speaking or otherwise communicating with the culprit. Every activity he was required to take part in had to be completed either alone or in full view of the entire community, “He will work alone at the tasks assigned to him, living continually in sorrow and penance, pondering that fearful judgment…Let him take his food alone in an amount and at a time the abbot considers appropriate for him. He should not be blessed by anyone passing by, nor should the food that is given him be blessed.” 127 In this way, the wrongdoer would be reminded of his poor behavior.

The primary requirement of the four discussed monastic communities was obedience. Guidelines for admission, adherence to a daily schedule, and clothing and bathing each represent several ways in which one can assess the importance of

obedience. Important differences lie in the execution of the discussed topics, not in the inclusion or exclusion of the subjects. An individual who did not cleave to these monastic qualifications was met with punishment, and in extreme cases, excommunication. In this way, the authors of the rules could ensure the smooth operation and success of their monastery. A strong monastic rule was necessary in order to guide individuals effectively in their search for salvation. More than organizational strength, however, a truly impressive rule had the ability to appeal to large numbers of people. Of the four discussed rules, the *Rule of Saint Benedict* best exemplifies an effective rule. The strengths of Benedict’s work will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.
Chapter Four
Benedictine Appeal, Influence, and Legacy

The *Rule of Saint Benedict* is one of two texts that give modern scholars a direct link to Saint Benedict. Pope Gregory the Great included a short biography of Benedict as part of a much bigger work, *The Dialogues* (593-594). Gregory the Great’s work, together with the rule, are the only written documents available today that come from Benedict and his circle. The greatest of Benedictine influences is the impact the saint and the rule had on monasticism. As one scholar, Myra L. Uhlfelder, wrote:

The importance of St. Benedict in the history of Western Civilization is inextricably related to the deep and widespread influence of monasticism, especially upon the Middle Ages, for monasticism was the quintessence of medieval spirituality. Later periods too, even the most secular of them, have been indebted to the monks who preserved the literature of the past by copying manuscripts. Since European monasticism is very largely Benedictine, the impact of Benedict’s life and work becomes evident.  

Gregory the Great wrote that the *Rule of Saint Benedict* was “outstanding in good judgment and clearly expressed.” It became the backbone of Benedictine monasticism. This manual has proven, throughout the centuries, to be an effective means by which to organize a monastery. An assessment of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*’s achievements will assist in clarifying what, exactly, made it appealing and influential. This chapter will consider the stylistic and organizational characteristics of the work. Furthermore, offshoots and variations of the manual whose basis lie in the *Rule of Saint Benedict* will be included as proof of Benedict’s influence on the history of monasticism. Additionally, this chapter will provide an account of one of the most famous Benedictine monasteries –

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129 Gregory the Great, *Dialogues, Book II*, 46.
Monte Cassino. Benedictine monasteries are a testament to the resilience of the *Rule of Saint Benedict.*

**Stylistic and Organizational Characteristics**

When compared with the three other rules discussed in this thesis, the *Rule of Saint Benedict* emerges as an ideal monastic manual. Written in the sixth century, it is composed of eighty-seven (87) pages and consists of a prologue and seventy-three (73) chapters. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* combines the brevity of Augustine and Cassian with the scope of the Master. This rule utilizes easily understandable language and has a navigable mode of organization. Each chapter begins with a title that introduces the subject of the section. For example, Chapter Five is entitled *Obedience.* After the title, the theme is expanded upon in a paragraph or series of paragraphs. The body of Chapter Five is composed of three paragraphs that give the reader insight into obedience and its importance to a Benedictine monastery. The first sentence effectively sums up the premise of the entire fifth chapter, “The first step of humility is unhesitatingly obedience, which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all.”\(^{130}\) Explanatory headings are included for each chapter. Additionally, the first sentence of each chapter precisely tells readers what the rest of the entry will be about. Due to the clarity of the descriptions, a thorough background in scripture or monastic organization is not necessary in order to read and comprehend this rule. Although references are frequently made to specific lines or passages from the Bible, they are effortlessly incorporated into the text of the chapter and, on account of the publisher, indicated with italics. For example: “Furthermore, the disciples’ obedience must be given gladly, for *God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Cor 9:7).”\(^{131}\)

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A reader interested in learning about the functions of a Benedictine community can do so by perusing the pages of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

The handbook is not technical. It was written with lay people in mind and is accessible to those with even the most rudimentary of educational backgrounds, “Its simplicity and Roman clarity assured it worldwide success. For after the Gospels, this little volume was the second work of the new religion of the Word that the missionaries carried with them everywhere.”132 One can envision the rule being read by a literate monk to the illiterate without difficulty. The reader would not have trouble communicating the content of the chapters to his listeners. Simultaneously, illiterate individuals could easily grasp the themes and details of the work, “At least once a week, and in many monasteries daily, the Abbot assembled his monks for the reading and exposition of the Rule. Its simple paragraphs became the object of creative meditation.”133 Although the content, context, and purpose of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* is similar to the content, context, and purpose of the *Rule of the Master*, Benedict wrote his rule with a specific audience in mind. Despite other similarities between the two rules, the style of writing and the individuals for whom the rule was written is enough to render Benedict’s work inimitable. Almost every topic noted in the *Rule of the Master* is included within Saint Benedict’s text. Yet, the language is easy to interpret. For example, Benedict’s passage about sleeping arrangements reads as follows, “If possible, all are to sleep in one place, but should the size of the community preclude this, they will sleep in groups of ten or twenty under the watchful care of seniors. A lamp must be kept burning

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in the room until morning.”

These two sentences effectively summarize a long-winded passage about the same topic included in the Rule of the Master and mentioned in Chapter Three.

The beds are to be arranged in order in a circle within a single room, as is done in a dining room. Let the abbot have his bed in the center of this circle, so that by seeing to the silence and reverence of everyone around him he may, as a careful and solicitous shepherd, watch over the whole flock of his sheep gathered into one sheepfold. There is to be a lamp hanging in this room...When everyone has settled down, the aforesaid extinguish it, in case a shortage of oil should make itself felt in the monastery.

This comparison perfectly exemplifies the fundamental differences between the two rules. Benedict included discussions of the subjects referred to in the Rule of the Master in his own rule. Yet, he refrained from using embellished wording or unnecessary explanations to build upon the topical areas.

The virtues of the Rule continue with effective and liberal use of biblical references. The frequent incorporation of scripture into the Rule of Saint Benedict, especially in the prologue, is a tool Benedict used to add authority to his work. The biblical excerpts are effortlessly woven into the general exposition. Readers can differentiate between biblical text and Benedict’s text only because of italics, as demonstrated above. Without this addition by a modern publisher, readers had no way of knowing that scriptural references were being made. The frequent use of scripture is a reflection of Benedict’s actual speech and thoughts. To him, it was difficult to make a distinction between the word of God and his own words. Benedict dedicated his life to Christianity. Before writing the Rule of Saint Benedict he lived in solitude in a cave. This

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lifestyle gave him ample opportunity to memorize biblical passages and ponder over their meaning. As a result, every decision he made was directly influenced by the enormous faith he had in scripture. The importance of maintaining a connection with scripture is evident in the amount of references made to biblical text. For example, the prologue has nineteen scriptural citations in less than five pages. Several paragraphs are almost completely composed of italicized words. For example:

Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say: *It is high time for us to arise from sleep* (Rom 13:11). Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out to this charge: *If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts* (Ps 94 [95]:8). And again: *You that have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches* (Revs 2:7). And what does he say? *Come and listen to me, sons; I will teach you the fear of the Lord* (Ps 33[34]:12). *Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you* (John 12:35).136

The passages included within the rule were strategically selected. Each one serves a specific purpose of building upon Benedict’s words to further explain each chapter, “And for his part, while composing his Rule, Benedict ceaselessly recalled Holy Scripture, of which his memory was so full, as well as the monastic legislation that had preceded him, starting with the legislation of the “Master” (*Regula Magistri*) the anonymous author whom Benedict followed step by step at first, and then never ceased to keep in mind even while reinterpreting him more freely.”137 It is difficult to challenge the authority of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* due to the large number of biblical excerpts.

Clearly, the author turned to the word of God for inspiration when writing his rule. For this reason, it would be hard to dismiss the work as spiritually ignorant; the

direct quotations from the Old and New Testaments legitimize the use of and adherence to this rule. The inclusion of scripture adds to the authenticity of Benedict’s rule. Additionally, those exposed to the rule orally were very aware of the scriptural passages included within it. In the fifth and sixth centuries, devout Christians knew which Testament and book a citation came from. Biblical references were incorporated into everyday life through conversations, stories, and exchanges. Most Christians were frequently exposed to scripture and monks were able to access copies of the Bible from which to read or be read to. Monks were familiar with the implications of the words being used and were exposed to them consistently. The oral culture of monastic prayer made certain that illiterate monks would be able to take part in recitation of psalms and scriptural passages as well. Although everybody was not capable of reading scripture, monks certainly were immersed in the Bible and psalms on a daily basis. By incorporating scriptural references that were recognizable to Christians, Benedict was able to ensure that large numbers of individuals would find the rule authoritative. An adherence to incorporating biblical passages within comprehensible text added to the appeal of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

The community Benedict founded was most certainly not the only mode of monastic organization with authority or followers in the medieval period. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* was not a monopoly and did not appeal to countless individuals. Some Christians were taken aback by the lack of severity and relative ease of a Benedictine lifestyle. Self-humiliation and mutilation of the flesh were not incorporated into the rule. These activities were deemed appropriate and necessary to some and supported by those who truly believed that individuals were their own worst enemies. Many chose to live by
this precept literally and inflicted wounds upon themselves. The active pursuit of self-mortification was absent from the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Other orders, however, chose to include harsher rules, punishments, and mandatory acts of reparation.

Benedict chose to refrain from incorporating extreme acts of bodily punishment in his rule. Instead, he approached the renouncement of self-control in a different way. To him, a monk’s most important task was to hold fast to ascetic vows. In order to do so, one had to maintain a life of poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability of place. These four Benedictine requirements could best be served by adhering to the guidelines laid out in the rule, “Brothers, now that we have asked the Lord who will dwell in his tent, we have heard the instruction for dwelling in it, but only if we fulfill the obligations of those who live there…If we wish to reach eternal life, even as we avoid the torments of hell, then – while there is still time, while we are in this body and have time to accomplish all these things by the light of life – we must run and do now what will profit us forever.”

Abiding by Benedict’s instructions gave monks the opportunity to achieve salvation. Continued satisfaction throughout centuries added to the endurance of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

**Benedictine Offshoots**

The *Rule of Saint Benedict* survived and flourished throughout the medieval period and beyond despite the founding of countless other monastic orders. The rule proved to be adaptable and was interpreted by an assortment of Christians over a long period of time. Variations in analysis led to the creation of Benedictine offshoots. The Cluniacs, for example, were founded in the tenth century. The goal of this community

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was to reinstall a strict observance of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.\(^\text{139}\) About a century later, a group of individuals continued to be interested in returning to the way of life advocated by Saint Benedict. The Cistercians were characterized by a “restless search for a simpler and more secluded form of ascetical life that found expression in other new orders in the eleventh century. Like similar movements, it began as a reaction against the corporate wealth, worldly involvements and surfeited liturgical ritualism of the Carolingian monastic tradition.”\(^\text{140}\) The seventeenth century Trappists also chose to adhere to the guidelines set by the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Thus, the Benedictine order paved the way for monastic subsidiaries whose basic tenets were rooted in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*.

The legacy of Benedict’s work is characterized by a pattern of adaptive survival and spreading. The origins of the rule were certainly understood and appreciated by the new communities. The modifications to the rule made Benedict’s foundation accessible to a population faced with modern crises. Although the order began in Western Europe, Benedictine communities have flourished in the contemporary United States and continue to be founded throughout the world. For example, Benedictine monks currently reside within the walls of Our Lady of Clear Creek monastery in Hubert, Oklahoma. Although founded in 1999, the tenets of Benedict and his rule are fully realized on a daily basis. As stated in an Autumn 2007 newsletter, “Over the centuries, Benedictine monks have played a quiet but decisive role in the preservation and development of civilization…By their balanced life, monks offer an example of how to praise God and respect His creation, how to love one’s neighbor and practice the moderate use of material goods.”\(^\text{141}\) More than anything, this community proves how sustainable the *Rule of Saint Benedict*

\(^{139}\) C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 83.  
\(^{141}\) Philip Anderson, Foundation for the Annunciation Monastery of Clear Creek, Autumn 2007 Newsletter.
is. From the early medieval period to the modern age, Benedict’s followers have taken part in an affirmation of the rule and proved its malleability despite the passage of time.

Monasteries and Monte Cassino – Examples of Benedictine Resilience

The influence of Benedictine monasticism can be seen in the buildings within which the monasteries were housed. A need for orderliness and structure as described in the rule was incorporated into the architecture of the monasteries. A self-sufficient monastic community was created for monks and abbots, “The monastery should, if possible, be so constructed that within it all necessities, such as water, mill and garden are contained, and the various crafts are practiced. Then there will be no need for the monks to roam outside, because this is not at all good for their souls.”\(^\text{142}\) In the sixth century and beyond, Benedictine monasteries were built with the rooms and features necessary to put Benedict’s rule into practice. One of Saint Benedict’s goals was to stress the importance of God’s equal love for his followers, “Ordinarily, everyone is to keep to his regular place, because \textit{whether slave or free, we are all one in Christ} (Gal 3:28; Eph 6:8) and share alike in bearing arms in the service of the one Lord, for \textit{God shows no partiality among persons} (Rom 2:11).\(^\text{143}\) While residing within monasteries, each monk received the same amenities as his peers. Order and organization in architecture and in lifestyle were part of the \textit{Rule of Saint Benedict’s} overall appeal. The orderliness of the rule was reflected in the functional stability of the monastic complex.

The whole course of the day was divided into hours of prayer, reading, work, eating, meditation and sleep. In his [Benedict’s] Rule many of these activities were allotted distinct buildings. To the organization of the day in time corresponded its organization by place, and the perfect monastery could only emerge from their complete agreement. Each activity was to take place in its

\(^{142}\) Timothy Fry, \textit{The Rule of St. Benedict}, 91.

\(^{143}\) Timothy Fry, \textit{The Rule of St. Benedict}, 23.
appointed room, which was to be used for no other purpose, whether this was sleeping, eating, working, meditating, washing, or even speaking.\textsuperscript{144}

The architectural structures were created to house followers of the Rule of Saint Benedict. Monte Cassino is one of the best examples of a monastery that reflects the needs of a Benedictine community. The form of Monte Cassino followed the building’s function. It has had an influential role in religious and Italian history, “Few places in the West represent the continuity of tradition between the ancient and the modern world as well as does Monte Cassino, the foundation of Saint Benedict.”\textsuperscript{145} This particular monastery was built on the remains of a former Roman fortification and ancient temple of Apollo in 529. Although the temple was completely destroyed, a component of the ancient tower was incorporated into the monastery’s infrastructure.\textsuperscript{146}

Monte Cassino rose to fame and became the most well-known Benedictine monastery founded in the early medieval period. Yet, its significance added to the frequency of its turmoil, “An outpost of the Roman church near the border of southern Italy, it was predestined to play a significant part in the clashes between the forces of the North, the emperors and the popes, and those in the South”.\textsuperscript{147} Eerily foreshadowing its World War Two destruction, the monastery underwent a series of demolitions throughout its history. In 577, it was sacked by Lombards but restored in 717 by a group of individuals commissioned by Pope Gregory II. In 787, Charlemagne visited the abbey and gave it certain religious privileges.\textsuperscript{148} Monte Cassino played a leading role in the

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\textsuperscript{144} Wolfgang Braunfels, Monasteries of Western Europe, 11.
\textsuperscript{145} Herbert Bloch, Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 3.
\textsuperscript{147} Herbert Bloch, Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages, 3.
\textsuperscript{148} The Abbey of Montecassino (Montecassino: Pubblicazioni Cassinesi, 2005), 2.
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ninth century Carolingian Renaissance but, in 883, was sacked again, this time by Saracens who were attracted by the complex’s riches. The monks escaped from Monte Cassino and monastic life did not fully recover until the tenth century when monks began to take up residence in the monastery again. The eleventh century, however, has come to be known as the monastery’s Golden Age. Under the abbot Desiderius, Monte Cassino amassed a large amount of territory and an enormous library. Desiderius fostered a positive relationship with Constantinople’s government and, as a result, ensured the influence of Byzantine artistic practices on the monastery’s reconstruction, “When he decided to rebuild the whole abbey, and especially the basilica of St. Benedict, he not only ordered works of art in Constantinople, but he also summoned thence a great number of artists, both to execute works themselves and to teach the monks the arts in which the Byzantines were believed to be the greatest masters of their time.”149 A description of the monastery by Fred Majdalany perfectly encapsulates the splendor and marvelous appeal of Monte Cassino in the 11th century.

It was built in the form of a trapezium, its longest side being two hundred and twenty yards long – more than twice the length of Buckingham Palace. It was a four-storyed building in the uniform design of a fortress, with a thick battlemented base and long even rows of small cell windows. Even the corridors along which the cells were ranged were nearly two hundred yards long. The Abbey was mostly built around five main cloistered courtyards, and the buildings included a cathedral, a seminary, and a college for boys. The great library ran nearly the full length of the building and there were in addition workshops of various kinds, where many different crafts were practiced. There was a kitchen garden, and a large building to house the animals required for food. And yet, improbably, this self-contained citadel lay sprawled across the summit of a steep mountain.150

149 Herbert Bloch, *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*, 40-41.
Desiderius filled the abbey with beautifully illuminated manuscripts, mosaics, enamels, and gold products from the Orient.\textsuperscript{151} This splendor, however, was destroyed during an earthquake in 1349. Despite Desiderius’s meticulous restoration and decoration project, only a few walls remained of the building he had worked so hard to rejuvenate after the natural disaster. As always, however, Monte Cassino was rebuilt to resemble closely the building complex that had once stood there. For several centuries, it was impossibly situated atop its mountain, overlooking the town of Cassino below. At this locale, it boasted its prominence to all who came to work, study, and pray at the monastery. Its location, art, culture, religious qualities, and Saint Benedict’s tomb all added to the notoriety of this impressive building complex. To many, it perfectly exemplified medieval artistic characteristics and the success of the Benedictine order. On February 15, 1944, however, Monte Cassino experienced an unprecedented tragedy and was completely destroyed by the bombs of Allied troops hoping to secure the mountain.

On March 15, 1945, the official laying of the foundation stone marked the beginning of Monte Cassino’s most recent reconstruction. The anniversary of the destruction of the town of Cassino was chosen as the date with which to commemorate the rebuilding of the monastery. Monte Cassino’s reconstruction started with the torretta, which had only been partially destroyed. It continued with the basilica, the south-eastern wing, and then the north-west transept.\textsuperscript{152} The new building adheres closely to the original plan that had been rescued by German soldiers before the fateful bombing. The plan had been retrieved and taken to safety in Rome, awaiting its use to resurrect Monte Cassino once again. Abbot Ildefonso Rea was in charge of the reconstruction program.

\textsuperscript{151} The Abbey of Montecassino, 3.
\textsuperscript{152} Rudolf Bohmler, Monte Cassino (London: Cassel, 1964), 300.
and strictly adhered to a “where and as was” ideology when making decisions about Monte Cassino’s building and decoration.\textsuperscript{153} Rebuilding the abbey cost a large amount of money, “The new monastery cost many thousands of millions of lire. By far the greater portion of the huge sum required was provided by the Italian Government, which, notwithstanding the heavy damage that Italy suffered during the war, was anxious to do all in its power to recreate this national memorial as quickly as possible. Generous contributions flowed in, too, from Europe and from countries farther afield, and the Order of Saint Benedict dedicated much of its wealth to the swift restoration of its founder’s monastery.”\textsuperscript{154} The funds and time used to create a new Monte Cassino perfectly exemplify how important this building was to countless individuals throughout the world.

This brief history of Benedict’s most famous monastery highlights the continued importance of the structure. The \textit{Rule of Saint Benedict} is often spoken of in conjunction with Benedictine monasteries. In this way, the rule has lived on as much more than just a manual; it has come to represent a celebrated way of life exemplified by miraculously impressive buildings, “He [Benedict] put his seal upon the monastic institution, not by some fiat, but by the practical, intellectual, and spiritual character of the Rule which he worked out for his own monastery at Montecassino.”\textsuperscript{155} Monasteries with Benedictine ties, such as Subiaco, serve as physical memories of the rule’s widespread influence.

\textbf{Advantages and Achievements}

After reading the \textit{Rule of Saint Benedict}, one is able to gather that the prosperity of an entire monastic community was dependent upon each individual residing within it.

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{The Abbey of Montecassino}, 3.
\textsuperscript{154} Bohmler, \textit{Monte Cassino}, 300.
As a result, respect for one's peers was highly encouraged and functionally necessary, “No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else. To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers; to God, loving fear; to their abbot, unfeigned and humble love.” Respect and love has continuously guided Benedictines since the founding of their order. In the years following its sixth century creation, The Rule of Saint Benedict has been viewed as a pleasing way by which to organize the life of a monk. This favorable attitude is a result of clear expectations. A potential monk could fully grasp what was to be required of him or her by reading Benedict’s rule. Each monk received adequate food, shelter, and security during a time of great instability.

During the late antique and early medieval periods, civilization encountered turmoil as the Roman Empire collapsed and Barbarians invaded Europe. It was in the midst of this environment that Benedict chose to live a life of asceticism and write a rule. Christians who adhered to the tenets of the Rule added stability to their otherwise unpredictable lives, “The labor of obedience will bring you back to him [God] from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience.” Benedict and those that followed his rule were convinced of God’s favorable attitude towards monasticism. The survival of the institution was dependent upon pleasing God by way of asceticism.

Monks lived within monasteries that were cared for by the inhabitants. Health care and sanitary conditions improved the life expectancy of monks and allowed them to focus on the routine of everyday life and the study of scripture. The maintenance of discipline was enforced by sanctions that stressed the importance of proper conduct.

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156 Timothy Fry, The Rule of St. Benedict, 94-95.
These advantages each added to the popularity of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*. Approval for Benedict’s rule can best be seen in the offshoots that sprung from it and the monastic communities that continue to adhere to the work. The resilience of Monte Cassino is a testament to the importance of the structure and the rule that led to its creation. The monastery has been rebuilt after an onslaught of natural and man-made catastrophes because of an unceasing desire to commemorate the place in which Benedict wrote his rule. Benedict’s words best describe the allure his eighty-seven (87) page book had, “No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else. To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers; to God, loving fear; to their abbot, unfeigned and humble love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.”158 Salvation, the ultimate goal of a monk, would be achieved after dedicating one’s life to God.

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Monasticism became a dominant institution in the medieval period because of a belief in self-fashioning, “Such self-consciousness had been widespread among the elite in the classical world, but Christianity brought a growing suspicion of man’s power to shape identity.” Individuals had confidence in their ability to construct a character for themselves and were motivated to work towards salvation by a fear of hell, hope for heaven, and desire for security on earth. Humans were perfectly capable of changing their spiritual condition from bad to better by altering their religious outlook. Additionally, human works were deemed valid in the eyes of God. A life of sacrifice and repentance brought one closer to Christian perfection.

Each of these statements assists in explaining the rapid success of monastic orders in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. The Rule of Saint Augustine, John Cassian’s Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict were products of similar mindsets. To join a monastery, one had to believe that becoming a member of such a community was beneficial and pleasing to God. In order to be recognized as a monk, an individual had to take lifelong vows that bound him to austerity for the remainder of his living days. This oath was not taken lightly by any of the rules. Monasticism was a commitment that required thought, dedication, and a desire for change. Those that joined monasteries did so in order to reach spiritual perfection. This goal stemmed from the realization that one’s current lifestyle individuals did not believe in modifying their hearts and minds, “But the person who has overcome the onslaught of vice, who now enjoys a secure peace and has passed to a was less than ideal. Therefore, monasticism was

continuously sustained by a wholehearted belief in self-fashioning. There would be no need for monasteries if disposition for the virtuous itself will hold constantly to that state of goodness which now possesses him entirely, because he believes that nothing is more damaging than damage done to inner chastity. For he to whom the wicked transgression of virtue and the poisonous contagion of vice itself are a serious punishment does not consider anything dearer and more precious than resent purity.”

A belief in the ability to change the course of one’s life was a necessary precursor to the founding of monasteries.

Monastic reconstruction of the soul required willingness on behalf of the potential monk. He or she had to be prepared to replace old ideas about self-aggrandizement with new concepts of religious purity. As long as they were open-minded, individuals had the power to change their lives for the better. In order to do so, however, he or she had to adhere to certain concepts and partake in activities as described in the Rule of Saint Augustine, John Cassian’s Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict. Most importantly, a monk had to renounce self-will. After a monk made the decision to partake in monastic self-fashioning and join a community, his daily activities were controlled by the rule. The abbot enforced the implementation of the statutory routine. The success of monastic reconstruction was completely dependent upon one’s observance of the rule. A close execution of either rule was necessary in order to experience salvation after death.

In addition to the abandonment of self-will, a monk undergoing monastic reconstruction had to be convinced of the rule’s ability to please God. The survival of any monastic rule was reliant upon belief in its power to lead followers to salvation. The

purpose of adhering to a monastic rule was to satisfy God. If monks did not believe whole-heartedly in the ability of the rule to delight God, skepticism could encourage them to turn back to their previous way of life without achieving monastic reconstruction. Different ways by which to judge a monk’s belief in the monastic system were detailed in the rules. For example, Cassian’s *Institutes* included an admission requirement that tested the desire of a Christian to join the monastic community. If the potential monk was able to live outside the walls of the monastery for an extended period of time without becoming discouraged, he or she was seen to be an enthusiastic supporter of monasticism and was granted entrance into the monastic community.

The community acts as a support system for those who wish to lead a spiritually fulfilled existence. Being surrounded by experienced monks assists new monks; recent additions to the monastery turn to the veterans for encouragement and example. The founders of the monastic orders knew how difficult the decision to join a monastery could be for some individuals, “He [God] knew how weak we could be at the start of our religious life, how easily we can turn back to the world when we associate with worldly people or happen to meet them. That is why it happened that when someone said to Him, ‘Let me go away to bury my father,’ He answered, ‘Let the dead bury the dead’ (Matt. 8:22). There are demons to assail us after our renunciation of the world.”161 Individuals often require communication with others who have lived through the experiences they are about to undergo. Precisely for this reason, monastic communities were founded. As discussed in Chapter One, anchorites resided throughout the Christian world. Yet, living alone did not provide the individual with assistance or support, two items humans rarely live without. The purpose of many monasteries was to bring together individuals with

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common interests. In this way, monks could simultaneously work towards spiritual perfection along with their similarly goaled peers.

Monastic rules gave monks the guidelines necessary for becoming successful ascetics. Adherence to these rules put its followers on the path towards reaching Christian perfection. Although the framework and text of the rules differed, the goal of each was the same, “Let them [monks] prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.” Together the Rule of Saint Augustine, John Cassian’s Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict represent the many forms Christianity has taken since its inception.

Frequently noted throughout the duration of this thesis, monastic rules were all interested in leading followers to salvation. Despite this similarity, each rule had at least one trait that could be used to differentiate it from the remainder of the rules. The following four features were only found in one of the discussed rules - masculine and feminine versions of text, a thorough discussion of sins and their remedies, the use of a common phrase before each chapter, and clear and concise language.

The Rule of Saint Augustine was written in both masculine and feminine forms. The guidelines were identical. Only nouns and pronouns were changed to refer to the appropriate sex. Although John Cassian, the Master, and Saint Benedict knew Augustine had created a male and female version of the Rule of Saint Augustine, they chose to refrain from creating separate rules for men and women. A thorough discussion of eight sins, comprising the fifth through twelfth books, is unique to Cassian’s Institutes. Additionally, Cassian includes remedies for each individual sin. For example, vainglory can be warded off by striving to “…reject as the stuff of boastfulness whatever is not

162 Timothy Fry, The Rule of St. Benedict, 95.
generally accepted and practiced as part of the way of life of the brothers...”163 No other rule dedicates as much discussion or length to any one topic or series of topics. The Rule of the Master is the only rule that includes an identical phrase before each chapter, The Lord has replied through the master. Whereas the other rules have chapter headings, the Master chose to include a phrase, in addition to a heading, before the content of the chapter. In this way, the Master stressed the divinity of the rule and the spiritual validation of the addressed topics. Lastly, the Rule of Saint Benedict is the only rule to use clear and concise language when describing monastic activities and guidelines. Consequently, Benedict’s rule was disseminated to a wide audience of lay people who could grasp the concepts he addressed.

These four features – masculine and feminine rules, a thorough discussion of sins and their remedies, the use of a common phrase before each chapter, and clear and concise language – are specific to only one of the four rules. For this reason, the rules were not equivalent and should not be characterized as interchangeable. Instead, the Rule of Saint Augustine, John Cassian’s Institutes, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of Saint Benedict can be compared to genres of art. Each stylistic period has attributes that acknowledge the work that came before it and inspired the work that came after it. In this way, the history of art is comprised of schools of painting. Similarly, each successive rule took the previous one into consideration. Each rule is a school within the scope of monastic organization.

One rule does not have spiritual dominance over the others. Yet, as we have seen, The Rule of Saint Benedict led to the success and popularity of the Benedictine order in an unprecedented way. The amount of tourists a Benedictine monastery receives in

163 Boniface Ramsey, John Cassian: The Institutes, 248.
addition to the current population of Benedictine monks is tangible evidence of the rule’s success. Benedict’s rule effectively presents the requirements of each monk living within a monastic community. The inclusion of scriptural detail assists in relaying the importance of the work without rendering the text incomprehensible. The descriptive chapter titles allow the reader to quickly search for and locate a specific topic of interest. Overall, the rule presents an alluring institution of Christianity, monasticism, with precision and clarity. Since the sixth century, the Rule of Saint Benedict has repeatedly intrigued those that encounter it. After nearly fifteen hundred years of captivation, it is doubtful the rule will be forgotten anytime soon.

About two years ago, when I began to seriously think about a topic for this thesis, I was introduced to the Rule of Saint Benedict. I was immediately struck by the short length of the text and vividly recall reading the entire rule in one sitting. My initial vision of a rule was an aged, cumbersome book whose large size was necessary in order to govern an entire monastic community. As one might imagine, I was quite surprised to find out that a pocket-sized manual was the foundation of the Benedictine order. This past summer, I had the privilege of visiting two Benedictine monasteries in Italy, Subiaco and Monte Cassino. These visits further increased my interest in the Rule of Saint Benedict.

I come away from this study with an enormous amount of respect for the authors of the rules and the followers who chose to adhere by the stated guidelines. As frequently mentioned, obedience was absolutely necessary in order to fully benefit from these Christian manuals and achieve salvation. The dedication to living an ascetic lifestyle that countless monks have shown since the creation of these rules is almost beyond my
comprehension. With each passing day of research and writing, I became increasingly fascinated by the lifestyles of these monks. Although my work is complete, my monastic curiosity has not been satiated.

The goal of this project was to delve into the content of Benedict’s rule in order to explore its appeal. Simultaneously, I wanted to learn why individuals would choose to abandon the lives they had grown accustomed to and become monks. I achieved both of these goals and, in the process, became aware of the necessity of faith. A belief in the ability of the Rule of Saint Benedict to govern a monastery is necessary for the success of the community. Similarly, a belief in salvation through the denial of self-will compelled many Christians to become monks. Lastly, a belief in my ability to write five chapters on late antique monasticism created this thesis. My genuine interest in the subject matter leaves me with aspects of medieval monasticism I hope to examine in further detail. I anticipate being able to do so in the near future, whether as an academic pursuit or leisurely curiosity.