



IDAHO KNIGHTLY NEWS

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Editor's Note

I apologize for missing last months. It was a very busy time in June and my computer crashed on me.

If anyone would like to submit an article for the Idaho Knightly News, please email me your article using Microsoft Word. Keep it between 1 page and 1.5 pages.

What is Monasticism: Part 5

By Barry E. Newell

Evolution of Monasticism

Monasticism continued to evolve, adapting to the environment it existed in. The stability and exemplary conduct of the monasteries attracted many bright minds and it was during this time that monasteries became storehouses and producers of knowledge. Lords and nobles started giving land and monasteries became wealthy.

In some instances, monks didn't have to work the land, but had a non-monastic workforce that left more time for the monks to study and pray. Subjects that were studied

included Latin, Greek, Hebrew, grammar, rhetoric, poetry, arithmetic, chronology, the Holy Places, hymns, sermons, natural science, history, and especially the interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Monasteries became centers of education. In many locations, monastic schools led to the establishment of a university in the region during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Monasteries even started taking charge or began social services such as medical, healthcare, and education. Having such farming operations, monasteries led the development of agricultural techniques to include fermentation (wine), brewing (beer), and distillation (alcohol).

Monks even contributed to the arts as a way of praising God and one example of this is the Gregorian chant (a favorite of mine).

Royal and noble families also utilized the monasteries for housing their children. For daughters, it was a place to educate them in an environment where they could remain chaste. For the second sons, it was a bit less pleasant as monasteries were used to keep the second sons from any inheritance. Political prisoners were also kept at monasteries,

depending on their crime and social status. Monasteries also provided refuge for those who were tired of the troubles of life (as seen with Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor who retired to Yuste monastery in Spain in his late years). Several monasteries are comparable to modern retirement homes for nobility.

Mendicant Orders

As the religious and geopolitical landscape continued to change so too did monasticism. In the 11th century, you see the Great Schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern/Greek Orthodox Church. Many monasteries had accumulated a great amount of wealth and relaxed the ideals/principles of monasticism which earned them the criticism of many across Christendom and new orders emerged such as the Cistercians that focused more on the manual labor of the monks and more austere life. The term “Cistercian” comes from the word “Cistercium” which is Latin for Citeaux (near Dijon) where the order was founded.

Around this time, you also saw the rise of mendicant orders such as the Franciscans or Dominicans. Mendicants (practitioners were called friars) were ascetics like monks, but instead of isolating themselves, mendicant orders were dedicated to traveling and living in urban areas as their primary mission was preaching, evangelizing, and ministering to the poor. Where monasticism was about finding a personal, private way to devote themselves to God, mendicants were all about the public service to others.

Some mendicant orders would also provide other services to the church thought they may have called it a public service. The

Dominicans were an order established to preach the Gospel and oppose heresy. This order would become known for running the Inquisition (today called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and is still a part of the Roman Curia of the Vatican). The Dominicans were instrumental in the attack on the Cathars and the Albigensian Crusades.

For good or bad, mendicant orders were contributed to the colonization of the new world, eastern Asia, and the South Pacific. In these places where only diplomatic relations existed or even where Western powers had conquered the land, governance was often truly centered on the Friars and not the civil government. If you are interested in this subject area, I’d recommend “Noli Me Tangere” by José Rizal.

The next part will be covering the decline of monasticism and how the renaissance and reformation impacted their existence in Western Europe.

