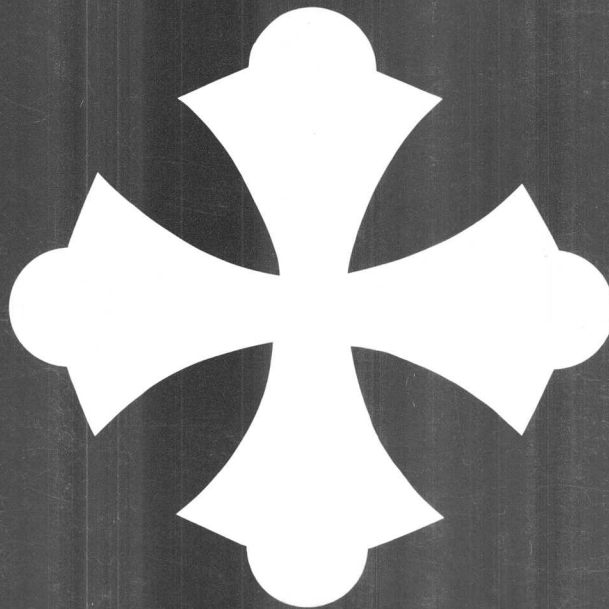


# COPTIC CHURCH REVIEW

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**SAINT PACHOMIUS  
FATHER OF THE KOINONIA**



*Society of Coptic Church Studies*

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**SAINT PACHOMIUS**

**FATHER OF THE KOINONIA**

**BY**

**RODOLPH YANNEY, M.D.**

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## ***PREFACE***

Because of the importance of early monasticism as a vigorous spiritual revival that was based upon the values taught in Scripture and upon the liturgical life of the Church, Coptic Church Review has always included articles dealing with it. A symposium on the history of Coptic monasticism appeared in 1980 (Volume I, No. 4) and a special issue on the mysticism of the Desert Fathers appeared in 1982 (Volume III, No. 3). Recent translations of the early monastic writings were reviewed. We had the biographies of the monastic founders, St. Antony the Great, St. Macarius the Egyptian, St. Moses the Ethiopian and St. Shenute of Atripe. But a life of the creator of monastic community life was missing. This is the scope of this special issue. The biography of Saint Pachomius the Great is constructed here from the various Coptic, Greek, and Arabic lives of the saint, together with historical sources of the Church in the fourth century.

The Feast Day of Saint Pachomius is the fourteenth of Bashans in the Coptic calendar (May 22).

Editor

## ***Acknowledgement***

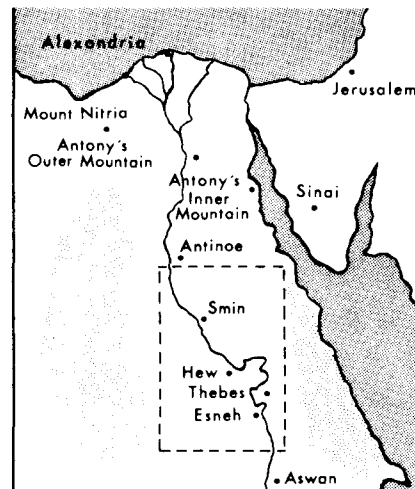
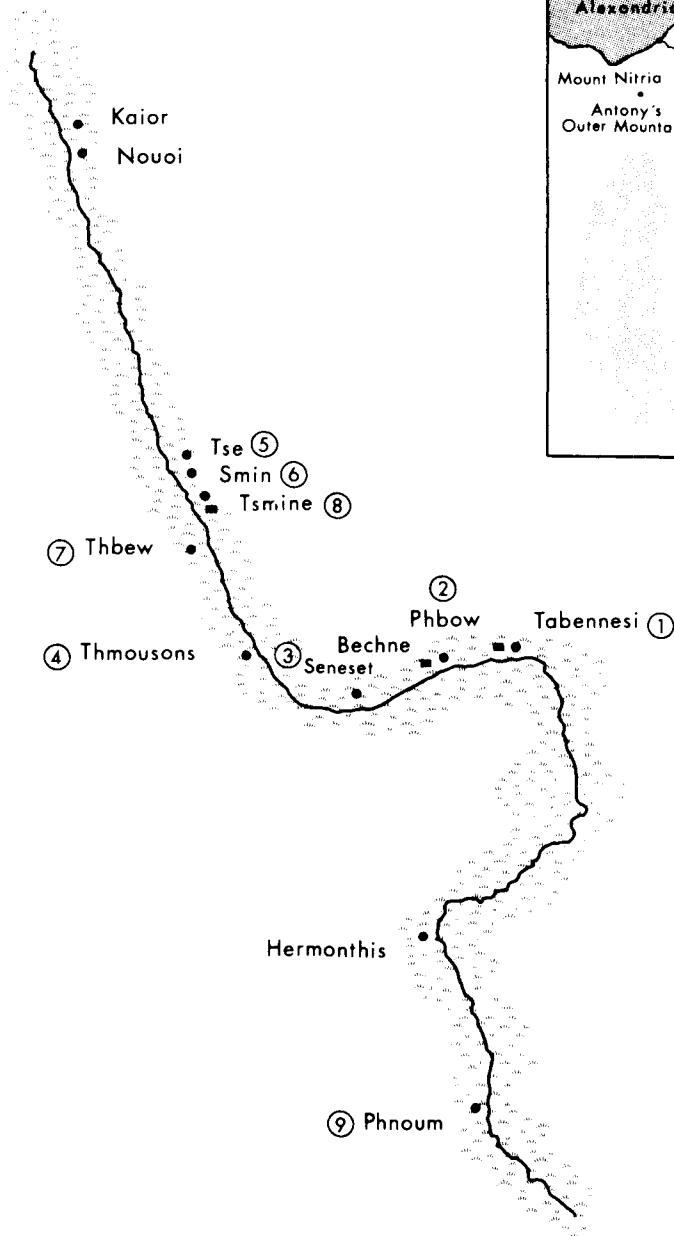
Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this volume are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, © 1971, 1973.

The Map of Pachomian Monasteries on page 6 is designed by Linda K. Judy. Reprinted from *Pachomian Koinonia I: The Life of St. Pachomius and His Disciples* (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Michigan 1980), with kind permission of the publisher.

## ***PROBABLE CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF SAINT PACHOMIUS***

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- monastery of monks
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- ① order of the major Pachomian foundations

Map of  
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## ***EARLY LIFE***

Saint Antony is considered the founder of Christian monasticism, for he was the first to gather around him Christian ascetics on a large scale. *Anchoritism* as led by St. Antony had its physical as well as its spiritual drawbacks and so monasticism quickly evolved to its next stage of *Collective Eremeticism*, or *Mitigated Anchoritism*, where the hermits gathered in special centers around the great charismatic personalities such as St. Macarius the Great, St. Amoun, St. Apollo and many others.

The third stage after *anchoritism* and *collective eremiticism* was *Cenobitism*, or monastic community life. This was started in Upper Egypt by St. Pachomius the Great. He was the first to organize the monasteries and to draw up a written rule which the monks should follow. This new chapter in the evolution of monasticism has been considered one of the greatest and most wonderful chapters in all the history of monasticism, both in the East and in the West.

### ***Childhood***

St. Pachomius was born of heathen parents about A.D. 292 in Seneset, a village of the Upper Thebaid<sup>1</sup> in the diocese of Hew<sup>2</sup>. His name is derived from a Coptic word that means Eagle. He was trained by his parents in the contemporary Egyptian heritage.

Although he was taught in one of the temple schools, yet, to the dismay of his parents, he was cool toward the Egyptian religion. Once he accompanied them to a temple by the riverside. When the sacred crocodiles raised their eyes in the water and saw the boy, they got frightened and fled away. The priest in charge of the sacrifice saw this and dismissed the young Pachomius out of the place, shouting in anger, "Chase the enemy of the gods out of here." On another occasion, his parents gave him wine from the pagan offering to drink. But immediately he vomitted all of it. The superstitious parents became very distressed because their gods were hostile to their son.

When St. Pachomius in later years recited these stories of his childhood to the monks, he added, "Do not think that the demons, who know nothing good, had me driven out of that place because they knew that I was later going to receive mercy through the true faith. But because they saw that I hated evil then that they moved their servants to chase me out."

This hatred of evil stayed with Pachomius throughout his youth. On one occasion his parents gave him some meat to carry to the laborers in a distant area. The owner of the place where he slept that night had two very pretty daughters. One of them tried to seduce him, but he was horrified and fled, running away to his home.



### ***Conversion***

When Pachomius was twenty years old, he was recruited in the Roman army. This was in 312 A.D. when Maximinus Daia was fighting Licinius; Egypt was then a part of the Eastern Empire under Daia. With many other recruits, Pachomius was taken by boat along the Nile. When they reached Latopolis (the modern Isna) they were brought into the city and put in its prison for the night. Some merciful Christians came to the afflicted recruits, bringing them food and drink and other necessities. When Pachomius saw this, he asked, "Why are these people so good to us while they do not know us?" He was then told that Christians love everyone and they are merciful to strangers. This was the first contact of Pachomius with Christianity, but it was enough to set his heart on fire with the love of the true God. He then withdrew to one side of the prison, and spent the whole night in prayer. He asked God to deliver him from his affliction, and he promised in return to dedicate his life to the service of humanity according to the will of God.

The next morning, they were led to the boat and they travelled downstream. When Pachomius went with his companions to buy food from the cities they passed by, he avoided accompanying them to evil places, remembering the grace of God which had come to him. The chastity he had loved since his childhood was strengthened with his new faith.

The recruits finally reached Antinoe and they were detained in its prison. News came that the war had ended. The conquering emperor issued an edict that the conscripts should be discharged.

### ***Baptism***

Pachomius returned to his old village Seneset and directly went to its church to enrol as a catechumen and he started to receive Christian instruction. He settled in a place outside the village, growing some vegetables to feed himself and any strangers who should happen to pass by.

On the night after his baptism, he had a dream. He saw the dew of heaven descending upon him and collecting in his right hand where it turned into honey. The honey dropped from his hand and spread out over all the earth, and he heard a voice, "Understand this, Pachomius, for it will happen to you later."

After his baptism, a serious epidemic struck the village. Pachomius found this an opportunity to serve the sick, and to carry wood to those who were unable to cut it for themselves from the forest.

## ***WITH SAINT PALAMON***

The charity and charm of Pachomius attracted many people who made their dwelling near him. But he longed for solitude and thought of becoming a hermit. After he had stayed for three years at Seneset, he took the way of the desert to the cave of a hermit, Abba Palamon, who was well-known in the vicinity and who was the spiritual father of many hermits. St. Palamon had lived since his early youth in the Eastern desert of Egypt near Seneset. His mode of life was described in the Coptic Synaxarion,<sup>3</sup>

*"This saint received from God the gift of healing and he tamed the beasts which used to eat from his hand and lick his feet. He had no clothes, but his long hair covered all his body. He fasted for the whole week, eating only half a loaf of bread on Saturdays and Sundays. Often he ate mountain grass, and drank his water in portions. Like his Creator, he was kind, charitable and merciful. When night came he used to leave his place of worship in order to visit the prisoners, the afflicted, the orphans, the widows and the strangers as much as he could. He spent on them the money he got from his handwork."*

Pachomius reached the cave of St. Palamon and knocked at its door. The old man looked down through an opening and asked roughly, "What do you want?" Pachomius answered, "I wish you would allow me to become a monk with you." Abba Palamon said, "This work of God is not so simple; many have come but have not persevered. First try yourself to find out whether you can be steadfast; then come back." Then he started to describe to Pachomius the way of his monastic life, as he had received from those before him, "We always keep vigil, spending half the night and often the whole night in prayer and reciting of the words of God. We do manual work with threads, hairs or palm fibers for our needs and in order to give to the poor. We fast until evening during the summer, while in winter we eat every other or every third day. We eat nothing but bread and salt; we use neither oil nor wine. As for the rule of our prayer, it is sixty psalms during the day, and fifty during the night, not counting the ejaculatory prayers<sup>4</sup> since we are commanded to pray without ceasing."

When Pachomius heard all this, he answered humbly that he had already been disciplining himself in everything for years, and he added, "I believe that with the help of God and your holy prayers, your heart will be at rest concerning me." The old man finally opened the door and received him with joy.

Palamon tried his young disciple for three months, then, seeing his firm determination, he clothed him with the monk's habit, after spending the whole night praying over it. Then they lived together as one man for seven years.

They kept vigils from evening till morning on Saturday nights. While meditating they did their manual work in order to stay awake.

### ***Fasting***

When Easter came, Palamon asked Pachomius to prepare for both of them a midday meal. The young monk added some oil to the crushed salt which they used to eat. When the old man sat down to eat and saw the oil, he struck his face and wept saying, "My Lord was crucified for me and am I to eat oil?" He added, "But for the holy sanctuary lamp and the work with bristles, I would not have tolerated this creature, oil, in my cell." Pachomius apologized for adding the oil to the salt and he then changed it for salt in which he put ashes, and they sat down to eat while tears flowed down their cheeks.

Near their cave grew a large fig tree which they watered by hand and used for the needs of the sick. Only once, on Epiphany day, Palamon boiled some hard figs for their feast.

### ***Pride goes before destruction***

Once as they kept vigil, a brother who lived in a neighboring cell came to them and pointing to the fire around which they sat he said, "Whichever of you has faith, let him stand on these glowing coals and recite the Gospel prayer!" The holy elder answered him angrily, "A curse on the demon who tossed that evil idea into your heart." But the brother ignored the warning from the man of God, and he stepped on the glowing coals while he recited the prayer. When he got off, his feet were not burnt, and he proudly walked away to his cell. Pachomius was struck with awe and wonder, but Palamon said, "My son, do not admire that man, for it is through the activity of the demons, by divine permission, that his feet were unscathed; as it is written, 'To the guilty God sends crooked ways.' (cf. Pr. 21:8) . . . If you knew the tribulations that are going to overtake that man you would weep over his wretchedness."

It was only a few days later that the brother was struck by some convulsive fit, during which he had evil sexual fantasies that turned his mind. When he came to his senses, he ran to Abba Palamon, and throwing himself at his feet he said with bitter tears, "I am the cause of my own ruin. You warned me many times, but my pride kept me from obeying you. Now help me in my wretchedness, for I am in danger of being destroyed by the demon." The two saints wept for his affliction and in tears prayed to the Lord for him. But the man fell again into another fit. They could not get hold of him and he ran a long way over the mountain till he reached the city of Akhmin. Later in a similar fit, he threw himself in the open furnace of the bathhouse, and was burnt to death.

# ***CENOBITISM***

## ***A Strange Vision***

The young Pachomius had the custom of meditating while he walked across the neighboring forest. One day, led by the Spirit, he went for about ten miles along the river till he reached the village of Tabennisi.<sup>5</sup> There he heard a voice, "Pachomius, struggle, dwell in this place and build a monastery, for many will come to you to become monks."

In the *Lausiac History*, Palladius mentioned that an angel appeared to Pachomius, and gave him a bronze tablet, on which was engraven the model by which he was to rule the monks. It ran as follows:

- I. Let every man eat and drink as suits his strength, and impose work on them according to their strength. Restrain them neither from eating nor from fasting . . .
- II. Make separate cells for them, and they should dwell together three to a cell.
- III. Meals should be taken together, all in one house.
- IV. Let them not sleep lying down, but make for them seats in order to rest and support their heads.
- V. At night time they should put on garments without sleeves, and their loins should be girded up, and they should be provided with caps. They should wear these on Saturdays and Sundays when they partake of the offering.
- VI. Arrange them in twenty four groups. For each group give a letter of the Greek alphabet.

On the tablet, according to the story of Palladius, were also engraven other rules concerning the acceptance of strangers, a three year observation before receiving a new monk, and the times of daily prayers and prayers before meals.

Professor Aziz S. Ateya comments upon this story,

"We however do not mention this legend as a religious story, but for its great historical value. The mentioning of the engraven tablet, the six commandments and the appearance of the angel to Pachomius is no doubt taken from the Old Testament and the stories of Moses and the ten commandments. But what we seek to record is the dictum of the monastic rules it mentions. For this primitive nucleus was the foundation upon which St. Pachomius built his enormous rules which revolutionized the monastic ways of life known in those days, and also had the greatest effect upon the later generations all over the world."<sup>6</sup>

After the vision, Pachomius went and told everything to Abba Palamon. The old man was grieved because this meant his separation from Pachomius whom he considered as his dear son, and whom he needed especially with his deteriorating health. But he saw

in the vision the hand of God, and the fulfillment of the dream which Pachomius had seen early in his life. So they both went to the place and built a cell for Pachomius. Before parting they promised to visit one another in turn. Pachomius needed these visits not only for the joy of meeting the man of God but because he needed his counsel on many occasions.

### ***Illness and Death of Palamon***

Not long after this, St. Palamon fell sick. He was persuaded by some brothers to see a doctor. The doctor found that he was simply exhausted from his fasting and advised him to take more appropriate food. The saint obeyed this for a few days without feeling any improvement. He then spoke to the brothers, "Do not think that healing and strength come from perishable foods. No, they come from our Lord. If the martyrs of Christ preserved in their faith to death, enduring the separation of their limbs, or being beheaded or burnt to death, is it not fitting that I should be weakened by a little sickness?" With this he went back to his mortifications.

When Pachomius heard about the sickness of Palamon, he came to him and ministered to him till his death in A.D. 323 and then he returned to Tabennisi.

### ***The First Monastery at Tabennisi***

The first monk to join the establishment of Pachomius was his older brother John. Together they led a very poor life. Whatever they got from their manual labor they gave to the poor, keeping nothing for themselves except two loaves of bread daily and a bit of salt. Each had only the tunic he wore, and they shared also a little cloak which they used in turn when they washed their tunics. Sometimes they had to use hair garments.

They prayed from evening till morning till their feet got swollen from prolonged standing. When they got weary they simply sat without leaning their backs against the wall. Pachomius and John built the first monastery with their own hands.

### ***Later Monasteries***

Other disciples came to Pachomius and within a short time the number of the monks exceeded one hundred, and he had to build for them a church in the monastery. In a few years he built several other monasteries in neighboring villages. Other less organized communities of monks in the area asked to come under his rule.<sup>7</sup> He put each monastery under the charge of an able leader. At first Pachomius was directly in charge of the monasteries in Tabennisi and Phbow, the modern Faw, two miles from Tabennisi. But from the year 336 he left his disciple Theodore in charge of Tabennisi, and he stayed at Phbow which became the center of administration of all the monasteries. Pachomius used to go around to the monasteries, comforting all the brothers by the word of God as a nurse comforts her children (I Th. 2:7).

Palladius states that the number of monks in the Pachomian monasteries totalled three thousand during his life, and they reached seven thousand when he wrote the *Lausiac History* in A.D. 420.

In addition Pachomius founded two monasteries for nuns, at Tabennisi and at Tsmine. The first was put under the direction of his sister Mary who came to visit him and was attracted by the cenobitic life. For this monastery St. Pachomius appointed as a spiritual father an elder called Abba Peter. According to Palladius four hundred nuns lived in it. The women's monastery had the same rule and the same way of life as the men, except for the cloak. No one went to the women's monastery except the priest and deacon, and these went only on Sundays. When a nun died, the sisters prepared her for burial, and then carried the body and placed it on the bank of the river. The brethren then would cross on a ferry and carrying palm leaves and olive branches and singing psalms, they would bring the body over to be buried in the common cemetery.

### ***The Pachomian Monastery***

Pachomian monasteries looked like forts surrounded with thick walls which reached about one hundred feet in height, in order to protect the monks from the attacks of tribal gangs or even from government officials at times of persecution. The small door which allowed no more than two or three men at a time was made of heavy wood enforced by iron sheets. On top of the wall was an inner passage for the guards. There was an aperture above the door through which the door keeper could see any stranger when he rang the monastery bell. This was done by pulling a cord which hung outside for visitors to use. Just inside the wall was the guest house. The monastery contained a church, a meeting hall, a library, a dining hall, a kitchen, and several storage rooms. Cells for the monks were constructed in long rows along the wall. A large space was left inside the monastery for gardening and as a work place where the monks performed their manual work. It also contained a shed for the animals used for farming.

## ***RULE OF ST. PACHOMIUS***

With the expansion of the Pachomian monasteries, the primitive rule which Pachomius received in his vision had to be expanded. Unlike later monastic rules, the Rule of St. Pachomius was not a set text. Like all great codes it did not precede the events but was based on them, and it had to evolve with the evolution of the Pachomian monasteries.

The Rule of Pachomius was written in Sahidic, the Coptic dialect of Upper Egypt. It was translated to Greek during his lifetime as some of the monks did not know Coptic. The Greek translation was translated into Latin by St. Jerome in A.D. 404.

The rule which has reached us complete only in the Latin translation can be summarized in the following points:

### *1. Admission*

The novice remained for a probationary period of three years, during which he was required to learn reading and writing, and to memorize twenty psalms, or two New Testament epistles or some other portion of Scripture.

### *2. Clothes*

Inside the monastery the monk wore a linen sleeveless tunic with a leather belt and a hood. Outside the monastery he covered his shoulders with goat skin, on top of which was a hood that covered his head.

### *3. Food*

Two meals were offered every day, at noon and at night. They consisted of bread, vegetables, soup, cheese and fruit. Meat and wine were only allowed during sickness. Monks were to eat together in silence, while one of the brothers read portions of Scripture.

### *4. Cells*

Three or four monks lived in each cell. Whole Pachomian-type cells are still remaining in the Monastery of St. Simon in Asswan, with their clay reclining seats on which monks used to sleep. Other than his clothes, the only thing a monk had in his cell was a mat which he used as a cover when he slept. Food and money were not allowed in the cells. Monks were allowed to sleep till midnight, then they had to rise for meditation and prayer.

### *5. Work*

Manual labor was compulsory to all, even the supervisors were not exempted. Although weaving mats and plaiting baskets from palm leaves were the common activities, the Pachomian monastery was usually a self-contained unit with its bakers,

cooks, weavers, tailors, farmers, millers, masons, carpenters, smiths and mechanics, and even scholars and scripts.

Palladius mentioned that in a monastery he visited near Panopolis that housed three hundred monks, there were fifteen tailors, seven metal workers, four carpenters, twelve camel drivers, and fifteen fullers, other than the swine keepers, gardeners, bakers, cooks, shoemakers and workers in other crafts.

#### *6. Worship*

There were regulations both for private and for community prayers. Monks met three times daily in the church for common prayer. In addition they participated in the liturgies on Saturdays and Sundays.

#### *7. Administration*

Every monastery had its local administration. Besides the father of the monastery, there was a housemaster who supervised the daily activities in the monastery. Each group of laborers had its own supervisor.

The central administration of all monasteries was in Phbow, where twice a year the supervisors from all monasteries met together to give their accounts to Pachomius and receive his advice and instructions. These meetings were held before Easter and on the twentieth of Masari (August 13), toward the end of the Coptic year.

#### *8. Education*

The brothers gathered three times each week to hear the teaching given by the father of the monastery. On Wednesdays and Fridays the housemaster gave the monks instructions from the Scripture and Christian Tradition. The novices had three daily lessons, at the first, third and sixth hours of the day (i.e. 7 and 9 a.m. and 12 noon our time).

In addition the Rule gave detailed instructions for the care of the sick brothers, for receiving visitors, for punishing offenders and for other activities of the monk in his daily life.



## ***FATHER OF THE KOINONIA***

The Pachomian monasteries were directed more by love than by any rigid rule. Pachomius had been attracted to Christianity by the fraternal love of the people of Isna. This had a permanent impression on his personality, and even before he became a monk, he had promised God to put himself in the service of humanity all the days of his life. Not only did this love of humanity appear in the Rule of Pachomius, but it was always working in the man behind the Rule. Pachomius was a father who bound his sons together and who radiated the grace of fatherhood to the superior of each monastery. However firm Pachomius was in demanding from his sons to follow the monastic teachings of obedience, poverty and chastity, yet he was never the dominant father. This is well shown in the following incident:

Once he punished two brothers who had quarrelled and struck each other. He decided to expel the one who started the quarrel from the monastery, and to separate the other from the Eucharist for a week. When the first monk was going out, Gnositheos, an elder who was eighty years old, exclaimed, "I am a sinner and I leave with him: if anyone is without sin, he may stay." All the brothers rose to leave following the elder. Pachomius, discovering his mistake, threw himself on his face and asked for their forgiveness. He said, "If those who have committed all kinds of evil flee to the monastery to be saved through penance, who am I to dismiss a brother from it?" As he condemned himself he fasted for three weeks during which he did not approach the Eucharist.

Pachomius was the first one to follow the rules and the *Koinonia*, or Pachomian community, was defined as a society in which Pachomius united the brothers to serve them himself and to teach them to serve one another.

### ***Servant of all***

Early in the life of the community, when Pachomius had only a few disciples, he labored alone in the work of the monastery. He was the one who grew the vegetables, prepared the food, answered the door and took care of the sick. When they built the monastery at Smin, Pachomius carried the clay on his back like all the other brothers. When the monastery cistern was full, Pachomius went down with the brothers to clean it. Once he was lying sick and Theodore washed his hands, but he in turn poured water on Theodore's feet to wash them. He said, "I should not be condemned for being served by you, when it is I who must be the servant of all."

He used to sit on the floor among the monks. When anyone brought him something to sit on, he would not consent to it, and would say, "While my body is healthy, I will not do that; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). We ought to be one another's servants rather than make others wait on us."

When he was sick, he often refused to have special treatment not given to the other monks. He even went to work as usual and did not inform any of the brothers that he was ill. It seemed that he did not easily believe that he was sick.

One evening after working all day in the field, Pachomius came back very sick. He could not even support his back and he lay down. Theodore covered him with a nice hair blanket. But Pachomius refused it and asked to be covered by a mat like all the other brothers. Theodore obeyed, but later when he found that Pachomius ate no food, he offered him some dates. Still the saint refused saying sadly, "Do we have the right to live in ease because we supervise the brothers? . . . Have you visited the other brothers to see if anyone of them is sick?" With this he stayed sick in bed for two days, without taking any food.

In his terminal illness Pachomius had a high fever and a brother sat fanning him with his hood. A visitor advised the brothers to use a fan instead in order to get the fever down. Worn down with the illness, Pachomius could not answer but he showed his protest against this by a movement of his finger. There was an epidemic at that time and many monks were sick. It was impossible to find a fan for each one, and Pachomius wanted to share the poverty with all the brethren.

### ***Obedience***

Obedience is the backbone of every monastic settlement. In the Pachomian monasteries the taking of the habit was accompanied by a formal promise of obedience. This was the nucleus of the religious vows which appeared later. Pachomius taught that the lowliest in the *Koinonia* who live in obedience according to God are far superior to the anchorites and will be found perfect in the law of Christ. For Pachomius any commandment even about the slightest matter is very important.

Even Pachomius himself submitted to the housemaster. He used to stand with the brothers to hear the instructions. His clothes were kept with the housemaster and he had no authority to take anything he needed without permission from him.

Once while on a visit to Tabennisi he was weaving a mat in his usual manner. A young monk saw him and said, "This is not the way we work, for our father Theodore gave us orders not to weary the plaits, so that the mats may look nice." Pachomius humbly asked the monk to teach him the new method, then he sat down and continued his work with joy.

One day Pachomius was at Tabennisi to get the yearly supply of bread for his monastery at Phbow. He heard some men talking among themselves. Bakers were not allowed to speak in the bakery, but had to recite the word of God while working.

Pachomius summoned Theodore, who was the father of the monastery and was responsible for the bakery; and ordered him to make a thorough investigation of the matter. Eighteen men were involved in the disobedience. The transgression of the brothers was considered an act of negligence by Theodore. Pachomius ordered him to turn over the command of the bakery to another monk. Theodore withdrew for three weeks, fasting two days at a time, and praying day and night, with sighs, groans and tears.

Once during a famine a brother was sent to buy wheat, which was very scarce all over Egypt. He found a God-fearing councillor who was in charge of the public wheat. He offered to give the monk as much as he wanted, if he could return it at the threshing time. The brother insisted on paying for the wheat and the councillor gave him two hundred coins worth of wheat at a price he could not get for double that money, if he found the wheat. The rest of the money the councillor consented to take anytime later. The brother then loaded his boat with the corn, and sailed happily to the monastery. When Pachomius learned how the wheat had been bought, he sent to the monk saying, "Do not bring one grain of that wheat to the monastery. This purchase is unlawful, moreover the monk bought more than I had ordered him to do. By his greediness he brought us wheat beyond our need, and borrowed on his own initiative what we have no means of repaying." Pachomius ordered the wheat to be sold at the price for which it was bought, the gold returned to the councillor, and new wheat bought for the monastery at the market price. As for the disobedient brother, he replaced with another.

At another time a brother was sent to sell sandals and other leather articles made in the monastery. He sold them for a price three times the value for which he was ordered to sell them. When Pachomius heard, he called the brother and asked him why he had done this. The brother answered, "I offered the articles for the price I was told, but the men who were buying said, 'Unless these are stolen articles, they are worth more.' I told them that this was the price I was ordered to sell them for. They then gave what pleased them and I did not count the money. Pachomius ordered to have the extra money returned, and the brother to sit in the monastery for repentance, and another brother to replace him.

Once on a visit to Thmousons, Pachomius observed a large fig tree in the middle of the monastery which was a cause of temptation to the young monks. He ordered the gardener to cut it down. The gardener, whose name was Jonas, was a very saintly man who had led a very severe life of asceticism in that monastery for eighty-five years. Although he had planted and cared for all the trees in the monastery, he never tasted a single fruit. When he heard the words of St. Pachomius he was grieved, because the tree used to bear a lot of fruit. Pachomius did not want to offend such a holy pious man. On the next day, the tree was found completely withered. When he saw this, the blessed Jonas became very sad, not because of the tree, but for his disobedience.

### ***A Firm Leader***

When Abba Macarius of Alexandria visited Tabennisi, Pachomius asked him, "When brothers do not submit to the rule, is it right to correct them?" The old hermit answered,

"Correct and judge justly those who are subject to you, but judge no one else." (cf. I Cor. 5:12, 13)

This became the rule for Pachomius' management of his monasteries. Neither his humility nor his love for all prevented him from becoming the firm leader for those gigantic establishments under him.

Once Pachomius returned to Phbow after a long absence in the other monasteries. A young monk complained to him saying, "Father, from the time you left until now no vegetables were cooked for us." Pachomius answered kindly, "Do not be afflicted, my son. I will have these cooked for you from now on." Then he went to the kitchen and rebuked the cook for breaking the rule of offering cooked vegetables to the monks at least on Saturdays and Sundays. The cook answered, "Father, I used to cook the vegetables every day; but I found that almost all the brothers practiced abstinence and do not eat cooked food. So I stopped cooking the vegetables in order to save the expense and labor for food we end throwing away." The cook added that during the two months in which he did this he was not sitting idle, but he worked mats with the brothers; he made five hundred of them. Pachomius ordered the mats to be brought and cast into the fire, and he said, "I have mercilessly burned the work of your hands, in order that you may learn how bad it is to disregard the ordinances of the Fathers concerning the care of the brothers. You have robbed the brothers of a great profit. God rewards those who abstain from some food for his sake, not when forced by necessity. Also sick brothers may be scandalized when they do not find their need on the table, and boys may fail to continue in virtue if they are not granted some comfort." The compassionate long-suffering Pachomius had to show cruelty on several occasions.

### *A Loving Father*

A brother suffered from a prolonged wasting illness till he reached the point of death. He asked the monks in charge for a little meat to eat. But they refused, saying, "Such a thing is not customary among us." The brother asked to be taken to Pachomius. When Pachomius heard the poor monk's story, he sighed and spoke to the brothers in tears, "Is it not written, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself?' (Matt. 19:19) Do you not see that this brother is like a corpse?" He told them that they should have taken better care of him even before his request. The brothers then hastened and bought a little kid for the sick man, prepared it and offered it to him.

Pachomius experienced no hatred even to those who attacked him. Ten elders at Phbow lived negligently and detested the teaching of Pachomius. They often opposed him openly. Pachomius did not despair of their case and refused to drive them out of the monastery. He offered for them vigils, supplications and fasts before the Lord until they repented.

The love of Pachomius was not restricted to his monks, but embraced all mankind. When he heard that plague and famine were raging everywhere, he fasted for several days saying, "Neither shall I eat while my fellow members go hungry." He mourned and prayed with great insistence for the rise of the Nile water in order to put an end to

the famine. In his prayers, Pachomius always prayed for the whole world; for monks, virgins and those in married life; for righteous and for sinners; for christians, heretics and heathens; for the clergy and laymen; for the kings and their subjects.

## ***SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT PACHOMIUS***

However original was St. Pachomius in developing the cenobitic life, his spirituality was the same as that of the Orthodox Church in general, and of the Desert Fathers in particular. Although these sought the Kingdom of God, they never ran after visions and extraordinary experiences. They rather preferred to observe humbly the teaching of the Gospel in order to reach the *Purity of Heart*, which is the basis for all contemplation.

Once a brother asked Pachomius, "Tell us about one of your visions for the sake of our benefit." He answered, "A sinner like me is not given visions. But hear about a great vision that can truly benefit you. If you see a man who is humble in his heart, this is greater than any vision for in him, as the temple of God, you see the invisible God."

A few months after the young Theodore entered the monastery, he came to St. Pachomius in tears and asked for an assurance that he would see God. Pachomius asked "Do you wish to see Him in this age or in eternity?" "In eternity," answered Theodore. Pachomius reminded him about the verse, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," (Matt. 5:8) and he added, "If you consent to one impure thought that comes to your mind, such as hatred, jealousy, envy, or pride, you will not see the Lord!"

For Pachomius, in common with the desert tradition, *Purity of Heart* is reached through ascetic practices which includes not only bodily austerity but also, and more important, a life of spiritual poverty with the continual guard of one's thoughts against the noxious foods of the soul such as vainglory, anger, envy and lust. Growth in the spiritual life is not a matter of personal achievement but occurs through the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul which is nourished by the Word of God both in Scripture and in the Eucharist.

### ***Ascetic practices***

Personally Pachomius continued the life of the heroic disciplines and self-denial of the anchorites. When he was living with St. Palamon, he was often sent to gather wood from the mountain. He was barefoot and his feet became sore because the forest was full of thorns. He never complained, but the pain led him to meditate upon the nails put in the hands and feet of Christ on the Cross. Although the *Rule* manifested a moderation yet Pachomius expected his monks to practice mortification and avoid a life of leisure.

Once when he was lying sick and the monks prepared for him a dish of vegetables, he added some water to it in order to do away with its sweet taste. Often when he was very thirsty after working in the burning heat, he would take a little water, but not enough to quench his thirst.

One day Pachomius went with two brothers to the monastery at Thmousons. As they sat down for the evening meal the brothers ate of everything on the table, while Pachomius, in tears, ate only bread. At the insistence of the brothers who asked him about this, the saint told them that he was grieved because they were not abstinent. Although it is not a sin to eat but it is good not to be enslaved by anything (I Cor. 6:12).

### ***Humility***

If pride is the first of the capital sins, humility is the foundation of all Christian virtues; without it any virtue loses its value and becomes a means toward vainglory. It was the virtue per excellence which the monks everywhere in Egypt always kept in front of their eyes. St. John Climacus said, "Humility is the door of the Kingdom . . . all who have entered the monastic life by any other door are thieves and robbers."

St. Pachomius arranged the *koinonia* to be a life of humble service, avoiding the spirit of vainglory. In building churches and other parts of the monasteries, Pachomius advised against adornments. One should use Christ's gifts to beautify His house, but not to the degree of praising the material art and being pleased with one's own handwork.

Once a monk made two mats in a single day, instead of one as the rule advised, and he placed them in front of his cell in order to be seen by Pachomius and the rest of the monks. Instead of getting the praise of the saint, the monk was severely rebuked and then confined to his cell for five months, eating only bread and salt.

Once Pachomius advised a brother to break his fast and eat with the brothers at mid-day because he discovered that he was engaged in hard asceticism for the sake of vainglory.

On one Sunday Pachomius asked Theodore, who was thirty years old at the time, to give the instruction to the brothers. While Pachomius sat with the brothers, some of them left the assembly hall and said angrily, "He is a young one while we are elders, and it is to him that he gives the order to instruct us." Pachomius saw in this the spirit of pride and advised them to repent because they refused to listen to the words of God, although spoken by a little one (cf. Matt. 18:15).

Theodore grew in virtue and he soon gained the trust of Pachomius and of all the heads of the monasteries. He was appointed to assist Pachomius in visiting the other monasteries. After seven years of directing the *koinonia* under Pachomius, the saint fell ill, so ill that the brothers thought he was going to die. Fearing the scattering of the monks after his death, the elders in all the monasteries begged Theodore to become the head of the *Koinonia* after Pachomius. Theodore, who had never thought of this, only gave his consent after much persuasion. For this Theodore had to be punished. After Pachomius recovered, he spoke to Theodore in the presence of all the brothers, "From now on you no longer have any authority over anything at all; but go to a solitary place and pray to the Lord that He may forgive you." For that simple thought, Theodore had to spend two years mourning and weeping in great penance.

Pachomius never sought miracles or extraordinary ways of sanctity. A heretic once tried to challenge him. He sent to him his disciples, who were wearing hair garments, with this message, "If you are truly a man of God and are confident that God listens to

you, come, let us cross the river together, walking on the water." The brothers took the message and reported it to Pachomius, who spoke to them angrily, "Do you not know that such things are foreign to God and against our way of life (cf Deut. 6:16)? . . . The devil works with such people for the propagation of their impious heresy. Go then, and say to those who brought this message, 'Here is what the man of God Pachomius says: I put all my striving and zeal not into crossing a river on foot, but in trying to avoid the judgment of God, and to escape; by His power, these satanic wiles.'"

### ***Visions and Revelations***

Mystic ecstasies were frequently manifested in the life of St. Pachomius through visionary perceptions, revelations and prophecies. From the first days of his spiritual life the prayers of St. Pachomius gave way to periods of contemplation when the saint became completely seized by the Spirit of God. Thus he knew where to settle after he left the army and on the night he was baptized he dreamed about his future service. The first Rule of the *koinonia* was given to him through an angel. Before receiving his first disciples an angel appeared to him as he was keeping vigil while he gathered rushes for his manual labor.

The *Life of Pachomius* mentioned in detail how many times the fate of souls at the time of their death was revealed to Pachomius. He saw visions about the state of souls in Paradise and also about the tortures of hell.

One day while praying he fell into an ecstasy and he saw the Lord addressing the monks and explaining the parables to them. When Pachomius later repeated to the brethren the same words he had heard in the vision, they felt the power of the words of Christ.

On several occasions the death of a brother in a distant monastery was revealed to him. Once some brothers from the monastery of Chenoboskion came to ask Pachomius that he might go with them to bless a sick brother. On his way with them, Pachomius heard singing in the air. He lifted up his eyes and saw the holy angels carrying the soul of the sick brother. As he stood and gazed for a long time, the brothers tried to hurry him, in order to reach the sick brother before his death. Pachomius then told them about his vision. When they reached the monastery, they found that the brother had died at the very hour in which the saint had seen his vision.

Together with Theodore, Pachomius often saw the angel of God dispensing the sacred mysteries with the priest during the Eucharist. When those who were unworthy approached the mysteries, the angel withdrew his hand, and it was the priest alone who dispensed them.

### ***Gifts of the Spirit***

The Holy Spirit was manifested in St. Pachomius through various gifts, including the gifts of faith, healing, working of miracles, speaking in tongues and prophecy, beside his original gifts of wisdom and knowledge in teaching. (I Cor. 12:4-11)



*Faith*

One of the early trials Pachomius and his first disciples had was the lack of food. On one time when they ran out of wheat, Pachomius comforted the sad brothers and reminded them that the Lord would not forsake them. He then spent the whole night in prayer, and early in the morning the monastery received an unexpected gift of wheat.

The Lord did numerous healings through the prayers of Pachomius. Although he never hesitated to use this gift for the benefit of those who came to him yet he always fled from human glory. Once the wife of a councillor who had been suffering for a long time from a flow of blood came behind him and touched his clothes, and she was cured at once. But the man of God was grieved to death because of the event.

*Healing*

One day he said to the brothers, "Do not think that bodily healings are healings, but the real healings are the spiritual healings of the soul." On several occasions he did not ask God for the cure of sick monks when he saw the spiritual benefits sickness would bring them.

Once a young monk from Phbow who was sick came to Pachomius and said tearfully, "You heal many people from the world, but you have never prayed for me that I might be healed." Pachomius comforted him by the words of Scripture. But his illness continued, so he took with him some of the elders to ask for the prayers of the man of God. In order to satisfy them, Pachomius agreed to pray for the sick brother. As soon as he began praying he heard a voice from heaven, "Do not ask for rest for this man. This trial is sent to him in order to save him from the snares of youth."

Theodore complained one day about a headache he had. Pachomius reminded him of the perfect man Job who blessed the Lord during his affliction, and told him that one who lies sick can be struggling far more than one who bears only the cross of the ascetic life.

*Other Miracles*

Pachomius manifested in himself the power given by Christ to his disciples over wild beasts, snakes and scorpions. One night, while he was teaching the brethren in an open area during the harvest season two snakes wound themselves around his feet. The saint neither moved nor looked at them. After the concluding prayer, he asked for a lamp and when it was brought the beasts were seen around his feet and were killed. Several times during work Pachomius was stung by scorpions, which are very common in Upper Egypt. The intense pain would not stop him from working, and he accepted the suffering for the sake of Christ. If he was stung during prayer, he would continue his prayer till he was healed.

*Gift of tongues*

Pachomius spoke only in Sahidic, the Coptic dialect of Upper Egypt. One of his monks, Theodore the Alexandrian acted as his interpreter when he spoke with Greek

monks and visitors. Once a Roman brother was reluctant to confess his sins to the saint through an interpreter. Pachomius asked the interpreter to withdraw and then he prayed to God, saying, "If You want to save through me those whom You send from the ends of the earth, then grant, O Lord, that I may know their languages." After praying for three hours, the saint returned to the Roman brother and spoke with him in Greek and Latin without any fault.

#### *Clairvoyance and Prophecy*

St. Pachomius had the gift of clairvoyance by which he could know events occurring in distant places as well as read the thoughts and feelings of men. He often knew the sins and failings of the monks and would try to lead them to repentance.

Future events were revealed to Pachomius. When Saint Athanasius became the archbishop of Alexandria in AD 328, Pachomius told his monks about the future afflictions of the Patriarch and about his final triumph against the heretics.

One day when Pachomius was returning with some brothers after their work in cutting the rushes, he saw a frightening vision about the fate of his monasteries. He saw the whole community in great trials. Some monks were surrounded by flames, others were in the midst of thorns, and others were caught in a deep precipice. The vision kept Pachomius stunned and he had to explain what he saw to the terrified monks; then he added, "I think, my children, that all this will happen to the monks after my death."

#### *Pachomius and Scripture*

When Pachomius lived with St. Palamon he spent much time in the recitation of the Bible books. The Bible was a cornerstone in the spirituality of St. Pachomius. It was continually recited by the monk in the Daily Office as well as during work, meals, or travel, and even when he was alone in his cell. Scriptures were the basic material explained in the weekly conferences. They were considered by Pachomius the breath of God. The Rule of Pachomius was based on the holy Scriptures.

Pachomius was famous as an exegete. The young Theodore left his own monastery after he heard about his interpretation of Scripture. Later when Theodore became the Father at Tabennisi, he used to go every night to hear the teaching of Pachomius at Phbow and then return to repeat it to the monks of his own monastery.

## ***SAINT PACHOMIUS AND THE CHURCH***

Pachomius was not a theologian. However, he was a pillar of orthodoxy in other ways. These included his life in the Church, his attachment to the authentic bishops and his witness against the heresies of his time.

In the early years of his monastic life, before he joined St. Palamon, Pachomius had been troubled and confused by the presence of many heresies, each claiming to possess the truth. He was even urged to join the Meletians<sup>8</sup> and the Marcionites<sup>9</sup>. He then prayed in tears to God that He might reveal the truth to him. As he was praying he went into an ecstasy and he saw amidst the darkness of the world a high lamp shining like the morning star and a voice spoke to him, "This lamp is the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in His holy Church of Alexandria. Christ calls in it in the person of Alexander, its bishop."

Pachomius established his monasteries during a hectic period in the history of the Church. The Arian heresy ruled over the empire and was the faith preached in most churches; even more than once an Arian bishop was forced over the throne of St. Mark at Alexandria. The Meletian schismatics threatened to divide the Egyptian Church. Various gnostic sects flourished and added to the confusion. It is noticeable that the gnostic Nag Hammadi library was discovered in a mountain within sight of a Pachomian monastery.

Pachomius always declared his hatred of heresies. When St. Athanasius was elected archbishop of Alexandria and the enemies of the Church tried to divide it on account of his young age, Pachomius spoke to the monks saying, "The Holy Spirit has declared to me that Athanasius has been chosen as a pillar and as a lamp for the Church. Many afflictions and slanders from men await him. But, strengthened by Christ, he will overcome every trial and will preach the truth of the Gospel to the churches till the end."

Pachomius saw the orthodox bishops as successors of Christ and his apostles. He recognized the Lord's presence in them. The *Life of Pachomius* mentioned that St. Peter and St. Athanasius, both Patriarchs of Alexandria, used to see the Saviour upon the throne in the church. Pachomius would estrange himself from people who spoke evil against the Patriarch.

### ***A Church Man***

The Rule of St. Pachomius intended the monks to live the whole life of the Church. The community in each monastery participated in the Divine Liturgy on Saturdays and Sundays, as was the tradition in the Coptic Church at the time. On Saturday evenings

they went to the village church, while on Sunday morning they invited the local priest to celebrate in the monastery. In the village church at Seneset, Pachomius performed the function of the lector.

The daily *Prayers of the Hours* were strictly observed. The monks had to assemble together three times each day, for the dawn, noon and evening prayers. Those who came late or left early without permission were punished. Once Pachomius interrupted his instruction to the monks and asked the steward, in a low voice, to go and visit a monk who was sleeping in his cell instead of praying.

The fasting days were observed according to the Church Tradition. One day Pachomius came across a funeral. He saw two angels following the dead man's body. While reflecting about this, the angels came to the saint and told him that they were the angels of Wednesday and Friday. They came to glorify the man in his death since he had never missed fasting on those two days.

### ***Pachomius and Priesthood***

Pachomius always prayed for the clergy and spoke of them as his fathers and as the Apostles' successor. The Rule advised that clerics should be received with greater honor, and have their feet washed. However, they were only allowed to join in prayer if they had the same faith. Pachomius respected the authority of the bishops and his monasteries worked in cooperation with local priests but he fought against rendering the *koinonia* a part of the hierarchy of the Church. He visioned it as a life embarked upon by those who sought their own salvation, not those who were hungry for power. He never dreamed of monasteries competing with seminaries, or becoming the recruiting grounds for the episcopate. Pachomius did not want any clerics in his monasteries. He repeatedly warned the monks, "It is better not to seek such a thing in our *koinonia* lest it should be an occasion for strife, envy and jealousy and even schisms. The clerical dignity is the beginning of a temptation to love of power, as a spark of fire when cast into a threshing-floor destroys the whole year's labor." On the other hand, if a priest wanted to become a monk, Pachomius would respect his rank, but he should submit willingly to the rules like any other brother.

### ***Relation with Local Bishops***

When it came to ecclesiastical matter Pachomius did not try to encroach upon the authority of the bishops of the regions where his monasteries were. When he built the church at Seneset, he did this only on the advice of Sarapion, the bishop of Nitentori. Discovering how beneficial the monasteries were as spiritual and missionary centers, some bishops encouraged Pachomius to build new monasteries in their jurisdiction. Arios, the bishop of Smin (Panopolis) sent a message to Pachomius asking him to organize a monastery in the area<sup>8</sup> so that the blessing of the Lord may come to our land because of you<sup>9</sup>. When Pachomius came with the brothers, the bishop gave them the land to build the monastery upon and a boat for their use. This was a great encourage-

ment to the monks who managed to finish the construction in spite of the resistance they had from some inhabitants of that predominantly pagan city who kept throwing down by night what the brothers had built during the day.

Bishops knew that the monasteries had their autonomous administration and respected it. Once a monk was caught in the act of stealing and was sent to the bishop of the area. The bishop, in his turn, sent him to Pachomius to judge him.

On the other hand, there were bishops who envied the man of God and saw in the *koinonia* a rival establishment. Serious trouble started when Pachomius tried to extend his *koinonia* to the south. Inspired by a vision he went with the monks to build a monastery at Phnoum near Latopolis (the modern Isna). When they began building the wall, the bishop of the area gathered a large crowd and tried to drive the monks away by force, but he failed and a very large monastery was built.

### ***Pachomius and Athanasius***

St. Athanasius came to the throne of St. Mark during a very troubled period in the Church history. The enemies of the Church hated nothing more than to see the hero of faith who stood against them in the Council of Nicea become the Archbishop of Alexandria. Arians, Meletians and Eusebians plotted against him from the first moment. They even circulated the rumor that he had not been formally elected, but had compelled a few bishops to ordain him by night. This was the time Pachomius declared to the monks that Athanasius had been chosen by God to become a pillar and a lamp for the Church.

A year later, in AD 329 in his first pastoral tour throughout Egypt, the Patriarch sailed by boat up the Nile as far as Aswan. He stopped to visit his flock at every spot along the way. When he reached Tabennisi, Pachomius and the monks came to meet him and escorted him a long way to the monastery, with great joy and psalm-singing. Abba Sarapion, the bishop of Nitentori tried to grasp the occasion in order to fulfill an old wish. For a long time, he had wanted to ordain Pachomius to the priesthood, but the man of God adamantly refused. The bishop mentioned that to the Pope. Hearing this, Pachomius quietly disappeared in the crowd before Athanasius could have any chance to speak to him. After prayer, when the Pope was leaving he left a message with the monks to deliver to Pachomius saying, "Since you have fled from the rank which leads to pride, jealousy, discord and envy, choosing for yourself what is better, our Lord will give you your wish."

Athanasius left, hoping to see Pachomius on his way back from Aswan. This did not happen. But Pachomius saw his Pope and recognized in him a holy servant of God.

Saint Pachomius once said to the monks, "There are three great things in our generation: the bishop Athanasius, who is the athlete of Christ; the holy Abba Antony, who is the model of anchoritic life; and this *koinonia*." Pachomius frequently praised Athanasius and constantly called him 'the father of the orthodox faith in Christ.'

Years after the death of Pachomius, about AD 360, St. Athanasius took refuge in the desert when he was pursued by the troops of Constantius. His most frequent residence

seems to have been the monastery of Phbow. Again, St. Athanasius visited the Pachomian monasteries during his flight from Julian the Apostate in AD 363. In a letter describing this visit, the Pope said that he perceived in Theodore the Lord of Pachomius and that he rejoiced at seeing the children of the Church (the monks).

## ***FINAL DAYS***

### ***Health of Saint Pachomius***

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us . . . ; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies. (II Cor. 4:7 & 10).*

Saint Pachomius was always a sick man, and he died at the relatively young age of fifty-four, as compared to most of the other Desert Fathers who reached or exceeded their hundredth birthday.

In spite of the fact that Pachomius never complained and tried never to inform any of the brothers that he was ill, yet his biographer cited many occasions when he became very sick. He usually did not believe that he was ill, until his feeble body had to give way. For more than twenty years, before building the monastery at Phbow, Pachomius suffered from recurrent fever with shivering and severe prostration. Onset of the relapses was sudden, and the remissions often happened unexpectedly in a few hours or days. Once he went with the brothers to reap rushes, and in the evening he came back sick and he lay shivering. At another time, also during work, he collapsed and fell down upon his face. At other times the fever seized him in the monastery, or he was just too weak in body to leave it. Such symptoms for a protracted period of time give us a strong clue to what illness he had. Pachomius suffered from chronic malaria. It has been a common disease which was endemic in Upper Egypt. Vast areas of land covered by water during the Nile flood and the hot summers made a favorable environment for the breeding of mosquitos. The writer of the *Life of Pachomius* did not fail to mention that early in his monastic life, the saint and his brother John used to pray all night in hot places where crowds of gnats bit them till blood covered their hands.

With no cure for this disease at the time, which was certainly not helped by his fasts and strict ascetic life, Pachomius became debilitated. Several times he became in danger of death, to the degree that the monks once gathered around Theodore and urged him to become their father after Pachomius.

Once he became so sick that in his suffering he saw a vision of the afterlife. According to his *Life*, his soul was snatched away from his body and he died. As he came to the gate of life, he heard an order from God to send him back to life. Pachomius was

sad to hear this, but a man shining in splendid light comforted him saying, "Go, my son, return to your body for you still have to suffer a small martyrdom in the world." Pachomius rejoiced, especially when the angels told him that the man who spoke to him was St. Paul the Apostle. The poor Pachomius longed to become a martyr, little expecting what type of martyrdom the vision was foretelling.

### ***Synod of Latopolis***

It was at Isna (Latopolis) that the light of Christ first shone in the heart of Pachomius at the dawn of his life, now at its eve it becomes for him the place of a nightmare. It was in the autumn of 345, the seventh year since the most holy Athanasius had been forced into exile and his throne taken by the Arian bishop Gregory the Cappadocian. The Church was in disarray, and its members in severe affliction.

Pachomius was very sad because the people of God were deprived of their beloved Archbishop and suffered unjustly at the hands of the intruder who was backed by the Roman military power. Pachomius prayed to God about this; and he sent a delegation to Alexandria, headed by two of his best monks, Theodore and Zacchaeus.

But trouble was already building at home for Pachomius. Some of the bishops and monks who envied him found it an opportunity to weaken the *koinonia* and if possible, get rid of Pachomius altogether. The bishops started to dismiss the monks from the monasteries in their dioceses. Hearing this, Pachomius went to meet them at Isna to discuss the matter. Afraid of the great crowd of monks and villagers who accompanied the saint, his enemies sent to him a message while he was still on his way. It ran as follows, "Come alone to the church in order that we may meet you, and freely open our hearts to you and then you may return in peace." The saint who had become sick on the way could not go with the messengers. Again those came with an order to carry him if he was unable to walk, and they carried him on a donkey to the church where he was put on a stretcher. A few elders went with him.

In the church, Pachomius saw bishops, monks and armed soldiers. It was evident that there was a conspiracy against him, but it was too late to withdraw. Surrendering himself to the hands of the Lord, he prayed asking His action to prevent the dispersion of the monks.

The bishops opened the trial of the saint by asking him about his clairvoyance. A monk witnessed, with some hesitation, saying that he had heard the man of God mention that the Lord revealed to him what was in men's hearts. Pachomius kept silent. Among the four bishops that were present, two had been his disciples, Philo and Mouei. When these asked him to answer the charge, instead he entreated them to recall their life in the monastery and witness to what the grace of God had worked through him for the sake of the brethren.

At this the synod went into turmoil; and the bishops shouted, "Touch no one other than Pachomius." A man with a sword attacked the saint. While the tumult arose in the church, two of his monks snatched him and tried to make their escape. The doors had



been already locked, but a layman called Sawina, led them through a side exit. They hurried to the nearby monastery of Phnoum. The rest of the brethren were beaten by hammers and when they left the church most were wounded and their blood was running upon their tunics.

### ***Farewell and Death***

A short time after the return of Pachomius to his monastery at Phbow, the boat came back from Alexandria. He embraced the brethren and asked them about the Church. Things had started to improve after the death of Gregory, but still Athanasius had one year more to stay in exile. Of him Pachomius said to the monks, "The enemies of the most holy Pope are powerless against him, for he has God to sustain his faith." Then he spoke to Theodore, "Now the little martyrdom which I was told about has been fulfilled. I think my day is at hand."

At the beginning of Great Lent (AD 346), while working in the harvest, Pachomius fell upon his face. He was brought to the monastery of Phbow with a high fever; he could not even speak. At that time an epidemic of plague flared in all the Pachomian monasteries; more than one hundred died in each monastery including many of the leaders. The disease was characterized by the onset of fever, change of color and gasping for breath; death came in a matter of hours to a few days. The illness of Pachomius was different. It was protracted, and he remained several months in the infirmary. He lost weight and became so weak that he could not even bear the weight of the mantle that covered him. When Theodore brought a good light mantle and spread it over him, he became angry and asked Theodore to take it back and cover him with one which was worn thin. Till the end, he refused any special treatment not available to the other monks.

A few days before the Holy Week, Pachomius was told in a vision, "The Lord will take a great offering from your house during the Feast." Pachomius, thinking that the vision spoke of his death, fasted completely during the last four days before Easter, and spent them in sighs and prayers for the *koinonia*. When Abba Paphnouthi the great steward of the monasteries, passed away on the holy Saturday Pachomius knew that his death was the offering which the angel had meant in the vision.

As for Pachomius he remained sick for most of the fifty days of Pentecost. Three days before his death he called the elders of all the monasteries and asked them to choose a successor who would lead the *koinonia* after him. The grief-stricken brothers wept and could not answer. Actually they had spent three days praying and weeping before God that Pachomius might stay on earth to shepherd them. When pressed by Pachomius to answer, they left for him the choice of the successor. He chose Petronius, father of the monastery at Tsmine.

Then turning to Theodore, he grabbed him by the beard and spoke to him three times, "Do not leave my body in the place it will be buried in." Theodore thought that the man of God wanted his body hidden lest someone should steal it to build a martyrion

for it. Pachomius then told Theodore frankly to take care of the negligent brothers after his death. Theodore was to become the third father of the *koinonia* after Pachomius.

The man of God was unconscious most of the time after this meeting. On Bashans 14 (May 9), at the tenth hour (4 PM) he signed himself three times with the sign of the cross, then he gave up the spirit.

The grieved monks wept and kept kissing his body. They carried him to the church and they spent the rest of the day and the night before the altar in reading and prayer. In the morning they prepared the body for burial and then they offered the Eucharist for him. They buried him in the mountain. At night, Theodore and three other brothers went back and transferred the body to another place.

### ***'He died, but through his faith he is still speaking'***

The fame of the *koinonia* spread far and wide. Before the end of the fourth century, Pachomian monasticism had spread to Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, North Africa, Italy, Gaul and other places. Even during the life of Pachomius, monks from many countries came to live in his monasteries. There were Greek, Roman, Libyan, Syrian, Nubian and Ethiopian monks. Many famous personalities lived for years in the Pachomian monasteries in the Thebaid and then returned to their countries where they left their impact upon monasticism either through their writings or through their establishments. St. Basil the Great visited the *koinonia* in AD 357-358, and when he returned to Asia Minor, he created his monastic community, the first one in Byzantium. St. John Chrysostom stayed in a Pachomian monastery from AD 373 to 381. In AD 385 St. Jerome visited Egypt and in AD 404 he translated the *Regula Sancti Pachomii* into Latin. Palladius visited the Pachomian establishments during his stay in Egypt (AD 388-399) and described them in his *Lausiac History*. St. John Cassian had lived for seven years in Egyptian monasteries before he founded the first monasteries in Europe in AD 415.

What is certain is that St. Benedict's Rule borrowed a good deal from the *Rule of Pachomius*, even whole phrases have been quoted word for word. Through St. Benedict (c. 480-550), the Pachomian teaching had its effect upon all subsequent Western monastic orders. However St. Benedict failed to incorporate in his Rule the Pachomian system of unifying the whole *koinonia* with its annual meetings. The result was that some Benedictine houses became very rich and their monks led an easy luxurious life. The Clunaic reform in the tenth century, the Carthusians and Cistercians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the Franciscans and Dominicans later tried to remedy this by going back to a central government as devised by Pachomius in the *koinonia*. Thus the genius of Pachomius not only effected the rise of monastic communities everywhere, but also influenced its revival in the Middle Ages.

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### ***Pachomian Koinonia***

*Translated, with an introduction, by Armand Veilleux. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, Inc.*

*Volume I: 1980. Pp. xxx, 493, Hardcover, \$26.95. Paperback, \$10.00.*

*Volume II: 1981. Pp. 239. Hardcover, \$25.95. Paperback, \$10.00.*

*Volume III: 1982. Pp. 313. Hardcover, \$26.95. Paperback, \$10.00.*

Pere Veilleux has accomplished a monumental work for which generations of the English-speaking world will be thankful. Pachomian monasticism as an important chapter in the history of religious life has been underestimated, and sometimes totally ignored, except for scholarly circles which had the rich material in the original language; now carefully and painfully assembled and translated in these volumes, and which also had access to the huge Pachomian bibliography in scholarly journals.

*Volume one* deals with the life of St. Pachomius and his disciples. The *Life of Pachomius* which was written by unknown brothers shortly after his death has been transmitted to us in many forms, mainly in Bohairic (the Coptic dialect of the Nile Delta), Greek and Arabic with a few fragments in Sahidic (the dialect of Upper Egypt). Father Veilleux gives a full translation of the two great *lives* (the Bohairic and the Greek) and the fragments of the Sahidic lives not included in these. The translations are accompanied by paragraph titles, chronological dates, biblical references, and references to other *lives*.

*Volume two* deals with Pachomian Chronicles and Rules. Of the former we have a translation of original documents of incidents and anecdotes dealing with St. Pachomius which have not been included in his *life*. They include the *Paralipomena* (the "leftover" or the "things omitted"), a *letter of Bishop Ammon* who was a Pachomian monk, a chapter from *The History of the Monks in Egypt*, and the chapters of the *Lausiac History* of Palladius and the fragments from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Sayings of the Desert Fathers) and other fragments that deal with Pachomius. Father Veilleux translates the *Rules of St. Pachomius* from the complete Latin version of St. Jerome (AD 404) and the extant Coptic and Greek fragments. The *Regulations of Horsiesios* (a successor of Pachomius as Father of the koinonia) is translated from Coptic.

*Volume three* contains instructions and letters of Pachomius and two of his successors, Theodore and Horsiesios. Most of these documents were unknown until very

recently, and except for a part of Pachomius' instructions, they are translated for the first time into English.

Each translation included in the three volumes is followed by lengthy scholarly notes that either explain or correct the text. There is a twelve page Pachomian Bibliography. The third volume ends with a series of indices for the three volumes. The biblical index (60 pages) gives not only the page a biblical quotation comes in the translation, but also its place in the Coptic or Greek document. The analytical index provides the reader with material for spiritual reading, and the scholar with a useful tool for research.

Pere Veilleux concludes his introduction for volume three saying, "We hope indeed that our contribution to the knowledge of Pachomian sources among English-speaking readers will give rise to a new interest in spiritual and scientific research on this beautiful segment of the monastic tradition."

We highly recommend this work to the religious in all churches; to scholars and Church historians; to readers interested in spirituality; and especially to the Coptic youth.

## ***NOTES***

- (1) Seneset, called by the Greek Chenoboskion, is now Kasr-el-Sayad in the province of Kena.
- (2) Diospolis parva in Greek.
- (3) The feast-day of St. Palamon is Abib 25 (August 1).
- (4) The Coptic Synaxarion states that the Jesus Prayer was always on the lips of St. Palamon.
- (5) A compound Coptic word meaning either the palmgrove or sanctuary of Isis (The Egyptian goddess). It is called now Nag-el-Sabriyat, on the east bank of the Nile halfway between Faw and Dechna, ten miles south of Seneset.
- (6) Ateya, A.S.: Development of Christian Monasticism in Egypt (in Arabic). In : St. Mena's Bulletin on Coptic Monasticism. Cairo; 1948:147-181.
- (7) There were nine Pachomian monasteries. In order of their foundation they were: Tabennisi, Phbow, Seneset, Thmousons, Tse, Smin, Thbew, Tsmine and Phnoum. All of them were in Upper Egypt in the modern province of Kena. They were established some time between AD 326 and 345.
- (8) Meletians are members of a schismatic church, started by Meletius who was bishop of Lycopolis (Assiut) at the time of St. Peter of Alexandria. The sect was condemned by the Council of Nicea.
- (9) Marcionites are followers of the gnostic heretic Marcion of Pontus (died c. 160). He rejected the Old Testament and taught that the Creator had nothing in common with the God of Love revealed in Christ.

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