

Eras and Life Cycles of Religious Life

Chapter 2

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The Evolution of Religious Life: A Historical Model

[from “The Recovery of Religious Life,” Raymond Fitz, SM, and Lawrence Cada, SM,
Review for Religious, Vol. 34, 1975-76; and L. Cada, *et al.*,
Shaping the Coming of Religious Life (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 19-43.]

Table 1.1: Age of the Desert (200-500)

Dominant Image of Religious Life: The ideal of religious life is the holy ascetic who seeks the perfection of Christ as a solitary or in community with a group of monks. Disciples withdraw into the “desert” and place themselves under the care of the master ascetic who teaches them the ways of perfection. They live nearby as hermits or gather in cenobia or monasteries under the leadership of the master. The monk prays, mortifies himself, does battle with the devil for the sake of the Church, and spends his life seeking union with Christ.

Second and Third Centuries

100	20,000 Christians in the world	Consecrated virgins and widows live a form of religious life within the Christian communities of the early Church during the persecutions.
249	Persecution of Decius	
251	Antony born	
271	Antony withdraws into the desert	
292	Pachomius born	

Fourth Century

313	Edict of Milan	Hermits and cenobites flourish in the Egyptian desert. Various forms of solitary and community religious life spread around eastern rim of the Mediterranean (Palestine, Syria, Cappadocia). First monasteries are founded in the West.
325	Pachomius founds cenobium	
356	Antony dies	
357	Athanasius writes <i>Life of Antony</i>	
360	Basil founds monastery in Cappadocia	
363	Martin founds monastery in Gaul	
376	Melania founds monastery on the Mount of Olives	
389	Simon the Stylite born	
393	Augustine founds monastic group in Hippo	
399	Cassian, disciple of Evagrius, migrates from Egypt to West	

Fifth Century

405	Honoratus founds monastery of Lérins	Religious life continues to expand in the East. While the western half of Roman Empire crumbles, monastic movement spreads throughout the West (Gaul, Spain, Britain, Ireland, etc.).
410	Alaric sacks Rome	
415	Cassian founds monastery in Marseilles	
450	Celtic monasticism takes root in Ireland	
455	Vandals sack Rome	
459	Simon the Stylite dies	
476	End of western Roman Empire	
480	Brigit founds double monastery at Kildare	

First Turning Point: Spread of Benedict’s Rule

Table 1.2: Age of Monasticism (500-1200)

Dominant Image of Religious Life: Life in a monastery under the discipline of the holy Rule is the ideal of the religious. The daily round of liturgical prayer, work, and contemplation provides a practical setting to pursue the lofty goals of unceasing praise of God and union with Christ. Within the Church and society, monks and nuns set an example of how deep spirituality can be combined with loving ministry to one's neighbor and dutiful fidelity to the concrete tasks of daily life.

Sixth Century

<p>515 Finnian founds Clonard 529 Benedict founds Monte Cassino 563 Columba founds Iona 577 Lombards destroy Monte Cassino 591 Columban founds Luxeuil 596 Augustine of Canterbury sent to Britain</p>	<p>Rapid expansion of Celtic monasticism in Ireland. Various rules observed in monasteries of Gaul and Italy.</p>
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Seventh and Eighth Centuries

<p>613 Columban founds Bobbio 635 Bobbio adopts Benedict's Rule 640 Aiden founds Lindisfarne 642 Arab conquest of Egypt 664 Synod of Whitby fuses Celtic and Anglo-Saxon observance 665 Luxeuil adopts Benedict's Rule 717 Monte Cassino refounded 735 Venerable Bede dies at Jarrow 744 Boniface founds Fulda 755 Chrodegang writes Rule for canons</p>	<p>Religious life of North Africa wiped out by Moslem expansion. Missionary journeys of Celtic monks to evangelize Europe and revive learning in the Church. Golden age of Irish monastic Church. Gradual spread of Benedict's Rule to more and more European monasteries and convents.</p>
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Ninth Century

<p>816 <i>Regula Canoniorum</i> of Aix-la-Chapelle 817 Louis of France decrees that Benedict's Rule be observed throughout Carolingian realms; Benedict of Aniane coordinates this policy</p>	<p>Observance of canons regular is made uniform by spread of the <i>Regula</i> of Aix. Consolidation of Benedict's Rule; virtually all of religious life becomes "Benedictine."</p>
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Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

<p>910 Cluniac reform 1015 Camaldolese reform 1084 Carthusian reform 1098 Cistercian reform</p>	<p>Various reforms breathe new life into Benedict's ideal and introduce organizational variations.</p>
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Twelfth Century

<p>1111 Bernard joins the Cistercians 1119 Templars founded 1120 Premonstratensians founded 1135 Gilbertines founded 1190 Teutonic Knights founded</p>	<p>Canons regular unite into orders, which are a variation of the monastic networks of Cluny and Cîteaux. Military orders attempt a new form of religious life which is temporarily successful.</p>
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Second Turning Point: Rise of the Mendicants

Table 1.3: Age of Mendicant Orders (1200-1500)

Dominant Image of Religious Life: The simple friar who begs for his keep and follows in the footsteps of the Lord is the ideal of religious life in medieval Christendom. He prays as he goes, steeping himself in the love of Christ. Unencumbered by landed wealth, the mendicants are free to travel on foot to any place they are needed by the Church and to provide it with a credible example of the gospel injunction to give away everything to the poor. They hold themselves ready to preach, cultivate learning, serve the poor, and minister to the needs of society in the name of the Church.

Thirteenth Century

- 1207 Dominicans founded
- 1209 Carmelites founded
- 1211 Franciscans founded
- 1216 Beguines begin
- 1221 5,000 Franciscans attend chapter of Mats
- 1243 Augustinians founded
- 1256 13,000 Dominicans in world
- 1298 Boniface VIII imposes cloister on all women religious

Rapid expansion of mendicant orders. Friaries and priories spring up in medieval towns across Europe. Mendicants teach, especially in the new universities, and preach, especially against heresy. Monastic orders imitate some activities of the mendicants.

Fourteenth Century

- 1312 Templars suppressed by Rome
- 1325 75,000 men in mendicant orders
- 1344 Brigittines founded
- 1349 Black Death
- 1365 Alexian Brothers founded
- 1400 47,000 men in mendicant orders

Stabilization and slow decline of mendicant orders. Flagrant abuses and laxity are prevalent in religious life during the last half of the century.

Fifteenth Century

- 1415 Hus burned at the stake
- 1435 Minims founded
- 1450 Gutenberg
- 1492 Columbus
- 1500 90,000 men in mendicant orders

Various reforms restore the mendicant ideal and produce a gradual increase in membership. First stirrings of the Renaissance introduce an uneasiness into the Church and religious life.

Third Turning Point: The Counter-Reformation

Table 1.4: Age of the Apostolic Orders (1500-1800)

Dominant Image of Religious Life: Men and women religious are to form an elite corps of devoted servants ready to aid the Church in its new apostolic needs, especially the formidable renewal tasks of the Counter-Reformation. A high level of personal holiness enables these religious to face the risks of these new undertakings without the protection of the monastic observances.

Sixteenth Century

1517	Luther sparks the Reformation	Religious life virtually wiped out in Protestant Europe. Founding and spread of a new style of religious life in the format of orders dedicated to the active apostolate, with no enclosure in the case of women. These groups work at providing services of charity and instruction, shoring up the Church's political power in Catholic Europe, spreading the gospel in foreign missions.
1535	Ursulines founded	
1539	Gilbertines suppressed by Henry VIII	
1540	Jesuits founded	
1541	Francis Xavier sails for the Far East	
1545	Trent starts	
1561	Teutonic Knights disband	
1562	Discalced Carmelite reform	
1563	Trent imposes cloister on all nuns under pain of excommunication	

Seventeenth Century

1610	Visitation Nuns founded	Flowering of Baroque spirituality, especially in the French School. Adaptation for the sake of the apostolate spawns new variations: societies of priests and clerical congregations for men; more or less successful attempts to evade cloister for women. Bulk of men religious still belong to mendicant orders.
1625	Vincentians founded	
1633	Daughters of Charity founded	
1650	St. Joseph Sisters founded	
1662	Rancé launches Trappist reform	
1663	Paris Foreign Mission Society founded	
1681	Christian Brothers founded	
1700	213,000 men in mendicant orders	

Eighteenth Century

1720	Passionists founded	A few new congregations are founded, but religious life as a whole seems to be in slow decline due to mentality of Enlightenment, inroads of Jansenism, enervation of comfort and wealth. Weakened religious life receives the <i>coup de grâce</i> from the French Revolution, which sets off a wave of political suppression and defection in France and across the rest of Catholic Europe.
1735	Redemptorists founded	
1770	300,000 men in religious life in world	
1773	Jesuits suppressed by Rome	
1789	French Revolution starts	

Fourth Turning Point: French Revolution

Table 1.5: Age of the Teaching Congregations (1800-Present)

Dominant Image of Religious Life: Religious dedicate their lives to the salvation of their own souls and the salvation of others. The style of life of religious men and women blends an intense pursuit of personal holiness with a highly active apostolic service. Identity with the person of Christ unites this twofold objective into a single purpose.

Nineteenth Century

- 1814 French Restoration: Jesuits restored by Rome
- 1825 Fewer than 70,000 men in religious life in world
- 1831 Mercy Sisters founded
- 1850 83,000 men in religious life in world
- 1859 Salesians founded
- 1870 Papal infallibility declared

Revival of religious life after widespread state suppressions. Numerous foundations of congregations dedicated to a return to authentic religious life blended with service, principally in schools. Old orders, such as Jesuits and Dominicans, rejuvenated in the format of the teaching congregations. Church gradually centralizes around the papacy and isolates itself from secular trends of the modern world.

Twentieth Century

- 1901 *Normae* recognized noncloistered women as true religious
- 1962 Vatican II: 173,351 women and 33,309 men in religious life in US
- 1966 181,411 women and 35,029 men in religious life in US
- 1977 130,804 women and 30,960 men in religious life in US

Expansion and solidification. In the sixties, crises set in from within religious life due to loss of identity and inroads of secularizing process. Numerous defections and decreasing numbers of new members.

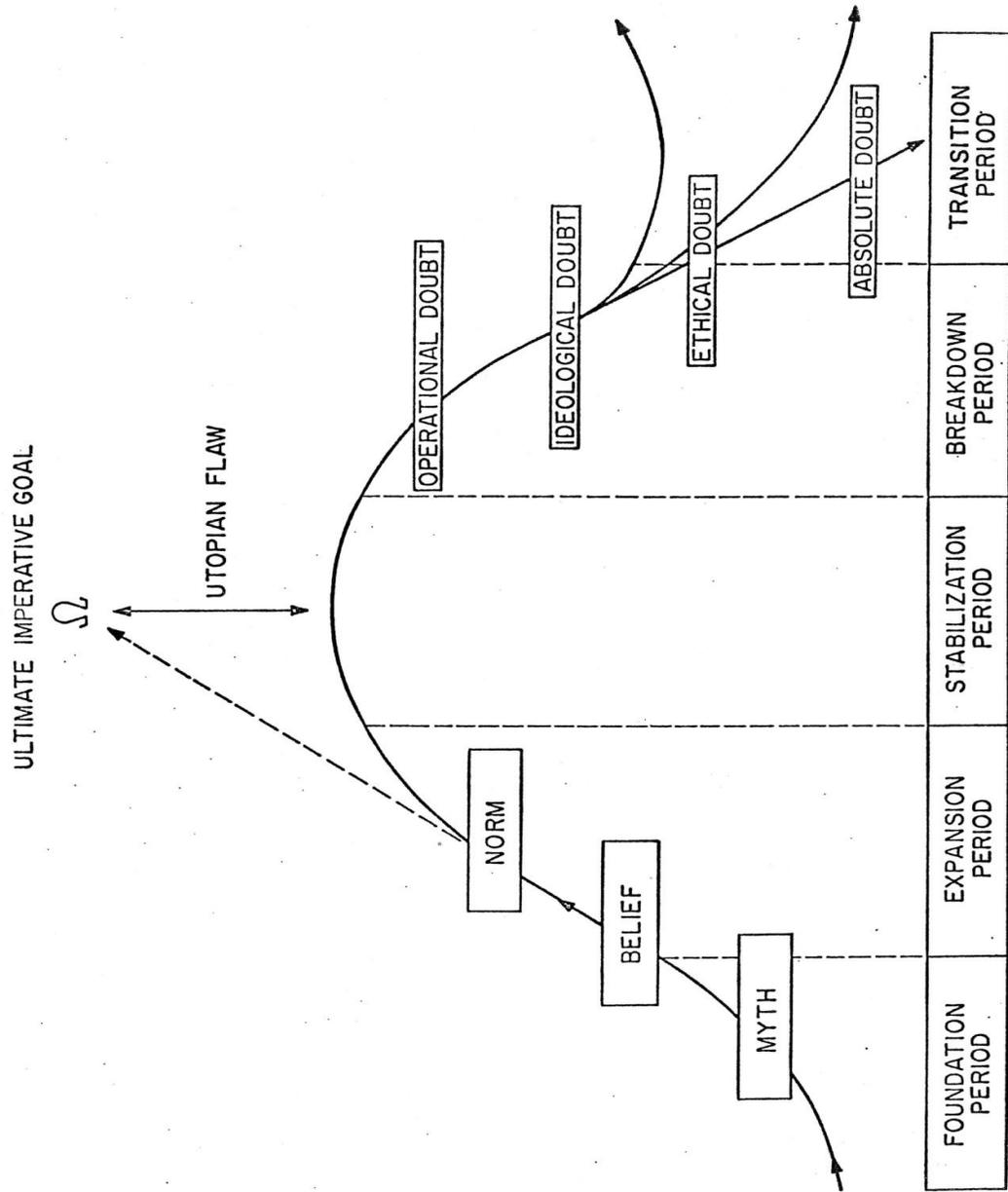
Twenty-first Century

- 1999 15,829 religious priests, 5,970 brothers, and 85,034 sisters in US
- 2009 135,051 religious priests, 54,229 brothers, and 729,371 sisters **in world**.
13,428 religious priests, 4,905 brothers, and 60,715 sisters in US
- 2010 12,629 religious priests, 4,606 brothers, 55,944 sisters in US

Numbers of men and women religious in Europe and North America continue to drop, while numbers in Asia and Africa increase. There is no change in these trends during the first decade of the new century and no clear emergence of a new paradigm of religious life.

Fifth Turning Point: (?)

Overview of “The Life Cycle of a Religious Community: A Sociological Model”



*from “The Recovery of Religious Life,” Raymond Fitz, SM, and Lawrence Cada, SM, *Review for Religious*, Vol. 34, 1975-76