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# The Representation of Salvation in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

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THE REPRESENTATION OF SALVATION IN  
*THE SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS*

by

Paul A. Ferderer  
Bachelor of Arts, Jamestown College, 2006

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the  
University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

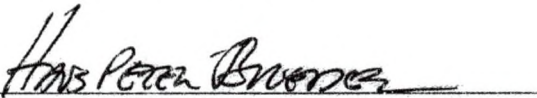
Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota  
May  
2010

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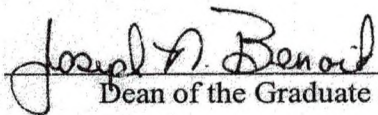
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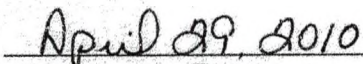
  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines four prominent works of monastic literature composed during the third through the sixth centuries and contrasts the representations of salvation within them. The *Lives of Constantine and Antony*, *The Lausiac History* and *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* discussed conceptions of salvation in some of the earliest forms of monastic literature. The contention of this thesis is that in relation to the major works of monastic literature composed during the same period, *The Sayings*, articulated an existential dimension of salvation experienced as deliverance from sin and manifested in restored communion between God and the believer. Using genre as its primary unit of analysis, this study reveals the unique theology of salvation found in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.

While this study focuses on the early monastic community, it has much broader implications in the study of historical theology and Late Antique religion. This study's theological focus contributes to the existing discussions on the holy man of Late Antiquity. At present, such scholarship remains focused on the sociological implications of ancient religion. This thesis provides a point of departure for studies of theological texts as works that describe the intellectual history of Late Antiquity.

The present discourse on the history of Christianity places much of its emphasis on Western Christendom. Saint Augustine and Aquinas remain the exemplars of Christian thought, and the reformation the pinnacle of the church's impact on the course of history. This thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship which probes Eastern

foundations of Christian spirituality through the monastic movement and its rich intellectual history.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*The Apophthegmata Patrum*, or *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* as they are known in English, provide a written record of daily interactions between the earliest practitioners of Christian monasticism. These exchanges began in the third century, and the earliest extant compilation dates to the early sixth century.<sup>1</sup> This was a formative period in the history of the Christian church's external fight for survival and internal struggle for its own identity. Christianity faced persecution from the Romans, competition from rival religious systems, and standardization with its adoption by the Imperial state. One question that loomed large in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* asked simply, "Father what must I do to be saved?"<sup>2</sup> The holy men of Christian monasticism dedicated themselves to the pursuit of salvation. *The Sayings* provide a written account of their pursuit and reveal what salvation meant to the monastic movement's most influential practitioners. This thesis compares *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, *The Lives of Constantine and Antony*, and *The Lausiac History* and uses this comparative analysis to establish the unique understanding of salvation articulated in *The Sayings*. These sources had generic contrasts which

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<sup>1</sup> The dates for *The Sayings* are inexact. There is a large and varied debate concerning both the individual *Sayings* and the corpus as a whole. See Graham Gould, "A Note on the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 133-138. See also Benedicta Ward, Foreword to *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), xvii-xx.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase serves as the introduction to a number of individual *Sayings* and is usually followed by a piece of advice tailored to the needs of the monk.

allowed them to conceptualize salvation and the means of its acquisition in different ways. The contention of this thesis is that in comparison to other works of monastic literature composed during the same period, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* proposed two kinds of salvation accessed through monastic life. One was the traditional notion of eternal salvation granted to an individual after death. The second was an existential salvation experienced as deliverance from sinful passions. This conception of existential salvation is unique to *The Sayings* and the oral context that produced them.

### The Historiographic Context of the Christian Holy Man

This study of representations of salvation in monastic literature is part of the larger discourse on the “holy man of Late Antiquity.” This figure was the subject of renewed interest during the 1960s and 70s as a result of Peter Brown’s scholarship. Brown recreated the holy man through an intense focus on spiritual authority. Brown’s conception of spiritual authority remains a profitable topic for research, but its dominant status made obvious among scholars the need to consider the holy man from new perspectives.<sup>3</sup> This is not because of a deficiency in Brown’s model. The impetus for new paradigms in the study of the holy stems from the desire to understand this figure in terms of his personal motivations, ideas, and beliefs.<sup>4</sup> The present conception of the holy man emerged as a response to the reductionist interpretation of Christian monks during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This interpretation portrayed monks as

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<sup>3</sup> Susanna Elm, “Introduction,” *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6.3 (1998): 342-350.

<sup>4</sup> Elm, 347-350. See also Elizabeth Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 142-144. She notes the impact of the linguistic turn in the study of patristics and Ancient History revealing that many of the standard assumptions regarding the relationship between texts and their relationship to context are problematic. This observation is especially important when considering *The Sayings* because their origins as oral conversation provided them with an elasticity of meaning for those studying their written form. On the flexibility of meaning in *The Sayings* see Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18-23.

individuals whose yearning for personal salvation led them to abandon the world around them. In addition to the charge that monks deserted their society, classicists and ancient historians argued that the pessimism of their religious system drained the Roman Empire of its resolve in the midst of a “crisis” in the third century that threatened its very survival.

The implementation of sociological theory in the study of Late Antique religion provided a way to reconsider the impact of the holy man within his society. Peter Brown used authority as the foundation to study Christian ascetics in terms of the variety of social functions they served, ranging from village patron to keeper of classical culture and Christ bearer to unconverted Romans.<sup>5</sup> Brown’s work inspired a generation of historians to the study of the holy man as a dynamic figure who presided over a profound cultural and intellectual transition in ancient history. Brown’s focus on spiritual authority successfully brought the monk out of his cell and into his society. His approach created a new awareness of interactions between holy men and their fellow Romans. This came at the cost of the intimacy of earlier appraisals of monasticism, characterized as they were by a polemically charged reductionism.<sup>6</sup> Modern scholarship scorned the pessimistic detachment of the monasticism but provided an accurate expression of the longing monks had for eternal salvation. The negative assessments of most modern studies did not obscure the validity of their observations or the potential compelling insights into the motivations of Christian ascetics. Modern scholars were right to assert salvation as both the ultimate goal of the monastic vocation and an intimate point of contact between monastics and their God. Brown himself acknowledged his desire to discover this point

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<sup>5</sup> These aspects of the holy man emerge through a series of articles covered in greater detail in chapter 1. A good summation of Brown’s work is Elm’s introduction cited earlier.

<sup>6</sup> This assessment begins with Gibbon. His impact is discussed in the main body of this introduction.

of contact outside his own sociological framework in pursuit of the believer's "map of the self."<sup>7</sup>

The remainder of the introduction examines the circumstances that led Peter Brown to undertake the study of Late Antiquity and provides the foundation for detailed exploration of his conception of the holy man in chapter one. The final section of the first chapter establishes the viability of salvation as a new analytical paradigm and gives working definitions for the key terms in this thesis. Chapter two explores representations of salvation in Alexandrian Christianity during the second and third centuries in an effort to establish some of the influences at work in monastic literature, and examines the work of Alexandria's most prominent theologians' early conceptual models for the representations of salvation found in monastic literature. Chapter three is a contrastive study of the representations of salvation in three major works of monastic literature composed during this period: *The Life of Saint Antony*, *The Lausiac History*, and *The Sayings of the Desert of Fathers*. This will demonstrate the presence of two representations of salvation in three major works of monastic literature.

This historiography examines works of ancient history composed after Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and before the 1968 publication of Peter Brown's "Approaches to the Religious Crisis of the Third Century."<sup>8</sup> The introduction reveals the dominance of the argument that the success of the monastic movement was the result of a "crisis" in the third century and the rise of "irrationality" in Western culture. The first part of the introduction uses E.R. Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational*

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<sup>7</sup> For Brown's discussion of functionalism and its impact on his work see Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 2 (Spring 1983): 20-25.

<sup>8</sup> Some references will cite materials published after 1968 to demonstrate the persistence of the perspective that favored certain attributes of the enlightenment and sought their antecedents in the Greco-Roman history.



to construct a working conception of irrationality, and the second part traces its origins through seminal works of ancient and Roman history beginning with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Part three examines the debate over irrationality as part of "the crisis" in the Roman Empire during the third century. Roman interest in religion became a form of irrational escapism within this context by which individuals sought to transcend a hostile world. Finally, there is an examination of two works composed in the years before the publication of Peter Brown's "Approaches" that provided the inspiration and point of departure for his holy man.<sup>9</sup>

#### The Monk and the Irrational: The Monk and the Decline of Ancient Society

The contention of this historiography is that Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* created an enduring link between Christian monasticism and the rise of irrationality in Western thought. This argument requires an applicable conception of irrationality as discussed by Gibbon and other historians before the publication of Brown's "Approaches." E.R. Dodds offers elements for the construction of this definition in his *The Greeks and the Irrational*. The purpose of his work was to chronicle Greek culture's descent into irrationality beginning circa 200 B.C. and culminating with its acceptance of Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Dodds argued that popular religion and pseudo-science descended from among the Greek masses to overwhelm a smaller group of intellectuals who sought to complete the Hellenistic world's transition to an age of reason.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The two works discussed here are Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive? IIIe-VIe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1938) and Derwas Chitty, *The Desert A City* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Press, 1966).

<sup>10</sup> E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 236-70. For his discussion of Christianity and the irrational in the Greek world see 249-250.

<sup>11</sup> Dodds, 245-255. For the failures of Greek rationalism see 250-255.

Irrationality provided a prism through which Dodds could relate the intellectual decline he perceived in later Hellenistic civilization. His psychoanalytical framework ensured that the individual was the point of departure for his analysis.<sup>12</sup> He believed that the expansion of knowledge in the fields of science, philosophy, and literature during the “enlightenment” of the fifth century overwhelmed many Greeks outside the intellectual elite and led them to seek irrational means of protection from an uncertain world. This introduction uses two elements of Dodds’ discussion of irrationality and examines this concept’s impact on interpretations of the monastic movement. The first is his contention that beginning in roughly 200 B.C. Greeks believed that humanity required the aid of supernatural forces to face an incomprehensible and hostile world.<sup>13</sup> The second is that such aid depended on the individual’s withdrawal from society and commitment to religious devotion.<sup>14</sup> The locus of impact was the individual and centered on his/her personal needs. *Greeks and the Irrational* argued for a resurgence of popular religion fueled by the desire for certainty and the “fear of freedom.”<sup>15</sup>

Dodds’ appraisal of classical Greece after the enlightenment of the fifth century B.C. pictured fearful masses seeking supernatural protection. Access to pagan deities, oracles, and rites came at the cost of individual agency. The world was an incomprehensible place governed by irrational, fatalistic forces and humanity could do little to affect positive outcomes within it.<sup>16</sup> This conception of the world led many

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<sup>12</sup> Dodds, 245-246. He makes it clear here that the distinguishing feature of Greek religion after 200 B.C. was its focus on individual salvation.

<sup>13</sup> Dodds, 245-289. The author does not limit his conception of the supernatural to polytheistic gods or monotheistic deities. He includes divine oracles (283-289), the revival of astrological study (245-250), and the study of sacred texts (245-246).

<sup>14</sup> Dodds, 246.

<sup>15</sup> Dodds, 249. This phrase is the title for the final chapter of Dodds’ *Greeks and the Irrational*.

<sup>16</sup> For a consideration of Dodds’ analysis of luck in Greek culture see 242. For his understanding of the growth of fatalism during the final centuries of classical Greece see 242-244.

Greeks to abandon their society in favor of seeking individual salvation through supernatural aid.<sup>17</sup> The philosophers, scientists, and administrators of the ancient world gave way to religious devotees who looked outside the self for salvation. The psychoanalytical framework employed by Dodds examined the classical Greek mind from a fresh perspective, but his conclusions concerning its decline were a continuation of Gibbon's narrative. This was a world in which people abandoned reason and society in a quest for personal transcendence.

### The Legacy of Gibbon

The assessments of the monastic movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century pictured it as part of Western culture's regrettable transition away from a world men could understand and engage, to a metaphysical one they could only hope to survive by enlisting supernatural help.<sup>18</sup> The monk was a poor substitute for his classical counterpart the philosopher, though his efforts to preserve a literary culture and articulate Christian theology earned him a reprieve from historians of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>19</sup> The enduring legacy of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* ensured that the monk and his era were judged in terms of their capacity to emulate the classical period's intellectualism and rationality. Reliance on Gibbon's narrative and the imposition of enlightenment standards of rationality provided the impetus for Brown's consideration of Late Antiquity as a period of historical study. He argued that this was a period of history characterized

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<sup>17</sup> Dodds, 247-250.

<sup>18</sup> The earliest modern assessment in the context of the Roman Empire is J.B. Bury, ed., *The Decline and Fall of the Empire* vol. 4, by Edward Gibbon (London: Methuen and Company, 1898), 57-76. See also J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire From the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian*, vol. 1, (New York: Dover Publications, 1889), 382-389. An example of a more recent appraisal which recites the same themes of self-mortification and withdrawal from the world is Glanville Downey, *The Late Roman Empire* (New York: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1976), 60-62.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Baynes, *The Hellenistic Civilization of East Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 1-20 and 37-39. See also his "The Thought World of East Rome" in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, eds. R.A. Humphrey and A.D. Momigliano (London: Athlone Press, 1960), 24-46.

by innovation, especially in religious thought.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to the prevailing contention that the religious fervor of the third century was an irrational response to the instability of the Roman world, Brown argued it was the culmination of humanity's efforts to obtain personal intimacy with the divine and began centuries earlier.<sup>21</sup> The goal of these efforts was to utilize and even embody divine power to battle evil forces.<sup>22</sup> The perfection sought through the religious life impacted both the individual and the society in which he or she lived.<sup>23</sup> Brown's conception of the holy man was a radical departure from the scholarly consensus of his day, as was his recasting of this figure's world.

#### Gibbon as the First Modern Appraisal of the Monastic Movement

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was the first modern appraisal of the monastic movement.<sup>24</sup> The author devoted twenty pages of his thirty-seventh chapter to a scathing critique of the monastic movement. The core of his argument against monasticism was that Christian asceticism made men useless to their society by immersing them in the quest for personal salvation. Gibbon saw monks as neurotic men who were "inspired by a savage enthusiasm which represents man as a criminal and God as a tyrant. . . [and] embraced a life of misery as the price for eternal happiness."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Brown, "Approaches to the Religious Crisis of the Third Century A.D.," *The English Historical Review* 83 (July 1968): 544-547.

<sup>21</sup> Brown cites several works as inspiration for his efforts. See Derwas Chitty, *The Desert A City* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Press, 1966), 179-181. See also Fergus Millar, ed., *The Roman Empire and Its Neighbors* (New York and London: Delacorte Press, 1967) 139-148 and 213-217; Marrou, *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive? IIIe-VIe siècle*.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity A.D. 150-750* (London: Thames and Hudson LTD, 1971), 49-60.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, 55-56.

<sup>24</sup> The implications of Gibbon's narrative remain in a number of discourses. For an examination of their impact on the monastic movement see Burton-Christie, 11-14. For its implications in the study of the Roman Empire see Averil Cameron, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 25. For its implications to the history of Christianity see Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 17, 20, and 25-26.

<sup>25</sup> Gibbon, 57.

Consumed by their fear of God's wrath, monks abandoned their society and its citizens. This intense fear created the "cruel and unfeeling temper that has distinguished the monks of every age and country."<sup>26</sup>

Henry Chadwick provided an apt summation of this critique in his seminal work *The Ascetic Ideal* noting that "the underlying axiom of Gibbon's objection is that the ascetic ideal makes people so otherworldly as to be of no use in this world."<sup>27</sup> Gibbon asserted that the monastic conception of God was an irrational one based on a crude formula that made suffering the only path to eternal salvation. The effect of this irrational understanding of God led monks to flee from the responsibilities of Roman life, and played a major role in the empire's collapse by causing Romans to doubt their ability to confront the challenges facing their society. These are the same critiques proffered by Dodds in his discussion of the intellectual decline in classical Greece. Both scholars argued that the societies in their respective studies were characterized by humanity's efforts to enlist supernatural forces to combat existential uncertainty. Dodds' psychoanalytical paradigm took its lead from Gibbon by placing its emphasis on the individual. For both men, ancient religion was a quest for personal salvation that consciously ignored the problems faced by society as a whole.

#### The Enduring Legacy of *Decline and Fall*

The legacy of *Decline and Fall* endured even as most scholars abandoned its contentions. J.B. Bury edited what is still the definitive version of Gibbon's manuscript, and offered his own solution to "Gibbon's problem" in his *History of the Later Roman*

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<sup>26</sup> Gibbon, 71. For Gibbon's assertion that monastic life was an irrational act see 67-69. For his assessment of monasticism as an abdication of civic duties see 62-63.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Chadwick, "The Ascetic Ideal in the Early Church," in *Monks Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition*, ed. W.J. Sheils (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 7.

*Empire*. Bury argued that a combination of factors led to the decline of Roman power and territorial control.<sup>28</sup> He provided an eclectic offering of social, economic, and logistical factors in describing Rome's breakdown. According to Bury the external trials Romans faced in the third century led to a "failure of nerve." Unable to deal with the combination of struggles through human means, individuals looked skyward for deliverance.<sup>29</sup> This critique avoided a direct indictment of monasticism, but maintained the growth of religious devotion was the response of society in crisis. The sweeping epics of the later empire argued for the supremacy of the classical period as the high water mark of development in the Ancient History. As individual contentions from Gibbon's work faded, his equating of the later empire with the loss of classical culture endured. The adversity of the third century overwhelmed Romans in the same manner it had the Greeks centuries earlier. Gibbon's characterization of Late Antique religion persisted despite waning interest in monasticism. Studies of Late Roman society after Gibbon broadened their focus to consider the increased interest its citizens took in religion in the midst of external struggles. Monasticism became a symptom of the Romans' inability and unwillingness to face the difficulties of their civilization.

These early narratives of the Roman Empire provided a caricature of ancient history that endured for half a century. The story was of Western culture's abandonment of science, literature, and art for the security offered by religion and superstition. The "post-classical" world found limited redemption in its capacity for imitation. The Eastern Empire became Byzantium as classicists began looking for traces of classical culture and

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<sup>28</sup> Bury, 309-313.

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert Murray, *The Five Stages of Greek Religion* (London: C.A. Watts, 1935), 124-125.

seeking a bridge to the Middle Ages.<sup>30</sup> Norman Baynes enjoyed a prolific career during the 1940s using a series of books and lectures to recast the Byzantine world as a seamless continuation of Hellenistic society and classical culture. The growth of Byzantine studies resulted because the question of why Rome fell was less important to Byzantinists than that of the transformation of Greco-Roman culture between Hellenism and Christianization.

Baynes' *The Hellenistic Civilization of East Rome* showed the continuation of Hellenistic culture in Byzantine literature, art, and thought.<sup>31</sup> Baynes pictured the Byzantine Empire as a civilization that retained the best elements of Hellenistic culture with a veneer of Christian piety. The monk constituted one of the only ruptures in the transition from Rome to Byzantium. This figure embodied "the double ethic" of the Christian empire. Baynes' double-ethic created two groups, "the ordinary Christian living his life in the work-a-day world" and those "haunted by Christ's words, 'if thou would be perfect.'"<sup>32</sup> The Christian monk created dissidence in Baynes' attempt to harmonize Byzantium and Rome because he was an entity with no easy counterpart in the classical world. The inability of Baynes to definitely place the monk in the transition from Roman to Byzantine society was the by-product of ancient historians' unwillingness to examine Late Antiquity outside of an enlightenment context. Scholars created multiple terms and concepts to deal with a large swath of history. They considered the

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<sup>30</sup> Norman Baynes, *The Hellenistic Civilization of East Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), 1-20 and 37-39. See also his "The Thought World of East Rome," in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays*, 24-46. For an economic and social perspective on the preservation of Greco-Roman culture and the transition to the Middle Ages see, A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*, vol. 2, (London: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 1025-1027 and 1064-1068. In the context of the early church see W.C.H. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 332. Frend argues that Christianity represented a profound cultural shift offering a "powerful Semitic religion" to the Roman world.

<sup>31</sup> Baynes, *The Hellenistic Civilization of East Rome*, 1-45.

<sup>32</sup> Baynes, "The Thought World of East Rome," 20.

differences between Byzantium and Rome and the classical and post-classical world. Amid the terminology, the concept of decline remained paramount in the study of the ancient civilizations of the West. Baynes' work marked a turning point in this discourse because of his assertion that Byzantium retained the essential intellectual and cultural features of the classical world. His argument for the vitality and sophistication of the Byzantine Empire was only possible through the presupposition of the classical culture's superiority. This idealized conception of the classical age remained the standard for the assessment of all other ancient cultures in the West. This perception of superiority made it impossible to consider the unique impact of the Christian monk on the society in which he lived.

#### The Notion of Crisis in the Third Century A.D.

The notion that Byzantium was part of the contagious Greco-Roman cultural legacy presented an alternative to Gibbon's narrative of decline but retained the latter's conception of the holy man. Baynes' "double ethic" kept the image of holy men whose zeal for personal salvation separated them from their society as an isolated few "haunted" by Christ's call to perfection.<sup>33</sup> Baynes explained how religion created continuity between Rome and Constantinople but could not explain the holy man's role in this transition. The caricature of holy men as cut off from the larger world obscured this figure's impact on the social order around them. The double ethic focused on the monk's withdrawal from "work-a-day" Christians in a quest for personal salvation. This characterization ignored the holy men who preached to churches full of parishioners, advised their Empire's rulers, and received throngs of pilgrims. As a result the assertion of continuity between the classical world and East Rome could not reconcile the monk's

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<sup>33</sup> Baynes, 20. See also 37-39.



influence in a culture they supposedly despised.<sup>34</sup> The need to explain this culture of piety led to the resurrection of Bury's claim that Late Roman society lost its nerve. The middle of the twentieth century contended that an "age of anxiety" led Romans to seek protection and counsel from the divine. E.R. Dodds' *Greeks and the Irrational* provided the functional definition for the concept of irrationality discussed in this introduction. This work is also useful in understanding how historians used the idea of "anxiety" as an explanation for change in ancient societies. The Greeks fled a society based on empirical observation and rational thought because they feared a world in which humans bore responsibility for their circumstances.<sup>35</sup> The original contribution of this work came from Dodds' use of psychoanalysis to elucidate the Greeks' pursuit of religion as a solution to existential uncertainty, but its composition came within the larger scholarly context determined to assert the superiority of the classical tradition and the irrationality of Greek religion.

W.K.C. Guthrie's *The Greeks and Their Gods* argued for the same link between existential uncertainty and the rise of religion, noting that the growth of cities in ancient Greece provided the impetus for the creation of various deities to protect them. He was also quick to link religion with the breakdown of rationality manifested as

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<sup>34</sup> Brown, 547.

<sup>35</sup> The unique contribution of Dodds' work was its psychoanalytical component, but this work was part of an extensive tradition that associated Greek religion with intellectual and cultural decline. Murray, 124-135. Martin Nilsson, *Greek Piety* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1948), 150. Nilsson associated intellectual decline with the Greeks' alliance with Eastern religions in pursuit of "vulgar transcendentalism." For a sociological perspective see W.R. Hadley, *The Pagan Background of Early Christianity* (London: University Press, 1925), 205. The rise of religion here stemmed from classical education's failure to reach "the masses." W.C.K. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (London: Mauthen, 1951), 233. He argued that the increase of cities throughout Greece was the catalyst for the religious expansion in the form of various civic deities. In each case religion occurs in response to some form of crisis and is embraced by the "masses."

“inconsistencies” that were inconceivable to the rational mind.<sup>36</sup> For Guthrie, as for Dodds, religion was the refuge of the uncultured masses. His stated purpose was to use religion as a way to “find out what we can about ordinary Greeks.”<sup>37</sup> The 1950s and 60s brought the production of classicists together with a keen interest in the physiology and sociology of religion. The consensus among scholars was that a surge in religiosity signaled a crisis within ancient society.

When Dodds penned *Greeks and the Irrational* he worked closely with many of the preeminent classicists of his day.<sup>38</sup> His efforts confirmed that the decline these classicists read of in their texts stemmed from the anxious mind of the individual and served as a point of departure for his second major work, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, published in 1965. *Pagan and Christian* was part of a resurgence of the decline and fall narrative repackaged as the “age of anxiety.” A.H.M. Jones composed two major works during this decade dealing first with the decline of the ancient world as a whole, and then focusing on the later Roman Empire.<sup>39</sup> The scholarly climate of the 1960s linked the growth of religion with societal crisis and collapse. It was this context that inspired the work of Peter Brown in his efforts to recast the monk as the holy man and later Rome as Late Antiquity. The growth of economic and social history in the second half of the twentieth century provided new tools with which to sculpt the narrative of decline and fall within the context of “an age of anxiety.” Jones’ meticulous study of tax records, church membership roles, and Roman law codes allowed him to argue that

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<sup>36</sup> Guthrie, xii.

<sup>37</sup> Guthrie, 58.

<sup>38</sup> See Dodds, iii. Referring to those who read and revised his manuscript he lists W.K.C. Guthrie, A.D. Nock, I.M. Linforth, and W.H. Alexander.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*. See also A.H.M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc, 1966).

by the third century the logistics of their empire were more than Romans could bear.<sup>40</sup> He avoided providing any one cause for the Empire's fall and pointed to a variety of factors: barbarian invasions, disease which led to depopulation, and failed economic reforms. The larger significance of Jones' chapter on Roman decline was his assertion that the events which precipitated it, particularly in the West, occurred in the third century.<sup>41</sup>

The second wave of decline and fall narratives was also quick to pronounce failure and assign blame to the Christian church and its holy men. Jones pointed to the church's consumption of integral human and natural resources needed to maintain the Roman infrastructure.<sup>42</sup> This investment in the holy failed to pay dividends because the church did not produce the moral and political stability needed to sustain the whole of the empire. The eloquent sermons and ascetic feats of the Christians did little to fight corruption, injustice, and poverty within the Roman system.<sup>43</sup> The failure of religion to help the Roman Empire outlast the crisis of the third century and left the civilization instead "a wasteland between the Ancient World and the European Middle Ages."<sup>44</sup> Scholars' connection of crisis and religion made an ideal platform for Dodds' *Pagan and Christian*. He expanded on the conception of "the irrational" in his first work to explain how both religious groups used divinity to cope in an empire in peril. The broadened

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<sup>40</sup> Jones, 1025-1068.

<sup>41</sup> Jones argues for a combination of factors in the decline of the West. He cites barbarian invasions (1028-1031), in conjunction with the depopulation (1041-42), and economic weakness because "too few producers supported too many idle mouths," chief among them the Christian clergy (1045-1048). See also his *Decline of the Ancient World* for a compact summary of the growth in church wealth, 252-269.

<sup>42</sup> Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*, 933-934.

<sup>43</sup> Jones provides a scathing indictment in a section entitled "the church's failure," 979-985. For a social history see Ramsey MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C.-284 A.D.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 121-128. He argues that the third century was a period of limited social mobility and increased economic stratification. The "stagnant" Roman economy "taught supplication not energetic enterprise," 123.

<sup>44</sup> Frend, 389.

scope of his second book did not change his understanding of the elements of irrationality. He maintained that the foundation of irrationality was the belief in an evil world.<sup>45</sup> Dodds also retained the element of withdrawal in his conception of religious irrationality.<sup>46</sup> The discussion of asceticism placed intense focus on the Christian monk bringing the full force of Freud to bear in its appraisal of ancient religion. Dodds argued that Christian teachings concerning human sexuality and the fallen nature of the material world filled the monk with a hatred of his own body. His ascetic regimen of virginity, dietary austerity, bible study, and prayer was the only means of freedom from his own self-loathing. This world view left no room for the hope of society's correction or improvement through human action.<sup>47</sup> This conclusion gave a scientific element to the claim that the monk embodied the ineffectiveness of the Christian church by bringing the holiness this figure claimed to possess to the world around him.

#### Foundations of the Christian Holy Man and Late Antiquity

The wide acceptance of an "age of anxiety" offered a compelling explanation for the transformation of religious life in the Roman Empire during the third century. The Christian holy man was an embodiment of the Late Romans' desire to flee a world of increasing instability and danger. This notion's explanatory power lessened when considered in light of the monastic movement's significance in the Byzantine Empire and Medieval Europe. An undercurrent developed within ancient history that questioned the viability of the prevailing notion of monks as men whose hatred for the world rendered them useless to it. This reconsideration of the monk's place in the ancient world was a

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<sup>45</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), 12-17.

<sup>46</sup> Dodds, 1-33.

<sup>47</sup> Dodds, 1-27.

result of much larger historiographic trends. One was a cross pollination of history and biography. As Mark Vessey explains in his “The Demise of the Christian Writer and the Remaking of ‘Late Antiquity’: From H.-I. Marrou’s *Saint Augustine* (1938) to Peter Brown’s *Holy Man* (1983),” the early twentieth century was a period when ancient historians and classicists began careful studies of individuals in an effort to better understand their societies.<sup>48</sup> The beginning of Peter Brown’s career in ancient history was his biography, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*.<sup>49</sup> The purpose and inspiration for his work came thirty years before from Henri-Irénée Marrou’s *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive*?<sup>50</sup> The literary styles and scholastic goals of the works were so similar that “it would have been difficult to say which of the two men...had the better claim to be considered the founder of modern Late Antiquity.”<sup>51</sup> Marrou saw in Augustine the first “late antique man.”<sup>52</sup> The life of Augustine served Marrou as a human demarcation between the classical world and the Middle Ages. The larger significance of this work was its ability to argue for Late Antiquity as a unique period in Ancient History and the Christian man of letters as its embodiment. The first version of Marrou’s *Décadence* had little to say about the Christian holy man. He echoed Baynes in his assertion that Augustine, and other Christian men of letters, retained the basic elements of Hellenistic culture augmented by their rigid theological focus. For these men

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<sup>48</sup> Mark Vessey, “The Demise of the Christian Writer and the Remaking of ‘Late Antiquity’: From H.-I. Marrou’s *Saint Augustine* (1938) to Peter Brown’s *Holy Man* (1983),” *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6.3 (1998): 379.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).

<sup>50</sup> Marrou, 111.

<sup>51</sup> Vessey, 383.

<sup>52</sup> Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, *Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1958), 145.

classical education was useful only in its capacity to prepare churchmen for divine contemplation, specifically the study of scripture.<sup>53</sup>

In a *Retractatio* to the original text, Marrou responded to criticisms that his attempts to describe a period of Late Antiquity placed too much emphasis on the Christianization of Roman culture. He explained that his intent was to point to “a quasi-Platonic form of the ‘life of the spirit’—common to both Christians and non-Christians in the Late Roman period.”<sup>54</sup> The impetus behind his work was to debunk the notion that the later empire was one of decline driven by fear. Augustine personified an interest in religion as an attempt to revive a culture whose militant commitment to tradition manifested itself in a desire for transcendence. The conclusion of his *Retractio* included a footnote in which Marrou explained that this longing for transcendence was “outside the cultural mainstream, in the sequestered milieu of the Desert.”<sup>55</sup> Augustine’s efforts to “revive” ancient culture through his theological focus were one part of the “life of the spirit” that distinguished Late Antiquity as a unique period of history. Marrou’s remarks began the process of recasting the monastic movement and its practitioners. The caricature of insignificant men consumed by self-loathing manifested in their detachment became untenable. The holy man in both pagan and Christian form became an essential element of cultural change driven by discontentment with his existence rather than fear of it. In 1967 Peter Brown published *Augustine of Hippo*, a work overtly influenced by that of Marrou.<sup>56</sup> The significance of Brown’s biography of Augustine to this study was its emphasis on social history. Marrou focused on Christianity’s revitalization of Roman

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<sup>53</sup> Marrou, 380.

<sup>54</sup> Marrou, 692.

<sup>55</sup> Vessey, 389. See Marrou, 692.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Brown, “The World of Late Antiquity Revisited,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 7 (1997): 5-30.

culture in the context of intellectual history. Brown placed intense focus on the interplay between culture and society, particularly in his discussion of Augustine's *De Doctrina de Chrisinta*. Brown argued that Augustine's notion of paganism as an "agreed language between men and demons" was an ancient articulation of a thoroughly modern sociology. The bishop understood paganism as a social construct made to satisfy the human desire for religion. The genius of Augustine was his ability to locate the source of paganism's power as its social function as opposed to its demonic inspiration.<sup>57</sup> Brown's analysis utilized the same sociological foundation found throughout his later work on the Christian holy man by demonstrating how Augustine legitimized his own claim to spiritual authority through Christianity.

Brown's theory of spiritual authority was in its infancy in *Augustine of Hippo*, but it provided the essential components for his study of the holy man. Brown found in Augustine's classical learning a form of social currency which the bishop used to assert his authority, and that of his church, over the preexistent pagan culture. His knowledge of classical literature and pagan religion facilitated his assertion that both were products of human invention, not divine creation. The 1960s emphasis on the role of religion in the crisis of the third century moved Brown to implement this formula in his creation and study of the holy man. The argument of the crisis of the third century obscured a scholarly undercurrent concerning the monastic movement and, more generally, Late Antique religion. Derwas Chitty's seminal work, *The Desert A City*, was published in 1966. The importance of this work was not the novelty of its contentions but its combination of erudite scholarship with intimate narrative. The book moved chronologically from the beginnings of monasticism in Egypt to the Islamic capture of

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<sup>57</sup> Brown, 266.

the Sinai Peninsula in the sixth century.<sup>58</sup> Chitty oscillated between the impact of monastic life on individuals and the larger Christian church. The impressive scope of the narrative explored the historical significance of monasticism as “an institution with a vast tradition and literature of its own, integrated into the organization, ecclesiastical and civil life of...Christendom”<sup>59</sup>

*The Desert A City* showed how the monastic tradition created and maintained a religious community that influenced, even created, its civilization. The production of monastic texts disseminated this religious sub-culture’s teachings throughout ancient civilization while its devotees served as leaders of ecclesial and civil entities.<sup>60</sup> The general focus on the monastic institution’s functions within the church provided fertile ground for further research, particularly in the area of social history. Chitty dispensed the appraisal of the monk as a man driven to isolation by personal neurosis. His holy men fought against the demons of their society, church, and soul with equal vigor.

### Conclusion

This introduction examined the historical representations of the holy man beginning with Gibbon’s scathing critique and concluding with Chitty’s sympathetic narrative. The enduring legacy of *Decline and Fall* created a holy man who epitomized Western culture’s dissent into a millennium of irrationality. Gibbon’s work faced criticism in the centuries following its release, but his scornful portrayal of the monastic legacy remained largely unchallenged. The twentieth century saw the expansion and modernization of his indictment of monasticism. The work of economic and social historians marshaled a variety of quantitative evidence to show that the church and its

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<sup>58</sup> Chitty, xv-xvi.

<sup>59</sup> Chitty, 179.

<sup>60</sup> Chitty, 179-181.



holy men were a drain on an empire already stretched to its limits. The psychoanalysis of Dodds buffered the claim that monks were lonely, unfeeling men so consumed with fighting their own demons that they did nothing to benefit the world beyond their cells. This unsympathetic assessment of the monastic movement became more persuasive when coupled with the notion of a “crisis” in the third century. In this context, monasticism became escapism; the attempt of frightened men to flee a hostile world besieged by plagues, poverty, and barbarians. Amid the backdrop of this age of anxiety, a small group of scholars recast the monk and his world. The confluence of history and biography made it possible to use men as conduits for understanding their times. Henri Marrou’s biography of Augustine was the story of an age and the man who personified it. The bishop from Hippo became a cultural revolutionary using theological rigor to revitalize a Roman culture stifled by the rigidity of its own traditions. Peter Brown’s *Augustine of Hippo* augmented Marrou’s intellectual history with the keen use of sociological theory. This work provided the foundation for Brown’s later explorations of the holy man and his place in Late Antiquity.

In his biography of Augustine Brown proposed a theory of religious authority that provided the basis for his study of the holy man. The first chapter of this thesis explores and critiques his theory to elucidate its importance to the current discourse of monastic movement and its practitioners. Chapter one then explains the limitations of Brown’s holy man and the growing consensus among ancient scholars of the need for new analytical paradigms for studying this figure. Finally, this chapter proposes representations of salvation as found in major works of monastic literature as means for gaining fresh insights into the thoughts, practices, and lives of these holy men.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SALVATION AS AN ANALYTICAL PARADIGM IN LATE ANTIQUE RELIGION

#### Introduction

The fourth through the sixth centuries witnessed the birth of several genres of Christian literature. While all Christian literature drew inspiration from a larger ancient context, some of the most popular forms of literature drew from Greco-Roman biography. This thesis contrasts *The Sayings* with *The Lives* of Constantine and Antony as well as Palladius' *Lausiaca History*. Genre created a framework through which authors conveyed certain themes or extolled ideals of the monastic vocation through narrative accounts of their subjects. The modern historian's aspirations of an objective history were foreign to the ancient biographer who sought to inform and persuade.<sup>61</sup> This study focuses on the use of narrative in Christian biography that created the representation of salvation found in *The Lives* and *Histories*. Christian biographies represented eternal salvation as the culmination of a lifelong program of spiritual progress. The holy man began his journey toward eternity with his entry into monastic life.

The narrative chronicled a story of divine providence and personal effort that signified the protagonist's spiritual development. The holy man vanquished demons, conversed with angels, and saw visions of heaven confirming his success.<sup>62</sup> The ability

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<sup>61</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), xiv.

<sup>62</sup> Cox Miller, 18-19, 23-24, and 36-40.

to structure narratives as progressions culminating with the holy man's impending death distinguished Christian biographies from their pagan predecessors.<sup>63</sup> It also represented salvation in an exclusively eternal context as the reward for the successful completion of their lifelong vocation. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* was a unique form of monastic literature when contrasted with monastic biographies composed during the same period. They originated as oral conversations between the monastic movement's founders and their content represented the "folk-wisdom of the Egyptian peasantry."<sup>64</sup> This monastic corpus articulated a two-dimensional conception of salvation. *The Sayings* affirmed the belief in eternal life as a reward from God, but it also referred to salvation as an existential state. This state of being was characterized by an individual's deliverance from sin and the restoration of productivity in his monastic life.

Both types of salvation discussed in monastic literature depended on the monk's pursuit and attainment of holiness. *Lives* and *Histories* represented their subjects as engaging in the pursuit of holiness through ascetic feats and demonstrated its presence in their lives through the miraculous by performing miracles. While *The Sayings* described the same external manifestations of holiness found in Christian biographies, it also chronicled holiness as an internal entity that the holy man shared with his disciples through the spoken word. Holiness came to monks through their brothers' impartation of spiritual wisdom taken from scripture, other holy men, or personal experience. This chapter places its discussion of holiness and salvation within larger historical discourses concerning the holy man and Late Antique religion. This thesis contrasts the

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<sup>63</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, "Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy," in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 249-250.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: A.D. 150-750* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 100.

representations of salvation in early patristic biography with *The Sayings* to explore how church leaders used narrative to construct ideal forms of Christian perfection as its holy men attempted to embody them.

### Organization

This chapter is an examination of the monk's place within the larger discourse of spiritual authority in Late Antiquity. The first section is a brief summation of Peter Brown's studies of the holy man in Late Antiquity. This section focuses on Brown's assertion that monks use demonstrated holiness to legitimize their authority. After tracking this theme through his foundational investigations of the Christian holy man, section two examines Brown's impact on the discussion of religion in Late Antiquity. Section two shows the dominance of authority as an analytical paradigm in the study of Late Antique religion. These studies yielded profitable insights regarding the power structures undergirding the Late Roman state, church, and society. The increased attention given to religious authority focused on the impact of the monastic movement on ancient civilization but gave insufficient consideration to the intellectual and theological frameworks that made this movement possible. The final section proposes the study of two representations of salvation in foundational works of monastic literature as means to engage a monastic history of ideas. The thoughtful considerations of the core intellectual and theological conceptions of early monasticism will enrich the understanding of this movement's historical significance. The final section concludes by offering explanations of salvation as discussed in monastic texts and working definitions for concepts discussed throughout the thesis.

The earliest appraisals of monasticism cast it as a manifestation of the Roman Empire's descent into irrationality. The modern appraisal of the monk argued that his quest for personal salvation led to a life of voluntary isolation. The ascetic ignored the obligations of his home, family, and society in hopes of gaining eternal salvation. This understanding of monasticism made its practitioners marginal figures with little impact. Monks' self-centered disengagement from their world made them "idle mouths" dependent on church and state subsidies to preserve their institution.<sup>65</sup> The calamities of the third century made specialization in holiness a luxury the Roman Empire could not afford. This "army" of holy men pushed limited resources past the breaking point, particularly on the Western frontier.<sup>66</sup> In addition to its cost, the monastic institution undermined the Greco-Roman commitment to intellectual curiosity. The monk encouraged Romans to look to the sky rather than to themselves for solutions to the challenges confronting their civilization. Alternatives to this characterization of monasticism came from a small group of scholars who offered sympatric portrayals of the monastic movement and its historical impact.<sup>67</sup> Henri Marrou and Derwas Chitty argued that the growth of the monastic institution and the Christian church constituted a cultural revival in an empire stifled by its antiquarian conservatism. Chitty showed that monasticism had a thriving literary tradition and scholarly community. Marrou's biography of Augustine was a prototype for the Christian man of letters who marshaled the intellectual power of the classical tradition in his effort to comprehend the divine.

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<sup>65</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 933. "The huge army of clergy and monks were for the most part, idle mouths living upon offerings, endowments, and state subsidies."

<sup>66</sup> Jones, 933-935.

<sup>67</sup> Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*. See also Derwas Chitty, *The Desert A City* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Press, 1966). Both men were active within the life of the church. Marrou was part of the resurgent "Christian humanist" movement in France, while Chitty served as an Anglican priest.

This effort to make all intellectual endeavors acts of divine contemplation freed Christian culture from the sterility of its classical predecessors.<sup>68</sup>

The publication of Chitty's *The Desert A City* in 1966 came on the cusp of a renewed interest in the field of social history. Scholars mined ancient sources in an effort to understand Romans' daily lives in a variety of social, economic, and geographic contexts.<sup>69</sup> The emphasis on the social history reconsidered the role of the individual in Roman society. The bulk of primary source material came from Roman elites in the governing and mercantile classes. The 60s and 70s witnessed increased efforts to use sources such as law codes, inscriptions, and church rolls to gain insights into the lives of urban laborers, slaves, and farmers.<sup>70</sup> The growth of social history during the second half of the twentieth century provided the impetus for fresh considerations of ancient religion. In his *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* Peter Brown combined Marrou's intellectual study of Augustine as a Christian man of letters with a penetrating use of social history.<sup>71</sup> The discussion of Augustine's *Doctrina de Christina* was an example of Brown's ability to locate the origins of spiritual authority. He pointed out that Augustine's knowledge of classical and pagan traditions supported his contention of their inferiority in relation to Christianity.<sup>72</sup> This study of Augustine provided the core for Brown's larger investigations of spiritual authority, particularly in the context of the Christian holy man.

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<sup>68</sup> Marrou, 144-145. Chitty, 179-181.

<sup>69</sup> The output in this area of study is tremendous and focuses on variety of topics within the general field of social history. A.H.M. Jones' *The Later Roman Empire 284-602* remains one of the most comprehensive in terms of the depth of economic, social, political, and legal documents examined. For a study of class conflicts in Roman society see Ramsey McMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C.-254 A.D.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). See also Millar, *The Roman Empire and Its Neighbors*.

<sup>70</sup> A good general study of segments of the Romans outside societal elites in the context of Roman law is J.A. Crooks, *Law and Life in Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967). For a discussion of the Roman family see 98-113; for laborers, 179-190. See also, P. Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

<sup>71</sup> See the introduction, 17.

<sup>72</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 266.

Augustine's classical knowledge functioned as a kind of social currency by which he asserted Christianity's authority over paganism.<sup>73</sup> Augustine's ability to discredit traditional paganism came from his position within Roman society as a scholar. Brown identified the social currency with which the bishop of Hippo asserted his spiritual authority and that of his religion. The bulk of his work concerning the holy man was a continuation of his effort to chart the location and manifestation of religious authority.

Brown displayed the same acumen in his studies of the holy man and more generally, Late Roman religion. The overarching theme of his *World of Late Antiquity* was that the Late Roman Empire was a civilization in transition and not decline.<sup>74</sup> One element of that transition was what Brown termed the "new mood" in religious thought. This new mood centered on the individual's capacity for a personal connection with the divine.<sup>75</sup> The Christian monastic connected with God through his pursuit and acquisition of holiness.<sup>76</sup> The pursuit of holiness Brown described served as a social currency that gave the holy man the ability to transform his society. A monk's quest for salvation began with a withdrawal to the desert where he "gained freedom and mysterious power."<sup>77</sup> The willingness to leave society did not constitute its abandonment, rather Christian holy men transformed civilization through miraculous signs, acts of intercession, and the razing of pagan temples.<sup>78</sup> Brown refined this analysis in his *The Making of Late Antiquity*. He explained that holiness was a religious entity cultivated

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<sup>73</sup> The functional definition and use of "social currency" varies. This chapter uses it in a general sense as defined in A.I. Katsenelinboigen, "General System Theory Axiology," in *General Systems: Yearbook for The Society for General Systems Research* (1974), 35-36. Katsenelinboigen defines social currency as the ability to enlist the assistance and support of "unknown persons."

<sup>74</sup> Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity 150-750*, 7-9.

<sup>75</sup> Brown, 7-9.

<sup>76</sup> Brown, 96-103.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, 101.

<sup>78</sup> Brown, 101.

within and emanating from the individual.<sup>79</sup> Together these works demonstrate how Peter Brown used the concept of holiness to elucidate the monk's rise and function in the Roman world. He demonstrated that a monk's holiness provided the social currency this figure needed to gain and exercise spiritual authority.

The issue of spiritual authority revitalized the study of Late Antiquity religion. Monks were no longer marginal fanatics who disengaged themselves from society in hopes of eternal life. Monks became charismatic religious leaders whose ability to attain and utilize spiritual authority placed them at the center of their civilization. Examining the origins of holy men's spiritual authority allowed historians to study their impact in Late Antiquity from a new perspective. Monasticism provided a radical expression of Christian piety through its practitioner's demonstration of holiness to the world around them. Brown's discussion of the acquisition and social function of holiness in Late Antiquity provides a point of departure for a study of monastic movement in the context of the intellectual history. Holiness existed as an idea in the minds of Christian ascetics and the larger Roman population. In addition to its ability to legitimate religious authority, monks saw holiness as the substance of spiritual progress. The monastic's efforts to cultivate holiness were part of larger goals to subjugate sinful desires and receive salvation from death. An understanding of how Christian ascetics thought about their vocation in relation to their personal motivations augments existing work regarding monasticism's historical significance by correlating the movement's internal conceptions of holiness and salvation with their external impacts on Roman civilization.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press 1993), 11-13.

<sup>80</sup> Brown himself expresses a desire to study monasticism from a more internal context. See Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," 18-21. Here he expresses the desire to understand the "believer's map of himself."



The portrayal of the holy man as an embodiment of spiritual authority and agent of social change came in response to an older conception of this figure that emphasized his insignificance to ancient civilization. In 1968 Brown published “Approaches to the Religious Crisis of the Third Century A.D.” This was a review of E.R. Dodds’ *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* and W.C.H. Frend’s *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*. The review was the sounding board for an alternative narrative of Christianity’s rise in the Roman Empire, cast against the prevailing conception of an “age of anxiety.” The review explained that the very notion of an age of anxiety was more of a literary trope than an explanation for the changing religious landscape of the late Roman Empire. Brown lauded E.R. Dodds’ application of Freudian psychoanalysis to the study of Late Antiquity religion, but lamented his regression to a crude dualism that presupposed the Christian monk’s hatred of himself and the world.<sup>81</sup> Freudian psychoanalysis offered fresh insights regarding the Christian monk, but failed to explain monasticism’s growth into “one of the most remarkable institutional achievements of the early Medieval period.”<sup>82</sup> Dodds’ use of Freud portrayed monks as men whose “disgust for the material world had been interjected as disgust for their own bodies.”<sup>83</sup> This portrayed the monastic movement as a form of escapism in the midst the political and economic challenges faced by the third-century empire. This caricature of the monastic movement failed to account for the able administrators, diplomats, and preachers it produced. Dodds’ focus on monasticism as a rejection of the material world failed to explain how monks became such an integral part of the world they feared and disdained.

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<sup>81</sup> Brown, “Approaches to the Religious Crisis of the Third Century A.D.,” 545-46.

<sup>82</sup> Brown, 546.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, 546.

Brown's critique provided the foundation for his subsequent reevaluations of religion in Late Antiquity. His assertion that *Pagan and Christian* "deprived" the monastic movement "of its future" expressed his disappointment that its author could not explain the holy man's influence on the course of ancient and medieval history.<sup>84</sup> His critique encouraged an investigation of factors that led to the growth and dominance of the monastic institution in Western Europe and the Byzantine Empire.

In 1971 Brown made his first exploration of the Christian monk's attainment and utilization of religious authority. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity" argued that demonstrated holiness was the monk's source of spiritual authority. The ascetic life transformed its practitioner and gave him miraculous power over evil forces. The monk healed sickness, exorcised demons, and interceded for sinners. These acts legitimized the holy man's authority in civic and religious life. The authority gained through his wonder-working allowed the monk to become the successor to the Roman patron in Egyptian villages.<sup>85</sup> The demonstrated holiness of the Christian ascetic authority made him a central figure in the Roman Empire's spiritual and secular realms.<sup>86</sup> His expressions of holiness through miraculous feats transformed the docile hermit into a "man of power" whose authority reached from his cell to all aspects of village life.<sup>87</sup> "Rise and Function" dealt with the monk's use of holiness to exercise authority as the successor to the village patron in the Roman Empire. In 1983 "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity" focused on the monk's use of authority in the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Brown argued that the Empire's toleration and

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<sup>84</sup> Brown, 546.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity" *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 84-85.

<sup>86</sup> Brown, 85.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, 87.

eventual sponsorship of Christianity did little to change the religious loyalties of its citizenry. The Roman world was one of “center” and “periphery.” Changes in social values occurred mostly in urban centers and diffused slowly to the surrounding countryside.<sup>88</sup> The limitations imposed by the Empire’s vast territory ensured that traditional paganism remained a central form of religious expression in the Roman Empire, even after Christianity gained state sponsorship. The logistical hindrances imposed by pre-industrial life combined with the Roman Empire’s cultural conservatism to ensure that most of its territory constituted “a vast sea of indifference” toward the Christian religion. This incarnation of the monk had the same propensity for wonder-working that made him the successor to the village patron in “Rise and Function.” The “exemplar” was a radical embodiment of his religion’s newfound influence in a “comfortably non-Christian world.”<sup>89</sup>

“The Saint as Exemplar” demonstrated the versatility of religious authority as an analytical paradigm in a variety of temporal and geographic contexts. “Rise and Function” focused on Roman Egypt from the birth of Antoine monasticism to the fifth century. “The Saint as Exemplar” considered the monk’s role in solidifying Christianity’s influence from the conversion of Constantine to the middle Byzantine period. The holy man’s authority served a variety of functions, but its source remained his demonstrated holiness. Peter Brown’s efforts revitalized the study of the Ancient World by allowing historians to consider Late Antiquity as a period of innovation and creativity, particularly in the area of religious life. Brown focused much of his attention

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<sup>88</sup> Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” 9.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, 20.

on the Christian holy man, but he saw this figure as part of a larger religious milieu.<sup>90</sup>

The holy man personified his society's desire for personal engagement with the divine.

The holiness exhibited by Christian monks confirmed their extraordinary relationship to

God, and legitimized their claim to spiritual authority. The conclusion of "The Saint as

Exemplar" expressed its author's desire to discover the "resources [holy men] could hope

to bring to bear in acting as exemplars in a comfortably non-Christian world."<sup>91</sup> His

work dispensed with the notion that monastic life disengaged its practitioners from their

society. Brown's challenge to investigate the "resources" at the Christian ascetic's

disposal sought the source of his holiness and thus his authority. Religious authority

provided an analytical paradigm for the study of Late Antique holy man in pagan and

Christian form.

#### Holiness and Authority in Late Antiquity

Garth Fowden applied Brown's paradigm to a pagan context in his "The

Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society." Both brands of holy men, he argued,

sought self-transformation through ascetic piety. The pagan utilized the writings

of Plotinus and other philosophical texts in his quest for holiness. The

philosophical foundations of late paganism conceived of holiness as spiritual

counsels given from the holy man to his disciples. Christian monasticism focused

on purging the soul of sinful passions and manifested its success through

miracles. The pagan holy man's "milieu was largely determined by his role as a

philosopher." The pagan was less a wonder-worker than a divine sage who

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<sup>90</sup> Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity A.D. 150-750*, 49-60.

<sup>91</sup> Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," 20-21.

expressed his holiness through teaching.<sup>92</sup> The discussion of holiness remained part of the discussion of religious authority. Fowden explained how pagan holy men acquired holiness through their dedication to religious life and demonstrated to others through their teaching.<sup>93</sup> “The Pagan Holy Man” stressed the continuity of Late Antique religious thought. Late Antiquity was an age of religious revolution characterized by humanity’s desire for intimacy with the divine through a life of religious praxis. Success in the religious life transformed its practitioner through his acquisition of what students of both paganism and Christianity termed holiness.<sup>94</sup> Holy men from all religious persuasions distinguished themselves in their capacity to validate their possession of holiness to others. The sage counsels of paganism revealed a connection to the divine similar to that of their Christian counterparts.

### The Body as an Instrument of Holiness

Central to the notion of holiness articulated by Brown was its existence as a spiritual entity located within the individual. Fowden’s analysis concurred with this assessment, but focused on paganism. In his *The Body and Society* Brown shifted the locus of holiness to the human body and its manifestation to the act of sexual

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<sup>92</sup> Garth Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* (1982): 39. This is not to say that the pagan was incapable of manifesting divine power through wonder-working. For Fowden’s discussion of miracles performed by pagan holy men see 51-59.

<sup>93</sup> Fowden, 33-39. See also Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 81-83.

<sup>94</sup> For examples of this tradition see Ramsey MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). For his explanation of wonder-working as divine power see 32-34. The assertion of late paganism’s philosophical foundation in opposition to Christianity’s spiritual one is found on 72: “It is rationalism...that must defend itself and is easily put to rout by Constantine.” See also his *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 22-30 for the impact of demonstrated holiness in conversion. He argued for a relatively minor role of miracle working and cited the conversion of Constantine and Imperial backing as the primary factor in Christianity’s success, 20-21. In opposition to Fowden’s conception of the pagan holy man as philosopher, see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth: Viking Press, 1986), 120-125. For a discussion devoted exclusively to the issue of holiness within the individual see Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 1-45 and Fowden, 80-85.

reunification.<sup>95</sup> Abstinence was a form of demonstrated holiness that distinguished the Christian monk and pagan sage from Romans outside the religious establishment. Brown proposed a continuum of sexual mores within the early church beginning with Pauline Christianity and concluding in the Middle Ages. Paul articulated a fearsome duality in his theology of the body in which the body became a symbol of humanity's fallen state. This was a radical departure from the prevailing sexual ethos of classical Romans who viewed procreation as a form of civic duty necessary to ensure the empire's survival. The Roman Empire prized marriage as a means to ensure the birth of a new generation of men to preserve the state.<sup>96</sup> Christianity's growth and acceptance in the Roman Empire made its adherents quest for non-conformity more difficult. The married Christian lived a life similar to that of his Jewish, and even pagan, neighbors.<sup>97</sup> Virginité "singled a new creation" promised in scripture and separated the committed Christian from his society.<sup>98</sup> Sexual countenance gave its practitioner the possibility to reclaim the original glory lost through humanity's fall. The allure of such an existence led many to forsake Roman society's traditional call to marriage and family.

The argument that the virginal body encapsulated holiness marked a significant turning point in the scholarly discourse on the holy man. The works prior to *Body and Society* analyzed holiness as a quality stored within and emanating from the individual. The miracles of the monk and sage counsels of Fowden's pagan sage realized parcels of holiness throughout Roman society. *Body and Society* argued that virgin flesh was the embodiment of the finished work of the religious life; the recreation of the edenic man.

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<sup>95</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men Women and Sexual Reunification in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), xiv-xx.

<sup>96</sup> Brown, 6-7.

<sup>97</sup> Brown, 60-61.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, 61.

The social implications of the holy body were similar to those of the signs and wonders performed by the Christian ascetic. Virginitly provided another dimension of this figure's spiritual authority by signifying his superiority to married brethren. Abstention from the pleasures and obligations of married life prepared the monastic for a life of uninterrupted communion with God.

The use of the body as an analytical paradigm yielded profitable studies of Late Antique religion, particularly in the area of gender history. This paradigm offered an explanation for the rise and function of the female saint in Late Antiquity. In her analysis of *The Life of Macrina* Susanna Elm wrote of the saint's "virginal body in all its splendid transcendence of gender."<sup>99</sup> The body created a neutered form of spiritual authority accessible to men and women in the midst of the Roman/Byzantine patriarchy. These works demonstrated how Christian virginitly gave women a greater degree of personal agency and religious authority by showing that holiness existed in objects as well as individuals.

The transcendent nature of corporeal holiness allowed for discussions of its impact outside the context of religious authority. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man" argued that holiness validated the religious authority of those who possessed it. Patricia Cox Miller's "Desert Asceticism: The Body from Nowhere" explored desert asceticism as an act of ritualistic performance.<sup>100</sup> In this context, the ascetic modeled the perfection achieved through monastic life to sanctify and

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<sup>99</sup> Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 380.

<sup>100</sup> Patricia Cox Miller, "Desert Asceticism: The Body from Nowhere," *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2.2 (1994): 137-39.

inspire audiences.<sup>101</sup> This recasting of the monastic vocation and the role of asceticism within it drew heavily from Brown's *Body and Society*. She echoed his assertion that the monastic life was a restorative act in which the holy man reclaimed "an original humanity" lost with the fall into sin.<sup>102</sup> In the second half of "Desert Asceticism" Miller explains her contention that the ascetic acts of Christian monks constituted a form of performance art. This section focused on Symeon the Stylite, who in the early fifth century stood alone on a pillar with his arms outstretched in imitation of Christ.<sup>103</sup> This act of perpetual standing rendered Symeon weak from muscle fatigue and left him covered with putrid sores.<sup>104</sup> The intense discomfort of the Stylite led many historians to interpret his actions in the context of suffering. For Miller, however, this was an act of performance that "enable[d] the interpreter to focus on the doing and acting which are creative of meaning in the ascetic context."<sup>105</sup> Christian monks did not "petition audiences" the way other performers did, but their acts drew crowds because of "the capacity to infer wholeness."<sup>106</sup> Symeon's actions provided an image of salvation experienced through Christian asceticism. The audience could "infer wholeness" while viewing the stylite's subjection of sinful passions upon his pillar.

Miller's "Desert Asceticism" was part of a larger effort to reconsider the place of the holy man in Late Antiquity. This involved an exploration of holiness

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<sup>101</sup> Cox Miller, 147-148.

<sup>102</sup> Cox Miller, 141.

<sup>103</sup> Cox Miller, 145-147.

<sup>104</sup> Cox Miller, 146-147.

<sup>105</sup> Cox Miller, 148.

<sup>106</sup> Cox Miller, 148.



outside the context of demonstrated holiness as the source of the holy man's religious authority. In 1998 *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* dedicated an entire issue to Peter Brown's work and its implications. Susanna Elm's introductory essay gave a brief summation of Brown's seminal works concerning the holy man and Late Antique religion. His work chronicled the movement of holiness, "the temple," from the individual to the larger Roman world.<sup>107</sup> She noted the "flexibility" of Brown's holy man, particularly with its augmentation of Foucault's notions of authority and power.<sup>108</sup> Despite his various incarnations of wonder-worker, sage, and ascetic, Elm argued that Brown's holy man "never quite lost his two-dimensional quality."<sup>109</sup> This figure remained locked in a cyclical struggle to acquire and demonstrate holiness as the means of validating his religious authority.

The essays worked collectively, not only to critique Brown's work, but to "create...a new analytical tool: asceticism."<sup>110</sup> Each examined "asceticism as the nexus between authority and the sacred, the body and society."<sup>111</sup> The goal was to move beyond the holy man himself and focus on the complex program of ascetic life by which he became holy. Elm's assertion that each essay focused on "asceticism" failed to capture the full scope of their collective goal. The essays she introduced focused not on asceticism itself but "on the historical, intellectual, social, rhetorical, and theological forces that shaped asceticism."<sup>112</sup> In the

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<sup>107</sup> Elm, "Introduction," *The Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 343-344.

<sup>108</sup> Elm, 345.

<sup>109</sup> Elm, 349.

<sup>110</sup> Elm, 349.

<sup>111</sup> Elm, 350.

<sup>112</sup> Elm, 350.

broadest sense, the essays served as points of departure for a new intellectual history of Late Antique religion. Peter Brown's holy man emerged as a powerful figure at the center of Late Roman society. Elm challenged historians to engage in a new history of ideas to find this power's source.

The new "analytical tool" of asceticism continued Brown's effort to place monasticism within larger discourses of "religious authority" and, in the broadest sense, the social history of Late Antiquity.<sup>113</sup> Elm's introduction and the other articles from the fall 1998 issue of *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* continued to probe the link between holiness and spiritual authority but sought its location outside the individual. The influence of the linguistic turn was apparent in each of these works. They focused much of their attention on how patristic authors used classical literary and rhetorical traditions to project representations of holiness on to their subjects and their readers. The twenty-first century witnessed several variations of the textual model of spiritual authority. Neil McLynn's "Self-Made Holy Man" laid the foundation for the exploration of how the holy man's representations of himself legitimized his authority and justified his transition from ascetic to bishop. Andrea Sterk's *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church* expanded on McLynn's analysis of literature and authority. She explored the ways in which Basil of Caesarea's "mixed-life" as a "monk-bishop" used Christian biography to legitimize his authority.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Elm, 348-350.

<sup>114</sup> Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 101-104. The literary depiction of Basil's emulation of Moses proved his worthiness as a bishop. See also, Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 126-127.

The existence of holiness in people, objects, and texts made this powerful religious entity portable and transferable. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper's *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* examined 850 letters written by two prominent Christian monks, Barsanuphius, and John of Gaza. The letters were responses issued by the holy men to aspiring pilgrims seeking spiritual guidance.<sup>115</sup> The book proposed a “dynamic process of spiritual direction” in which the monk served as his correspondents’ “spiritual director.”<sup>116</sup> The letters holy men sent to their pilgrims constituted a portable form of holiness transferred from the mind of the monk to his written correspondence. The holiness found in the letters of Barsanuphius and John “embraced the model of Christ in gospels, of a teacher who wanted to be followed for his words not his miracles.”<sup>117</sup> The monks’ letters disclosed holiness in the form of practical wisdom rather than demonstrating it through miraculous signs. Correspondence shared between monks and their disciples were results of religious authority as opposed to manifestations of it. They revealed the confidence monks had in their capacity to provide guidance to their readers. The ultimate value of such guidance was its capacity to grant salvation to its reader. Barsanuphius and John often closed their letters with an assurance to the reader that he/she would “be saved” by implementing their advice.<sup>118</sup> These assurances

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<sup>115</sup> Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity and Spiritual Authority in Sixth Century Gaza* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 4-5. Those seeking guidance included farmers, urban dwellers, and bishops.

<sup>116</sup> Hevelone-Harper, 5.

<sup>117</sup> Hevelone-Harper, 88.

<sup>118</sup> Hevelone-Harper, 17.

describe salvation in the same two-dimensional way found in *The Sayings* in that they speak of both deliverance from sin and of eternal life.<sup>119</sup>

Barsanuphius and John composed their letters during the seventh century and their recipients lived outside the monastic community. Their representations of spiritual progress and salvation worked within much older theological conceptions and models of spiritual instruction. Hevelone-Harper's work serves as a point of departure in the discussion of holiness in relation to salvation. Her primary focus was on documenting the movement of holiness from monks into their letters. These letters became vessels of spiritual authority in the hands of the holy men's disciples. The importance of her work in this study is her connection of this holiness to the attainment of existential and eternal salvation.

#### Conceptions of Holiness within Monastic Literature

The resources of patristics and, in the broadest sense, religious studies provide an opportunity for the study of religious ideas in conjunction with their capacity to facilitate social change.<sup>120</sup> The origins of patristic studies isolated this field of study from other scholarly disciplines, including history.<sup>121</sup> The study of Christian theology occurred within the church for the training of its ministers and theologians.<sup>122</sup> The study of historical theology as intellectual history is one to way to understand the rise of the monastic movement and the source of its practitioners' religious authority. Patristic scholarship made tremendous contributions to the study of early monastic texts. Douglas Burton-Christie's, *The*

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<sup>119</sup> Havlone-Harper, 17-19.

<sup>120</sup> Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 159-161.

<sup>121</sup> Clark, 159-161.

<sup>122</sup> Clark, 159-161.

*Word in the Desert* provides a conceptual framework for examining representations of salvation in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.<sup>123</sup> His work explored “how the early desert monks interpreted Scripture and how their approach to interpretation shaped their search for holiness.”<sup>124</sup> Burton-Christie employed Brown’s notion of holiness as a spiritual entity within the individual. His exploration of a desert hermeneutic focused on how monks used scripture to become holy.<sup>125</sup> In contrast to studies of holiness as a means to exercise authority, *The Word in the Desert* considered how individuals obtained it.<sup>126</sup>

*The Word in the Desert* explored a dimension of Christian holiness and of its significance in early church history. The primary manifestation of holiness came through the spiritual counsels monks shared through conversation.<sup>127</sup> Burton-Christie focused his study on the use of Scripture in monastic guidance but his model of spiritual direction also revealed a conception of salvation unique to *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*. He noted that several *Sayings* described one monk asking another for a “word” by which they could be saved.<sup>128</sup> The monk’s hope for salvation through the words of a spiritual guide was an existential one. Monks’ counsels served dual functions of spiritual deliverance and restoration.<sup>129</sup> The “word” of one ascetic to another provided practical instruction through which the hearer conquered various temptations and sins. The oral foundation of *The*

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<sup>123</sup> Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 15-23.

<sup>124</sup> Burton-Christie, 15.

<sup>125</sup> Burton-Christie, 48.

<sup>126</sup> Burton-Christie, 48-49.

<sup>127</sup> Douglas Burton-Christie, “Oral Culture and Biblical Interpretation in Early Egyptian Monasticism,” *Studia Patristica* 30 (1995): 146. See also Burton-Christie, “Practice Makes Perfect: Interpretation of Scripture in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*,” *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989): 213-218.

<sup>128</sup> Burton-Christie, 76-78.

<sup>129</sup> Burton-Christie, 76-80.

*Sayings* created generational chains of spiritual guidance. Monks preserved particular *Sayings* because of their effectiveness in dealing with certain specific challenges faced by aspiring holy men.<sup>130</sup> *The Word in the Desert*'s exploration of hermeneutics in creating a monastic theology of praxis provides an ideal point of departure to explore understandings of salvation in this movement's literary works.<sup>131</sup> Burton-Christie highlighted the capacity of "words" given by the holy man to grant salvation to their recipient through instantaneous liberation from sinful passions. He focused on *Sayings* depicting oral conversations between monks. This analysis uncovered a larger theological and literary theme of existential salvation granted through the implementation of specific counsels or, more broadly, through the hearing of certain words and phrases.<sup>132</sup>

Burton-Christie's observations concerning spiritual guidance in early monasticism have an additional application in comprehending the ways in which Christian ascetics understood salvation. The first *Saying* attributed to St. Antony provides an example of the wider intellectual and theological theme at work in Burton-Christie's work. This *Saying* described Antony being assailed by sinful thoughts that disrupted his communion with God and inhibited his spiritual progress.<sup>133</sup> The sinful thoughts grew progressively worse until Antony cried to God for deliverance from them. The answer to this prayer came when an angel told Antony to leave his cell to observe a "brother's" manner of life. Antony

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<sup>130</sup> *Apophthegmata patrum* Dioscorus 55. Translations from the *Apophthegmata* (hereafter abbreviated as AP) are from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. and ed. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 2. For discussion see Burton-Christie, 78.

<sup>131</sup> Burton-Christie, 81. Often this took the form of spiritual exercises derived from scripture or the love of a neighbor in his/her interactions with others.

<sup>132</sup> Jean-Claude Guy, "Educational Innovation in the Desert Fathers," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974): 25.

<sup>133</sup> AP Antony the Great, 1.

found the brother engaged in a regimen of perpetual rotation between work and prayer. Antony received assurance from the angel that emulating the brother's regimen would quell sinful thoughts and *The Saying's* confined that though his imitation of the regimen Antony was "saved."<sup>134</sup>

Antony's triumph over his sinful thoughts is an example of the utility of Burton-Christie's theology of praxis within a larger context of spiritual instruction and the "desert hermetic." Antony's goal was to rid himself of the evil thoughts that inhibited his spiritual progress. The angelic visitation he received provided a regimen that "saved" him from the evil thoughts and restored his spiritual vitality. This example had several elements discussed by Burton-Christie in his exploration of the desert hermetic. The first was the individuality of the solution to Antony's plight. His celestial vision prescribed a combination of manual labor and prayer almost indistinguishable from the norms of monastic life.<sup>135</sup> The effectiveness of this ascetic program came from its divine inspiration and personalized nature. God occupied the role often occupied by other monks of providing a heaven sent prescription for Antony's spiritual malady. This story also conformed to the pattern of deliverance and restoration identified by Burton-Christie. The elimination of sinful thoughts was the result of Antony's return to a productive monastic life of prayer and labor. This pattern of deliverance and restoration is an essential characteristic of existential salvation as articulated in *The Sayings*. The applicability of this concept extends beyond issues of biblical

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<sup>134</sup> AP Antony the Great, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Burton-Christie, 213-218.

interpretation and spiritual instruction by revealing a unique understanding of salvation in monastic literature.

### Conclusion

This chapter examined the birth and evolution of holiness as a subject of study in Late Antique religion. The first section showed how Peter Brown used the concept of demonstrated holiness to explain the rise and function of the holy man. This figure's claim to religious power came from the holiness he acquired and manifested through monastic life. The second section looked at the evolution of this concept in terms of its capacity to elucidate the nature of religious authority in Late Roman and Byzantine society. The major contributions to this discourse came through scholars' efforts to find holiness in locations other than the individual and track its impact on the power structure of society. The final section argued for the consideration of holiness in terms of its relationship to salvation. This creates the opportunity to study holiness as something disclosed through the spoken word. This can augment our understanding of holiness as something demonstrated through feats of asceticism and miraculous power by balancing the holy man's roles as wonder-worker and spiritual advisor. The study of holiness in relation to salvation links these theological conceptions to the practical concerns facing Late Romans.

The next chapter focuses on early Christian conceptions of salvation in the city of Alexandria. Chapter two does not propose a linear progression from the city of Alexandria to monasteries of the desert. This chapter will examine the prevalence of determinist/predestination conceptions of salvation among many of the city's Christian sects and spiritual leaders. This chapter will show that Clement of Alexandria argued for



a salvation based on free will and individual effort. Chapter two also examines how his integration element of Judaism, Stoicism, and Christianity created a salvation experienced during the believer's mortal life. Clement envisioned a Christian faith in which every thought and action had the potential to preserve or destroy the believer's tenuous grip on existential salvation. This Alexandrian model serves as a case study to examine the larger Hellenistic framework in which early Christianity articulated its conceptions of salvation. The study of Alexandria serves as a well-documented example of the larger religious, philosophical, and literary context from which monastic conceptions of salvation emerged.

## CHAPTER III

### ALEXANDRIA AS A CASE STUDY FOR FOUNDATIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF SALVATION

This chapter uses the Christian community in Alexandria during the second and third centuries as a case study in early Christian understandings of salvation. The first section explores the intellectual and religious context in which Alexandrian Christians formed and articulated their ideas about salvation. Section two focuses on Alexandria's various Christian sects. The second and third centuries were crucial to Christianity's growth in major urban centers within the Roman Empire, and Alexandria's library made it a major intellectual center where teachers relayed the wisdom of sacred texts to eager disciples. Of particular importance to this study is the prominence of predestine and determinist conceptions of salvation among several Christian sects. Section three analyzes the discussion of salvation in the major works of Clement and Origen. This analysis uses as its point of departure the diverse theological atmosphere of the second and third centuries. In this context Clement and Origen framed their conceptions of salvation in response to their rivals. Central to Clement's polemic was his creation of a Christian equivalent to the stoic notion of *apatheia* or "passionlessness." The subjection of the passions marked a Christian's transformation from a simple believer to what Clement termed the "true Gnostic." This figure retained a tenuous grip on the passionless state because he/she faced the constant assault of the passions during his/her interactions with others. Finally, section three explores the intellectual continuity in the

understandings of salvation articulated by Clement and Origen. The relationship between the two theologians remains uncertain among historians but it is clear that their writings were products of similar intellectual and theological milieus. Origen's contributions to ascetic thought and practice were the result of his quest for the same subjection of sinful passions discussed by Clement. The nature and extent of the Alexandrians influence remains a topic of fierce debate among scholars of the early church and the Ancient World.<sup>136</sup> The purpose of this chapter is not to draw a linear progression between the Alexandrians and the later monastic conceptions of salvation. This chapter utilizes Alexandrian Christianity as an introduction to the concepts and debates concerning salvation within the early church.

Late Antiquity witnessed the transformation of deity from an impersonal force to an intimate partner. The pagan pantheon was a collective representation of what Peter Brown called "the god of the philosophers." The Late Roman intellectual conceived of a universe "ruled by one high God who was quite inexpressible and thus above everything."<sup>137</sup> Christianity offered its adherents a personal God with whom "one could be alone."<sup>138</sup> The interpersonal dimension of deity in the Late Roman Empire did not diminish God's role in human history but augmented it with a deep concern for the individual. This preexisting notion of a "high God," combined with the individualism of Late Antique religion, created a world in which God sought intimate contact with humankind and enlisted a select group of its number to reshape history. Alexandria's

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<sup>136</sup> Graham Gould, "The Influence of Origen on Fourth Century Monasticism: Some Further Remarks," in *Origeniana sexta: Origene et Bible 30*, eds. A.G. Dorival and A.A. Le Boulluec (Paris: Leuven, 1995): 591-598.

<sup>137</sup> Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity 150-750*, 50.

<sup>138</sup> Brown, 51-52.

large population and thriving intellectual community placed it at the forefront of Late Antiquity's quest for a personal God.

Late Roman Alexandria functioned as "a Greek island" in the larger "Coptic speaking world of Egypt."<sup>139</sup> Alexander founded the city in 323 B.C. during his conquest of Egypt. The city followed Egypt and fell under the control of various pre-industrial empires. Its location on the banks of the Nile gave it hegemonic status among Egyptian cities.<sup>140</sup> In the Late Roman Empire Alexandria functioned as a major commercial, agricultural, and intellectual center of the Ancient World. The city's diverse population and economic importance made it the benefactor of government patronage. This patronage led to the construction of its Meson, a large research center which also contained the city's Great Library. The various conquests of Egypt caused damage to the library but it remained a major intellectual center until its destruction during the Arab conquests in 642. The city's populace included Greeks, Roman pagans, Jews, and East Asian peoples outside the Imperial orbit.<sup>141</sup> Further encouraging religious innovation was the Roman state's general avoidance of coercion in matters of faith. Alexandria's demographic composition made civil disturbances frequent, but not regular, occurrences. Quarrels between the city's major religious groups punctuated long periods of relative stability. Andrew Harker's *Loyalty and Disobedience in Roman Egypt* concluded that civil hostilities in Alexandria were "no worse" than those in other urban centers.<sup>142</sup> This is not to say that religious conviction was devoid of risk for Alexandrians. In his

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<sup>139</sup> William Harmless, *Desert Christians: The Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>140</sup> Harmless, 6-9. For a basic summary of the role of Alexandria in the Roman world see Heinz Heinen, "Alexandria in Late Antiquity," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1:95-103.

<sup>141</sup> Harmless, 6-9.

<sup>142</sup> Andrew Harker, *Loyalty and Dissidence in Roman Egypt: The Case of the Acta Alexandrinorum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6.

*Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, Timothy Haas noted that after the Jewish revolt of 115-117 pagans “asserted their undisputed hegemony” over the city. This hegemony continued into the fourth century when pagans could still “lynch a bishop with impunity.”<sup>143</sup> The persecution of foreign religions after the Jewish revolt led many Christians to seek martyrdom to obtain eternal life, but the inconsistency of Roman persecutions forced Alexandrian Christians to find alternatives to physical martyrdom.<sup>144</sup>

While Clement took issue with several doctrines espoused by rival Christian leaders, this study focuses on his critique of his competitors’ conceptions of salvation. He believed they argued for a determinist/predestination conception of eternity and spiritual progress. In response, Clement centered his alternative on free will and individual effort.<sup>145</sup> Determinism refers to the belief in divine knowledge or “Gnosis” that existed as a product of nature. For Clement, predestination was the logical and eternal consequence of his rival’s determinist worldview. Since the believer could do nothing to obtain divine knowledge, which existed as an innate quality, he/she had no control over his/her soul’s eternal destiny. Clement situated his conception of salvation

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<sup>143</sup> Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 331-332. More recently see also Harker, 1-5.

<sup>144</sup> A seminal work investigating the use of martyrdom as a means to eternal salvation remains Edward E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as Successor to the Martyr* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 9-20. More recently, see Michael Gaddis, *There is no Crime for Those who Have Christ Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), for a discussion of the Alexandrian contributions to theologies of martyrdom and salvation, 39-40.

<sup>145</sup> The study of various Christian sects and their influence on Clement of Alexandria received great attention during the last half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. See Elaine Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon’s Commentary on John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), 110-115. See also her *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979). For a discussion of Valentinian Gnosticism and the charges of elitism in the context of salvation see 102-105 and 116-118. For studies focused on Gnosticism’s impact on the thought of Clement see Elizabeth A. Clark, *Clement’s Use of Aristotle: The Aristotelian Contribution to Clement of Alexandria’s Refutation of Gnosticism* (New York: The Edward Mellon Press, 1977), 16-27 and 47-53; Brown, *The Body and Society*, 125-130. More recent studies include Denise Kimber-Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 85-89. Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 115-141.

as the antithesis to that of his opponents. He noted that the followers of Valentinus conceived of divine knowledge as “a germ of superior excellence” which an arbitrary God granted to some but withheld from most.<sup>146</sup> Divine knowledge was no academic matter for Clement because it was essential to a believer’s salvation.<sup>147</sup> Clement also disagreed with the followers of Basilaidies who claimed that faith was “natural” to all and that the “free gift of faith is comfortable to the hope of each.”<sup>148</sup> Clement perceived essentially the same error discussed concerning the Valentinians. The natural faith espoused by Basilaidies removed individual choice and effort from the pursuit of salvation. The assertion that faith was something “comfortable to the hope of each” indicated its predetermined quality. As Elizabeth Clark noted in *Clement’s Use of Aristotle*, Clement saw faith as a choice for which an individual received rewards or punishments from God.<sup>149</sup> Clement argued that if faith was the involuntary response of all people no one could obtain salvation through the forgiveness of sin.<sup>150</sup>

#### Clement’s Response: Providence Piety, Progress the Rise of the True Gnostic

Late Antiquity combined elements of religion and philosophy, grounding the search for truth in a contemplation of the divine. Clement of Alexandria wrote not as a preacher, but as a “divine sage” expounding “true philosophy” to aspiring disciples.<sup>151</sup> His second major work, *The Instructor*, explained that life was a process of continuous and progressive training in Christian virtue.<sup>152</sup> Faith in Christ granted eternal salvation

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<sup>146</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Translation of the Fathers down to 325 A.D.*, vol. 2, trans. Dr. W.L. Alexander (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893) 3, 349.

<sup>147</sup> *Stromateis* 2.3, 349.

<sup>148</sup> *Stromateis* 2.3, 349.

<sup>149</sup> Clark, 23.

<sup>150</sup> *Stromateis* 2.3, 349.

<sup>151</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 128-131. For utilization of this model in a pagan context see Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 81-83.

<sup>152</sup> Brown, 128.

and provided the foundation for a life of contemplation that brought sinful passions into total subjection making simple believers into “true Gnostics.”<sup>153</sup> His incremental transition from believer to Gnostic drew much inspiration from the Roman education program of *paideia*. This term referred to the academic training of urban elites, but lessons in literature, grammar, and philosophy were less important than the ethos of self-improvement the program instilled in its students. This educational program of Late Antiquity also functioned as a cultural adhesive, uniting learned Romans from varied backgrounds while molding new generations of Roman gentlemen.<sup>154</sup> Clement was a product of this long-standing educational tradition; his own conversion came from his studies with a Christian teacher in Alexandria.<sup>155</sup> His understanding of Christianity placed it within the larger Roman educational ethic. This provided a way for his upstart religion to compete with more established systems of devotion in the “marketplace of late antiquity.”<sup>156</sup>

The details surrounding the life of Clement of Alexandria are in short supply, but Eusebius does provide a basic sketch of his journey from his native Athens to Alexandria, circa 180 A.D. There is some evidence to suggest that Clement was the son of pagan parents, and even an initiate of the Eleusinian rites.<sup>157</sup> When he arrived in Alexandria

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<sup>153</sup> While Clement uses this term often he provides a working definition in his *Stromateis* 7.1, 523. Here he noted that his [the Gnostic] soul's “continual study and occupation, bestowed on the Deity in ceaseless love.”

<sup>154</sup> Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 52-57. See also M. Bloomer, “Schooling in Personal Imagination and Subordination in Roman Education,” *Classical Antiquity* 16.1 (1997): 59-63.

<sup>155</sup> *Stromateis* 1.1, 301.

<sup>156</sup> Haas, 333-336.

<sup>157</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Translation of the Fathers down to 325 A.D.* 2, 175. The question of Clement's involvement in this cult or any others remains a topic of fierce debate. For the argument supporting Clement's involvement in pagan cults see A. Mehat, “Les orders des d'enseignement chez Clement de Alexadrie et Seneque,” *Studia Patristica* 2 (1957): 351-357. In rebuttal to this position see G.E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusianian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 288-316.

Clement began an eclectic study at the feet of several spiritual and philosophical guides.<sup>158</sup> The explanation Clement provided in his *Stromateis* revealed his belief that comprehension of truth was possible only through engaging and uniting with the divine.<sup>159</sup> Upon his conversion to Christianity, Clement worked to demonstrate the continuity between the philosophical wisdom of the Greeks and the spiritual wisdom of the Hebrews. His spiritual journey was a living polemic against the determinism and predestination he perceived among other Christians. Though he felt personal effort was vital to his discovery of Christian faith, of equal importance was the force of divine providence guiding him to a proper understanding of God. This combination of personal choice and divine providence formed the core of Clement's polemic against rival Christian sects.

#### Clementine Providence: Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian Influences

The Christian who chose worked in tandem with the providence of God. This Christian providence united with individual effort to turn a Christian novice into a true Gnostic. For Clement, the Gnostic represented the highest state of intimacy with, and likeness to, God. His schema rewarded the simple faith of all Christians with eternity, while granting those dedicated to religious life an existential form of salvation. This section examines the themes of providence and personal devotion to religious life in Clement's three theological treatises, *The Exhortation to the Greeks*, *The Instructor*, and his multi-volume *Miscellanies*. Finally, this section examines a portion of Clement's *Who is the Rich Man Who is Being Saved* as an example of how he envisioned his model at work within the Christian church.

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<sup>158</sup> *Stromateis* 1.1, 301. Clement lists some of the teachers under whom he studied, among them a Hellenized rabbi.

<sup>159</sup> Clark, 23-25; Brown, 128-130; Ashwin-Siejkowski, 25-26.



The word providence (*Pronia*) occurred seventy-five times in Clement's theological trilogy, and eighty-four times in the extant corpus of his writings.<sup>160</sup> This term did not convey an external entity; rather it described the character of God's dealings with humanity. Most Romans believed in a monotheistic force which ensured relative peace and stability in the world, but this deity was inaccessible even to the most erudite philosophers. As the intimate conception of God articulated in Brown's "new mood" gained currency, learned men of faith began searching history for signs of God's providential care.<sup>161</sup> Clement envisioned Greco-Roman history as a drama with God as its director. He used historical events as sign posts signaling the incarnation of Christ.<sup>162</sup> Clement did not deny the traditional elements of Greco-Roman providence but charged that philosophers' acknowledgement of its power was lacking. His *Exhortation* included an extensive critique of the philosophers and their errant understanding of God. He identified one group as atheists because their focus on natural elements within creation such as fire, water, and air constituted a form of idolatry in which men "worshiped matter" rather than God.<sup>163</sup> The most significant error in the philosophers' understanding

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<sup>160</sup> Jon D. Ewring, *Clement of Alexandria's Reinterpretation of Divine Providence: The Christianization of the Hellenistic Idea of Pronia* (New York: The Edward Mellon Press, 2008), 139-152. Clement's trilogy refers to his *Exhortation*, *Instructor*, and *Miscellanies* which are this chapter's primary concern. There are other preservations of Clement's thought both as fragmentary sources and quotations of him.

<sup>161</sup> There is a vast historiography concerning notions of deity in Late Rome. For a foundational consideration of this idea and its significance see Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: 150-750* (New York: W.W. Norton), 1971, 4-5 and 49-60. More recently see Averil Cameron, "Remaking the Past" in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Post-Classical World*, eds. G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Graber (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1-21. For a discussion of Christian providence as justification for Imperial political power see H.A. Drake, "The Impact of Constantine on Christianity," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, ed. Noel Lenski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 130-132.

<sup>162</sup> Ashwin-Siejkowski, 89-90. For later examples of similar notions of history in Eusebius see Cameron, 1-5.

<sup>163</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 2.6, 190-191. Clement lists several philosophers and their glorification of various elements such as earth, wind, and water.

of God was their limitation “of the sphere of providence to the orbit of the moon.”<sup>164</sup> By linking providence to the corporal world, Greek intellectuals limited providence to the governance of the natural world as opposed to one that “is clearly manifested all around us” in our daily lives.<sup>165</sup> Christian providence operated in nature, but also shaped the course of human history. In the tenth chapter of the *Exhortation* Clement explained that the providence of God shaped all aspects of life. He juxtaposed the monolithic providence of God with the pluralism of polytheism that deified human events such as war.<sup>166</sup> He explained that every human activity yielded “good results even from evil designs.”<sup>167</sup> The power and omniscience of God was a golden thread linking the grand narrative of human history with Romans’ daily lives.

Clement expanded his notion of divine providence in his largest work, *Miscellanies*. He explained that Greek philosophy could edify its student because of its providential origins. Philosophical knowledge was incomplete without Christian revelation but its ethical teachings and contemplative method made it “a work of divine providence.”<sup>168</sup> Philosophical study also provided insights concerning the nature and person of God.<sup>169</sup> Clement contended that philosophers’ insights concerning the nature of God were the result of Greek culture’s plagiarism of Hebrew wisdom.<sup>170</sup> Clement’s assertion of the antiquity of the Old Testament in relation to Greco-Roman culture was vital to his argument for the former’s divine inspiration.<sup>171</sup> As John Ewing noted, the Hellenistic conception of providence affirmed the general benevolence of God, but saw

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<sup>164</sup> *Protrepticus* 2.6, 191.

<sup>165</sup> Ewing, 154.

<sup>166</sup> *Protrepticus* 2.10, 200.

<sup>167</sup> Ewing, 159.

<sup>168</sup> *Stromateis* 1.1, 303.

<sup>169</sup> *Protrepticus* 2.6, 191.

<sup>170</sup> *Stromateis* 1.15, 315-318.

<sup>171</sup> *Stromateis* 1.21, 324-325.

no ultimate goal in the course of human affairs. Clement drew from a select corpus of Greco-Roman literature to prove that God's providence worked for the good of the individual and humanity as a whole.<sup>172</sup> In addition to its inclusiveness, Clement's notion of providence offered a compelling polemic against determinism. His conception of providence focused on God's use of foreknowledge to ensure a positive outcome in any circumstance. When Clement's rivals argued that persecutions endured by Christians were a form of divine punishment he responded that God used such adversity to convert non-believers and edify the church.<sup>173</sup> He contended that God's omniscience enabled Him to anticipate negative actions and utilize them for humanity's benefit. The providence of God ensured that the totality of human experience led to faith in and salvation through Christ.<sup>174</sup> This did not negate the importance of personal effort in the religious enterprise. Clement saw his own conversion as the completion of an intellectual and spiritual quest for God.<sup>175</sup> In his *Instructor* he spoke as from the exalted position of the "true Gnostic." His concern to avoid excluding less advanced believers from eternity did not prohibit his assertion that God endowed certain individuals with the disposition for a contemplative life.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ewing, 156-159. His work remains the only major study of Clement's use and "Christianization" of the Hellenistic term *Pronia*. For his examination of the literary influence at work in this process see 21-57. Ewing cites the Greek Septuagint, Hellenic Judaism, and Hellenic philosophy as the three major influences for Clement's reformulation of Providence (*Pronia*).

<sup>173</sup> *Stromateis* 4.12, 423-425.

<sup>174</sup> Clement's optimistic view regarding the promise of God brought condemnation from later generations of Christians who felt he advocated a doctrine of universal salvation. C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 147. See also W.E.G. Ford, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 40.

<sup>175</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Translation of the Fathers down to 325 A.D.* 1.1, 209. In addition to the details surrounding his conversion, Clement addresses the readers as "my children," indicating his attainment of a high level of perfection in Christ.

<sup>176</sup> Ronald E. Heine, "The Alexandrians," in *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, eds. Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 118.

Clement's *Exhortation to the Greeks* Christianized a popular form of literature encouraging the reader to study philosophy. Clement found in the philosopher an individual dedicated to the attainment of knowledge and the practice of virtue. His discussion of philosophy exhorted Plato as its best practitioner in light of his affirmation of monotheism. He argued that Plato's acknowledgment of God as the "Father and Maker of this universe" placed him in an exalted position among Greek thinkers.<sup>177</sup> The apologist attributed such insights to a spiritual sensitivity among individuals "occupied with intellectual pursuits."<sup>178</sup> For these insights Clement commended, chastened, and finally implored Plato's ghost, "Well done, Plato! Thou has touched on the truth. But do not flag. Undertake with me the inquiry respecting the good."<sup>179</sup> Clement portrayed Plato's insights as a rare combination of divine providence and personal efforts. The latter's apprehension of monotheism resulted from spiritual acumen afforded to those who dedicated their lives to thought and a glimpse of God's character. The Alexandrian's rhetorical invitation to Plato reflected the former's belief that the God of the philosophers was unknowable, even to the most reverent and brilliant of their ranks.<sup>180</sup> Plato was an example of how the Christian could utilize the philosopher's mode of life to perfect the character of God and obtain personal intimacy with Him.

#### Piety and Progress: The Making of Clement's True Gnostic

In his *Instructor* and *Miscellanies* Clement explored how a Christian became a true Gnostic. This process began with the sacrament of baptism through which the believer received spiritual "illumination" which heightened his/her spiritual and moral

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<sup>177</sup> *Protrepticus* 1.6, 191.

<sup>178</sup> *Protrepticus* 1.6, 191.

<sup>179</sup> *Protrepticus* 1.6, 191.

<sup>180</sup> *Protrepticus* 1.6, 191. Clement quotes the philosopher Plato as saying, "Tell me what I am to conceive God to be who sees all things, and is Himself unseen."

discernment. This act also conferred on the recipient a “release from evils” which provided “the beginning of salvation.”<sup>181</sup> Clement’s theology of baptism served as a rebuttal to Christian sects who argued that salvation was an innate spiritual quality restricted to a select group of individuals. While the eternal significance of baptism was important to Clement, its primary function was to set Christians on the path to becoming true Gnostics. The transition from a simple believer to a true Gnostic did not mark the completion of one’s spiritual journey. The Gnostic’s victory over sinful passions was never permanent, and required constant maintenance.<sup>182</sup> The collections of feelings, desires, thoughts and actions that could disrupt the Gnostic’s perfected state remained even as this individual continued his/her spiritual journey. This understanding of perfection ensured eternal salvation to all who chose faith in Christ while granting existential salvation to a dedicated few who spent their lives subduing sin and seeking God. Clement emphasized personal effort in the gradual improvement of the individual. His endorsements of Greek philosophy reflected his conviction that exposure to good morals and ideas led the Christian closer to his/her goal of becoming a Gnostic.<sup>183</sup> Of equal importance was the subjugation of sinful passions, culminating in the believer’s attainment of “passionlessness” or *apatheia*. While he borrowed his terminology from Stoicism, he saw the state of passionlessness as an existential form of salvation that revealed the believer’s status as a true Gnostic. Clement defined passion as “a perturbation of the soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason.”<sup>184</sup> In general, he saw passions as abhorrent thoughts and actions that impeded the believer’s spiritual

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<sup>181</sup> *Paedagogus* 1.6, 215-216.

<sup>182</sup> *Paedagogus* 1.1-2, 209-210. Clement explains how the words of the sacred instruction and Christ himself as the Logos work as medicine to heal the passions.

<sup>183</sup> *Stromateis* 1.4, 305.

<sup>184</sup> *Stromateis* 2.13, 361.

progress. As Peter Brown noted in his *Body and Society*, passions “are best seen as tendencies built up within the ego, which could force the sage to overact to any situation.”<sup>185</sup> Clement’s discussion of the passions was also part of his polemic for free will. He argued that the Christians could override sinful passions which manifested themselves as wrongful acts, noting that obedience and disobedience were controlled by the individual.<sup>186</sup> Clement objected that “adherents of Basilaidies are in the habit of calling the passions appendages: saying that these are in essence certain spirits attached to the rational soul.”<sup>187</sup> The assertion that the passions were external entities placed them outside of the individual’s control. For Clement, such a conception of the passions negated the free will on which his program of perfection depended.

In his *Instructor* Clement outlined a meticulous code of conduct and deportment for aspiring Gnostics. His consuls covered nearly every aspect of daily life in what Brown termed Clement’s “moral genius.”<sup>188</sup> This moral genius was most apparent in his lengthy discussion of table etiquette. Clement instructed his disciples to avoid slurping their wine, crossing their legs, or even placing their hands upon their chins for fear that such a posture would lead to seduction.<sup>189</sup> Matters such as table manners may seem trivial when juxtaposed with Clement’s overarching goal of salvation, but to him every aspect of life was an opportunity to cultivate the soul and draw it closer to God. Clement’s counsels ran the gambit of social concerns in his day. The dinner table was vital to perfection, but the marriage bed offered Clement his greatest challenge. The intense love shared between married people and powerful feelings experienced during

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<sup>185</sup> Brown, 128-129.

<sup>186</sup> *Stromateis* 2.13, 361.

<sup>187</sup> *Stromateis* 2.20, 371-372.

<sup>188</sup> Brown, 127.

<sup>189</sup> *Paedagogus* 2.7, 252.

loves making could easily destroy the perilous claim to *apatheia*.<sup>190</sup> Though they were not evil, marriage and sex could undermine the passionless state by shifting one's focus from God to his/her spouse. Clement's meticulous ethical program focused on a basic principle he termed "choice and avoidance."<sup>191</sup> His scrupulous admonitions centered on the principle that Christians should attend to the basic needs of human existence such as food, shelter, clothing, and companionship without allowing them to interfere with spiritual formation. His acquiescence to the weakness of flesh sought to ensure that the aspiring Gnostic did not

desist from necessary things, I mean contemplation and from pure sinlessness, forcing him, who has not wholly dedicated himself to God in love, to occupy himself about provisions.<sup>192</sup>

The finished product of this spiritual education functioned within the church as the "Christian sage."<sup>193</sup> Clement saw himself as the embodiment of the sage, helping less advanced believers attain new levels of spiritual progress and instructing them in proper conduct. His *Instructor* focused on giving a practical guide for daily living. In his discussion of the differences between simple and Gnostic faith Clement highlighted the importance of instruction from a wise teacher.<sup>194</sup> Though he failed to explain the precise contours of this position in his theological trilogy, his homily *Who is the Rich Man That Shall be Saved?* offered a glimpse of the sage at work. This description of the sage began as a plea from Clement to wealthy congregants "to set over thyself, some man of God as

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<sup>190</sup> *Paedagogus* 2.10, 262.

<sup>191</sup> *Stromateis* 4.5, 413.

<sup>192</sup> *Stromateis* 4.5, 413.

<sup>193</sup> Brown, 128-131.

<sup>194</sup> Clark, 24.

a trainer and governor.”<sup>195</sup> This man guided the wealthy Christian toward right action and was to “spend many sleepless nights for thee, interceding for thee with God.”<sup>196</sup> The sage embodied the austerity and lucidity of the Christian holy man. This figure waged a constant war against sinful passions so that he could continue his work as a teacher and intercessor.

### The Continuity of Clement and Origen

The final section of this chapter examines the points of continuity in the works of Clement and Origen. The comparison of the two Alexandrians focuses on three areas of continuity relevant to this thesis. The first is Origen’s description of the providence of God in relation to an individual’s spiritual progress. Origen affirmed the role of providence in equipping certain individuals with aptitudes useful in contemplative life, utilizing events of daily life to facilitate spiritual growth. A second correlation between the Alexandrians was their understanding of sinful passions. Both men conceived of passions as self-generated thoughts and actions that were unfavorable to spiritual development. Lastly, the Alexandrians affirmed a demarcation between advanced Christians and simple believers in need of religious instruction. Origen saw himself as an exegetical instructor who interpreted hidden meanings of scripture for believers lacking his level of spiritual acumen. His work as a writer and homilist demonstrated the importance of teaching in his ministry. Origen saw the process of education through the spoken and written word as vital to the process of spiritual formation. While the extant evidence does not confirm a linear progression from the Alexandrians to the desert, the

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<sup>195</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man That Shall be Saved?*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Translation of the Fathers down to 325 A.D.*, vol. 2, trans. William Wilson M.A. (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893), 51.

<sup>196</sup> *Who is the Rich Man That Shall be Saved?* 2.51, 602.



Origenist Controversy of the fifth century revealed the latter's influence on future generations of Christian monks.<sup>197</sup> In a broader sense, both Alexandrians work as apologists, theologians, and polemicists created a framework for the assertion of Orthodox authority regarding a number of doctrinal issues including salvation.<sup>198</sup>

### Details of Origen's Life and Works

Eusebius provided a great deal of information about Origen in his *Church History*.<sup>199</sup> This account discussed all of Origen's life, from early childhood to death. Eusebius asserted that Clement served as Origen's tutor at the Christian school at Alexandria.<sup>200</sup> Despite this claim, Origen did not acknowledge Clement in his surviving works.<sup>201</sup> Origen's prolific literary output makes a complete study of his works impractical for the purposes of this chapter. This analysis centers on his most extensive

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<sup>197</sup> The Origenist Controversy refers to the investigation and later condemnation of some of Origen's works and teachings at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. This subject received a good deal of attention during the last decade of the twentieth century. See Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of An Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). For a more concise summation of this event see Brian E. Daley, "What did 'Origenism' Mean in the Sixth Century?" in *Origeniana Sexta: Origène et la Bible: Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum, Chantilly, 30*, eds. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Bouilleuc (Louvain: University Press, 1995), 627-638. For a consideration of Origen's influence on monasticism see Graham Gould, "The Influence of Origen on Fourth Century Monasticism," 591-598; see especially 597-598 for his contention that Origen's influence was minimal. See Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1990); see especially 11-13, 39-40, and 186-187 for his arguments of Origen's influence on the monastic movement.

<sup>198</sup> For a discussion of the Alexandrians' influence on the formation of Orthodoxy see David Ivan Rakin, *From Clement to Origen: The Social and Historical Context of the Church Fathers* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 126-129. See also Ewing for a discussion of revitalized interest in Clement's writings in the Orthodox Church, 226-233.

<sup>199</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, trans. The Rev. Dr. Arthur Cushman McGiffert (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 6-7.1, 250-293. Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 69-70, argued that Eusebius' study constituted an early form of Christian encomium 70-71.

<sup>200</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.6.1, 253.

<sup>201</sup> For a recent study that strongly opposes a working relationship between the Alexandrians and the existence of an institutional Christian school see Denise Kimber-Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 13. See also David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 219-222. For a recent argument for a close association between the two men see Ewing, 198-202.

theological work, *On First Principles*, his apologetic treatise, *Contra Celsum*, and his commentary on the *Songs of Songs*. *First Principles* provides a solid foundation for Origen's conception of faith and its relationship to salvation. In *Against Celsus* Origen explained his belief that the providence of God worked in and through personal experience. His articulation of providence functioned as a polemic against Celsus, who argued that God took no interest in human affairs.<sup>202</sup> Finally, Origen's commentary on *Song of Songs* expressed his conviction that the combination of providence and piety expressed in the Alexandrian ethos created a church with two levels of Christians. The first group constituted the majority; simple believer's who, through free choice, placed faith in Christ and received eternal salvation. The second group consisted of "perfect" Christians whose dedication to scriptural study and ascetic discipline granted them existential salvation in the form of a passionless existence. The approximate dates and historical circumstances surrounding *First Principles* and the whole of Origen's corpus derive from information in Eusebius' *Church History*. Eusebius noted that Origen began writing biblical commentaries at the behest of his friend and patron Ambrose in 218.<sup>203</sup> Using citations Origen included from his commentaries dates the *First Principles* to circa 219-230.<sup>204</sup> This was work of systematic theology, though much of its content was speculative and eventually deemed heretical.<sup>205</sup> Origen composed his commentary on *Song of Songs* in two parts. He began this work during a visit to Athens circa 240 and

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<sup>202</sup> Origen *Contra Celsum* IV.LXXXIII., in *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 4.83, 249-250.

<sup>203</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.23.1, 271.

<sup>204</sup> The range offered in this thesis is very general since the ambitions of this chapter make exact dates less important. Several scholars propose a more exact time frame of 229-230. See G.W. Butterworth, "Introduction," in *Origen: On First Principles* (Gloucester: Peter Smith Publisher's Inc., 1973), xxviii-xxxii.

<sup>205</sup> Clark, 109, 113.

completed it upon his arrival in Caesarea of Palestine sometime later.<sup>206</sup> The impetus for this treatise was, again, Ambrose who wanted Origen to provide an apologetic to help literate believers repel attacks from learned pagans.<sup>207</sup> Taken together these works provide an understanding of Origen's thought relevant to the discussion of salvation in this thesis, while the dates of their composition provide expressions of the theologian's development throughout his career.

### Providence United with Free will: Origen's Conception of Christian Perfection

Origen articulated his understanding of Christian perfection in an intellectual environment similar to that of Clement. He faced rival teachers who espoused determinist/predestination theology and pagans who saw Christianity's conception of the divine as irrational.<sup>208</sup> He relied on the same ideas of free will and divine providence in constructing his own models of Christian perfection and salvation. The effort to demonstrate the general continuity between these Alexandrian theologians does not discount the differences within their theology.<sup>209</sup> While Clement maintained that philosophy was a work of God, Origen remained silent on the providence of Greek

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<sup>206</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.23.1, 271. The dates offered by Eusebius do not provide a definitive date for the commentary's completion. See R.P. Lawson, Introduction to *Origen Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies* Ancient Christian Writers Series, 26 (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1957), 4-5.

<sup>207</sup> Two recent studies shed light on the apologetic and polemic functions of *First Principles*. See M. Frede, "Origen's Treatise *Against Celsus*," in *Apologetics in the Roman Empire Pagans Jews and Christians*, eds. M.J. Edwards, M. Goodman, and S. Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 131-155. For an examination of Origen's familiarity with Greek philosophical schools see S.P. Bergjan, "Celsus the Epicurean: an Interpretation of an Argument in Origen's *Contra Celsum*," *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001): 179-204.

<sup>208</sup> Origen, *De Principiis*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 4, trans. The Rev. Frederick Crombie P.D. (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887), § 1.8, 308-309. This section provides a refutation of determinist/predestination theology. The *Contra Celsum* offers an example of Origen's defense of Christianity's conception of God's providence as irrational VII LXVIII., trans. Chadwick, 4.83, 249-250.

<sup>209</sup> See Kimber-Buell, 11-15. For an examination of the nuances of their understandings of perfection and salvation see A.N. William, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect of Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71-73 bears special importance in that it describes Origen's increased attention to salvation's eternal dimension.

intellectual history and did not perceive philosophy as training for the soul. His own contribution to the Christian understanding of providence came from his debate with a pagan intellectual who placed his faith in the distant “high god of the philosophers.” Celsus began his critique with several jabs at the Christian’s notion of providence, but the center of his argument was that the very nature of an all-powerful God prohibited its incarnation as a human being.<sup>210</sup> His larger point was that the divine took no interest in minutia human affairs. The semblance of order found in nature was the result of an “irrational providence” that gives no indication of God’s involvement in humans’ daily lives.<sup>211</sup> Celsus noted that even ants working at their nests constituted a kind of society, but these insects showed no signs of seeking God or vice versa.<sup>212</sup> He further argued that God’s intrusion into human history through incarnation was beneath the dignity of divine providence. He conceived of providence as a sustaining entity that oversaw the human and non-human elements of the universe. He noted that “all things have not been made for man any more than for the lion, or the eagle, or the dolphin.” If God doted on one segment of creation it demeaned His providential character.<sup>213</sup> Origen’s response centered on his belief that humanity represented the highest order of earthly beings created in the image of God. He argued that God’s desire to reconcile “the universe to Himself” compelled Him to extend His providence to “the universe as whole, but in addition to that, he takes particular care of every rational being.” God’s omniscience allowed him to use the totality of human experience to reconcile creation to Himself. The

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<sup>210</sup> *Contra Celsum* IV.XIV 4.14, 192-193.

<sup>211</sup> *Contra Celsum* IV.LXXXIII 4.83-84, 249-250.

<sup>212</sup> *Contra Celsum* IV.LXXXIII 4.83-84, 249-250. For a discussion of Celsus’ conception of the divine as a part of his Stoic background see Henry Chadwick, Introduction to *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), ix-xiii. For a more recent discussion of the debate concerning Christian and Hellenistic notions of providence contemporary with Origen and Celsus see Ewing, 75-79.

<sup>213</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.99, 262.

providence of God was so powerful that “even if some part of it [the universe] becomes very bad because the rational being sins, He arranges to purify it and after a long time to bring the whole world back to Himself.”<sup>214</sup> Origen’s conception of a Christian providence mirrored that of Clement’s in its dual concern for the universe as a whole and the lives of individuals. This conception of providence also dealt with the problem of evil by arguing that God’s absolute knowledge enabled Him to incorporate the totality of human experience into the process of redemption.<sup>215</sup>

Origen’s high esteem for the providence of God did not diminish his belief that the individual played a decisive role in his/her salvation. He dealt with this topic specifically in his discussion of free will. The formal discussion of free will in *On First Principles* occurred at the beginning of the third book. Origen’s discussion led him to interpret a series of problematic Biblical texts that indicated humanity lacked freedom of will in the context of salvation. From the Old Testament he examined the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus and argued that the expression “hardened” was a figure of speech describing God’s foreknowledge of Pharaoh’s unwillingness to repent and release his Hebrew slaves.<sup>216</sup> The opportunity for repentance remained for Pharaoh throughout his dealings with Moses, and the “hardening” of his heart was the result of his defiance. The nature of Origen’s polemic reflected Peter Brown’s assertion that “Origen thought of himself, above all as an exegete.”<sup>217</sup> While his arguments had their foundations in philosophical discourse, his citations derived almost exclusively from scripture. His exposition on Exodus centered on Pharaoh’s failure to heed God’s supernatural warnings,

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<sup>214</sup> *Contra Celsum* 4.99, 262.

<sup>215</sup> *Stromateis* 4.13, 423-425. For a discussion of Clement’s dealing with the problem of evil by his appeal to divine providence see Ewing, 160-161.

<sup>216</sup> *De Principiis* 3.1.9, 309.

<sup>217</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 161.

and that the “hardening” of heart did not diminish his capacity as a free moral agent. While his content differed from Clement, who mingled scripture with philosophy, Origen centered his conception of salvation on free choice.<sup>218</sup>

In a manner similar to Clement, Origen argued that the individual who chose faith received both eternal salvation and the spiritual illumination necessary to enter the contemplative life. His exegetical focus led Origen to identify the moment of “illumination” with the Biblical concept of Holy Spirit. While the act of baptism was important to Origen, its function was to confer the Holy Spirit to the believer, but this process could occur through other means. Origen argued that the illumination of soul could occur “by baptism or by the grace of the spirit.”<sup>219</sup> This illumination to the reality of God carried an obligation of spiritual progress through individual effort. Origen cited the parable of talents in which three servants received money to invest from their master to illustrate his point.<sup>220</sup> Just as the servant who buried his master’s talent faced punishment, the Christian who failed to utilize personal freedom for spiritual progress risked forfeiting his salvation. The immediate benefit of this transition was its granting of eternal salvation to the believer, typically at baptism.<sup>221</sup> Just as the Ark preserved Noah and his family, so God “by a like figure” saved new Christians through the flood of baptismal waters.<sup>222</sup> In his examination of death and judgment Origen argued that the level of spiritual progress achieved in life determined one’s status with God after death.

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<sup>218</sup> *De Principiis* 3.1.10, 311.

<sup>219</sup> *De Principiis* 1.10.7, 296.

<sup>220</sup> *De Principiis* 1.10.7, 296.

<sup>221</sup> *De Principiis* 1.5.3, 281.

<sup>222</sup> *De Principiis* 1.5.3, 281.

He recounted various ranks that the faithful received at the end of the world according to the “merits, and to the progress which they had made in the...imitation of God.”<sup>223</sup>

This pronouncement reflected a larger Alexandrian ethos regarding spiritual progress in which God worked in tandem with the individual to produce “higher degrees of perfection” throughout life.<sup>224</sup> Origen’s strict adherence to scripture in constructing his arguments creates a slightly different vocabulary of perfection. Origen articulated the process of perfection in terms of the avoidance and elimination of sin. A.N. Williams’ assertion that Origen “seemed less worried about the passions than Clement” is important to understanding the former’s preference for scripture in argumentation. Origen avoided the use of philosophical terminology when constructing his theology, but he articulated a rhetoric of purification similar to that of Clement.<sup>225</sup> Both men conceived of passions as having their origins within the individual, and their manifestation in thoughts and actions harmful to the process of perfection.<sup>226</sup> Origen equated the passions with “evil thoughts, wicked actions, and sinful desires.”<sup>227</sup> This definition was part of Origen’s discussion of how the Godhead, working through sacred scripture and the Holy Spirit, “consumed” the “vices and passions” within the soul.<sup>228</sup> Those seeking the highest levels of deification needed to avoid worldly commitments that distracted them from the contemplation of God. Though marriage was permissible, its call of devotion left the soul “consumed by the fire of love” and unable to achieve full communion with the divine.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *De Principiis* 2.10.6, 292.

<sup>224</sup> *De Principiis* 1.2.8, 255.

<sup>225</sup> A.N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect of Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 69-70.

<sup>226</sup> Williams, 45. See also Brown, 128-131.

<sup>227</sup> *De Principiis* 1.1.1, 242.

<sup>228</sup> *De Principiis* 1.1.2, 242.

<sup>229</sup> *De Principiis* 2.10.5, 295.

The stringent exegetical standards Origen used when composing his works made him reluctant to utilize a non-Christian vocabulary. Nowhere in *First Principles* did Origen use the term Gnostic to describe advanced Christians. Origen did not name his sage but he affirmed a division between learned and simple believers. He acknowledged the importance of learned men to serve as Biblical exegetes and spiritual advisors for new Christians. In his refutation of predestination theology he noted God's promise to replace His peoples' hard hearts with "hearts of flesh" was analogous to

one who was ignorant and untaught, and who, feeling the disgrace of his ignorance, should, driven either by an exhortation from some person, or incited by a desire to emulate other wise men, hand himself over to one by whom he is assured that he will be carefully trained and completely instructed.<sup>230</sup>

In this example Origen described his basic qualifications for a Christian teacher. The paramount characteristic of the Christian teacher was his advanced understanding in relation to that of his disciple. The student sought guidance because he perceived his "ignorance" and sought instruction. He also affirmed the importance of teachers in his own spiritual growth, noting how his "Hebrew teacher" had explained Christ's prophetic fulfillment of various passages from Isaiah.<sup>231</sup> These examples demonstrate that Origen conceived of a group of teachers within the church who functioned as Biblical interpreters and trainers in Christian virtue. He contrasted those Christians who completed their transformation with the mass of simple believers. A distinguishing characteristic of simple believers was their comprehension of only the literal meanings of scripture. Origen's hermeneutic was the product of a larger Jewish and Hellenistic

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<sup>230</sup> *De Principiis* 3.1.15, 316.

<sup>231</sup> *De Principiis* 4.1.26, 375. Eusebius also confirmed Origen's ability to read and write Hebrew. See *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.16.1, 262.



tradition of allegorical interpretation.<sup>232</sup> As Toshio Mikoda showed in his “Lemonkon in the Soul,” the ability to comprehend higher meanings of scripture signaled the believer’s progress toward perfection.<sup>233</sup> This process proceeded “step-by step” and fitted a Christian to become a teacher instructing others concerning the nuances of God’s word.<sup>234</sup>

Origen’s commentary on *Song of Songs* was the paramount example of his understanding of spiritual progress. The literal understanding of this Old Testament poem corresponded to the lowest level of spiritual development. The spiritual sense of this text was accessible only to the Christian who “ceased to feel the passions of his bodily nature.”<sup>235</sup> The mature Christian could study the *Song of Songs* only when he/she reached the highest level of spiritual knowledge which allowed him/her to understand the hidden meanings of the texts encoded in allegorical language.<sup>236</sup> Origen argued that the three books attributed to Solomon were designed to guide believers at various levels in their spiritual journey. Proverbs was the “first course” in Christian virtue and aided the reader in “amending his behavior and keeping the commandments.”<sup>237</sup> The second course came from Ecclesiastes, where the reader learned “the bitterness of transitory

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<sup>232</sup> Origen’s hermeneutical method was a product of both the Hellenistic and Jewish methods of allegorical interpretation. R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: A Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen’s Interpretation of Scripture* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1959), 1-25. Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neo-Platonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 78-83. For a brief summation of the older Jewish allegorical interpretive tradition of *Song of Songs* see Paul J. Tanner, “The History of Interpretation of the *Song of Songs*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 154 (1997): 23-46, esp. 27.

<sup>233</sup> Toshio Mikoda, “Lemonkon in the Soul” *Origeniana sexta: Origene et Bible* 30, eds. A.G. Dorivial and A.A. LeaBoulluec (Paris: Leuven, 1995), 463.

<sup>234</sup> Mikoda, 459-460.

<sup>235</sup> Origen, *Commentary on The Canticle of Canticles*, in *Origen: The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies* The Ancient Christian Writers Series 26, trans. R.P. Lawson (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1957), Prologue 1, 23.

<sup>236</sup> Mikoda, 460-461.

<sup>237</sup> *Commentary on The Canticle of Canticles* Prologue, 1.3, 45-46.

things” and renounced them.<sup>238</sup> The completion of this second course marked the Christian’s subjugation of sinful passions and made it possible to “contemplate and to desire the things that are not seen, and that are eternal.”<sup>239</sup> Origen’s view contrasted with that of rival Christian sects such as the Valentinians in that it was a student’s personal effort working in tandem with God’s providence that unlocked the higher meanings of Biblical texts. The contemplation of scriptures’ spiritual meanings signaled a Christian’s passage from simple believer to Christian sage.

### Conclusion

The influence of the Alexandrians on the church’s emerging rhetoric of salvation requires an understanding of how their doctrines entered the bloodstream of Roman Christianity. Elizabeth Clark’s *The Origenist Controversy* remains the definitive chronicle of Christianity’s reception of Alexandrian theology. The Origenist controversy centered on two ascetics, Rufinus in the east and Jerome in the west, and their translations of Origen’s theological texts. These men worked during the late fourth century, at a time when the church sought clarification on a number of theological issues. The importance of Clark’s work to this study was its discussion of an interest in Alexandrian theology among ascetics and lettered laity from roughly 300-550.<sup>240</sup> The Fifth Ecumenical Council issued fourteen anathemas against Origen in 553, but even his fiercest critics acknowledged that much of his theology fell within the narrowing spectrum of “Orthodoxy.” Jerome denounced much of Origen’s theology as heretical, but affirmed his understanding of salvation in which a believer’s progress in virtue

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<sup>238</sup> *Commentary on The Canticle of Canticles* Prologue, 1.3, 45-46.

<sup>239</sup> *Commentary on The Canticle of Canticles* Prologue, 1.3, 45-46.

<sup>240</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of An Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15-20.

determined their rank in eternity.<sup>241</sup> As Brian Daily noted in his “What did Origenism Mean in the Sixth Century?” Christians of both the pro and anti-Origen camps often held a wide range of theological views. Labeling someone an Origenist often had little to do with theological specifics and functioned as shorthand for a charge of heresy or a means to impugn a rival’s reputation.<sup>242</sup> The conception of Christian salvation as the culmination of a gradual process of spiritual formation gained acceptance in the Roman world. The increased acceptance and eventual support the church received from Constantinople in the fourth century facilitated a golden age in Christian literature. These works borrowed from Greco-Roman literary forms to chronicle the careers of a growing number of holy men. Monastic *Lives* and *Histories* chronicled the careers of the holy men, often from infancy to death. These stories contained exotic tales of miracles and ascetic feats, concluding with its protagonist’s passage to eternal salvation. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* developed concurrently with these *Lives* and *Histories*. They presented intimate portrayals of desert monks whose authority came from their capacity to instruct fellow believers seeking perfection in Christian virtue. Death brought deep confliction from monks concerning their prospects for eternal salvation, as opposed to the tranquil death scenes in *The Lives*. *The Sayings* manifested salvation’s existential dimension as the capacity to instruct other Christians or intercede on their behalf before God. The efforts to combat the determinism/predestination of the second century led Clement to argue for a systematic process that directed every action toward eternity. *The Lives* and *Histories* narrated the seemingly inevitable successes of holy men in gaining

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<sup>241</sup> Clark, 99-101.

<sup>242</sup> Daley, “What did ‘Origenism’ Mean in the Sixth Century?,” 637-38.

salvation while *The Sayings* gave voice to the perilous nature of a world in which every action had eternal significance.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> The literature on the subject of Christian origins is immense and receives a fuller treatment later in this chapter, but in way of a summation of the foundational works in the study of the early church, Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Earliest Christianity*, trans. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Kroedel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). It was originally published as *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1934). This work marked the first serious challenge to the notion that Christianity began as a uniform religious system. More recent works touching on similar themes include B.A. Pearson, "Earliest Christianity in Egypt, Some Observations," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, eds. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 132-156 and Richard Hanson, "The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honor of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1-5.

## CHAPTER IV

### REPRESENTATIONS OF SALVATION IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN *LIVES*, *THE LAUSIAC HISTORY* AND *THE SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS*

#### Introduction

As Origen lay dying in a Roman prison during the persecution of Decius in 254, the religious revolution in which he participated remained alive and well.<sup>244</sup> The Alexandrian theologians argued for a Christianity of transcendence and transformation. The believer dedicated to austerity, piety, and contemplation obtained victory over the passions. The notion of the passionless state came from Stoicism. The Christian's attainment of the "passionless state" was the result of

a meticulous rhythm of life in which the body's stirrings were minutely assessed in terms of what were legitimate and what were illegitimate expressions of its instinctual needs, would enable the sage to maintain the infinity precious lucidity and serenity of vision.<sup>245</sup>

The Alexandrian Christians of the second century gave voice to a model of spiritual progress in which men could control their passions, but never vanquish them. The careful instructions Clement offered his disciples regarding everything from table etiquette to sexual intercourse worked to quell the passions that hindered their spiritual progress. The careful sifting of each thought and action was a gradual process bringing its practitioner closer to the goal of the *apatheia*.

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<sup>244</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, trans. The Rev. Dr. Arthur Cushman McGiffert (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904) 7.1, 293.

<sup>245</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 129-130.

The Alexandrians used philosophical treatises such as *The Exhortation* to explain their models of and programs for Christian perfection. The third through the fifth centuries witnessed a golden age in the production of Christian literature. Apologists and theologians utilized older forms of Greco-Roman biography to provide human models of holiness. These biographies made their subjects into ideal forms of Christian piety and symbols for the church's triumph over pagan Rome. Constantine's conversion brought security to the church which helped facilitate the production of Christian biography while his *Life* provided a representation of the first Christian Emperor.<sup>246</sup> Applying the insights of structural criticism to early Christian biographies elucidates the ways in which narrative represented different understandings of salvation within the church. The conception of Divine Providence discussed in chapter two figured prominently in Christian biographies. Authors represented God's providence as a powerful force shaping the course of history to protect the holy man and facilitate his spiritual development. The Alexandrian conception of spiritual development postulated a number of stages through which the believer progressed before achieving Christian perfection.

Charles F. Altman's notion of two forms of opposition in hagiographic texts provides the analytical framework in this study. He argued that hagiographic literature such as *Saints' Lives* and *Histories* used gradational and/or diametrical oppositions to structure their narratives.<sup>247</sup> Gradational opposition proposed a universe in which virtues existed on a continuum of good, better, and best. For example, a married couple living as virgins was a good manifestation of virtue, serving as a clergyman was better, but a

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<sup>246</sup> Ward, Foreword to *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, xxiv; Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 1-20. See also Roger S. Bagnell, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 230-260.

<sup>247</sup> Charles F. Altman, "Two Types of Opposition and the Structure of Saints' Lives," in *Medieval Hagiography and Romance*, ed. Paul Clogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 1-2.

solitary monk was best. Christian biographies created models of spiritual progress though their narratives in which the providence of God united with individual effort to create the ideal holy man. In many cases these stories concluded by recounting the believer's death, and used this event to validate his/her life of faith for the reader. The depictions of death in the earliest *Lives* or *Histories* used a range of representation to depict the Christian's passage from mortality to eternity, but in each case this scene is tranquil and conveys the protagonist's assurance of salvation.<sup>248</sup>

This chapter concludes by contrasting the view of salvation presented in the *Lives* and *Histories* with that of *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. *The Sayings* represented a radical departure from the conception of salvation presented in *The Lives* and *Histories*. *The Sayings* articulated salvation both as a state of being and as the reward of eternal life. They also considered the existential element of salvation in terms of subjection of sinful passions discussed in chapter two. Several *Sayings* also expressed anxiety and even terror among holy men at the hour of their death, suggesting that a failure to maintain the passionless state in life left monks conflicted as they approached eternity. This is significant because the conversations that made up *The Sayings* and their transition from oral to written texts coincided with the creation of Christian *Lives* and *Histories*.<sup>249</sup> The existential dimension of salvation found within *The Sayings* combined with its less uniform collection of death narratives provide valuable insights into the desert monk's

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<sup>248</sup> For examples see Eusebius of Caesarea *Vita Constantini*, in *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, 4.61-64, 177-180. See also Athanasius *Vita Antonii*, in *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 92, 97-98.

<sup>249</sup> Douglas Burton-Christie, "Oral Culture and Biblical Interpretation in Early Egyptian Monasticism," *Studia patristica* 30 (1995): 144-46.

quest for salvation. They also suggest that many of them were incapable of realizing the idealized models found in hagiographic texts.

### The Religious Climate of the Fourth Century

Origen's junior contemporary, Plotinus, began writing philosophical texts for the instruction of pagan disciples in the middle of the third century. The pagan philosophers of the third and fourth centuries aspired to an existential transformation resembling that of his Christian rival. The pagan's transformation depended on his progression through a program of intellectual and spiritual formation. The culmination of these efforts created the platonic sage whose victory over the material world and its passions fitted him to instruct others. The passionless state of the sage remained as perilous for Plotinus as it had for Clement. He urged his students to "cut off the body, even the perception of the body, and in this way try to find self-sufficiency in the matter of well-being."<sup>250</sup>

Plotinus' spiritual rhetoric gave the illusion that his goal was total disengagement from the world. The austere instructions to cut off "even the perception of body" must be considered in terms of the overarching existential goal of Neo-Platonism. The pagan sage sought invincibility to the uncertainties of life that distracted him from divine contemplation.

Since the sage could not eradicate existential angst his lifetime of spiritual discipline worked to make him "wholly unaffected" by the passions, desires, and emotions of bodily existence.<sup>251</sup> The checking of passions cleared the way for the pagan sage to become divine. Central to pagan and Christian models of perfection was the

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<sup>250</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, in *Plotinus: Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books Enneads* in The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1, trans. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) 1.4.5, 187.

<sup>251</sup> *Ennead* 1.2.5, 139.



notion that action did need to be evil to inhibit one's spiritual progress. Plotinus noted that familial relationships posed a threat to his aspiring disciples. The strong bonds of friendship and kinship could hinder an individual's dedication by causing anxiety about these individuals' well-being.<sup>252</sup> Despite the difficulties posed by interpersonal relationships, Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* portrayed its hero instructing both married and single disciples.<sup>253</sup> The pagan sage had less concern regarding sexual passion than his Christian counterpart. Plotinus accepted human sexuality as a lesser expression of the soul's desire for union with God.<sup>254</sup> The central concern for the Christian and a pagan seeker alike was that their attachments to earth would disrupt their connection with heaven.

The freedom from early attachments and obligations allowed the seeker to engage in a continuous search for God. The fourth century conceived of holy men as researchers of the divine. For such men, intimacy with the divine was possible only through dedicated study of sacred texts and proper instruction on their interpretation. The Neo-Platonist's collection of philosophical texts created a systematic theology that rivaled Christianity and Judaism. As Garth Fowden notes in his "Varieties of Religious Communities," "Only in the philosophical milieu did the polytheist offer something that resembled the religious communities fostered by scriptural religions."<sup>255</sup> The philosophical texts employed by Neo-Platonists offered an opportunity for the learned Roman to contemplate and engage the divinity under the tutelage of a pagan sage.

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<sup>252</sup> *Ennead* (trans. A.H. Armstrong, 139), 1.2.5.

<sup>253</sup> Porphyry *The Life of Plotinus*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, in *Plotinus: Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books Enneads I.1-9*, vol. 1, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 196), 31), 9.

<sup>254</sup> *Ennead* (trans. A.H. Armstrong, 169), 3.5.1.

<sup>255</sup> Garth Fowden, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society," *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 102 (1982): 33-38.

The novel approach Romans of the third century took to understanding God rested against a much older model of divinity as a distant force in command of history.<sup>256</sup> The Greco-Roman world believed this force worked to its benefit by shifting the course of history so that all roads truly led to Rome. As Christianity's influence grew throughout Late Antiquity its apologists began casting the God of scripture as a universal figure who engineered history to bring Christian faith the Roman Empire.<sup>257</sup> Gaining the allegiance of those outside the church involved marketing Christianity to a generation of Romans eager for a God who was their protector and confidant.

#### Roman Notions of Providence in the Lives of Constantine and Antony

Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* was an important stage in the evolution of Christian literature. While *The Life of Antony* marked the composition of the first "proper" *Saint's Life*, its narrative structure drew much from the work of Eusebius. The familiarity that two authors had with each other makes it probable that Athanasius read Eusebius' works.<sup>258</sup> The relationship between the *Lives* of Antony and Constantine remains a topic of debate because the respective protagonists served had such different roles in an emerging Christian empire. The *Life of Constantine* was an effort to create a "Christian hero... more political than ascetic" who led the Roman Empire to accept the Christian faith while Antony was an ascetic hero who fought the majority of his battles in the spiritual realm.<sup>259</sup> The two authors used different content to present their respective models of piety but each relied on a narrative structure that stressed spiritual progression

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<sup>256</sup> Crown, *The World of Late Antiquity A.D. 150-750*, 49-52.

<sup>257</sup> Averil Cameron, "Remaking the Past," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, eds. G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Graber (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2001), 1-5 and Drake, "The Impact of Constantine on Christianity," 113-115.

<sup>258</sup> Averil Cameron, "Form and Meaning: The Vita Constantini and the Vita Antonii," in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, eds. Tomas Hagg and Philip Rousseau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 73-74.

<sup>259</sup> Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hill, Introduction to *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, 35.

under the guiding hand of Christian providence.<sup>260</sup> This analysis of the *Lives* of Constantine and Antony uses the work of Averil Cameron as its point of departure. She argued that *The Life of Constantine* was the first of an innovative form of Christian biography duplicated in works such as the *Saints' Lives*. Eusebius' portrayal of Constantine was a literary "hybrid" that combined history, biography, and Imperial panegyric.<sup>261</sup> The providence of God used celestial signs to reveal Christianity to Constantine and guided his conquest of the Roman world. This same providence led an obscure Egyptian farmer to relinquish his possessions and engage in a lifetime of spiritual warfare and ascetic contemplation. Both authors concluded their biographies by recounting the serene and self-assured death of their subjects. Though the details of their passing differed, each man was the Christian ideal of his respective vocation, and each received the reward of eternal life.<sup>262</sup> The similarities between the earliest of the Christian *Lives* were the result of their shared apologetic and polemic goals. In the context of this thesis the importance of these two works is their use of genre to articulate a gradational model of spiritual progress guided by providence.<sup>263</sup>

As Patricia Cox Miller noted in her *Biography in Late Antiquity* during the third through fifth centuries, biography functioned "as a half-way house between history and

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<sup>260</sup> For an excellent introductory study of the biographical genre in Greco-Roman history see Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 39-40.

<sup>261</sup> Cameron, 81-82. The generic classification and authorial intent of Constantine's *Life* remain topics of intense debate. For the contention that the work began as a standard history and become biographies in praise of the emperor see T.D Barnes, "Panegyric History and Historiography in *Eusebius' Life of Constantine*," *The Making of Orthodoxy. Essays in Honor of Henry Chadwick*, ed. R. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 104-108. See J. Moreau, "Eusebius von Caesarea," *Reallexikon für und Ch* (Stuttgart (1966): 1073-1075 for the contention that the entire work was an Imperial biography.

<sup>262</sup> Cameron, 81-82.

<sup>263</sup> For the relationship between Eusebius and Athanasius see Cameron, 73-74. On these authors' use of genre to explain methods of spiritual progress see 82-83. See also Cox Miller, 90-101 for a discussion of Eusebius' efforts to articulate ideals of Christian perfection and its impact on Christian discourse.

polemic.”<sup>264</sup> The biographies of Christian holy men did more than present an exemplary life of faith; they also presented models of Christian perfection through their narratives. *The Lives* of Constantine and Antony gave readers examples of Christian perfection in different spheres of the Roman world, but each was the product of the same rhetorical milieu in which the lives of men conveyed the ideals of their movements. Divine providence provided the explanation of Constantine’s conversion. On the eve of battle with his last remaining rival, Maxentius, Eusebius noted that Constantine received divine instruction to mark his soldier’s shields with a cross to symbolize loyalty to Christ.<sup>265</sup> Eusebius’ version of this story emphasized the explicit link between this symbolic act and the outcome of the fight because the vision included the celestial command, ““By this conquer.””<sup>266</sup> The anecdote provides an understanding of Late Antiquity’s conception of deity. H.A. Drake noted “pagans and Christians alike believed in a deity who did intervene and did so with disturbing regularity.”<sup>267</sup> The story of Constantine’s celestial vision spoke to the Roman desire to know that the divine would work for their good regardless of its name.

Drake used Constantine’s conversion as a case study to examine how Christian converts reconciled their civic and religious identities. Constantine’s early attempts to mediate church disputes displayed his commitment to Christian monotheism and a generous conception of orthodoxy. The first crisis of Imperial Christianity was the “Arian Controversy.” Arius was a clergyman who argued that Christ’s status as the son of God subordinated him to God the father. Many church leaders rejected this conception

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<sup>264</sup> Cox Miller, xvi.

<sup>265</sup> *Vita Constantini* 1.28.2, 81.

<sup>266</sup> *Vita Constantini* 1.28.2, 81.

<sup>267</sup> Drake, “The Impact of Constantine on Christianity,” 115.

of the Godhead because it diminished the divinity of Christ.<sup>268</sup> Constantine called on church leaders to resolve the conflict, and keep such “minimal disputes...in the mind, guarded in the hidden recesses of thought.”<sup>269</sup> Drake pointed out that to Constantine “all that was needed was belief in a monotheistic divine providence that guided human affairs; any further stipulations were private matters.”<sup>270</sup> This is not to say that Constantine considered the doctrinal particulars of Christianity unimportant, but his focus was on God’s providential role in shaping human history. Constantine’s conception of divine providence revealed “the important role that deity played in the late Roman version of national security.”<sup>271</sup> His emphasis on the monotheistic and providential elements of the Christian Godhead spoke to the Roman desire for the favor and protection of a theistic deity. Divine providence influenced men and empires with equal consistency. The beginning of Imperial unification was the intensely personal conversion of its future ruler. The *Life of Constantine* made clear the irresistible nature of its protagonist’s rise to power: “God the President of the whole world, of his will [did] elect Constantine...as universal ruler and governor.”<sup>272</sup> Constantine was a man ordained to transform the Roman Empire into the Kingdom of God.

The *Life of Constantine* was the story of conversion first of a man and then of an empire. This two-tiered narrative focused on the political and military exploits of the hero without much discussion of this man’s spiritual journey. As Averill Cameron pointed out in her introduction to her translation of Constantine’s *Life*, “Eusebius

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<sup>268</sup> Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* is firmly anti-Arian. See *Vita Antonii* 69, 82-82.

<sup>269</sup> *Vita Constantini* 2.71.7, 119.

<sup>270</sup> Drake, 124.

<sup>271</sup> Drake, 132.

<sup>272</sup> *Vita Constantini* 1.24, 78-79.

probably did not have “as clear a view of genre as modern critics wish upon him.”<sup>273</sup> T.D. Barnes’ “Panegyric History and Hagiography in Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine*” provides a recent example of efforts to classify Eusebius’ work exclusively as an intermediary stage in the development of hagiography.<sup>274</sup> Barnes attempted to classify each line of the VC as either historical or hagiographic. Squabbling over the precise generic classification of the text or rehashing its intermediary status fails to acknowledge its context within a much larger Hellenistic tradition. Cameron pointed out Eusebius’ acknowledgement of ancient *Lives*, *Histories*, and the Acts of the Apostles as the inspirations for his work.<sup>275</sup> The combination of genres facilitated Eusebius’ presentation of Constantine as a “divine man” chosen by God.<sup>276</sup> The desire to fit his work within a definitive genre places modern expectations on a work of literature that sought an eclectic combination of generic features to meet its apologetic, political, and historical ends.

When Athanasius penned *The Life of Antony* he faced a combination of circumstances similar to that of Eusebius. His narrative constructed the ideal Christian ascetic who battled demons, pagans, and heresy with equal success. The explicit confluence between history and theology in *The Life of Antony* confined itself to the author’s impassioned attack of Arian Christology.<sup>277</sup> There is no doubt that Athanasius used Antony’s *Life* as a vehicle to attack Arian heresy, often placing his favorite arguments on Antony’s lips through monologues, but a theme of equal importance in this work were its representations of Christians and the role of providence in helping

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<sup>273</sup> Averil Cameron, Introduction to *Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, 33.

<sup>274</sup> T.D. Barnes, “Panegyric History and Hagiography in Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine*,” 104-108.

<sup>275</sup> Cameron, 27-33; *Vita Constantini* 1.10.2-10.3, 71-72.

<sup>276</sup> Cameron, 31.

<sup>277</sup> David Bakke, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 1-20.

humanity obtain it.<sup>278</sup> Robert C. Gregg’s preface to his translation of *The Life* called Antony “eminently convertible.”<sup>279</sup> By this he referred to Antony’s Christian upbringing and progression through “elevated ranges of spiritual attainment.”<sup>280</sup> Gregg’s introduction notes that Antony’s first conversion came when he heard his priest’s recitation of Matthew 19:21 to renounce all possessions as a command given him personally by God.<sup>281</sup> While Gregg rightly identified the larger theme of what he termed “ladder like” spirituality, his analysis avoided literary theory and did not discuss the historical impact of Athanasius’ *Life* in relation to Late Antique conceptions of deity.<sup>282</sup> A seminal article in the literary analysis of *Saints’ Lives* is Charles Altman’s, “Two Types of Opposition and the Structure of Saints’ Lives.” Altman classified his two oppositions as diametrical and gradational. Diametrical oppositions consisted of two polar opposites. Christianity’s focus on the avoidance of sin led to the expression of these opposites in moral terms such as vice and virtue.<sup>283</sup> Gradational opposition used the same moral framework for making its judgments but implemented the “ladder like” structure discussed by Gregg.<sup>284</sup> In *Roads to Paradise*, Allison Goddard Elliot explained that *Lives* “present a gradational view of the universe, in which *good* is opposed to *better* or *worse*.”<sup>285</sup> This narrative was ideal to explore models of Christian perfection by using the holy men as case studies in the creation of ideal expressions of holiness.

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<sup>278</sup> For an example of Athanasius’ arguments in *The Life of Antony* see *Vita Antonii*, 68-70, 82-83. For an analysis of their implementation see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 95-97.

<sup>279</sup> Robert C. Gregg, Preface to *Athanasius: The Life of Antony*, xiv.

<sup>280</sup> Gregg, xiv-xv.

<sup>281</sup> Gregg, xv.

<sup>282</sup> Gregg, xv.

<sup>283</sup> Altman, 1.

<sup>284</sup> Altman, 1-2.

<sup>285</sup> Allison Goddard Elliot, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of Early Saints* (Hanover: The New England University Press, 1987), 16-17.

*The Life of Antony*'s place as the first "proper" *Saint's Life* derived from its composition under the first Christian Empire.<sup>286</sup> The acceptance of Christianity by the Roman state shifted the means of perfection and salvation from external struggles against the pagan world to internal battles to transform the soul. Goddard Elliot captured the paramount nature of this struggle noting that the heroes of *Lives* faced "the devil himself and not his public representative and surrogate, the Roman magistrate."<sup>287</sup> Those touched by the hand of providence fled the security of the newly Christian polis to face the Prince of Darkness in the desert. A recurrent theme in monastic literature was the accessibility of the monk's life to all Christians in comparison to the selective call of martyrdom.<sup>288</sup> The "spiritual martyrdom" offered by the monastic life was "open to everyone."<sup>289</sup> Such appraisals fail to account for the providential elements of Late Antique thought, particularly among learned Romans. The conception of "spiritual martyrdom" was potentially accessible to all Christians, but theologians often argued that God's providence elevated a select group of believers to the highest levels of Christian perfection. Salvation from death was the eventual reward for all Christians, but spiritual martyrdom was a vocation fitted only for those endowed by God with proper intellect and temperament. Only the hand of providence could guide the holy man through the process of Christian perfection.

The ideas of monasticism as a spiritual martyrdom and the elite nature of its practitioners in relation to other Christians were prominent themes in *The Life of Antony*. The text referred to the monastic life as a daily martyrdom, drew and cited the same

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<sup>286</sup> Cameron uses the word proper to describe *The Life of Antony* in the development of hagiography, 33.

<sup>287</sup> Goddard-Elliot, 42.

<sup>288</sup> Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr*, 44.

<sup>289</sup> Goddard-Elliot, 43-44.



Biblical themes and passages as proto-monastic such as Clement and Origen.<sup>290</sup> One of the earliest references to monasticism as daily martyrdom was chapter nineteen of *The Life* where Antony delivered instructions to his peers concerning monastic life. He quoted the apostle Paul in the book of Romans, noting that, “for if we so live as people dying daily we commit no sin.”<sup>291</sup> Antony’s hermeneutics seemed to indicate that the monastic life created spiritual infants who began each day with a blank slate regarding their monastic vocation. The fearful tone of this chapter centered on human mortality; since life could end instantly, monks always stood on the threshold of judgment by God.<sup>292</sup> These remarks on daily martyrdom require contextualization within *The Life*’s larger narrative structure. Antony’s discussion of daily death hinged on his belief that “our life is naturally uncertain and providence allots it to us daily.”<sup>293</sup> The importance of daily renewal centered on God’s providential control of all aspects of human life, including its duration. His observations concerning daily death in chapter nineteen reflected a consciousness of human mortality and life’s uncertainty.

Antony gained personal experience of life’s uncertainty during the persecution of the church under the Emperor Maximinus. Eager to become a martyr, Antony ignored the regional governor’s order that no monks appear in the judgment hall where other Christians faced trial and sentencing.<sup>294</sup> Details of this anecdote demonstrate the high esteem of Christian martyrs in the third and fourth centuries. Athanasius revealed that Antony “washed his cloak” the day before his court appearance and “grieved” when the

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<sup>290</sup> Harmless, 65-66.

<sup>291</sup> *Vita Antonii* 19, 45-46.

<sup>292</sup> *Vita Antonii* 19, 45-46.

<sup>293</sup> *Vita Antonii* 20, 46-47.

<sup>294</sup> *Vita Antonii* 46, 65-66.

governor failed to sentence him to death.<sup>295</sup> The most important detail came at the end of the hero's trial when Athanasius explained that "the Lord was keeping him for our profit and that of others, that he should become a teacher to many of the discipline which he had learned from the Scriptures. For many only beholding his manner of life were eager to be imitators."<sup>296</sup> Antony sought death at every phase of his encounter with the Roman officials and blatantly defied the order that no monks appear at trial, but his value to the church ensured his protection. The use of providence within this story facilitated the protagonist's spiritual progression and conformed to the Christian conception of divine providence. God protected Antony so that he could serve the church and continue his progress toward eternal salvation.

The functional duality of God's providence gave it a uniquely Christian character in Antony's encounter with Roman authorities. The Christianization of divine providence centered on demonstrating that God used His foreknowledge to aid the individual and humanity as a whole. Christian apologists often employed their conception of providence as a response to the problem of evil in relation to God's benevolence.<sup>297</sup> In this case, God's providence spared Antony so that he could continue his own spiritual progress and instruct aspiring ascetics. While Antony hoped to obtain eternal life through martyrdom, God created circumstances that preserved the hermit and edified the church as a whole.

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<sup>295</sup> *Vita Antonii* 46, 65-66.

<sup>296</sup> *Vita Antonii* 46, 65-66.

<sup>297</sup> Jon D. Ewing, *Clement of Alexandria's Reinterpretation of Divine Providence: The Christianization of the Hellenistic Idea of Pronia* (New York: The Edward Mellon Press, 2008), 75-79.

Following his failed attempt at martyrdom, Antony returned to his cell determined to live in solitude.<sup>298</sup> God thrust greatness upon His humble monk by sending an assortment of sick and possessed Romans in need of the holy man's care.<sup>299</sup> Deprived of solitude and fearful that his fame as a wonder-worker would destroy his humility, Antony received guidance from a celestial voice, which led him to an oasis on the "inner mountain."<sup>300</sup> His peace suffered periodic disruptions from demons, but God preserved the saint during these encounters.<sup>301</sup> Despite his retreat to the inner mountain, Antony found himself besieged by a steady flow of pilgrims seeking combinations of spiritual counsel and physical healing.<sup>302</sup> This might lead the reader to the conclusion that Antony's move to the inner mountain was a failure, but Antony received confirmation that his push to the deeper desert was a success. This came in the form of two visions given by God following a period of prayer in his cell. First, Antony had an out of body experience in which demons leveled accusations against him in a celestial realm. Angels countered these charges noting that any sins committed before Antony became a monk were "wiped out."<sup>303</sup> A second vision showed Antony human souls ascending toward heaven, but those found wanting were halted in their ascension by the devil.<sup>304</sup> These visions assured the reader of Antony's imminent salvation after his death. This was part of a thematic focus in the *Lives* that represented the protagonist's activities as upward or downward journeys.<sup>305</sup> While several variations of these journeys existed in hagiography, the purposes of this study require only a summation of their broadest

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<sup>298</sup> *Vita Antonii* 47, 66-67.

<sup>299</sup> *Vita Antonii* 48,67.

<sup>300</sup> *Vita Antonii* 48-51, 67-70.

<sup>301</sup> *Vita Antonii* 53-54, 69-72.

<sup>302</sup> *Vita Antonii* 55-60, 72-77.

<sup>303</sup> *Vita Antonii* 65, 78-79.

<sup>304</sup> *Vita Antonii* 66, 79-80.

<sup>305</sup> Goddard-Elliot, 103-104.

contours. The downward journey in hagiographic literature centered on “paradoxical motion.” Paradoxical motion moved the hero further downward, closer to despair, evil, or death, even as “every step on the downward journey brings the saint closer to Paradise.”<sup>306</sup>

The effort of this first section was to draw a connection between the notion of divine providence and gradational opposition in two Christian *Lives* composed during the fourth century. The selection of these texts stemmed from their unique position in the history of Christian literature. Constantine’s *Life* provided valuable insight into the religious climate of the Late Roman World because it told the story of a recent convert attracted to the provincial direction of the Christian God. *The Life of Antony* argued for a gradational view of Christian spirituality, but retained the Late Roman conception of providence. The narrative was a story of Antony’s spiritual progress culminating in the visions he received, and his assurance of salvation at death. The fourth century provided Christians with archetypal figures to confirm their triumph over paganism and create a path to eternity after death. The format of these texts changed little after *The Life of Antony*, retaining the basic elements of the saint’s birth, spiritual progress, encounters with the miraculous, death, and salvation. Andrew Louth noted that the “conventional form and the inclusion of the miraculous” led many historians to disregard most of these sources, mining them only for bits of information concerning Late Antiquity.<sup>307</sup> The repetition of *Lives* makes it unnecessary to examine each manifestation of this genre in Late Antiquity. This chapter focuses on the creation and standardization of themes in hagiography.

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<sup>306</sup> Goddard-Elliot, 104.

<sup>307</sup> Andrew Louth, “Hagiography,” in *The Cambridge History of Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 360-61.

### *The Lausiatic History: Providential Morality*

The notion of “diametrical opposition” creates another foundation for discussing the ways in which monastic authors used preexisting genres to discuss spiritual progress, perfection, and salvation in Christianity. Diametrical opposition juxtaposes polar opposites and uses its narrative to explore the differences between them. Collective biographies provide an example of this type of narrative structure in patristic literature. As opposed to the continuum of virtue found in *Saints’ Lives*, collective biographies use a dualistic framework. In these works, the narrations of holy men often revolve around a single event and usually avoid a formal chronology.<sup>308</sup> A popular form of patristic literature in Late Antiquity was the *History*. This type of monastic literature collected various stories attributed to different holy men and presented them in a single volume. Church leaders composed several monastic histories between the third and fifth centuries, but this study deals exclusively with *The Lausiatic History*.<sup>309</sup> The importance of this monastic history stems from its close ties with the Roman State, which is discussed in greater detail in the paragraph below. While other monastic histories utilized a structure similar to that of *The Lausiatic History* these texts tended to function as devotional literature for other monks and had limited circulation outside of Christian monasteries.<sup>310</sup>

The circumstances surrounding the publication of *The Lausiatic History* in 419 demonstrated the strengthening of ties between church and state in Late Antiquity. The author Palladius wrote this collection of biographies at the behest of the Imperial

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<sup>308</sup> For a recent summary of this literary genre see Patricia Cox Miller, “Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy,” in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 214-220.

<sup>309</sup> In early Christian literature the major works of collective biography are the *Historia Lausiaca* (*Lausiatic History*), *The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (*The History of the Monks of Egypt*), and *Historia Relegiosa* (*The Religious History*) dealing with Syrian monks. See Cox Miller, 214-220.

<sup>310</sup> Ward, Introduction to *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 7-10.

chamberlain, Lausus. The author included a letter to his bureaucratic patron, wishing him “success in your [Lausus’] resolution.”<sup>311</sup> The bishop did not explain the precise nature of this resolution, but the rest of the letter indicated the chamberlain’s desire for spiritual guidance. Palladius described a hierarchy of Christian edification which argued, “The first order of beings have their learning from the most high Trinity, the second learns from the first, the third from the second, and so on down to the least.”<sup>312</sup> Palladius’ remarks pointed to a gradational scale of virtue placing the church’s leaders in charge of the laity. The bishop informed his patron that “Those who think they need no teacher or those who do not believe those who teach them...are afflicted with the disease of ignorance.”<sup>313</sup> He concluded with a comparison between the desert holy men and Christ as part of a warning against the sin of pride.<sup>314</sup> The chamberlain’s desire to study and emulate the lives of holy men was an example of a larger trend identified by Peter Brown in his “Saint as Exemplar.” Brown argued that Christian holy men were manifestations of holiness amid an Empire “of almost total indifference” regarding Christianity.<sup>315</sup> The chamberlain hoped to move beyond a nominal belief in Christ to a deeper Christian faith. Palladius included a prologue to his biographies in which he provided advice and instruction for Lausus. One passage in particular focused on eternal salvation as the goal of Christian life. He warned his reader that “Your mind is by its nature subject to various evil influences...it can be at rest only with aid of continual prayer and concern for its own

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<sup>311</sup> Palladius, *Epistulae ad Lausus*, in *The Lausiaca History* Ancient Christian Writers Series 34, trans. Robert T. Meyer, 34 (New York: Paulist Press, 1964) 1.1, 21.

<sup>312</sup> *Epistulae ad Lausus* 1.1, 21.

<sup>313</sup> *Epistulae ad Lausus* 1.3, 22.

<sup>314</sup> *Epistulae ad Lausus* 1.2-3, 22-23.

<sup>315</sup> Peter Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations* 2 (Spring 1983): 9.

salvation.”<sup>316</sup> The passage had a sense of urgency, warning Lausus to remain focused on his mortality and the hope of its transcendence through Christ. The conclusion of the forward discussed the temperate consumption of food and wine. Despite urging the reader to imitate the examples of holy men, Palladius used the final section of his prologue to encourage his reader to reduce his personal wealth and moderate the consumption of wine. After congratulating Lausus on his efforts at “diminishing” his wealth, he encouraged him to partake of wine in moderation.<sup>317</sup> He contrasted Biblical figures such as Joseph and even Christ, who drank moderately, with “would be philosophers” who abstained.<sup>318</sup>

The drinking of wine served as a case study in Palladius’ larger point that faith was the determining factor in the Christian life.<sup>319</sup> Asceticism could be useful, but practices such as fasting or reunification of all possessions were unnecessary for those outside the desert. The Christian in Roman society needed to exercise a quiet piety in conjunction with material simplicity. Palladius concluded by noting that only Orthodox faith brought salvation. He admonished his disciple to “avoid as much as possible those who can be no help to you...those who deck themselves out in an unseemly fashion, even if they be orthodox but especially...those who are heretical.”<sup>320</sup> The concluding remarks of the prologue reflected the acceptance by late Romans, at least in bureaucratic circles, of an elite class of holy men ordained by providence as Christ-carriers and intercessors.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca*, in *The Lausiaca History* Ancient Christian Writers Series 34, trans. Robert T. Meyer (New York: Paulist Press, 1964), Prologue 1.7, 25.

<sup>317</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* Prologue 1: 9-10, 26.

<sup>318</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* Prologue 1: 9-10, 26.

<sup>319</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* Prologue 1: 13-14, 27-28.

<sup>320</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* Prologue 1:15, 28-29.

<sup>321</sup> Brown, 18-19.

Palladius' counsels concerned matters of moral deportment and proper belief in a Christian empire. His episodic biographies functioned in a similar fashion. While the content told of monks engaged in extreme ascetic feats, their practical value stemmed from their function as what William Harmless called "living morality tales."<sup>322</sup> These stories widened the gap between the holy man and the lay reader by recounting extreme ascetic feats and used the narrative to impart a moral lesson to the reader. In one such story, a monk named Heron began as a rigorous ascetic, deserted monastic life, and returned near the end of his life. Personal conceit led the young monk to defy his superiors, and abandon the monastery. He moved to the city to engage in a riotous secular life and took a mistress, "eating and drinking to excess he fell into the filth of lust."<sup>323</sup> The wayward Heron's tryst left him infected with a venereal disease that destroyed his genitals.<sup>324</sup> This led him "back to a pious resolution" and he rejoined his monastery where he "fell asleep just before going to work."<sup>325</sup> These short narratives marked an important evolution in the production of hagiography because they combined diametrical and gradational conceptions of Christian spirituality. The overarching narrative in the story of Heron was a diametrical oscillation between good and evil in his personal conduct. A fall into sin is absent from *Saints' Lives*, and the protagonist's journey is one of progress toward perfection.<sup>326</sup> The moral of the story instructed the reader against excessive pride. Heron began with a promising career but pride led him to gradually disregard his superiors and, ultimately, to abandon monastic life. *The Lausiaca History* included many ascetics who faced catastrophes in their monastic efforts.

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<sup>322</sup> Harmless, 289.

<sup>323</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* 26.4, 87.

<sup>324</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* 26.4, 87.

<sup>325</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* 26.4, 87.

<sup>326</sup> Gregg, xv. See also Harmless, 90.



Palladius' cautionary tone was central to his work, and linked to the circumstances surrounding its composition. The rank and rigors of the holy man existed for those providentially blessed to handle them. The bishop's introductory letter told Lausus to lead a life of pious moderation, while his narrative indulged in exotic tales of monastic feats and follies. These stories often lacked the chronological organization of *Lives*. Palladius supplied partial biographies for famous monastics such as Evagrius, but in two important cases the narrative's main characters lack proper names. These stories acquired titles from the action in the story chronicling "The Nun who Fell and Repented" and "The Compassionate Monk." These stories sought the impartation of morality to the laity of a Christian empire.<sup>327</sup>

The use of diametrical opposition in these narratives placed intense focus on salvation as life after death. This diametrical opposition relied on a more distant form of providence than that found in *The Life of Antony*. The turning point for Heron came with his contraction of a venereal disease, leading him to return to the monetary. Palladius stopped short of an explicit vindication of this prodigal monk, but the key to understanding his intent was his metaphorical use of the word "sleep" to note Heron's passing. In his translation of *The Lausiaca History* Robert Meyer pointed out that "sleep for die...was a frequent Christian euphemism" and cited Paul's assurance at I Thessalonians 4:14: "those who sleep in Christ, God will bring with him."<sup>328</sup> Heron's return to the monastic life hinged on his illness and conformed to the understanding of providence found in Christian *Lives* in which God directed events for the benefit of the holy man. His story illustrated the morality in an Empire living under Christian

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<sup>327</sup> *Historia Lausiaca*, for example, "The Nun who Fell and Repented" 68, 150-151.

<sup>328</sup> Palladius, 173.

providence. Palladian narratives called the fifth century Christian to a life of civic piety and Orthodox faith.

*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: An Alternative Rhetoric of Providence and Salvation*

*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* comprised an alternative representation of salvation in comparison to *The Lives* and *Histories*. This was a significant development in hagiographic literature, in part because of the departure from stylized Greco-Roman literature for folk wisdom in proverbial form.<sup>329</sup> Divorced from the expectations of a formal narrative *The Sayings* presented a salvation with eternal and existential dimensions. Salvation's existential element often focused on the "passionless state" sought by Clement and Origen. The terminology used overtly Christian terminology by linking the Stoic passions with Christian sins rather than referring only to "the passions" as in Stoicism. The difficulty monks experienced in obtaining salvation in its existential form often translated to uncertainty about death. Holy men who struggled with sinful passions often included a *Saying* recorded "at the hour of their death," expressing their fear of judgment. *The Sayings* linked the existential salvation characterized by the subjection of sinful passions with a monk's assurance of good standing with God and eternal life.<sup>330</sup> This was a stark contrast to the *Lives* and *Histories* which represented salvation as a goal reached at death. This examination of *The Sayings'* representation of salvation has three parts. The first presents a brief historiography concerning this corpus of monastic literature and offers a theoretical paradigm for studying them in their oral and written form. The second elucidates *The Sayings'* conception of existential salvation in terms of its relationship to "the passionless state" discussed in chapter two. Finally, an

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<sup>329</sup> Peter Brown, *Body and Society: Men Women and Sexual Reunification in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 222-224.

<sup>330</sup> AP Arsenius 55, 39-40.

examination of *Sayings* concerning the topics of death and judgment demonstrates the connection between salvation's existential and eternal dimensions.

The desert fathers formed monastic communities in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Arabia between the second and fourth centuries.<sup>331</sup> Providing exact dates for *The Sayings* is impossible because the collection existed "first in oral form and later in written memorials."<sup>332</sup> The corpus referenced people and events that occurred from 330 to about 450.<sup>333</sup> These events occurred mostly in Egypt, but the extant compellation came from Palestine in its completed form in the early fifth century.<sup>334</sup> There are different compellations that emerge during the fifth century. The Greek versions consisted of Alphabetical and Systematic collections.<sup>335</sup> These versions contained similar content, but organized it in different ways. The Systematic Collection organized its material around concepts such as lust or solitude, while the Alphabetical Collection organized *Sayings* by author. There is also a collection of Ethiopian *Sayings*, but this corpus is independent of the Greek collection used in this study.<sup>336</sup> In addition to dating *The Sayings*, important scholarship exists on how and why desert holy men transcribed the words of certain colleagues. A substantial body of work argues that *The Sayings* functioned as a heuristic corpus for both contemporary monks and future generations of Christian ascetics.<sup>337</sup> This may explain why so many *Sayings* take the form of proverbs as an attempt to preserve the

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<sup>331</sup> Ward, xvii.

<sup>332</sup> Ward, xxvii.

<sup>333</sup> Harmless, 250.

<sup>334</sup> Harmless, 250.

<sup>335</sup> Derwas Chitty, *The Desert A City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 67-68. See also Harmless, 250.

<sup>336</sup> Harmless, 249.

<sup>337</sup> Douglas Burton Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 151-154; Brown, 222-224; Columbia Stewart "Radical Honesty About the Self: The Practice of the Desert Fathers," *Sobornost* 12 (1990): 25-26; Jean Claude Guy, "Educational Innovation in the Desert Fathers," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974): 45.

spiritual principle conveyed by a father to a reader outside of its immediate context.<sup>338</sup>

The spoken word held immediate power for desert holy men. In his discussion of a *Saying* of Abba Felix, Jean-Claude Guy noted “the authority of the word depends entirely on the power of the spirit who inspires the one who offers it.”<sup>339</sup> The reception of this word by the hearer depended on the “real faith with which it is asked and received.”<sup>340</sup> This was a dynamic process of spiritual instruction with an intense sense of immediacy for those who sought a father’s counsel. The “word” brought an immediate solution for a pressing spiritual concern. This model of instruction was foundational to the representation of salvation in *The Sayings*. Holy words of spiritual guidance functioned as a key to “unlock a monk’s heart,” freeing him from the grip of sin and restoring him to the state of salvation.

This study examines the Alphabetical Collection of *The Sayings* in an effort to connect the representations of salvation to key figures in the monastic movement. *The Sayings* include the pious musings of monks from diverse locations within the Roman Empire. This study focuses on Egyptian monks because of Coptic foundations of the monastic movement. The analysis moves chronologically beginning with the generation of monks led by Antony the Great in the third and fourth centuries.

#### Existential Salvation as Deliverance and Restoration

The first of Antony’s *Sayings* found his mind under siege, “attacked by many sinful thoughts.” He prayed to God asking what he could do “to be saved.” God sent an angel who showed Antony a regimen of physical work and prayer, noting that “by this

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<sup>338</sup> Graham Gould, “A Note on the *Apophthegmata Patrum*,” 133-138. See also Benedicta Ward, “Traditions of Spiritual Guidance in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*,” *The Way* 24 (1984): 66-70.

<sup>339</sup> Guy, 46.

<sup>340</sup> Guy, 46.

you will be saved.” The text linked Antony’s implementation of this angelic work ethic with his deliverance from the thoughts that threatened his existential salvation.<sup>341</sup> The advice functioned as the “key” to unlocking Antony’s salvation, and provided the individual guidance of the Christian sage. The holy man held a tenuous grip on salvation because sinful passions loomed everywhere, even among the monks of the desert. Antony’s disciple and contemporary, Ammonas, lamented that he spent fourteen years “asking God night and day to grant me victory over anger.”<sup>342</sup> Miraculous events, while not absent from this corpus, play a secondary role to spiritual counsels shared between monks. Ammonas described the uncertain nature of existential salvation in his interpretation of the “narrow way” discussed by Christ in Matthew 7:14. When asked what constituted the “narrow way” he responded that it is “to control your thoughts and strip yourself of your own will.”<sup>343</sup> The conviction that monasticism controlled rather than transcended the passions was central to existential salvation. Evagrius, the founder of a monastic community at Nitria who practiced monasticism a generation after Antony, warned his disciples, “Restrain yourself from affection toward many people...so that your interior peace may not be disturbed.”<sup>344</sup> His disciple, Marcarius of Alexandria, spoke of one man who did not break his concentration of prayer for four months, calling him an “angel on earth.”<sup>345</sup> Abba Abraham, another monk of the Evagrian tradition, warned a brother who claimed to be free of passions that these disruptive forces were

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<sup>341</sup> AP Antony 1, 1-2.

<sup>342</sup> AP Ammonas 3, 26.

<sup>343</sup> AP Ammonas 11, 28.

<sup>344</sup> AP Evagrius 2, 64.

<sup>345</sup> AP Marcarius of Alexandria 3, 152.

“only controlled by the saints.”<sup>346</sup> These examples point to salvation as something obtained in life, and manifested as the subjugation of the passions.

The unique quality of salvation in *The Sayings* stemmed from their origin as oral conversations. The advice a holy man extended to others depended on the challenge faced by the latter. The efforts of the holy man are significant in the context of their larger goal of intimacy with God and personal transformation through the acquisition of the passionless state.<sup>347</sup> The stories in *The Sayings* lacked the formalized conception of salvation presented in *The Lives* and *Histories*. These biographical sources created a standardized journey toward eternity with “signs and wonders” to serve as the mile markers. *The Sayings* presented a salvation obtained and lost through the application of sage counsels tailored to face the challenges of daily life as a monk. The words of the holy man became the keys necessary to free the soul held captive by sinful passions.

#### The Link Between Existential and Eternal Salvation

*The Sayings* emphasized salvation as something obtained and experienced before death. This existential salvation existed in tandem with the more traditional understanding of life after death. The issues of death and judgment constitute some of the most complex material in *The Sayings*. Many fathers saw their own mortality as a powerful motivation to remain dedicated to monastic life. They urged monks to keep the inevitability of death and judgment of soul by God in mind as they perused their vocation.<sup>348</sup> These *Sayings* presented a uniform conception of death and judgment in which the monk’s soul separated from his body, faced divine judgment, and received its

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<sup>346</sup> AP Abraham 1, 33-34.

<sup>347</sup> Ward, Foreword to *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, xxiv.

<sup>348</sup> AP Evagrius 3, 64. See also AP Theophilus 4, 81-82.

due reward or condemnation.<sup>349</sup> Despite a holy man's certainty regarding the details of his death, *The Sayings* offered few indications that his life of piety assured him of a favorable outcome. The desert fathers often expressed sadness, uncertainty, and terror when considering their mortality. The ascetic piety of the monk functioned within the scarcity of the desert. The necessities of food, shelter, and water were often in short supply. The desert also exposed the holy man to animal attacks, extreme weather, and raids by thieves or barbarians.<sup>350</sup> *The Sayings* reflected the fragility of monastic life by encouraging monks to pursue their vocation in light of their own mortality.

The prominent Alexandrian bishop, Theophilus, provided an exposition on death which mirrored that of Evagrius. His example used the imagery of a celestial courtroom to explain the judgment of the soul. The "evil powers" listed the sins charged to the soul during its mortal existence. The "divine powers" acted as the soul's defense attorney with a recount of its good deeds. Theophilus avoided the notion of a scale of deeds with evil on one side and good on the other. He noted only the "the soul judged worthy" would proceed to "joy and ineffable glory." The soul found to have "lived carelessly" spent eternity in "outer darkness, and condemned to everlasting fire...punished through all the ages without end."<sup>351</sup> The Archbishop's conception of death and judgment remained ambiguous as to the nature of demarcation between the saved and condemned, noting only that the latter "lived carelessly." The second half of this *Saying* was an impassioned exhortation to monastic life in light of human mortality. He contrasted the fleeting value of "carnal life" with the eternal value of "good works." Theophilus

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<sup>349</sup> AP Evagrius 3, 64. See also AP Theophilus 4, 81-82.

<sup>350</sup> John Chryssvgis, "The Sacredness of Creation in *The Sayings of Desert Fathers*," *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993): 346-351. See also Ward, Introduction to *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 43-45.

<sup>351</sup> AP Theophilus 4, 81-82.

rejected a conception of judgment in which the soul strived to outweigh its evil through the performance of good deeds. In his quotation of I Corinthians, Theophilus argued that the overarching goal of monastic life was that its practitioner “make every effort to be found blameless and above reproach.”<sup>352</sup>

The recognition that each soul would face the demonic recounts of its failings suggests Theophilus did not regard “blamelessness” as the complete avoidance of sinful acts. The monastic life transformed the individual through his pursuit of “good works.” The importance of good works was their capacity to prepare the soul for judgment. Both *Sayings* pointed to a three-stage progression for the judgment of the soul at death and remained ambiguous concerning the distinction between salvation and condemnation. While he left ample room for individual effort in his exhortations to pursue good works, the bishop left no indication that Christians could know the outcome of divine judgment. A soul could have no assurance during divine judgment “until [its] sentence is pronounced and it gains liberty.” Monasticism focused on transforming the soul through the subjugation of sin and the performance of good works but only the judgment of God at death validated these efforts. Theophilus’ contemporary Evagrius also encouraged monks to focus on their impending death and judgment before God. His conception of death included the same basic elements of the soul’s separation from the body and its appearance before God for judgment. He urged them to consider in vivid detail the contrast between the joys of heaven and the sorrows of hell. The purpose of this intense contemplation was to inspire the monk to “flee wrong and harmful thoughts” and prescribe a combination of moderate food intake and charity to “lead the monk rapidly to

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<sup>352</sup> AP Theophilus 4, 81-82.



the threshold of apatheia.”<sup>353</sup> Evagrius posited a direct link between the existential salvation of the passionless state and eternal salvation at death.

The theoretical discourses provided by Theophilus and Evagrius conform to the monks’ direct experiences with mortality as recorded in *The Sayings*. The only direct reference to physical death in Antony’s collection recorded a vision he received informing him that a young monk committed a great sin. The wayward youth met with his friends and asked them to convince Antony to intercede with God and grant him ten days in which to repent. The story concludes by noting that, “in the space of five days he died.”<sup>354</sup> The narrative’s tragic end came in spite of the monk’s genuine effort to repent. This contrasts with *The Lausiatic History* in which fallen ascetics invariably repent and presumably die in favor with God.<sup>355</sup> The young monk’s failure to retain salvation in its existential (and presumably eternal) forms reveals the difficulty faced by some holy men in abscencing their spiritual progress. Antony’s counsels to his fellow monastics reveal that even the earliest and holiest of the desert fathers struggled to maintain their victory over sin. He noted that a commitment to ascetic rigors was dangerous for the novice and could actually stifle a monk’s progression toward God. In a proverbial *Saying* he noted that those who “afflicted their bodies with asceticism” but “lacked discernment” remained “far from God.”<sup>356</sup> This advice reflected the conviction that the monastic life was at its core a specific individual’s journey toward God and eternity. When an unnamed disciple asked how he could be saved Antony told him to adhere to the “testimony of Scriptures”, “always have God before your eyes”, and to “not easily leave”

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<sup>353</sup> AP Evagrius 4, 64.

<sup>354</sup> AP Antony the Great 14, 4.

<sup>355</sup> AP Antony the Great 14, 4.

<sup>356</sup> AP Antony the Great 8, 3.

his home.<sup>357</sup> Antony viewed these precepts collectedly as programs of religious training in response to the nameless disciple's question. He insisted that the aspiring monk "keep these three precepts" to obtain salvation.<sup>358</sup>

Antony's *Sayings* focused mostly on a monastic theology of praxis, but his corpus demonstrated the ability to discuss the concepts of sin, passions, and *apatheia* undergirding this theology. In his twenty-second *Saying* Antony explained that the body could achieve a state of "natural movement." He explained that this was the desired state for a monk, but was unattainable without "the consent of the soul." The state of natural movement was "without passion" but was capable of disruption through the consumption of alcohol and the "wiles and jealousy of demons."<sup>359</sup> Antony's *Sayings* fused elements of Stoic philosophy with Christian notions of temperance. The natural movement of the body was free from passion and manifested itself in one's self-control. Antony's assertion that demons could arouse the passions differed slightly from earlier Alexandrian discussions of this concept which always represented passions as self-generated. Antony's location of some passions outside the individual did not diminish the importance of free will in the struggle against them. He noted that the third passion "afflicts those who fight" just as the second passion afflicted drunkards. In both cases Antony located the loss of the passionless state to the action of free will.<sup>360</sup>

Two *Sayings* of Arsenius demonstrate the ease with which a monk could forfeit his victory over sin and the anxiety this created at death. Arsenius was a young Roman of senatorial rank who left his position as the Imperial tutor when he heard a celestial

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<sup>357</sup> AP Antony the Great 3, 2.

<sup>358</sup> AP Antony the Great 3, 2.

<sup>359</sup> AP Antony the Great 22, 6.

<sup>360</sup> AP Antony the Great 22, 6.

voice instructing him to “flee from men and you will be saved.”<sup>361</sup> He went secretly to Alexandria in 394 and settled in the monastic community at Scetis.<sup>362</sup> Despite his efforts, Arsenius’ *Sayings* provided little indication that he experienced salvation’s existential dimension. One recorded him pleading with God, “Do not leave me I have done nothing good in your sight, but according to your goodness let me now make a beginning of good.”<sup>363</sup> He warned disciples to avoid unnecessary contact with others in an effort to preserve their own interior pace and followed the practice himself, often turning away visitors, even those desperate for his guidance.<sup>364</sup> Arsenius’ efforts to avoid others stemmed from his desire to acquire and maintain existential salvation. He expressed very specific regrets in the area of human interaction, noting that “I have often repented of having spoken, but never of having remained silent.” The feelings of inadequacy he expressed about his own monastic career reflected the perilous nature of a monk’s victory over sinful passions.

The *Sayings* recording this monk’s death offer conflicting reports of his hope for eternal life. The first quoted his disciple Daniel telling a group of monks that at his death Arsenius sent a message telling his brothers, “Do not make offerings for me, for truly I have made an offering for myself and I shall find it again.”<sup>365</sup> The second narrated Arsenius’ passing while surrounded by other monks. The others discovered the Ababa weeping, and asked him if he was afraid. He responded that, “The fear which is mine at this hour has been mine ever since I became a monk” and died.<sup>366</sup> This demonstrates a

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<sup>361</sup> AP Arsenius 1, 9.

<sup>362</sup> Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 9.

<sup>363</sup> AP Arsenius 3, 9.

<sup>364</sup> AP Arsenius 33, 7-8.

<sup>365</sup> AP Arsenius 39, 18.

<sup>366</sup> AP Arsenius 40, 18.

potential connection between the acquisition of existential and eternal salvation during life and the monks' hope for eternal salvation at death. This example also points to the fleeting nature of salvation in its existential form, and the fear monks encountered when confronted with eternity. The conflicting testimony of Arsenius pointed to both the enormity and nebulosity of the monastic enterprise. Arsenius could reflect on a lifetime of devotion to and contemplation of God. The external quality of this effort was never in doubt. Arsenius was certain that through personal effort he "made himself" a living offering to God. When cast against the backdrop of Christian perfection, the pious monk was unsure if God would find his offering acceptable. The quantity of one's efforts could not provide assurance of salvation. Theophilus' conception of "blamelessness" centered on individual effort, but provided no means to validate one's success or failure in monastic life. His exhortation to virtue followed his assertion that only God could determine if the soul was free from sinful passion and worthy of eternal salvation. Arsenius' contemporary Theophilus considered his friend's fixation on his death a sign of the latter's spiritual maturity. He called Arsenius "blessed because you have always had this hour [that of his death] in mind."<sup>367</sup> In this case, the corpus used an endorsement from another monk to show the reader that Arsenius' fear at death was actually a blessing and mark of his spiritual progress.

Another illustration of connection between existential and eternal salvation comes from the fortieth *Saying* of John the Dwarf. This *Saying* told the story of a young Christian woman who converted her home to a hospice for traveling monks. When a group of men convinced her to abandon her life of charity to become a prostitute, John went to her assistance. He manifested his concern for the woman by weeping over her

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<sup>367</sup> AP Theophilus 5, 82.

sins. Though moved by his efforts, the woman doubted her ability to obtain salvation and asked, "Is it still possible to repent?" With John's assurance she left her home immediately and went into the desert to pray with the holy man. As the two prepared to sleep Jon saw "a shining path reaching from heaven to her."<sup>368</sup> His discovery of the woman's death was accompanied by a celestial voice which informed the monk that, "One single hour of repentance has brought her more than the penitence of many who persevere without showing such fervor of repentance."<sup>369</sup> John received assurance of this woman's salvation through a celestial vision, but its value in terms of this study was its identification of individual "fervor" as a key to success in achieving Christian perfection. Arsenius' invocation to God for a longer life, that he may "make a beginning of good," reveals that personal efforts, even when intensely focused, often left the holy man uncertain of his standing with God. The vindication of a person's efforts to obtain salvation was often the work of external agents such as other monks, but preferably celestial entities.

Cassian's *Sayings* provide rare examples of a holy man expressing assurance of salvation at the hour of his death. In his fifth *Saying* a group of monks surrounded John and asked for "a concise salutatory saying as their inheritance which would enable them to become perfect in Christ." John responded by stating, "I have never done my own will, nor taught anything which I had not previously carried out."<sup>370</sup> Cassian's assurance rested in his ability to reject his own will, and conformed to the larger monastic notion of the negation of self. He made no mention of the Stoic notion of the passions, but his *Saying* did locate his assurance within his capacity to subjugate his own desires and

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<sup>368</sup> AP Jon the Dwarf 93, 40.

<sup>369</sup> AP Jon the Dwarf 93, 40.

<sup>370</sup> AP Cassian 5, 115.

perform those of God. His deathbed pronouncement carried none of the regrets or ambiguity found in that of Arsenius. Cassian expressed his confidence that his engagement with monastic life subdued his own will, and with it sinful passions contrary to that of God.

### Conclusion

The *Lives* of Constantine and Antony along with *The Lausiac History* presented salvation as the reward of eternal life granted after death. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* presented an existential element of salvation in tandem with the notion of eternal life. This conception of existential salvation was a product of the larger religious milieu of the Late Roman Empire, which emphasized the individual's capacity for interaction with the divine. Romans disagreed concerning the objects of their devotion, but acknowledged the need for a lifelong program of spiritual formation. The Roman dedicated to divine contemplation found existential salvation difficult to procure and retain. This tenuous state required vigilance against mortal passions that sought to destroy divine serenity. Victory over the passions transformed men into sages who guided aspiring disciples through the same process of gradational transformation. The Roman world recognized the sage as a unique figure and did not impose his passionless state as a goal for everyone under the Roman theocracy. The monk functioned as the incarnation of the Christian sage guiding the simple and preparing disciples as spiritual leaders. The *Lives* and *Histories* offered a simple formula of orthodoxy and civic virtue for masses of recent converts darkening the church doors. Palladius softened his stories of radical asceticism with a note to his Imperial patron counseling moderation in food, drink, and personal deportment. The narratives utilized a gradational model of spiritual

progress drawn from Roman culture to structure their narratives and promised eternity as the culmination of a faithful life. The monks of *The Sayings* waged mostly internal struggles not against demons, but against sinful thoughts, pride, lust and anger. These internal struggles threatened the cultivation of their souls and their hope of eternal life. The notion that salvation was something individuals could possess provides essential insight into the holy man's prominent role during late antiquity. Antony's quotation from I John was his own affirmation of the monastic life. The monk's efforts extended beyond stockpiling holiness they could disperse through various signs and wonders. They sought the "perfect love" which "drives out fear."<sup>371</sup> The experience of salvation brought the transcendent lucidity of the sage, allowing the monk to become the teacher, administrator, and exemplar so vital to his church. The passionless state was not a "preoccupation with otherworldliness." On the contrary, the detachment it provided allowed the monk to bring the kingdom of God to the Roman Empire.

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<sup>371</sup> AP Antony the Great 32, 8.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS: A SUMMATION AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Peter Brown's conception of holiness provided the point of departure for this thesis. His work revitalized the study of the Ancient World, and allowed historians to reconsider the role of religion within it. Modern appraisals of what became Late Antiquity saw the centuries after Constantine as a period of degradation for the Western mind as humanity retreated to superstition to avoid the responsibility of a rational world. Brown applied a keen understanding of sociological theory to recast Late Antiquity as a period of innovation in the fields of literature, philosophy, and religion. At the center of Brown's history was the notion that holiness was the primary catalyst for social change. In the broadest sense, holiness served as the legitimizing agent of religious authority. This holiness existed in people, objects, texts, spoken words, and various actions performed by religious devotees. In its various forms, holiness functioned as the social currency by which individuals, whether pagan or Christian, displayed their connection to the divine.

Brown described a holiness characterized by action, most often in the form of signs and wonders. His work was most effective when tracking external manifestations of holiness and explaining their impact on the social order of the Ancient World. Brown was conscious of tension within the monastic life's internal and external dimensions. His desire to understand the Christian's "map of the self" was part of a larger effort to probe



the internal motivations and consciousness of the Late Roman seeker. This reconsideration of Late Antiquity was, in large part, a response to the reductionism of enlightenment modernity. The rehabilitation of the monastic legacy, and more broadly, that of Ancient religion, countered a vast body of work that dismissed the holy man as an irrelevant, irrational, and even delusional figure. The sociological focus of Brown's work focused much of its attention on the holy man's function within his society. In the case of the Christian monk, this led to profitable examinations of the public incarnations of the holy man as a "village patron", "Christ-bearer", and "exemplar." This "man of power" seemed the antithesis of Gibbon's "cruel" and "unfeeling" fanatic whose desire for heaven led him to seek hell on earth.

The lack of sophistication in this modern appraisal should not diminish the salience of its focus on salvation. Gibbon's critique was at its core theological. He argued that the monastic movement's intense focus on individual salvation disconnected its adherents from the world around them. While his assessment of the movement's social impacts were truncated, he was right to assert that Christian ascetics pursued their vocation with their own mortality and eternity in mind. Salvation from sin, existential angst, and ultimately death were major motivations for undertaking monastic life. The flaw in this analysis was its reduction of the complex notion of salvation within Christian theology. This paper contributes to a larger theological turn in the study of Ancient Christianity. Elizabeth Clark's *History, Theory, Text* noted that Christian theology marked an important period in the intellectual history of the Ancient World.<sup>372</sup> The hours Christian ascetics spent in their monasteries in prayer, study, and conversation created a consistent body of practical theology. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* provide a

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<sup>372</sup> Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 144.

conduit into the daily lives of Christian ascetics. This corpus of monastic literature contains the spiritual counsels of monastics from a multifarious combination of geographic, social, economic, and political contexts. The wide array of contexts from which these *Sayings* emerged makes their continuity concerning the subject of salvation a fertile topic for additional study. This thesis established *The Sayings*' unique representation of salvation in relation to other prominent works of monastic literature composed during the same period of church history. Despite this study's focus on genre as a unit of analysis, the exact nature of the relationship between literary style and theological content remains unclear. Future studies can elucidate the role of genre in the theologically uniform quality of salvation in *The Sayings*. In addition, I hope to better understand the connection between salvation's eternal and existential dimensions.

Chapter three postulated a tentative link between a loss of existential salvation in life and anxiety among Christian ascetics as they approached death, but additional examples are necessary to solidify that connection. Finally, subsequent studies will examine the ways in which the monastic theology of praxis articulated in *The Sayings* reached beyond the hermit's cells as an agent of social change within Roman and Byzantine society. Antony the Great found in monastic life the "perfect" love of God even as several of his compatriots described a sense of foreboding in their considerations of divine judgment. These inconsistencies came in part from a monastic ethos that viewed every human activity as an exercise in spiritual formation. *The Sayings* spoke to the profound consciousness of the sacred among the desert fathers. For these men even the most mundane of activities had eternal significance.

The work of social historians such as Peter Brown demonstrated monasticism's impact on the Ancient World as men of action whose manifestations of holiness brought Late Romans intimate contact with the divine. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper's study of the correspondences of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza explored modes of spiritual guidance during Late Antiquity. Her study encountered Christians seeking guidance not unlike that of *The Sayings*. The broader significance of her work in relation to this thesis was its study of the diffusion of the monastic theology of praxis throughout Byzantine society. Disciples sought guidance concerning topics ranging from theological belief to legal arbitration.<sup>373</sup> This desire for practical advice reflected the extent to which Christians outside the monastic community internalized its ethos. The letters from Gaza came from a firmly Christian empire, but the foundation formed this tradition of spiritual instruction. Those who sought guidance did so because of their belief that their daily interactions with others had eternal significance. The foundations of this understanding of Christian spiritual progress and salvation came in large part from the Egyptian desert. *The Sayings* chronicle both the development of this practical theology and its rhetorical presentation as a literary genre. Monasticism created a conception of salvation based on the practical implementation of spiritual counsels. This thesis explained the intellectual components of this monastic theology of practice and provided a point of departure for understanding this theology's larger social impact on Late Antique society.

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<sup>373</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 81-99.

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