

Historical development of Consecrated Religious Life in the Catholic Church

Refer to: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consecrated_life_\(Catholic_Church\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consecrated_life_(Catholic_Church))

Each major development in religious life, particularly in the Latin West can be seen as a response of the very devout to a particular crisis in the Church of their day.

The Eremitic (hermit) Life

When Constantine was legalizing Christianity in the Roman Empire in the early 300s, and the Christian faith became the favoured religion, it lost the self-sacrificing character that had profoundly marked it in the age of Roman persecution. In response to the loss of martyrdom for the sake of the Kingdom of God, some of the very devout men and women left the cities for the testings of the life in the desert that was meant to lead the individual back into a more intimate relationship with God, just like the wandering of the Israelites in the Desert of Sin. The Greek word for desert, *eremos*, gave this form of religious living the name *eremitic (or eremitical) life*, and the person leading it the name hermit. St Antony the Great and other early leaders provided guidance to less experienced hermits, and there were soon a large number of Christian hermits, particularly in the desert of Egypt and in parts of Syria.

Though the eremitic life would eventually be overshadowed by the far more numerous vocations to the cenobitic life, it did survive. The Middle Ages saw the emergence of a variant of the hermit, the anchorite; and life in Carthusian and Camaldolese monasteries has an eremitic emphasis. The Greek Orthodox and the Russian Orthodox Churches have their own eremitic traditions, of which Mount Athos is perhaps the most widely heard of today.

In modern times, in the Roman Catholic Church the Code of Canon Law 1983 recognises hermits who - without being members of a religious institute - publicly profess the three evangelical counsels, confirmed by vow or other sacred bond in the hands of their respective diocesan bishop, as Christian faithful that live the consecrated life (cf. canon 603, see also below).

Monastic Orders

The eremitic life was apparently healthy for some, but led to imbalance in others. St Pachomius, a near contemporary of St Antony the Great, recognized that some monks needed the guidance and rhythm of a community (*cenobium*). He is generally credited with founding, in Egypt, the first community of monks, thus launching cenobitic style monasticism.

St Basil in the East in the 300s, and St Benedict in the West in the 500s, authored the most influential "rules" for religious living in their areas of the Christian world ("rule" in this sense refers to a collection of precepts, compiled as guidelines for how to follow the spiritual life). They organized a common life with a daily schedule of prayer, work, spiritual reading and rest.

Almost all monasteries in the Eastern Catholic Churches and in the Orthodox Church today follow the Rule of St Basil. The Rule of St Benedict is followed by a variety of orders of monks in the West, including the Benedictines, Cistercians, Trappists, and Camaldolese, and is an important influence in Carthusian life.

Mendicant Orders

Around the 13th century during the rise of the Medieval towns and cities the Mendicant Orders developed. Whereas the monastic foundations were rural institutions marked by a retreat from secular society, the mendicants were urban foundations organized to engage secular city life and to meet some of its needs such as education and service to the poor. The three primary mendicant orders of the 13th century are the Order of Friars Preachers (the Dominicans), Order of Friars Minor (the Franciscans), and the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (the Carmelites). Unlike the monks and nuns of the earlier Orders, the members of the latter Orders called their houses convents, rather than monasteries (in English, Dominican convents for men may also be called 'pories', and Franciscan convents 'friaries').

Apostolic orders

The next major development in religious institutes occurred in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. The Society of Jesus, was founded with several innovations designed to meet the demands of the 16th century crisis: They were freed from the commitments of common life, especially the common prayer, which allowed them to minister individually in distant places. Their unusually long formation, typically thirteen years, prepared them to represent as individuals the intellectual tradition of the Church even in isolation.

Apostolic congregations

Like the Jesuits, the apostolic congregations were founded to provide specific services or ministries for the Church and society. The period of greatest growth of these communities was in the wake of the French Revolution in early 19th century France and Belgium. These communities were largely founded to build schools, hospitals and new missionary enterprises around the world.

Secular Institutes

Secular Institutes have their modern beginnings in 18th century France. During the French Revolution, the government attempted to dechristianise France. The French government had required all priests and bishops to swear an oath of fidelity to the new order or face dismissal from the Church, and had forbidden any form of religious life. Fr Picot de Cloriviere, a Jesuit, founded a new society of women, the Daughters of the Heart of Mary (French: *Societe des Filles du Coeur de Marie*). While living a life of perfection, they did not take vows, remaining a secular institute to avoid being considered a religious society by the government. They would eventually receive Pontifical Institute Status in 1957. With the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* issued by Pius XII February 2, 1947, Secular Institutes were recognized as Latin: *nova categoria status perfectionis* (a new category of the state of perfection).^[4] Secular Institutes^[5] are a recognized form of Consecrated Life in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. They differ from Religious Institutes in that their members live their lives in the ordinary conditions of the world, either alone, in their families or in fraternal groups. They include, among others, Caritas Christi, The Grail, and the Servite Secular Institute.