Order of Saint Benedict

Excerpted from Thomas Woods' 'How the Monks saved Civilization'.

Eastern monasticism influenced the West in a number of ways: through the travels of **Saint Athanasius**, for example, and the writings of **Saint John Cassian**, a man of the West who possessed a wide knowledge of Eastern practice. Western monasticism however, is most deeply indebted to **Saint Benedict** of Nursia. Saint Benedict established twelve small communities of monks at Subiaco, thirty-eight miles from Rome, before heading fifty miles south to found **Monte Cassino**, the great monastery for which he is remembered. It was here, around 529, that he composed the famous Rule of Saint Benedict, the excellence of which was reflected in its all but universal adoption throughout Western Europe in the centuries that followed.

The moderation of Saint Benedict's Rule, as well as the structure and order it provided, facilitated its spread throughout Europe. Unlike the Irish monasteries, which were known for their extremes of self-denial, Benedictine monasteries took for granted that the monk was to receive adequate food and sleep, even if during penitential seasons his regimen might grow more austere. The Benedictine monk typically lived at a material level comparable to that of a contemporary Italian peasant.

Each Benedictine house was independent of every other, and each had an abbot to oversee its affairs and good order. Monks had previously been free to wander from one place to another, but Saint Benedict envisioned a monastic lifestyle in which each remained attached to his own monastery.

Saint Benedict also negated the worldly status of the prospective monk, whether his life had been one of great wealth or miserable servitude, for all were equal in Christ. The Benedictine abbot "shall make no distinction of persons in the monastery. . . . A freeborn man shall not be preferred to one coming from servitude, unless there be some other and reasonable cause. For whether we are bond or free, we are all one in Christ. God is no respecter of persons."

A monk's purpose in retiring to a monastery was to cultivate a more disciplined spiritual life and, more specifically, to work out his salvation in an environment and under a regimen suitable to that purpose. His role in Western civilization would prove substantial. The monks' intention had not been to perform great tasks for European civilization, yet as time went on, they came to appreciate the task for which the times seemed to have called them.

During a period of great turmoil, the Benedictine tradition endured, and its houses remained oases of order and peace. It has been said of Monte Cassino, the motherhouse of the Benedictines, that after own history reflected that permanence. Sacked by the barbarian Lombards in 589, destroyed by the Saracens in 884, razed by an earthquake in 1349, pillaged by French troops in 1799, and wrecked by the bombs of World War II in 1944—Monte Cassino refused to disappear, as each time her monks returned to rebuild.

A great many of the Benedictines who did great work for the Church and Christian civilization remain anonymous. Thousands of unknown saints converted pagans, cleared the wilderness, introduced new crops, improved agricultural methods, copied ancient texts, built Abbeys, offered prayers, alms, and comforted the sick and desolate, and much more. The following list of Benedictines saints is only a small sample of these great heroes of Christendom.

Prominent Benedictines

EARLY BENEDICTINES

Benedict of Nursia *(d. 547)*
Wrote the <u>Rule of Benedict</u> and founded the monastic movement in Europe. Established monasteries throughout Italy.

Scholastica [nun] *(d. 543)*
Sister of St. Benedict who founded a convent near her brother's Abbey at Monte Cassino.

Maurus and Placid *(d. 584)*
Disciples of St. Benedict who lived at **Monte Cassino**, and continued Benedicts work founding monasteries in Italy.

Gregory the Great *(d. 604)*
First pope from a monastic background. Instituted many reforms, and became a doctor of the church.

FRANKISH MONKS - CAROLINGIAN RENAISSANCE

Bertin the Great *(d. 709)*
Disciple of the Celtic missionary **Columbanus**, who founded a monastery in Western Frankish territory to convert heathens.

Paul the Deacon *(d. 799)*
Historian of the Lombards, and monk of **Monte Cassino** who served as a scholar in the Carolingian Renaissance.

Alcuin of York *(d. 804)*
Scholar, teacher, abbot, and bishop. Recruited by Charlemagne to lead the Carolingian Renaissance. Founded Schools and Abbeys in France, ended career as Abbot of Tours.

Benedict of Aniane *(d. 821)*
Monastic reformer of the age of Charlemagne, who contributed greatly to the Carolingian Renaissance.

Rabanus Maurus *(d. 856)*
Carolingian era monk who was the author of an Encyclopedia <u>On the Nature of Things</u>.

Paschasius Radbertus *(d. 865)*
Important Carolingian era theologian and Abbot of the **Monastery of Corbie** in Picardy.

Ansgar *(d. 865)*
Monk from the **Abbey of Corvey** who became a missionary to Jutland and Sweden. Known as the 'Apostle of the North'.

Ratramnus *(d. 866)*
Important theologian of the Carolingian era, who wrote on the Eucharist and predestination. Taught at the **Abbey of Corbie**.

Hincmar *(d. 882)*
Frankish monk who became archbishop of Reims under Charles the Bald, and directed the affairs of the Western Frankish kingdom.

MONKS OF GERMANY AND EASTERN EUROPE

Egbert of Ripon *(d. 729)*
Northumbrian Monk who began organizing missions to Frisia before the famous mission of **St. Boniface.**

Willibrord *(d. 739)*
Missionary to Frisia, established first diocese in Utrecht

Boniface *(d. 754)*
Led Anglo-Saxon mission to Frisia, northern part of the Frankish kingdom. [a.k.a. Winfrid]

Sturm *(d. 770)*
Disciple of Boniface who continued his work, founded **Monastery of Fulda** in Hesse in 742

Walpurga [nun] *(d. 779)*
Well educated nun and niece of Boniface who accompanied his monks on their mission to Frisia.

Adalbert of Prague *(d. 997)*
Bohemian missionary to the Hungarians and Poles. Suffered political persecution and martyrdom. Lived as a hermit while in exile.

Notker the German *(d. 1022)*	German monk and scholar associated with the **Abbey of St. Gall**. First scholar to translate Aristotle in the German language.
Hermann of Reichenau *(d. 1054)*	Severely crippled scholar-monk. Composer, mathematician, and astronomer. Wrote the hymn *'Alma Redemptoris Mater'*.
Maurus of Pecs *(d. 1075)*	Abbot of a Benedictine monastery in Hungary who was appointed first Bishop of Pecs by **St. Stephen** of Hungary.
Hildegard of Bingen *(d. 1179)*	German abbess who was a zoologist, physician, poet, playwright, and musician. Named a doctor of the church in 2012.

REFORM ERA BENEDICTINES

Suger *(d. 1135)*	Abbot of **St. Denis** in Paris, first was responsible for building the first Gothic Cathedral.
Abbo of Fleury *(d. 1004)*	Influential scholar-monk of **Fleury Abbey**, noted for his contributions to theology, philosophy, mathematics and astronomy.
Pope Sylvester II *(d. 1003)*	One of the greatest monk-scholars of the Middle Ages, introduced Arabic numerals. [a.k.a **Gerbert of Aurillac**]
Guido of Arezzo *(d. 1033)*	Monk-musician and Musical theorist. Invented musical (staff) notation, and the musical scale (do re mi, etc.)
Peter Damian *(d. 1073)*	Reformer monk of the eleventh century who wrote scathing critiques of Church abuses during the Investiture controversy.
Gregory VII *(d. 1085)*	Reforming pope involved in the Investiture controversy who was associated with the Cluniac reforms. [a.k.a. **Hildebrand**]

NORMAN MONKS

Saint Herluin *(d. 1078)*	Norman Knight who gave up everything to become a monk and founded **Bec Abbey**, built with his own hands.
Lanfranc *(d. 1089)*	Prior of **Bec Abbey**, appointed by William the Conqueror to serve as Archbishop of Canterbury after the Conquest.
Anslem *(d. 1109)*	Scholarly Abbot of **Bec Abbey** and founder of scholasticism. Elected as Archbishop of Canterbury, but spent much of career in exile.

BENEDICTINE ABBEYS

- **Monte Cassino** (529) — Founded by **St. Benedict**.
- **Luxeuil Abbey** (590) — One of the oldest monasteries in Burgundy, founded by **Columbanus**.
- **Fleury Abbey** (640) — Founded by Merovingian monks, influential during Carolingian era.
- **Corbie Abbey** (660) — Founded with support from Frankish king, grandson of Clovis.
- **Mont St. Michel** (708) — Occupied by hermits in 500s. Built by **Aubert of Avranches**.
- **Abbey of St. Gall** (719) — Founded by St. Othmar on the site of **St. Gall's** hermitage.
- **Abbey of Fulda** (744) — Founded by **St. Sturm**, a disciple of **St. Boniface**.
- **Bec Abbey** (1034) — Founded in Normandy by a Norman soldier **St. Herluin**.