

St. Jerome and Roman Monasticism.

A Historical Study on His Spiritual Influence

Introduction

One of the most colorful personalities a historian of the Church comes across in his study of history is Jerome of Stridon. Many people are taken aback by his vindictive character, his temptations, his peculiar animosity, his wrathful indignation, his readiness in insult, and his incapacity at times, to forgive his enemies. It is said that Sixtus V, seeing a picture of St. Jerome beating his chest with a stone had exclaimed: "It is good for you to have that stone on your hand, otherwise, without it, the Church would have never canonized you".

Jerome, however, is a real saint. A passionate man no doubt, but so human, so real, so lovable, so natural, so manly that we find more affinity with him than with many a saint which Christian hagiography has handed over to us at different epochs of the history of the Church.

Jerome became a saint because of an admirable life in the service of God and of the Church. He was a passionate man, with a passion for Christ and the Gospel message. If he had enemies, and many were they, he had more friends who were so devoted to him, to his erudition and biblical knowledge and to

his love for monasticism that they followed him to his retirement at Bethlehem, never to abandon him.

This study will only deal with Jerome's impact on Roman monasticism as it took root at Rome and in Palestine.

All the writings of Jerome manifest his inimitable personality, but in no other source can we see it better reflected than in his *Letters*. Covering the whole period of his long and fruitful life at the service of the Church and monasticism, they are the mirror on which Jerome's passionate soul is best reflected. Many authors have served us as guides, but the real guide has been Jerome himself, who, with hand outstretched, has introduced us into the monastic world he tried to recreate for his Roman followers.

A notable difference can be noticed between Roman monasticism at the time of Jerome (d. 420) and that of St. Gregory the Great (d. 604). Roman monasticism during Jerome's time is still in its infancy. Monasticism, that strange import from the Egyptian wilderness, is hardly known in the half-pagan city that was Rome. New and almost unheard of, it finds acceptance difficult. The popes are not opposed to it, but neither do they do something positive to promote the movement. At the end of the VI century — less than two hundred years after Jerome — during the reign of Gregory the Great, Rome has become too small for the large number of monks living in her monasteries. On the express orders of the Pope himself, they embark upon the spiritual conquest of pagan England. The monks of Rome have turned into zealous missionaries for Christ in a yet unknown land.

What has happened in the space of time that spans Jerome's death and Gregory's accession to Peter's throne (590)?

We need not wait to arrive at Gregory's time to see a slow but steady progress in Roman monasticism. It cannot be denied that a remarkable change occurs between the last quarter of the IV century and the first decade of the V century.¹ As we will see later in our study, it is a formative period during which Roman monasticism, basically an import from the East, is search-

¹ G. D. GORDINI, *Origine e sviluppo del monachesimo a Roma*, in *Gregorianum*, XXXVIII, 1956, pp. 258-259. (220-260).

ing for adaptation to the particular needs of Rome and its inhabitants. There is a continual search for monastic organization, without, however, arriving at a state comparable to monasticism in the East.

St. Jerome's arrival at Rome

In the year 382 St. Jerome comes to Rome. "The eternal city — writes Steinman — was still what it had been in Jerome's student days. The forum, the Coliseum, the hot baths and the tombs that lined the imperial road were as imposing as they had ever been. Constantine's new basilicas made a dazzling sight. The same chattering and colorful crowd thronged the same narrow and clamorous alleys. It was fifteen years now since he had attended Donatus' classes and looked up to Victorinus. Monastic life and his stay in the East had set their mark on him. He spoke Greek fluently now, and he knew Hebrew. He was thirty-five and he had become serious. He is unlikely to have gone back to the little Ostia bars where the students went for a meal of fried fish washed down with a dry wine from Campagna. As a churchman, Jerome felt a burden of responsibility weighing on his shoulders. A new religious struggle was convulsing the ruling class of the capital where he had arrived".²

Jerome himself attests it was a need of the Church that brought him to Rome³ in the company of Epiphanius of Salamis, in Cyprus, and Paulinus, bishop of Antioch. His companions, left Rome the following year. Jerome, captivated by the great city and becoming good friends with the reigning Pope Damasus (d. 384), remained.

The Jerome who returns to Rome is a converted man, very much different from the young student Rome knew before. He had become a biblical scholar, a famous man, an ascetical figure renowned the world over. He comes to Rome full of monastic experience, with a deep love for ascetical life. His *Letters* are a living testimony to his spiritual restlessness and of his deep yearn-

² STEINMAN, JEAN, *Saint Jerome*, London, 1959 p. 111.

³ "Denique, cum et me Romam cum sanctis Pontificibus Paulino et Epiphanio traxisset necessitas". *Letter* 127, 7. Ed. D. RUIZ-BUENO, *Cartas de San Jerónimo*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1962, vol. II, p. 633.

ing for contemplation. Chalcis had been the school where that monastic experience had been acquired.

At the time of Jerome's arrival at Rome, different groups of people were already following the monastic way of life. Jerome himself writes: "Marcela came to know the way of life of blessed Antony, who still lived at that time. She also came to know, through the Alexandrian priests, the pope Athanasius and later Peter, his brother, the monasteries of Pachomius in the Thebaid. These two, fleeing from the Arian persecution, took refuge in Rome, as in a sure port of their communion. Marcela was introduced by them into the life and discipline followed by virgins and widows and of those not ashamed to profess what they thought and knew was acceptable to Christ. Sofronia and many others followed her years later."⁴

It appears that some noble women practiced an ascetico-monastic life, without the aid of a set of precise rules regulating their lives. Most of them were widows and virgins of the best aristocratic circles. These people were unafraid to challenge the malicious insinuations of many Romans who considered monasticism as something strange and even alien to Christianity.⁵ Jerome introduces himself into these circles, becoming almost overnight their spiritual father and the greatest inspirer of the Roman monastic movement. An extraordinary man, hallowed by a widespread fame as a biblical scholar, he finally gives into the petitions of these noble women, especially of Marcella, to become their spiritual director and master in their study of the Sacred Scriptures.

"His experience of monastic life — writes Brochet — his journeys, his stay in the East, his knowledge of the original languages of Scriptures, his understanding of the Sacred text,

⁴ "Haec [monastic life] ab Alexandrinis sacerdotibus papae Athanasio et postea Petro, qui persecutionem Arrianae hereseos declinantes quasi ad tutissimum communionis suae portum Romam confugerant, vitam beati Antonii adhuc tunc viventis monasteriaque in Thebaide Pachummi et virginum ac viduarum didicit disciplinam nec erubuit profiteri, quod Christo placere cognoverat. Hanc multos post annos imitata est Sofronia et aliae". St. JEROME, *Letter* 127, 5, RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 632. Athanasius' arrival at Rome occurred towards 340-341. It was his second exile. Peter reached Rome in 373. For this question read GORDINI, *op. cit.*; 222.

⁵ Cfr. A. PENNA, *S. Girolamo*, Turin-Rome, 1949, p. 75.

above all, his natural qualities, such as frankness of character, vivacity, a brilliant imagination, a prodigious memory, his tact, the ironical and at the same time, his passionate tone in spirit, the exquisite dominion of the language stemming from the most pure sources of latinity and adorned with germs of biblical poetry, his brilliant education, his eloquence and above all, the enthusiasm of a generous nature, eager to learn, anxious for love and austerity, soon secured his authority over those delicate, ardent and pious souls."⁶

It cannot be denied that Jerome changed the trend of Roman monasticism. At first, he avoided the noble women, shying away from their luxurious houses — something normal in a man who longed for solitude and silence — but the rich Marcela finally overcame Jerome's monastic modesty inducing him to organize lectures on the Bible in her own palace on the Aventine hill.⁷ The Christian high society of Rome, mainly aristocratic women, gathered around him, eagerly following his lectures on the Holy Scriptures. It is a unique spectacle in the history of Christianity, without parallel in any other part of the Roman world. He stressed constantly to his listeners the need to develop a profound zeal for science and for virtue. These he had faithfully practiced at his retirement in Chalcis, where in a providential way, a converted Jew had introduced him into the knowledge and love of the Bible.⁸ This fact helped Jerome lay the foundation of monastic learning in the Church. The study of the Bible at Rome is greatly facilitated with the help of his friend Damasus of whom Jerome, in the course of time, becomes the spokesman, and the man who would solve the innumerable exegetical questions put to him by the pope himself.⁹ The Roman noble women, reared with all the luxuries of a good birth and excellent education, give themselves up body and soul to the study of Greek and Hebrew to better understand the divine text. The study is thorough and deep, as narrated in the many letters written by

⁶ BROCHET, *Saint Jérôme et ses ennemis*, Paris, 1905, p. 8.

⁷ "Et verecunde nobilium feminarum oculos declinarem, ita egit secundum apostolum importune, oportune, ut pudorem meum sua superaret industria". ST. JEROME, *Letter* 127, 7. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 634.

⁸ *Letter* 125, 12. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 610.

⁹ Cfr. *Letters* 19, 20, 21, 35, 36 where Jerome explains the biblical difficulties felt by Pope Damasus.

Jerome to explain to his friends some of the thorny and obscure problems arising from the study of the Bible.¹⁰

The noble Marcela, who so insistently had asked Jerome to become their master, was the first to embrace the monastic way of life among the Roman nobility. "No woman had, at that time, known the way of life of the monks, nor, given the novelty of the thing, dared to accept that name, for it was taken as an ignominy among the people and it was highly discredited in society."¹¹

Marcela was a highly intelligent and cultured woman, whose love for Holy Scriptures touched the incredible.¹² She was the glory of the city of Rome and of all the saints.¹³ She lived in the Aventine hill with her mother Albina and the virgin Asela.¹⁴ Her admirable and luxurious house, "*ampla domus*", was slowly abandoned by the Romans who were in search for pleasure after Marcela converted the place into a house where mortification, penance and monastic virtues prevailed. After Jerome's departure from Rome, the wealthy Marcela left her own house and took shelter in the so-called "suburban field". A large number of ladies follows her, forming a closely-knit group of women professing the monastic life. There is nothing unusual about this, for we must not forget that in 353, Marcelina, a sister of Ambrose of Milan, received the veil of virgin from Pope Liberius.¹⁵ This proves that in Rome there existed institutions to which young girls, animated with the same *religious zeal* as Marcelina, would find shelter and refuge.¹⁶

During Jerome's stay in Rome he explained the Holy Scriptures, most especially the Psalms. Marcela, in the absence of

¹⁰ Cfr. *Letters* 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 29, 30, 34, 36, etc. Vide CAVALLERA, *St. Jérôme, sa vie et son oeuvre*, Louvain-Paris 1922, (2 vols.), vol. I, p. 85.

¹¹ "Nulla eo tempore nobilium feminarum noverat Romae propositum monachorum nec audebat propter rei novitatem ignominiosum, ut tunc putabatur, et vile in populis nomen adsumere." *Letter* 127, 5. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 631-632.

¹² "Divinarum Scripturarum ardor incredibilis". *Letter* 127, 4. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 630.

¹³ "Omniumque sanctorum et proprie Romanae Urbis inclitus decus". *Ib.*, p. 627-628.

¹⁴ Cfr. *Letter* 47, 3. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 337.

¹⁵ ST. AMBROSE, *De Virginibus*, 1-3. PL 16, 231-236.

¹⁶ Cfr. A. PENNA, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

Jerome, would take upon herself the responsibility of solving the difficulties of her companions.¹⁷

Some of the noblewomen who followed Marcela in her way of life and lived close to her, also became acquainted with Jerome. Two of them played a vital role in Roman monasticism in Palestine and influenced Jerome's own life. They are Paula and her daughter Eustochius. Another daughter of Paula, Blesilla, after a serious sickness, embraced the monastic ideal through Jerome's influence, dying soon after. Paula and Eustochius did not abandon their comfortable house and instead converted it into a partial monastery, where their own slave women took part in the same way of life, forming a fervent domestic gathering, half monastery, half house.¹⁸ Paula and Eustochius spend their time in prayer, in acts of charity and study of the Bible. Both practiced the life of virgins. Paula followed Jerome to such an extent that she sweetly and faithfully imitated him in the practice of monasticism, inspite of their almost contrary character. Both of them abandoned Rome, fleeing to Palestine, close to the land trod by the Lord. Paula then would establish two monasteries, one for her and for her nuns, of which she became the superior, and another for men, where Jerome would stay.

In his letter 30, Jerome writes to Paula: "Greet Blesilla and Eustochius, my students. Greet Feliciana, happy indeed for her virginity of the flesh and of the spirit; greet the whole choice of chastity and the whole Church living in your house, for whom I even fear the worst".¹⁹ Jerome explains to Paula, in this same letter 30, the psalm 110. The two activities which Jerome was busy with since his arrival at Rome are also explicit in this letter: 1) a profound explanation of the Holy Scripture; 2) a widespread propaganda of monasticism and its ideals, inspite of

¹⁷ "Habes ibi in studio scripturarum et in sanctimonia mentis et corporis (magistras) Marcellam et Ascellam". *Letter* 65; 2. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 590.

¹⁸ Cfr. *Letter* 30, 14. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 239. CAVALLERA, *op. cit.*, I, 39.

¹⁹ "Saluta Blesillam et Eustochium, tirunculas nostras, saluta Felicianam, vere carnis et spiritus virginitatis, felicem; saluta reliquum castitatis chorum et domesticam tuam ecclesiam, cui omnia etiam quae tuta sunt timeo..." *Letter* 30, 14. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 239.

its tremendous opposition and numerous opponents in the still semi-pagan city of Rome.²⁰

Marcela's house on the Aventine had become an academy both for the study of the Holy Bible and for the practice of monasticism. Yet monasticism, at this stage, does not mean a submission to a particular rule, or the wearing of a distinctive dress to be adopted by all, or by the vow of obedience to a superior, or the imposition of discipline. This will take place much later on, because not even in V century, when the popes personally take the initiative in the erection of the first formal monasteries in Rome, can we find a concrete rule adopted by the monks and nuns. The only rule was *custom*, the practice of Eastern monasticism and the legislation of the councils.²¹ Jerome, during his stay at Rome, guards against this lack of a rule and community life by substituting pious meetings in the houses of noble women. There together they search for the true meaning of the Scriptures, the following of Christ and the search for Christian perfection. They meditate night and day on the law of God, thus converting those luxurious houses into fervent houses of prayer, or semi-cloistered monasteries. We do not even know what rules were followed years later in the Roman monasteries of Bethlehem. The counsels that Jerome had so often and insistently written in his letters would be the ones he would apply in his own monastery and in the monastery headed by Paula. Jerome would not adopt any particular rule, though he was influenced by Egyptian monasticism, above all that of Pachomius, who had well organized the daily life of his monks.²²

In Rome Jerome popularizes a more austere way of life, renunciation of holy matrimony, observance of perfect chastity, practice of virginity. This way of life was already a tremendous step forward. Monasticism was something new to Romans, both pagans and Christians. Virginity was despised. The only open and dignified way of life for a young noble girl lay in marriage.

²⁰ "Nostrae deliciae sint in lege Domini meditari die ac nocte, pulsare ianuam non patentem, panes trinitatis accipere, et saeculi fluctus domino praeunte calcare." *Letter* 30, 13. RUIZ-BUENO, *ib.* pp. 238-239.

²¹ Cfr. L. HERTLING, in ZKT 64, 1930, pp. 345-359.

²² Cfr. P. LADEUZE, *Etude sur le cénobitisme Pachomien pendant le IV siècle et la première moitié de V siècle*, Louvain-Paris, 1898; CASSIAN, *Inst.* I, 22, CSEL 17, 192. PENNA, *op. cit.* p. 124.

Jerome changes all this, encouraging young noble girls to consecrate their virginity to Christ, so much so that he wrote to Eustochius: "You are the first Roman aristocrat who has decided to preserve her virginity."²³ The "family monasteries" of Paula and Marcela are examples of these houses for virgins. Later on we will see the same thing being practiced by Melania the Younger.²⁴

Monastic life in these Roman palaces could certainly not be like the monastic life in the desert of the Thebaid. The Roman house in the 'suburban field' of Rome is not like the wilderness of Egypt. The exquisite education of these noble women contrast with the lack of culture of the Egyptian monks. It had to be a life adapted to the concrete Roman circumstances and peculiar to the Roman genius.

While Jerome stayed in Rome many of the noble Roman ladies who practiced the monastic life came to rely entirely on him, to listen to his lectures on the Aventine, to strengthen themselves in the monastic purpose through his encouragement. But Jerome's group was not the only one practicing this special kind of life. We find some other people who also practiced the monastic life and who did not depend on Jerome for guidance. One of them was composed of a certain Lea, who lived at a certain distance from the city.²⁵ Lea, according to Jerome himself, was a woman entirely given to God, of high humility, superior and mother of a monastery of virgins.²⁶

Jerome's way of life, his preaching of monasticism, his lectures to so many women of the best aristocracy, his outspoken reaction to those objecting to the monastic ideal, contributed to increase the number of his mortal enemies. These same people spread rumors of some kind of misbehaviour in Jerome's relations with the women under his tutelage, so that by 385 his position was no longer tenable. He could not afford to stay in the city any longer. Thus his departure from Rome appeared more of

²³ Cfr. J. STEINMAN, *op. cit.* p. 127.

²⁴ PALLADIUS, *The Lausiaca History*, 61. Ed. ROBERT T. MEYER, London, 1965, p. 143.

²⁵ Cfr. *Letter* 23, I. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 208. "Equidem conversationem Leae nostrae quis possit digno elevare preconio? Ita eam totam ad Dominum fuisse conversam ut monasterii princeps, mater virginum fieret..."

²⁶ Cfr. *Letter* 23, 2. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 293.

a flight than a peaceful goodbye. A year before, to the chagrin of the opponents and enemies of monasticism, he had written for those 'religious' and for posterity's sake, a spiritual program to be followed by them all. It is a small treatise on virginity, addressed to Eustochius under the form of a letter.²⁷ This by far, is the best that came out of the excellent and prolific pen of Jerome. In it we can see Jerome at his best, a zealous defender of monasticism on one hand, and a bitter enemy to those who opposed him on the other. Jerome abandoned Rome forever. Paula and Eustochius would soon follow him. They, however, were not the first noble Romans to do so. Years before, to the astonishment of the whole Roman world, Melania Antonia had abandoned Rome, and, after some time, established herself in Palestine.²⁸

Fuga mundi

The monastic ideal, so vividly pictured by Jerome in many of his letters could not totally and perfectly be carried out in the city, less in such a city as Rome. In order to attain sanctity and holiness of life, man needs silence, peace and tranquility. Solitude is an essential quality in any person desiring to reach the summit and zenith of Christian perfection. How could Paula, Eustochius, and the other Roman nobles, eager searchers of monastic perfection, attain it in their own palaces in Rome? An appropriate place had to be found. What better place then than a place like Palestine? Here the holiest of peoples were to be found, people from all parts of the world. Monks and pilgrims of all races and nations, easterners and westerners were to be found living in the Holy Land. The Holy Land! It was the land of the Saviour! Paula and Eustochius, leaving behind them their families, friends and all they possessed embarked themselves for Palestine and there they established the monastic life, close to the places sanctified by the Saviour Himself. Marcela, who had been most responsible for Jerome's involvement with the Bible and monasticism during his stay in Rome, remained firm in

²⁷ Letter 22. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 153-207. We do not know Jerome's title for this short treatise on virginity, but if we are to believe Rufinus (Apol. II, 5 PL. 21, 587) it must have been *Libellus de virginitate servanda*.

²⁸ Letter 39, 5. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 293.

Rome. In this manner, she manifested a real spiritual independence from Jerome. In spite of Jerome's influence on her, so clearly manifested in so many of his letters, she remained more independent from Jerome than Paula and Eustochius. Many times she was asked to leave everything and join them in Palestine. She had been the first to kindle in them the fire of love for monasticism, yet she chose to remain in Rome.²⁹ Yet she did not stay in Rome for long, and retired to the 'suburban country house'.

All these women were full of love for the monastic ideal, eager to abandon their former way of life and search for solitude and silence, so necessary in the practice of the monastic ideal. Jerome is always the prime mover. His letters served as levers of change in the lives of so many noble Roman ladies and men.³⁰ One of his greatest merits is to have proposed the monastic ideal in a very clear manner, thus becoming, in all justice, the father of Roman monasticism. Marcela,³¹ Paula,³² and Eustochius,³³ Asela,³⁴ Blesila,³⁵ Pammachius,³⁶ Fabiola,³⁷ Principia,³⁸ and many other famous Romans appear often mentioned in his correspondence. Of all of them he could say what he had said of Paula and

²⁹ "Tu quæ prima scintillam nostro fomiti subiecisti, quæ ad hoc studium nos et sermone hortata est et exemplo, et quasi gallina congregata sub alas pullos tuos, nunc libere absque matre volitare pateris et accipitris pavere formidinem, et ad omnem umbram prætervolantium avium formidare? Igitur, quod solum absentes facere possumus, querulas fundimus preces et desiderium nostrum non tam fletibus quam hemiulatibus contestamur, ut Marcellam nostram nobis reddas, et illam mitem, illam suavem, illam omni melle et dulcedine dulciorem non patiaris apud eas esse rigidam, et triste rugare frontem, quas adfabilitate sua ad simile vitæ studium provocavit." *Letter* 46, 1. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 320.

³⁰ Cfr. CAVALLERA, *St. Jérôme et la vie parfaite, in Revue d'Ascétique et Mystique* 2, 1921, p. 104. He writes: "Il a surtout puissamment contribué à créer un esprit. Ses lettres luës et reluës plus encore que ses ouvrages de polémique, ont, de son temps comme au cours des siècles, été l'un des ferments les plus actifs en faveur de la conception évangélique de l'existence, de l'estime de l'état religieux, du détachement du monde, de l'austérité de la vie chrétienne".

³¹ *Letters*, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34, 40, 41, 42, 43, 59 and above all 127.

³² *Letters* 30, 33, 39, 108, also called *Epitaph of Paula*.

³³ *Letters* 22, or *Epistola de virginitate servanda*, and 31.

³⁴ *Letter* 45.

³⁵ *Letter* 30.

³⁶ *Letters* 44, 49, 57, 66, 84, 97.

³⁷ *Letters* 64, 78.

³⁸ *Letters* 75, 127.

Eustochius; "Whether the world likes it or not, they are mine in Christ".³⁹

Jerome himself, in his letter 127, tells us of Marcela's love for solitude and the need to flee the world. He testifies that she abandoned her own luxurious palace in the city of Rome and for the love of silence went to the countryside. "A house in the outskirts of the city was converted into a monastery and, for the love of solitude, you preferred a country house".⁴⁰

One of Jerome's best programs for monastic life is the one he proposed to his friend Paulinus of Nola.⁴¹ This noble man had abandoned everything for the love of Christ and wanted to follow the monastic way of life, in spite of his marriage to his holy 'sister' Therasia. According to Jerome, every kind of profession in life demands a different way of life. The life of a cleric cannot be the life of a monk. The emphasis is placed in the *flight from the world*. This "fuga mundi" is different from, and must not be confused with the solitary way of life, but rather a life in common with other monks. Experience had proved to Jerome that it was dangerous for a monk to be alone, to lead an anchoritic life.⁴² The "fuga mundi" is an imperative for all those who want to embrace the monastic ideal. The noise, agitation and hectic life of the city draws the monk away from his purpose.⁴³ It is the living place for the unoriented, the time-killers, the multitudes. "Search for Christ in the solitude and pray alone with Jesus in the mountain. Find your pleasure in the vicinity of holy places, that is, abandon the city and leave the company of rich people, banquets, visits to friends, people in general. In one word: run away from everything that might distract you from your purpose of becoming a monk".⁴⁴

³⁹ "Saluta Paulam et Eustochium, velit nolit mundus in Christo meae sunt". *Letter* 127, 8. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 317-318.

⁴⁰ "Suburbanus ager vobis pro monasterio fuit et rus electum propter solitudinem". *Letter* 127, 8. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 635.

⁴¹ *Letter* 58. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 506-518.

⁴² *Letter* 125, 9. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 607.

⁴³ *Letter* 58, 4. RUIZ-BUENO I, p. 510. "...differentias in locis arbitror si urbibus et frequentia urbium derelicta in agello habites, et Christum quaeras in solitudine, et ores solus in monte cum Iesu, sanctorumque tantum locorum vicinitatibus perfruaris, id est, ut et urbe careas et propositum monachi non amittas".

⁴⁴ "...multitudines hominum et officia et salutationes et convivia veluti quasdam catenas fugias voluptatum". *Letter* 58, 6. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p.

Most of the noble Roman women who had embraced the "monastic ideal" in Rome before or during Jerome's stay in the city, came together in one of their own houses as soon as he left the city. In the gathering, they listened to the lectures on the Bible given by one of them. Once these explanations of the Holy Scriptures were over, they returned to their respective houses. As time went by and through Jerome's personal encouragement in his numerous letters, they came to consecrate themselves to Christ, having one nun as director or superior in a monastery. This superior lead all the others in the ways of monasticism.⁴⁵ A clear proof of this is to be found in Jerome's letter 127. Little by little the hostile attitude towards monasticism was changed into admiration. Jerome himself, from his seclusion in Bethlehem, notices this change of attitude in Rome towards the monks and all those following their way of life. He stresses the fact that, at the very beginning, during his stay at Rome, monastic life was despised and attacked, and monks and nuns were deemed a highly contemptible people. Most of the Romans could not even bear to hear of their strange way of life. It was a kind of ignominy to be a monk or a nun. Now, he goes on to say, it is a glory to be counted among them.⁴⁶

Social state of the Roman world in the IV century

In order to understand the opposition to monasticism at Rome during the last quarter of the IV century and why this essential way of Christian life was ridiculed and attacked by so many people, even by clerics themselves, we have to describe, though it be in a brief manner, the social state of the Roman empire during the IV century. Cardinal Rampolla⁴⁷ offers us a vivid and a moving description of the moral and social state of Rome and the empire during this period. The city and the empire had grown old and weak. Moral degeneration and widespread corruption pervaded the various strata of Roman society. The Ro-

512. To Eustochius he had written before: "Nolo habeas consortia matronarum, nolo ad nobilium accedas domos, nolo te frequenter videre quod contemnes virgo esse voluisti". *Letter* 22, 16. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 171.

⁴⁵ *Letter* 127, 8. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 635.

⁴⁶ "Ut pro frequentia servientium Deo quod prius ignominiae fuerat, esset postea gloriae". *Letter* 127, 8. *Ib.*

⁴⁷ RAMPOLLA, *Santa Melania iuniore, senatrice romana*, Rome, 1905, pp. V-XV. This is, in all aspects, an excellent book.

man empire was a dying giant, in the inevitable process of extinction. Rome was only a glory. Within this empire the Christian religion had been allowed to exist for almost one hundred years. But at heart, this very empire which conquered politically and intellectually the rest of the known world was a pagan empire. As such it was reactionary to the Christian message of love, equality, of universal brotherhood and all that the Christian message implied. And one of the manifestations of Christian life which was so opposed by Romans was monasticism. Love for chastity, for virginity, for simplicity of life and the like were alien to most of the Romans. At this state, it is not so difficult to realize the reasons why monasticism found so many opponents in Rome. Even within the ranks of ordinary Christians, clerics not excluded, monasticism was bitterly opposed. If, as we see, people in general, did not take the Christian message as seriously as they should, if the Christian way of life was bitterly contested by so many Romans, more so would it be for a way of life coming from the East, such as the monastic way of life. Schuster, one of the specialists on St. Jerome writes:

"Intanto la vecchia religione dello stato romano idolatra, anche dopo le leggi di proscrizione di Costanzo e di Costantino, era restata più o meno pacificamente in possesso dei suoi diritti tradizionali, così che nel quarto secolo mentre ad Ossia si offrivano ancora dei sacrifici sull'ara di Vulcano, le numerose turbe di pellegrini che da ogni parte del mondo accorrevano ai piedi dello stesso Colle Vaticano con gli iniziati ai misteri di Mitra, i cui tauroboli contanimavano di sangue fin quasi le soglie del sacro tempio". And he adds:

'Impostor et graecus est' solleva gridare la plebaglia romana dietro ai mal capitati, che, avvolti dei loro caratteristici mantelli, s'arrischiavano a comparire per le vie dell'Urbe, per cual cosa la prima accoglienza incontrata dal monachesimo in Roma riuscì affatto sfavorevole, tale insomma da non lasciare preludere per nulla a quella gloria cui in seguito doveva elevarsi per opera soprattutto dei due primi papi a nome Gregorio".⁴⁸

⁴⁸ SCHUSTER, *L'influenza di S. Girolamo sui primordi della vita monastica in Roma*, in *Miscellanea Geronimiana*, Rome, 1920.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

It is not difficult to imagine now why monasticism could not progress fast enough in such an atmosphere. The old pagan world, before being overthrown by the new Christian view on life, put up a strong and decisive fight, but its attacks could not hinder Christianity's growth and progress, nor even could it stop the spirited march of monasticism. More dangerous were the attacks coming from the ranks of Christianity itself. These Christians pictured the monks as hypocrites and fakes and their way of life a form of escapism. Many of them viewed monasticism as totally alien to the Christian vocation and tradition.

It appeared, therefore, that Rome in which Jerome proposed so forcefully such a way of life, was too dangerous a place for him to remain. With the given opposition to his influence and the declared enmity of so many Romans, even clerics, his life was in danger. In 384 Blesila, the young widowed daughter of Paula, who had embraced the monastic ideal and had come under Jerome's spiritual influence, succumbed to a rapid and mysterious sickness. In a few day she was gone. It was one of the most unbearable blows Paula could have received. She seemed to be beyond consolation, losing not only her composure but even her physical balance. She collapsed many times, regained consciousness again only to give free rein to her sorrow. The whole world, which days before, seemed so secure and deeply rooted in God was now on the point of collapse. So deep was Paula's sorrow and grief that Romans, even those who did not believe in an after-life, were never seen to have cried so much when members of their own families died. Due to Paula's excessive sorrow, she became seriously sick. She passed the time screaming and shouting in an uncontrollable manner.⁵⁰ Jerome, bitterly attacked by people as the main cause of Blesila's death and Paula's sorrow, tried to console her by sending her a special letter in praise of Blesila. In it he strived to explain the Christian meaning of suffering. Jerome emphasized the real fact that God had taken her away in the prime of her youth and that Paula's attitude must be one of willful acceptance of God's will. God's own designs are indeed unfathomable and we must accept them. Jerome was personally touched and troubled. His soul was full of grief and

⁵⁰ "Ululas et exclamitas, et quasi quibusdam facibus accensa, quantum in te est, tui semper homicida es". *Letter* 39, 6. RUIZ-BUENO, I. p. 294.

suffering.⁵¹ It could not be otherwise, given Jerome's love for Blesila and Paula's family. Yet, he reminds her of the Christian precept that it is not good to cry out too much for those whom we know are living another life and have finally reached God. "An excess of piety towards our own people is a kind of impiety towards God".⁵² Paula, a Christian woman and a nun, must show herself within Christian moderation in her expression of grief. Jerome tells her in blunt terms that "her sacrilegious tears are most detestable, full of incredulity, without any moderation, tears carrying you on to the point of death."⁵³

Paula finally overcame her crisis and continued with her monastic way of life. The Roman patricians, however, cried out: "Detestable kind of monks! Why are we waiting to expel them from the city, or cover them with stones or throw them down the river Tiber? The monks have seduced this noble matron, a lady so full of love for her daughter, that it is clear she hated monasticism, because never had a pagan mother cried out for her children as Paula has done."⁵⁴

It was not only the pagan world that raised its voice against Jerome and his way of life.⁵⁵ Protests came from within the ranks of Christianity and most especially from some clerics close to

⁵¹ "Confiteor affectus meos, totus hic liber fletibus scribitur... Testor, mi Paula, Jesum, quem Blesilla nunc sequitur, testor sanctos angelos eius quorum consortio fruitor, eadem me dolorum perpeti tormenta quae pateris: patrem esse spiritu, nutricium caritate..." *Letter* 39, 2. RUIZ-BUENO, I. p. 284.

⁵² "Grandis in suos pietas impietas in Deum est". *Letter* 39, 6. RUIZ-BUENO, I., p. 293

⁵³ "Detestandae sunt istae lacrimae plenae sacrilegio, incredulitate plenissimae, quae non habent modum quae ubique ad vicina mortis accendunt". *Letter* 39, 6. RUIZ-BUENO, I. p. 293.

⁵⁴ *Letter* 39, 6. RUIZ-BUENO, I. p. 294. "Quosque genus detestabile monachorum non urbe pellitur, non lapidibus obruitur, non praecipitatur in fluctus? Matronam miserabilem seduxerunt, quae quam monacha esse noluerit hinc probatur quod nulla gentiliū ita suos umquam filios fleverit."

⁵⁵ There is much debate over Jerome's supposed trial in Rome. Cfr. PENNA, *op. cit.* p. 112; GORDINI, *op. cit.* p. 252. Cfr. *Letter* 45, 2. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 314-315 where it seems Jerome was formally accused: "Esto; crediderunt mentienti; cur non credunt neganti? Idem est homo ipse qui fuerat: fatetur insontem qui dudum noxium loquebatur..." Jerome's relations with Pope Siricius (d. 399) never reached the cordial state he had with Pope Damasus (d. 384). Siricius belonged to the party of the nobility, totally opposed to monasticism, and it is evident that Jerome's cause was lost when Damasus died. Siricius did little or nothing to defend Jerome against all the charges he was accused of. Cfr. PENNA, *op. cit.*, p. 113. Jerome's enemies made his life in Rome highly intolerable.

Pope Siricius (d. 399). In order to avoid the Roman presbyters and a formal condemnation from them, Jerome hurriedly left Rome never to return again. Although he expressed sorrow for such an event, he asked to be helped to leave 'Babylon' and reached Jerusalem safely.⁵⁶

Against Helvidius

Let us now turn our eyes to Jerome's polemics with three famous opponents of Christian monasticism: Helvidius, Jovinian and Vigilantius.

In 383, Helvidius, a Christian layman, learned in theology, and a friend of the Arian bishop of Milan, Auxentius, published in Rome, where he resided at that time, a book in which he denied Mary's virginity. Jerome was dragged into the controversy in spite of himself. What Helvidius said in his book was too serious to be bypassed, as it was a frank denial of the value of monastic life. According to Helvidius all vocations of life in the eyes of God have the same value, so that all married people of the Old Testament were, in no way, inferior to the chaste people of the new Testament. Mary's virginity was one of the pillars on which the defenders of the monastic ideal based their doctrine. For centuries already her virginity had been highly praised by Christian writers and was raised as a paragon to be emulated by lovers of asceticism and monasticism.

Helvidius based his doctrine on the Bible, thus giving Jerome a golden opportunity to avenge the honor of the Virgin through the exercise of his excellent biblical knowledge.⁵⁷ In his *Contra Helvidium*⁵⁸ Jerome refutes his opponent's arguments point by point. The thesis on the virginity of Mary was already a common belief in the Christian world. Helvidius, according to Jerome, was a man without eloquence, of few letters and to ans-

⁵⁶ "Haec...cum iam navem conscenderem raptim flens dolensque conscripsi, et gratias ago Deo, quod dignus sum quem mundus oderit. Ora autem, ut de Babylone Hierosolyma regrediar..." *Letter* 45, 6. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 317.

⁵⁷ BROCHET, *op. cit.* p. 22. The whole question on Helvidius is dealt with on pp. 1-39. Vide also J. STEINMAN, *op. cit.* p. 10.

⁵⁸ *Contra Helvidium*, PL. 23, 183-206.

wer him will not be too difficult a task.⁵⁹ Jerome proved in his *Contra Helvidium* to be a consummate biblical scholar, knowing the ins and outs of the Old and the New Testaments, with a ready and exact answer to explain difficult and obscure passages. But it is more than an exegetical answer to an opponent of virginity and monasticism. A whole view on Christian life, a different *Weltanschauung* was at stake.

"What is more" — writes Steinman — "in his vindications of virginity, Jerome was defending one of the essential marks of the Christian life. Respect for virginity implies respect for the work of God in its original nobility, respect for woman as such and not merely in virtue of her function as mother. It is a victory for the spirit."

"When Jerome was answering Helvidius, the great monastic movement which was to dominate the Middle Ages and which has come down to our day was only in its beginnings. Voluntary celibacy in Rome conflicted with the right of the father of a family to marry off his daughter without her consent. In the eastern religions, which a large number of Jerome's fellow Romans were still practising, the most flagrant abuses were taken for granted and recalled the worship of the Semitic high places which the prophets had denounced. The eunuchs of Isis and of Cybele were a common sight in the streets of Rome. The maenads were not far off. The sacred prostitutes of Venus were still roaming round the temples. And this unbridled display of often unnatural sexual feeling had its echoes in the cruelty and the blood of the circus game. If Christianity were to get the better of it, it would have to hold up the example of the monks and the nuns, at the risk of occasionally going too far in the direction of strictness and asceticism."⁶⁰

Jerome's indirect but telling answer to Helvidius and his sympathizers is to be found in his *Letter 22* to Eustochius, probably written in 384. In a masterful way he traces a clear monastic program.⁶¹ As we have already mentioned, it is more

⁵⁹ "Non quod difficile fuerit, hominem rusticanum, et vix primis quoque imbutum litteris, super veri assertionem convincere." *Adversus Helvidium*, I. 1. PL. 23, 183.

⁶⁰ J. STEINMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁶¹ Cfr. BROCHET, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

than an ordinary letter and Rufinus of Aquileia speaks of it as a treatise on virginity.⁶² This letter to Eustochius is a defense of Jerome's doctrine in his *Contra Helvidium*. It is a terrible and pitiless denunciation of the vices of Rome. Jerome's anger has been provoked and there is something for everybody in the letter. A furious attack is mounted on some monks called "remnuoth", a detestable and despicable kind of people, wanderers from place to place, without any interior love for the monastic life. "Everything in them is affected, wide sleeves, unadjusted sandals, too gross a habit, frequent sighs, visits to virgins, murmuring against the clerics, and, when a more solemn feast arrives, taking excessive food up to the point of vomiting".⁶³ Some pagans, we are told by Rufinus,⁶⁴ read with extreme pleasure these frantic denunciations of Jerome, thus strengthening them in the opinion they had of Christians and of their morality. Some pages of Jerome's letter to Eustochius make one feel that the Church was an association of unclean, impudent, adulterous and proud men.⁶⁵

We should not be deceived by Jerome's animosity and denunciations of Roman vices. The positive things weigh much more than the negative ones. This letter to Eustochius must have served, once it was made public to all, as a vigorous upliftment for many Christians and for virgins who perhaps due to the writing of Helvidius were in imminent danger of abandoning their new state. It is, above all, a chant of all Christian virtues, most especially a chant for virginity, chastity, and the following of Christ.

⁶² RUFINUS, *Apol. II*, 5. PL 21, 583. "Libellum quendam de virginitate conservanda Romae positus scripsit."

⁶³ *Letter 22*, 34. "Tertium genus est, quod dicunt *remnuoth* deterrimum atque neglectum, et quod in nostra provincia aut solum aut primum est". RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 197. Vide also another passage of the same letter where Jerome says the following: "Sed ne tantum videar disputare de feminis, viros quoque fuge, quos videris catenatos, quibus feminei contra apostolum crines, hircorum barba, nigrum pallium et nudi in patientiam frigoris pedes... Omnis his cura de vestibus, si bene oleant, si pes lexa pelle non folleat. Crines calamastri vestigio rotantur, digitis de anulis radiant et, ne plantas umidior via spargat, vix imprimunt summa vestigia. Tales cum videris, sponsos magis aestimato quam clericos."

Quidam in hoc studium vitamque posuerunt ut matronarum nomina, domos moresque cognoscant". *Ibid.* RUIZ-BUENO, p. 188.

⁶⁴ *Apol. II*, 5. PL 22, 587.

⁶⁵ PENNA, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

We conclude from this wonderful letter that all virtues form a part of the total Christian baggage, most especially for the monks. And he ends this letter with this incisive sentence: "All this, that is collected in this letter, will sound too hard for the man who does not love Christ."⁶⁶

A great deal of the opposition to Jerome came on account of his exegetical method, totally new and highly disconcerting for many Christians and clerics who wanted to lead an easy life and who lacked a basic Christian and exegetical education.⁶⁷ They were people who confused coarseness with sanctity. What Jerome wanted, and he told them outright, was to go to the pure sources and not only to the muddy little rivers.⁶⁸ Many of these people opposed to Jerome felt, at the same time, a deeply rooted envy, as Jerome had an easy access to the best houses of the Roman aristocracy and his undisputed influence upon Pope Damasus. There were many people, especially clerics and monks, who eagerly wished to be accepted in those high places but were not able to. "People of my own condition", Jerome would write.⁶⁹ The Roman clerics found it difficult to accept the power and influence of this strange and impertinent foreign monk. During the first years of Jerome's stay in Rome he was praised and extolled by all, he was considered the oracle of the Holy Bible, the spokesman of Pope Damasus. In the opinion of many people (perhaps Jerome may have entertained this opinion too) he was considered worthy of the supreme pontificate.⁷⁰ But after Damasus' death he was

⁶⁶ "Haec omnia quae digessimus dura videbuntur ei qui non amat Christum." *Letter* 22, 29. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 203.

⁶⁷ "Ad me repente perlatum est quosdam homunculos mihi studiose detrahare cur adversus auctoritatem veterum et totius mundi opinionem aliquae in evangelis emendare temptaverim." *Letter* 27, I, p. 219.

⁶⁸ "Quibus si dispicet fontis unda purrissimi, caenosos rivulos bibant." *Letter* 27, I. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 219.

⁶⁹ "De mei ordinis hominibus loquor" *Letter* 22, 28. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 188.

⁷⁰ "Antequam domum sanctae Paulae nossem, totius in me urbis studia consonabant. Omnium paene iudicio dignus summo sacerdotio decernebar; beatae memoriae Damasi os meum sermo erat; dicebar sanctus, dicebar humilis et disertus... O invidia primum mordax tui! O satanae calliditas semper sancta persequens..." *Letter* 45, 3-4. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 314-315.

called a liar, dishonest, impure, visiting the houses of the nobles and virgins to seduce and to bribe them.⁷¹

Jerome's 'Adversus Jovinianum'

Jerome's disputes indicate one clear thing among them: that the opposition to monasticism ran deep and found fertile soil among intelligent people. Many of them offered serious objections against monasticism. Hardly had Jerome settled in Palestine, in the silence of his monastery at Bethlehem, when the winds of opposition started blowing furiously again. This time the reaction against monasticism was more serious, as it was the effect perhaps of a general pagan counter-offensive, the last one, against the semi-official Christian religion. Paganism was officially re-established in the West by the usurper and assassin of Valentinian II, the self-proclaimed emperor Eugenius, in the year 393. It was in this year, or the previous year of 392 — just ten years after Helvidius — when a certain Jovinian revived in Rome through a well prepared but greatly biased writing, the pagans' and Christians' opposition to monasticism. Jovinian himself was a deserter from the ranks of monasticism, having been previously a monk. His attack is frontal, going straight to the heart of the debate: monasticism is a farce, alien to Christianity, a corruption of the Christian vocation. He advocated, to the delight of many people, both pagans and Christians, for the suppression of all prohibitions through which the Church oppressed the flesh. No more virginity! No more continence! No more abstinence! Jovinian's case kept the Christian world breathless, forcing people to pronounce themselves either for or against monasticism. His writing found favorable acceptance among the semi-pagan atmosphere of Rome, now in the hand of a pagan emperor bent on re-establishing paganism.

The following are the four main theses of Jovinian:

1. The virgins, widows and married women, once they have been regenerated in Christ, if they remain faithful to this regeneration, will have the same merit.

⁷¹ "Ego probrosus, ego versipellis et lubricus, ego mendax et satanae arte decipiens." *Ibid.* 2, RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 314.

To see the attacks he was accused of read *Letter* 40, 2. 45, 1 ff. CAVALLERA, *op. cit.* I, p. 117; II. p. 86 ff.

2. Those who have been regenerated through baptism with complete faith cannot be overcome by the devil.
3. There is no distinction between abstention of meat and the use of it with thanksgiving.
4. All those who throughout their lives have remained faithful to their baptismal vows will obtain the same reward.⁷²

Rome became stirred up again by these revolutionary theses of Jovinian. Many people had recourse to Pope Siricius who condemned "the enemy of purity, fasting and abstinence, the master of debauchery".⁷³ Jovinian set out for Milan hoping to get Ambrose's support for his radical theses. But Jovinian missed the fact that Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, was not like Auxentius, the Arian bishop of the city at the time of Helvidius. Ambrose, one of the most noble bishops of the Church at that time, answered Pope Siricius that Jovinian has been expelled from his episcopal city. Perhaps Jovinian had too optimistically believed that given the partly abnormal relations between Rome and Milan he would be accepted there. He squarely erred.⁷⁴

Jerome had to be notified of this black cloud hovering dangerously over the Christian world. Its effects would be incalculable if nobody of an intellectual caliber came to the defense of the threatened monasticism. And indeed he was notified by some zealous Romans and friends, worried over the somewhat favourable acceptance dispensed to Jovinian's pamphlet. The problem was no doubt very serious and grave. In a moment he called his secretary and answered with his *Adversus Jovinianum*.⁷⁵ In the opinion of many writers, this is the best defense of Jerome

⁷² Cfr. BROCHET, *op. cit.*, p. 64 & ff.; GEORGES GOVAU, *Santa Melania*, Rome, 1909, p. 36. *Adversus Jovinianum*, I. 3. PL 23, 214.

⁷³ SIRICIUS, *Letter* 7, PL 13, 1168-1173. We can also see for this question Jerome's Letters 48, 49 & 50.

⁷⁴ AMBROSE, *Letter* 42, 12-13-14. PL. 16, 1128 "Itaque Jovinianum, Auxentium... quos sanctitas tua damnavit, scias apud nos quoque secundum iudicium tuum esse damnatos."

⁷⁵ "Pauci admodum dies sunt, quod sancti ex urbe Roma fratres cuiusdam mihi Joviniani Commentariolos transmiserunt, rogantes, ut eorum ineptiis responderem, et Epicurum Christianorum, Evangelico atque apostolico vigore conterrerem." *Adv. Jov.* PL 23, 211.

⁷⁶ *Adversus Jovinianum*, PL 23, 211-236. *Letter* 50, 3-4 RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 373-381

in favour of monasticism.⁷⁷ Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* opened a real pandora box. The scholarly answer of the monk of Bethlehem only served to spread the fire of the controversy even more. Jerome seemed to favor virginity so much that marriage appeared as something evil. The world was shocked. His *Adversus Jovinianum* caused a scandal in Rome and in the Christian world. Jerome had written:

"Woman is classed among the greatest evils... The man who marries a woman does not know whether she is going to be charming or detestable. In the second case, it is difficult to endure her. In the first, the love I feel for her is likened to hell, to dry ground and to a fire".⁷⁸

Jerome's answer to Jovinian was rather harsh for many, for too many of its readers in fact. This forced some of his good friends in Rome, especially the senator Pammachius, who for some years had kept themselves apart from Jerome, to withdraw from circulation Jerome's writing against Jovinian. He tried to justify his doctrine with profuse quotations from Holy Scripture, especially St. Paul's *I Letter to the Corinthians*.⁷⁹ The Apostle, according to Jerome, authorizes marriage as a lesser evil, as a tolerance for weak souls.⁸⁰ Consequently, then, this Epicurus of the Christians had arrived a little too late. It would be better to leave him with children and women.⁸¹ Jerome tells Jovinian that the reason for his seeming success depends on the desire for pleasure people have.⁸²

Moderation was not one of Jerome's natural virtues. Hence, it was very difficult for him to explain all the points he was accused of, more so now since many of the opponents of monas-

⁷⁷ Cfr. PENNA, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

⁷⁸ J. STEINMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

⁷⁹ Letter 54, 18. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 467.

⁸⁰ "Si bonum est mulierem non tangere, malum est ergo tangere: nihil enim bono contrarium est, nisi malum". *Adv. Jov.* I, 7. PL 23, 218. Also, following the Apostle, he adds: "Melius est nubere quam uri: ideo melius est nubere quam peius est uri. *Ibid.*, I, p. 9.

⁸¹ "Nunc restat ut Epicurum nostrum subantem in horticulis suis inter adolescentulos et mulerculae, alloquamur". *Ibid.* II, 36. PL 23, 333-334.

⁸² "Quod multi acquiescent sententiae tuae, iudicium voluptatis est: non enim tam te loquentem probant quam suis favent vitiis." *Ibid.* Cfr. also BROCHET, *op. cit.*; p. 64.

ticism came from the intellectual circles of Christianity.⁸³ The problem was further aggravated by Jerome's recourse to Tertullian's doctrine on virginity rather than to the Fathers of the Church. He answers his critics in his *Apologeticum ad Pammachium* — letter 49. Here marriage is subordinated to virginity, without condemning it. This necessary and essential distinction is enough to separate him from Tertullian.⁸⁴

Many of the accusations were answered by him when he wrote to Pammachius:

"It is said by people that it is a kind of condemnation of marriage to praise virginity so much that it appears that there is no possibility for comparison between the virgin and the married. If I rightly remember the problem, the contention between Jovinian and us lies in the fact that he equates virginity to matrimony while we subordinate marriage to virginity."⁸⁵

A great deal of Jerome's answer is dedicated to refute Jovinian's third thesis against abstinence. This is quite understandable for Jerome considered fasting very essential to the "monastic purpose". Writes a scholar of Jerome:

"Il monaco betlemita vedeva nell disprezzo del digiuno il rinnegamento della principale practica in uso presso l'antico monachesimo."⁸⁶

The monk is stronger when he fasts and praises God. "Ego dico quod genua eius ieiunio tunc maxime roboratur."⁸⁷

Jerome's polemic against Vigilantius

The cause of Helvidius and Jovinian found a late imitator in Vigilantius, a former friend of Jerome, and now

⁸³ Letter 49, 13. 13. RUIZ-BUENO I, p. 357, 361.

⁸⁴ Cfr. BROCHET, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁸⁵ Letter 49, 2. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 344.

⁸⁶ PENNA, *op. cit.* p. 187.

⁸⁷ G. MORIN, *Anecdota Maredsolana*, III, II, Maredsoli, 1897; *Tractatus de Psalmo CVIII*, p. 193. Jerome had given excellent advises to many people regarding fasting and abstinence. Vide Letter 22, 17: "Sint tibi sociae, quas videris quod ieiunia tenuant, quibus pallor in facie est, quas et aetas probavit et vita... Moderatus cibus et numquam venter repletus. Plurimae quippe sunt quae, cum vino sint sobriae, ciborum largitate sunt ebriae. Ad orationem tibi nocte surgente non indigestio ructum faciat, sed inanitas." RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 173.

turned an avowed enemy of monasticism. Less dangerous than Jovinian, Vigilantius' main doctrine was an apology of the married state and a bitter reproach against ecclesiastical celibacy. Another familiar reproach of Vigilantius, often repeated throughout history by opponents of monasticism and of priestly celibacy, was raised against the monks. They were considered deserters and cowards, afraid to valiantly face the social responsibilities of life, ending his writing with this anxious cry:

"Si omnes virgines fuerint, nuptiae non erunt; interibit genus humanum."⁸⁸

Jerome, in his answer to Vigilantius, explains what the monastic ideal means for the Church of God. Baptism invites and demands perfection from all Christians, but it does not prohibit one to choose the most difficult and, at the same time, the safest means to enable him to reach that Christian perfection demanded by Christ himself.⁸⁹

Vigilantius may rest assured of not being left alone in this world. The immense majority of people, by a basic law of nature, will find much easier, though less in accord with the teachings of the Gospel, the life of the world and, by force of a strange compromise, will find an easy solution.⁹⁰ There will always be people who like Vigilantius or rather "Dormitantius"⁹¹ — for it would be more fitting to call him thus — would be more ready to follow the most comfortable way of life. With keen insight Jerome tells Vigilantius:

"Rara est virtus nec a pluribus appetitur."⁹²

Vigilantius may sleep happily, unafraid of the world to come.

Jerome's answer is too violent, to the extent of being offensive, but he tries to justify his way of writing by saying that

⁸⁸ *Adversus Vigilantium*, 15, PL 23, 351.

⁸⁹ *St. Matthew* 19, 10-12; *St. Paul*, II Cor. 7, 25 & ff.

⁹⁰ Cfr. SCHUSTER, *Miscellanea Geronimiana*, p. 118.

⁹¹ Ais Vigilantium, qui *kat'antifrasin* hoc vocatur nomine (nam Dormitantius rectius diceretur) os fetidum rursus aperire, et putorem spurcissimum contra sanctorum martyrum proferre reliquias... O infelicem hominem, et omni lacrymarum fonte plangendum..." *Letter* 109, 1. RUIZ-II, p. 301. Jerome had written years before: "Sanctum Vigilantium presbyterum qua aviditate susceperim, melius est, ut ipsius verbis quam meis discas litteris". *Letter* 58, 11. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 517.

⁹² *Adv. Vigil.*, 15. PL 23, 351.

nothing is unjust when done for the love of God.⁹³ Yet, his reaction is too exaggerated, his answer set in a tone which seemed improper for a man who professed to follow Christ in the monastic life.⁹⁴ Jerome was a very dangerous enemy, not easily given to forgive his opponent, as Rufinus of Aquileia knew by sad experience.

Flight to the Holy Land

In the previous pages we have spoken about the "fuga mundi" as something essential to the ascetico-monastic life. The search for solitude is a special trait of the lovers of monasticism. They remembered Hoseas' saying:

"Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her."⁹⁵

This was interpreted by the proponents of the monastic ideal as a call to the soul to leave everything and tenderly embrace Christ. Solitude is also natural to the followers of the cenobitic life, for the *cenobium* is the house of God, wisely administered by prudent men.⁹⁶ Yet, what explanation can be given for this mass "fuga mundi" of Roman monasticism to Palestine? Was perhaps Palestine essential for the practice of monastic virtues?

The phenomenon, though common, assumes a primary importance in the history of Roman monasticism, so much so, that some of Jerome's contemporaries accused the Roman nuns and monks in Palestine of heresy, as they gave the impression that only in Palestine could a Christian reach the state of sanctity.⁹⁷ This phenomenon, as we have noticed, is common in the West and in the East. History has transmitted to us the famous pilgrimage of a Spanish virgin, called Etheria. She travelled to Palestine in the IV century, leaving behind her wonderful accounts about Palestinian monasticism and liturgical practices.

⁹³ "Non est crudelitas pro Deo pietas". *Letter* 109, 3. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 303.

⁹⁴ *Letter* 109, 1, RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 302.

⁹⁵ Hoseas, 2, 14

⁹⁶ Cfr. SCHUSTER, *Liber Sacramentorum*, vol. V. p. 21.

⁹⁷ *Letter* 46, 10. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 329.

From all regions of the world, even from Egypt, the motherland of monasticism people fled to Palestine. Let us see how Paula and Eustochius describe the place for us:

"Whoever in Gaul shines as first, here he comes running. The Briton far away from our world, hardly has he embraced Christianity, leaves the place where the sun sets and looks for this place which he knows by hearsay and through the Bible. Why should we mention the Armenians and Persians, the people of India and Ethiopia, and from neighboring Egypt, fertile land in monks, from Pontus and Cappadocia, from Celesyria and Mesopotamia and from all places of the East?"⁹⁸

And all this, why? In all places can we find martyrs and relics, Paula and Eustochius tell Marcela. Sanctity and holiness are possible anywhere in the world. In the city of Rome itself Christians found the holy Church, the trophies of the apostles and martyrs, the true confession of Christ and the faith as it was preached by the apostles. This, however, was not enough. In a big city like Rome, where paganism was widely prevalent, Christians found it very hard to live in peace, tranquility and silence, especially the aristocratic ladies.⁹⁹ In Palestine, on the contrary, all is silence, austerity, solitude and singing of psalms. Paula and Eustochius, writing this letter dictated by Jerome, did not seem to impress Marcela, less convince her to follow them to the Holy Land. The anxiously awaited messenger bringing the good news of Marcela's coming to Palestine did never arrive. She remained in the "suburban country house" up to her death in 410 during or just after the sack of Rome, due to the sufferings inflicted upon her by the savage fury of Alaric's hordes.¹⁰⁰

A deeper motivation than mere search for solitude has to be determined to explain this exodus to the holy places of Palestine. It is Paula herself, in her letter to Marcela, who solves the riddle for us:

⁹⁸ *Letter* 46, 12. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 330.

⁹⁹ "Sed ipsa ambitio, potentia, magnitudo urbis, videri et videre, salutare et salutare, laudare et detrahare, audire vel proloqui et tantam frequentiam hominum saltem invitum pati, a proposito monachorum et quiete aliena sunt". *Letter* 46, 12. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 332.

¹⁰⁰ *Letter* 127, 13 RUIZ-BUENO, II, pp. 639-640.

"In truth, if the glorious orator considers worthy of reprehension a certain person who learned the Greek letters not in Athens but in Lilibeum, and the Latin letters not in Rome, but in Sicily, as every province has something peculiar not to be found in any other, how could any man reach the summit of perfection without passing through our Athens"?¹⁰¹

The perfect place, then, for a Christian and for monks would be where Christ was born, lived, preached, suffered and died. The land sanctified by Christ is a "Holy Land". The Lord Jesus is the point of attraction for those eager souls who happily abandon their land, their families and luxurious houses and journeyed to Palestine in search of perfection and sanctity. These noble Roman nuns and monks did not, by their conduct, deny that God's kingdom is in the heart of men, especially in the hearts of holy people. "What we say, and this very emphatically, is that here are to be found the holiest of people."¹⁰²

Thus Palestine, with its many memories, traditions and solitary studies, became a school of Christian perfection and center of biblical studies. Paula and her daughter Eustochius came to Palestine searching for peace, silence and solitude. Were they successful? As we will see, the Origenist dispute wrenched the monastic world apart, and destroyed the external peace of those people who had been eagerly looking for it.

Jerome had abandoned Rome in 385, followed soon by Eustochius and Paula. The three of them, after some wanderings, settled down in Bethlehem in 386. But they first made a trip to Egypt, to study and to admire monasticism at its best. Jerome knew the monks already, but what was the impression left upon the neophyte Paula and her daughter Eustochius? All of them, most especially the two Roman ladies, were greatly strengthened in their monastic idea. As soon as they reached Bethlehem, the construction of two monasteries started, one for women and another for men with Paula and Jerome as superiors respectively.

The two monasteries were located at a certain distance from each other. The monastery of men was situated away from the

¹⁰¹ *Letter* 46, 9. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 329.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 10, RUIZ-BUENO, *Ibid.*

Basilica of Bethlehem, while Paula's monastery was close to it.¹⁰³ It is here where they will spend the remaining years of their lives, with some exception taken for occasional visits to Jerusalem. Each monastery had its own small chapel used for prayer and meditation. On Sunday, they assisted at the liturgical services of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, together with the people of the town and the clerics in charge of it.¹⁰⁴ The bishop of Jerusalem used to come a number of times during the year and preside at the ceremonies, being in the best of terms with the Latins. Jerome himself kept in contact with his friend Rufinus, whose monastery was built on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Melania the Elder, Rufinus' friend and spiritual daughter, lived close by under his spiritual guide. Rufinus and Melania had come to Palestine before Jerome and Paula. In fact, they welcomed the newcomers and, though separated from one another, were in friendly terms. Melania and Rufinus were respected and admired over the whole Roman world for their charity and generosity towards monks and pilgrims. In spite of these friendly relations, Jerome and Paula established themselves in the town of David, birth-place of Christ, exchanging contacts when the occasion called for.¹⁰⁵ How different it will be during the Origenist dispute. All would be hatred and furious attacks, tearing themselves down in vile writings, to the scandal of many monks who had settled down in Palestine. Perhaps due to this, Melania the Elder left Palestine and returned to Rome in 402,¹⁰⁶ fleeing from the fire of the controversy that was aflame in the hearts of Rufinus and Jerome, the two main protagonists in this dramatic fight.

While in Bethlehem, Jerome was in close contact with the world. New friends came under his radius of action and influence. In the city of Rome itself Fabiola, a rich and exceedingly beautiful noble woman, after a scandalous life in her youth, became a convert to the monastic ideal. She imitated Marcela and, as it was customary among many Roman nuns and monks, she set out for the Holy Land. It was here where she came into close contact with Jerome. For some time Fabiola listened to Jerome's lectures on the Bible in Bethlehem. She followed the monastic

¹⁰³ Cfr. CAVALLERA, *op. cit.*, I, p. 128.

¹⁰⁴ Letter 108, 20. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 280 & ff.

¹⁰⁵ Cfr. CAVALLERA, *op. cit.*, I, p. 129.

¹⁰⁶ RAMPOLLA, *op. cit.*, note I, pp. 93-98.

life in the town of David enjoying the company of Paula and Eustochius. All of them were eager and faithful listeners of Jerome's exegetical explanations.¹⁰⁷ She did not stay long with them, however, and due perhaps to the Origenist dispute, which according to Jerome had divided the monastic world, and no doubt disenchanted with what she saw there, left them shortly to return to Rome. Another reason that influenced her to leave Palestine was the danger of an invasion of the Barbarians. All of them, at a certain moment, had everything prepared to leave. In the end, the danger looming in the distance disappeared and Jerome, Paula and Eustochius continued in Palestine. But real peace was still a dream. Jerome testifies to this when he wrote: "The fight of the Barbarians was to small compared to the wars inside our own house."¹⁰⁸ This was Jerome's wailing lament over the state of affairs in Palestine. And how sad we are upon reading this lamentation of Jerome, a sadness that digs deep and claws the heart. The opponents were not enemies of Christianity. They were all fellow Christians and monks, perfectly orthodox in their doctrine, all of whom were followers of Jesus Christ.

Fabiola, upon her arrival at Rome, associated herself with the noble Pammachius. Of the highest nobility in Rome, Pammachius had been the first noble man to embrace the monastic life. Rufinus, feeling bitter against him for his part in the Origenist dispute, rebukes his insincere conduct, emphasizing the fact that, when all people were at odds with Jerome in Rome, during his dispute with Jovinian, Pammachius tried to withdraw from circulation Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*. On the contrary, very stealthily he got hold of Rufinus' notes on the *Peri-Archon* and sent them to Jerome in Bethlehem for his comments. Rufinus bitterly complains:

¹⁰⁷ "Unde repente et contra opinionem omnium Hierosolymam navigavit, ubi multorum excepta concursu, nostra parumper usa est hospitio; cuius societas recordans videor mihi adhuc videre quam vidi. Jesu bone, quo illa fervore, quo studio intenta erat divinis voluminibus! et veluti quandam famem satiare desiderans, per prophetas, evangelia, psalmosque currebat quaestiones proponens, et solutas recondens in kriniolo pectoris sui! Nec vero satiabatur audiendi cupidine, sed addens scientiam, addebat dolorem; et quasi oleum flammae adiceres, maiores ardoris fomenta capiebat... Illa [Fabiola], quia tota in sacris erat, et in omni orbe peregrina, reversa est ad patriam..." *Letter 77*, 7.8. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 727-729.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 729.

"Sed ad Orientem mitteret, et instiguaret linguam eius hominis qui eam temperare non noverat."¹⁰⁹

Fabiola and Pammachius gave themselves to the service of the poor, giving a sublime example of Christian charity, and as it was coming from so noble a people, the effects were felt among the people at large.¹¹⁰

Life in the monasteries at Bethlehem

What was the monastic life in Jerome's monastery at Bethlehem? What kind of monastic life did Paula and Eustochius lead in their monastery? These are very important questions and, though briefly, we should try to provide an answer.

In spite of the many disputes in which Jerome was continually involved, he found time, ample time indeed, for the practice of the monastic ideal. He, as head and superior of the monastery, exhorts his monks to remain staunch along the path they have chosen. His many letters are an excellent indication of his involvement in the religious life and problems affecting the Church of his time, but do not allow us to follow him in detail in his monastic life. We can follow, however, a great deal of his daily routine. G. Morin,¹¹¹ a Benedictine scholar of international renown, has enabled us to see Jerome at work in his monastery, preaching to his monks, lecturing to them on the Bible, most especially the Psalms used in their daily divine office, and in the liturgical services.¹¹²

Jerome advises, as a good master and a man of sound spirituality, familiar with contemplation and interior life, the detachment from the world, poverty, flight from perishable things. In one word: he stressed contemplation and the union with God.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ RUFINUS, *Apol.* II, 44, PL 21, 620.

¹¹⁰ "Quin potius omnem censum, quem habere poterat (erat autem amplissimus, et respondens generi eius), dilapidavit et vendidit, et in pecunia congregatum, usibus pauperum prae paravit; et prima *nosokómion* instituit, in quo aegrotantes collegeret de plateis, et consumpta languoribus atque inedia miserorum membra refoveret". *Letter* 77, 6. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 725.

¹¹¹ G. MORIN, *Anecdota Maredsolana*, III, II, Maredsous, 1897; III, III, Maredsous 1903.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, III, III, 1 & ff.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, *Les monuments de la prédication de Saint Jérôme*, 1896, en *Etudes, textes et découvertes*, I, 1913, pp. 220-293, CAVALLERA, *op. cit.*, I, p. 186.

Paula, for her part, followed her own way of life in her monastery at Bethlehem, never escaping Jerome's watchful eye. Jerome himself, in his excellent *Letter 66 to Pammachius* deals with the nature of life the holy Paula, Eustochius and the rest of the nuns led in the solitude of Christ's birthplace. In Paula's monastery nuns from all parts of the world could be found, drawn to Bethlehem by the fame of her sanctity and her exemplary life. Living poorly, clad in rough woolen clothes, busy in the most humble tasks of the convent, Paula and her daughter Eustochius, belonging to the high aristocracy of ancient Rome, found happiness, the happiness that always escaped them while living in the world.¹¹⁴

It was not only material tasks that kept them busy, for paramount in their minds was the spiritual formation of the large number of virgins living with them in the monastery. Once again, Jerome becomes our guide, leading us to Paula's monastery, taking us inside the walls of the monastery to examine, with our own eyes, the daily schedule of the monastic life of Paula's nuns. The letter 108, also called "Paula's Epitaph", written by Jerome after Paula's death in 404 in her own monastery at Bethlehem, meticulously describes for us what life they led. In her monastery, following the Pachomian system, the virgins were divided into three groups, according to their social status: nobles, servants and those belonging to the lower classes of society, with their respective houses and superiors. Their manual occupation was the confection of habits of any kind of dress, for the nuns and for Jerome's own monks. The liturgical prayer, matins, terce, sexte, none, vespers and the study of the Holy Bible filled their time, thus leaving no time for idleness. Life in the monastery was hard, severe, never taking meat or wine unless in times of sickness. Everybody used the same kind of habit made of wool, but Paula, who was a Roman, tempered everything in a Roman way, balancing a life of severity with a life of sweetness.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ "Nunc sorditate et lugubres et sui comparatione forticulae, vel, lucernas concinnant vel succendeunt focum, pavimenta verrunt, mundant legumina, holerum fasciculos in ferventem ollam decidunt, adponunt mensas, calice huc illucque discurrunt. Et certe magnus virginum chorus cum illis habitat". *Letter 66*, 13. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 631-632.

¹¹⁵ *Letter 108*, 20. 21. RUIZ-BUENO, II, pp. 280 & ff.

Paula's way of life, the internal organization of her monastery had one inspiration: Jerome. His influence was continuous, beneficial and, after some years, quite indispensable.

The monastic world at war

At this stage, it is necessary to deal with the Origenist dispute and show how the monastic world and, in a special way, Roman monasticism became involved whether willingly or unwillingly in a senseless dispute. Jerome saw everything in black and white. He and Rufinus were the main protagonists of the senseless dispute. Jerome had written to Rufinus from Antioch in his young years:

"How deeply would I embrace you, placing my arms round your neck; what kisses would I impress upon that mouth that before with me erred or with me was dis-creet."¹¹⁶

To end this letter with something similar to a tragic foreboding: "The friendship that comes to an end has never been true friendship."¹¹⁷ This eternal friendship that Jerome had promised Rufinus came to an end to be substituted by an unchristian controversy lasting till Rufinus' death in Africa in 410, a refugee from the savage horror of Alaric's soldiers. As pilgrim and monk, Rufinus had travelled far and wide in the East, finally settling down in Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, where in 378, together with Melania the Elder they founded two monasteries, one for men and another for women. And this much before Jerome! Jerome must have visited the two Latin monasteries, previous to his final settlement at the monastic establishment with Paula in Bethlehem. By the time Jerome arrived in the Holy Land in 385, Rufinus and Melania's fame had reached all the corners of the Roman world. Rufinus was an admired and respected man, even by bishops, having become a consultor to John, bishop of Jerusalem.¹¹⁸ Alas, things have greatly changed! Rufinus and Melania helped each other during the Origenist controversy in this war of monks against the furious attacks of the lion of Bethlehem. The Roman world,

¹¹⁶ Letter 3, 1, RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 43.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6, RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 48.

¹¹⁸ Cfr. J. STEINMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

the world of Roman monasticism, was bitterly divided, and the poor simple virgins found themselves in the thick of the battle where nobody remained unscathed. Those who expected peace and solitude found instead a cup full of envy and hatred.

Palladius speaks of Paula in his *The Lausiatic History*. She was a woman, he tells us, of great sanctity who had but one obstacle in her mystical ascent towards God: a certain Jerome. Due to the envy of this man, she did not reach, like a royal eagle, the summit of perfection and sanctity.¹¹⁹ His admiration for Paula is great, emphasizing, on the other hand, Jerome's envy as the main obstacle for Paula's holiness of life. Palladius continues with an amusing story.¹²⁰ According to him, Paula confided to some people who visited her that she anxiously waited for death to be finally liberated from Jerome's obnoxious influence. Palladius is forced to admit, however, Jerome's natural qualities. Palladius must have visited Bethlehem around the years 386-388. Thus he may have known Paula as superior of her monastery. What we cannot understand is Jerome's envy towards Paula. On the contrary, there are innumerable extant proofs of Jerome's profound concern for Paula and her daughter Eustochius. A cursory reading of the Letter 108, Jerome's funeral oration in honor of Paula, will convince us of Palladius' baseless accusations.

If Palladius attacked Jerome, the latter, on the other hand attacked other people. The world of monks was at war. Rufinus of Aquileia and Melania Antonia, the inseparable friends, are the main target of Jerome's venomous arrows.

As we have seen, Jerome had promised perpetual friendship to Rufinus. When the fire of the Origenist controversy started raging throughout the monastic world, he forgot that promise and changed altogether his attitude towards Rufinus. A similar change occurs in Jerome in his relation with Melania the Elder. Before the controversy, Jerome had written her: "The holy matron Melania, true among the Christians of our time, with whom may the Lord give us to have part in his

¹¹⁹ PALLADIUS, *The Lausiatic History*, 41. Ed. MEYER, p. 118.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36. MEYER, pp. 104-105.

day...".¹²¹ After some years, in the midst of this war of monks, Melania is no longer the holy matron, admirable for her virtue and sanctity of life. She has turned into an unbearable woman, black in her soul, thus coinciding with her name 'Melania' which in Greek means "black".¹²²

The poor Rufinus neither receives a better treatment, as he was Jerome's enemy number one. After so many years of holy association with Melania Antonia, Rufinus receives under his spiritual protection Melania the Younger, the grand-daughter of Melania Antonia, together with her husband Pinianus. They retire to their possessions in Sicily. With them, Rufinus ends his days in the peace of the Lord. At this moment, it is not the "eternal friend" who parts away to God but "Scorpiusque inter Enceladum and Porphyriionem Trinacriae humo premitur, et Hydra multorum capitum contra nos aliquando cessavit".¹²³ This is Jerome's unchristian eulogy of Rufinus, the "eternal friend" of his youth. Palladius, in his *The Lausiatic History*, said of Rufinus that he had been "a strong man, lately considered worthy of the priesthood, learned and reasonable like none other."¹²⁴ In Rome, people declared themselves for Jerome, especially Marcella who was Jerome's confidant since his early days in Rome. If we are to believe him, she turned against all the heretics, especially Rufinus.¹²⁵

Both sides in this war went to incredible extremes in their attacks. In the long analysis, many of them ended up being uncharitable, beyond any reasonable justification for their way of behaving. Not even at the point of death, when usually enemies forget their passions and petty quarrels, did Jerome utter

¹²¹ Letter 39, 5. RUIZ-BUENO, I. pp. 292-293. Letter 45, 4. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 315.

¹²² "Evagrius Ponticus Hiberita, qui scribit ad virgines, scribit ad monachos, scribit ad eam, cuius nomen nigredinis testatur perfidiae tenebras..." Letter 133, 3. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 740.

¹²³ St. Jerome, *In Ezechiel*, I, I. PL. 25, 16-17. Cfr. Letter 127, 9. RUIZ-BUENO, pp. 635-636.

¹²⁴ PALLADIUS, *The Lausiatic History*, 46. MEYER, p. 124.

¹²⁵ Letter 127, 9. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 635-636. "Tunc santa Marcella... postquam sensit fidem apostolico ore laudatam in plerisque violari, ita ut sacerdotes quoque et nonnullos (hereticos) ac simplicitati includeret episcopi, qui de suo ingenio ceteros aestimabat, publica restitit malens Deo placere quam hominibus."

a kind word for Rufinus. At the height of their dispute, all of them seem to have ignored an essential virtue required of monks and Christians alike: charity. No dogma of the Church was at stake, nor was any pagan to be overcome. Not only Palladius was in need of divine mercy.¹²⁶ All of them in equal measure had need of it. Human passions prevailed in the controversy rather than reason and charity.

From Rufinus's own pen, a man less militant and more peaceful than Jerome, came out bitter words of reproach against his old friend, especially Jerome's booklet, *Libellus de Virginitate Servanda* (letter 22 to Eustochius), written just before Jerome's flight from Rome in 385. It encases bitter criticism and harsh words, unworthy of a Christian. Thus Rufinus writes:

"Libellum quendam de conservanda virginitate Romae positus scripsit, quem libellum omnes pagani et inimici Dei apostate persecutores et quicumque sunt, qui certatim sibi describebant, pro eo quod omnem ibi Christianorum ordinem, omnem gradum, omnem professionem, universamque pariter foedissimis exprobrationibus infamavit ecclesiam: et ea crimina quae gentiles falso in nos conferre putabantur, iste vera esse, immo multo peiora a nostris fieri, quam illi criminabantur adseruit".¹²⁷

And he adds a little later: "Alia quoque ingerit obscena quam plurima."¹²⁸ Jerome's letter 22, however, is considered by spiritual writers as a jewel of Christian ascetism, the best of the many that came out of Jerome's elegant pen.

The great dispute on Origenism caused nothing positive to eastern or western monasticism. To the astonishment of many, the monastic world, with so many enemies from without, was discrediting itself by its own works. What kind of life awaited those who had joined the ranks of monasticism and who were searching for silence, peace and solitude? Jerome himself was unable to find the monastic peace he was always looking for. It has become a grave scandal in the history of the Church and of

¹²⁶ "Palladium vero Galatam, qui quondam carus nobis fuit et nunc misericordia Dei indiget, cave quia Originis heresem praedicat et docet, ne forte aliquos de populo tibi credito ad perversitatem sui inducat erroris". Letter 51, 9. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 403.

¹²⁷ RUFINUS, *Apol II*, 5. PL 21, 587.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

monasticism in particular to witness the spectacle of bishops and monks tearing each other down to pieces on account of some petty doctrinal questions yet too significant and important in the eyes of the protagonists themselves. The enemies of monasticism would happily smile, for there was no need for them to intervene. Monasticism was digging its own grave. What is perhaps worse is that persons, with their letters and advices enkindled the fire of the controversy, pushing the protagonists right into the middle of the arena. It was difficult for one to sit on the fence, or to adopt a position of wait and see. People had to declare themselves which side they supported.¹²⁹ It was a veritable ecclesiastical civil war which came to an end with the death of its main protagonists.

Penna, resuming the whole dispute, tells us that some of Jerome's friends, by their way of acting, behaved in a most reprehensible manner:

"Gli amici di Girolamo, i quali agirono in maniera tutt' altro che encomiabile. Fra questi bisogna annoverare Marcella, Principia, Pammachio, Oceano, Eusebio ed il fratello di Girolamo, Paoliniano."¹³⁰

Monastic life at Rome

How was monastic life at Rome during the last quarter of the IV century? Distracted by the disputes on Origenism, we may have lost sight of the manner how the monastic ideal was practiced at Rome by Jerome's friends. In spite of the many difficulties both external and internal, monasticism continued a slow but steady growth. During the last quarter of the IV century and the first of the V century, Roman monasticism begins to grow by leaps and bounds. We have seen Jerome's beneficial influence on Roman monasticism both in Rome and in Palestine. Soon we will return back to him.

Let us see how Augustine, newly converted to Christianity, gives his own account of Roman monasticism towards 388-389:

"Romae etiam plura — diversoria — cognovi in quibus singuli gravitate atque prudentia et divina scientia proe-

¹²⁹ *Letter* 118, 10. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 636.

¹³⁰ PENNA, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

pollentes, coeteros secum habitantibus praesent, christiana charitate et libertate viventibus."¹³¹

From the above-quoted passage we can conclude that the life Augustine is writing about was widespread not only in Rome but even in towns far away from Rome. It seemed to be a most admirable kind of life, worthy of imitation by all people. The communal character of these so-called "diversoria"¹³² is evident, both on account of the number of people living in them and the presbyter presiding over them. He leads them in the ways of God through monasticism. People in these "diversoria" led a life of penance, self-denial and true Christian love. True community life, then, existed in many towns and cities not far away from Rome.

Yet, at this stage, a grave difficulty can be raised against us. And it is this: a patent contradiction seems to exist between the above-mentioned passages from St. Augustine and the following passage from Jerome's letter to Eustochius:

"The third kind (of monks) is the so-called "remnuoth", the most detestable and despicable, and the only one or the first to be found in our province."¹³³

In order to resolve this difficulty we have to take a number of things into consideration. We must never lose sight of the fact that Jerome's letter was written in Rome, most probably in 384, thus making him an ocular witness of Roman monasticism. The conclusion gathered is based on the fact that monasticism, still in its infancy, has not yet managed to rise high enough from its base.

How can we harmonize these two seemingly opposite statements? Jerome's letter was written just 4 or 5 years before Augustine's episode. In so short a time, how could such a radical change have taken place? It sounds quite unbelievable. Jerome had, or at least was in a better position to have, a more accurate knowledge of the state of Roman monasticism, than Augustine. The latter saw everything under the eyes of a neophyte. His

¹³¹ ST. AUGUSTINE, *De Mor. Eccl. Cath.* I, 70, PL 32, 1340.

¹³² Cfr. DU CANGE, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, III, 151.

¹³³ Letter 22, 34. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 196.

stay at Rome was too short to allow him a perfect evaluation of the state of things regarding monasticism. Most of the things Augustine knew came from hearsay.¹³⁴ Jerome, on the other hand, is a main protagonist of Roman monasticism at the period we are writing about. He is the backbone of the monastic movement in Rome during his stay there.

Yet, no doubt, quite a change seems to have taken place in the short span of 14 or 15 years since Jerome left Rome. If we are going to believe Jerome's own testimony to Pammachius, Roman monasticism has grown by leaps and bounds in a matter of years:

"In our own days" — he writes — "Rome possesses what the world lacked before. Before, few were wise and powerful among the Christian nobles. Now the wise, powerful and noble monks are innumerable."¹³⁵

At the time of this writing Jerome found himself in Palestine. His knowledge of Roman monasticism cannot be classified anymore as of first hand, inspite of his almost continual communication with Rome. What we must not lose sight of, however, in approaching this problem, is the character of Jerome's letter to Pammachius. From the very beginning we can detect a laudatory tone in Jerome's letter. Pammachius, a man of the highest nobility, going back to the most glorious names in Roman history, a senator, a man of immense wealth, had embraced the monastic way of life. The friend of his youth, fellow-student under Donatus in Rome, had said goodbye to a most brilliant political career and had consecrated himself to Christ. Carried away by the good news of Pammachius' change of life and his dedication to the monastic ideal, Jerome exaggerates the state of Roman monasticism. Hence the rosy picture he draws of monasticism in Rome.

During the period we are dealing with and regarding religious women, their number was always greater than that of men. For some years already the Roman ladies answered with zeal the call for monasticism. A reading of Jerome's *Letters* and Palla-

¹³⁴ Cfr. GORDINI, *op. cit.* p. 240.

¹³⁵ *Letter* 66, 4. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 622.

dius' *The Lausiac History* will confirm this view. It does not mean, however, that the number of monks at Rome was insignificant or even small. What we can conclude from Jerome's letter 66 to Eustochius, written in 384, is that he is writing as a polemist. As a polemist, then, he is at war with some kind of monks, most especially the so-called "remnuoth". It seems that Jerome bore a grudge against this particular kind of monks, and this most probably due to their extravagant way of life, and even at times, a most scandalous life.

The number of monks in Rome was always sizable, though never could they equal the number of nuns. Yet, there is another reason for this seeming preponderance of nuns over monks. Many women belonged to the Roman nobility. They were extremely beautiful, highly intelligent, with everything at their disposal the world could offer. This being so, their dedication to the monastic purpose astounded their contemporaries and stole the show from the monks. The glory of the monks, in the eyes of the spectators of monasticism, paled in comparison to the life of those Roman matrons. In order to have an exact picture of Roman monasticism, at the time we are studying, it is of paramount importance to keep in our minds these psychological and historical facts. Many other Romans became monks and nuns, but as they did not belong to the nobility, history had not registered their names. It cannot be denied that the number of monks was very numerous in Rome at the end of the IV century, so much so that Pope Siricius, the enemy of Jerome, was forced to regulate their activities in the city, prohibiting them to be ordained as priests. Such prohibition was due to the scandals of their vagabond and irregular lives.¹³⁶

This is further confirmed by Jerome himself in his letter 127, of 412:

"For a long time you have lived in a very exemplary manner. Due to your example and to your love for monasticism, we rejoice here in Palestine at the knowledge that Rome had become a new Jerusalem. Everywhere monasteries were to be seen and the swarms of monks could not be counted."¹³⁷

¹³⁶ SIRICUS, *Letter* 1, 6.7. PL 13, 1137-1182. ST. JEROME, *Letter* 22, 34. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 196-197.

¹³⁷ *Letter* 127, 8. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 635.

Here is surely another rhetorical way of writing. Jerome exaggerates, no doubt, but it is also indubitable that a radical and a tremendous change has taken place both in the attitude and the progress of monasticism at Rome. Augustine's testimony, then, does not contradict Jerome's own testimony, but rather complements it. Both Fathers picture Roman monasticism at its beginnings, hardly approximating the perfection and organization of Eastern monasticism.¹³⁸ Alaric's invasion of Italy and sack of Rome in 410 endangered not only the virginity and life of the nuns living in their "country monasteries", but also the very existence of monastic life in Rome. The danger, however, soon passed away. Everything returned to its primeval state and later Roman monasticism finds itself firmly established upon solid foundations.¹³⁹

Roman monasticism received a great boost, thanks to the examples of Melania the Elder, grandmother of Melania the Younger. The famous friend of Rufinus, after many years of monastic life in Palestine left the Holy Land and returned to Rome.¹⁴⁰ It was a triumphal coming back to the city that saw her part away many years before. In 402 she enters Rome, a living legend to all lovers of monasticism. Her granddaughter is strengthened in her decision to embrace monasticism. Melania Antonia's sojourn in Rome, though short in duration, was a milestone, a capital event in the history of Roman monasticism. Roman Christian society held its breath at seeing for the first time, the noble woman, full of monastic experience, who many years before had abandoned her family, her wealth and, as a humble pilgrim, had set out for Palestine in search of solitude and sanctity of life. All lovers of monasticism saw in that return an epoch-making event. And indeed it was. Through Melania Antonia's example and preaching, many sold everything they had, turned away from a life of pleasure and comfort and committed themselves entirely to monasticism.

Palladius, in his *The Lausiack History*, after giving us an admirable panegyric of Melania the Elder, tells us of her activities and way of life in the city. Day in and day out she insisted on

¹³⁸ GORDINI, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

¹³⁹ *Letter* 127, 12-13, RUIZ-BUENO, II. pp. 638-639.

¹⁴⁰ RAMPOLLA, *op. cit.*, Note I, pp. 93-98.

the need for the Romans to change their lives, on the shortness and caducity of earthly things, the nearness of death, the fleetingness of the things of the world. Her opponents, Palladius continues, were many, most of them coming from the nobility, especially senators and their wives. They received from Palladius the common appellation of "beasts".¹⁴¹ At the end of his story on Melania Antonia he says these revealing words: "Having freed all those, she oriented them towards the monastic life."¹⁴²

We do not know what way of life these people adopted, where they retired, but the sentence is full of meaning because they were "oriented towards the monastic life". But Melania Antonia was unable to convince her own son Publicola to embrace monasticism. He even denied permission to his daughter, Melania the Younger, to follow the monastic ideal. Only his death, that occurred a few years later, allowed her full freedom to follow the monastic vocation.

Melania the Younger belonged to the noble family of the Valerii. Her wealth found no comparison in any part of the Roman world.¹⁴³ Her possessions, estates, villas and palaces were to be found in all regions of the Roman empire. Married to the noble Pinianus, Melania the Younger slowly induced her husband to give up her married life and by mutual consent followed together the monastic life. Pinianus, used as he was to the good life of the world, mildly resisted her, but convinced by her entreaties and arguments, finally gave way at the end. The two consecrated themselves to Christ, following a life of penance and mortification. Slowly they started to sell their possessions. As they were so rich it was not easy to dispose of so much wealth in a short period of time.

The adhesion of these people to monasticism had a profound influence upon Roman monasticism. It was a sublime example of Christian detachment and self-denial. Coming as it did from so noble and rich a family, it left the Romans dumbfounded and bewildered. On the other hand, the money was placed at the service of monks and virgins, thus assuring the

¹⁴¹ PALLADIUS, *The Lausiack History*, 54. MEYER, 134-136.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁴³ RAMPOLLA, *op. cit.*, Note XVII, p. 176-180.

financial needs of the monastic movement. Palladius took upon himself the task of retelling the immense benefits Christianity at large, and monasticism in particular, received from this nun and her "brother" Pinianus.¹⁴⁴

Melania the Younger's house was soon converted into a "family" monastery, where the couple, together with their servants and slaves practiced, as far as this was possible, the monastic way of life. As the famous Marcella had done before, Melania, after some time, abandoned her house and withdrew to her country-house where a more strict monastic life could be observed. In her "asceterium", penance, mortification, common life was practiced by her and her slaves who thus became her "sisters" in Christ. They wore a common habit, without ornaments. They fasted often, leading a life of solitude and silence. As it was common to Roman monasticism, the study of the Holy Bible occupied a lot of their time. Melania the Younger's husband, Pinianus, gathered his own servants round him and together they spent the time in cultivating his orchards and in spiritual conferences.¹⁴⁵

Melania and Pinianus, after spending some time with their relative Paulinus of Nola, left for their possessions in Sicily. In the company of their friend Rufinus of Aquileia they retired there, fleeing from the danger of the Visigoths at that time ravaging Northern Italy and Rome.

The couple proceeded on to Northern Africa where they founded two monasteries, one for men and the other for women. It seems that many people joined them. This is quite believable, as most of the monks and nuns came from a humble past.¹⁴⁶ After some time, they left for the Holy Land where they finally settled down.

What was the relationship between Melania the Younger and her husband Pinianus with St. Jerome? As we know, Jerome was a bitter enemy of their grandmother Melania Antonia. Very little information has come down to us to give us light in this respect. Of the many letters that Jerome wrote throughout his

¹⁴⁴ PALLADIUS, *The Lausiaca History*, 61. Ed. MEYER, pp. 142-143.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ ST. AUGUSTINE, *De opere monachorum* 22, 26 PL 40. 568.

life none is addressed to this couple, famous over the whole Roman world. This would sound strange if we were not to know how they had associated themselves with Rufinus, the greatest enemy of Jerome, how tenderly and charitably they had looked after him, how they accepted him in their possessions in Sicily. There, in their own house, he died. Rufinus had been, in Jerome's opinion, the venomous scorpion, the viper that supported the heretical doctrines of Origin. Rufinus' capital sin had been the translation into Latin of Origin's *Peri Archon*. Melania Antonia, their grandmother, had been publicly insulted and detested by Jerome.

Yet, in spite of all these difficulties and problems Pinianus and Melania the Younger are mentioned by name in Jerome's letter 144. There they are called holy children.¹⁴⁷ They were not afraid to place themselves under the direction of Jerome. Enlightened by his scriptural knowledge, the Roman couple spent their monastic lives in Bethlehem, under the spiritual guidance of Jerome, deepening their study of the Holy Scripture.¹⁴⁸

Cassian and Roman monasticism

Roman monasticism also gained positive influence from many illustrious monks who, for diverse reasons, visited the eternal city at different times during the second half of the IV century and the first quarter of the V century. We have come to know, in the process of our study, how St. Athanasius, the great defender of orthodoxy against the Arian heresy, and his brother Peter came to Rome, though at different times. Athanasius is considered as the founder of Roman monasticism, though the practice of the "monastic purpose" in Rome was in existence before he came to the city. Yet, as most of the persons following the monastic way of life before Athanasius' arrival in Rome belonged to the lower strata of society their lives have remained unknown. History has not registered their names.

Some other famous monks, as illustrious as Athanasius, came from the East and sojourned in the eternal city for some time.

¹⁴⁷ ST. JEROME, *Letter 144*, 2. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 787.

¹⁴⁸ About the liturgy on the monasteries of Melania vide DOM CABROL, *Etude sur la Peregrinatio Silviae, Les Eglises de Jerusalem, la discipline et la liturgie au IV siècle*, Paris, 1895, p. 445. RAMPOLLA, *op. cit.*, p. 260 & ff.

One of them, of whom we have also made mention, is Palladius, the author of the famous *The Lausiack History*. In this history mention is made of Jerome's friends and enemies. Jerome is pictured as an envious man, exercising a negative influence upon Roman monasticism. In 404, as a defender of St. John Chrysostom (d. 407), Palladius set foot on Rome. Here he came into contact with many important people, among them Toxocius, son of Paula and brother of Eustochius. In his *The Lausiack History* a whole chapter is dedicated to the Roman virgin Asela. "During my visit in Rome I also saw the virgin Asela, of advanced age, living in her own monastery. Extraordinary by her humility, she always lived in her convent."¹⁴⁹

In his last Roman letter, just before embarking for the East in 385, Jerome had written a quick note to Asela in which she was called "example of purity and virginity".¹⁵⁰ Palladius influence upon Roman monasticism must have been great. Nobody apart from Rufinus did influence Melania the Elder more than Palladius. As a faithful disciple of St. John Chrysostom, whose defender at Rome he was, Palladius must have spoken to those eager souls of the love of the poor and the grave obligation the rich have to take care of their "poor brothers". This theme on poverty is one of the outstanding topics dealt with by St. John Chrysostom in his sermons.

Most famous for the history of monasticism in general, though not for Roman monasticism, is the great John Cassian. This famous monk visited Rome in 405. Born in Scythia, Cassian had spent ten years among the anchorites in Egypt, having received a solid monastic education in Bethlehem. Nobody knew Oriental monasticism better than Cassian did.¹⁵¹ During his stay in Rome, Cassian was befriended by Leo,¹⁵² future pope, younger than Cassian himself. How long did he stay in Rome? We do not know, but towards the year 410 he leaves Italy, perhaps due to the insecurity and danger brought by Alaric's invasion of Italy and the terrible sack of Rome. His name has become immortal in the annals of Western monasticism, above all for his writings.

¹⁴⁹ PALLADIUS, *The Lausiack History*, 41, 4. MEYER, p. 118.

¹⁵⁰ Letter 45, 1. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 313.

¹⁵¹ O. CHADWICH, *John Cassian, A study in primitive monasticism*, Cambridge, 1950.

¹⁵² PL. 54, 59.

Cassian left no special monastic rule whereby monks could regulate their lives, but in his writings he left clear and practical norms for the monks. They were to serve as basis for a perfect monastic life. After some time in Gaul, Cassian established two monasteries in Marseilles, one for men and the other for women. These two monasteries became, in a short time, centers of monastic life for the rest of the West. Cassian is the bridge spanning Eastern and Western monasticism. His two main works, *De Institutis Coenobiorum* and his *Collationes Patrum*, exercised an immeasurable influence upon Western monasticism. How much and in what way did Cassian influence Roman monasticism during his brief stay in Rome? We do not really know.

All these illustrious monks, chance visitors to Rome, gave inspiration and life to Roman monasticism, always open to any influence, most especially from the East. But it is Jerome's influence that remained the deepest and most lasting. His merit rests in having proposed the monastic ideal in an unequivocal manner, as the most perfect and the surest way to sanctity and the attainment of the perfect love of Christ. Indeed, for Jerome the real successor to the early Christian martyr is the monk, so much so that he never wanted to exercise his ministry as a priest in order not to lose his freedom to follow the monastic ideal.

CONCLUSION

We have practically come to the end of our study of Roman Monasticism. A number of observations can be made before we close it. We cannot see in Roman monasticism a perfectly regulated monastic life. The monks and the nuns are not bound together by any particular rule. This will come later on. The principal fact we can gather is its renunciation of marriage, the perfect observance of chastity and the imitation of Christ the virgin through the following of perpetual virginity. The rest were accidental. Some adherents sold everything, distributed it to the poor and lived practically as mendicants. Others kept a portion of their possessions to sustain their own personal needs. Others kept everything they had.

St. Jerome, with his writings, his exemplary life of total detachment and absolute renunciation of worldly possessions,

exercised a powerful influence upon many, inducing them to give up all they had for the love of Christ. Poverty, renunciation, detachment from worldly possessions were considered by Jerome essential virtues for the monk. A monk is supposed to live less comfortably than the rest of the Christians, show more piety, embrace poverty, lead a virginal life. All these Jerome forcefully and clearly proposed to the Roman nuns and monks who had embraced the monastic life. There seems to be no extant and clear legislation regulating the whole life of the Roman monks and nuns.¹⁵³

As a way of conclusion, what can be said about solitude is that it is an essential virtue for the monk. He has to live away from the world, from the noise and hectic life of the city. Yet Jerome did not recommend the anchoritic life anymore. He preferred the cenobitic life. In this respect, a radical change had been effected in him and by him. In his letter to Heliodorus he had written:

"O desert where the flowers of Christ grow in abundance! O solitude in which, according to the Apocalypse (21: 28-21) those stones out of which the city of the great king is built are to be found! O wilderness full of God's familiarity".¹⁵⁴

Jerome's letter to Heliodorus, a first-class panegyric of the monastic life, is probably of 377. Years later the panegyric goes to the cenobitic life. What has happened in the meantime? Something great must have taken place to have such a radical change of attitude. A flight from the world is essential, but nothing can be compared to a life of peace and tranquility in the monastery.¹⁵⁵ Experience has taught Jerome the terrible dangers of the eremitic life and the advantages of the common life. How well could he recall the temptations at Chalcis, in his days as an

¹⁵³ CAVALLERA, *St. Jérôme et la vie parfaite*, in *Revue d'Ascétique et Mystique*, 2, 1921, pp. 112-113.

¹⁵⁴ *Letter* 14, 10. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 81. "O desertum Christi floribus vernans! O solitudo, in qua illi nascuntur lapides de quibus in Apocalipsi civitas magni regis extruitur! O heremus familiari Deo gaudens!"

¹⁵⁵ *Letter* 107, 13. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 243; *Letter* 125, 9. 15 16. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 607; *Letter* 130, 17, RUIZ-BUENO, II pp. 686-687.

anchorite! The heat of the temptation of the flesh was more intolerable than the pitiless heat of the Syrian desert.¹⁵⁶ Jerome himself was a saint, but could he demand from the rest that kind of life?

Jerome wrote years later to Rusticus:

"I do not want to bother the reader with any more examples. This is what I want to convey to you now: you must not follow your own will. On the contrary, you should live in the monastery under the discipline of one single father and in the company of many brethren. Thus, from one will learn patience, from the other silence, from a third humility. You will do what you are told, eat what is offered you, have what is given you, dress in the manner others want. They will assign a task for you. You will be under people you do not like, go to bed exhausted, even falling asleep on the way; half asleep as you get up. You will pray the psalm assigned to you. By the way, do not look for melodious voices, but search for the fervor of the spirit, as the Apostle says: 'I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also' (I Cor. 14, 15). Also 'Sing to the Lord with all your heart' (Eph. 5, 19). And this because he had heard the command: 'Sing wisely' (Psalm 46, 8). You will serve your brother, wash the feet of the guests, suffer in silence any affront, fear the superior of the monastery as a master and love him as a father, accept everything from him as conducive to your salvation. Judge not the decision of your superior, as your duty is to obey and fulfill what you are commanded, according to what Moses said 'Keep silence and hear, O Israel' (Deut. 27,9). Wholly absorbed in so many tasks, passing from one thing to the other, one work waiting for the next one, you will have in your mind just what you have to do at that moment."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Letter 22, 7. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 163-164 "O quotiens in heremo constitutus et in illa vasta solitudine, quae exusta solis ardoribus horridum monachis praestat habitaculum, putavi me Romani interesse deliciis! Sedebam solus, qua amaritudine repletus eram... Ille igitur ego, qui ob gehennae metum tali me carcere ipso damnaveram, scorpionum tantum socius et ferarum, sepe choris intereram puellarum. Pallebant ora ieiuniorum et mens desideris aestuabat in frigido corpore, et ante hominem suum iam carne praemortua sola libidinum incendia bulliebant."

¹⁵⁷ Letter 125, 15. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 612-613.

The quotation is long, but in it a whole program of monastic observance is proposed by Jerome to his friend Rusticus. This monastic program is not very much different from the one Jerome observed in his own monastery at Bethlehem. He insisted repeatedly in many of his letters upon the monastic observances, prayer, study of the Bible — something not in use among the Egyptian monks — manual labor, especially for the Christian virgin. The whole day and night must be regulated. Prayer refers to the canonical hours — something traditional — whereby the daily time of the monks is distributed in such a way as to keep him busy and yet be ready to sing the Psalms.¹⁵⁸ Holy Scripture must never cease to be the monk's daily bread,¹⁵⁹ perusing it so often that even sleep will find him with it in his hands.¹⁶⁰ Work will fill the monk's time, thus avoiding idleness.¹⁶¹ Jerome tells us in his letter to Rusticus:

"Nobody is received in the monasteries of Egypt unless he knows a particular trade. And this not so much to earn a living as for salvation of the monk's soul."¹⁶²

Well did Jerome know that idleness was the mother of all vices!

And yet the real corner-stone of religious and monastic life must be obedience. All the rest pale in comparison to it:

"Hoc dico, qui hic in nobis summa et sola est virtus oboedientia."¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ G. MORIN, *Anecdota Maredsolana* III, III, *Tractatus de Psalmo CXVIII*, 229. CAVALLERA, *op. cit.*, II, p. 125-126. *Letter* 130, 15, RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 683; *Letter* 22, 22, 37. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 200; *Letter* 109, 3. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 304.

¹⁵⁹ *Letter* 52, 7. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 415.

¹⁶⁰ *Letter* 22, 17. RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 173 "Crebrius lege et disce quam plurima. Tenenti codicem somnus obrepit et refectio satietatem fugiens", *Letter* 54, II. RUIZ-BUENO, I, pp. 459-460; *Letter* 75, 4, RUIZ-BUENO, I, p. 712; *Letter* 125, 11. RUIZ-BUENO, II, p. 609; *Letter* 127, 4-7. RUIZ-BUENO, II, pp. 630-634.

¹⁶¹ *Letter* 125, II. RUIZ-BUENO, II, pp. 608-609; *Letter* 130, 15. RUIZ-BUENO, II, pp. 683-684.

¹⁶² *Letter* 125, 10. RUIZ-BUENO, II, pp. 609-610.

¹⁶³ G. MORIN, *Anecdota Maredsolana*, III, II, *De oboedientia*, 399.

To add a little later :

“Nihil sic Deo placet quomodo oboedientia.”¹⁶⁴

Much more could be said about a further development of Roman monasticism in the V century. Development that takes place under the personal guidance of the popes. The monks find in them their best defenders at Rome. They will be the ones to be on the forefront in the erection of new monasteries. This, however, would take us too far away and extend our study beyond our intention.

LUCIO GUTIERREZ, O.P.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*