Rise of Asceticism

Athanasius, Life of Antony, and Revision of the “Holy Man”

Christianity as counter-culture: challenges of the body and wealth

Rise of Ascetic Movements: Antony and Pachomius

Athanasius, Life of Antony, and Revision of the “Holy Man”

Athanasius (298–373), central figure of 4th C. Nicene Orthodoxy

“Domestication” of a “wild and woolly” Antony: subservient to bishops, instinctively rejects “heresy” although unlettered

Echoes of Porphyry’s Life of Pythagoras in the Life of Antony

While rejecting “the world” operates within its values

Unlettered ascetic embodies what is best in philosophical piety

Christianity as Counter-Culture: Wealth

Jesus

Luke/Q:
Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.... But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Blessed are you that are full now, for you shall hunger. (6:20–25)

Mark
It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (10:25)

Acts
“Communitarian” ideal of the earliest apostolic community: shared wealth

Pastoral Epistles: adopting general social values

Bishops/elders should have a household ...

Life of Antony:
Demons test Antony with gold and silver
Christianity as Counter-Culture: the Body and Sexuality

- Paul, 1 Corinthians 7
  - Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (1–2)
  - I wish that all were as I myself am... To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. (7–8)
- Tertullian (ca. 200), on why women should be modest:
  You are the devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die. And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins?
- Pastoral epistles: Adopting general social values
  - Regulation of “widows” and “virgins”
  - Women redeemed through the bearing of children

Rise of Ascetic Movements: Pachomius, and “Cenobitic” Monasticism

- Cenobitic, from koinobios, “living together,” a communal form of monasticism
- Pachomius, d. 346
- Communal life, meals, labor
- A life of transformation through spiritual guidance and prayer

Rise of Ascetic Movements: Antony, and “Eremetic” Monasticism

- “Eremetic,” related to the desert, whence “Hermit”
- Antony, c. 270–356
- “Anakhoresis,” abandonment (a rural strategy) applied to the life of this world, whence “anchorite”
Asceticism as alternative social practice in Late Antiquity

- The late antique Holy Man
  - Ascesis and power: the ability to perform miracles and to act as social patron (Peter Brown)
  - Body as the site of struggle with demons
- Asceticism as elite haven (4th C. and later)
  - Autonomy for wellborn women
  - A life of contemplation and writing for men
- Clark: Monastic rules and the problem of social leveling in monastic communities in late antiquity: The continued legacy of Christian counterculturalism?
- Connection to receding eschaton? 4th C. Withdrawal of persecution?