

Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue “Exploring the Future of Christian Monasticisms”

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The origins of Christian monasticism are buried deep in the shadows of Christian history, but without doubt it came to full fruition during the fourth century and continued to grow nearly unabated for the next millennium and a half. By the late 18th century, it was facing its most difficult challenges, in the forms of secularism and Enlightenment thinking, but it rebounded during the 19th and into the 20th centuries. Even Protestant Christian traditions that historically lacked monasticism (e.g., Anglicanism and Lutheranism) saw its (re-)introduction at this time. Now, in the first two decades of the 21st century, there is the emergence of New Monastic communities and other forms of “secular monasticism.” It is clear that monasticism in its many forms in the history of the Christian Church has yet to outlive its spiritual utility.

The articles contained in this Special Issue of *Religions*, entitled “Exploring the Future of Christian Monasticisms”, looks backwards but, more importantly, forwards to the future of the institution of monasticism; or, perhaps more appropriately, monasticisms (notice the “s”). That is, of the many forms of monasticism that have emerged historically, which ones still hold promise for the future? Will those communities be comprised of vowed and non-vowed members, of men and women? Will they be contemplative and/or enclosed in a traditional sense or more open to modern culture by living outside the cloister? For those that might retain a more historic form, what kind of apostolates will the future hold? These questions, and many more, are investigated in the excellent papers gathered here. May these essays provide food for thought as they explore the future of Christian monasticisms.

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