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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- All Christians are to be monks of the heart—some are called to an outer vocation.
- Historical monastic tradition accomplished change in human consciousness.
- Today, human beings are the recipients of the gift of the great monastic work.
- The temptation of Yeshua in the desert set the stage for full human freedom.
- The world now moves to the End—the transformation by beauty.

INTERIORIZED MONASTICISM: *THE ASCETICAL ARCHETYPE*

Monasticism has been at the heart of the spiritual practice of the Christian faith. Perhaps beginning with Yeshua himself and his practice as a Nazarite, and his connection to the Essene community in Judea, this “ascetical ideal” as a way of life has been held up as the highest goal which practitioners of the spiritual path should reach. Though only but a few could attain this ideal in full, monasticism became the image of true Christian *ascesis*—the true means of spiritual practice.

There is, then, a long tradition of monasticism within the Christian world dating back to the early Fathers and Mothers of the desert, and perhaps before that into the ancient Jewish world. Traditional monasticism continued on in many forms both in the eastern and western branches of Christianity, becoming the great monastic movement with names and places most Christians recognize today, for example, Mt. Athos, Assisi, Saints Anthony, Benedict, and Francis, just to mention a few.

The fact that the vast majority of Christians did not and could never achieve this ideal state has left the impression, of course, that the real depth of Christian spirituality was ultimately out-of-reach, and

that most Christians were second-tier practitioners of spiritual life, at best.

This impression has often left Christian lay-people (the vast majority of Christians throughout the centuries) working in the ordinary world

been a norm and therefore crippling for a majority of the followers of Yeshua through the centuries.

Even when monasticism was at its most intense peak, however, there were those (both monastics and non-monastics alike), who have been aware of a deeper truth, a more fundamental principle. In more recent times, monks such as Thomas Merton, and lay theologians, such as the Russian Orthodox Paul Evdokimov, have helped to correct this mistaken impression.

While monasticism has for centuries expressed an outward sign, all along its inner truth has remained a different spiritual reality. Yeshua himself was not a monastic in the way we think of it historically. Yet he lived the inner ideal as an archetype, and became the great **icon** of its life and practice for all people and generations to come. The desert Fathers and Mothers, and the majority of the monks and nuns through the ages have intentionally practiced this inner ideal, but so have multitudes of men and women not found in monastic cloisters. Their inner practice both inside and outside the convents and monasteries has remained central.



The ascetical ideal of Christianity began in the deserts of the Middle East.

of human affairs with a sense of loss. Since the highest state (monastic life) was unattainable, then why bother—“leave it to the monks and nuns to do the real work,”—the rest can go on living their mundane lives at the margins (but not at the center) of spiritual life. This impression, while fundamentally untrue, has

PAUL EVDOKIMOV

According to Evodokimov, the monk is essentially an eschatological being literally possessed by the Parousia. He or she ... proclaims the abolition of profane history and announces the coming of the new city inhabited by the new humanity. "Exile becomes the pilgrimage of the *homo viator* in search of his celestial roots." In a word, what the monk does is witness to a radical eschatological folly in which the in the midst of a church which has forgotten the apocalyptic violence of the Gospel, pitched its tent in history and allowed itself to be defined by history and by the present *saeculum*. For Evodokimov as well as for Thomas Merton, the monk is one who goes in search of his or her true identity, of authenticity and integrity, who recoils in horror, anguish, and nausea from the possibility of "bad faith," which life in the city and in a church that has lost the eschatological fervor presents to the monk and others.

—Peter Phan

In a lecture in 1982, the Rev. Dr. Peter Phan, then chair of the Department of Theology at the University of Dallas, introduced the work and writings of **Paul Nicholaevitch Evodokimov**, a great Russian theologian to its students. Paul Evodokimov was born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1901, and died in Paris in 1970. (The following material by Peter Phan was also printed in *Sobornost* in an edited form).

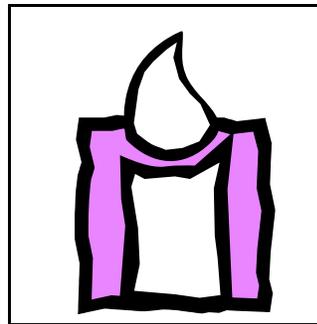
According to Evodokimov, **Interiorized Monasticism** is the ideal and norm of Christian spirituality and must be central to our contemporary understanding of the path of Yeshua.

Eschatology and Monasticism

The two main themes of Evodokimov's thought are: First, humans are eschatological beings—participating now in the "last things" of history and showing it to be "wholly other" than it appears on the surface of the world. Second, there is only one universal spiritual norm, which is normative for each and every student of Yeshua—the inner state of the Kingdom of God. This inner state, for him, is literally "... the coming of the Kingdom to the depths of the heart, and the trembling of the soul in humility before the gate of heaven" (*Orthodoxy*, 1959).

In claiming that the monastic ideal is normative, Evodokimov is not proposing that we should return to the ancient forms of monastic *ascesis*, but rather that we

should possess its inner reality within ourselves in a new way now. He believed (and boldly proclaimed) that what the great desert tradition of monasticism accomplished was exactly this. As a result, human consciousness has been forever changed by its work which has modified the dominant energies of the human psyche and renewed the human spirit, creating what he called "the ascetic Archetype" within humanity. All, therefore, can begin to live out of these interior energies.



The Inner flame of things.

This "ascetic Archetype" is now the permanent feature of all Christian spirituality. It forms the basis for **interiorized monasticism**, which does not belittle those called to an outer monastic vocation, but makes the inner ideal available to all. For each Christian to accomplish this inner ideal he emphasizes five elements: prayer, eschatological maximalism, and the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Prayer

For Evodokimov, prayer was much more than pietistic practice. It was a permanent state of the soul—prayer

becoming flesh, and the full ministry of praise as Eucharistic living in the midst of the world. He expressed it this way, "The essence of the state of prayer is simply to be there, to hear the presence of another person, of Christ and also our fellow man in whom Christ challenges me. ... The perfect prayer seeks the presence of Christ and recognizes him in every human being" (*Ages of the Spiritual Life*, 1998).

Eschatological Maximalism

This unusual term represents what Evdokimov understood to be an existential attitude which followers of Yeshua must direct towards history. It is an attitude not merely of expectation concerning the "second appearance" of the Christ. It is the form of energy (which he called "violence") which conquers the Kingdom itself and which seeks for the transformation of the world into that Kingdom and its justice. It means living now in light of the End, which it sees and contemplates as the "inner flame of things" relativizing the outer forms of this *kosmos* (*The Sacrament of Love*, 1985).

The Three Vows

Poverty, chastity, and obedience, the three traditional monastic vows, constitute not an outer form, but the great charter of human freedom. Freedom is precarious because we are constantly tempted against these three virtues by idolatry, impurity, and riches.

TEMPTATION IN THE DESERT

The story of the temptation of Yeshua in the desert is seen as the beginning of human freedom. Yeshua faced and triumphed over the multiplied forces of evil which had overwhelmed humanity since the failure of Adam and Eve. He was challenged and won through to a new place of liberation, not just for himself alone, but in the end, for all humanity. As the prototypical Servant of God, he paved a “way in the desert of this world” as the **obedient** human, the **poor** human, the **pure** human.

In a brilliant analysis of the tree temptations, Evodokimov sees that the three spectacular gestures that Yeshua was tempted to perform, namely, to transform stones into bread, to throw himself down from the temple, and to adore Satan, correspond to modern humanity's efforts to solve our eco-

nomic, philosophical, and political problems respectively.



Living by bread alone.

These three temptations were first addressed by Satan to the Messiah, and then later by the Roman Empire to the Church, to which it in part succumbed. When the desert Fathers and Mothers fled the Empire for the wilderness, rejecting the Church's compromise with the

Empire, it was upon Yeshua's three immortal answers to Satan that they built their lives and communities. It was also against these same temptations which they struggled personally, and for all the follower which were to come.

That which kills the human spirit, imprisoning us and keeping us from true freedom are the three great temptations—to live by bread alone (that is, in full obedient attention to the material world), to test the divine limits (that is to press all the limits of knowledge regardless of the consequences), and to seek for power, riches and dominance (that is to become the monopolizing authority in the world whereby everything lives and before which it falls in worship). It is against these that the eschatological person lives in witness through poverty, chastity and obedience.

Interiorized monasticism of the laity, Evodokimov points out, is ultimately identical with the universal priesthood of the faithful. ...” There is but one spirituality for all without any distinction of bishops, monks, or laymen, and that is the monastic spirituality.” It follows that the laity forms precisely the state of interiorized monasticism. ... The universal priesthood obliges the laity to live their interiorized monasticism not only be means of the equivalent of the three vows, but also to exercise their triple functions of king, priest, and prophet. As prophet, lay persons are defenders of the faith who refuse idols by their witness...to prevent the world from being closed in upon itself. As priests, lay persons are homo liturgicus who transform their lives into an offering, their work into cosmic liturgy. ... As kings, lay persons conquer the world and history by mastering passions and instincts to achieve perfect freedom and to transform the world into an icon of the Kingdom. Thus, says, Evdokimov, “to be an authentic layman is to be the one who, by his (or her) whole life, by whatever is already present within, announces the One who comes.

—Peter Phan

PRAXIS: POVERTY, CHASTITY, OBEDIENCE

Contrary to our ordinary expectations, the three traditional vows of Christian *asceticism* taken by monastics, represent inner dimension of reality rather than merely external forms of conformity to convention. These vows have indeed been lived out in many different forms, but the spirit that informs them transcends all historical embodiment, and is “universally applicable to all walks of life” (Phan).

Evodokimov contends that **interiorized monasticism** belongs to the “royal priesthood” of all the followers of Yeshua, finding new spiritual forms equivalent to these original monastic vows.

Poverty

The vow of poverty reveals a new hierarchy of human values in which the spiritual has primacy over the material, grace over necessity. It can be lived in two ways, he says, first by sharing, not simply what one has, but also by what one **is**, and second, by reducing our needs to a minimum. “The absence of need to have becomes the need not to have.”

Chastity

The vow of chastity transcends the physical. It indicates purification of the heart expressed as love and reverence towards the whole creation, the refusal of domination over the

cosmos which would exploit the world and our fellow human beings. It indicates “the chaste, whole, integral structure of the human spirit.”

Obedience

The vow of obedience indicates the liberation of the human spirit, not only from slavery to the powers of aggression and evil (personified in Satan), but from the falsehood of self-will and self-love. It is a form of listening to the Spirit in utter freedom. “Obedience crucifies man's own will in order to arouse ultimate freedom—the spirit listening to the Holy Spirit.” (**Ages of the Spiritual Life**).



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THIS IS A RESOURCE
FOR SPIRITUAL
PILGRIMS, WISDOM
SEEKERS, AND THOSE
GIVING GUIDANCE AS
FRIENDS, MENTORS
AND COMPANIONS ON
THE CONTEMPLATIVE
PATH.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE

Evdokimov's **interiorized monasticism** is, therefore, no leisurely retirement from the world in search of solipsistic perfection and the salvation of one's soul. It is neither a unilateral transcendence of the Parousia abandoning the world with its political, economic and sociological concerns, nor a settlement in history and in a closed world cut off from its End. The former is an attempt to build eschatologically without history, the later to build history without eschatology. Together with Fedorov and Berdiaev, Evdokimov posits an "active eschatology," and an eschatological creativity. Not only should we bring the Church into the world, but also the world into the Church. Evdokimov is one of the few theologians who attach to personal asceticism and holiness a cultural significance, in particular the dimension of beauty.

Evdokimov appropriates Dostoevsky's principle that "beauty as manifestation of holiness is a salvific force which harmonizes the world" (36). Unfortunately culture and beauty have become profoundly ambiguous; the original unity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty has been broken; thegnoseological, ethical, and aesthetical principles are no longer integrated in the religious principle (37). The way of a rediscovery of culture as cult is not through the autonomy of art, but through beauty as holiness, that is, through the Holy Spirit who is the source of unity and integrity of the spiritual world of humanity. For Dostoevsky and Evdokimov, aesthetics is

intrinsically bound up with pneumatology.

This pneumatological aesthetics includes first of all a discernment of the religious meaning implicit in all authentic creative acts because "everything in art, everything that is discovered in the sciences and everything that it lives with is an accept of eternity, all these summits of humanity's genius and holiness will come into the Kingdom and will coincide with their truths just as the image is identified with its original (38).

Ultimately, however, the Christian must transcend culture itself. It is the eschatological transfiguration of beauty. In order to encounter Beauty face-to-face, to receive its radiance of grace, Evdokimov holds, artists must, by way of transcendence, go beyond the sensible and the intelligible and cross over into the Temple where they will witness the Parousia, where Beauty-Spirit will come to meet them, not imprison them within the finite forms of art, but to introduce them into the burning proximity of the personal God. The way, then, is a radical death to oneself, a *metanoia*, a "baptism of fire," an eschatological transcendence and transfiguration. Just as the art of the catacombs, a purely "significant" art, renounced itself, underwent the purifying death and rose to life again as the dawn of the fourth century becoming the art of the icon, no longer mere sign but symbol of the Presence, so modern culture is urged to transcend itself, to

assume the "priestly functions" of the icon: "the scientist, the thinker, the artist, the social reformer will be able to find again the charisms of the Royal Priesthood, and each in his or her domain, as "priest," will make of research a sacerdotal work, a sacrament, transforming all forms of culture into the *theophanic* place: to sing the Name of God by means of science, thought, social action (the "sacrament of the brother"), and art. In its own way, culture joins in with liturgy, resounds the "cosmic liturgy," becomes doxology (39).

As to whether such interiorized monasticism has diluted the authentic monastic spirit, none is better equipped to answer than one of the greatest monks of our time, Thomas Merton: "Evdokimov demands a virile *ascesis*, not simply gentlemanly retirement into leisure. The monk does not build his monastic city 'on the margin' of the world, but instead of it. This is important ... For Father Evdokimov (sic), the monastic life is there to proclaim the abolition of history. How many Western monks could swallow that? Few, I imagine" (40). Perhaps it is not out of place to note that Paul Evdokimov himself was a living example of interiorized monasticism, married man and monk in the world.

From the conclusion of Peter Phan's article on Paul Evdokimov who quoted extensively from Evdokimov's L'Art de l'icône. Théologie de la beauté (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1970).