



Further Reflections  
on the Practice of

# Interiorized Monasticism

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**T**his past month “In the Work” we sent each of you a revised edition of a previous offering on one of the key aspects of the work of the Order and its self-understanding—Interiorized Monasticism. We are Christian contemplatives and monastics of a very different kind from the conventional perception of monasticism as we have received it in the West. First, our “monastery” as well as our monastic vocation is in the contemporary world, and our practice is “interior,” rooted in the inner field of the heart. Second, this reflects the profound teachings and vision of Yeshua as he expressed them in the Sermon on the Mount, which was Judaism interiorized. All of this was powerfully summed up in the article that you received. There are, however, terms and ideas which may need further explication and reflection.

## Understanding Terms

Let us begin, first, with a number of the terms used by Paul Evdokimov and Peter Phan in the Journal article. Paul Evdokimov and Peter Phan both say that followers of this path of Interiorized Monasticism are to be (or become) **eschatological beings**. Eschatology is, of course, the “theology of last things” – reflecting the prophetic tradition’s awareness of the summation of human history *in divinis* (that is, brought to summation in the Divine Reality). Time itself is a creation of Ultimate Reality and will be brought to an end by being lifted back into the Eternal Now where all history and every aspect of the past, present, and future are held united in a single Whole present to divine Consciousness.

To be an “eschatological being” means that practitioners of this path live now, in time, in light of this Ultimate End, or as Peter Phan says, they “proclaim the abolition of profane history” and announce the coming of a new celestial city (or human community) inhabited by the new humanity. Eschatological beings help men and women in the contemporary world to wake up and remember that their personal history as it is currently unfolding is not all there is to it. There is an ultimate objective that is being realized even now, but outside the norms of conventional society and the contours of time as we know them.

The Latin term *homo viator* was coined by E. F. Schumacher’s (of **Small is Beautiful** fame). It refers to spiritual pilgrimage across the landscapes of space-time homeward toward our Source. Here is a commentary on Schumacher’s use of the term which also relates it to the eschatological being of the pilgrim:

*“It is when we come to politics,” Schumacher insisted, “that we can no longer postpone or avoid the question regarding man's ultimate aim and purpose.” If one believes in God one will pursue politics “mindful of the eternal destiny of man and of the truths of the Gospel”. However, if one believes “that there are no higher obligations”, it becomes impossible to resist the appeal of Machiavellianism “politics as the art of gaining and maintaining power so that you and your friends can order the world as you like it”. Once one accepted that man was created by God with a designated purpose, politics, economics and art had value only for the end of helping man reach a higher plane of existence, which should be his goal.*

*By the end of the fifties Schumacher had reached the conclusion that man was **homo viator** (a pilgrim on a journey). He believed that it was the failure to recognize this fact which led to society's ills.*

Interestingly, in the discussion of Interiorized Monasticism in these articles, the idea of **violence** is used in a curious way to conceive of the conquest of the Kingdom. Peter Phan speaks of it as a form of energy that conquers the divine Realm, and seeks for the transformation of the world (2). This is related to two overlooked sayings of Yeshua. One is found in Matthew 11:12 where Yeshua says that Kingdom is forcefully seized by forceful humans. This could be interpreted either positively or negatively, of course. The other comes from the Gospel of Thomas where, again, Yeshua says, “The Father’s realm is like a man wanting to kill someone powerful. So he draws a sword in his own house and puts it through the wall to test whether or not his hand is actually strong enough. Then he goes out and slays the giant” (Logion 98). Both of these suggest an active, radical stance in relationship to the Realm of Heaven—one that aggressively engages the realm of the Kingdom with a certain inward energy.

As difficult an idea as this may be for us in the modern world which is characterized by such violence and also in light of the history of non-violent resistance as a hallmark of a powerful new force and change-agent for our time, we must see this as some kind of wisdom teaching in a different mode. One way of looking at it, perhaps, is to see our engagement with the divine Realities as a kind of Olympian struggle in the way St. Paul suggested it—a race, where we train and struggle for mastery. Once that is achieved then there is clarity, freedom, and power. This is what is taught in the Islamic tradition as spiritual (or inner) *jihad* (a struggle for mastery of the soul). It is in this way that we may see how it is that we can gain the “sovereignty” of which Yeshua spoke in Logion 2 of Thomas.

Finally, the ancient Greek term *parousia* (often translated as “appearing”) is typically used to indicate the return appearance of the Messiah at the end of time. However, in this context, this designation is widened to include the “appearance” of a new form of humanity as the completed form of the Christ. This means that we are invited to “make” the appearing happen by our own participation since we will appear with, in, or even **as** him. We “bring on” the return at the End of time (or we trigger it) in a catalytic way by our own “eschatological creativity.” These are amazing ideas and very hopeful.

Reflecting further on what these ideas mean practically for the Order, I would like to focus on a number of things. Orders typically form around teachings and teachers. This has been the case with the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West which has been privileged to have a treasury of teachings available to it and many individuals who are called to this transmission. Here, however, a distinction between the Occidental and the Oriental manner in which this transmission occurs can be made.

### **Structures of Interiorized Monasticism**

Typically in the West, teachings and teachers have been associated with institutions and institutional forms such as cloistered orders sanctioned by the Church, or as churches or denominations themselves. This more formal, institutional framework is familiar to us. However in the Middle East today there exists another oriental template that is quite different from our more formal, institutional religious structures. This template can be illustrated by the ways Orders are formed in Sufism, for example, which are not associated with Mosques or one strand of Islamic “denominationalism” per se. Instead these manifest, typically, as

independent “schools” of thought, or “colleges” of learning (*madreseh*) that follow a certain stream of transmission. The students and teachers forming in these (wisdom) schools are not congregants in Mosques, but collegiums of support and learning. In such a learning environment, either students go to the teacher who is located in a particular place (often called a House of Prayer in the Sufi world), or the teacher moves to those sites or locations where students are more concentrated. Our Order acts in this less formal way as well. Instead of being housed in churches or monasteries, we typically gather “in retreat” at some designated location set aside either permanently or temporarily for such gatherings.

More deeply still, perhaps, is the demeanor of our gatherings. Monks of the Order seek fellowship with one another out of profound respect and love. As opportunity will allow, we gather for strength and solidarity with each other to help catalyze our journey and share in the common power that comes from healthy, vibrant communities. We are *cenobitic* rather than *eremitic*, that is, we are Monks-in-community rather than being monastic solitaries—though it is true, when we move back to into our monastic vocation in our personal world, of necessity, we may have to come to terms with being solitary (and practice, for a time, at least, as solitaries). We prefer, however, that our practice be in community as community. This leads, then, to further thoughts on practice.

## Praxis

Christian orders, either East or West, are often associated with some particular form of practice. In the West for example, there is the practices of the Jesus Prayer for the Orthodox, or the Benedictine Rule and the Monastic Hours, Lectio Divina, Daily Examen, the Spiritual Exercises, the Rosary, and Centering Prayer. The list is long and helpful. In Sufism, as well as in Jewish esoteric traditions, there are various forms of invocatory prayer (*zikr*), chanting, turning or body prayer, and poetic or scriptural recitations associated with a particular order or stream and handed down from one generation to another.

Rather than narrowing ourselves to a single method or practice, or privileging one method of contemplative prayer over another, the Order has chosen to use and teach a wide variety of spiritual practices which may, in the end, lead into something that might be called “full-spectrum contemplation.” By this term, we are acknowledging the breadth and depth of what we understand contemplative prayer to be: a progressive movement from the outer to the inner—from words to that deep silence which is the vestibule for the meeting with and engagement of that Presence which resides at the level of the heart. Contemplative prayer conceived in this way is deeply invocatory—a calling of deep to deep. At that level of interior depth it engages the heart in dialogical exchange which (because it is fundamentally *kardial* in nature and not mentally discursive), is what Sufis call a true *sohbat* (interior discourse with the divine Master as Lover). More radically this term may be understood to be “pillow talk,” because, for followers of Yeshua in the Oriental tradition, it is always a meeting with (and union between) “Lovers in the Bridal Chamber of the Heart.”

## Wisdom Culture

As daring as it may seem, Monks of the Order (living in the contemporary society as eschatological beings and carrying forward an interior monastic vocation), are on the planet to assist—in its desperate time of need—the creation of a wisdom culture. There are, of course, powerful counter-forces to this possibility everywhere, but the time is critical, and the need is immense and we must move expeditiously. Change, as we see it, cannot come in any other way. Technological innovation will not be enough. Better economics or even better science will not save us. What we need is a powerful, upward change in the consciousness of humanity, and a transformation of what it means to be a human being. Another kind of “temple” out of the stones of ancient *sophia perennis* and modern contemplative wisdom must be constructed. External edifices will not suffice, only “con-templing” at the level of the heart will do. Out of the dynamic interweaving of heaven and earth, the human and the divine will come a new way of being, and out of that will come a new culture, a new society based on *philo-sophia*, the love and practice of wisdom. We are here to catalyze that possibility in every way we can.

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