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Beyond the Monastery Walls: Rebirth of Lay Monasticism

Renée Brousseau (Touma)

A Thesis

in

The Department
of Theological Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Beyond Monastery Walls: Rebirth of Lay Asceticism

Renée Brousseau (Touma)

In the last decades, an increasing numbers of Christians are drawn to a disciplined spiritual lifestyle (asceticism) and are finding new forms to express their spirituality by joining the secular and religious world. This research elaborates on this fact, presenting lay ascetic communities as well as individuals in North America and around the world, who have chosen lay asceticism as a Christian way of life.

Throughout this work, concepts and vocabulary are clarified in order to eliminate misconceptions and facilitate understanding. One constant preoccupation was to keep objectivity; in order to achieve this, a wide variety of sources was consulted from various cultures, eras and realms.

The facts uncovered in this research not only unveil new opportunities for all Christians whether they be male or female, celibate, married, or family groups, but they also challenges Christian individuals to remember that in order to live the Gospel values one needs to discipline oneself.

It challenges Institutions to revise what spiritual nourishment church communities offer, to find spiritual guides and to open new spiritual status for laity. It also challenges theologians to search for a new understanding of chastity, of the theology of the body and the theology of marriage.

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My utmost gratitude goes to my partner in Christ and in life, my best friend and husband Reverend Father Elie Touma for our continuous spiritual exploration and discussion through which I have found the path upon which to follow God.

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I greatly appreciated the help of my dear friend Susan Kouri who assisted me with the correction of this work. Dr. Nabil Matar also corrected some parts of this thesis.

To all my deepest gratefulness, may God grant you many years of union with Him.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to our grandmother Eveline Maamari Touma, who was a saint in the eyes of all who knew her. She was a true ascetic through the practice of humility, detachment, surrender to God, prayer, fasting and forgiveness.

May her memory be eternal!

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INTRODUCTION

I Asceticism Today

II Background and Foreground

I Asceticism today

The last decades ...have seen a decline in the number of people ...entering consecrated life ...Paradoxically, the same period has also witnessed a great increase of interest in the Christian ascetic tradition among the wider community and the publication of many books on this subject. Columbia Stewart...has pointed out a serious deficiency in the current academic landscape: an absence of the spiritual and theological element in the understanding of early Christian asceticism. This is a fundamental flaw as the desire for God and hope for heaven was the defining motivation of the ascetics themselves.¹

In his study of the spirituality of the fourth-century Rules of St. Basil, Dom Augustine Holmes, a Benedictine monk of Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland, points out significant aspects of contemporary spirituality. The focus of my research concerns Holmes' assertion that there has been "a great increase of interest in the Christian ascetic tradition among the wider community". This research will entail not only an analysis of the theoretical foundations of asceticism within the Christian tradition but also an examination of contemporary examples of ascetic communities and individuals living a formal ascetic lifestyle. However, as Columbia Stewart² argues, there is a significant obstacle to such a study. He notes that there is: "a serious deficiency in the current academic landscape: an absence of the spiritual and

¹ Augustine Holmes, *A Life Pleasing to God: The Spirituality of the Rules of St Basil* (Great Britain: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000), xvi.

² Holmes quotes Columbia Stewart, in *A Life Pleasing to God: The Spirituality of the Rules of St Basil* but no information could be found on that author, except that Holmes tells us he wrote a "series of three very perceptive review articles". They are: 'Asceticism: a feature review,' *American Benedictine Review* 48:3 (1997): 254-65. 'Writing About John Cassian in the 1990's', 48:4 (1997): 341-6. 'Feature Review: Three Recent Studies on Early Monasticism' 50:1 (1999): 3-11.

theological element in the understanding of early Christian asceticism.”³

Consequently, this work will also attempt to clarify the connection between spirituality, theology and asceticism.

The growing body of evidence, concerning ascetic lifestyles, provides an opportunity to research and communicate this new spiritual reality emerging in our midst. However, the phenomenon still appears odd or even “unorthodox” to the few who hear about it. This misinterpretation makes lay asceticism invisible realities because these movements are on the rise, yet they remain unnoticed and misunderstood. In Method in Theology, Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984), the prominent Canadian theologian, draws attention to our horizons of learning: “What does not fit, will not be noticed or, if forced on our attention, it will seem irrelevant or unimportant”.⁴

The goal of this study is two-fold: to gain a better understanding of the ascetical dimension of Christian praxis; second, to explore the motivation and experience of a number of ascetical groups and individuals as well as new monastic communities in the contemporary world. This work focuses on God as encounter, as communion, rather than being a philosophical explanation of the divine or of the doctrines of the church. It analyzes initiatives of human beings towards meeting God by offering examples of contemporary individuals and communities, who have chosen lay asceticism as their way of

³ Holmes, A Life Pleasing to God, xvi.

⁴ Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 237.

life. Therefore, an important aspect of this study is the relation between theory and praxis, since asceticism requires knowledge that is allied with praxis.

In probing aspects of theological anthropology, David Tracy argues that modern theologians put too much emphasis on “logy” (study of) and not enough on “theo” (God). Tracy understands theology as a human connection with God. “...this much is clear: to say and mean ‘God’ is what must drive all theology, whenever, wherever and whoever speaks”.⁵ Early Christian writers preferred to focus on the concept of “theiahenosis”, “theosis” or “deification”⁶, which is the capacity of human beings to “partake in the divine nature of God” (2 Peter 1: 3-8), because they were created in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Lonergan, also voices the same kind of concern when he discusses ‘knowing’.⁷ The notion of knowledge will be deepened according to the concepts of Lonergan and the understanding of the early ascetics, as both viewed the knowledge of God as implying “conversion”:

Knowing accordingly is not just seeing; it is experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing. The criteria of objectivity are not just the criteria of ocular vision; they are the compounded criteria of experiencing, of understanding, of judging and of believing... To be liberated from that blunder, to

⁵ David Tracy, “God, Dialogue and Solidarity: A Theologian’s Refrain”, *The Christian Century* (1990), 901-904

⁶ A Monk of the Easter Church, [Lev Gillet], *Orthodox Spirituality: An Outline of the Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Tradition* Crestwood (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 10.

⁷ Bernard, Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University Press Incorporated, 2003), 238.

discover the self-transcendence proper to the human process of coming to know, is to break often long-ingrained habits of thought and speech...It is a conversion, a new beginning, a fresh start. It opens the way to ever further clarifications and developments⁸.

Antony, the Egyptian hermit, made famous by Athanasius of Alexandria in his Life of Antony, declared that one who knows himself knows God:

The rational man who has prepared himself to be set free through the advent of Jesus, knows himself in his intellectual substance. For he who knows himself knows the dispensations of the Creator and all that He does among His creatures.⁹

All ascetics agree with the necessity of inner search. The contemporary Monks of New Skete declare: "To know oneself one needs to work hard at uncovering layers of hidden thoughts, misconception caused by pride and denial".¹⁰ Hence, one has to find his or her true self. Once this is accomplished, one's horizon changes because of a new understanding. In the New Testament we read of the qualities that will make our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ active and effective:

God's divine power has given us everything we need to live a truly religious life through our knowledge of the one who called us to share his own glory and goodness. In this way he has given us the very great and gracious gifts he promised, so that by means of

⁸ Bernard, Lonergan, Method in Theology (Toronto: University Press Incorporated, 2003), 238-240.

⁹ Antony, "Letter III", in the Letters of Saint Antony, trans., Derwas J. Chitty (Oxford: SLG Press Convent of the Incarnation Faicares, 1983), 9.

¹⁰ Monks of New Skete, In the Spirit of Happiness: Spiritual Wisdom for Living (Boston, New York, London: Little Brown and Company, 1999), 114-134.

these gifts you may escape from destructive lust that is in the world, and may come to share the divine nature.¹¹ For this very reason do your best to add goodness to your faith; to your goodness add knowledge; to your knowledge add self-control, to your endurance add godliness; to your godliness add brotherly affection, and to your brotherly affection add love. These are the qualities you need, if you have them in abundance, they will make you active and effective in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus-Christ. (2 Peter 1 3:3-8)

As early as the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea wrote some of the most influential¹² works concerning the ascetic life; the most famous is called The Rules¹³. Historians agree that few people have had such an impact on asceticism throughout history and throughout the world. His theology was the source for both the Eastern and the Western ascetic development¹⁴ and that is true until today, since his work is still the inspiration of ascetic Christians around the world. He repeatedly insisted that asceticism is for all, since the ascetic life consists of following the statutes of Christ, which is the goal of all Christians:

The ascetical life has one aim - the soul's salvation ... The most important thing, consequently, and the chief concern for the Christian ought to be stripping himself of the varied and diverse movements of the passions toward evil whereby the soul is defiled... Does it not seem to you, then that the Gospel applies to married persons also? Surely, it has

¹¹ See Partaker of the Divine Nature by Christoforos Stavropoulos, Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Company, 1976.

¹² See "Appendix A" for a full list of Basil ascetical works.

¹³ Roy Joseph Deferrari, ed., "St Basil Ascetical Works," The Fathers of the Church (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962).

¹⁴ His rules were translated and then transmitted in Europe by both Cassian and Benedict.

been made clear that obedience to the Gospel is required of all of us, both married and celibate.¹⁵

Another great spiritual writer of the early church, John Chrysostom, shared the same conviction. He is quoted by Paul Evdokimov, a contemporary author in the field of spirituality, who wrote extensively on the status of lay people:¹⁶ “When Christ commands to follow the narrow path, he addresses it to all human kind. The monk and the layman have to reach the same heights.” This touches exactly on the topic of this thesis: “Beyond the Monastery Walls”. Lay asceticism is an important movement for it is actually in motion and opens the door to a wide diversity of Christians today, assisting them in finding their way towards God.

II Background and Foreground

To facilitate the reader’s understanding this thesis is divided in two sections, ‘Background’ and ‘Foreground’. The Background offers clarification of concepts and vocabulary as well as the historical background of Christian asceticism. The Foreground summarizes the changes occurring in the realm of asceticism trying to elucidate, “What is going forward”¹⁷.

¹⁵ Basil, “St Basil Ascetical Works,” The Fathers of the Church (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 17.

¹⁶My translation: « Quand le Christ, ordonne de suivre la voie étroite, il s’adresse à tous les hommes. Le moine et le séculier doivent atteindre les mêmes hauteurs. » Paul Evdokimov, Les âges de la vie spirituelle, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1964, 1980).

¹⁷ Lonergan’s expression to define history, Method in Theology, 178-179.

In order to confront the problem of understanding the real meaning of lay asceticism from a multiplicity of view points, diverse sources including literature, conferences, and fieldtrips have been explored. Despite the fact that ascetic lifestyles and the more formalized monastic communities are over seventeen centuries old in the Eastern and Western Churches, knowledge of its motivation, inspiration and mutation is often imperfectly understood. Since language is a living thing, which sometimes changes its meaning according to time as it describes the reality of society;¹⁸ whenever possible the information was put into context.

Furthermore, throughout the historical overview whenever relevant, a different version of history was presented, and when bias was detected it was identified. Such a procedure was found useful in clarifying notions and language. Consequently, it establishes a connection, a bridge between early and contemporary spirituality by unfolding the roots of the Christian spirituality while the very diversity of ascetic lifestyles presents a dialectical point of view.

The Foreground section of this thesis summarizes the changes occurring in asceticism today and analyzes some contemporary communities and individuals in their choice to live closer to Christ in their daily lives. This section follows the historical presentation of asceticism's origin and presents a short section on the theoretical framework that has set the stage for the

¹⁸Ibid, 114, 127, 190, 191.

rebirth of an ascetical-like lifestyle in the contemporary world by examining the ideas of a number of modern commentators: 1) “Innerworldly Asceticism”: In Sources of the Self¹⁹, Charles Taylor,²⁰ renowned Canadian philosopher and Christian commentator quotes Max Weber’s (1864-1920) expression: “Innerworldly Asceticism” as an expression to reinstate the value of lay status. 2) “Invisible Monastery”: Paul Irénée Couturier (1881-1953), a Benedictine monk, proposed²¹ a new spiritual concept. It concerned a spiritual sphere composed of individuals or communities, living apart in different countries, but united in their mission: they dedicated their life to prayer for the unity of the Church. 3) “Interiorized Monastery”: Paul Evdokimov (1900-1970), well-known lay theologian and a prolific writer, has expressed the essence of Early Christian spirituality through his concept of “Interiorized Monasticism”: “...every lay person is a monk of the inner monasticism submitting to the demands of the Gospel.”²² There are so many groups which show evidence for a New Monasticism, it will be impossible to study them all in the present thesis. Consequently, only a representative sampling will be analyzed.

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 17, 146, 222.

²⁰ Michael Novak, in “An Authentic Modernity”, First Things 33 (1993) identifies Taylor as follows: “premier philosopher of modernity, the most judicious, the one who makes the most apt and discerning distinctions, the one who best sees both modernity’s grandeur and its misery”. See p 40-42.

²¹ Monique Simon, La vie monastique, lieu œcuménique (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 63.

²² My translation: « ...tout laïc est un moine du monachisme intériorisé soumis à toutes les exigences de l’Évangile » Paul Evdokimov, Les âges de la vie spirituelle.

Lev Gillet,²³ who has written intensively on eastern spirituality, best expresses the spirit of this thesis:

If each day you give some moments to the prayers of simplicity; if you know how to separate yourself interiorly, in some degree, from persons and things in order to enter into yourself, and not allow yourself to be dominated by them; if in your thinking and reading, you bring with you a certain preoccupation with God and attentiveness to His presence; you are already beginning to lead contemplative life, even if you are still in the world.²⁴

²³ Lev Gillet (1893-1980) is known internationally as “A monk of the Eastern Church”. His books have been translated in many languages over the years. More information will be given in the section on Individual Ascetical Lifestyles, p 73.

²⁴ A Monk of the Eastern Church, [Lev Gillet] Orthodox Spirituality: Orthodox Spirituality: An Outline of the Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Tradition (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 28.

PART ONE: BACKGROUND

I Asceticism: Theoretical Foundations

II Historical Overview of Asceticism

I Asceticism: Theoretical Foundations

Fundamental Concepts: Theology and spirituality

A particular word can have many significations, and various people can understand the same word in different ways. In his book Dieu cet inconnu, Radu Roscanu, an eminent “Abba”, orator, and writer dissects the mutation of the meaning of theology provoked by social changes, which transformed its meaning and its reality:

In the seventeenth century, a dissociation happened between thought and sensibility; between intelligence and conscience... here the division appears in the dissociation between theology and spirituality, between thinking about God and the motion of the heart towards God... faith is not a simple exercise of the mind; it implies an answer from the will – or the heart- to the One in Whom we believe in. Out of this context, theology must justify itself –indirectly but unrelentlessly- as an indispensable part of culture. This justification is difficult to make and it necessarily pushes theology toward the periphery.²⁵

Roscanu echoes the writing and language used by the Greek Fathers. For instance, “theologia” had a different meaning from what is understood today. For the Fathers it implied not only discussion about God and reflection about

²⁵ My Translation : *Au XVIIe siècle, il s'est passé une dissociation entre la pensée et la sensibilité, entre l'intelligence et la conscience... Ici la division se manifeste dans la dissociation entre la théologie et spiritualité, entre la pensée sur Dieu et le mouvement du cœur envers Dieu... la foi n'est pas un simple exercice de la raison; elle implique la réponse de la volonté-ou du cœur- à Celui en qui on croit. Coupée de ce contexte, la théologie doit se justifier- indirectement, mais inexorablement- comme étant partie indispensable de la culture. Justification difficile et qui pousse nécessairement la Théologie à la périphérie* Ranu, Roscanu, Dieu cet inconnu : L'Apophatisme de l'Eglise de l'Orient (Quebec : Edition de la Transfiguration, 2001), 89.

doctrines of God but also contemplation of God. A theologian was the one who put in practice what he believed in. Roscanu quotes Evagrius: ²⁶ “If you are a theologian, then you are really praying that is when you are a true theologian”²⁷. Since language is a living thing changing through civilization and time, the meaning of a word might mutate and carry within itself polysemy. In the Greek Fathers writings when one makes a conversion, it is called “Metanoia”, which means: change of heart. After conversion, one’s perception of the world is different, because one has changed from within; one’s reaction and understanding are also changed. Conversion means transformation:

By conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his world. Normally it is a prolonged process though its explicit acknowledgment may be concentrated in a few momentous judgments and decisions.²⁸

There are certain ways of life, which have been recognized over the centuries to convey inner transformation, by facilitating the purification of the heart, and through this process allow communion with God. Those were based upon the scriptures and the life of the saints who have encountered God, the “God-bearing Fathers and Mothers”. Their writings are collected under the name “Philokalia”.

²⁶ Evagrius, (346-399) “ ...created a literary genre of monastic mysticism, with fertile ideas destined to influence spiritual masters in East and West through the centuries”, Charles Kannengiesser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis (Boston: Brill, Leiden, 2004), 730.

²⁷ My translation, « *Si vous êtes théologien, alors vous priez vraiment, c'est alors que vous êtes théologien.* » Ranu, Roscanu, Dieu cet inconnu : L'Apophatisme de l'Eglise de l'Orient (Quebec : Edition de la Transfiguration, 2001), 90.

²⁸ Lonergan, Method in Theology, 130.

Philokalia holds teachings which were transmitted from master to disciple for over one thousand years... The authors of this work are called 'The God-bearing Fathers': 'God's carrier, moved by his presence'... The exact title of the collection is: 'Philokalia of the Holy God bearing Fathers, where we can see how through a philosophy of an active life, the intellect purifies itself, is enlightened and brought to perfection.'²⁹

The word "Philokalia" comes from a Greek root, and translates "love of the beautiful," which for the authors meant "love of God", since He is the source of all things. The Philokalia spells out the basis of asceticism: constant prayer, stillness of thoughts, detachment from earthly things, the guidance of a spiritual Father or Mother and the love of others. The latter is a specific mark of Christian asceticism, following the first commandments identified by Jesus-Christ himself: "... thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy whole heart, and with all thy whole soul, and thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength" and " Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Mark 12:30-31). Being disciples of Christ, Christians are invited to follow His path by living according to the gospel values. As a matter of fact, in the writings of Ascetic Fathers, the word spirituality is not used, but they talk about "the Christian way of life", and that applies to all, laity, monks and clergy.

²⁹ My translation « *Elle (La Philocalie) renferme un enseignement qui s'est transmis de maître à disciple pendant plus d'un millénaire... Les auteurs de ses œuvres sont qualifiés de 'théophores' : porteurs de Dieu, animés par sa présence' ... Le titre exact de ce recueil est : 'La philocalie des saints pères théophores, où l'on voit comment, par la philosophie de la vie active, l'intellect se purifie, est illuminé et rendu parfait' » Placide Deseille, La spiritualité orthodoxe et la philocalie (Paris: Spiritualités vivantes, 2003), 9.*

One of the ways by which we can reach the bond of communion with God is the ascetic life. Antony, the monk famous for his ascetic lifestyle and writings has found three methods by which one could be in union with God. The first category is through one's own good nature, like Abraham; and the second is through the understanding of the written word, which is given through the work of the Holy Spirit, the third is through ascetical work:

There are those who are called by the law of love which is in their nature and which original good was implanted in them at their first creation... The second calling is this. There are men who hear the written law ...their thoughts are rouse up to seek to enter into the calling... The third calling is this. There are souls which at first were hard of heart and persisted in the works of sin;...till they grow weary, and come to their senses, and are converted, and draw near, and enter knowledge, and repent with all their heart...³⁰

The willingness is the key word: it is our desire to know God, which has been implanted in us from our Creation that makes possible our return to our natural state, our likeness to God. (Genesis 1:26)

II Historical Overview

1. Historical Origins

Since the origin of Christian asceticism dates from as early as the second century, it is often assumed that the first Christian form of asceticism was eremitical (hermits living an isolated life) or within the family such as

³⁰ Antony, "Letter I," The Letters of Saint Antony, trans., Derwas, J. Chitty (Oxford: SLG Press Convent of the Incarnation Faicares, 1983), 1.

consecrated virgins. The monastic form with a more formalized lifestyle under the directions of charismatic leaders like Anthony, Basil or Benedict dates from the fourth century.

For example, there was already in existence the House of Virgins: "As early as 110 CE, virgins and widows are mentioned as a privileged class in the Church in Smyrna".³¹ Also "The two Pseudo-Clementine Letters addressed to virgins revealed that virginity was a common lifestyle in third century Syria." (Ep. Virg. 2.4.2;5,11).³² In addition, the very first document about Christian hermits whose author we know is the Life of Antony (251-356) written by Antony's bishop, Athanasius³³. Therein, Athanasius specified that Antony sent his sister to a House of Virgins; this establishes that ascetic groups were in existence at that time. Also we learn that, Antony retired in the desert around 270 and met an elderly hermit named Palamon³⁴. Since this hermit was already an old ascetic we can assume that asceticism already existed in the 200's. Paul Allen, an eminent writer on asceticism, agree with this statement:

"In Egypt, Anthony himself was no innovator. In the very next village he found 'an old man who had practiced from his youth the solitary life'."³⁵

³¹ A Monk of the Eastern Church [Lev Gillet], Orthodox Spirituality: An Outline of the Orthodox Ascetical and Mystical Tradition (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 6.

³² Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, under virgin, Second Edition, (New York, London, 1997). 1166.

³³ Athanasius, The Life of Antony and Letter to Marcellinus, trans., Robert C. Gregg (New York, Ramey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980).

³⁴ The Monks of New Skete, In The Spirit of Happiness: Spiritual Wisdom for Living (Boston, New York, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 114.

³⁵ Peter Brown, The Body and Society (New York: Columbia University Press: 1988), 204.

Obviously, before anything was written, there were people living ascetic lives.³⁶ For example, Athanasius mentions a papyrus showing that there was already a large group of hermits around Antony in Lower Egypt around 305. Also in Upper Egypt, Pachomius founded his monastery around 320. When he died in 356, he left about six or eight thousand monks and nuns and even earlier than that there were monks in Syria.

The pre-history of monasticism is like an “underground spring”. The sudden emergence of monasticism in several distant geographic points, such as Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Asia Minor and Gaul, has been identified as “a secret preparation by the Holy Spirit”.

Luc Brésard, from the Scourmount Abbaye³⁷ identifies different influences which could directly or indirectly have led to the emergence of monasticism in the third century³⁸. He draw attention to ascetical movements among the Jews at the time of Jesus, the radical call of the gospel teaching which gave rise to consecrated virginity fairly early on³⁹, martyrdom and finally the influence of Origen.⁴⁰ We can conclude that there were many factors, which

³⁶ Bernard Lonergan calls this “prehistory” see Method, 185.

³⁷ The Abbaye of Scourmount, in Belgium, offers a wide scriptorium on line for monastic studies.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The point about virginity can be argued since Brésard does not mention how “the radical call of the gospel teaching gave rise to consecrated virginity”. Christ did ask the rich man to leave his riches and for others to leave father and mother but He did not ask for continence. It is rather the ascetic tradition that understood being detached from earthly riches as necessarily excluding sexuality and therefore also marriage from ascetic life.

⁴⁰ Origen was an early Christian theologian (185-254 CE).

gave birth to the monastic movement. It was in part due to ascetical desire, to mystical intervention, to precedents, and finally to some social changes. More importantly than defining the causes, one has to realize the amplitude of such a phenomenon, as well as its consequences upon Christian.⁴¹ Monasticism brought a new dimension in the spiritual experience of the Church and a new institution, which needed to be controlled and structured. In our understanding of the ascetic movements in their many forms, we need to realize that its history is not written “in stone” and that the accepted understanding might need some nuance.

Because they have no claim to universality, the discoveries of the historians are not verifiable in the fashion proper to the natural sciences; in history verification is parallel to the procedures by which an interpretation is judged correct.⁴²

The consensus amongst scholars concerning the origins of monasticism in Christianity is that it took the place of martyrdom, since after Constantine’s conversion (312 CE), Christianity was no longer persecuted:

When martyrdom or “confession” was wanting, one could nevertheless be an “athlete” by heroically fighting against human passions. In this manner the “ascetics” obtained a special place within the ancient Church before monasticism was born.⁴³

⁴¹ For a striking descriptive of the transmission of this spiritual wave see Brésard <www.scourmont.be/studium/bresard/Course>

⁴² Lonergan, *Method*, 178.

⁴³ *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), 613.

Constantine's edict of Milan (313CE) encouraged a great surge in Christian membership, which eventually brought about the possibility of laxity in the Christian way of life. This created a void for those thirsting for a life dwelling in Christ. Peasants, merchants, and nobles searching for union with God, chose to leave all worldly goods and live in solitude and contemplation and follow strict ascetic rules.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is vital to remember that asceticism originated from an upsurge of spirituality among ordinary people, laymen and lay women and took different forms. A movement implies motions, it moves...it has its own life; this "spiritual happening" could not be put "in boxes" and so in our time, it has found new ways of expression.

2. Various forms of ascetic lifestyles

Before entering into the analysis of asceticism and the development of monasticism, let us present in a concise and schematic way the various forms it took over the years, so to better understand the words of Paul Evdokimov⁴⁴, about form:

"You are not from this world, you are in this world."
This saying of the Lord advocates a very particular ministry, which is to be a sign, a reference to the "all other"; long ago, it was realized differently here and there, today the sign seems to show itself over the city and the desert, for it is called to transcend all form

⁴⁴ Evdikimov is a contemporary theologian, who is known for his writing on the theology of the laity.

in order to be able to express itself everywhere and in all circumstances.⁴⁵

Evdokimov argues that contemporary asceticism is called to overcome the limitations of past forms in order to be able to express itself everywhere and in all circumstances. Hence, it is essential to understand the spirit of asceticism as articulated through different forms of expression through the ages. Hereafter, each category is defined and its archetype is identified. The word “Archetype” presents the person on which the model lifestyle was widely followed.

a) Eremitic/Anchorite: The word “eremite” from Greek *eremia*, means “desert”, it defines a hermit who withdraws from society and lives in solitude, devoting him or herself to prayer. “Anchorite” comes from the Greek word *anakhoretas*, meaning “one who has retired” [from society]. In their days, hermits lived secluded in huts or caves or even on top of pillars. Its archetype was Antony of Egypt (251-356). Originally the words hermit and monk were synonyms. The word monk comes from Greek *monacho*, from *mono*, which means one, single, solitary. Traditionally, a monk is defined as a member of a religious community of men, bound by vows of obedience to the rules of the order. In this thesis the word “monk” will encompass a wider

⁴⁵My translation : « Vous n'êtes pas de ce monde, vous êtes dans le monde. Cette parole du Seigneur préconise un ministère très particulier qui est celui d'être signe, référence au « tout autre »; il était jadis réalisé différemment là et ailleurs, actuellement, le signe semble-t-il se fait voir au-dessus de la cité et du désert, car il est appelé à dépasser toute forme, afin de pouvoir exprimer partout et à travers toute circonstance » Paul Evdokimov, *Les âges de la vie spirituelles* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1964, 1980)

⁴⁵<<http://www.pagesorthodoxes.net/mariage/monachisme-int.htm>>

reality and will relate to all those living a cenobitic monastic life. A monk may define both male and female monastics⁴⁶ although “nun” is a more traditional term. The word “hermit” will be used to define those who live an eremitic ascetical lifestyle.

b) Semi-Cenobitic/Skete⁴⁷: Skete is the name of a place in the Egyptian desert, where in early monasticism, small groups of two to six monks gathered in an informal way, guided by an elder. Each monk lived alone in his own hut widely separated from the rest. On Saturday and Sunday they met together for worship. Its archetype was Macarius the Great⁴⁸ (300-390) or Gerasimus (- 475),⁴⁹ depending on the sources. Today, it defines monastic lifestyle which is family-like, such as the New Skete monks of Cambridge, New York, in the United States.

c) Cenobitic: from Latin *coenobium* means “eating together”. Monks dwelling together in a monastery, following common rules and leader. Its archetypes were Pachomius (292-346) and Basil (330-379).

d) Encratites: derived from Greek *enkrateia* meaning “continence” or “self-control”. There were many groups, which were characterized by strict ascetical regulations. They were celibate, forbade the

⁴⁶ See information on the Companions of New Skete p.62

⁴⁷ Also called hermitage.

⁴⁸ Encyclopedia of Early Christianity: Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), 617.

⁴⁹ Sophie, Koulouzim, The Orthodox Christian Church Through the Ages (New York: The Metropolitan Council Publications Committee, Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America, 1956), 103-104.

use of wine in the Eucharist and refrained from eating animal food.⁵⁰ Extreme conditions of seclusion were found particularly in Syriac monasticism. Some extremists among the encratites were excluded from the Church. Eventually, this form was absorbed by the others and some of its harsh practices were perpetuated in some places. Memory of those severe practices has created a negative reaction in the mind of many concerning the more general term of asceticism. Its archetype was Symeon the Stylite.⁵¹

e) Oblates: From the Latin word *Oblatus*, meaning “to offer” implying to God. Oblation is a term used in liturgy; it means a sacred offering. Oblates are ascetics who are following the Benedictine Rules under two forms. The first, within the walls, whose members are called Interns or Regular Oblates take monastic vows and wear a habit; the other living outside the walls, are called Externs or Secular, or Common Oblates. They promise “to put on Christ” every day⁵² in what ever they do in the outside world. They do not make permanent vows, but rather make a commitment. They are usually attached to a monastery for their spiritual activities. They are laymen and lay women, married or celibate who follow the Benedictine Rules “Beyond the Monastery Walls”.

⁵⁰ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 203.

⁵¹ *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*: Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), 617.

⁵² In lieu of permanent vows.

3. Monastic Praxis

The following section focuses on the birth of asceticism with Antony, its climax with Basil and its internal and external aspects with the Oblates. Ascetic forms changed over the years, including reforms in Oblates status. Yet, generally speaking, lay asceticism per se, as a notion of Christian spiritual choice was not challenged.⁵³

a) ANTONY (251-356)

Through his ascetical lifestyle, Antony was able to overcome his encounters with demons. After many years of solitude, contemplation and prayer, he achieved closeness with his Creator⁵⁴. Antony decided to come out of his strict solitude in order to speak, teach, and communicate with his fellow men and so he wrote his six letters⁵⁵. The first impression the readers get from reading Antony is one of humility, frankness, calmness and patience; one encounters a man that has reached wisdom. Antony started his First Letter,

⁵³ Jovianian (Jovianianus) Roman monk in the 300's fought for equality between laity and clergy. He thought that too much emphasis on sexual renunciation was degrading marriage. He also declared heretic statements about the Virgin Mary, after which he was excommunicated and exiled http://www.catholicity.com/encyclopedia/s/siricus.pope_saint.html, under Siricus

Also, the Beguines were contested in their times. They were female medieval mendicant lay ascetics who among other things were helping the poor. Some think that the opposition was a gender controversy. See Abby Stoner, Gender and the Medieval Beguines <<http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~edf/1995/beguines.html>>

⁵⁴ Athanasius, Vita Antonii, trans. Robert C. Gregg, (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980), 33-39

⁵⁵ Antony, Letters of Saint Antony the Great, trans., Derwas, J. Chitty (Oxford: SLG Press Convent of the Incarnation Faicares, 1983).

elaborating on the origin of man's love of God, his emphasis being that, there are many different ways for men and women to love and obey God.

In order to advance towards God, Antony emphasized the need for a person's complete surrender to God, which renders his/her journey of war against evil thoughts much easier. He declared that he has found that fasting, vigil prayer and contemplation are basic means by which man can obtain the spirit of repentance, which in turn opens the eyes of the human's soul, thus leading human beings to repent and purify their body and soul. This control can be realized through fasting and prayer, which allow the mind to control all bodily needs and desires; these desires sneak into the mind through the senses such as sight, hearing, smell, and touch, also through imagination which is the mind's work:

Cry out to your Creator day and night, that help may come forth to you from on high, and may encompass your hearts and thought in Christ.⁵⁶

Humility, virtue, faith, love for God and love for the neighbor are basic elements to acquire purification. They allow us to obtain the harmony that God provides us with to fight all sorts of demons. Antony explained how demons come in various shapes and forms and how we are to pray to God to allow us to recognize the devil's work and not to be subdued by him:

The evil spirits make us zealous for works which we are not able to perform, and cause us to faint in tasks

⁵⁶Antony, "Letter VI", Letters of Saint Antony the Great, 22.

on which we are engaged, and which are profitable for us. Therefore they make us laugh when it is time for weeping, and weep when it is time for laughter, and simply turn us aside at every time from the right way. And there are many other deceits whereby they make us their slaves...when they fill our heart with these deceits, and we feed on them and they become our food, then God is patient with us and He visits us...⁵⁷

Pride, hidden persecution, subtle malice, the spirit of seduction, blasphemous thoughts, infidelities to God and man, hardening of heart, anger, judgment, self justifications, boastfulness, greed, impatience, and hate, all these are methods by which the devil enters into the heart of man/woman and work through him/her to overcome the work of God.

Antony explained how the soul is received as a trust, and as God entrusted us with this soul, so we should return it to our Creator as we received it; pure and undefiled. He elaborated also on how the body can resist the devil's temptations by having a strong mind that does not yield, a pure soul that does not bend. Thus, people can free themselves from the devil's claws and reach salvation. The devil can attack the weak; he attacks those who love pride and vainglory. Satan can even speak through clergymen, through monks, through those who recite the Scriptures. He can shape himself to any form he desires just to win over feeble persons. Antony's message was: pray and fast and ask the assistance of God to open the eyes of your heart, so that you can see and foretell the devil's work:

⁵⁷ Antony, "Letter IV", Letters of Saint Antony the Great, 17.

...they attack first those who have attained to a very great measure, seeking by means of pride and vainglory to turn them against one another. They know that in this way they can cut us off from God, for they know that he who loves his neighbour loves God; and for this cause the enemies of virtue sow division in our hearts, that we may be filled with great enmity against each other, and not hold any converse with our neighbour even from a distance.⁵⁸

b) PACHOMIUS (292-346)

When Pachomius decided to become a monk there was only the eremitic form around him, and so like many others it happened that a hermit formed Pachomius. Each hermit was to achieve individual perfection through his journey in solitude according to his own temperament. Being faithful to the voice of an angel who told him three times: "The will of God is to serve the human race and to reconcile them to himself"⁵⁹. Pachomius decided to start something helpful for others. He thought that every person should find his own perfection in helping others, and that this could only be achieved within a community of brothers, where all help each other in the spiritual combat. Pachomius was haunted by the memory of Christian primitive community in Jerusalem, where everything was owned in common. The community of mutual service, the holy Koinonia, had a very important place in his spirituality; monks lived in community and charity was expressed through action which is the uniqueness of Pachomius ascetical life. Since charity is the foundation of Christian life, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye

⁵⁸ Antony, "Letter IV", Letters of Saint Antony the Great, 23.

⁵⁹ Augustine Holmes, A Life Pleasing to God, 146.

love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13; 34) Pachomius made it the foundation in his Precepts and Sentences: “Charity sums up the whole Law”.⁶⁰ Pachomius’ spirituality underlines the double commandment of love of God and neighbor. His rules insisted on Scriptures, the Common Office, on renouncing the worldly things⁶¹ and on one’s own will. Prayer, meditation and reading the Bible go together for Pachomius. There were two assemblies in the church, called “synaxes” one in the morning and one at night, and prayer in the evening in each house. (text 13) The offices were simple but very important: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them”. (Matt. 18;20)

The community of goods meant not only material things but also the service of others spiritually, concretely and physically. One great expression of this was the mutual forgiveness and the imitation of Christ as servant of all. For Pachomius, this communal life made the cenobitism superior to anchorism. Pachomius gave great importance to Scriptures, Scripture was the rule of life for a Pachomian monk; the monk had to meditate on the Word of God at all times (Text 10) but as the Pachomian Order developed, the Rule became more central.⁶² It is said that after Pachomius death and that of his disciple

⁶⁰ Pachomius, The Rule of Pachomius, trans., Esmeralda Ramirez de Jennings, ed., Daniel R. Jennings, Part 3, < http://www.seanmultimedia.com/Pie_Pachomius_Rule_3.html.>

⁶¹ Including one’s own family, we shall see how this changes in New Monasticism

⁶² In Pachomius writings we can read: “According to the scriptures”. After 40 years this expression is replaced by “According to the Rule”.

Theodore, the whole order lost focus and collapsed like “a fire of straw”.⁶³ Since so many centuries later, some of the contemporary monastics have adopted its lifestyle, one can say that “il renaît des cendres!”

c) BASIL (330-379)

Not only did cenobite monasticism reach its fullness at the hands of Basil of Caesarea, but he also had an impact on asceticism throughout subsequent history and throughout the world. And that is true until today, both for monks and laity, since many faithful from the Eastern Church travel around the world to sojourn in Basilian Cenobitic Monasteries. Therefore, it is intentionally that much attention will be given to Basil's writings and his own understanding of the ascetical life, acknowledging that Basil was the cornerstone of monasticism. Born in 330, in Cappadocia⁶⁴ from wealthy parents,⁶⁵ his Christian education was due to the initiative of his older sister Macrina. In 356, he visited monasteries in Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt, experiencing various types of asceticism during his travels, but he decided on the Greek Cenobitic type. “...upon his return, he was baptized, which demonstrates that his

⁶³ Luc Brésard, A History of Monastic Spirituality (Abbey of Scourmount, Belgium)

<<http://www.scourmont.be/studium/bresard/Course>

⁶⁴ Cappadocia is well known for its Cappadocian Fathers, who are notably recognized for their theology and spirituality.

⁶⁵ Augustine Holmes, A Life Pleasing to God, 140.

monastic experiences were decisive.”⁶⁶ This spiritual journey imprinted in him the ascetic teaching and he molded his lifestyle in view of that. In order to really appreciate all of Basil’s richness, one has to read his writings⁶⁷. It is quite touching to read the account about his conversion, which reveals his open heart to ascetic life and his marvelous qualities:

Having lavished much time on the vanity and having consumed almost all my youth in futility, which were mine while I occupied myself with the acquirement of the precepts of that wisdom made foolish by God, when one day arising from a deep sleep I looked out upon the marvelous light of the truth of the Gospel, and beheld the uselessness of the wisdom “of the princes of this world that come to nought”, bemoaning much my piteous life, I prayed that there be given me a guidance to the introduction to the teaching of religion.⁶⁸

Soon after, he lived in seclusion and wrote the basic rules⁶⁹ for monastic life, the most renowned of his ascetical work; Longer Rules and Shorter Rules⁷⁰. Therein, we can feel how he amended his life accordingly. He then established a monastery in Cappadocia. His Shorter Rules, also called “Morals” or “Ethics”, has been seen as a guide to the spiritual life of Christian in general, with some specifics directed towards monks and clergy. The Long Rules traditionally has been understood as encompassing monastic

⁶⁶ Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, 139.

⁶⁷ The interested reader would benefit greatly from the reading of Basil’s ascetical work.

⁶⁸ Basil, “St Basil Ascetical Works,” The Fathers of the Church, vii-viii.

⁶⁹ His rules are dated by various authors with contradicting dates, the latest published work is by Charles Kannengiesser, Handbook of Patristic Exegesis (Boston: Brill, Leiden, 2004).

⁷⁰ Basil, “St Basil Ascetical Works,” The Fathers of the Church.

instructions. It is written in form of questions and answers. They are not really “rules” but rather spiritual directions; the title was translated into English as “rules” and so they are known as such. In many instances those rules can easily be applied to Christians in general. Holmes notices the same in the reading of Basil’s Preface of the Shorter Rules:

Seeing that God has brought us here together...let us not turn aside to any other work...but rather pass the hours of the night that remain in careful thought and in search out that which is needful.⁷¹

Holmes sees therein, a “gathering of committed Christians”, which is not necessarily monastic. Since following Christ is the way of life for all Christians then the ascetic life is profitable to all. Basil’s rules are said to be scriptural and evangelical because he firmly based his entire monastic doctrine upon the Bible. His rules can also be described as “practical”, because they give order and guidance to the daily work of ascetics.⁷² By insisting on the created nature of human beings, Basil established early on the basis for the doctrine of the image and likeness, that of deification:

The love of God cannot be taught. For we have neither learnt from another person to rejoice in the light and to cling to life, nor did anyone else teach us to love our parents or those who brought us up. In the same way, or much more so, the learning of the divine loving desire (pathos) does not come from outside; but when the creature was made, I mean man, a certain seminal word (logos spermatikos) was

⁷¹ Augustine Holmes, *A Life Pleasing to God*, 50.

⁷² Augustine Holmes, *A Life Pleasing to God*, 71-72.

implanted in us, having within itself the beginnings of the inclination to love.⁷³

Most of all, Basil's rules are spiritual; it is in this way that he reaches the soul of Christians and stirs up their love for God and their neighbors. It is most important to realize that the impact of Basil's theology and spirituality does not limit itself to its spreading around the world and throughout history, but more significantly in the metanoia⁷⁴ of millions of individual, who because of his ascetical guidance were brought in closer contact with God.

It is crucial to underline the fact that even when "Basil's commitment to the life of the wider Church began in an ascetic context and while involved in public life and the fight against heresy took more and more of his time, he remained involved with the ascetic movement throughout his life"⁷⁵ not only physically but also spiritually. This point is essential to this thesis as it proves the possibility to be involved in an ascetical life while being involved in the outside world. Basil describes the ascetic as someone who abandons all desires concerning earthly belongings in the hope that his spirit will attain the climax of adjoining God:

One who would reserve himself for God may not be defiled by any emotion savoring of this world; anger, envy, bearing a grudge, deceit, insolence, arrogance, unseasonable talking, indolence in prayer, desire for

⁷³ Basil, "St Basil Ascetical Works," Fathers of the Church, 233.

⁷⁴ Change of heart, ascetical transformation.

⁷⁵ Augustine Holmes, A Life Pleasing to God, 38.

goods one does not possess, negligence in observing the commandments.⁷⁶

Concerning chastity, Basil becomes even more specific as he mentions:

The practice of continency... does not have to do only with the delights of the table, but extends also to the avoidance of all that represents an impediment to us. One who is perfectly continent does not control his appetite only to fall prey to the desire for human fame. He does not gain mastery over shameful desires and neglect to overcome his attachment to wealth as well as all other base emotions, such as anger, dejection, and the rest of the vices which are wont to enslave inexperienced souls. Thus, he is humble who is continent...⁷⁷

Other ascetics had the same understanding, for example “Cyprian knew only too well, in himself and in his obstreperous colleagues, what it was for the Christian to be besieged not only by sensuality, but by the heavier and more devastating “worldly” lusts of anger, jealousy, and ecclesiastical pride.”⁷⁸ Modernity defines continence only in the limited sense of abstaining from sexual intercourse, thus it is vital to widen one’s horizon about this particular aspect since it is directly connected to the concepts of chastity, virginity and marriage. Therefore, it is important to understand Basil’s concept of continency. For Basil, continency is a form of detachment. Thus, we clearly notice his ascetic spirituality, which is based on detachment from possessions and passions and committing

⁷⁶ Basil, “St Basil Ascetical Works,” *Fathers of the Church*, 209.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 194.

one's entire life to the service of one's Creator. One should understand here the importance to feel detached from all earthly things, rather than denying them. For example, one can own money, but not be enslaved by it; the difference being that one puts his/her trust in God instead of in things.

According to Basil, the first and the most important commandment is love. This commandment is what Christ classified as the first among all, as he said: "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and your strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as yourself..." (Luke 10:27). Abiding by such a commandment a person will be able to achieve all others. Basil continues to write:

For thus we gain love towards God, which both stir us up to the practice of the Lord's commandments and is in its turn preserved by them in permanence and security. And this the Lord shows, saying in one place, 'If you love me, keep my commandments,' and in another, 'If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,' adding with still more insistence, 'Just as I have kept my Father's love.'⁷⁹

How can one keep God's commandment of love throughout the tribulations of life? According to Basil, one needs to have a good disposition:

I consider a good disposition to be a desire of pleasing God that is vehement, insatiable, firmly fixed and unchangeable. It is attained by wise and continuous contemplation of the majesty of the glories of God, by good thoughts, and by ceaseless

⁷⁹Basil, A Life Pleasing To God, 108.

remembrance of the blessings that come to us from God.⁸⁰

So the means by which a person can achieve such continued contemplation and ceaseless remembrance of God is by being in contact with God's spirit. Prayer does not need to take place only in seclusion, it can also be during an every day occupations. Restoration of daily prayers⁸¹ is a good start within the family:

Prayer is to be recommended, for it engenders in the soul a distinct conception of God. And the indwelling of God is this- to have God set firm within oneself through the process of memory - We thus become the temple of God whenever earthly care cease to interrupt the continuity of our memory of him.⁸²

The ascetic means of self-transformation and connection with God are of unceasing prayers, and of separation from the ungodly crowd, as he wrote:

We shall be able to rub out the stains of sin by toiling in prayer and persistent meditation on the will of God. It is impossible to attain to this meditation and prayer in a crowd which distracts the soul and introduces worldly cares. 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord'⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid, 119.

Note: One practical example of such thanksgiving is the Akathist by New Hieromartyr Gregory Petrov, which is a thanksgiving litany for every aspect of life. See <http://yya.o.ca.org/pages/ChurchwidePrograms/Yo_Mail/back-issues/2004-11.htm>

⁸¹ At sunrise, before and after meals, before an important task, when embarking in a vehicle, before bedtime, when one is sick, daily thanksgiving, etc...

⁸² Basil, A Life Pleasing To God, 120.

⁸³ Ibid, 127.

Thus, we see how retirement from worldly concerns was important for Basil, for it leads to seclusion, which allows meditation, contemplation and ceaseless prayers. This is the means by which ascetics are able to secure their desires to acquire their connection with God.⁸⁴ It is vital to emphasize the fact that Basil is not talking about retirement in the desert, as he did not promote anchorite monasticism, Basil wrote:

...community life offered more blessing that can be fully and easily numerated. It is more advantageous than the solitary life both for preserving the good bestowed on us by God and for warding off the external attacks of the enemy.⁸⁵

Christ did not ask us to isolate ourselves in the desert, but in our room: “But when you pray, go into thy room, and closing the door, pray to thy Father in secret;” The expression “in secret” wants to clarify the fact that one should not boast “in order to be seen by men.” (Matt. 6:5b, 6) Furthermore, contemplation is one of the many forms of prayer. Another is the unceasing prayer by means of a phrase that one can repeat even during working periods.⁸⁶

Most importantly, as mentioned above, Basil believed asceticism was for every Christian; therefore solitude can be attained in one’s own home, garden, or any other place. What is important is to create silence within one

⁸⁴ Here solitude was understood as getting away from all civilization. As we will see in later section, it can also be understood as retirement within oneself.

⁸⁵ Basil, “St Basil Ascetical Works,” *The Fathers of the Church*, 250.

⁸⁶ See Appendix C “Guide to Meditation”.

self, to retire from the worries of this world and to pray to God, to be able to “cry out of the depth”⁸⁷ of our soul for his help and assistance⁸⁸.

One of the important characteristics of Basil's asceticism was the assistance to the local population. For that specific reason, he had monasteries built close to the city, with an attachment to lodge, feed and cure the needy and the poor, which were funded from his own wealth. The love of God and His Church and its unity were the focus of his entire life. Basil insists:

Love of God and neighbor find full expression only in community life... God the Creator ordained that we need one another... in order that we may be linked with one another... the manner of the love of Christ does not allow us each to be concerned solely with his own interest. For love does not seek its own.⁸⁹

One sees in the Rules of Basil an insistence on moderation in all things.⁹⁰ He regulated and systematized monasticism. He introduced the supervision of an Abbot of the monastery, who was a spiritual guide not only chosen by his peers but whom they could also remove. He also encouraged education⁹¹ for his fellow monks and eventually monasteries became the source of scholarship. Basilian monasticism was and is still a vibrant model for both the

⁸⁷ Psalm 130.

⁸⁸ See Philip, Saliba, Joseph J. Allen, Out of the Depths Have I Cried (Brookline, Ma. : Holy Orthodox Press, 1979).

⁸⁹ Basil, A Life pleasing to God, 148, 174.

⁹⁰ Basil was against anchorite asceticism. He could have encountered some encratite ascetics during his tour. Holmes has suggested the same possibility in A Life Pleasing to God, 160.

⁹¹ Probably because, he himself enjoyed and appreciated the value of his own education, which he also transmitted to his own brother Gregory.

Eastern and Western Churches. Its spirituality is also a source of encouragement for people living in the world.⁹²

The primordial and most significant aspect of Basil's Rules is its end, which is the union with God or deification. Basil assisted innumerable people to reach it, as attested by Theoret of Cyrus when he describes him as "the light not only of Cappadocia but of the whole world". One finds that any attempt to describe Basil falls short of the reality. Even today, this inner world can be recaptured by following Basil's instructions.

d) GREGORY OF NYSSA (335-395)

Earlier scholars generally underestimated Gregory in relation to the other great Cappadocians...but recent patristic research has resulted in positive reevaluation ...It is ...primarily as a Christian thinker and spiritual guide that Gregory has won widespread recognition.⁹³

A few words about Basil's brother, Gregory of Nyssa appear necessary to clarify the understanding of virginity, as it is a fundamental concept in ascetical life. Some authors who have analyzed Gregory's writings on that particular subject will assist us in making our point. Both Valerie Karas and Mark D. Hart wrote articles on Gregory's text On Virginity. Valerie Karras, research associate at the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae University of

⁹² Today, there are many books published on the subject. See Light & Life Publication Co. at www.Light-N-Life.com.

⁹³ Encyclopedia of Early Christianity , 401. Also Charles Kannengiesser, in Patristic Exegesis notes that Gregory of Nyssa is the most studied Greek Father in recent decades, along with Origen, 753.

California contradicts Mark D. Hart⁹⁴ on many points, yet they both agree that Gregory is using the terms “marriage” as metaphor for attachment and “virginity” as an image for nonattachment to earthly things and concerns.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Gregory is very explicit in his text On Virginity, when he declares that virginity is most importantly “in the soul” (this is in accordance with other Fathers of the Church):

Achieving it (truly virginal life) is not as simple as one might think, nor is it confined to the body; it pertains to all things and extends even to thought which is considered one of the achievements of the soul⁹⁶

Christ himself has warned us: “But I say to you that anyone who so much as looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt 5: 28) Gregory reminds us:

Why, then, does the head of a wise person have eyes? Does this mean that an analogy exists between members of the soul and the body? Just as the head presides over the entire body, so does the soul hold preeminence as the governing principle.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Valerie A. Karras, “A Re-evaluation of Marriage Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa’s *On Virginity*”, Journal of Early Christian Studies 13, 1 (2005): 115. In this work Karras criticizes Hart’s text entitled “Gregory of Nyssa’s Ironic Praise of the Celibate Life,” Heythrop Journal 33 (1992): 1–19. Hart has also written, “Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa’s Deeper Theology of Marriage,” Theological Studies 51 (1990): 450–78.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, Ecclesiastes, J.357.

“The ascetical work of Gregory⁹⁸ teaches Christian spirituality in emphasizing Basil’s example and applying his Rules to the ordinary lay status.”⁹⁹

d) MACRINA (- d 379)

A few words must be said about Basil’s and Gregory’s sister Macrina. Traditionally the Cappadocians are known as “The Cappadocian Fathers”. But recent scholars have included Macrina in the Cappadocian clan and are shedding light on her important role within this illustrious community.

“Macrina, the Teacher” is the title given to her in a recent study. She was a “well-educated woman who had a major part in the education and spiritual developments of her brothers.”¹⁰⁰ Macrina, whom her father had promised in marriage, decided at twelve years old to remain a virgin when the husband-to-be died. According to some scholars, after her father’s death, in 350, she transformed their house in Pontus into a monastery and became the superior. She led her mother into ascetical life¹⁰¹. Macrina was the first in the

⁹⁸ Titles among his numerous works touching asceticism are: Life of Macrina, On the Soul and Resurrection, In Canticum canticorum, and Life of Moses are discussing especially the nature of Christian perfection as continuous progress, and the mystical union with God. In In inscriptiones psalmorum, he presents the five steps on the ladder of perfection. Also generally attributed but not universally accepted On the Christian Mode of Life. In From Glory to Glory, Gregory talks about the “Paradise from within”, which is an extraordinarily beautiful metaphor for expressing the realization of deification. Commentary on Ecclesiastes deals with the renunciation of earthly things and how the spirit transcends the senses.

⁹⁹ Luc Brésard, Monasticism, <<http://www.scourmont.be/studium/bresard/09-basil.htm#basilV>>

¹⁰⁰ Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, 558.

¹⁰¹ St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Macrina, W.K. Lowther Clarke, trans., London: SPCK, 1916.

family to enter ascetic life. According to Holmes she had been an ascetic for ten years when Basil returned from his tour.¹⁰²

Philip Rousseau, whose work has been examining monasticism, offers an¹⁰³ exposé, which identifies Macrina's community as a House of the Virgins and describes it as a domestic ascetic community¹⁰⁴. Rousseau concludes by saying that Macrina's situation proves to be a transition; one should understand here a transition between the House of Virgins which was domestic and monasteries lifestyle which was more formally communal and directed by common rules.

In St Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Macrina, W.K. Lowther Clarke, a well-known writer on Christianity, particularly on the Cappadocians, also agrees in that sense as he finds in the Life of Macrina:

...a double monastery, the men presided over by Peter, the women by Macrina. This seems to have been a natural development of the earlier ascetic family life to which Macrina had drawn her mother after the death of Naucratus, (Macrina's father).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Augustine Holmes, A Life Pleasing to God, 8.

Some think that Basil might have start writing his Rules before his tour of the Ascetics. But it seems improbable that he would have gotten the insight before he actually went and experienced this type of life. Charles Kannengiesser dates all of Basil's rules after 373. See Handbook of Patristic Exegesis, 741.

¹⁰³ Philip Rousseau, "The Pious Household and the Virgin Chorus: Reflections on Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Macrina", Journal of Early Christian Studies 13, 2: 186.

¹⁰⁴ Domestic meaning family or household type.

¹⁰⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Macrina.

In this quotation, Clarke confirms the existence of ascetic family life, which was a different form than that of the House of Virgins.

Reading and understanding the Cappadocians help us realize the opportunity that ascetic spirituality has to offer the world today. The Cappadocians had to deal with all kinds of difficulties concerning the organization of the Church, yet their heart and their soul were in charge and so they kept their spiritual life strong. It can be said that it is not the material things that hindered ascetic life, but rather our attachment to them, as mentioned by Gregory himself, in his treatise On Virginity. To put it in another way: it is not our living in the world that makes it impossible for us to be ascetic, but rather our lust and undisciplined desires which prevent us from being free to go towards God.

The Cappadocians came from upper-class families and were well educated. It has often been argued that material and spiritual life should be separate, that ascetical life should be in solitude. Yet the cenobitic monasticism envisioned by Basil insisted upon intermingling with the local population. Each of the Cappadocians chose to live their ascetic lives in various ways, but in their concern for the whole Christian community through preaching, writing and care for the needy, they were able to connect both worlds, which prove that it is difficult but not impossible.

e) BENEDICT (480-547)

Monasticism spread throughout Europe when St. Benedict of Nursia (480-550) influenced by Pachomius and Cassian¹⁰⁶, but mostly by Basil of Caesarea¹⁰⁷, wrote his own rule, which follows "The Rule of the Master"¹⁰⁸. The rule is a combination of spiritual doctrine and practical regulations. Benedict refers his readers to Cassian and Basil (R.B. 73); his Rule is a synthesis of their work.

Gregory the Great wrote The Dialogues, which is a "highly stylized hagiographical account with emphasis on miracles" about Benedict's life.¹⁰⁹ Gregory was only three years old at the time of Benedict. His story is based upon Benedict's followers' accounts. Benedict's biography is sketchy and at times contradictory. Some say that he did not create any order,¹¹⁰ others that he built "twelve monasteries and placed a superior in each and in the thirteenth he instructed those that be better instructed by his own presence"¹¹¹. Some insist that his reputation for holiness drew thousands of people to him,¹¹² others, that it was only three centuries later that Benedict's

¹⁰⁶ Note: In comparing the life story of Cassian and Benedict, one can easily see that Cassian was eclipse by the political influence of Charlemagne, since he made St Benedict Rules mandatory in all monasteries under his authority. One would benefit greatly in reading attentively Cassian's writings.

¹⁰⁷ Whose rules were translated in Latin by Rufinus.

¹⁰⁸ The Rule of the Master is not the title of St Benedict rule, but rather an anonymous work.

¹⁰⁹ Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, 148.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 149.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Saint Benedict Order, "History," St. Benedict and his Order.

<http://www.christdesert.org/noframes/scholar/benedict/benedict_history.html>

rule was widespread throughout Europe due to the religious politics of Charlemagne who imposed it on all monasteries.

Benedict's Rule lays down no specific tasks for his organization, contrary to other orders that were preaching, teaching, or nursing the sick. Indeed, they "were simply a ladder provided to aid a man in his search for God"¹¹³. For Benedict, a monastery was nothing more or less than:

... a school for the Lord's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. ¹¹⁴

Benedict had the revolutionary idea - "*ora et labora*", work was a necessary instrument of virtue on a par with prayer. He envisioned a state of life in which the physical components of work, prayer and reading were in all ways equal. He warned against outward expressions of piety and excessive mortification, especially when they were found to be, as is most often the case, an end in themselves. His was a voice of moderation and reason; his concern was to prevent "sadness, murmuring and contumacy".¹¹⁵ Indeed his Rule is a document about how a man can live with God in an imperfect world. Still today, Benedict's writing of the Rule is recognized for "its discernment

¹¹³ Saint Benedict Order, "History," [St. Benedict and his Order](http://christdesert.org/Monastic_Studies/St_Benedict_and_His_Order/A_Brief_History/index.html).

<http://christdesert.org/Monastic_Studies/St_Benedict_and_His_Order/A_Brief_History/index.html>

¹¹⁴ Benedict, [The Rule](#), Prologue, verses 45-50.

¹¹⁵ [Encyclopedia of Early Christianity](#), 149.

and clarity of language” and its author is known for his sensitivity “to human freedom and uniqueness”, leaving to the abbot some flexibility to adjust to its own environment.

g) WILLIAMS OF HIRSCHOU (-1091)

History suggests that there have been two different origins for the birth of Oblates. From the very beginning, Benedict’s monasteries were accepting young boys and convents were receiving young girls who were “offered” by their parents. In the course of time, adult laity also asked to be associated with the monks’ lifestyle, without leaving their homes, families, or occupations. These ascetics offered their lives to God, regulating them according to the spiritual Rule of Benedict, wherever they were in the outside world. In the Middle Ages, the oblates were established as a Third Order or tertiaries among many Religious Orders, for instance, the Benedictines, Augustinians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Cistercians, Carmelites, and Poor Clares.

Another explanation for the Oblates inception establishes that, once Williams¹¹⁶ became the Abbot of Hirschou in 1069, he reformed the Benedictine rule, which had become lax with time. Status and rules for the Oblates were defined in two types: the first being the Interns or Regular Oblates living in the monastery and thus following the discipline of the

¹¹⁶ Hirschou was one of the reformers of the Western monastic.

monastery and making formal vows. The Externs or Secular (Common) Oblates were the second type; they lived outside the monastic community but were always affiliated with the monastery. This lay external spiritual group attracted large numbers of both celibate and married women and men, who consecrated themselves to God, and lived according to the statutes of the Oblates wherever they were, with their family, their fellow workers, even within their social activities. The Externs are not professed monks or nuns, but they do make a promise. They are considered as a secular order, meaning living outside the religious community.

The Oblates rules are less rigid than those of cloistered life. Yet, they involve serious spiritual commitment and particular practices. Today, a variety of Oblate Orders are found within the Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox Churches,¹¹⁷ although, they are more numerous within the Catholic tradition.

4. Commonalities

Christian asceticism took various forms of expression. It was first and foremost a practice of deep beliefs. Commitment to one's faith meant a profound change in one's way of life, according to Christ's teaching. Common factors of all Christian ascetical forms can be identified. They evidently have the same goal of seeking God, following Christ and abandoning oneself to the grace of God. They also have common practices

¹¹⁷For example the Orthodox Holy Cross Antiochian in Linthicum, Maryland, U.S.A.

such as scriptural meditation, ascetic literature, spiritual discernment, together with a disciplined spiritual life and service to others. Furthermore, their detachment from desires and worldly things is formally declared in the three vows or promise made by all monks and ascetics, which are chastity, poverty and obedience.¹¹⁸

This first section has examined the theoretical foundations of asceticism in the Christian past. Then the various forms that evolved in a wide variety of cultures were examined over extended historical periods. This has been a brief overview, necessarily selective, of what many described as an extraordinary experiment in giving concrete expression to gospel values. The following section will explore contemporary experiments which are findings ways to commune with God through ascetic lifestyles within the modern world.

¹¹⁸ These vows or promise are also made by Contemporary New Monastic Members.

PART TWO
FOREGROUND

I Contemporary Theoretical Foundations

II Contemporary Praxis

The Background section of this work has presented what is behind us historically. The Foreground, as its name specifies, will uncover the part of the scene closer to the viewer. Therefore, this section will expose what is happening in the community today, the reality of history of which we form part. It unveils theological concepts created by contemporary authors. It lists a number of communities and individuals who have chosen to live an ascetical life in our world today, underlining its common ground and its connection with traditional asceticism.

I Contemporary Theoretical Foundations

Since the intention of this thesis is to unveil a broad spectrum of possible view points, this section will detail a variety of stories of individuals whose desire for God drew them towards a particular spiritual expression in some unusual ways. These were specifically chosen to contrast with the well-known traditional ways of monasticism. These new forms of spiritual expression needed a specific linguistic expression to define themselves.

This presentation will allow us to shed more light on different concepts, and initiatives on the matter, not only through its evolution in history but from different angles, hence giving better perspectives and broader understanding.

1. "Innerworldly Asceticism", Max Weber

In his book Sources of the Self¹¹⁹, Charles Taylor¹²⁰, renowned Canadian philosopher, and Christian commentator, quotes Max Weber's expression: "innerworldly asceticism." As the founder of sociology, Weber's perspective is anthropological and not theological; yet Taylor identifies for us Weber as one of the first person after the Reformation to connect asceticism and the laity. At that time, the emphasis on hierarchy in the church was diminishing the "spiritual status" of laity, which was considered lower than the clergy. It provoked a reaction, which revalorized the vocation of laity within the Reformation Church. According to Taylor, Weber describes the seventeenth century Puritan¹²¹ lay spirituality as "innerworldly asceticism."

We must in a sense love the world, while in another sense detesting it. This is the essence of what Weber called the Puritan's "innerworldly asceticism". The answer to the absorption in things that is the result of sin is not renunciation but a certain kind of use, one which is detached from things and focused on God. It is a caring and not caring, whose paradoxal nature comes out in Puritan notion that we should use the world with "weaned affections."¹²²

¹¹⁹ Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1989), 17, 222, 223.

¹²⁰ Michael Novak, in "An Authentic Modernity," First Things 33, (1993) identifies Taylor as follows: "premier philosopher of modernity, the most judicious, the one who makes the most apt and discerning distinctions, the one who best sees both modernity's grandeur and its misery." p 40-42

¹²¹ "A group in England and the American colonies who, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wanted a greater reformation of the Church of England in order to 'purify' it further..." Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Edition, (New York:1971).

¹²² Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1989), 222.

This philosophy, which describes the Puritan spirituality, is an exact paraphrase of the ascetic Fathers and Mothers' conception of detachment. It is one of many paradoxes in the Church history that a movement against monasticism opened the door to lay asceticism. After this point in time, many lay people, married or celibate were involved in missionary work, some spending a few years, others their whole life.

2. The "Invisible Monastery", Paul Irénée Couturier

Paul Irénée Couturier (1881-1953), was a Benedictine monk who created a new spiritual concept that of the "invisible monastery". It concerned a spiritual sphere composed of individuals or communities, living apart in different countries, but united in their mission: they dedicated their life to prayers for the unity of the Church, thus the expression: "the invisible monastery". He defines this reality as follows:

It (the Invisible Monastery) is constituted of the 'wholeness' of souls to whom the Holy Spirit could make himself known from an intimate knowledge because they have tried to really open themselves to its flame and through it to its light... its entire reality remains always invisible "hidden in God"... the word monastery is pertinent since it is the same suffering, the same desires, the same preoccupation, and the same spiritual life, the same goal that unites in Christ's heart...¹²³

¹²³ My translation : "Il est constitué par l'ensemble des âmes, à qui l'Esprit-Saint a pu faire connaître, d'une connaissance intime parce qu'ils ont essayé de vraiment s'ouvrir à sa flamme et par elle à sa lumière... sa réalité totale demeure toujours invisible, 'cachée en Dieu'... le nom de monastère convient à cette totalité puisque la même souffrance, les mêmes désirs, les mêmes préoccupations, la même vie

We can note in this exceptional monk, the truthfulness of prayer, the intimate connection with God and his strong faith in the Spirit of God. His concept did not only concern prayers but also actions: "...this collective and brotherly request of forgiveness addressed to Christ would not be sincere if they [Christians] did not start by humbly asking forgiveness from each other."¹²⁴ The idea of an invisible monastery is inspirational, since it involves oblation of one's life, perpetual prayer, humility and love.

Another man had a similar idea, except that he added a more structured spiritual life. Wilfrid Monod (1867-1943) maintained that to sustain spiritual life, one needs discipline. In 1923 he founded the first Protestant Third Order: "Le Tiers-Ordre Protestant des Veilleurs" which follows Francis of Assisi as its model. Its motto is: "Joy- Simplicity -Mercy". Its members choose to follow three basic commitments:

1. Three periods of prayer (morning, noon and night)
2. On Friday, meditation on Christ and support to others
3. On Sunday, participation to local community service

This written formal commitment is renewed annually. Even though its members are dispersed, they are united by their prayers and they gather within their respective community every semester. Each year, a three day

spirituelle, le même but rassemble dans le cœur du Christ...", Paul Couturier, " Les écrits de l'abbé Paul Couturier", Oecuménisme Spirituel, ed., Maurice Villain (Belgique : Casterman, 1963).

¹²⁴ My translation : "...cette demande collective et fraternelle faite au Christ ne serait pas sincère si elle ne commençait pas par une demande de pardon envers eux-mêmes..." Paul Evdokimov, Les âges de la vie spirituelle .

retreat is offered to those who want to participate.¹²⁵This particular “arrangement” seems to amalgamate the “Invisible Monastery” of Paul Couturier and the “Interiorized Monasticism” of Paul Evdokimov.

3. “Interiorized Monasticism”, Paul Evdokimov¹²⁶

Paul Evdokimov (1900-1970) provides a multitude of texts on the subject of lay asceticism. He is a renowned lay theologian and prolific writer. He has expressed the essence of the Early Christian spirituality by his concept of “Interiorized Monasticism” : “...every lay person is a monk of inner monasticism, subdued to the Gospel’s demand.”¹²⁷

At first, it may sound strange but in its essence it pictures the Gospel call, which is answered through the monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Evdokimov insists that the spirit of these vows must guide each Christian in his life, whether he be monk, lay, married or celibate. This theologian is connecting the past monasticism “philokalia” to the modern lay asceticism, by keeping its essence yet holding the doors open to new forms. Evdokimov has very precisely identified the call of the contemporary asceticism: “to overcome the limitations of all forms in order to be able to

¹²⁵Eglise Reformée Cévennes Languedoc Roussillon 2007, Les Veilleurs, < http://www.erf-clr.org/communautes_et_centres.php?rub=184&nid=218&tag=118>

¹²⁶ Alexandre Boukharev and before him Alexandre Boukharev have also mentioned this expression before Evdokimov but the latter has develop it extensively in his work.

¹²⁷ My translation : “ *Chaque laïque est un moine soumis au monachisme intériorisé soumis aux exigences de l’Évangile...* ” Paul Evdokimov, Les âges de la vie spirituelle.

express itself everywhere and in all circumstances”. He adds concerning the forms:

...one must be aware of any simplification and one must distinguish between forms which are mobile and principles which are permanent, between the transmission of the essential message of the Gospel and the creative fruits of its new witnesses ¹²⁸

One form, which is appearing in contemporary monasticism, is the mixed communities of married and unmarried ascetics. This new form reconnects the ascetic spirituality to its roots as preached by Basil, which is that it applies to all Christians, since it is an answer to the call of Christ to follow Him. One should remember that Christ’s disciples were not all celibate (1Cor 9:5) and that in Early Christianity asceticism developed under various forms.

In the following section, we shall proceed to present some contemporary examples of those ascetic communities and their understanding of monasticism. These new perceptions about asceticism reality shall broaden the horizons and hopefully clarify some more the perception of the reader. Furthermore, the growing numbers of communities including celibate and married people in their ranks might bring a new understanding of the

¹²⁸ My translation : “ ... *il faut se garder de toute simplification et distinguer entre les formes mobiles et le principe permanent, entre la transmission du message essentiel des Évangiles et l’engendrement créateur de ses témoins nouveaux...* ” Paul Evdokimov, Les âges de la vie spirituelle.

theology of the body and a more positive theology of marriage, some of which have already been developed by Evdokimov¹²⁹ and others.¹³⁰

II Contemporary Praxis

1. Contemporary Communal Ascetic Lifestyles

Many lay communities in our contemporary society such as the Oblates, Opus Dei, New Skete and New Monasticism, and others are relevant to the question and all will be documented with supportive data taken from published documents, personal interviews or correspondence. In fact there are so many groups, particularly in New Monasticism, that it will be impossible to study them all in the present thesis. Therefore, only a representative sampling of this phenomenon will be analyzed but all that were found will be listed for further research.

a) The Oblates

In 2003, the Oblates of Britain, which include married Oblates, took a new direction as they were challenged by the Abbot of Worth Abbey to become a new Benedictine Lay Community, which meant separating themselves from the monastery to become a new entity, with new challenges. This new entity opened new directions to the community as it got much involved with the

¹²⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

¹³⁰ See the following articles by Paul Jennings, "La grâce de l'éros", *Œcuménisme*, 163 (2006) and by George Morelli, "Sex is Holy", *The Word*, 153 (2004) 78.

local population. Also, according to Helen Nolan, the director¹³¹, members became more involved in Lectio Divina¹³² and began to reassess their spiritual involvement. Later on, a monastic community actually sprung out from this group and established a communal home in Brighton, United Kingdom. It is called The Elm Grove Community and its mission is to assist local people.

In recent years, Kenneth Russell¹³³ and Mark Praiss¹³⁴ have both published books expressing their commitment to contemporary forms of monasticism in the Oblate community. Since the 1970's, Russell has also researched and promoted lay contemplative life for married couples and recommended Aelred of Rievaulx¹³⁵ as a model for married contemplatives. Russell and Praiss have been both married oblates living with their family and working in the community. Praiss defines his spiritual life form as: "Monastery without walls",¹³⁶ and defines the goal as follows: "The tools of monasticism must never become ends in themselves... The goal is love of God, union with God."¹³⁷ Praiss defines their spiritual life as follows:

¹³¹ E-mail conversation, 2006.

¹³² Sacred reading from the Scriptures and writings of the Holy Fathers/Mothers.

¹³³ Kenneth Russell, "The Lay contemplative", Theoforum, 36 (2005): 21-33.

¹³⁴ Mark Praiss, The Inner Room: A Journey into Monasticism (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press) 2003.

¹³⁵ Aelred of Hexham, Anglo-Saxon monk of the 1200's, Abbott of Rievaulx, who wrote among other books Spiritual Friendship. In his writings he encourages virginity among the unmarried and chastity in marriage, < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aelred_of_Hexham.>

¹³⁶ Mark Praiss, "Appendix" in The Inner Room: A Journey into Monasticism (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press 2003), 122-127.

¹³⁷ Praiss, The Inner Room, 1-27.

The goal, however, is not the reading, nor the Hours, nor the meditation, nor some mythical romantic monastic ideal. God is the goal. Though we are powerless to grasp God, we nonetheless can know God-through love. Our spiritual ways are nothing if exercised without love. The spiritual exercises are not carried out in order to love God, but love of God impels carrying out the spiritual exercises... Love God, love your neighbor and love in the manner in which Jesus loves you - unconditionally. Then will your sacrifice of praise rise up before the Lord like incense, like an evening oblation.¹³⁸

Furthermore, he clarifies some aspects about monasticism beyond the walls of the monastery:

The Monk is compelled, stumbling through doors trying to follow the voice that calls... The monk is in the monastery. The monk is also on Wall Street, on Main Street and down the farm... Monasticism beyond the walls is certainly one way to illustrate that the line between the secular and the holy is fiction... many people today are being led by the Holy Spirit to discover this new way to Jesus Christ... I do suggest, that we are perhaps on the cusp of a new age in which the boundaries of the monastery will expand to such a point where reference to "wall" will be moot.¹³⁹

More importantly, Plaiss unveils a vital reality concerning married people who experience a call to a kind of monastic lifestyle. He identifies three very important needs for married people who seek God, the first is spiritual inspiration, the second spiritual support, and finally, they need a mode of expression for their spirituality:

¹³⁸Ibid,127

¹³⁹ Ibid, 6,126.

Because the vocation is hidden, a person receiving the call to it is perplexed... Consequently the person stumbles through one door after another trying to follow the voice that calls. The person persists in the search, for he or she feels compelled to do so, a compulsion fueled by the urge to rest in God... This search often leads to a monastery. There the person discovers the rhythm of life that speaks to the soul... This discovery is often accompanied by deep spiritual rumblings... Now this person is thoroughly confused. Perhaps he or she is married, has children and is paying off a mortgage. How can all that be reconciled with the apparent call to monasticism?¹⁴⁰

Plaiss underlines one fundamental factor:

To realize the nature of this call to monasticism and to accept it are giant steps toward accepting peace and solitude, for to accept one's identity is to be, to simply rest in God. Wherever the lay monastic may be, whatever the lay monastic may be doing, he or she is, thus, participating in the will of God.¹⁴¹

The Oblates mission can be defined as follows:

As their states in life permit, Oblates make use of various means for improving themselves spiritually, intellectually, culturally and socially, by making retreat a day of renewal of promise.

Oblates strive to be men and women of practical spirituality
Oblates strive to be men and women of Christian virtue
Oblates strive to foster a spirit of community
Oblates strive to be men and women of peace¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴¹ Mark Plaiss, The Inner Room: A Journey into Lay Monasticism (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2003) 7.

¹⁴²< http://cistercianmonks.org/html_files/obnlates.html.>

Some suggest that the Oblates can be seen as “Monasticism’s Gift to the World”:

Through their commitment to Benedictine values, Oblates bring the light of Christ into the world and, by their witness to Gospel values, encourage humanity to respond to God’s ongoing call of love. Especially in this age of secularization and widespread loss of religious values in Western culture, Oblates can provide a powerful witness to the real possibility of intensive Christian life.¹⁴³

b) Opus Dei

Opus Dei (The Work of God) is a Roman Catholic organization, founded in 1928 by Josemaría Escrivá, which explores the status of laity: Opus Dei's central teachings are that "everyone is 'called' to become a saint" and that "ordinary life is a path to sanctity". Escriva says:

Our Lord does not limit his dialogue to a small, restricted group: he talks to everyone...” Jesus does not deny anyone his word, and it is a word which heals, which consoles, which enlightens... Therefore, talk is not enough; we have to act, we have to put into practice the teaching we receive...¹⁴⁴

Many connections can be made between Escriva’s writings and those of early ascetic writers. Recently, John L. Allen has published a study of

¹⁴³ Bede Classick (St Paul’s Abbey, Newton: New Jersey), < [http://www/osb.org/sva/obl/oblform.html](http://www.osb.org/sva/obl/oblform.html)>.

¹⁴⁴ Josemaria, Escriva, [The Richness of Ordinary Life](http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=244&id_scat+36), <http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=244&id_scat+36>.

Opus Dei and provides valuable insights into this movement.¹⁴⁵ Therein he underlines the contemplative aspect of Opus Dei:

The concept of contemplation in the middle of the world, however, cuts deeper than simply praying in the car rather than in the chapel. The idea is that all of one's life is a prayer, that there are no separate compartments of existence marked off as "religious" and "secular"... There are no compartments that aren't labeled "God's business."¹⁴⁶

Various Popes and Catholic Church leaders strongly supported this movement. But the Opus Dei was also contested from both within as well as without the Roman Catholic Church, among other things; it was accused of political bias.¹⁴⁷ In 1982, Opus Dei was made into a personal prelature¹⁴⁸ which is defined as follows as a fundamentally lay organization operating in the world (members take no vows and live normal, everyday lives), whereas religious orders are religious organizations operating out of the world (members take vows and lead lives in accordance with their specific organization).

However, it is very important to realize that this definition reveals a distinct reality different than that of the Secular Oblates in formation, association and institutional frame. Currently over 84,000 people from every continent belong

¹⁴⁵ John, L., Allen, Opus Dei, (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 91, 93.

¹⁴⁷ John L, Allen, Opus Dei (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Double day, 2005) 134-162, 277-300.

¹⁴⁸ This special status was given by Jean Paul II. A personal prelature is an exclusive status worldwide, as it is not under the authority of the local church; it also differs from religious orders.

to the prelature.¹⁴⁹ Its headquarters, together with its prelatric church, are in Rome. The intentions of Opus Dei are to bring laity to sanctity, which in Escriva's mind included an evangelization tool.¹⁵⁰ Its members, undergoing training, were to spread the good news about the Savior Jesus-Christ. In Escriva's own word Opus Dei's mission is:

...the spreading of this message, which comes from the Gospel. And to those who grasp this ideal of holiness, the Work offers the spiritual assistance and doctrinal, ascetical and apostolic training which they need to put into practice¹⁵¹

c) New Communities

The New Communities are so called because they follow the traditional monastic rules with a contemporary understanding. This new understanding includes openness to all states of life, celibate, married couples, families, clergy and monastic, as well as other denominations. Their life arrangement is comparable to that of a family, with the number of members, sharing of responsibilities and type of housing.

¹⁴⁹In reaction to the book by Dan Brown and movie "The DaVinci Code", many media covered the story and differentiated between fiction and reality. David Van Biema, "The Way of Opus Dei", Time 167(2006): 36-44, James Martin, "Saints or Assassins? Opus Dei and the Da Vinci Code", America 194 (2006): 10-12.

¹⁵⁰Josemaria Escriva, Conversations with Msgr Escrivá de Balaguer, 1968.
<http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=271&id_scat=270>

¹⁵¹ Josemaria Escriva, Conversations with Msgr Escrivá de Balaguer, 1968.
<http://www.josemariaescriva.info/index.php?id_cat=271&id_scat=270>

New Skete¹⁵² Companions is one of the oldest of such communities; it has been in existence for twenty-four years. Located in Cambridge, New York on top of a mountain, the New Skete Companions are married orthodox monks (male and female) tonsured and professed.¹⁵³ This community does not impose sexual abstinence. Chastity is understood as choosing to respect and love everything in their life and includes the expression of sexuality in marriage. The Companions devote their ascetic lifestyle to daily community prayers, to hosting people and couples for retreats and spiritual counseling, the maintenance of the household and the immense peace gardens created for meditation. The Companions live as married couples in a modern type of family dwelling called "The Emmaus House". It offers private lodging to residents and visitors with an open view of the mountain. The monks have established their lifestyle through long and friendly discussions amongst themselves.¹⁵⁴ They follow Basilian and Benedictine models and belong to the Archdiocese of the Orthodox Christian of America (OCA).

The Monks of New Skete published a book in 1999: In the Spirit of Happiness: Spiritual Wisdom for Living¹⁵⁵, therein they explain in details and in simple words, their journey towards Orthodox monastic life from a

¹⁵² Skete is a Greek word for a small group of monks or nuns united in a lax way, (semi-eremitic) living together, guided by an elder. Archetype: Macarius The Great¹⁵² (300-390) or Gerasimus¹⁵² (d. 475) (depending on the sources) Skete is also a desert in Egypt where many monasteries were built.

¹⁵³ When each individual in an Orthodox couple is ready, both female and male can be tonsured as monk, after a trial period that lasts about three years, at which point they make the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and are tonsured. Since they live within a married monastic community the female called themselves monk rather than nuns, the latter relates to the traditional celibate female monastic.

¹⁵⁴ Meeting with Sister Melanie Updike, Superior of the New Skete Companions, during a personal retreat at the Emmaus House, August 8-9, 2006.

¹⁵⁵ The monks of New Skete, In the Spirit of Happiness: Spiritual Wisdom for Living (Boston, New York, London: Little Brown and Company, 1999).

contemporary understanding, which is shared by all members of the monastery. This book has brought God seekers from as far as Korea. The New Skete Monastery offers its warm hospitality to all who knock at its door¹⁵⁶. A parish formed of members of the surrounding communities has sprouted from this cordial attitude:

We are interested in and respectful of believers and unbelievers alike and welcome them in our home...And we are committed to doing whatever we can toward healing the centuries-old schism between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.¹⁵⁷

The companions describe their mission as follows:

Our Mission as married monastics is to dedicate ourselves to achieving a full flowering of human life, as embodied in Christ, through our shared liturgical and communal life. As married monastic community we achieve our mission by willingly exploring, evaluating and challenging every area of our lives in loving, dynamic inter-relationship. Balancing times of solitude, prayer, study, silence and work, we offer ourselves to God as witnesses of married monasticism in contemporary America. We share our mission with all who come our way and experience the peace and joy of our lives and partake of our hospitality.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Their hospitality is open to all denominations.

¹⁵⁷ The monks of New Skete, *In the Spirit of Happiness: Spiritual Wisdom for Living*, (Boston, New York, London: Little Brown and Company, 1999), 306.

¹⁵⁸ The Monk of New Skete, *Mission Statement*, <<http://www.newskete.com/mission.htm>>

In the Orthodox Church there are other similar ascetic groups such as La Communauté de Béthanie et de Sainte Croix in France and the mission of St John the Compassionate in Toronto, Canada.¹⁵⁹

The Community of The Beatitudes is among the oldest of the “New Communities”. It was founded in 1973 in France, under the name of “Community of the Lion of Judah”. Its extensive statutes (over 65 pages) were approved “ad experimentum” in 1992 by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. It was defined as a “Private Association of the Faithful, with juridical personality of Diocesan Right”. In 2001, it was recognized by the same authority as an “International Private Association of Faithful”. They too include people of all states. Its birth was due to the effervescence of the Catholic charismatic movement of the 1970’s. Its tradition remains Catholic but its spiritual framework includes other denominations. Seventy such communities can be found around the world including Germany, Hungary, Lebanon, Peru, Djibouti, Zaire, New Zealand, United States and Canada (Quebec City).¹⁶⁰ Its spirituality has been described and published in a book called The Book of Life. The community defines itself as follows:

¹⁵⁹ Paul Ladouceur, « Le désert dans la Cité: vers de nouvelles formes de monachisme », Le désert et la cité : le pouvoir du silence, Actes des Colloques de théologie orthodoxe de l’université de Sherbrooke 2005 et 2006 (Sherbrooke : Productions G.G.C.Ltée, 2007) 191.) Ladouceur is responsible for the French-language Orthodox web site www.pagesorthodoxes.com, one of the finest and complete website on Eastern Theology and the electronic Bulletin Lumière du Thabor. He also wrote several books and his theological articles have been published in various journals in North America and in France.

¹⁶⁰ David Scott, “Community of the Beatitudes,” St Anthony Messenger, (March 2002).

It brings together the faithful of all states: -laity, married or unmarried, clerics, brothers and sisters consecrated in celibacy, into one single reality, image of the people of God in its unity and the diversity of its vocations. Its members have in common the desire to imitate as closely as possible the model of the first Christian community through a communal life, the sharing of goods, voluntary poverty, an intense sacramental and liturgical life, in union with the Catholic Church and its representatives, as well as a commitment to an active commitment to the service of the poor and the proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁶¹

Others communities in this category are found in Europe among them the following: Le Chemin Neuf, Les Foyers de charité l'Emmanuel, Le Puit de Jacob, La Communauté de la Théophanie. These are all associated with the Catholic Church.¹⁶²

Some communities are also found within the Protestant churches, for example, Taizé, which is one of the most renowned internationally.

Located in France, this community was created by the Swiss Protestant, Roger Schutz (1915-2005) in 1945¹⁶³; a community life was unheard of before in this tradition. He wrote: "It is through their own life that Christians can render their word credible."¹⁶⁴ Youth around the world

¹⁶¹ Statutes of the Community of the Beatitudes, as approved by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 8 December 2002 .

¹⁶² Paul Ladouceur, "Le désert dans la Cité: vers de nouvelles formes de monachisme."

¹⁶³ <http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/k33440/rp.html>

¹⁶⁴ My translation, Iréné Beaubien, commentaire de Choisir d'aimer, Les Presses de Taizé (2006). 139.

gather at Taizé for communal spiritual experience. Taize includes Catholics in its ranks.

Ongoing communication with European lay communities will bring more data to the present research project in order to identify other communities.

A recent study (2002) by Michel Clément, entitled Quelques Règles Monastiques Protestantes en France, Reuilly, Pomeyrol, Villeméjane, has uncovered historical facts about Protestant monasticism in France.

d) New Monasticism

This expression was coined by the Anabaptist theologian, Jonathan Wilson in Living Faithfully in a Fragmentated World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre' s After Virtue (1998). In this book, Wilson agrees with the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his declaration that there is a need for “local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained.” Wilson answers MacIntyre’s call for “another–doubtless-different-St Benedict” by recognizing that in his Church exist resources upon which such communities can be created.

Jason Byasse, assistant editor at Christian Century, has described these communities. Here is his introduction:

At a time when the church had grown too cozy with the ruling authorities, when faith had become a means to power and influence, some Christians who sought to live out an authentically biblical faith headed for desolate places. They pooled their resources and dedicated themselves to a life of asceticism and prayer. Most outsiders thought they were crazy. They saw themselves as being on the narrow and difficult path of salvation, with a call to prick the conscience of the wider church about its compromises with the "world." I'm describing not fourth-century monks, but present-day communities of Christians who think the church in the United States has too easily accommodated itself to the consumerist and imperialist values of the culture. Living in the corners of the American empire, they hope to be a harbinger of a new and radically different form of Christian practice.¹⁶⁵

In this 2005 article, Byasse enumerates several communities in the United States, coming from various denominations¹⁶⁶ that considered themselves "New Monastics". Those communities are very keen to follow the lifestyle of the first apostles as described in the Acts 2: 42-47:

And they continue steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and the communion of the breaking of the bread and in the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; many wonders also and signs were done by means of the apostles in Jerusalem, and great fear came upon all. And all who believed were together and held all things in common, and would sell their possessions and goods and distribute them among all according as anyone had need. And continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread in their houses, they took their food, with gladness and

¹⁶⁵ Jason Byasse, "The New Monastics: Alternative Christian Communities", Christian Century (2005).

¹⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that for a long while, the worldwide spread movement of Oblates was mostly Catholic; it is now changing to include other denominations. These new communities on the other hand are not Catholic, some are Anabaptist, some are Evangelical and others Mennonite.

simplicity of heart, praising God and being in favor with all the people.

Byasse specifies about the New Monastics:

They do not reject technology as such... as it serves their purposes of linking similar Christian communities to one another and sharing resources. Newness is also evident in their embrace of Catholic and Orthodox sources of inspiration...¹⁶⁷

Here, Byasse underlines two realities that have been confirmed in other types of communities. First, the contemporary monastics do not reject technology: The New Skete Monks use computers, Internet, microwave, etc.; second, the contemporary monastics embrace Catholic and Orthodox sources of inspiration. This is true of many Oblates, and of the New Skete Monks as well, as they welcome in their Liturgy members of other denominations, many consider Ecumenism as one of their missions.

The New Monasticism movement is spreading. A conference on the subject was held in 2004, at the Church of the Apostles in Seattle, where a number of New Monastic communities were represented. A book has been written on the subject: School(s) for Conversion: The 12 Marks of New Monasticism, written by Rutba House¹⁶⁸¹⁶⁹, which is a follow-up of Seattle's meeting.

¹⁶⁷ Jason Byassee, "The New Monastics, Alternative Communities", The Christian Century (2005). <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_21_122/ai_n15966389>

¹⁶⁸ Rutba House is a New Monastic community created by Jonathan Wilson's daughter.

The 12 Marks are as follows:¹⁷⁰

1. Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire.¹⁷¹
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us.
3. Hospitality to the stranger
4. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation.
5. Humble submission to Christ's body, the church.
6. Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate.
7. Nurturing common life among members of intentional community.
8. Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children.
9. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life.
10. Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies.
11. Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18.
12. Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.

Here are the communities that Byasse has examined: The Rutba House, in Durham, North Carolina (Anabaptist) which was founded by Jonathan Wilson's¹⁷² daughter; Servant King, since 1978, in Eugene, Oregon (Evangelical); Reba Place, since 1950 in Evanston, Illinois (Mennonite); Church of Sojourners, since 1987, San Francisco, (Evangelical); Shalom Mission (Anabaptist) and Grace Fellowship, San Francisco, (Asian, Cumberland Presbyterians). Byasse describes their mission as follows:

These new monastics pursue the ancient triumvirate
of poverty, chastity and obedience... their pledge to

¹⁷⁰ Jim Gilliam, <<http://wiki.jimgilliam.com/Church2/NewMonasticism>>

¹⁷¹ Here the authors mean assistance to the under-privileged areas in the United States of America.

¹⁷² Jonathan Wilson coined the expression "The New Monasticism".

chastity is understood as a commitment to marital fidelity. Poverty means eschewing typical middle-class economic climbing but not total indigence... Obedience means accountability not to an abbot but to Jesus and to the community.¹⁷³

Other writers have explored the subject of New Monasticism, among them Timothy V. Vaverek, Sergei Baikalov-Latyshev and David Ian Miller.

e) Intentional Communities

Intentional Communities, as its name indicates, are based upon commonality of intentions and goals, which in many cases consist of social assistance, but also imply co-housing or communal life. While some communities are distinctively Christian, others are secular. Our research will only consider those who are Christian. In his book Intimacy and Mission: Intentional Community as Crucible for Radical Discipleship, Luther Smith¹⁷⁴ studied the following intentional communities in the United States: Jesus People, Plow Creek, Koinonia Partners, Bartimaeus, Sons of God, Seekers Church, Shiloh, Church of the Messiah, Patchwork Central, and Voice of Calvary. These communities are communes, co-housing with a mission, a new type of communities; each yearns to live as Christians, and moreover chose a specific mission to accomplish in their locality. It usually means assisting the

¹⁷³ Jason Byassee, "The New Monastics, Alternative Communities", The Christian Century (2005): 1-10, <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_21_122/ai_n15966389.>

¹⁷⁴ Elaine Justice, "Smith Intentional communities", Emory Report 48 (1996).

poor. Smith calls it “radical discipleship”. Smith reveals both strengths and struggles of the communities. Smith’s crucible is the United States of America as in the past years many of these communities have been established there. He states that they are reacting against the over-capitalism and consumerism and choose a simpler life with Christian values.

Luther Smith bluntly asks: “Can the Church empower us to fully respond to God’s call? Can the Church rise far enough above the demands of institutional survival to live out a radical gospel?”¹⁷⁵ These are crucial challenges that the Church has to face today, since all above mentioned communities are within the official church, their development might have an important impact, such as provoking a change of focus and a new understanding of both asceticism and laity status.

2. Commonalities

All groups presented in this section share a general understanding of the place of ascetic spirituality within the Christian way of life. They all encouraged the exercise of detachment with the deepening of the knowledge and love of scripture and ascetic writings; they all have structured time of prayers. Moreover, they all share a profound commitment to local communities and they all accept other denominations in their ranks as well

¹⁷⁵ Luther Smith, Intimacy and Mission, back cover.

as all states of life. Those communities would certainly agree with Sergei-Baikalov-Latyshev's definition of asceticism:

Asceticism is a strict, purposeful life, expressed in spiritual labors, that is, in prayer, contemplation, the directing of the mind toward God, frequently in conjunction with corresponding physical undertakings, and simultaneously with abstention from any negative activity and unnecessary natural satisfactions... This does not mean that asceticism must be the lot only of certain desert-dwellers or monks ("ascetics"). The Christian faith itself is built on self-denial, which to a certain degree is asceticism.¹⁷⁶

One might ask: How are these communities different from sects, which we hear so much about? The answer is easy; all the communities, which we are discussing, are recognized by official church authorities and follow the Christian ascetical traditions, only the exterior changes. The name they choose distinguishes them from each other and identifies their origin. Some come from Catholic backgrounds, (Oblates, Opus Dei) and some others from Orthodox tradition (New Skete). Many come from Protestant denominations, such as the communities belonging to the "New Monasticism"; some are more local, such as the American Intentional groups; others are international like the Oblates and the Community of the Beatitudes. Some do call themselves monastic others do not,¹⁷⁷ even

¹⁷⁶ Sergei Baikalov Latyshev, Orthodox Life 27 (1977): 33-39. Translated from: The Messenger of the Western European Diocese of the Russian Church Abroad 7 (1976): 8-15. Sergei Baikalov Latyshev wrote other articles on asceticism published on the Orthodox Christian Information Center website under Ascetic Struggle, <http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/ascesis_modern.aspx>

¹⁷⁷ Such is the case for the Lay Community of St Benedictine of England.

though, when a Christian “commune” is living an “ascetical life”, by definition it is called a monastic community.

The exterior may look different from one group to another, but on the inside flames the same fervor, the desire to meet God in our Savior Jesus Christ and in others. The way each group easily accepts other denominations within its ranks, denotes Christian fellowship. Certain observations can be noted concerning the monastic lay movement, which clarifies its reality and defines its identity. Paul Ladouceur notes the following facts:

1. The clear distinction between monasticism and the outside world is vanishing.
2. The possibility to accomplish the fundamental spirit of monasticism- the inner monasticism- including the three vows in all states of life.
3. The search for God’s Kingdom and concrete manifestation of love for God through love and service for others.
4. Open vision of God’s family: all are God’s children; all need love from the faithful.
5. Commitment to dialogue and ecumenical service as part of love of others, yet remaining faithful to one’s spiritual tradition.
6. Openness to the signs of the times, positive answer to the need of others, who ever they might be, seen as an answer to God’s need.
7. The creation if necessary of new institution to fulfill the call one has received¹⁷⁸

Byasse, on the other hand remarks a negative aspect. He pinpoints a problem transcending divisions along lines of races and classes. Members tend to be white, and college educated, despite great effort to reach out to

¹⁷⁸ Paul Ladouceur, « Le désert dans la Cité: vers de nouvelles formes de monachisme », Le désert et la cité : le pouvoir du silence, Actes des Colloques de théologie orthodoxe de l’université de Sherbrooke 2005 et 2006 (Sherbrooke : Productions G.G.C.Ltée, 2007) 191.

the wider community.¹⁷⁹ Some differences can be noticed in organization, style, finances and even theological emphasis. Each community has its own gift, idealism, quirkiness and commitment to local community,¹⁸⁰ and seeks to embody gospel values in its common lifestyle.

3. Individual Ascetical Lifestyles

In addition to these communities, there exist many examples of individuals who live an ascetic lifestyle within the general population. Some individuals are known internationally; few have not heard of Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche. However, there are still others who in our days remain anonymous; they are striving for such a life in one form or another.

Lev Gillet (1893-1980)

One eminent ascetical person of the twentieth century was Lev Gillet. Born in France, he was ordained as a priest in the Western Church, and was tonsured as an Eastern Monk; he believed in and worked for the union of churches. He lived his life outside the monastery assisting and guiding people throughout the world. Lev Gillet was a man of many names. He gave himself two pseudonyms: "A Monk of the Eastern Church", for his books,

¹⁷⁹ Byasse, "The New Monastics, Alternative communities", *The Christian Century* (2005): 1-10, <www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_1058/is_21_122/ai_n15966389>

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

which denote his sense of humility by avoiding the popularity of his name, while “Lev Ivanovitch” was used for his letters, probably to keep his anonymity during the war. He has been described as: “a window on the complexity of the history of Christianity in the 20th century”¹⁸¹, “a monk in the city”, and “a pilgrim inside the city”.

Gillet served in World War I, and studied psychology. He was the first to translate Freud’s: “On Interpretation of Dreams,” and underwent psychoanalysis himself. He possessed sensitivity to the complexity and the suffering of the soul, which remained with him throughout his life. After the war, he entered the Benedictine Order, in Clervaux Abbey in Luxembourg. In Rome, he became friends with two monks, and the three elaborated the foundation of a mixed Eastern-Western monastery in Chevetogne, Belgium. He later traveled for his work as priest and scholar around Europe and the near East, became the rector of the first French language Orthodox Parish in Paris. He served as Chaplain in prisons and hostels; He was an itinerant preacher and spiritual father to bishops, priests and youth. He supported himself by his writings: freelance, editing, translating and research. Behr-Sigel, a close friend, has written an extensive and detailed biography based upon an immense correspondence.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹Sophie Deicha, *The Ecumenical Review*, World Council of Churches (1995).

¹⁸² Elizabeth Behr Sigel, *Lev Gillet, "Un moine de l'Église d'Orient": Un libre croyant universaliste, évangélique et mystique* (Paris : Cerf, 1993).

Lev Gillet was a spiritual man, he was a Christian man, and he was an ascetic among the people. Much of his life was dedicated to sustain the Russian immigrants in France who fled from persecution, and so this monk lived his life for others. It has been written that he did not spend more than two years in a monastery. Yet, he has written profuse works on spirituality. His works include: Orthodox Spirituality: An Outline of the Ascetical and Mystical Tradition, The year of Grace of our Lord, Praying the Name of Jesus, The Ancient Wisdom of the Jesus Prayer, and many others ¹⁸³. His books were translated into Dutch, German, English, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Danish, Portuguese, Catalan and Japanese. His writings span a long period of time, as he lived to be nearly one hundred years old. His writings were the inspiration for this thesis.

There are other ascetics who lived like Lev Gillet within the secular community. The first that come to mind are Jean Vanier, founder of l'Arche and Dorothy Day who published a newspaper while feeding, sheltering and living with the poor of New York City. But many more, unknown until now are described by Paul Ladouceur in his conference entitled « Le désert dans la Cité: vers de nouvelles formes de monachisme. »¹⁸⁴ In this text he presents different contemporary individuals and their choice to live as ascetics. Among them Alexandre Boukharev, Paul Evdokimov, Marie Skobtsov, all of whom

¹⁸³ See "Appendix B" for a list of his work.

¹⁸⁴ Paul Ladouceur, « Le désert dans la Cité: vers de nouvelles formes de monachisme », Actes des Colloques de théologie orthodoxe de l'université de Sherbrooke 2005, 2006. (Sherbrooke : Productions GGC Ltée)

have a connection with the Orthodox Russian Church due to the Russian exile in Europe. Ladouceur also mentions Gabrielle Papayannis and André Scrima.

An example nearer to home is Denise Fillions. In addition, to her responsibilities as a Presbythera (Orthodox clergy's wife) at the Orthodox Cathedral in Ottawa, she was the Chairwoman of the Department of Lay Ministries for many years at the Orthodox Church in America Archdiocese. She created Spiritual Resource Handbooks and other inspiring initiatives. She also gives conferences to encourage laymen and women in their spiritual journey, such as "Paradise Within", organized by the Christian Orthodox Women of Quebec¹⁸⁵. These aspects of her work are considered lay ministry.

Between the communities and the individuals exist the Christian families which are natural Christian communities and can be a cradle for ascetical lifestyle, if the parents choose to follow and encouraged a disciplined spiritual way of life.

¹⁸⁵ Denise Fillions, "Paradise Within", Lenten Conference (Montreal: The Christian Orthodox Women of Quebec, March 4, 2006).

4. Resume

The different ascetic communities and individuals who have been described can be divided into several groups or forms. The following chart may assist the reader in clarifying what they are:

CHRISTIAN LAITY INVOLVEMENT

Type	Ascetical	Service	
Purpose	CONTACT WITH GOD		
	Service to the community		
GOAL	Personal enlightenment		
RESIDENTS	COMMUTERS	SATELLITES	LAY MINISTRY
Ascetics living together under common spiritual rule and common head. Ex: -New Skete -Christian Families	Individuals living separate lives coming together as a group for spiritual exercise and community service. Ex: Oblates	Individuals not belonging to a formal group, practicing assiduously spiritual exercises in communion with others Ex: Les Veilleurs	Individuals assisting other Christians in their evolution. Ex: -Visits to the sick, -Formation of Catechumens, -Lay Chaplaincy, etc.

The divisions are not static, they can be dynamic. For example, Opus Dei belongs to the Satellite group and the Ministry Group

There is no spirituality that is specifically and exclusively monastic, just as there is no spirituality that is specifically for clergy. Rather, there is only Christian spirituality, the life in Christ that is common to all Christians, be they monastic or non-monastic, be they clerical or lays...the struggle to die to self and to live only for Christ, is common to all.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Lawrence R. Farley, "Monasticism", Canadian Orthodox Messenger, 17(2006): 7.

The many examples mentioned in this section demonstrate that the question “Beyond the Monastery Walls” remains largely unexplored in academic circles as a contemporary phenomenon, either on the spread of its communities, or its significance for today and tomorrow. This thesis tries to collaborate in the implementation of these goals even if it has to be just a “débroussaillage.”

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this research, the goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of the ascetical dimension of Christian praxis by exploring the motivation and experience of a number of ascetical groups both past and present. Until now, the understanding of asceticism has been somewhat narrow. This work has defined asceticism as a spiritual disciplined way of life, comparable to that of the intense training of the athlete. Moreover, I have established that the Christian way of life requires an ascetical dimension in order to follow Christ. Therefore, any lay person should be able to follow a certain ascetical lifestyle, thus the importance of revealing the existence of so many new ascetic communities.

A major preoccupation throughout this work was the clarification of concepts and vocabulary in order to present clear arguments. For example, most would agree that since the term “lay” is defined as non-clerical, it includes monks and nuns and laity in general. But, more specifically, contemporary communities include married couples and sometimes their children living together with other celibates as family, such is the case in many new lay monastic communities. These new realities change the definition of lay monasticism.

Most importantly, this work has emphasized the fact that asceticism can take various forms. Its lifestyles and communities have been mutating over the years, changing its exterior form: the new monastics include all states of life within their rank; they welcome the different Christian denominations; they live in a home type residence rather than a monastery; and most do not wear a habit; yet, they follow the ascetical spiritual tradition. This kind of monasticism is developing in different denominations within the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches.

The numerous sources used are evidence that people are searching for answers to their transcendent questions and a sense of meaning and spiritual guidance in their lives. The spirituality of the Eastern Fathers was to be developed in the desert, the same spirituality is being followed by many lay people in the Western world today, but they are living in the world, and in the city, adopting new forms. Many are hoping that the spreading of this new way will allow more balance in our materialistic world

These new realities present challenges to individuals as well as institutions. It reminds each individual Christian that to follow Christ entails a certain discipline in one's choices and lifestyle. These lifestyles call for experienced spiritual guides as well as encouragement and understanding from the wider church community. A profound awareness of the necessity for integrating the

ascetic dimension into the full living of gospel values is calling many to examine the possibility of leading such a life “Beyond the Monastery Walls”:

The Monk is compelled, stumbling through doors trying to follow the voice that calls... The monk is in the monastery. The monk is also on Wall Street, on Main Street and down the farm... Monasticism beyond the walls is certainly one way to illustrate that the line between the secular and the holy is fiction... many people today are being led by the Holy Spirit to discover this new way to Jesus Christ... I do suggest, that we are perhaps on the cusp of a new age in which the boundaries of the monastery will expand to such a point where reference to “wall” will be moot.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Mark Plaiss, The Inner Room: A Journey into Lay Monasticism (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2003), 126.

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APPENDIX A

BASIL ASCETICAL WORKS ¹⁹¹

An Introduction to the ascetical life

An ascetical discourse and exhortation on the renunciation of the world and spiritual reflection

A discourse on ascetical discipline

Preface on the judgment of God

Concerning faith

Herewith begins the morals

An ascetical discourse

The long rules

Concerning Baptism

“Give heed to thyself”

Against those who are prone to anger

Concerning envy

Of humility

On detachment from worldly goods

On mercy and justice

¹⁹¹ Deferrari, ed. *St Basil Ascetical Work*, *Fathers of the Church*, iv

APPENDIX B

LEV GILLET'S MAIN BOOKS

Sois mon prêtre. Beirut :An-Nour, 1942.

Notre Père. Beirut :An-Nour, 1942.

L' An de grâce du Seigneur. Beirut: An-Nour, 1942, 1945, 1980.

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Le Visage de lumière, Chevetogne, Paris, 1966.

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Amour sans limites. Chevetogne, 1971.

Ils regarderont vers lui. Chevetogne, 1976.

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L'Offrande Liturgique. Cerf, 1988.

Burning Bush. Springfield: Templegate Publishers, 1990.

Praying Jesus: the ancient wisdom of Jesus prayer, Liguori Publications, 1999.

P.S. Most of Lev Gillet's books have been translated; sometimes it is difficult to know by the title if it is a translation or another book on the same subject. This list tries to show the earliest publications whether they were translations or not

APPENDIX C

GUIDE TO MEDITATION¹⁹²

How does such a meditation happen? Simply by doing it, without a lot of fuss. Look for a regular time and place where you can anticipate being undisturbed, a nearby church or library, or a bedroom, study, or even the back porch of your home. Any time of day can be adapted for meditation, but early in the morning, when most activity is at a minimum, seems to be the most natural. Even in the busiest of households such time can be found by rising a half hour earlier than normal. Wash your face briskly, drink your coffee, then sit attentively with the Bible while the rest of the world sleeps. You will need to focus on your meditation for twenty minutes to a half hour, so use a chair with firm back support to keep your spine straight. This will help you breathe deeply and keep your attention sharp. Be conscious of the presence of God. Get comfortable enough not to be thinking how uncomfortable you are, but not so relaxed as to nod off to sleep.

An advantage of using sacred reading for our meditation is endless wealth of material Scripture provides for our use. So we need a translation that speaks directly to us, not one that forces us on the spot to translate the translation, so to speak... Your Bible for *lectio*¹⁹³ should be a modern one, but not paraphrase." ...

A sharp caution: one of the most misdirected and destructive tendencies in modern Christian life is to focus on the Bible so narrowly that we inadvertently make it into an idol. The Bible is not divine. God alone deserves our worship... Rather, like Jacob wrestling with the angel in the dark night... we simply have to struggle with the many problems and layers of the meaning in the Bible, if necessary revising the way we understand things so that we hear its word correctly. Only then will it confer its blessing of life on us... This is what believers have always done, which is why we see change and development take place within the Bible itself on (diverse) attitudes... The Bible is meant to change and convert *us*, *continuously*... Taking the Bible literally and simplistically, without regard to its literary forms, historical context, and even its use by the living tradition of the Church, ultimately is a sterile exercise.

Faith calls us to renounce the security of certitude and security, established answers for a demanding journey into the unknown. Thus, while the Bible possesses strong historical value, it is not a work of history but of faith, and

¹⁹² The Monks of New Skete, *In the Spirit of Happiness*, Spiritual Wisdom for Living, Boston, New York, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999. 159-173.

¹⁹³ Lectio refers to sacred reading

therefore it deserves to be encountered on that level...Though the Scriptures are invaluable in mediating God's world to us, they are by no means our only source, nor is the manner in which they do so always self-evident. It is quite possible to think we are hearing Christ which actually we are only listening to our own projections....However, we can dramatically reduce the odds of falling victim to this through the safeguards of patience, intellectual honesty, and healthy self-doubt... Our parish, our connections with church tradition, provide a context and perspective that may help guide our understanding and interpretation...If we look to the wisdom of our monastic tradition, there is a more honest and realistic approach to utilizing the spiritual riches of the Bible that need not compromise our intellectual integrity. *Lectio divina*¹⁹⁴ is a way of absorbing the world so that it may bear fruit for us in wisdom and insight. Without discounting its original meaning, we home in on how the text might apply to us, to me, today. What is God, and our own conscience, saying to us now? By allowing these questions to work on us, by making those connections in our own life that reveal our blindness and stubbornness, the practice cleans away the stains of ignorance and deception. Above all, the point in *lectio divina* is to let the words penetrate into the core of our lives so as to effect change, instead of passing superficially over the surface.

Sometimes, the results of *lectio* are immediate, bringing clarity to our confusion before we even fully realize it. Then we find it easy to explore our thoughts and feelings silently in God's presence. At other times we may find ourselves struggling in uncertainty or emptiness, unable to perceive anything for ourselves in the text. We search but cannot see a thing. We should not let this upset us. The discipline of trying to meditate on the meaning of the text, even if it seems to result in little of substance, nonetheless focuses our mind in a way that will affect how we live. Through a continual return to the text, we learn to ignore and banish distracting and unwanted thoughts, acquire concentration, and foster within ourselves patience and attentiveness.

This way of reading, what we might describe as contemplative reading, differs fundamentally from the way most people read today. In *lectio divina* it is quality, not quantity that counts, and it is meant to engender real, personal changes in us...Precisely because it is not entertainment, the active exercise of contemplative reading takes a bit of time to get used to. The Bible, too, has never been an easy book to read, and the novice in its use can easily be overwhelmed without some practical guidance. Monks know this...Rather than tackling it at random..., they often use the Church's cycle of daily Scripture readings as a starting point for meditation...¹⁹⁵ A good preparation for daily *lectio divina* is to read the following day's Gospel selection the night before, just before going to bed. Your subconscious chews on it as you sleep, becoming material for your dreams, and preparing you for your morning meditation.

¹⁹⁴ *Lectio divina* is a Western expression, the Eastern Tradition use the term Sacred Readings

¹⁹⁵ Orthodox churches list their readings on calendars.

One more thing to note: When you meditate, do not be alarmed or discouraged if you initially experience a high degree of inner noise-fragments of conversation, TV shows, loud music, recollections of the previous day's events- seemingly making a travesty of your desire to sit quietly. Given the amplitude of ambient noise that surrounds us, it is little wonder that an interior riot breaks out once we settle ourselves in a quiet spot... Stay calm, be patient, and persevere. Simply focuses on your chosen text, read it aloud softly if necessary, and go over it slowly several times. You will notice the inner noise begins to fade... Focus, clear away distractions, remind yourself of God's presence, and listen.

...The uniqueness of each individual and the fact that each of us experiences everything in our own particular way, should make us wary of defining too rigidly the shape of a meditation. Each session will be different and unrepeatable. No one has a relationship with God that is exactly like anyone else's, and no one really thinks about God in exactly the same way. Therefore, we each will respond in our own way to the experience of *lectio divina*. Do it your way, but do it!

...It is a good idea to first spend a few moments settling down. Open the Bible to the passage you intend to use, and calm yourself with several deep breaths.¹⁹⁶ Remember that God is present everywhere. Invite God's Spirit to lead you to deeper understanding and a willingness to show it in the way you act. Or say a favorite prayer. Then begin reading your chosen passage, very slowly. No need to race through it. Reading it by moving your lips can help slow you down, but don't make it dramatic, don't exaggerate it. Repeat things. Listen to what it says to you... Read the passage through several times slowly, meditatively. Just as we cannot speed-read poetry, so it is with sacred reading. We need time to savor the text, allowing it to make connections beneath the surface of our consciousness. If extraneous thoughts assail you, simply refocus your attention on the text and continue reading slowly. What lights up for you? What strikes you?...

There is no right answer here. *What point of the text strikes you?* At this point, do not interrupt your reading to reflect on it yet, just take note of it for now.

After you have read through the passage several times, focus in on the particular phrase or sentence that you connect with, the one charged with meaning and interest or feeling at that very moment... Begin ruminating on this segment, repeating the text again and again in your heart. This is precisely what the Latin word meditation (from which comes our word meditation) means: learning the text by heart by repeating it over and

¹⁹⁶ One can find incense particularly useful to relax.

over...In its traditional sense, meditation means turning the text over in your mind again and again, being preoccupied with it, learning it by heart... This is not simply rote memorization. Repeating the phrase again and again in our hearts makes it part of us; we begin to imbibe the words in a more intuitive way...At this point we should be less concerned with “figuring out the meaning of the text” than with letting ourselves be absorbed by it. The words wash over us, again and again, penetrating ever more deeply, and we begin to realize how they apply to us.

Suddenly, a spontaneous burst of prayers pierces our awareness like an arrow...Normally it happens that at some point in our prayer we run out of words. Don't get anxious about this. Just sit there, quietly, and relax with your uncertainty. Linger for a while, keeping your mind and your heart open. Forget about time, words; simply be still in the experience of the moment. There is no need to worry about flying away in some sort of ecstatic trance or even falling asleep! Soon enough other thoughts and feelings will return, bringing you back to yourself. If time remains, you may wish to return to the text and continue in the same vein, ruminating on it further. Otherwise, conclude with a brief prayer of thanksgiving.¹⁹⁷

The formal *lectio* has ended, but the spirit animating it will lead you over time into an increasing thoughtfulness and openness. This might not be so obvious after one or two times...or even a dozen. Sacred reading will not bear any fruit if we practice it in a helter-skelter way. You have to make it into daily habit, and this can be challenging...¹⁹⁸Initially it'll be difficult to get up for sacred reading regularly. That extra half hour or so of sleep early in the morning can be really tempting. Doing *lectio* once or twice is easy, but further it gets tougher. It will no longer be novel. Most likely you'll find yourself skipping a day-maybe even several days- and with that will come a certain natural discouragement that will have you wondering whether the practice is really feasible. Don't let yourself off the hook! The first insight you can glean from this experience is how clever we can be in making excuses. Keep to your original intention, and make mental or written note of thoughts and questions you struggle with...When we have begun, really begun, to be faithful to this highly disciplined (and creative) routine, “to present yourself daily before the Lord”- then the morning's prayer will gradually remain with us throughout each day. Its quiet encounters will help us to stay serenely down-to-earth....Our frequent recollection of the passage will immediately put us in touch with the spirit of the meditation. We will find inner strength and peacefulness, a spiritual continuity to our day.

¹⁹⁷ Thanksgiving is primordial in spiritual journey, try to as many things as you can to be thankful for, it is a sure remedy to self pity and pessimism, and it helps resituating God in his rightful position. For an excellent example of thanksgiving prayer see “The Akathist” by New Hieromartyr Gregory Petrov <<http://www.orthodox.net/articles/grigori-petroff-hieromartyr-poem.html>>

¹⁹⁸ Here is the challenge each Christian has to face and accept: breaking the daily routine to let God in and once it is done to keep on doing it every day. Asceticism is a way of life which helps us to accomplish this.

The practice of sacred reading is entirely straightforward. There are no gimmicks, and the change that occurs in us while powerful, does not happen overnight. Real transformation of character is gradual, occurring over a lifetime...so let us approach our practice of *lectio divina* with faith and confidence, persevering in it despite occasional bouts with dryness, boredom, discouragement, or other forms of spiritual adversity. We can expect to go through these valleys along our journey.

We are not without guides. The wisdom accumulated from the teachings of hundreds of spiritual masters reassures us that ups and downs are inevitable parts of the trek, not ominous signs of a spiritual impasse. When we persevere day after day, we will soon enough come to a different elevation, another vista. We will hear another word. More and more we will recognize that life itself is an exciting text, vibrant with meaning, for us to read and respond to from moment to moment. Then our practice will embrace all the words of God without exception, and we will steadily realize a new level of insight and integrity in our spiritual journey.

APPENDIX D

NEW SKETE COMPANIONS



The Companions of New Skete, a married monastic community, was established as the third New Skete community in 1983. It was officially brought under the omophorion of his Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, primate of the Orthodox Church in America in 1984. The members of this religious house live the traditional monastic life in common. As a religious community in the church, it exists for the spiritual growth of its members in fellowship with the Monks and Nuns of New Skete, according to the principles of monastic life, and by extension, for the spiritual growth of the Church and the world at large.



The members of the Companions of New Skete, together with the monks and nuns, live a spiritual life, consecrated to a deeper relationship with God, through the three monastic vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Chastity is an interior state of the spirit, not a physical state of the body. It transcends physiological integrity. Chastity is a harmonization of this interior state with the exterior, physical conditions of one's life: married, single, or celibate, living in monastic life or in the world.



Marriage is not an obstacle to living monastic life, priestly life, or religious life in any of its manifestations. Love of God is primary, and is never in competition with any other relationship. Each individual must love God. Our human condition impels us to transcend ourselves, to seek the creator. This is the lifelong quest of every human soul, not only the celibate monk or nun.

If one is married, one's spouse is not in competition with this love, but strengthens it through mutual love for each other in the sacrament of marriage. This is the discernment of spirit – of one's own and one's spouse, who was chosen to go on this journey through life as a soul mate to participate in the joys and sorrows of a shared life and to assist each other in continual growth through love.

+ + +

We welcome inquiries from married couples that are serious about considering our life.

+ + +

We also offer guest accommodations for married couples that desire to visit the New Skete communities and join us in our worship.

+ + +

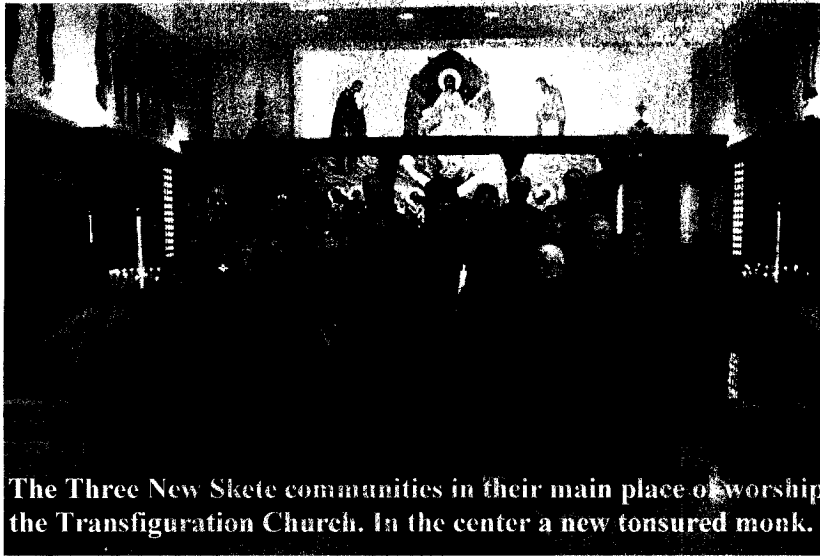
The Companions of New Skete

PO Box 189

Cambridge, NY 12816

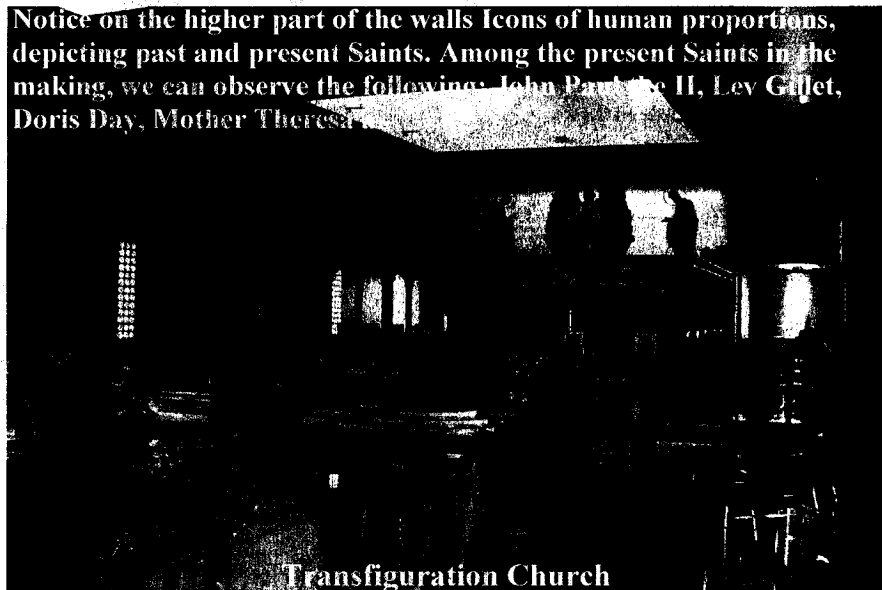
Tel: (518) 677-8863

email: Companionsofnewskete@wildblue.net



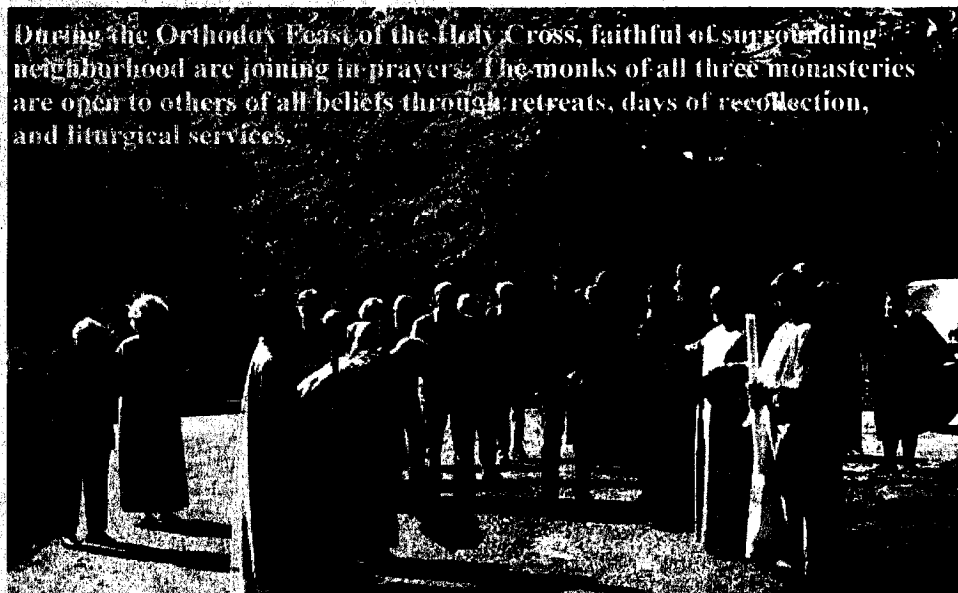
The Three New Skete communities in their main place of worship, the Transfiguration Church. In the center a new tonsured monk.

Notice on the higher part of the walls Icons of human proportions, depicting past and present Saints. Among the present Saints in the making, we can observe the following: John Paul the II, Lev Gillet, Doris Day, Mother Theresa.



Transfiguration Church

During the Orthodox Feast of the Holy Cross, faithful of surrounding neighborhood are joining in prayers. The monks of all three monasteries are open to others of all beliefs through retreats, days of recollection, and liturgical services.



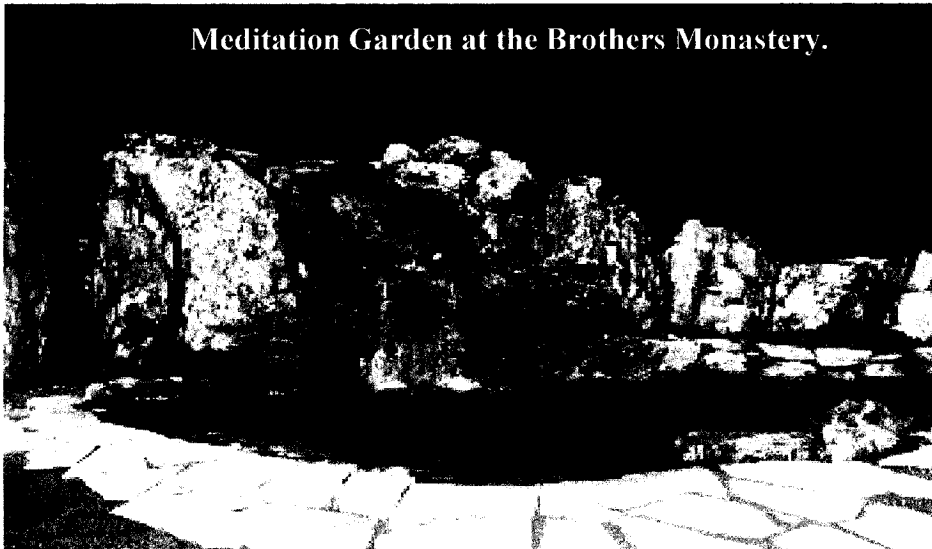
The three communities share a traditional meal and fellowship at the Feast of The Holy Cross.



Summer meal enjoyed by New Skete monks and local population.



Meditation Garden at the Brothers Monastery.



For a tour of the monastery go to <http://www.newsketemonks.com/tour.htm>

APPENDIX E

COMMUNITIES WEB SITES

Church of Sojourners

<http://www.churchofthesojourners.org/>

Communion and Liberation

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communion_and_Liberation

Community of the Beatitudes

<http://www.beatitudes.us/Focolare>

<http://www.midland.perth.anglican.org/focolare.html>

<http://www.thecompassnews.org/compass/2002-04-26/02cn0426l6.htm>

Grace of Fellowship

<http://www.gracefellowship.com/history.htm> Hope Fellowship

<http://www.mennowdc.org/texaschurches.htm> Neo-Catechumenate

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neocatechumenal_Way

http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Ronald_Haynes/nc-jpnl1.htm

Koinonia Partners

<http://www.koinoniapartners.org/>

L'Arche

<http://www.larchecanada.org/>

Les Veilleurs

Pasteur Daniel Bourget, Les Abeillères, 30270 Saint Jean du Gard,

New skete

Companionsofnewskete@wildblue.net

<http://www.newskete.com/companions.htm>

Oblates

<http://www.osb.org/obl/index.html>

http://cistercianmonks.org/html_files/oblates.html

<http://www.fransciscans.com/community/index.html>

<http://www.laymonas.ca/faq.htm>

Opus Dei

http://www.opusdei.org/Plow_Creek_Fellowship

http://www.plowcreek.org/Rutba_House

<http://www.newmonasticism.org/>

San Egidio

<http://www.santegidio.org/EN/index.html>

Seekers Church

<http://www.seekerschurch.org/>

Servant King

<http://www.rebaplacechurch.il.us.mennonite.net/>

Shalom Mission

<http://www.shalomconnections.org/sc.html>

Taize

<http://www.taize.fr/>

Voice of Calvary

<http://www.vocm.org/>

MONASTERIES

The following monasteries can accommodate families with children for short visits.

Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery

144 Bert Washburn Road, Otego, NY 13825-2265 Tel: 607-423-3179

E-mail: myrrhbearers@aol.com.

Website : www.holymyrrhbearers.com

St. John of San Francisco Monastery

PO Box 439, 21770 Ponderosa Way, Manton, Ca., 96059 tel: 530-474-5964

E-mail: office@monasteryofstjohn.org

Website: www.monasteryofstjohn.org

Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration

321 Monastery Lane, Ellwood City, PA 16117-6531 Tel: 724-758-4002

E-mail: omtl@losch.net for your stay: omtguest@losch.net

Website: www.oca.org/DIRlisting.asp?SID=9&KEY=OCA-RO-ELCHXC

Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Monastery

3389 Rives Eaton Road, Rives Junction, MI 49277 Tel: 517-569-2837

Website: www.dormitionmonastery.com

GLOSSARY

Asceticism: Best described by the origin of the word, which is Greek: *asketikos* “rigorously self-disciplined”, from *askein* ‘to exercise, ‘to train for athletic competition, practice gymnastics, exercise’. Comparisons of ascetics with athletes were frequent in spiritual writers, for the discipline required training mind, soul and body. “Ascetics” are characterized by a life of poverty, fasting, daily prayers and chastity. Asceticism implies a life of virtue, service, contemplation and detachment. One can easily understand the metaphor since the different choices made in an athlete lifestyle to achieve his goal: training, diet, exercises, etc., are done daily and with all his/her heart applies; so is the case with an ascetic who chooses to follow Christ; he/she has to make choices for a particular lifestyle, which necessitates the same qualities: determination, will, endurance, self-discipline and both need a “coach”; in the case of the ascetic, it will be a spiritual guide. All ascetics were God seekers¹⁹⁹. Asceticism is clearly a spiritual disciplined lifestyle.

Whatever the context, asceticism necessitates a personal choice to follow Christ’s teachings: detaching oneself from a fixation on material concerns, pursuing spiritual personal transformation through repentance with confidence in God’s mercy, searching to unite with God through prayer and dedication to others, with the help of a spiritual guide.

¹⁹⁹ The Monks of New Skete, In the spirit of happiness: Spiritual Wisdom for living (Boston, New York, London: Little Brown and Company, 1999).

Assistance to others: The assistance to others is an obligation to any Christian. Jesus reminds us of that in his recommendation for the final judgment:

Then the king will say to those on his right hand, “come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me... I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me. (Matt 26; 34-37, 40)

Assistance to others is molded depending on the monastic lifestyle. For example, a hermit will give his assistance through prayers. A monastery in the desert will see its monks sustaining each others physically and spiritually, a monastery within a community will help the local population in various ways, again depending on its own mission, which could be agriculture, baking, hosting, etc...

Chastity: Discussion about the definition of chastity can be found as far back as in the time of Gregory of Nyssa (335 – after 394). It is vital to make a distinction between, chastity and virginity. Chastity is synonym of purity of heart. Virginity in its strict sense is understood as synonym of abstinence, and in a wider sense, it includes chastity. Both terms have been misused and misunderstood. As Gregory²⁰⁰ explained very well, one can be abstaining

²⁰⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity, < <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf205.ix.ii.i.html>>

but not be pure in his heart. Most importantly, Christ never demanded from his follower to be virgins. Many of his disciples were married. And one has to think that if to be a Christian one had to be a virgin, the human race would not have last very long, and that was actually one subject the Catholic Church had to debate at a time when monasteries were widely spread.²⁰¹

The most important notion here is the one of Purity of Heart, upon which many writers have spoken. One of them, Harriet A. Luckman defines the Purity of heart as “the keeping of the commandments of love in all activities.”²⁰² And that would include sexual activities. Keeping the commandment of love would mean putting the other person before one’s own pleasure. Sexuality was given to human beings by God, but it is the work of men and women to keep it godly. Some authors²⁰³ have bluntly elaborated on this subject and call sex as “holy”.²⁰⁴ Furthermore spiritual marriage is considered treason to Gods intent and depreciation to marital status:

Asceticism aspires to the true nature, to the dispassionate passion; its struggle is never against the flesh, but against the perversions of the flesh, against unlawful concupiscence that is against nature.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Lucian Turcescu, *The Cappadocians*, Course Concordia University.

²⁰² Harriet A. Luckman, “Basil of Caesarea and the Purity of Heart”, *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature*, The Order of St. Benedict Inc., Collegeville, Minnesota, 1999

²⁰³ George Morelli, “Sex is Holy”, *The Word*, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Englewood, June 2004, 78

²⁰⁴ Paul Jennings, “La grâce de l’eros”, *Œcuménisme*, Montréal, no 163, septembre 2006

²⁰⁵ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love*, St Vladimir Seminary Press, Crestwood, 1985, 60

Community: For this particular thesis, the word community can be quite confusing because it defines the monastic group as well as the local population. Therefore to eliminate any misunderstanding, the word 'community' will be limited to the ascetic groups and the terminology 'local population' will be used for the group of citizens.

Detachment: Is possible when one puts God first. One does not feel the need or the "urge" to possess or to own certain things; one is detached from wanting certain types of food or richness. One is not only satisfied but one is grateful. One has faith that God will attend to one's need. Humility is also a way of detachment, faith in God rather than in one's own power is also detachment.

Eremitic/Anchorite: Defines the spiritual life of an ascetic (hermit) who retires from the world, and lives alone in a desert or a cave. Many people confuse this specific type of asceticism with the more general meaning of asceticism.

Freewill: Comes from the scripture: "Let us make mankind in our image and likeness." (Gen 1:26)²⁰⁶ It is the basis for the doctrine of deification or theosis. Not only is it the capacity of human beings to join God, but it is the goal of all Christians.

Lay is defined as non-clerical. At its birth, monasticism was a lay movement. Nuns and monks are not ordained as cleric; therefore they are all lay Christians²⁰⁷. The confusion in terminology comes from a number of factors. First, when asceticism became organized through monasteries, these institutions were recognized by church authorities as gospel lifestyles and they were identified under different religious order names such as the Benedictines, The Cistercians, The Poor Clare, etc... Since the religious garb of the monks and nuns tended to distract from their lay status, in the eye of the general population they did not seem to be laity anymore. But in reality their personal status remained and still remains lay. Moreover, since lay means non-clerical, anyone of us who is not a member of the clergy is a layperson. Secondly, today the meaning of the word "lay" is mutating towards expressing the reality of "living in the world". It describes a variety of ascetical groups whose members may or may not be monastics.

Monasticism: Asceticism can be practiced alone or within a community. When it is practiced within a group who share a spiritual community life, it is called Monasticism (from monastery). Monasticism, as a specific form of asceticism necessarily implies participation to common life and common spiritual exercises. Whether they live in a monastery, in a common housing or in individual housing, whether male or female, celibate or family groups,

²⁰⁷ A few are ordained in order to offer the Liturgical services.

monastics are applying themselves to live together as did the first disciples of the Church.

Mysticism: The meeting of God is the result of two entities: God and the human soul, this is called synergy or the co-operative grace. About mysticism Lev Gillet gives us a perfect definition: " 'the mystical life' is a life in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit are predominant over human efforts, and in which 'infused' virtues are predominant over the 'acquired' ones; the soul has become more passive than active."²⁰⁸

Repentance: Is somewhat related to freewill, since one has to choose his direction towards God; one has to change his/her ways which were wrong. Repentance does not come easy to anyone. First, one has to feel what is going wrong in ones life. It demands sensitivity and openness. It is easier to forget, to turn away towards other distractions. Then one has to see, to admit the wrongness....here, the usual reaction is denial²⁰⁹. If one is strong enough to see his/her weaknesses, one has to decide to change; often enough we come up with excuses. The decisive step, one has to actually act upon the changes and keep on the right track...All these steps need self-analysis, humility, open-mindedness and will. We have spoken before about the freewill; now let us state that repentances have been a long-line of Judeo-

²⁰⁸ Gillet, 25

²⁰⁹ See Philip Saliba, Joseph Allen, Out of the Depths Have I Cried, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, 1979.

Christian tradition. First, with Jonah, then Jeremiah, after that John the Baptist and Our Lord Jesus-Christ himself, followed by Paul. Subsequently, it can be said with certainty that repentance is at the heart of the Christian spirituality and therefore one main goal of its ascetical practices, as all ascetic Fathers and Mothers emphasized it in their writings.

Secular: Is a difficult term to define because in recent decades it has been used in various ways, which were not always exact. Furthermore, secular can in itself have different meanings. For the purpose of this thesis, secular will be used as a synonym for profane, meaning not connected to religion.

Solitude: The ascetical vocabulary revolves around solitude. Hermit: from Greek word *eremia* "desert, solitude," from *eremos* "uninhabited." Effectively the first hermits isolated themselves in the desert. Monk: from Greek word *monos* "alone." The new monastism movement asserts that one can find ways to be alone, while living within the world. From that "*prémice*" came such expression as "Inner Room", "Paradise within", "Monachisme Intérieurisé" and "Inner Way".

Spirituality: Is similar to the definition of theology as understood by the Fathers, but somehow it has a certain tendency to be more connected to the motion of the spirit rather than the actions, for example the daily prayers rather than assistance to the neighbor

Theology: Theology has different meaning depending on historical periods. In the time of the Fathers, theology meant one is living the challenges of one's faith in every day's life. Since the enlightenment, theology has become more a synonym of philosophical debate, particularly in the West. Contemporary writers have challenged this perception²¹⁰.

²¹⁰For example Roscannu and Gillet