

## THE MYSTIC AND THE MONK:

### Holiness and Wholeness

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Appalled by the crisis of religion in his time, Soren Kierkegaard wrote: “Western civilization is approaching the end of an age and must either pass through a new religious mutation or lead to the total spiritual bankruptcy of Europe.”<sup>(1)</sup> Written over a century ago, the words seem a dreadful prophecy of our own age. They also provide a significant context in which to consider the relationship of monasticism to the life of a spiritually healthy society of men and women who are themselves healthy, whole and human.

The authentic monastic spirituality of the west affirms that the truly human is inseparable from the spiritual. Spiritual bankruptcy is an impoverishment of humanness itself. In an age when men and women lose touch with the inner dimension of spirit, humanity (*humanitas*) withers and dies. Civilization loses its savor and tang. A deadly listlessness--the ancient vampire of accidie so well-known to the monk--saps the human heart of joy, vitality and passion.

To some it may seem a curious thesis - to find in monasticism the pattern of a true humanism; for the monk is often seen as one who has wandered from the center of the human stage to play an odd, irrelevant role somewhere in the wings. (Of course, this is precisely what some monks--and many non-monks--have wanted and managed to do.) Yet the monk who is truly rooted in the authentic Christian monastic tradition is one who has chosen, whatever the cost, to live at the very heart of the human drama. His is no escape from life, but a flight to the real. He plunges himself into the depths of the human adventure where “the divine mystery and the human mystery are one .... in God there is hidden the mystery of man and in man the mystery of God.”<sup>(2)</sup> The monk can provide for men and women of any era the secret of living radically, of becoming grounded, rooted and centered in the real. The monk can be a sign for us of what it means to be fully human and alive on this earth.

The pertinence of monasticism to the kind of radical crisis described by Kierkegaard is not likely to be missed by anyone with even a cursory knowledge of western history. For monasticism once before provided, in the Dark Ages, a fertile ground for the rebirth of civilization. Monasteries have been known classically as *seminaria aedificationis*—seedbeds of growth. Even today there remains in authentic monastic spirituality the power to enliven and renew the springs of human life and to restore vigor and youth to a civilization grown torpid and stale. To do this, of course, the power inherent in monasticism must be liberated from behind abbey walls and find its true home in the daily lives of men and women everywhere.

How does the monk bring this power of spirit into society? Quite simply by being a monk: a single-minded, integrated man of spirit; a whole and holy person. He becomes truly and fully human.

A brief search into any dictionary will reveal the kinship of the words holiness, wholeness, and health. There is a wisdom too valuable to miss here. Too often modern men and women (and modern psychology) seek health and wholeness apart from holiness. Just as often modern religion seeks holiness apart from wholeness and health. As a result, modern man, finding himself alienated on the one hand from the realm of the sacred, falls into an empty materialism. On the other, he becomes alienated from his body, from earth, from matter, and retreats into a vague platonism or a gnostic flight from the created world.<sup>(2a)</sup> Neither of these two ways is a path to health or wholeness. For the human being is neither a disembodied spirit nor a soulless mechanism of flesh and blood; he is neither angel nor beast. He is man (male or female): a living symphony of body/soul/spirit. Christianity, when true to its roots, neither condemns material creation nor seeks to make men and women into angelic beings. Instead Christianity affirms creation and humanity; for God becomes man and promises that earth itself will be the substance of the new creation, and that we shall live eternally as whole human beings (body/soul/spirit).

We are deeply afraid of wholeness and of our humanity. For this music which is man, eternally sung into being by the Father, is a living song. Like any other music its life is change and modulation, harmony arising out of discord. We can bear the harmonies. It is the changes, the discords and dissonances within us that terrify us. How pleasant (we think) it would be to stay simple and unchanging, a lovely chord endlessly sounding its harmony. But such is not the nature of a man or woman created in the image of God. Such endlessness, such monotony belong not to the Kingdom of God but to the realm of death. In any case, the Symphonist in his fierce mercy never lets us rest in such unreal and deadly comfort. Whether it be in the comfort of established social ways, or of traditional religious forms, or of safe personal routines and habits, God--the relentless smasher of idols--will not let us become settled for too long.

. . . the coming of the Kingdom is perpetual. Again and again, freshness, novelty, power, from beyond the world break in by unexpected paths, bringing unexpected change. Those who cling to tradition and fear all novelty in God's relation with his world deny the creative activity of the Holy Spirit, and forget that what is now tradition was once innovation, that the real Christian is always a revolutionary, belongs to a new race, and has been given a new name and a new song. God is with the future.<sup>(3)</sup>

We hear this echoed in the startling words of Revelation: "Behold! I am making all things new!" (Rv 21:5) We are not permitted the comfort and safety of standing still. Instead the eternal Symphonist calls us forth to join in the great dance of all creation

Where we learn the true humility:  
That our splendor and our rest are in the dance  
Of all creation with creation's Lord;  
Where atoms never cease their holy play,  
Nor galaxies contain themselves for joy.<sup>(4)</sup>

It is, from a comfort-lover's view, a mad and foolish dance, and the dancers are a motley and unseemly blend: life and death, lions and lambs, camellias and cancers, acrobats and amputees, holy men and whores, roses and rabies, violets and volcanoes. The guest list is nearly endless and is consistently maddening in its perverse variety. Who but a madman or an evil genius could have called such a dance or made such a creation? Unless, of course, the whole thing is just a nightmare jumble come about by unlucky accident.

Those who doubt there is a God or, granting his existence, deny that he is love are, in both instances, admitting that they are faced with something alien, incomprehensible. But it is necessary to note that the problem often arises from our false notions of God or love---our premise that God is nice and good, and that love must be blissfully wonderful. Such a premise (and I think it must be a common one) ignores the terribleness of God and the fearful, darker convolutions of love. God is not nice, Love is not nice. (Both are beautiful perhaps, but that is another matter.) People are quick to see reflections of God in the loveliness of nature, but not so quick to see him in calamity, corruption, or cancer.

Holiness (wholeness, health) is not nice. C.S. Lewis tells us this vividly: "Holy places are dark places. It is life and strength, not knowledge and words, that we get in them. Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but dark and thick like blood."<sup>(5)</sup> Holiness--the way to our recovered humanity in its wholeness--is a hard and bloody way, not a woodland path for genteel types to stroll on. To miss this point--the hardness of holiness and true health--is the first element in our spiritual bankruptcy. It is deepened and complicated by our general fear of the difficult--the

dura et aspera

of human life—and by our perverse notion that happiness must be just around the corner; and when it comes (that eternally, elusive “redeemer”), we’ll see an end to all this nonsense and difficulty in the scheme of things. Against all these childish hopes and notions, a voice--that of the great spiritual thinkers of the ages--thunders the warning: “Seek God, not happiness!” The monk’s life proclaims this same message. Indeed, Saint Benedict, the Father of western monasticism, requires in his Rule that when a man enters the monastery “a senior, skilled in conversation, should supervise him to see if he truly seeks God .... He must be told of the difficulties and austerities ahead of him on the pathway to God” (*Rule*: Chap. 58).

Rainer Maria Rilke, who suffered intensely the spiritual crisis of our time, speaks of the courage one must have before the hardness of life authentically lived:

We have no reason to mistrust our world, for it is not against us. Has it terrors, they are our terrors; has it abysses, those abysses belong to us; are dangers at hand, we must try to love them. And if only we arrange our life according to that principle which counsels us that we must always hold to the difficult, then that which now still seems to us the most alien will become what we most trust and find most faithful. How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses; perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible in us is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us.<sup>(6)</sup>

There is no path around the difficult; the way lies through the difficult. Beyond, there is peace. This is echoed in the words of Christ: “I have told you all this so that in me you may find peace. In the world you will have trouble. But courage! The victory is mine: I have overcome the world” (Jo 16:3). Note well the promise (“You will have trouble”) and the consolation (“In me you may find peace”). Jesus spoke these words the night before his Passion and ruin.

Peace, unlike happiness, is based not on having achieved something good once and for all, b/it on an endless remolding of one’s will to make it conform to the Creator’s will, even when that will seems to preclude those very things we think will make up happy. “Our peace is in his will” said Dante: it may be found nowhere else. Where happiness seeks to stop the music of creation, peace says to the Musician: “Play on! Your will be done!” How is one to achieve this peace? How even is one to desire this peace that seems so alien, so unlike our usual notions of peace (as in “peace and quiet”)? How above all is one to know what God wills? And finally, what has all this to do with health and wholeness?

First, it must be seen that in one sense peace and attunement to God’s will amount simply to being the creature and person God wills one to be. As a rose praises God and is at peace in being a rose--in petals, perfume, thorns and decay--so may we find our peace and fulfillment in being our true selves.

Now it is just at this point that the real problems begin. Who or what is my real self? How many selves do I have? This is an identity crisis of the first order and is, I think, at the heart of the spiritual crisis spoken of by Kierkegaard. For without a solid sense of true being, without a center that persists and endures throughout the multiple happenings of my life, I am humanly broken and lost. Without some “still point” the world and my life in it must seem to be merely a random series of events that happen: birth merely happens to me, love happens to me, sickness happens to me, death happens to me.

Few things are more fatal to life than this state of morbid passivity. Perhaps one meaning of the contemporary fascination with diabolical possession is that it reflects modern man’s sense of being lived by alien things or powers outside himself, rather than living his own life from a true center within. Perhaps the frantic seeking of new experiences and new thrills reflects only our desperate need to fill an emptiness that was never meant to be filled

by experiences and events, but only by a person: that is, one who experiences and lives life from within, from a center and a dimension that, by transcending the ceaseless flow of events, can also make sense of them and hold them in a meaningful perspective.

This center or true self, wherein we are close to the very heart of creative Being, is called by the ancient Fathers and spiritual directors the “heart.”

The heart is to be understood here, not in its ordinary meaning, but in the sense of “inner man.” We have within us an inner man, according to the Apostle Paul, or a hidden man of the heart, according to the Apostle Peter. It is the God-like spirit that was breathed into the first man, and it remains with us continuously, even after the fall. (Theophan the Recluse)<sup>(7)</sup>

Theophan elsewhere writes: “When we are in the heart, we are at home: when we are not in the heart, we are homeless.”<sup>(8)</sup>

Homelessness. How poignantly the word captures the modern sense of exile and meaninglessness, the sense of being strangers everywhere we go, the desperate seeking for a place to rest at last.

If we have wandered from the very center of our being, it is any wonder that the world appears to us, poor eccentrics, as a broken, wounded thing? If we have wandered from that pool of living water at the heart of our being, is it any wonder that our lives are sterile, our works dry and barren, and that life spreads about us like a desert? Is it any wonder that so many of us have nearly resigned ourselves to the prospect of our earth becoming a nuclear wasteland? Until our lives are fed and watered from these inner wells of being, life must seem an absurd jest, and death a great deliverance.

Like the prodigal son of the parable we have wandered from home and squandered all our riches. There is no other hope for us now but in returning home: “I will arise and go to my father.” (Lk 15:18) We must make the long and arduous journey back to that quiet place of the heart where we come naked before God--lord of blazing suns and interstellar spaces, maker of volcanoes and violets--and in the pure simplicity of our need call out the one name that is closest to his heart: “Abba! Daddy!” For in that place--and it is our glory, not our shame--we are forever the children he loves and longs to play with.

The father said to his servants, “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to make merry. (Lk 15:22-24)

This center, this home, this place of the child in us, we may call the monastic dimension: “Every human being has a monastic dimension, but this is realized in different ways and cultivated in different degrees of purity and awareness by different people.”<sup>(9)</sup> The monk is a sign to his age of this dimension in every man and woman. “The monk is the normal man” wrote William of St. Thierry. It is just by a return to the heart that one integrates every aspect of one’s life. In this place of one’s deepest self, close, to the pulse-beat of God’s creative will, the monk and the normal man and woman finally perceive the unity, sense and meaning of creation. Where before there were chaos and fragmentation, there is now the harmony of that will whose way is peace. Our humanity is restored to wholeness, holiness and health.

Traditionally, the monk’s means to wholeness have been solitude and prayer, about which we must now speak. *Beata solitudo! Sola beatitudo!* “O blessed solitude! O solitary blessedness!” This word-play of the medieval monk expresses well his view of the value of a right perception of solitude and its paradoxes.

In our own time solitude has had a bad press. Kierkegaard comments of his own age:

But in ancient times as well as in the Middle Ages people were aware of the need of solitude and had respect for what it signifies. In the constant sociability of our age people shudder at solitude to such a degree that they know no other use to put it to but . . . as a punishment for criminals . . . so it is natural that such people, the lovers of solitude, are included in the same class as criminals.<sup>(10)</sup>

Kierkegaard perceives too the significance of solitude and the joy of solitude: “The fact that he feels this vital necessity more than other men is also a sign that he has a deeper nature. Generally the need of solitude is a sign that there is a spirit in man after all, and it is a measure for what spirit there is.”<sup>(11)</sup> Solitude as an element of our natural make-up is a sign of the spirit or the heart, the monastic dimension in all of us.

Just as a love of solitude betokens the presence and acceptance of the heart’s dimension and of our wholeness, so too a fear of solitude and a flight from it just as clearly show both the presence of spirit and our terrible fear of spirit within us. We are curiously threatened by this weight of glory and seek to avoid it at any cost. What a price we pay! For most of the unhappiness in our lives arises from our refusal to accept this dimension within us. We flee from our deepest creative self and find only a broken world.

Yet, for all this, there is reason to fear solitude. For solitude plunges us most deeply into the difficult, into the passion of creation itself, and into nearly intolerable hungers and anxieties. Thomas Merton maps this region: The truest solitude is not something outside you, not an absence of men or of sound around you; it is an abyss opening up in the center of your own soul. And this abyss of interior solitude is a hunger that will never be satisfied with any created thing. The only way to find solitude is by hunger and thirst and sorrow and poverty and desire, and the man who has found solitude is empty, as if he has been emptied by death. He has advanced beyond all horizons. There are no directions left in which he can travel.<sup>(12)</sup>

A modern writer perceives the same dilemma: “Solitude gives birth to the original in us, to beauty unfamiliar and perilous--to poetry. But also, it gives birth to the opposite: to the perverse, the illicit, the absurd.”<sup>(13)</sup> What an awful choice is given here! We may flee our solitude, condemning ourselves to live in a sterile world and suffering the dull ache of meaninglessness. Or we may enter into our solitude and encounter there sharp hungers and a vast emptiness. This emptiness Merton rightly compares to death. The early monks called it the desert, a land of unknown perils and danger, yet for all that a place where God and meaning most surely would be found.

The healthy man and woman, like the monk, know that the only road out of the wasteland of our time leads through this inner desert; there is no other way. Into this emptiness, this virginal space within each of us, God will invade. His coming will not be without pain, but we will know it is the pain, not of death, but of birth; or of both, for we must always die in order to be born anew. “You will have trouble . . . but in me you may find peace.”

What can be said of those who choose the safer path and stay, against all the promptings of the Spirit, in the outer desert of a civilization without roots? Antoine de Saint-Exupery speaks of their fate in this passage from *Wind, Sand and Stars*:

I heard them talking to one another in murmurs and whispers. They talked about illness, money, shabby domestic cares. Their talk painted the walls of the dismal prison in which these men had locked themselves up. And suddenly I had a vision of the face of destiny. Old bureaucrat, my comrade, it is not you who are to blame. No one ever helped you to escape. You, like a termite, built your peace by blocking up with cement every chink and cranny through which the light might pierce. You rolled yourself up into a ball in your genteel security, in routine, in the stifling conventions of provincial life, raising a modest rampart against the winds and the tides and the stars.

You have chosen not to be perturbed by great problems, having trouble enough to forget your own fate as man. You are not the dweller upon an errant planet and do not ask yourself questions to which there are no answers. You are a petty bourgeois of Toulouse. Nobody grasped you by the shoulder while there was still time. Now the clay of which you were shaped has dried and hardened, and naught in you will ever waken the sleeping musician, the poet, the astronomer that possibly inhabited you in the beginning.<sup>(14)</sup>

There is sorrow in those words: sorrow at the grayness of our world, at the loss of humanitas, at the deadly apathy of modern man in refusal to live the life within. In his recent book *Mystical Passion*, Father William McNamara drives this point home: “Apathy is a withdrawal of feeling---a-pathos or passionlessness. It is not the most spectacular form of suicide, but it is the most common. It has been eroding our civilization for a century and more and is about to reach its apogee, and all in the name of progress and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>(15)</sup>

Man’s flight from the tragic and the difficult has brought him to this final desert place where all that is beautiful in him must become bleared, all that is noble mocked, all that is wild tamed, all that is feeling—joy, sorrow, laughter, pain—numbed and deadened.

Mad and sad as this impoverishment is, there is a cold logic to it. Man knows that to be safe from all danger of spirit within him, he must close his mind and heart to all of creation, even (perhaps especially!) its joys and goodness; for creation ever bears the mark of its Maker--the untamed, beautiful, terrible God. He, that relentless hound of heaven, will take advantage of any opening we leave him to invade and fill us with the wildness of his Spirit. To be perfectly safe from this uncontrollable Spirit of life and creation, to be protected from this fierce grace, we must wrap ourselves in apathy and numbness. We fear God-inflicted life more than self-inflicted death. So we make ourselves invulnerable. And yet

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket--safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.<sup>(16)</sup>

How we fear the dangers and perturbations of love; yet God is love. How we yearn for the comfort and quiet of safety; yet safety is hell. These ideas shatter so many of our comfortable notions about God and about our own human nature. Yet, if our thoughts here have meant anything at all, we must see this shattering as a grace and a deep blessing.

Give your heart to the Creator and he will break it; but he will break it only that you might freely assent to his graceful remolding of it into something greater--something finer, wilder and more beautiful than ever it was . . . . “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezk 36:26). In brief, our hearts must become like their Creator, alive, loving, passionate. And that is what prayer is about, for the monk and for the man or woman who seeks human wholeness.

Prayer is not primarily something one does at set times and places. One does not do prayer. Least of all does one say prayer. Prayer is a dimension of truly human existence wherein our being, touching God’s being, is thereby transfigured and made alive. The holy one--the man or woman whose life is integrated and centered in the heart—becomes prayer.

We may think of prayer as the springtime of the human heart—that fierce and beautiful season of death and birth. Into the frozen wastes of our petty lives God blazes like a golden Sun. With a mercy that terrifies, he breaks and melts our hearts of ice, scattering darkness and shattering the death within us. To one who has lived all his life in the cold safety of winter, God’s springtime is bitterest pain. Yet to him who, despite his terror, will bow before this great desolation, spring will reveal her wildest beauties. Seeds of life within us, long dormant, will crack, begin to stir and seek the sun. The whole humanness of us--body, soul, spirit--warmed and illumined from within, will unfold and bloom and be born a new being and will live in a new creation wherein all one does is holy. One will be restored to true childhood:

Our Savior’s meaning, when he said, he must be born again and become a little child that will enter into the kingdom of heaven is deeper than is usually believed. It is not only in a careless reliance upon Divine Providence that we are to become little children., but in the peace and purity of all our soul.<sup>(17)</sup>

In this authentic state of prayer, we return to that pure dimension within us that never ceases to wonder at and delight in the dazzling dance of creation. We become one with the eternal childhood of God, delighting in the play of his works, and incarnating again and again in history through the actions and delight of our lives and the blossoming of our full human nature.

The body’s organs of perception, so sensitive in childhood, are themselves freshened and opened to the vivid life of all creation. Thomas Traherne, the seventeenth-century poet and mystic quoted earlier, describes this rediscovered state of childlike wonder:

Certainly Adam in Paradise had not more sweet and curious apprehensions of the world, than I when I was a child. All appeared new and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful: I was a little stranger, which at my entrance into the world, was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. My knowledge was Divine . . . . All things were spotless and pure and glorious . . . . Everything was at rest, free and immortal . . . . I was entertained like an angel with the works of God in their splendour and glory, I saw all in the peace of Eden . . . .<sup>(18)</sup>

With a child’s openness and sensitivity, the whole and holy person responds to every note and nuance of the symphony of life--joys are keener, laughter more spontaneous, work more creative and playful, sorrows more piercing, trust more simple and pure, love more surely given and more warmly received.

Much of the spirit of western monasticism is grounded in this passionate and healthy dialog with creation through a vivid sensual life. The word sensual will no doubt seem oddly used here, though it is used in its strict sense. The oddness arises from a false sensuality prevalent in a spiritually unrooted age and from the (false) dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual that results from our unrootedness. Without roots in the spirit, sensuality becomes demonic and destructive; and the senses, dulled and listless, require ever more powerful gratification. No longer free partners in a dialog with creation, the senses become powerless and enslaved.

Typically, religious people are quick to attack passion as the cause of our malaise. As a result they have given asceticism a bad name and a false image. We tend to think of the ascetic as a cold bloodless creature who has left passion far behind. Of course, a healthy man or woman is repelled by such a corpse-like image, and rightly so. For it is against our very nature to be cold and passionless. Authentic spirituality and western monastic humanism correct this mistake by insisting that the malaise lies not in the passion, but in the state of enslavement. This authentic tradition rejects the dichotomy of flesh and spirit and insists with the second-century Ignatius of Antioch that “the things you do in the flesh are spiritual.”<sup>(19)</sup>

Asceticism then, properly understood, is no more than the intelligent effort of our human nature to examine itself for the bonds and burdens that restrict our growth and to remove them. Asceticism, rather than being a denial of or flight from the world, actually frees one to live more fully and humanly in the world.

A true Christian humanism must be built upon a solid pagan appreciation of the world--pagan in its radical etymological sense of "dwelling in the countryside, in nature." It is a perversion of Christianity to ignore nature in the name of religion. Nature has not been lost or its goodness ("God saw that it was good") abrogated by the arrival of Christianity. Instead, more wonderfully than we imagine, nature has been lifted up into even higher realms of agape, purer realms of joy. It is foolish to expect a man to have a taste for Beatific Vision when he has not yet developed the simpler, humbler vision to see the world that dances about him even now. To miss the miracle of the present moment is tragic beyond words. How will a man ever recognize Love if he has always been a stranger to loveliness? What could Dante have known of the splendor of the sempiternal Rose had he never loved and enjoyed the roses in his own back yard?

The whole, holy and healthy man and woman, like the monk, are children utterly at home in their Father's creation and are passionately and creatively concerned for the well-being of every creature of the Father's making. Their world, seen from the dimension of spirit or the heart, is not some metaphysical realm open only to select initiates, but the real world of earth, stars, puppies and people. "Earth's the right place for love" wrote Robert Frost: "I don't know where it's likely to go better." (20) Another poet, E. E. Cummings, captures the delight of this healthy person's adventures in time and eternity:

time time time time time

--how fortunate are you and i, whose home  
is timelessness: we who have wandered down  
from fragrant mountains of eternal now  
to frolic in such mysteries as birth  
and death a day (or maybe even less).<sup>(21)</sup>

The exile of the heart is ended, the prodigal son comes home.

Homecoming does not involve coming to know any new facts about the world but merely a changed perception. Human existence ceases to be a problem to be solved and becomes a mystery to be enjoyed. The secret is that nothing is lost. Seek and you will not find. Give up the quest for the kingdom of God and you discover the holiness of your native soil . . . Homecoming involves the realization that gracefulness requires nothing but the individual's becoming fully incarnate in his own body and historical situation. Grace is the natural mark of a fully human life.<sup>(22)</sup>

Go to a monastery expecting to see otherworldly men and women and you will be disappointed and possibly scandalized by the time spent there in such mundane tasks as milking cows, manuring fields, pitching hay, baking bread, keeping bees, making jelly. Yet the secret of holiness, wholeness and health is there, for the life is a carefully, even artistically, constructed dialog of spirit with creation. Out of that dialog grows true humanness.

Thomas Merton, who more than any other writer has shown the essential identity of the monk's concerns with those of the normal man and woman outside the monastery, wrote in his last book: ". . . whereas final psychological integration was, in the past, the privilege of a few, it is now becoming a need and aspiration of mankind as a whole."<sup>(23)</sup> Can this be part of the "new religious mutation" mentioned by Kierkegaard? If it is, clearly monastic spirituality--applied to the lives and concerns of ordinary men and women--has a vital role to play in averting and alleviating the spiritual bankruptcy of our own dark age.



## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Quoted in George Maloney, *The Breath of the Mystic* (New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1974), p. 92.
- (2) Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 296.
- (2a) (I use the words “empty materialism” and “vague platonism” deliberately, to distinguish them from a proper Christian materialism and a genuine Platonism, both of which have much to offer in our present poverty of soul and ideas.)
- (3) Lumsden Barkway & Lucy Menzies (editors), *An Anthology of the Love of God: From the Writings of Evelyn Underhill* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1976), p. 73.
- (4) James M. Deschene, “Joy Recalled” (Unpublished poem).
- (5) C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (Michigan: Wm. Eerdmans Publishers, 1970), p. 50.
- (6) Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1962), p. 69.
- (7) Timothy Ware (editor), *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 191.
- (8) *ibid.*, p. 192.
- (9) Raymond Panikkar, quoted in Thomas Merton, *The Monastic Journey* (Kansas: Sheed Andrews & McMeel, Inc.), p. vii.
- (10) Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling & The Sickness Unto Death* (New York.: Doubleday and Company, 1954), p. 198.
- (11) *ibid.*
- (12) Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), pp. 80-81.
- (13) Thomas Mann, “Death in Venice” in *Stories of Three Decades* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976), p. 395.
- (14) Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Wind, Sand and Stars* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), pp. 13-14.
- (15) William McNamara, O.C.D., *Mystical Passion: Spirituality for a Bored Society* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 118.
- (16) C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960), p. 169.
- (17) Thomas Traherne, *Centuries* (London: The Faith Press, 1969), p. 112.
- (18) *ibid.*, p. 109.
- (19) Ignatius of Antioch, “Letter to the Ephesians” quoted in Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers* (London: S.P.C.K., 1975), p. 56.
- (20) “Birches” in Oscar Williams & Edwin Honig, *The Mentor Book of Major American Poets* (New York: Mentor Books, 1962), p. 238.
- (21) *ibid.*, p. 454 (“stands with your lover on the ending earth”).
- (22) Sam Keen, *To A Dancing God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 22-23.
- (23) Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1971), p. 216

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