

Monasticism Today *Purpose and Challenges*

Fr. Dr. Kuriakose Kollannur

Monasticism has been an integral part of the Christian spirituality. The various expressions of the monastic life, from the strictly coenobitic¹, as the one conceived by Pachomius or the one conceived by Basil, to the rigorously hermitic, as with Antony or Macarius of Egypt, correspond more to different stages of the spiritual journey than to the choice between different styles of Spiritual life. In any form, whatever path they take, they are all based on monasticism. Monasticism was not seen merely as a separate condition, proper to a specific category of Christians, but rather as a choice for all baptized, according to the gifts offered to each by the Lord. Monasticism is a pneumatic continuity and a living witness of the evangelical counsels.

This paper gives a detailed account of the Characteristics, purposes and Challenges of Monasticism today.

1. Monasticism, the Heart of the Church

Celibacy and fasting are only a means to an end which is the turning of the heart to God in unceasing prayer. The later development of monasticism as an order of the Church corresponded to the idea of monastic life as a kind of sacrament: a sign of the coming of the Kingdom. Monasticism may be called the heart of the Church, the hidden part far from the eyes of men which beats to the rhythm of Christ's Name. Two important characteristics of Syriac monastic life are of great importance to the Church in its spiritual life: the emphasis put on hermit life and the daily reading and meditation of Scripture.² The meditation of Scripture which should be the basis of all Christian life, was such an integral part of the monk's life in ancient Syriac monasticism that it takes on an almost liturgical and ritual aspect.

Monasticism guides and participates in the Church's mission of salvation with regard to the world. This can be seen in the great mission work undertaken by the Greek monks to the Russian lands and later by the Russian monks to Alaska. There is, however, a concern with regard to the openness of monasticism to the world, and it must be warned against: the work done by monasticism in the pastoral, educational, social and charitable fields has its limits. If it does not remain within these limits, it becomes unfaithful to its specific function and its special service in the Church for the world - to be a sign of eschatological hope³.

In ancient Syriac monastic tradition the coenobitic life was seen principally as a simple preparation for the solitary life. There later came into existence communities of monks living a common life. The life of fellowship and having all things in common, like the Apostles, the celebration of the liturgical offices together are also signs of the coming of the Kingdom: a sign

¹ Cenobitic (or coenobitic) monasticism is a monastic tradition that stresses community life. Often in the West, the community belongs to a religious order and the life of the cenobitic monk is regulated by a religious rule, a collection of precepts.

² I. PHILIPS, *Monasticism, the heart of the Church*, 17-19.

³ J. MOFFITT, ed., *A new Charter for Monasticism*, 41.

of fellowship between the brothers which shows Christ's fellowship with his flock, serving each other in humility as Christ served his Apostles. The monastic life in Indian Christian heritage is also a witness to that particular form of life. The Syriac tradition being so rich in its monastic heritage and ideals is the oldest and most venerable form of Christianity in this country. The great strengths of living in a monastic community is to learn how to forgive without hesitating, to learn to love others more than oneself: all our Churches can learn from this experience of God's grace. Monasteries can be humble guardians and witness to this life of prayer so essential to the life of Christ's Church.⁴

2. Monastic life as a Service of the Church

In hard times the anchorites and ascetics abandoned their cells and monasteries and went into the cities to aid the faithful and to confirm them in their religion, to help those bear oppression with patience and in steadfast faith. When heresy arose, they departed to preach to the faithful and to preserve them from the mistaken beliefs of the heretics and to give them a firm hold in the orthodox faith that was entrusted to them by the holy apostles and the Church.

Saint Anthony - the father of monasticism and the star of the desert - acted thus, determined not to abandon his connections with the Church. His cooperation with the Church was a good example for monks to emulate. During the wave of oppression that was instigated by Maximinus (305-318), he left his cell and went to Alexandria with the intention of suffering a martyr's death for the sake of Christ. There he visited confessing prisoners, comforting them and encouraging them to remain firm in their faith unto death. When the followers of Arius killed the Church Fathers and believers in a great wave of persecution, Saint Anthony visited Alexandria a second time in 355 to defend the true faith, to comfort the confessors, to visit the prisoners, and to exhort them to remain firm in their faith⁵. Mor Aphrem the Syrian for his part founded a church choir composed of young girls from Edessa, which sang works that he had both written and put to music, and which served to strengthen Christian doctrine and refute heresy. The beginning of orderly liturgical life in the Syrian Church is regarded as being his work. It should also be mentioned that when famine broke out in Edessa in the winter of 372/373, when many of the inhabitants died of hunger, Mor Aphrem visited wealthy citizens of the city, collected alms from them and distributed them among the poor. Furthermore, he established houses in which he set up 1300 beds. They served as hostels for the old and infirm under his personal care⁶.

3. The Nobility of Monasticism in the Church

Although celibacy arose outside the Church, monasticism became a significant force within the Church. It is more than prayer, fasting, the practice of asceticism, and keeping vigil. It is more than knowledge and learning. In the eyes of society, the monk is thus the bearer of sublime tidings, the teachings of the Gospel, which he lives in truth, practices in perfection, and offers an example to humanity. Thus monastic life has performed an invaluable service for the Church. Moreover, the development of the Church is assured in a way with the flowering of monasticism, as St. Athanasius wrote: "If monasticism and the priestly ministry grow weak, the entire Church weakens."⁷

The monasteries have been beacons of religion, learning, knowledge and a lasting token of culture and civilization. Monks and nuns have offered a good example for all mankind. The

⁴ I. PHILIPS, *Monasticism, the heart of the Church*, 19.

⁵ COREPISCOPA K. MOOLAYIL, Ed., *A Collection of Articles by His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas*, 116.

⁶ COREPISCOPA K. MOOLAYIL, Ed., *A Collection of Articles*, 117.

⁷ COREPISCOPA K. MOOLAYIL, Ed., *A Collection of Articles*, 117.

daily life of the monastics has been a clear demonstration of the true promise of Christ to all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy, for he will give them relief if they follow him and bend their necks to his yoke and learn from him to be gentle and humble-hearted, for his yoke is good to bear, his load is light (Matt. 11.30). His divine instructions, which are the instructions of perfection in the Christian life have been put into practice by monks and nuns, and they were happy on Earth and have entered the Kingdom of Heaven, for they have worshipped God in spirit and in truth, and they have deepened knowledge of religion and of the world, doing humanity a great service. These monasteries have given the Church and the world outstanding scholars who have produced great works. Their pens have given birth to famous works in the fields of theology, philosophy, languages and other disciplines and branches of knowledge.

4. Monasteries are incorporated in the Ecclesial community

The Church is a kind of sacrament, or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. Man was made and the Church constituted for the union of men among themselves and for their union with God and the supreme bliss of man. Man made in the image and likeness of God must seek and discover him, respond to his call and realize with him in knowledge and love, in adoration and praise, in dedication and service. This man must act, not only as an individual, but as a member of the community of men. A community is united with God in the risen Christ through the Spirit and as such it is a sign and instrument of mankind's union with God, dedicated to the adoration of the triune God, standing as the witness to man's supreme goal and essential duty.

The relation between the Church and monasticism can also be illustrated by the fact that monasteries are evident signs of the authentic community life that characterizes the Church. The primitive Church provided an example of community life when the multitude of believers were one heart and one mind and found nourishment in the teaching of the Gospel and in the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharist.

The monastic life is not a ministry nor a particular function different from the sacerdotal or married state; it is based not on a particular sacrament; what is specific about it is that it is situated not in the order of the sacramental signs, but in that of the realities of grace signified by the sacraments, it is simply the place where by through the means of sanctification, one may be gifted the fruits of life in the Spirit. That is why monasticism is truly the heart of the Church, whose whole mystery, it in some way recapitulates. The monasticism constitutes the most interior aspect of the ecclesial tradition and is a model for every Christian.

5. Monasteries with better incorporation in the Church

The Church is engaged today in all-round and deep-level renewal. Since the fate of monasticism, through the centuries, has been associated with that of the Church, an imperative condition for its continued and better integration in the Church is a program of updating and renewal of monastic life. The monastic life, developing as it did from the eremitical life, is always in some way a *fuga mundi*, a flight from the world. As a *fuga mundi*, monastic life has an essentially eschatological dimension. It is an anticipation of death and resurrection, of transits through which all are destined to pass, and through which we must pass with Christ if we are to enter into eternal life. In the atmosphere in which eremitical and monastic life developed, martyrdom was regarded as the supreme form of Christian death, the most perfect configuration to Christ, the most perfect imitation of Him. Monasticism was a substitute for martyrdom. It thus aimed at the consummation of Christian life.

The current appearance of monasticism has often made of liturgy a theatrical performance with flowing cowls, hooded heads and ethereal chanting - much of which came from a romantic, medieval cloister worship, rather than a deep-felt liturgical sensitivity to what was meaningful for the spiritual life of the participating monk.

In general, we must try today to make the monastery a sign that will be authentic, that is, meaningful, sincere and therefore effective – a sign of the kingdom of God. The monastery should be a finger pointing to the transcendence of God, remaining men of God's love, of its imperiousness, of the totalitarian demands that this love, devouring and purifying, makes in man. As a consequence the monastery has a role to play today that is peculiarly relevant. There is so much stress on the demands, the values and the validity of life on earth that we must not forget that there is a world as we experience it will not last forever, and in consequence we must use it as though we used it not⁸.

The poverty of the monastery will have to take into account the total life of the surroundings: the conditions of life of the nation in general and of the neighbors in particular. Friendly relations with the people of the neighborhood, an aspect of hospitality, a virtue traditionally associated with monasticism, is also part of the practice of poverty. The authority and obedience - a crucial question in the Church's life today. The religious obedience originated in the master-disciple relationship between an experienced anchorite and a young aspirant for life in the desert. Today even the master-disciple relationship is a doubtful basis from which to begin reform. When this relationship originally developed, the master was indeed a *magister* and had much to teach that the young man did not know. Today education is more widespread: specialization is a necessity. It often that in many spheres a monk knows more than his abbot.

Regarding the reform of Divine Office, the office should be so arranged that it will not be too long. There could be fewer psalms, for instance, and more pauses. In every area of liturgical life it is essential to introduce into the rites themselves more frequent and longer pauses if the liturgy is not to degenerate into mere ritualism. It has been well said that a liturgy without silence is a liturgy without future. If the Office were thus simplified and made easier to assimilate, it would become again what it originally was, the prayer of the Church. It is improper to think of it merely as prayer for the Church recited by those deputed for the purpose.

6. The Monastic Family

The monastic community life is patterned on that of Disciples around the Master. Christ is the true head of the community. Faith brings the monk to Him, through the Holy Spirit, for strength, guidance, support, inspiration and courage. But the Master is visibly represented in the midst of His disciples by a human person, the Father Abbot.⁹ The Abbot,¹⁰ chosen from among the monks by vote, is an older and more experienced priest who is capable of administering the affairs of the monastery and taking care of the spiritual and material needs of the monks. All the monks obey him according to their vow, in a spirit of faith and under his direction they carry out the work that needs to be done for the common good.

7. Monasticism and liturgical life

Goal of the liturgy is the sanctification of human and the glorification of God. All other human activities are to be subordinated and directed to liturgy. Monasticism faithfully follows

⁸ 1 Cor. 7/31.

⁹ T. MERTON, *The Monastic Journey*, 9.

¹⁰ *Abbot* means Head of the Monastery or House.

the Divine Tradition, and the liturgical life occupies the central position in it. One of the main contributions of monasticism is in the realm of liturgy. Monks have been mostly the authors of liturgical compositions and prayers. Many of these prayers were formulated from the depth of spiritual experience and theological insights. The liturgical celebration was the outcome of profound ecclesial life and inspired by the biblical and patristic sources.¹¹ The monks' love for psalms and their availability for prayer and spiritual guidance made the people turn to them for spiritual guidance and inspiration.

The first monks were often devoted to psalmody, without solemnities, but silent prayer was almost always the preferred thing. The monastic life is in direct touch with that which constitutes the very heart of the liturgy. Some monastic traditions showed a lack of interest in certain expressions of liturgical life. The witness of ancient monks is that prayer with tears and compunction of heart do not go well with chanting and liturgical solemnities – these were meant for people in the world¹².

Vatican II teaches: "Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fountain from which all her power flows... The liturgy in its turn inspires the faithful to become of one heart in love when they have tasted to their full the paschal mysteries; it prays that they may grasp by deed what they hold by creed".¹³ The eastern churches which are called rightly monastic celebrate their liturgy in all solemnity with lengthy duration and repeated invocations. This helps gradual identification with the mystery that is celebrated. In the liturgy, elements reveal their own nature as a gift offered by the Creator to humanity.

8. Monasticism and Spirituality

Monasticism was an attempt to revive and regenerate the strength and salient features of the early apostolic community life, where individuals worked for the community, which in turn sustained the individuals in true spirit of Christian love and justice. The tide of worldliness, negligence of disciplines, lack of true worship, deterioration of true Christian faith and lack of love in the Christian Church demanded a re-established structure for a model Christian Community. Many individuals went to the desert to practice this ideal Christian life. Church Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Naziansus, Dionysius the Areopagite, Augustine of Hippo were some who tried to grasp and propagate this type of Christian life.¹⁴

Monasticism became a movement, incorporating all the community aspects of spirituality that existed in the apostolic Church. Gradually, monastic communities with qualities like simplicity, holiness, obedience, hard work, fraternity, love, justice etc., were developed in the Church. Later, these monastic movements flourished well in different parts of the world and served as a source of power for the Church. The true spirituality could be maintained only in a community life, where qualities like love, justice, equality, discipline, service to humanity and worship of God were properly understood and effectively practiced.¹⁵

9. Monasticism and Ecumenism

¹¹ X. KOODAPUZHA, *Oriental Churches and Monasticism*, 189.

¹² A. LOUF, *The Message of Monastic Spirituality*, 32.

¹³ *Vatican II, Liturgy*, No.10.

¹⁴ This approach highlighted the God-Man vertical spirituality, but ignored the horizontal man-to-man relationship, thus neglecting the application of spirituality in societies and communities(C.C CHERIAN, *Christian Spirituality - An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 18).

¹⁵ C.C CHERIAN, *Christian Spirituality*, 19.

A divided Christianity is a counter witness to Christ. Jesus prayed for unity, harmony and love among his followers and made it a precept so that the world may believe. Ecumenism is a common pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ. This pilgrimage has for its destination a common fatherland wherein to bloom in harmony, as Disciples of Christ. Ecumenism cannot be at the cost of fidelity to Christ and the way shown by Him. Ecumenism has no private concern to nurture, and no establishment to protect. Its only goal is God's Kingdom and everything else is subordinate to this goal.

Monasticism as a bridge between the Eastern and Western Churches and monasticism from its beginning was one of the most efficient and enduring agents of universal Church unity. Monasticism is the full application of both the general anthropological need for a disciplined life-style to rise above the heavy weight of human life, and of the call to imitate Christ. At the same time, these deep anthropological and basic Christian roots are often the fundamental common ground for its active ecumenical impact. The monastic writings and experience were most important exchange between the different Churches of East and West. The true monasticism is an ecumenical channel, and at the same time the expression of its deepest dimension of sharing with God, the Supreme Beauty, is the love for the beauty of life¹⁶. Monasticism becomes bridge not only between the Christian Churches, but also between Christian and non-Christian monasticism. This cosmic anthropological dimension of monastic ecumenism has been too little developed but could become very promising in the future.

Ecumenical movement is an invitation to involve us in the divine revolution of the reign of God in our hearts, a radical *metanoia* of surrendering ourselves to the will of God.¹⁷ It is a spiritual revolution that Jesus Christ proclaimed as *Kingdom of God*. This revolution is the content of His Gospel. Monasticism is a common heritage for all the ancient Churches both in the East and the West. These Churches have the Gospel and Holy Tradition for their foundation. All the Churches share the earliest Christian tradition. The writings of the great fathers of monasticism have permeated all the Churches. The Palestinian, Syrian, Mesopotamian, Persian, Egyptian, and Basilian monastic branches are from the same root though they are manifested in different places in harmony with the cultural and spiritual background of the people around them.¹⁸

10. Monasticism and Angelism

At the present moment, there is a tendency in calling everything of a monastic or contemplative nature, *angelism*. The word seldom defined, but it is commonly so used as to include under its meaning pessimism, dualism, anti-humanism or anti-incarnationalism and Platonism¹⁹. To discover what *angelism* properly refers to, one must go back to the sources of monastic tradition. When one does so, no conflict between angelism and humanism is discovered. Generally speaking, the reference to angels does not serve the purpose of contrasting two natures, that of a pure spirit and that of corporeal beings, nor does it remove man - and the God-Man - from the conditions of time and space; its purpose is to illustrate the present state of redeemed mankind by a comparison with that of the blessed who share already fully in God's glory.

In monasticism, as in the tradition of the Old and New Testaments and of later Judaism, and among those influenced by this literature, the function rather than the nature of the angels is important. And in our time historians influenced by philosophies deriving from

¹⁶ A. BONIFACE, *Eastern Monasticism*, 36.

¹⁷ X. KOODAPUZHA, *Oriental Churches and Monasticism*, 192.

¹⁸ X. KOODAPUZHA, *Oriental Churches and Monasticism*, 192.

¹⁹ J. LECLERCQ, Trans., M. DODD, *Aspects of Monasticism*, 151.

Aristotelianism raise problems which the ancients hardly touched²⁰. The monks spoke of the angels, the obsessive insistence on chastity which became so marked later on angelism.

11. Monasticism Today

The monastic life is a life of renunciation and total, direct worship of God for his own sake. Is this still to be regarded as something a reasonable man will undertake in the 21st century? Is it simply an escape from life? Is it a refusal of fellowship with other men, misanthropy, evasion, delusion? The monk is not concerned with himself so much as with God, and with all who are loved by God. He does not seek to justify himself by comparing himself favorably with other people: rather, he sees himself and all men together in the light of great and solemn facts which no one can evade. The fact of inevitable death which puts an end to the struggles and joys of life. The fact that the meaning of life is usually obscure and sometimes seemingly impenetrable. The fact that happiness seems to elude more and more people as the world itself becomes more prosperous, more comfortable, and more confident of its own powers. The fact of sin, that cancer of the spirit, which destroys not only the individual and his chances of happiness, but whole communities and even nations. The fact of human conflict, hate, aggression, destruction, subversion, deceit, the unscrupulous use of power.²¹

A monk has made this surrender, knowing what it costs, knowing that it does not absolve him from the doubts and struggles of modern man. But he believes that he possesses the key to these struggles, and that he can give his a meaning that is valid not only for himself but for everyone else. That meaning is discovered in faith, though not in arguments about faith. Certainly faith is not opposed to reason. It can be shown to be rational, though it cannot be rationally 'proved'. But once one believes, one can become able to understand the inner meaning of one's belief, and to see its validity for others. Both this belief and this eventual understanding are special gifts of God.

12. Purposes of Monasticism

1. Overcoming Imperfections

All monasticism has its mainstay in theological convictions that life in society cannot generate the spiritual consummation stipulated by the religion's founder. In some traditions, especially in those of South Asian provenance, the true "self" is held to be clogged and concealed by imperfections by sin, ignorance, or other theologically suggested impediments. The ego with which the layperson and the seeking neophyte identify is not the true self, which must be discovered or uncovered. Barriers differently conceived as matter, individuated mind, or a soul-mind aggregate defiled by sin, ignorance, and perversion must be broken through, or a veil lifted, so that the true self, the primordial spirit, may shine forth. In most traditions this breakthrough is held to be unattainable through a conventionally good life in society, and thus a new approach must be sought. The body and the mind, which are part or the entire impediment, have to be controlled, disciplined, and chastised; hence, monastics advocate either asceticism or a set of psychophysical practices that differ radically from the normal routines of life.

2. Spiritual Perfection

The quest for spiritual intensification is elitist even when, as within Christian monastic orders, humility is required. Withdrawal from society is necessary because the instrumentalities of perfection cannot normally be acquired and activated in the surroundings of everyday life.

²⁰ J. LECLERCQ, *Aspects of Monasticism*, 152.

²¹ T. MERTON, *The Monastic Journey*, ed, Patrick Hart, 5.

Intense contemplation, often accompanied by physical rigors, constitutes ascetic practice i.e., prayer, worship, incantation, propitiation, and various forms of self-abasement or self-inflation. Monastics pursue all these forms of orthopraxy in enormously varied forms and degrees.

13. Present-Day problems in Monasticism

In some Churches, the forms of prayer are in full process of renewal. The use of the living language, which represented a minimum, a first condition, is henceforth within reach of all who wish it. For example in Catholic Church, the structure of the Divine Office is in course of transformation, and the experiments being carried out are already yielding good results. And much more than that, the conditions of all prayer in common-theological, philosophical, psychological, sociological and even economic are being reconsidered in the light of recent acquisitions of Christology, ecclesiology and biblical and patristic studies, as well as of phenomenology and other schools of contemporary thought. We are still only at the beginning, but it is full of promise.

The institutional structures are also in the process of being transformed. In each institute, constitutions are being revised. The participation of representatives of community in its own government²² is little by little being introduced almost everywhere, in accordance with a demand of the Council. The length of the mandate of superiors is no longer what it used to be. Collaboration between the different orders is being intensified. Nuns are gradually coming to take their destiny into their own hands; the legislation concerning enclosure is being modified. The relation between mother houses and their foundations of every kind is moving in a direction to ensure that the latter may have the necessary help, but also autonomy. The lay brothers and sisters who came into being in the West during the Middle Ages are now a thing of the past. It is gradually being accepted on all levels-theological, psychological and even institutional-that the priesthood is not tied to the monastic state. In every way, structures are being renewed so as to return to tradition over and beyond recent historical forms. There are many problems facing monasticism in the present day.

There are many reasons behind the emergence of Monasticism as an institutional form. Since the fourth century witnessed the fast growth of monasticism in its strict sense, it is reasonable to consider this movement as a reaction against the degradation of quality of the Christian life. After the last persecution, when Christianity became the state religion, peace and tranquility ruled in the Church, and there was some sort of laxity among the fervent believers. Till then in the early church the martyr represented an ideal. Many were fervent enough to have earnest desire to become a martyr. After the end of the persecution this ideal was no longer attainable. In effect it was replaced by the ascetic, whose rigorous life was often regarded as martyrdom. In the case of ascetic the human persecutor earlier was replaced by a demon. If we consider ascetics as the heirs to martyrs, we can realize the sense of their austere life. They simply tried to carry out the norms of Christian life in pre-Constantine time. During that time, to be a Christian was a matter of seriousness. Hence ascetic life was in reality not a parallel track, but an attempt to be firm on the right way of living in the Church and to keep fidelity to Gospel values.

1. The identity crisis

Today each of organizations within the Church has to query its own identity. The great religious orders and groups of orders are querying their aim and their position within the Body of Christ; monasticism cannot escape the challenge. Monk is not even a religious, he is in no way specified, and thus he can do everything, and in fact in many places he does do everything,

²² Regimen is the word used in the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life, no. 14.

in the same way that others do it. Neither are his activities specific nor is the style of life they determine. Other people, more demanding, tend to think that certain separation from the world, a major part of the day given over to prayer, a stricter asceticism, and activities determined by these facts are characteristic of the monastic state and distinguish it from other forms of life in the Church.

2. Monasticism in a changing society

One of the aspects of the present day crisis in monasteries is that certain monks within their ranks query their *raison d'être*²³ in the name of contemporary anthropology and sociology and of theological considerations. It is also insisted upon more and more today that the relationship of man and God is lived in the relationships with other men. One can only save oneself in helping to save them, in having had “experience of one’s neighbor in love”. The community as such must have a spiritual life, and not, or not only, each one of the individuals who make it up. The more personal each one is, that is to say, the more he differs from others in his nature and grace, the more he will contribute to the wealth of the whole. He will stay himself and he will develop for God and the Church in the measure that he gives and receives.

Conclusion

The Christian monastic theory has always been a synthesis between permanent elements, primordial ones, those that come from the Gospel and constant monastic tradition, and cultural elements, historical ones bound up with determined moments in evolution. The general conception of the world, of society and of the place that monasticism has within it has been modified more or less according to the times; it has known more or less lengthy periods of stability. It is now undergoing rapid and profound change. Monastic theory must, then, be constantly revised. We must avoid fixing it once and for all, but we must also avoid making it lose, in the course of its development, certain of its essential factors. And it is not easy to practice this discernment and this updating in a tie when the knowledge we have of both the Gospel and monastic history is undergoing change and, we may say, progressing.

One of the forms of monastic asceticism is that of accepting the fact that the theory of monasticism, the justification that monks have for their life, remains constantly insufficient, subject to revision and transformation. Let them never enjoy an absolute speculative security, but let them have confidence. The progress of their spirituality and of the forms of their existence entails a certain risk, which they must accept in the Holy Spirit. The charisma that was, and remains, at the origin of their life will allow them to continue to be within the Church, instruments in God’s service and for the universal expansion of his work among men.

The relevance of monastic movement was less significant in India but people itself followed ascetic life rather than an organized institution so monastic life and ascetic life is significant for Christian churches in India. Before monasticism was well organized as we see today, in India especially in Kerala, St. Thomas Christians organized their life both spiritually and materialistically. The early Fathers who sacrificed their life for the church became the seed of the church we see today.

It is difficult to trace out the beginning of a systematic organized monasticism. Transition of time, change in administration, and change in liturgy, domination in administration both in political and spiritual field all influenced the monastic life that we have accepted. Marthoman Christians (St. Thomas Christians) received the traditions of various Church Fathers who came to Kerala during different time periods. The Antiochean, Persian, Chaldean, Western

²³ A person’s *raison d'être* is their purpose or reason for living. It’s why they do things. In French, *raison d'être* literally means “reason for being”, and in English it means about the same. Someone’s *raison d'être* is the most important thing to them.

Portuguese, British, Protestant traditions all influenced the Christian church in Kerala. Both Eastern and Western monasticism influenced the Christian churches in Kerala as we see today that the monastic movements of St. Thomas Christians is linked with either Eastern or Western monasticism. Almost all Apostolic Churches in Kerala follow either eastern monastic rule or western monastic rule but a transition of time affects today's monastic life and Christian monasticism.

The modernization, modern thinking and heretics led to the declension in the Christian values of the church. Unfortunately, both Christian monastic institutions and Ashrams become silent instead of raising the Christian values. The people are living a luxurious and comfortable life in the modern world, so they hesitate to lead a sacrificial and suffering life. The means of monasticism such as celibacy, obedience, poverty, sacrifice, sufferings and humility is on the path of detachment even from the Church.

If the Church wishes to bring about a change in the present situation, it must promote monastic movements, share Christ's love, try to develop faith and trust in Jesus, and also build up dedicated Christian life in our Christian families. Though change is relevant, we must not deviate from Christ. We must hold firm to Christ's way of life. Let us mould up a generation in the path of love, humility, sacrifice, sharing and devotion through the Christian Monasticism.

The Church in India will have to learn to appreciate the contemplative life and come to recognize the value of monasticism. We may confidently hope that God will grant the age-long but always vigorous and sappy stem of Christian monasticism to shoot over our land a fresh and young branch with thick foliage, bearing abundant fruit. A day will come - no matter how long hence - when God will give the Indian Church an Antony or a Benedict who will make Indian monasticism come into its own and give it a form at once traditional and new, adorned with the purified spiritual splendor of its past legacies. But it is already time that the children of the Church in India realize their obligation in this regard and prepare to gird themselves up humbly but steadily for the hour appointed by God.

Bibliography

- BONIFACE, A., *Eastern Monasticism and the Future of the Church*, Stamford 1993.
- BUDA, L., «Syriac Proto-monasticism and Monasticism in the Light of the First Christian Community in Jerusalem (Acts of Apostle 2, 42-47 and 4 32-35)», *Harp* 17 (2005) 233-244.
- CHERIAN, C.C., «Christian Spirituality-An Eastern Orthodox Perspective», *Deepthi* (2008).
- HARMLESS, W., *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, New York 2004.
- JURGENS, W.A, ed., *The Faith of the Early Fathers, I-III*, Bangalore 2005.
- KNOWLES, D., *Christian Monasticism*, London 1977.
- KOODAPUZHA, X., «Oriental Churches and Monasticism», *Harp* 19 (2008) 177-194.
- LECLERCQ, C.H., ed., *Aspects of Monasticism*, Michigan 1978.
- LOUF, A., *The Message of Monastic Spirituality*, New York 1964.
- MOFFITT, J., ed., *A New Charter for Monasticism*, London 1970.

MOOLAYIL, K., ed., *A Collection of Articles by His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas*, Changanaserry 2013.

PHILIPS, I., «Monasticism, the Heart of the Church», *Harp* 4 (1991) 17-19.

WARD, B., ed., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Kalamazoo 1975.