THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
FROM AN EASTERN MONASTIC PERSPECTIVE

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores principles inherent in Eastern Orthodox monasticism as they contribute to informing a philosophy of religious education. Beginning with an examination into the origins of Christian monasticism, we proceed to investigate the divergence between monastic practice in the Latin West and Greek East. This discussion is followed by an inquiry into the prayer of the heart, and the pedagogical principles discernable in Athonite hesychastic practitioners. Theirs is a lived pedagogy directed toward theosis, a participation in the divine energies of God. If theosis is the telos of their education, it is an end occasioned through asceticism (i.e. praxis). The pedagogy of Eastern monastics is infused with an inward-oriented gaze, concerning itself not with external objects, but rather inward relation. This interior cultivation is put into dialogue with John Henry Newman’s educational theory, as this serves as a useful lens through which to read the Eastern monastic tradition.
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I. Introduction

When the modern individual pauses to reflect on Christian monasticism, what comes to mind? Although answers will undoubtedly vary from one person to the next, it is probable that many responses will share some of the following elements. For many, monks are viewed as relics of bygone eras. Their monasteries are enjoyable stops for vacationers on tour busses, and where the vineyards are still operational, the possibility exists for deriving pleasure from the wine. This association with alcohol engenders a view of the drunken monastic; jovial and benevolent, this mental image is useful for little more than comic relief in Hollywood films.¹ And, of course, the motion picture industry – when not portraying the tipsy friar – will often take recourse to a different and darker depiction of monasticism. Here the monks are depicted as dubious individuals of questionable motives, who, when not given to acts of extreme corporal mortification, are busy going to any and all immoral lengths to keep historical truths from exposure to light.² For many, such is the mental imagery conjured up when reflecting on Christian monasticism.

Turning sharply from our initial question, let us pause for a moment to consider a second query. When the modern individual reflects on education, what comes to mind? Here again, there are a multitude of potential responses. However, we may venture to sketch some broad outlines of pedagogical visions shared by many. Perhaps one calls to mind imagery of ivy-covered buildings on beautiful campuses. The ground-creeping and climbing evergreen

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¹ One thinks of Michael McShane’s portrayal of Friar Tuck in “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves” (1991). Although strictly speaking, one must distinguish a friar from a monk, in the popular imagination, members of the mendicant orders are often seen as analogous to their monastic counterparts.

² The ubiquity of this image derives, in large part, from Paul Bettany’s portrayal of Silas in “The Da Vinci Code” (2006). Umberto Eco’s Il Nome Della Rosa (1980) is an earlier example of a text that occasions such a view of monastics.
occasions thoughts of Harvard, Princeton, Yale and other Ivy League institutions. One conjures up images of students bustling to and fro, on their way to lecture halls and tutorial rooms, their knapsacks containing pens, papers, books and laptops. Perhaps one envisions a professor, standing before her blackboard, providing instruction of knowledge that will be regurgitated by pupils to satisfy the demands of tests and examinations. Many will imagine diplomas, degrees, and Latin phrases, such as summa cum laude.

There are undoubtedly other visions, both of Christian monasticism and education, which can be called to mind. It is the task of this thesis to provide the reader with one such depiction, a depiction that paints a decidedly different picture on both fronts. It is an image that replaces the drunken friar with the temperate hermit, and the metal cîlice with the wool chotki; an image that exchanges the lecture hall’s oratory for silence and the examination period for prayer. It is the task of this thesis to explore the principles inherent in Eastern Orthodox monasticism as they contribute to informing a philosophy of religious education.

This thesis shall proceed along the following lines. In the second chapter, the origins and early development of Christian monasticism shall be explored. We will examine why monasticism began to flourish following the legitimization of the Christian faith in the early fourth century. By investigating the manner of living embodied in lives of early anchorites, we are able to discern a number of features that became entrenched in Eastern monastic practice, features that persist down to the present day. In this chapter, we will give special attention to St Antony the Great, as his life and teachings became a source of emulation for many monastics that followed. Thus his simplicity, poverty, chastity, obedience, asceticism and unceasing prayer became hallmarks of Eastern monastic practice. In this chapter, we also note the emergence of a
competing form of monastic life, namely coenobitism, and briefly examine the genesis of monasticism in the West.

In the third chapter, we proceed to examine Western and Eastern divergence with respect to monastic development. The Western conception was heavily infused with communal principles embodied in the Benedictine Rule. These principles would lay the foundation for scholastic endeavours that would greatly influence the future of Latin monastic practice. Juxtaposing this scholastic foundation with St John of the Ladder’s monastic vision, we observe an exceptionally different approach. In a work of great importance to Eastern monasticism, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, we find the seeds of hesychasm beginning to sprout. Thus we may observe telling differences in the Latin West and Greek East, with the former giving rise to scholastic emphases, and the latter solitary and unceasing hesychastic practice.

Hesychasm’s impact in the development of Eastern monasticism was so profound that we devote the fourth chapter to examining its growth. What became known as the prayer of the heart – sometimes simply referred to as the Jesus Prayer – consists in the unceasing invocation of the divine name. The specific formula employed by the monastics, as well as associated psychosomatic physical aids, are discussed. We begin by delineating hesychasm’s Sinaite Phase, prior to examining the Athonite Phase that followed. In particular, we note that through the prayer of the heart, hesychastic practitioners sought to unite themselves with God. This union, termed theosis or deification, was the goal of all ascetic efforts.

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3 Hesychasm may be understood as the ascetic pursuit of internal stillness. It describes a specific methodology of prayer, in which the unceasing repetition of a phrase (e.g., “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”) is invoked on a repeated basis. It tends to be accompanied by specific psychosomatic aids. A defining feature of such prayer is its insistence “upon individual sanctification in solitude” (Gillet 32). It is often referred to as the “prayer of the heart.”
The fifth chapter’s title – Eastern Monasticism’s *Telos* and Pedagogical Methodology – describes the twofold nature of this section. First, the chapter seeks to outline pedagogy’s end goal for Eastern monks, that being union with the divine (i.e. *theosis*). Second, the chapter endeavours to extract pedagogical principles that engender the actualization of monasticism’s *telos*. By examining the life and teachings of St Silouan the Athonite and Elder Joseph the Hesychast, we are able to glean the works of asceticism inherent in the struggle toward deification. Unceasing prayer, temperance in food and speech, vigils and other ascetic efforts are all elements of a pedagogy directed not toward the head, but rather toward the heart. It is a didactic methodology that seeks not intellectual growth and cognitive enhancement so much as it seeks to engender love and humility. As the fifth chapter endeavours to make manifest, it is an education that elevates Person over Object, Indwelling over Idea, and Relation over Reason.

This is followed by an attempt to place John Henry Newman’s pedagogy into dialogue with our monastic tradition. The sixth chapter is thus concerned with juxtaposing Newman’s educational theory (as embodied in his 1852 lectures that became known as *The Idea of a University*) with that of Eastern monasticism. Differing, as they do, in both their *telos* and methodologies, such juxtaposition makes for a stark contrast. For Newman, the diffusion and extension of knowledge is the primary aim of education; it follows that his gaze is outward-oriented. Placing Newman into dialogue with our topic helps to clarify how Eastern monasticism articulates and envisions its didactic role, and leads to a deeper understanding of its inward concentration toward the heart. According to St Hesychios, “Just as he who looks at the sun cannot but fill his eyes with light, so he who always gazes intently into his heart cannot fail to be illumined” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 180).
It is the aim of this thesis to investigate Eastern monasticism’s pedagogy as it relates to such illumination. It is an illumination derived from lengthy study in “The University of the Wilderness” (Elder Joseph 27), a pedagogy through which the monk strives to become proficient in the “art of all arts and the science of all sciences” (Elder Joseph 125). So let us now thrust off imagery that presents the monastic as an antiquated relic, drunken reprobate, or shrewd and immoral figure. May it be replaced by the humble, pious and patient figure, who lives a life of unceasing prayer out of love for the world? In addition, let us open ourselves to the possibility of didactic methodology that extends beyond the purview of the traditional classroom. It is pedagogy in praxis, through which knowledge is derivative of ascetical living and where Wisdom dwells in the human heart.
II. Origins and Early Development of Christian Monasticism

From the Church’s infancy, early Christians were subject to periodic persecution on account of their religious beliefs. These persecutions tended to ebb and flow over the initial centuries, and martyrdom for the sake of Christ became a reality for many. During this period, martyrdom was held by Christians as the highest pinnacle of perfection (Daniélou & Marrou 124). This is not surprising. One clearly finds within the impetus to suffer and perish the topos of the suffering and death of Jesus of Nazareth, whom early Christians held to be the Christ, the promised Messiah. The typology was further entrenched through the violent demise of the first disciples and early apostles.

However, the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312), and subsequent issuance of the Edict of Milan (313), altered the relationship between the Empire and Church. With the legitimization of Christianity and ensuing religious freedom that followed shortly thereafter, the danger of martyrdom quickly diminished. In fact, many Christians ascended from the ranks of the

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4 The following passage from Justin’s First Apology (Daniélou & Marrou date this work c. 150-165), detailing the martyrdom of Ptolemy and Lucius is telling in this regard. “What is the ground of his judgment? You punished this man, not as an adulterer, nor fornicator, nor murderer, nor thief, nor robber ... [he] has only confessed that he is called by the name of Christian” (Stevenson, “New Eusebius” 31).

5 Henry Chadwick has observed that the various persecutions “did not strike everywhere with equal ferocity” (121).

6 Tertullian’s renowned claim (c. 197), that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Chadwick 29) provides some indication as to the ubiquitous nature of martyrdoms during this period.

7 Consider the following passage from Tertullian, while writing of the church at Rome. “How happy is that church, on which the apostles poured forth all their doctrine with their blood! Where Peter endures a passion like his Lord’s! Where Paul wins his crown in death ...” (Stevenson, “New Eusebius” 164).

8 Lactantius tells us that prior to this battle, “Constantine was directed in a dream to mark the heavenly sign of God on the shields of his soldiers and thus to join the battle” (Stevenson, “New Eusebius” 283). Eusebius’ account attempts to be even more exacting. “He saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and an inscription, CONQUER BY THIS attached to it” (Stevenson, “New Eusebius” 284). The exact details of his vision notwithstanding, what appears clear is that Constantine attributed his victory to the Christian God. This accreditation would alter the Church’s position in society immensely.

9 In the ensuing years, we find Christians possessing the autonomy to worship as they please, restitution of Church property, fiscal grants made by the Emperor to the clergy, et cetera (Stevenson, “New Eusebius” 284-289).

10 Not only did the danger of being a martyr subside, but the bishoprics became highly esteemed public offices. Such was the extent of this change that Ramsay MacMullen observes a corresponding corruption in attaining a
persecuted to those of the privileged. Tertullian’s wry observation of the ubiquity of the cry, “The Christians to lion,” (Chadwick 29) no longer rumbled around the Mediterranean. A new current was now blowing, no longer buffeting Christians down into the mouths of lions but rather elevating them to the heights of the soaring imperial eagle. It was increasingly to the corridors of power that Christians now had recourse; the threat of death on account of theological belief quickly seemed a distant memory (Daniélou & Marrou 237).

This was a very new development. Peter Brown has observed that “there were never very many Christians in the Roman world before the conversion of Constantine” (xxxix). From the moment of the Emperor’s conversion, we find Christianity beginning to flourish; prior to the close of the fourth century, the Church “had virtually captured society” (Chadwick 174). To observe the movement from isolated, minority and marginalized position to preeminent social standing is to become aware of just how dramatic this initial change proved for Christians. For the Church, power had replaced poverty; privilege superseded persecution.

This presented a problem for many believers, who shared the view held by Irenaeus (c. 130 – c. 200) that the martyr “stood for nothing less than human nature at its highest” (Brown 73), and shared in Clement of Alexandria’s\(^\text{11}\) statement, “We call martyrdom perfection” (Daniélou & Marrou 126). If perfection in piety was no longer to be obtained through martyrdom, where were Christians to look for the consummation of their religious beliefs? Some no doubt sought perfection in their newfound positions of influence and affluence. There were, however, those who scorned the very possibility of perfection in such circles. For this minority group, progress in perfection would increasingly necessitate a withdrawal from large

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\(^{11}\) J. Stevenson (“New Eusebius” 374) estimates that Clement of Alexandria lived from 150-214.
urban areas and even smaller towns and villages; perfection was actualized in flight from the world. No longer afforded opportunities to confess their faith and suffer a violent martyrdom at the hands of an antithetical ruler or angry mob, attention was turned to a different form of martyrdom, one “attained by a life of renunciation and mortification” (Daniélou & Marrou 270).12 Thus although it found its inception in the third century of the Egyptian desert, monasticism as an institution can be said to flourish and become increasingly entrenched as a viable Christian lifestyle only after Constantine brought an end to Christian persecution.13

a) The Early Anchorites

The initial Christian monastics were hermits.14 They took flight to the desert in order to live an ascetic life.15 16 According to Henry Chadwick, they were infused with “a theology dominated by the ideal of the martyr who hoped for nothing in this world but sought for union with the Lord in his passion” (177). This self-abasement and self-sacrificial model was found in

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12 On this point, St Antony’s own life – to which we will turn in a moment – is telling. “Antony was burning with a desire for martyrdom ... and achieved a daily martyrdom of faith and conscience, wearing himself out by means of more rigorous fasting and nightly devotions” (Athanasius 38-9).
13 The Christian literature during this transition is indicative of evolving theological attitudes. Whereas the initial accounts of saints focused almost exclusively on the death of the adherents – most frequently detailing a violent demise – the subsequent hagiographical literature came to focus not on the death of the saints, but rather their lives. For a telling contrast, one may juxtapose the third century Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity with the fourth century Life of Antony.
14 The word ‘monk’ originates from the Greek ‘monachos’, itself derived from ‘monos’ meaning ‘alone’.
15 The hagiographies of Eastern monks greatly stressed just how ‘wild’ their desert locations were. This was owing to the typographical nature of the genre. For example, the forty days spent in the desert by Jesus of Nazareth offers a topos for the monastic life, as does the life of John the Baptist.
16 The topos noted above indicates that the desert possessed not only a material, but also a spiritual reality. In early medieval social thought, the specific use of the desert is contrasted with civilization, and this contrast helps us make sense of how monastics divided up the world and their imaginative understanding of it. According to Jacques Le Goff, the desert represents “values opposed to the city” (47). Rather than viewing it simply by its geographical features, the desert is better understood as “a symbol and a historical and geographic reality” (47). The desert can thus be understood not only by its terrestrial features, but also as a non-civilized locale. As monasticism developed, especially in the West, the symbolic and spiritual understanding of ‘desert’ was responsible for Nordic and Celtic monks referring to the sea as their desert; later Western monastics would apply the same desert terminology not to barren wastelands but dense forests (Le Goff 51). This desert topos thus made for an effective and important spiritual contrast between country and city, what the Romans would refer to as rus and urbs (Le Goff 58). For a fuller discussion on this distinction, see Jacques Le Goff, “The Wilderness in the Medieval West”, in Le Goff, The Medieval Imagination (1988), 47-59.
Christ’s passion; his triumph was derivative of his willingness to suffer. Thus the early anchorites\textsuperscript{17} sought to live with great frugality and utmost simplicity, renouncing the riches of the present life in the hope of riches in the next.\textsuperscript{18}

The towering figure of early monastic development is undoubtedly St Antony the Great (c. 251-356), often referred to as the “Father of Monasticism” (even if he wasn’t necessarily the first monastic).\textsuperscript{19} His life became a model for subsequent generations to emulate.\textsuperscript{20} Such emulation, however, would have been impossible if not for the hagiography written by St Athanasius (c. 360),\textsuperscript{21} who wrote it in part that people “might be able to undertake to emulate him and follow his example ... for to know who Antony was offers us the perfect path to virtue” (8). This hagiographic text had a significant impact on the development of Eastern monasticism.\textsuperscript{22}

This work establishes a central tenet of monasticism as it matured in the East: “the pre-eminence of simple people” (Daniélou & Marrou 271). St Antony was not born into royalty but

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17} The earliest monastics were known as anchorites, from the Greek ‘anachoresis’ meaning flight or departure. \textsuperscript{18} It must be noted that although early Christian monastic endeavours obviously found parallels with the life of Christ and sought to emulate his suffering as a means of occasioning glory, their ascetical outlook contained elements of classical Greek thinking and teaching (Chadwick 177). \textsuperscript{19} In contrast with Athanasius who would assert that St Antony was the initial desert hermit (16), Jerome would argue that Paul of Thebes predated Antony (White xii). The point here is not who was first, but rather whose way of life had the greatest impact on the development of Eastern monasticism. Surely Athanasius’ assertion is not entirely accurate with respect to the historical development of eremitical life. After all, even Antony appears to have taken as his role model an elderly man who had once lived a solitary life as a youth. \textsuperscript{20} Antony’s renown was such that it “marked the beginning of the desert’s colonization” (Athanasius 19). \textsuperscript{21} According to Caroline White, Athanasius wrote the Life of Antony at the request of other monastics (3). She goes on to explain that many copies of the work had been made by the close of the fourth century. Copies had most certainly spread to both east and west, as numerous references are made to the work by a variety of writers from this time period. For example, Gregory of Nazianzus (c.330-c.390), Palladius (c.365-c.425), John Chyrsostom (354-407), Jerome (c.347-c.420) and Augustine (354-430) all incorporate elements of Antony’s life into their writings (White 205). Its popularity was likely enhanced by a Latin translation made by Evagrius of Antioch prior to 374 (White 4). \textsuperscript{22} In the fifth chapter of this thesis, we will examine two 20\textsuperscript{th} century monastics, St Silouan the Athonite and Elder Joseph the Hesychast. It is interesting to note the many parallels between the lives of these 20\textsuperscript{th} century figures, with the manner of living embodied by St Antony in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century. Such was the impact of his life that Eastern monastics continue to take him as an exemplar down to the present day.
came of rather ordinary stock; was not well-educated but rather illiterate; was not influential but rather unimportant. His lowly and simple origins would do much to entrench the ideal of the unsophisticated and humble monk; in subsequent monastic developments, piety was rarely divorced from simplicity. From the outset of Life of Antony, Athanasius is at pains to stress Antony’s simple nature. He tells us that as a child, Antony refused to learn to read or write, and “lived a life of simplicity at home” (9).

As he aged, his simplicity is said to have remained intact. There is a telling anecdote recorded in the Apophthegmata Patrum, which forcefully illustrates this humble and simple ideal.

Once some brothers came to visit Antony, and Joseph was with them. Antony, wanting to test them, began to speak about Holy Scripture. He asked the younger monks first the meaning of text after text, and each of them answered as well as he could. To each he said, ‘You have not yet found the right answer.’ Then he said to Joseph, ‘What do you think is the meaning of this word?’ He replied, ‘I don’t know.’ Antony said, ‘Indeed Joseph alone has found the true way, for he said he did not know.’ (Ward 148)

In Antony, we encounter hostility toward definitive assertions arrived at through scholastic endeavours. It is as though he holds the learned life as a potential barrier to divine illumination. Antony states, “Sophistical eloquence and philosophical arguments can do nothing to halt the growing number of believers,” and he derides philosophers as those attempting to entangle men and women with the nets of their syllogisms (Athanasius 58). Yet despite this disdain on his part, visitors were continually “amazed at his mental acuteness” (Athanasius 54) even though he

23 Athanasius goes so far as to claim, “[Antony] had no education” (53).
24 Possessing only the linguistic powers of his own Coptic tongue, St Antony was unlearned in both Greek and Latin.
was unlearned. Antony’s manner of living asserts that true wisdom may be obtained through study at a single academy: The University of the Desert.\textsuperscript{25}

Entwined within his simplicity and humility, St Antony’s hagiographical account also delineates a related element of the monastic life, namely that of voluntary poverty.\textsuperscript{26} St Athanasius tells us that the crucial moment in Antony’s decision to adopt the monastic way of life came when he walked into a church as the following passage of Holy Writ was being read: “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all you possess and give it to the poor and come, follow me and you will have treasure in heaven” (Athanasius 9). Faithful to the dominical teaching, Antony returned home and sold his possessions so as to be “released from all worldly ties” (Athanasius 10). St Antony sought fidelity toward these words, and in so doing, ensured that subsequent monastics would be sworn to lives of poverty. Both his manner of living and his teaching support this ideal. He asserted that the monastic ought not to have concern or desire for transitory objects. Attachment to temporal goods could serve as a barrier for entrance into paradise.\textsuperscript{27}

In addition to simplicity and poverty, this story also impresses upon us a further point, namely the primacy of the Gospels and Holy Scriptures as a guiding text for the monastic way of life. We cannot afford to overlook this point. Athanasius is keen to inform his readers that

\textsuperscript{25} It may be useful to briefly mention what education entails in this setting. Etymologically, the English word “education” is derived from the Latin \textit{educare}, meaning “to raise up.” In this thesis, we are not talking about education as schooling \textit{per se}, but rather how one is brought up into communion with God. (We shall have more to say on \textit{theosis} or deification below.) This thesis will look at the divergence in education between the Greek East and Latin West, the latter process being far more rational in its approach to pedagogy. In this thesis, it is also important to note that the Eastern system tends to congeal at a very early date, with little substantial development in later centuries, whereas the Western system takes a very different path, despite their common starting point.

\textsuperscript{26} St Syncletica’s words embody this attitude toward material possession, when she states, “A strong soul is strengthened by freely accepting poverty” (Ward 56).

\textsuperscript{27} Antony’s asceticism afforded no room for worldly luxuries. On one occasion, confronted with a silver plate while walking along a path, Antony exclaimed, “This is a product of your cunning, you devil, but you will not hinder my intention. May your silver plate go to hell with you” (Athanasius 17).
Antony always “listened attentively to the Scriptures” (10) to ensure his manner of living conformed to divine teachings. Antony encouraged those leading an eremitical life to recite the Psalter during morning, noon and evening, and meditate upon Scriptural commands daily (Athanasius 43). The importance attached to knowledge of the Scriptures and the keeping of the commands is perhaps best embodied in Antony’s statement, “The question of whether each individual prepares for himself either torments or glory depends solely on whether he disregards the rules of Scripture or carries them out” (Athanasius 30).

With respect to his decision to become a monk, St Antony’s life continues to furnish us with further details that would influence monastic development. He did not take flight to the desert immediately. Initially living on the periphery of the town, Antony chose to sojourn there as it afforded him the opportunity to glean insights from a man more experienced than he in the spiritual way of life. Being, as it was, a daily martyrdom, the life of the monastic was difficult. Its difficulties necessitated a spiritual guide. St Antony would himself later become a spiritual father to many, advising them, “You should tell me, as if I were your father, what you have learned and I will reveal to you, as if you were my sons, what I have discovered as a result of my great age” (19). The development of Byzantine monasticism cannot be divorced from the importance of the spiritual sage guiding inexperienced monks. However, the significance of the elder’s position included more than merely instruction; the role of the spiritual father also involved the crucial task of intercession.

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28 In addition to Athanasius’ Life of Antony, we also find evidence of Antony’s high regard for the Biblical text in the Apophthegmata Patrum. Upon being asked what must be done to please God, we find Antony replying, “Wherever you go, keep God in mind; whatever you do, follow the example of holy Scripture ... If you keep these guide-lines, you will be saved” (Ward 3).

29 In The Ladder of Divine Ascent, to which we shall turn below, St John Climacus employs effective typology with respect to this intercessory role. “Those of us who wish to get away from Egypt, to escape from Pharaoh, need some Moses to be our intermediary with God, to stand between action and contemplation, and stretch out his arms to God,
Upon maturing as an experienced monastic, Antony’s manner of living provides a striking and defining feature of early Egyptian monasticism, that of the solitary hermit. This solitude is vividly expressed by Athanasius, who tells us, “Antony spent twenty years in the desert ... remaining cut off from the sight of men” (18). Even the most cursory reading of the Life of Antony confronts the reader with a central observation: here was a man who lived an ascetic life. Self-control, nocturnal devotion, extreme fasting, going without sleep – or, when one was overcome by the need for repose, sleeping on the bare ground so as to grudgingly acquiesce to this bodily demand – these are merely a few of the many asetical forms observed in Antony’s way of life. According to Daniélou and Marrou, the asetical impetus is discernable in this observation made by early Church Fathers: “The man who lets himself do everything that is allowed will very soon become slack and do what is not allowed” (271). Thus in matters ranging from food and drink to work and sleep, we find Antony attempting to master the passions before they gain mastery over him.

On this point, what must be stressed is that asceticism was not an end in and of itself, but rather a means to an end. The end was purity of heart and communion with God. This mystical communion was occasioned through prayer. Recall St Antony’s fidelity to the Holy Scriptures. “Watch and pray” was a Dominical injunction, while the directive to “pray without that those led by him may cross the sea of sin and put to flight the Amalek of the passions” (75). The spiritual father was expected to fulfill this topos.

30 Athanasius tells us that Antony routinely passed the night with unceasing prayer, and refused to eat more than once a day, often abstaining from food completely for three days at a time (13).

31 In the fifth century, while writing on his own experiences as an Eastern monastic in his Conferences, St John Cassian would reflect, “Our fastings, our vigils, meditation on Scripture, poverty and the privation of all things are not perfection, but the means of acquiring perfection” (White xvi).

32 See The Gospel According to St Matthew, chapter 26, verse 41.
ceasing” embodied Pauline teaching. Vigils, Psalmody and prayer thus became central components of Antony’s way of life.

The austerity of the eremitic life cannot be understood apart from this central aspect of the monastic life: spiritual warfare. Athanasius refers to Antony’s life as “the most noble contest” (7), a conflict of good versus evil, of right versus wrong, of angels versus demons. Antony’s withdrawal into the desert has as a topos Christ’s withdrawal, following his baptism, into the desert to face temptations from the devil. In much the same manner as Christ being tempted by the devil, so too was Antony subject to like temptation, “For the devil, like a roaring lion, was on the look-out for some means of pouncing on him” (Athanasius 13). The trials took various forms, on some occasions resulting in corporal afflictions. Subsequent solitary hermits would also be engaged in a “constant battle against demonic attacks” (White xvi), emulating Antony in this regard.

Although Antony endeavoured to attain perfection in piety, his life must not be understood as a pursuit that was merely personal. Yes, he had turned his back on the world, but in a paradoxical manner, he had turned his back on it to save it. He prayed not only for his own salvation, but the salvation of all mankind. Perhaps this helps explain – at least in part – the interesting phenomenon, that the more a monk sought solitude and isolation from society, the

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33 See The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 17.
34 Psalmody was a hallmark of early monasticism. In his Rule, Benedict would come to write, “Monks who in a week’s time say less than the full Psalter with the customary canticles betray extreme indolence and lack of devotion in their service. We read, after all, that our holy Fathers, energetic as they were, did all this in a single day. Let us hope that we, lukewarm as we are, can achieve it in a whole week” (47).
35 In fact, following Peter Brown, we may be able to go even further, stating that not only Antony, but all Christians during this time period understood their life in such terms. Says Brown, “Angels and demons were as close to the Christian of the third century as adjacent rooms” (166).
36 St Athanasius provides the following depiction: “[The devil] gathered together his minions and tortured Antony by beating him all over. The intensity of the pain deprived Antony of his ability to move and to speak, and later he himself would often tell how his injuries had been so serious that they were worse than all the tortures devised by men” (14).
more he was besieged with throngs of pilgrims. They flocked to the desert for any number of reasons: to seek intercession through prayer, to have diseases healed, to have questions answered. They frequently sought sage admonitions from the lips of the eremitical hermits. The *Apophthegmata Patrum* are filled with frequent requests from pilgrims beseeching the solitary hermits, “Speak to me a word, father, that I may live” (Chadwick 178). It rapidly became apparent that the solitary hermit was concerned not only for the health of his own soul, but the well-being of all souls. Speaking of the desert hermits, it was not long before visitors to the Egyptian deserts came to believe, “These are they by whom the world is kept in being” (Ward xi). Such was the perceived power of their ascetical efforts and intercessory prayer.

**b) Coenobitism Emerges**

The eldest monastic institution – with St Antony as the great exemplar – was the life of the solitary anchorite. Initially inhabiting the Egyptian deserts, and later other inhospitable regions, such as the Syrian and Palestinian deserts, anchorites lived alone in their cells. Leading an eremitical life largely devoted to prayer, meditation and simple forms of work, what developed over time was a number of monks living in close proximity to an elder, a monastic recognized as a pious saint. This elder could thus act as spiritual father to a number of monks, without forfeiting his solitude and quiet to an unbearable degree.

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37 Of course, when they did deign to acquiesce to requests for dialogue with pilgrims, they often did so with great reluctance. Athanasius tells us, “Antony found the disturbance caused by conversations very annoying ... [and] even while he was speaking, he was thinking of his beloved solitude” (62-3).

38 The *Ladder of Divine Ascent* speaks of the efficacy of prayer in similar manner. With respect to prayer, John Climacus states, “Its effect is to hold the world together” (274).

39 In this context, “cell” refers to any solitary dwelling place, often taking the form of a cave, hut, et cetera. Uniform cells in communal monasteries are a later development.

40 As Eastern monasticism evolved, the figure of elder would become increasingly significant. In Greek practice, the elder was often referred to as *geronta*, while in Russia, he received the title *starets* (Ware, “Church” 39). As an example of just how influential these spiritual fathers would become, we may consider that in the nineteenth century, both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky greatly revered their spiritual elders. Dostoevsky likely modeled Starets...
Daniélou and Marrou tell us that this type of monastic lifestyle, which had begun in Middle Egypt, spread both to the Delta in the North, as well as the Thebaid of the South (273). This development was accompanied by the advent of various collections of sayings attributed to the desert hermits. These were largely diverse compilations of brief maxims, short stories and instructive teachings, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* being a prime example. The appearance of these writings is indicative of the growth of monastic practice during this time, with thousands of monastics inhabiting Egyptian deserts by the close of the century (Brown 215). In addition to the aforementioned geographic expansion, monasticism also advanced to the West of the Delta, in the desert of Scete, and this barren land was forever popularized by the figures of Macarius and Evagrios Pontikos, the latter who gained renown for his efforts “to systematise the teaching of the monks and to make of it a body of doctrine” (Daniélou and Marrou 274). This is highly significant, as it would come to influence future monastic growth – especially that of the Latin West – in the ensuing years.

Concurrent with this development, we also witness the emergence of coenobitism, the life in common. What we observe here is monastic life that takes place in a community. Monastics still live in individual cells – the arrival of a common dormitory is a later development – but there is an increased emphasis on community life (Ware, “Church” 37). This also originated in Egypt, and its chief architect proved to be St Pachomius. Having first lived as an anchorite, Pachomius proceeded to establish his initial community in 323 at Tabennisi, a remote village by the Nile (Daniélou & Marrou 274). Here we find a further striking difference between

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41 The speed with which monastic life was adopted is quite astounding. Writing in the 360s to “the monks abroad,” Athanasius was able to state, “There are already numerous monasteries ... the word monk is very familiar” (7).

42 Coenobitism is derived from two Greek words, ‘koinos’ meaning ‘common’ and ‘bios’ meaning ‘life’.

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Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov on St Tikhon of Zadonsk, while of St Ambrose of Optina, Tolstoy wrote, “I did no more than converse with him, and somehow, my soul lost all heaviness” (“Synaxarion - Vol. I” 335).
the anchoritic ideal,\textsuperscript{43} for whereas the eremitical hermits lived in the desert, Pachomius founded a monastery on cultivated land. Also noteworthy is the fact that it was a monastic community enclosed by a wall (White xx).\textsuperscript{44} Possessing rigorous discipline and hard labour, this community grew in both numbers and structure (Chadwick 178). With the emergence of the Pachomian coenobitic communities, one thus begins to observe a divergence from the early life of the solitary hermit. Ascetical life in community became a viable – and increasingly popular – monastic alternative. Writing in the fifth century, Sozomen tells us that the Pachomian monastics “became very renowned, and in the process of time increased so vastly, that they reached to the number of seven thousand” (Stevenson, “Creeds” 164).

Perhaps most importantly, St Pachomius wrote the first monastic rule, which outlined his vision for how monks ought to live in common.\textsuperscript{45} The foods to be eaten, the clothing to be worn, the type of work to be completed,\textsuperscript{46} the forms and times for prayer – all were regulated. Of course, prior to being subject to these regulations, one had to be admitted to a monastery. Stringent principles were established that governed how prospective monastic was accepted. John Cassian (c. 360 – c. 435) furnishes us with a descriptive account of what preceded admission. The penitential position of the prospective monastic is clearly evident.

\textsuperscript{43} According to White, “The essential elements of the monastic life, then, are withdrawal from the world, chastity, abstinence, unceasing prayer and manual work. However, it is also true that from an early stage these ingredients were combined in various ways with the result that different forms of the ascetic life evolved” (xvii).

\textsuperscript{44} Henceforth, with the majority of monks living in enclosed communities, it would lead to largely stationary lives. By way of example, consider the Venerable Bede, who upon entering the monastery at Jarrow as a young boy “remained there until his death” (Hollister 73). Prior to Pachomius, monks were far more mobile and travelled. Athanasius provides a good indication of the anchoritic freedom of mobility in his Preface to Life of Antony, when he states, “I wanted to invite some monks to come here to me, in particular those who used to visit Antony frequently” (8).

\textsuperscript{45} Early in the fifth century, Jerome would translate the Pachomian Rule into Latin, making it accessible to Western readers. A common way of life ordered by a rule would become a defining feature of Western monasticism.

\textsuperscript{46} Based on his own observations, Jerome writes, “Brethren of the same trade are lodged in one house under one superior. For example, weavers are together; mat-makers are reckoned as one household; tailors, carpenters, fullers, shoe-makers – each trade is under the several rule of its own superior. And, week by week, an account of their work is rendered to the abbot of the monastery” (Stevenson, “Creeds” 165-6).
One, then, who seeks to be admitted to the discipline of the monastery is never received before he gives, by lying outside the doors for ten days or even longer, an evidence of his perseverance and desire, as well as of humility and patience. And when, prostrate at the feet of all the brethren that pass by, and of set purpose repelled and scorned by all of them ... and when, too, covered with many insults an affronts, he has given a practical proof of his steadfastness, and has shown what he will be like in temptations by the way he has borne the disgrace; and when, with the ardour of his soul thus ascertained, he is admitted. (Stevenson, “Creeds” 164)

In this willing submission of penitential posture, we are confronted with messianic typology. In particular, the fact that one is “repelled and scorned” bears significant resemblance with prophetic Biblical imagery. Admission to Pachomian monasteries has many parallels with the description above. Jerome affords us a further insight, when he tells us that the candidate was also instructed to memorize the Lord’s Prayer and “as many Psalms as he can learn” (Stevenson, “Creeds” 165). Not a few prospective monastics endured this initiatory process, and the common way of life gained momentum. Upon his death in 346, Pachomius had founded eleven coenobitic communities, nine for men and two for females. The latter point is important, as it demonstrates that the monastic way of life was not limited only to men. In fact, the apophthegms of the so-called Desert Fathers include a number of Mothers.

The common life raised a new challenge, that being material sustenance. Although they had renounced personal ownership, monastics still required enough on which to live. The Pachomian monasteries tended to include a chapel, which needed funds for both construction and maintenance. In addition, kitchens, infirmaries and other services arose that necessitated fiscal

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47 For example, in the fifty-third chapter of The Book of the Prophet Isaiah (c. 8th century BCE), we find him “despised and rejected” (verse 3), and remaining silent though “oppressed and afflicted” (verse 7).

48 Matrona, Sarah and Syncletica are three of the more famous female ascetics from this period (Ward 200).
To provide for these needs, the coenobitic communities of fourth century Egypt increasingly turned to agriculture as a means to meet their economic requirements. By the close of the century, there were certainly thousands of Pachomian monastics – possibly even tens of thousands – and no small numbers of these were given to working in agriculture as the seasons demanded (Daniélou & Marrou 275).

Following its Egyptian growth, monasticism continued spreading throughout the East. Palestine, Cyprus, Syria and Asia Minor all had significant monastic numbers prior to the close of the fourth century. Although there was variety in forms based on local custom and leadership, the monastic forms thus far were fairly straightforward in adhering to the basic practice of either anchoritic or coenobitic institutions. However, this would change with the advent of St Basil (c. 330 – 379), who bequeathed to subsequent generations “a new conception of monasticism” (Daniélou & Marrou 276). Wherein lay the originality of Basilian monastic practice? St Basil was weary of the notion that the solitary hermit, living an ascetical life solely with an eye toward his own salvation, could be truly fulfilling the dominical injunction to “love your neighbour as yourself.” In The Longer Rules, Basil states, “Now the solitary life has one aim, the service of the needs of the individual. But this is plainly in conflict with the law of love, which the apostle fulfilled when he sought not his own advantage but that of the many” (Stevenson, “Creeds” 99). In addition, Basil adduces further objections to the solitary life. First, he argues that as no one is self-sufficient, communal life is superior regarding the satiation of bodily needs. Second, Basil asserts that we are often blind to our defects and deficiencies. Living in a

49 Writing about life in a Pachomian monastery, Jerome tells us, “The sick are attended to with wonderful devotion, food being made ready for them in plenty” (Stevenson, “Creeds” 165).
50 See The Gospel According to St Matthew, chapter 22, verse 39. This is a restating of earlier Levitical law.
51 Regulae Fusius Tractatae, VII, 345E.
community ensures there are others who can point out to us the error of our ways. Third, when we stumble on the spiritual road, if we are alone, there is no one to help us back to our feet. The communal life ensures there are loving members around us who will raise us from such falls.

Returning to an initial objection – namely that the solitary hermit cannot adequately fulfill the law of love – Basil taught that charitable works and acts of mercy were defining features of the Christian life. If monasticism afforded society at large with a demonstration in the perfection of piety, then the monks would have to be the exemplars of loving service for those in need. Basil has in mind here Jesus of Nazareth as the one to be emulated. He challenges the solitary monastics with the following words: “[Jesus gave] us a pattern of humility ... In the perfection of love he girded himself and washed the feet of the disciples in person. Whose feet then wilt thou wash? Whom wilt thou care for ... (Stevenson, “Creeds” 100). It was precisely this emphasis on service to the needy that motivated Basil’s monastic regulations. Writes Chadwick, “Insistence on the primacy of the social purpose of the ascetic movement was the central feature of Basil of Caesarea’s organization in Asia Minor, and made his achievement epoch-making” (178). In his efforts to marry asceticism with charitable acts, St Basil elevated communal living to the pinnacle of spiritual life. While the desert hermits were inclined to lay greater stress on poverty and affliction, monks influenced by St Basil increasingly came to regard charity and obedience as a primary good.⁵² Although never entirely vanishing, the eremitic life ceased to be the model for the majority of future monastics.⁵³

⁵² By way of example, Basil even went so far as to refuse to allow monks to set themselves severe ascetical feats without first seeking permission from their elder. For those who disobeyed this directive, arduous penalties were imposed (Chadwick 179).
⁵³ This must not be understood to mean that the eremitical life completely disappeared. It has always been a lived reality in Eastern monasticism. The point here is that it became practiced by a minority. However, to this day it remains an integral feature of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This thesis will later explore two hermits that achieved
c) Monasticism Arrives in the West

Until this point, monasticism remained a distinctly Eastern phenomenon in the Church’s development. The individual normally receiving greatest recognition for making it better known in the West is St Jerome (c. 347 – c. 420). Having lived in the desert near Antioch, Jerome took his monastic experiences with him to Rome, where he was met with both praise and criticism. Eventually, however, the approval outweighed the objection, and monasticism became entrenched as an important and central feature in the development of Latin Christendom. Luminaries such as St Ambrose in Milan and St Martin near Poitiers infused early Western monastic practice with decidedly Eastern values and practices. Although there would always remain some common elements, from the fourth century we may observe different approaches to monastic practice in the West.

In addition to St Jerome, monasticism spread to the West largely on account of the efforts of St John Cassian. Having lived an ascetical life in both Egypt and Palestine, he left the East for Rome in 404, and subsequently Marseilles in 415 (Chadwick 181). Not content merely to organize monastic communities for both men and women, Cassian also left an indelible mark on monastic development in the West by writing his Institutes. The extent of his influence was such that “it would be hard to exaggerate how much later Western monasticism owed” to his works (Chadwick 182). A large part of his influence can be seen in the Western preference for communal, rather than solitary, monastic structures. Although upholding the solitary ideal as a superior way of life, Cassian asserts that such an existence is problematic for the majority of monastics, suitable only for a select few, and then only after extensive training in the ascetical

renown in the 20th century: St Silouan the Athonite and Elder Joseph the Hesychast. In addition, the pedagogical principles extrapolated from Eastern monasticism will focus on this ascetic ideal.
way of life within a community (White xxvi). A striking feature of Western monastic development is its preference for communal living, and this preference owes a good deal to the influence of St John Cassian.

An early development in the West – and something new for monastic practice – was the rise of Episcopal monasteries. This occurred with Bishops opting to live ascetical communal lives surrounded by members of their clergy. Eusebius may have been the first to develop this monastic form, but it is the towering figure of St Augustine who entrenched it as a viable and imperative monastic element. Upon being elevated to his Episcopal see in 395, Augustine oversaw the imposition of a life of renunciation on his clerics. This community of Hippo became not only a centre of ecclesiastical development and formation, but also of intellectual and doctrinal genesis. It was not only a life of prayer, but also a life of study (White xxiii). The simple and solitary existence of St Antony in the barren Egyptian desert was replaced with a philosophical and communal way of life entrenched in the Church’s hierarchy. The learned life was no longer a separate entity from the religious life. Thus we are able to observe the beginnings of monastic centres as not only Episcopal communities, but also intellectual communities – the latter of which became entrenched with the growth of the Benedictine Rule (to which we will turn in the subsequent section).

Although there would always remain common elements, the way of life for monks in the West and those of the East was now separated by a chasm that has never been bridged. At the outset of the fifth century, whereas the Byzantine Empire was able to withstand the threat of Germanic invasions, the Western Empire eventually surrendered to barbarian attacks. A corollary of this development was “the break-up of that cultural unity which linked the Greek
and Latin countries within the same imperial civilisation” (Daniélou & Marrou 331). A major development occasioned was the ubiquity of the Latin tongue in the West, and the diminishing influence of Hellenistic proficiency. The impact and extent of this linguistic development ought not to be understated. Consider, by way of example, the lives of St Ambrose and St Augustine. While the former possessed an exhaustive erudition of the Greek language, the latter never acquired great competency in this domain. According to Daniélou and Marrou, the doctrinal significance is momentous. “A pure Latin ... St Augustine was, in a sense, thrown back on originality ... In fact, with the help of his genius, it was he who in his *De Trinitate* worked out the first strictly Western theology” (332). Agreeing with this assessment, Peter Brown suggests that Augustinian theology was an entirely new thing. It differed in many regards from not only the Greek and Syrian theological beliefs articulated by earlier Christians, but also Augustine’s Eastern contemporaries. Augustine proposed “a markedly different exegesis of the opening chapters of the book of Genesis” (Brown 400), marking a new chapter in doctrine of the Latin West.

Thus, on account of linguistic, cultural and political reasons, Christian theology and practice of the Greek East and Latin West was increasingly divided. Daniélou and Marrou are at pains to indicate the monumental nature of these changes. “Not only did theologians work at different tasks but the whole way of Christian life became different: ecclesiastical institutions, liturgy, the monastic ideal, popular devotions, the place of Christianity in daily life: in every

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54 Juxtaposing Ambrose’s linguistic proficiency with that of his peers, Peter Brown states, “Unlike most of his upper-class Latin contemporaries, he read Greek: Philo, Origen, even Plotinus (if only in ‘pre-digested’ Christian extracts), and the sermons of his great Cappadocian contemporaries, were directly available to him in a library that few Westerners would have possessed” (346).

55 It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the nature of new doctrine initiated by Augustine, nor the extent of its influence on later Western thought. For our purposes, it is enough to note this early divergence between Eastern and Western belief. The reader interested in pursuing the impact of Augustinian theology may wish to consult chapter XIX – “Augustine: Sexuality and Society” – in Peter Brown’s *The Body & Society*. 
sphere differences appeared’' (334). It is the task of the present thesis to turn to a single variance, that of monasticism.

56 On this point, Kallistos Ware writes, “Western theologians now came to employ new categories of thought, a new theological method, and a new terminology which the east did not understand. To an ever-increasing extent the two sides were losing a common ‘universe of discourse’ (Ware, “Church” 62).
III. Western and Eastern Divergence: Scholastic and Hesychastic Approaches

The initial eremitical hermits of the East sought to practice “life-long celibacy, fasting, solitude, silence, vigil, prayer and poverty” (Ward ix), and to a very large extent, subsequent generations of monastics sought fidelity with this early practice. At first blush, we may observe a large degree of similarity to this initial monastic paradigm as monasticism developed in the West. However, on closer inspection we find differences – both subtle and substantial – that may be discerned.

a) St Benedict’s Rule

While Eastern monasticism was dominated by the figure of St Antony the Great, his Western counterpart is undoubtedly St Benedict of Nursia (c. 480 – 547). Although not the first monastic practitioner in the West, he nevertheless came to be styled the “Father of Western monasticism” (Hollister 68), in large part due to the subsequent influence of his Rule. His renown also grew, in part, from his early and key champion, Gregory the Great (590 – 604). The second book of Gregory’s Dialogues serves as the most important source of information about St Benedict (Fry 10). Writing in 593 or 594 – some decades after Benedict’s repose – Gregory’s intent was to demonstrate that Byzantine Christians did not have a monopoly on piety; he asserts the sanctity of Christians in the West. Powered by the authority of this papal

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57 As we have seen, through figures such as John Cassian and Jerome, monasticism as a Western phenomenon clearly predates the sixth century. However, it begins to flourish only after the appearance of the Regula Benedicti.
58 It appeared circa 540.
59 This accounts for the fact that the Dialogues, a series of exchanges between Gregory and one of his deacons, focus pre-eminently on the miracles attributed to St Benedict. The Biblical typology employed by Gregory was neither accidental nor esoteric. With respect to Benedict’s miraculous works, we read the following: “In the water pouring from the rock I see Moses, in the iron which came back from the depths of the water I see Elisha, in the walking on water I see Peter, in the obedience of the raven I see Elijah, and in the grief at the death of his enemy I see David” (177).
validation, Benedict’s Rule came to be solidified as a defining mode of monastic practice in the West.

It would be erroneous to imagine that Benedict completely diverged from all Eastern monastic teaching. After all, it was from the Basilian pattern “that Benedict derived his Rule and the whole of Western monasticism grew up” (Runciman 38). Steeped in the tradition of St Antony and often urging his adherents to read Eastern writings such as John Cassian’s Conferences, St Benedict formulated a monastic rule built on a Byzantine foundation. However, as the edifice was constructed, it tended to diverge in two exceptionally important ways.

First, the Benedictine life was at its core communal. Early monastic forms had stressed three virtues – poverty, chastity and obedience. To these, St Benedict added a fourth: stability. Henceforth, monks would almost always remain within the walls of their communities. To this end, we find Benedict commanding that monks should remain “in the monastery until death” (19). Benedictine monks were not encouraged, and rarely permitted, to travel beyond the boundaries of their monastery (Chadwick 183). On occasions necessitating a monk’s journey away from the monastic enclosure, upon his return he was forbidden “to relate to anyone else what he saw or heard outside the monastery” (Benedict 91-2). Of course, the very act of leaving would be occasioned only by order of the abbot. The monks lived together as a single family, with the abbot reigning as the paternal figure. Consider the opening lines from Benedict’s Rule: “Listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them ... This is advice

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60 This is quite a different way of life than that of the eremitical hermits of the Egyptian and Syrian deserts. As Peter Brown makes manifest, the earlier form was “an asceticism based upon wandering and begging monks, rather than on a ferocious self-sufficiency based upon sedentary labor” (lii). Benedict clearly adopted the latter way of life.

61 Although monastic practice in the East – especially through Cappadocian influence – had evolved to include a preference for the communal manner of living, this emphasis would be taken to an entirely new level by Benedict.

62 This paternal imagery stems from a significant typology, namely that of Christ as father. For Benedict, the Abbot “is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery” (21).
from a father who loves you” (Fry 15). Benedict’s Rule led to “the institutionalization of the monastic life in the west” (White xii). This was naturally an immense difference from the way of life embodied by earlier anchorites in the East.

It is interesting to note that in the penal sections of Benedict’s Rule, we find the punishment for serious faults to be temporary removal from communion with others monastics. The individual guilty of such transgressions is “excluded from both the table and the oratory” and must “work alone at the tasks assigned to him” (51). Whereas such solitude would have been welcomed with joy by earlier desert hermits, what had been cause of rejoicing and thanksgiving came to be seen as the severest of punishments. Benedict’s strategy for dealing with perceived transgressions is thus telling of the changes wrought in his Rule with respect to the emphasis on communal living.

Second, whereas “the first Christian monks in Egypt were neither clerics nor scholars” (Ward x), but were rather comprised of largely uneducated peasants, this would change. As monastic practice evolved, “scholarly enterprises” (Brown 345) became inevitably linked to the monastic way of life. Scholastic endeavours would blossom with Benedict’s desire “to establish a school for the Lord’s service” (18). As monasticism developed as a Western institution, it became an increasingly scholastic domain; poverty, celibacy and obedience would remain hallmarks of monasticism, but it was now sophisticated scholars who renounced property, shunned sexual union, and willingly acquiesced to their superiors. In Benedict’s life and writings are found the seeds that would one day germinate, in the seventh and eighth centuries, into the monastery as a citadel of learning, both the protector and propagator of intellectual
works (Daniélou & Marrou 429). From the ranks of Monte Cassino would precede Bishops but not stylites.

The Benedictine schools have been credited with keeping “the art of writing alive during the early Middle Ages” (Hollister 69). Many Benedictine monks spent copious hours working as scribes, and the scribal work, while certainly in keeping with the actions of the scholar was a far cry from the life of unceasing prayer and asceticism of the desert hermits of the East. As pens came to be employed with greater frequency than prayer ropes, Benedictine monasteries became the de facto “intellectual centers” (Hollister 69) of the West. As Benedictine monasticism developed, this intellectual renown moved beyond knowledge of the purely religious, and was synthesized with secular learning. A prime example of this evolution is Cassiodorus’ monastic institution at Vivarium in the latter sixth century. Literature and ideas not traditionally within the boundary of Christian theology received prominent position. On the novelty of this development, Chadwick remarks, “It was a new thing that ... monks were directed to read Cicero, Quintilian, and Latin translations of Aristotle, Porphyry, and Galen” (252-3).

It has been observed that the primary “method of learning in the desert was not by instruction but by example” (Ward xxx). Now it was not Benedict’s intent to deviate from this

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63 Although Benedict founded a number of monasteries, the grandest of these was Monte Cassino, located equidistance between Naples and Rome. Its influence was immense. Hollister writes, “Benedict’s abbey at Monte Cassino remained for many centuries one of the chief centers of religious life in Western Europe” (68).

64 Benedict’s primary intent in prescribing a large degree of scribal work emanates from a resolve that if monks were not idle, it would spare them from a host of related vices ascribed to idleness. “Idleness,” he writes, “is the enemy of the soul” (69). The corollary of spending so much time producing copies of the Bible or Patristic texts were the astounding intellectual accomplishments of subsequent generations of Benedictine scholastics (Chadwick 252).

65 One legacy of this union will become manifest below during our discussion of John Henry Newman’s educational outlook, in which he advocates a similar relationship between sacred and secular learning, a relationship that came to dominate Western thought.

66 It is somewhat ironic that this trend was occasioned by Benedict’s Rule, as Gregory tells us that Benedict distrusted liberal education, and cut off his early studies lest “any worldly knowledge should touch him” (165).

67 Hyperichius’ words are beneficial here as an excellent indication of this attitude conveyed by the Apophthegmata Patrum: “He who teaches others by his life and not his speech is truly wise” (Ward 106).
pedagogical methodology. With respect to the Abbot, we find Benedict commanding that he shall teach “all that is good and holy more by example than by words” (22). However, as scholasticism became increasingly entrenched in Benedictine practice, this didactic strategy – although never wholly absent – became marginalized with respect to other pedagogical methods, namely those engendered by pen and book. It must be stressed that Benedict did not turn earlier monastic belief and practice completely on its head. As mentioned above, he still stressed poverty, obedience and chastity. His Rule deals at length with the importance of, and means to attaining, humility. Prayer is also of the utmost importance and Benedict’s Rule ensures that a significant portion of the monastic day be devoted to prayer. However, in practice, Benedictine monasticism became increasingly scholastic in nature, dominating Western monastic development.

b) St John’s Ladder

Redirecting our gaze to the Byzantine Empire, we discern that a vast chasm exists between our own familiarity and that of monasticism’s Eastern development. Peter Brown observes that “the preoccupations of the Desert Fathers, of Gregory of Nyssa, of Chrysostom, and of Ephraim the Syrian always seem to speak to us from across a great gulf” (338), whereas we find ourselves much more at ease – on account of familiarity – with Latin practice (e.g., the scholasticism that would come to dominate the Western world, in large part through the influence of Benedictine monasticism). Antithetical to the learned monastic life that developed in the West, and its corresponding scholastic disposition, we are confronted with a very different
development in the East. *Hesychasm* would come to occupy a pre-eminent position in the East on account of the Byzantine understanding that the monk exists to “bear witness to ... fullness of spiritual life, enthusiasm, effusion of the Spirit. This last point is perhaps the most striking feature of Eastern monasticism: the monk was a ‘pneumatic’ a ‘pneumatophor’, he bore witness to the presence of the Spirit by the charismata granted to him, and that was the highest function which he had to fulfill in the body of the Church (Daniélou & Marrou 382). In the East, the monastic vows were taken not with an eye to reading, writing or scribal work but rather toward “effusion of the Spirit”. This necessitated an emphasis on prayer, and a very specific form embodied in the *hesychast* tradition.

Although the seeds for this development can be found in earlier works of mystical theology, it was the seventh century that truly witnessed the emergence of *hesychasm*, particularly at Mount Sinai through the influence of St John Climacus (Daniélou & Marrou 380). Also known as St John of the Ladder, his teachings are delineated in that work of great importance to Eastern monasticism and ascetical theology, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. So influential was this text that Peter Brown has deemed it “the undisputed masterpiece of Byzantine spiritual guidance” (237), while Kallistos Ware has noted that outside of the Bible and

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68 For a succinct definition of *hesychasm*, the reader may wish to refer back to footnote 3 on page 5.
69 The concluding portions of this section shall elaborate on *hesychast* theology inherent in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. A fuller discussion of *hesychasm* shall be provided in the subsequent section.
70 Examples include – but are certainly not limited to – St Nilus the Sinaite, St Diadochus of Photiki, as well as St John of Karpathos (Gillet 32).
71 John is certainly not the first thinker – either in the Greek East or Latin West – to employ the Biblical imagery of Jacob’s ladder. However, his is a developed analogy, with thirty rungs, the number being significant “for each year in the hidden life of Christ before His baptism” (Ware, “Ladder” 11).
liturgical service books, no single work in the East “has been studied, copied and translated more often” (“Ladder” 1) than this text.\textsuperscript{72}

John Climacus spent much of his monastic life as a solitary hermit. Toward the latter stages of his lifetime, he was appointed abbot of the monastic community at Sinai, and he writes as one entrusted with the well-being of a larger community. In reading The Ladder of Divine Ascent, it is important to keep in mind that John writes in the spirit of the anchorite; his ascetical theology is best understood in this light. Readers familiar with the theological bent of earlier Latin thinkers, such as Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine, are at once struck by the different flavour and texture evident in John’s theology. These palpable differences are indicative of a growing divergence in thought between the Latin West and Greek East. Let us consider merely one example, the attitude adopted toward the body, as an indication of this trend.

In contrast to the schools of extreme asceticism prevalent particularly in the medieval West, the hesychasts restored the notion of body as a God-created vessel of the spirit, and taught that human spirituality can be achieved only in a harmony between the spirit and the body, controlling the latter by the spirit, but not mortifying the body. (Pospielovsky 42)

John’s perspective on matrimony is indicative of his divergence from earlier Latin thinkers who adopted a very different attitude.\textsuperscript{73} John insists that marriage is by no means a barrier toward salvation, and explicitly states that those bonded by holy matrimony – so long as they live according to the church’s precepts – will “not be far from the kingdom of heaven” (Climacus 78). In fact, he even cites purity inherent within marriage by employing the example of the

\textsuperscript{72} The Ladder of Divine Ascent continues to occupy a preeminent position in the East. In particular, Eastern monastics continue to lend great weight to the work. According to Kallistos Ware, “Every Lent in Orthodox monasteries it is appointed to be read aloud in church or in the refectory, so that some monks will have listened to it as many as fifty or sixty times in the course of their life” (“Ladder” 1).

\textsuperscript{73} The following examples make for a stark contrast with John’s theology. Ambrose saw, in the marriage bed, the “tangled brushwood of human frailty” (Brown 362), Jerome held marriages to be “regrettable ... capitulations to the flesh” (Brown 377), while Augustine abhorred the very notion of matrimony to such an extent that he felt it appropriate for spouses to “descend with a certain sadness” to the marriage bed (Brown 426).
disciple Peter, who was married “yet nevertheless received the keys of the kingdom” (Climacus 181). This point is mentioned here to emphasize the very different theological disposition found in the East.

The divergent attitude that existed between East and West regarding marriage, the body and asceticism, stems in large part from the Western understanding of original sin. The Latin view was dominated by the work of St Augustine (Ware, “Church” 224). According to Elaine Pagels, Augustine knew that many of his Eastern contemporaries would not agree or subscribe to his delineation of original sin (108). How was it that Augustine came to adopt a different position from the likes of John Chrysostom or the Cappadocian Fathers? The answer resides in Augustine’s exegesis. Take, by way of example, his analysis of Romans 5:12. Prior to Augustine, Christians had largely understood this passage to mean that death came into the world on account of Adam’s sin. However, Augustine took this much further. His reading led him to believe in “universal, and inevitable, sin” (Pagels 109). Denying humanity’s free moral choice, Augustine advanced a belief “that the whole human race inherited from Adam a nature irreversibly damaged by sin” (Pagels 109). The corollary of this position was that all subsequent humans were thus tainted. Although this belief never received sanction in the Byzantine Church, it was a belief that moved “into the centre of Western history” (Pagels 126). This movement would introduce a widening of the chasm between East and West.

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74 “Through one man, sin entered the world and through sin, death; and thus death came upon all men, in that all sinned.”

75 Elaine Pagels advances the argument that Augustine’s “misreading” of Genesis and other passages of Scripture, which created a new emphasis on original sin, was the result of his failure to read Greek. In particular, she suggests that such exegesis was only made possible because Augustine “either ignored or was unaware of the connotations of the Greek original” (109).

Returning to John Climacus, we find in his *Ladder* a belief that Christianity entailed far more than canonical laws and scribal work; he stressed the experiential nature, which necessitated an encounter with the Divine. Such illumination was occasioned only through prayer, and prayer, for John, necessitated personal experience. Much in the same manner as words alone were insufficient to “convey the sweetness of honey to people who have never tasted it” (Climacus 218), John draws the parallel that one “cannot discover from the teachings of others the beauty of prayer” (Climacus 281). John agrees with the Psalmist’s declaration, “Taste and see that the Lord is good,” and it is this which makes his theology meaningful in light of its participatory nature with the Divine.

We must pause for a moment to consider an important feature of Benedict’s *Rule*. Benedict goes to great length – and excessive detail – in regulating the manner of living that will guide daily behaviour. The order of the psalmody, the celebration of the Divine Office, sleeping arrangements for monks, the proper amount of food, the proper amount of drink; in all of these instances – and many, many more – Benedict is at pains to provide detailed instructions. John of the Ladder strikes us as almost the polar opposite. According to Kallistos Ware, “These omissions are surely deliberate. His interest is in the inward rather than the outward ... What he offers is not techniques and formulae but a way of life ... His aim is to impart a living, personal experience” (“Ladder” 9). Such personal experience, however, requires a struggle. The way he has structured his *Ladder*, John demonstrates his conviction – derived from his own experience – that the active life must precede the contemplative life. Put another way, *praxis*

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77 For the entire passage, see the eighth verse in the thirty-fourth chapter of the Psalter.
78 Juxtaposing the structure of Benedict’s *Rule* with John’s *Ladder* is beneficial on two points. First, it provides further indication of the East-West divide that was growing between monasticism in these regions. Second, it is helpful in beginning to better understand hesychasm’s inward-oriented journey.
must precede *theoria*.\(^7^9\) It is the earlier rungs on the ladder which deal with the practice of the virtues (i.e. *praxis*), elements such as obedience, penitence, anger, talkativeness, gluttony and like passions. Only when these are mastered can one climb to the lofty heights of the contemplative life, where one finds dispassion, love and union with God (i.e. *theoria*). John stresses that this achievement is only occasioned through great exertion. As he says, “No one can climb a ladder in a single stride” (225).

This is important, for John is insistent that *hesychia* cannot be practiced immediately, nor can it be obtained without struggle. For John, although the end goal is “the contemplation or vision of God” (Ware, “Ladder” 16), it is an end not to be confused with one’s starting point. Thus, while he desires that the monk strives to be “an imitator of Christ” (Climacus 74), he believes that one may only truly bear “a resemblance to God” (Climacus 286) through *praxis*.

John’s mystical theology affords one with the opportunity to become participatory in the divine – but this participation requires a struggle. The intensity of the struggle is such that John observes, “Hardly anyone can be found in this day and age willing to bring low the body” (Climacus 79).\(^8^0\) It becomes apparent that asceticism serves as a prerequisite to union with Christ.\(^8^1\) All of this asceticism is undertaken to reorient the body toward its proper goal and highest calling.

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\(^7^9\) Although writing in the 20\(^{th}\) century, Elder Joseph’s life and writings are of benefit to better understanding this distinction, as he stands directly within the patristic tradition of the East. The elder writes, “*Praxis* must precede *theoria* ... It is impossible to reach *theoria* without *praxis*. So struggle now in everything that *praxis* requires, and the more spiritual things will come by themselves” (76). Elder Joseph’s own life is an example of this belief. The many years of struggling with ascetic works such as fasting, prostrations and tears – the practice of the virtues, or *praxis* – are a means to obtaining *theoria*.

\(^8^0\) This need to “bring low the body” ought not to be understood along ascetical currents that had come to dominate Latin thought through the work of Jerome, Ambrose or Augustine. Instead, it is better understood through these words from Alexander Schmemann: “Christian asceticism is a fight, not against but for the body” (38). For John Climacus, repentance necessitates the participation of both soul and body. Without degrading the physical body, John’s ascetical theology provides a means to its union with the Divine.

\(^8^1\) With respect to St John’s ascetic attitude, we find many parallels with that of St Antony. John advocates ascetical feats such as “mortification of the appetite, nightlong toil, a ration of water, a short measure of bread” (83) and other like restraints.
this is what Abba Moses, some years earlier, had in mind when he asserted, “Fasts and vigils, the study of Scripture, renouncing possessions and everything worldly are not in themselves perfection, as we have said; they are its tools. For perfection is not to be found in them; it is acquired through them” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 96).

How is such perfection occasioned? The answer to this question was not fully worked out in Eastern theology until Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) directed his considerable talents toward articulating a solution. However, the seeds of an answer preceded not only Gregory Palamas, but also John Climacus. In the fourth century, Athanasius proclaimed, “God became human that we might be made god” (Ware, “Church” 21). For John, the reality of the Incarnation makes possible the transfiguration of human nature. Not only is the Christian called to imitate Christ, but to fully partake of the Divine, by sharing in God’s energies.82

This participation is engendered through a synergy between God and the individual.83 Thus, while one must get “into the habit of waging war” (Climacus 184) by ascetical efforts such as fasting, tears, Psalmody, prostrations and the like, one does so fully cognizant that the indwelling of the Divine is never the result solely of human efforts. To think otherwise, says John, “is sheer lunacy” (Climacus 208). Although our own efforts are “hard, truly hard” (Climacus 75), on their own they will never suffice; “our helplessness and our fragility” (Climacus 76) necessitate divine assistance. In short, what John envisions is a synergy, or partnership, between God and humanity. “God is,” writes John, “the great collaborator”

82 This passage demands a greater explanation. The Eastern notion of theosis will be discussed below when we arrive at Gregory Palamas. At that point, more will also be said on the distinction Gregory draws between God’s essence and energies.
83 St Maximos the Confessor states, “Man has two wings, freedom and grace.” Commenting on this passage, Paul Evdokimov writes, “‘It is still God who puts virtues in the human heart,’ but to man belong ‘the hard labor and the sweat’” (78).
(Climacus 109). To comprehend the theology advanced by John necessitates that one look to his work as that which advances a dynamic equilibrium. This delicate balance was, for John, derivative of the reality of both the Fall and the Resurrection. To read the Ladder is to be struck by its ascetic nature. Yet its stringent attitude is offered without loss of hope. Indeed, one must never despair, for there is always the possibility for transformation and transfiguration. John’s asceticism is best understood as a negative balancing a positive – the positive being, in this sense, the possibility for redemption. If a duality exists in his theology, it is not a duality that sets soul against body, but rather a polarity between the fallen, corruptible state and that which is immortal.

This dynamic equilibrium leads to the paradoxical nature of John’s text.\textsuperscript{84} Thus John can say with conviction that the monastery is simultaneously “a tomb before the tomb” (Climacus 113) as well as “heaven on earth” (Climacus 111); tears that are “bitter” and also “sweet” (Climacus 127); a “death freely accepted” (Climacus 91) and a “resurrection” (Climacus 92). These paradoxical statements – and many others that have gone unmentioned – lead to the ultimate enigma: the “joyful sorrow”\textsuperscript{85} (Climacus 137) engendered by John’s mystical theology.

For John, the body is simultaneously friend and foe. Thus, with respect to the body, we come across this contradictory statement: “I embrace him. And I turn away from him” (Climacus 186). On account of the Fall, the body is rendered corruptible, but this corruptibility does not mean it is to be merely cast aside, scorned and neglected. Recall that John believes in the

\textsuperscript{84} Examples of paradoxes within Christian thought are not, of course, an entirely new advent here. For example, one finds examples in dominical passages which instruct followers to both carry their crosses, while simultaneously finding solace in an easy yoke and light burden. The working out of Trinitarian theology in the fourth century provides another good instance of a theology permeated and penetrated by enigmas: God is both three and one.

\textsuperscript{85} Alexander Schmemann’s ability to speak of the Lenten journey as a “bright sadness” (15) is made possible in light of this theological foundation.
possibility, nay the call, to be transfigured. This transfiguration involves not only the soul but also the body. According to Kallistos Ware, John concurs with the Pauline attitude toward bodily transfiguration, that “the body of our humiliation” will one day be transfigured in likeness of Christ’s “own glorious body” (Ware, “Ladder” 29). There are moments of negation in the Ladder, which treat the body like an enemy, but this negation is always balanced by affirmation; at the resurrection, both body and soul shall rise, and thus it ought to be the aim of all monastics to have “a body made holy” (Climacus 74). For John, if the body is at times repressed through fasting, lack of sleep, and other ascetical measures, it is fettered that it may be free.

The pinnacle of John’s Ladder is love, situated as it is on the uppermost rung. At this summit, John follows the dominical teaching that our love ought to be twofold: directed both toward God and humanity. John writes, “He who loves the Lord has first loved his brother, for the latter is proof of the former” (Climacus 35). Without such love, ascent is impossible. The prototype for such love is the suffering and sacrificial Lord. It is a self-abasing love that willingly accepts the burdens of all in need. In the Ladder, John furnishes us with a telling example of such love.

There was once a zealous monk who was badly troubled by [a] demon. For twenty years he wore himself out with fasting and vigils, but to no avail ... So he wrote the temptation on a sheet of paper, went to a certain holy man, handed him the paper, bowed his face to the ground and dared not to look up. The old man read it, smiled, lifted the brother and said to him: 'My son, put your hand on my neck.' The brother did so. Then the great man said: 'Very well, brother. Now let this sin be on my neck for as many years as it has been or will be active within you.' (213)

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86 Kallistos Ware has in mind St Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 3, verse 21.
87 Consider Christ’s response to the young lawyer in The Gospel According to St Matthew, chapter 22, verses 37-39: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”
The elder in this story is described as a great man, and his greatness is derivative of his love. It
is to such love that John directs our aspirations, a love that advances the needs of others before
one’s own, bearing the burdens of the other, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.88

If love is indeed the summit of St John’s Ladder, it is a peak unattainable without
practicing unceasing prayer, the rung which immediately precedes it. For John, “Prayer is by
nature a dialogue and a union of man with God” (Climacus 274); humans were created for
communion with God, and prayer places them into such a relation. On this point, a fundamental
difference must be stressed between Benedict’s Rule and John’s Ladder. Although a significant
portion of the Benedictine Rule is devoted to prayer – both liturgical and corporate – a very
different practice developed in the East. The Ladder of Divine Ascent affords us insight,
specifically as it relates to hesychasm. John urges his followers to, “Pray in all simplicity”
(Climacus 275), and such prayer manifests itself in a very specific manner. To be more precise,
what John advocates is the unceasing petition and entreaty of the “concise Jesus Prayer”
(Climacus 178). Kallistos Ware observes, “St John Climacus is, it seems, the earliest author to
use this expression” (“Ladder” 46). However, it is important to note two things. First, the roots
and foundation of this form of prayer predate John. Second, John is somewhat reticent
concerning the specific form and practice of the prayer, which makes it probable that it was
already ubiquitous, and did not require greater formulaic or practical elaboration. Alternatively,
it is also conceivable that John avoids being more specific as he welcomes a variety of possible
phrases for the Jesus Prayer.89 90 Slightly more exoteric, John shuns attempts at praying “with

88 See St Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, chapter 6, verse 2.
89 Kallistos Ware has observed that at the time of John’s writing, a variety of different formulaic prayers suggested
by the phrase “Jesus Prayer” were already in frequent use amongst Eastern monastics. Ware cites the following
examples: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”; “Lord Jesus Christ, save me”; “Master Jesus, protect me”;
elegant and clever words” (Climacus 184), clearly favouring a more humble approach. He extols the virtues of adopting the Psalter’s, “Have mercy on me.”

It is apparent that John instructs his monastics to utilize the Jesus Prayer as a means of warring against the demons. Speaking specifically of spiritual warfare, he exhorts, “Flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, since there is no stronger weapon in heaven or on earth” (Climacus 200). Here the name of Jesus is invoked with an aim to protection amidst attack. However, there is another component of the prayer worthy of note. In the Ladder, John has followed many earlier monastics in stressing the value of stillness. Toward the end of his work, he makes manifest his belief that the Jesus Prayer can be used to occasion stillness. He writes, “Stillness is worshipping God unceasingly and waiting on Him. Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with your every breath. Then indeed you will appreciate the value of stillness” (269-270). This emphasis is essential to understanding John’s theology, as well as his emphasis on the Jesus Prayer specifically. Indeed, the word stillness comes from the Greek hesychia. It is from this word that we derive the English word hesychasm, which stands as a definitive characteristic of Eastern monasticism. John pronounces, “A hesychast is like an angel on earth” (Climacus 263). Let us now turn to a more comprehensive examination of this incorporeal state.

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“Jesus, help me” (“Ladder” 47). It is conceivable that John has no particular belief in the efficacy of one form over another, and may be ambivalent to dictate a prescribed form on this account.

90 Vladimir Lossky tells us that over time, the prayer came to be solidified as: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner” (210).

91 Exhorting his followers to simple prayer, John writes, “In your prayers there is no need for high-flown words, for it is the simple and unsophisticated babblings of children that have more often won the heart of the Father in heaven” (275).

92 Both here and elsewhere in this thesis, the reader may observe a variety of parallels between Eastern monastic practice and belief with that of other religions or groups (e.g., Tibetan Buddhism). Such an observation of blending – or merely similarities – between different faiths is not new. Henry Chadwick notes that in the third century, followers of Mani (216-276) had “blended elements drawn from Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Gnostic forms of Christianity” (169). In addition, Daniélou & Marrou observe that many aspects of Eastern monastic practice, such as stillness, meditation, ascesis and contemplation are “ideals which are among the most deeply rooted in the very
IV. Hesychasm

According to Lev Gillet, hesychasm is best understood as an historical development extending from its fifth century inception across the ages into the eighteenth century, progressing with “two very distinct phases: the Sinaite phase and the Athonite phase” (33). It must be noted that such a distinction can be slightly misleading, as the Sinaite and Athonite phases are not to be understood as limited to those geographical locales, but rather emanated out from these domains, each embodying a unique spirituality. That being said, it is useful to briefly mention what is meant by each of these domains. By Sinaite is meant the spiritual tradition which emanates from St Catherine’s monastery, located at the base of Mt Sinai. Athonite is a term referring specifically to Mt Athos, often known in Orthodox circles as “The Holy Mountain”. A peninsula located in northern Greece, it has been “the chief centre of Orthodox monasticism” (Ware, “Church” 38) since the tenth century.

a) The Sinaite Phase

Certainly one of the earliest to bear witness to Sinaite hesychasm was the fifth century bishop, St Diadochos of Photiki. He writes, “The intellect requires of us imperatively some task which will satisfy its need for activity. For the complete fulfillment of its purpose we should give it nothing but the prayer ‘Lord Jesus’” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 270). Noteworthy in this passage is the insistence on a formulaic approach to the prayer. For Diadochos, the Jesus Prayer consists in the perpetual invocation of the words “Lord Jesus” as a means of purifying structure of human nature” (270). They proceed to note that such similarities have monastic equivalencies “in India, Central Asia, [and] China” (270).

This is not to be understood that hesychasm ceased to be practiced after the eighteenth century, but rather that from this point, there were no significant theological developments

In 527, the Emperor Justinian founded the monastery of St Catherine (Ware, “Church” 38).

The editors for The Philokalia describe the intellect as “the highest faculty in man, through which – provided it is purified – he knows God or the inner essences or principles of created things by means of direct apprehension or spiritual perception” (362).
one’s heart. His teaching would prove influential. Writing in the sixth century, Abba Philimon instructs, “Keep watch in your heart; and with watchfulness say in your mind with awe and trembling: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.’ For this is the advice which the blessed Diadochos gave” (“Philokalia - Vol. II” 347).

As we have seen above, John of the Ladder stands within the Sinaite tradition as a preeminent figure. With respect to the development of the hesychast tradition in his writing, there are two important points worthy of our attention. First, John anticipates and paves the way for future advances “which associate the Jesus Prayer with the perception of a supernatural light, for ... the ‘eye of the heart’ is able to see the divine ‘Sun of the intelligence’ (Gillet 39).” Second, John instructs that our recollection of the name of Jesus be joined with our breathing. St Hesychios the Priest, who lived after John Climacus, and was familiar with his teachings, takes this one step further. Hesychios suggests that the name of Jesus be attached not only to one’s breath, but also to the whole of one’s life. This is an integral observation, for in it, we note “the spirituality of the name grows ever more and more all-embracing” (Gillet 40). Perhaps more than any other individual to this point, the writings of Hesychios are filled with references to...

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96 The heart is not to be understood merely as the physiological organ here. It is better comprehended in this context as “the spiritual centre of man’s being, man as made in the image of God, his deepest and truest self, or the inner shrine, to be entered only through sacrifice and death, in which the mystery of the union between the divine and human heart is consummated” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 361).

97 We shall turn in greater detail to the place of the uncreated light in hesychast practice with the arrival of Gregory Palamas.

98 According to the editors of The Philokalia, “Hesychios of Sinai’s date is uncertain” (161). However, they argue that he drew significantly from The Ladder of Divine Ascent, and therefore contend that Hesychios lived in the 8th century, or possibly even as late as the 9th century. Although he cannot be placed with certainty, Lev Gillet associates Hesychios with the Monastery of the Burning Bush on Sinai (39).
“persistence in the Jesus Prayer” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 163). He extols both its virtues and the manner in which it may be practiced. Of its virtues, Hesychios suggests it leads to purity of heart: “It is impossible to find the Red Sea among the stars or to walk this earth without breathing air; so too it is impossible to cleanse our heart ... without the frequent invocation of Jesus Christ” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 166). That purity of heart may be engendered by calling upon the name of Jesus is significant, especially in light of the dominical teaching, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Perhaps it is this reason, above all, that makes Hesychios so adamant that “we must at each instant call on Christ” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 171). If the Jesus Prayer was not already understood as an unceasing invocation of the holy name prior to St Hesychios, such an apprehension is clearly manifest after his teachings.

Throughout the eighth and ninth centuries, the Jesus Prayer continued to be employed by Eastern monastics, and became an entrenched component of Byzantine spirituality (Gillet 41). Within the development of the Orthodox tradition, St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) occupies a significant place. His own influence on the development of the Jesus Prayer specifically – and Eastern mystical theology more generally – should not be underestimated. His mystical teachings “contributed to a certain conception of the ‘primacy of the spiritual,’ understood as the primacy of the pneumatic and charismatic element over the hierarchical and institutional, and also as the primacy of contemplation over intellectual and active life” (Gillet 43-4). This stress on the contemplative life over the intellectual life is telling of differences between Eastern and Western monastic forms. By this point in Western development, the

99 This is what prompts the editors of The Philokalia to state, “Hesychios has a warm devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, and this makes his treatise of particular value to all who use the Jesus Prayer” (161).
100 See The Gospel According to St Matthew, chapter 5, verse 8.
101 Kallistos Ware has described him as “the greatest of the Byzantine mystics” (“Church” 66).
intellectual life was fortified in Benedictine practice, augmenting the emphasis toward scholasticism. However, St Symeon’s emphasis on *hesychasm* is illustrative of a quite sharp divergence of monastic practice between the Latin West and Greek East.

Symeon links the practice of this contemplative prayer with a psychosomatic technique. We have observed that earlier Eastern monastics, such as John Climacus, had advocated attaching the name of Jesus to one’s breath. With Symeon, we observe advancement in this psycho-physiological practice of the prayer. We now find specific psychosomatic recommendations for saying the prayer. “Sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you. Close the door ... Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 72). It is worth observing that in these instructions, Symeon believes himself to be teaching that which is faithful to the lived realities of the earliest desert hermits. In fact, he concludes his comments on bodily posture by quoting from the *Apophthegmata*, “Sit in your cell and it will teach you everything” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 73).102 This inclusion is not accidental. It indicates Symeon’s conviction that *hesychasm* is in keeping with the initial theological tenets and monastic way of life embodied by the early anchorites.

As the teaching and recommendation of a specified physical state became better known, it was not without opponents. We find, by way of example, Barlaam the Calabrian (c.1290-1348) criticizing such practice on the grounds that it holds “a grossly materialistic conception of prayer” (Ware, “Church” 66). However, for Barlaam, the errors inherent in what he held to be this mistaken physical effort in one’s prayer life was nothing to the ire he possessed over a

102 St Symeon is quoting the saying attributed to Abba Moses. See B. Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, page 10.
related feature of Symeon’s hesychast practice: experiential knowledge of the uncreated light.  

St Symeon, and those who practiced *hesychasm* within the tradition he embodied, asserted that during prayer, they were confronted with the same light witnessed by the apostles who were with Christ during his transfiguration on Mt Tabor. Writing about the vision of divine light, Symeon states:

> The person inwardly illumined by the light of the Holy Spirit cannot endure the vision of it, but falls face down on the earth and cries out in great fear and amazement, since he has seen and experienced something that is beyond nature, thought or conception ... He becomes even more radiant. When, totally incandescent, he has become like light, then the saying is fulfilled, ‘God is united with gods and known by them,’ in the sense perhaps that He is now united to those who have joined themselves to Him, and revealed to those who have come to know Him. (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 38)

Such manifestations of the divine light had thus become a noteworthy feature in *hesychastic* development by the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. It is appropriate for us, at this juncture, to segue from the Sinaite to Athonite traditions, where this understanding and experience of the uncreated light came to play an increased role in *hesychastic* practice.

**b) The Athonite Phase**

*Hesychasm’s* Athonite phase was occasioned by Gregory the Sinaite’s arrival at Mt Athos in the fourteenth century. Upon arriving, Gregory encountered only three monastics well versed in the practice of the contemplative life and the Jesus Prayer. However, through his influence,

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103 It is interesting to find St Symeon, as if anticipating such criticisms, writing, “Those taught by God will be regarded as fools by the disciples of such as are wise in the wisdom of the world ... Since these people are blind to the divine light, they cannot see the marvels it contains; they regard as deluded those who dwell in that light and see and teach others about what is within it. On the contrary, it is they themselves that are deluded, not having tasted the ineffable blessings of God” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 47).


105 It is important to note the similarities between Symeon’s depiction of one confronted with a vision of the uncreated light and the response of the apostles conveyed in the Gospels of both St Matthew and St Mark. In both instances, the apostles are depicted as falling to the ground before the immensity of their encounter. According to Ouspensky and Lossky, Orthodox iconographic representations of the Transfiguration find St Peter kneeling and “raising his right hand to protect himself from the light,” while St John “falls, turning his back to the light,” and St James “falls backwards” before the light (211).

106 St Symeon is quoting from St Gregory Nazianzos (c. 329 – c. 390) in his Oration 45,3.
hesychasm would flourish on the Holy Mountain, losing the earlier fluidity by which it had once been characterized. If the Sinaite tradition had been marked by “tenderness and spontaneity” with respect to the practice of the prayer, the Athonite tradition developed with “greater rigidity” (Gillet 54). Gregory provides instructions that make the prayer increasingly rigid in formulaic articulation, as well as physical posture. “Sitting from dawn on a seat about nine inches high, compel your intellect to descend from your head into your heart, and retain it there. Keeping your head forcibly bent downwards ... persevere in repeating noetically or in your soul ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy’” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 264). Here we observe a trend toward increasing strictness in both the structure of the physical body during prayer, as well as the words to be invoked. In addition, Gregory also provides very specific instructions for how the hesychast practitioner should organize his day.

From early morning the hesychast must devote himself to the remembrance of God through prayers and stillness of heart, praying diligently in the first hours, reading in the second, chanting psalms in the third, praying in the fourth, reading in the fifth, chanting psalms in the sixth, praying in the seventh, reading in the eighth, chanting psalms in the ninth, eating in the tenth, sleeping in the eleventh, if need be, and reciting vespers in the twelfth hour. (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 233)

Also in the fourteenth century, it is important to take note of Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia, as it is his pupil, St Gregory Palamas, who occupies the highest pinnacle of the Athonite tradition. Theoliptos holds that “prayer is the mind’s dialogue with God” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 181), and takes opportunity on numerous occasions to expound on hesychasm, explicitly mentioning spiritual enlightenment derivative of the uncreated light. He asserts that while “the mind repeats the words of prayer,” the intellect must be fixed upon God that it might

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107 Years later, Gregory would write, “You have heard of Theoliptos, whose name signifies ‘inspired by God’ and who is recognized in our days as an authentic theologian and a trustworthy visionary of the truth of God’s mysteries – the bishop of Philadelphia or, rather, he who from Philadelphia as from a lampstand illumined the world” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 341).
be “united with love” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 182; 184). Theoliptos states that when the divine Logos – that is, the name of Jesus – is invoked, it brings one’s inner state to perfection, vivifying it with “light-generating love” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 184).

Prior to progressing to St Gregory Palamas, one point must be made, that being a clarification of Lev Gillet’s interpretation of Theoliptos’ teaching and practice regarding hesychasm. According to Gillet, Theoliptos “occupies in the history of the Jesus Prayer the place of a theoretical exponent – an exponent, that is, not of the psycho-physiological technique of the Prayer (bodily attitude, breathing, etc.), but of its psychology, of the mental operations which it implies” (56-7). While it is certainly true that Theoliptos does expound upon mental operations (as we have seen above with his description of prayer as a “dialogue” between God and man), Gillet is perhaps mistaken to diminish so greatly the importance of psycho-physiological techniques for Theoliptos. Although not emphasizing this aspect of the prayer like other writers, there is little to suggest that Theoliptos expects that hesychasm will be practiced apart from established physical aids. For example, we find him explicitly advocating a psycho-physiological aid when he states, “Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 185). Rather than accepting Gillet’s statement as fully accurate, it may be more accurate to suggest that although stressing the mental operations inherent in hesychasm, Theoliptos still remains within a noetic tradition that advocates the use of bodily posture and acts as a means to effective prayer.

We now arrive at St Gregory Palamas. Initially a practitioner of hesychasm on Mt Athos, and subsequently at Beroea, his lasting renown stems from his defence of the hesychasts

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108 St Gregory Palamas “enjoys a particular prominence” in the Orthodox Church, being commemorated in the liturgical calendar not only on the day of his repose, but also the second Sunday of the Lenten period. According to
against their attackers. Although he would have preferred to maintain his life of monastic silence and stillness, Gregory explained that although he had “intended to give up writing altogether,” he rose up in defence of the hesychasts as “great need compels me to do so” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 294). In fact, his defence of hesychasm was held in such high regard by the Athonite monastics that the earliest iconic depiction of St Gregory, which appeared in the fourteenth century on Mount Athos at the Monastery of Vatopedi, bears the legend: ‘The New Chrysostom’ (“Synaxarion - Vol. II” 135). In 1341, the Athonite elders endorsed Gregory’s defence of hesychasm, as did Orthodox bishops at two consecutive councils at Constantinople (“Synaxarion - Vol. II” 137). Shortly after his death (c. 1359), Gregory’s theological positions were given official assent by the Church in 1368 (Gillet 59). After first being charged a heretic, Gregory was vindicated as his defence of hesychasm was deemed canonical.

Gregory’s writings, defending the prayer of the heart, aroused great controversy through his delineation regarding the presence of the uncreated light. This was, of course, not a new

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109 The most vehement and vocal of these attackers was Barlaam, who had “made God the object of cold reason and not of experience” and was thus disturbed by hesychast monastics who “allowed a place to the sensory element in the spiritual life” (“Synaxarion - Vol. II” 136). Barlaam claimed that the radiance observed by hesychasts during prayer was “not the uncreated light of the Godhead” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 288), as held by the hesychasts themselves.

110 Chrysostom means ‘golden-mouthed’.

111 It is interesting to observe that Gregory himself had modeled his defence on St John Chrysostom who “clearly and fluently wrote about holiness” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 294).

112 In particular, they endorsed what he had written in his Hagiorite Tome.

113 Things had become quite bleak for Gregory, specifically during a four year period in which Gregory found himself imprisoned on account of his theological beliefs. In fact, he was even temporarily excommunicated by Patriarch John Calecas, who had sided with Gregory’s opponents. The ascension of Isidore to the Patriarchal See was cause for reversing this decision (“Synaxarion - Vol. II” 138).
thing, as we have observed earlier hesychasts describing their experiences with the uncreated light. What Gregory attempts to do is articulate how “we are able to enter into union with the Holy Trinity” (Lossky 69). Drawing on earlier concepts already inherent in Patristic thought, Gregory seeks to draw a distinction between the ‘essence’ and ‘energies’ of God (Ware, “Way” 22). The hagiographical passage below, taken from The Synaxarion is useful to demonstrate the key elements inherent in the controversy.

[Gregory] defended the authenticity of the methods which the Hesychasts used to fix the intellect in the heart; for since the Incarnation we have to seek the grace of the Holy Spirit in our bodies, which are sanctified by the Sacraments and grafted by the Eucharist into the Body of Christ. This uncreated grace is the very glory of God which, as it sprang forth from the body of Christ on the day of the Transfiguration, overwhelmed the disciples. Shining now in the heart purified from the passions, it truly unites us to God, illumines us, deifies us ... In thus affirming the full reality of deification, Gregory was far from denying the absolute transcendence and unknowableness of God in His essence and the eternal, creative and providential energies by which the Lord enables created beings to participate in His being, His life and His light – without, however, introducing any division into the unity of the divine Nature. God is not a philosophical concept for Saint Gregory: He is Love, He is Living Person ... Who does everything to make us Godlike. (Vol. II, 137)

From this passage, we become cognizant of the Orthodox view of deification, or theosis. The Byzantine Church came to speak of partaking of the divine nature of God, but only to the

[114] Gregory states that he is merely “affirming the teachings of the holy fathers” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 316).

[115] The fourteenth century controversy was fuelled by opposition from Barlaam the Calabrian (c.1290-1348). Barlaam contended that what the hesychasts reportedly saw or experienced was “a created and physical radiance” rather than the energies emanating from the Godhead’s uncreated light” (“Philokalia – Vol. IV” 288). Barlaam asserted that the physical aids employed were unnecessary, useless and naive. He taunted the hesychast practitioners with the label of omphalopsychoi (i.e. navel-psychics). Beyond these taunts, Barlaam’s greatest charge lay in his claim that hesychast practitioners were Messalians (Gillet 59). A heretical sect that arose in the fourth century, the Messalians believed in a plurality of gods (Chadwick 179). Barlaam was essentially arguing that if the light experienced by the Athonite monks was not created, it led one back into this heretical belief. St Gregory’s distinction between the essence and energies of God was thus invaluable in safeguarding against this charge. Gregory left Mount Athos and travelled to Constantinople to defend the hesychast view against these charges. In 1341, his teachings were adopted by church councils (see footnote 116 below). Despite further attacks in ensuing years, the hesychastic practice was again affirmed by subsequent councils in 1347 and 1351 (“Philokalia – Vol. IV” 288). One further point must be noted. This resistance to hesychasm, especially its resistance found in Barlaam of Calabria is significant of the East-West divide within Christendom. Barlaam had been schooled in the West, and was an Aristotelian scholastic. His rational approach to theology was thus at odds with a much more mystical approach that had developed in the East.

[116] The Synaxarion asserts that theosis became official Orthodox doctrine through its adoption, in 1341, by two councils at the Church of St Sofia in Constantinople (137). Although its official sanction was thus located in the
extent to which union was effected through the divine energies of God. St Gregory is careful to draw a distinction between the possibility of union to God’s essence.\textsuperscript{117} If humans were united to God in his essence, this would be problematic in that “God would then no longer be Trinity” (Lossky 70). Although unknowable in His essence, the Incarnation provides humans with a means to be united to God through his energies. This is why Gregory is able to state, “He who participates in the divine energy, himself becomes, to some extent, light” (Lossky 224). It is on this basis that Gregory sought to defend the partaking of the uncreated light experienced by hesychast monastics.

Following the defence articulated by Gregory Palamas, and the ecclesiastical endorsement that he won in the East, hesychasm – now ubiquitous in practice – became a permanent and defining fixture of Eastern monastic practice. The Athonite phase of hesychast development finds its fullest articulation in a work attributed to the fourteenth century figures Kallistos and Ignatius Xanthopoulos. The formula, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” was accepted without opposition. The prayer of the heart is accompanied with psychosomatic directives, and hesychasm is combined with ascetic efforts (e.g., fasting, Psalmody), all of which are directed toward a means of occasioning union with God (or to partake of the divine energies, as Gregory Palamas might have described such a union). Only then, according to Kallistos and Ignatius, is the soul able to agree with the author of the Song of

\textsuperscript{117} Kallistos Ware describes essence as the “nature or inner being of God” whereas the energies are understood as God’s “operations or acts of power” ("Way" 22).
Songs, “I am wounded with love”\textsuperscript{118} (Gillet 63). Thus our own journey through *hesychasm*, which has moved from Sinai to Athos, is best understood as an inward pilgrimage, exploring the depths of the heart.

\textsuperscript{118} See chapter 5, verse 8.
V. Eastern Monasticism’s Telos & Pedagogical Methodology

From what has preceded above, we must now seek to extrapolate the primary pedagogical principles that enable this inner exploration. In order to proceed in this manner, we must first identify the telos of education as articulated by Eastern monastics. What is the end toward which all of their thoughts, words and actions are directed? In order to identify their telos, and investigate how their manner of living helps actualize that end, we will take recourse from the lives and teachings of two recent figures from Mt Athos: St Silouan the Athonite\(^\text{119}\) and Elder Joseph the Hesychast.\(^\text{120}\)

St Silouan was born Simeon Ivanovich Antonov, a Russian peasant who lived in the province of Tambov. He was born in 1866, the son of an “absolutely illiterate” (12) father and Silouan only “attended the village school for just two winters” (52).\(^\text{121}\) He lived a simple and impoverished life, and upon completing his required military service, Silouan left Russia to live on Mt Athos in 1892. He would remain on the Holy Mountain for the rest of his life, living a life of severe asceticism, until his death in 1938. What we know of his life is primarily transmitted to us by Archimandrite Sophrony, who lived as Silouan’s disciple for the final fourteen years of his life (3).\(^\text{122}\) In addition to the biographical account, there are also scraps of writing – the majority discovered by Archimandrite Sophrony after Silouan’s death – on a variety of spiritual topics. These fragments were thematically compiled by Sophrony, and attached to his

\(^{119}\) In 1988, the Patriarch of Constantinople recognized the veneration of St Silouan (“Synaxarion - Vol. I” 178).

\(^{120}\) The reason we are able to jump, at this juncture, to two figures who occupy a preeminent position in 20th century Eastern monasticism is on account of their recognizable behaviours dating back to the 6th and 7th centuries. For monastics of the East, the very notion of change or development is often seen as strange, bizarre and uncalled for. We may date a divergence between Eastern and Western practice back to the Benedictines and their involvement in the printed word and the rationality – and novelty – it engendered.

\(^{121}\) Speaking of St Silouan, Archimandrite Sophrony says that he “was unlettered” (110) and nearly illiterate. When he did write, he wrote of “what was given him to behold” (263). His was an experiential knowledge.

\(^{122}\) Archimandrite Sophrony tells us that he felt himself unworthy to write Silouan’s life. A reluctant hagiographer, he undertook the task as an act of obedience when commanded to write by Hieroschemamonk Pinuphrius (257).
hagiographical account. He is optimistic that through these writings, “Whoever did not know the Staretz\(^{123}\) personally can still get an idea of him through his writings; whereas anyone who did know him, who remarked his genuine simplicity and humility, his ever-welcoming, quiet and meek disposition, saw that here was a man of high perfection” (267). It is this aspect of Silouan that Archimandrite Sophrony is at pains to reveal, and through this revealing, it is for us to discern pedagogical principles rooted in the monastic tradition of the East\(^{124}\).

Although Elder Joseph the Hesychast was a twentieth century contemporary of St Silouan on the Holy Mountain, there is little to suggest that the two figures ever met. In fact, there is nothing to suggest that they even knew of one another. Elder Joseph was approximately three decades younger than St Silouan, being born to Greek parents in 1898. He arrived on Mt Athos in his twenties, where he would remain until his death in 1959. Elder Joseph presided over his synodia\(^{125}\), a small group of monastics who swore obedience to him as their spiritual father.\(^{126}\) Living a life of severe asceticism, Elder Joseph’s synodia prized, above all, the practice of unceasing prayer. Their typikon\(^{127}\) consisted of keeping vigil throughout the night. As Father Ephraim, who lived with him as his spiritual child for the final twelve years of his life recalls, they would remain awake at prayer each and every night (21). As with St Silouan who preceded

\(^{123}\) Archimandrite Sophrony often refers to St Silouan simply as the Staretz, which is the traditional Russian phrase to denote a spiritual elder, one known for his “spiritual discernment and wisdom” (Ware, “Church” 39).

\(^{124}\) As Archimandrite Sophrony is the sole chronicler, and acts as the only depositor of St Silouan’s writings, there are many historians who may rightly raise objections to the veracity of the material. However, such objections are beyond the scope of this paper, as our concern here is merely to extract from this hagiography and teachings a philosophy of spiritual education specific to Eastern monastics, of which St Silouan’s recorded life and teachings embody fidelity to this tradition.

\(^{125}\) Synodia is often rendered as ‘brotherhood’ in English.

\(^{126}\) Living in a loose grouping of cells at St Basil’s Skete, high up the Holy Mountain, in a remote and inaccessible domain, Elder Joseph’s synodia was composed of the following monastics: Fr Athanasios, Fr Arsenios, Fr Theophylactos, Fr Ephraim, Fr Joseph and Fr Haralambos. It is quite significant, and worthy of note, that these latter three – Fathers Ephraim, Joseph and Haralambos – would all become abbots on the Holy Mountain at later stages of their lives. Such was the influence and renown of Elder Joseph’s teachings and way of life.

\(^{127}\) Used in this particular context, typikon refers to a synodia’s regulatory rules that govern behaviour.
him, Elder Joseph was also unlearned by worldly standards.\textsuperscript{128} Father Ephraim tells us that despite having only completed two years of elementary education as a child, Elder Joseph “was wise in things divine, for he was tutored by God. The University of the Wilderness taught him what we basically need: the divine” (27).

Let us pause, for a moment, to consider this “University of the Wilderness”. There are (for our purposes) two questions that such a unique pedagogical institution raises. First, what was the telos for such a school, a school that sought to teach the “art of all arts and the science of all sciences” (Elder Joseph 125)? Second, how did it attempt to bring its pupils toward an actualization of its telos? Put another way, what pedagogical methodology was advocated and practiced to occasion the desired end?

\textbf{a) The Eastern Telos}

In responding to the former question, we may take recourse directly to these words from Elder Joseph: “Man’s purpose, from the moment he is born, is to find God” (43). Salvation is the telos of monastic education, understood by the Eastern monks as theosis (as we have observed above). It is theosis, according to St Silouan’s teachings,\textsuperscript{129} that “can make man a god” (215). The monk seeks salvation, a saving grace found only in his relation to God, obtained to the extent to which the monastic may become a “partaker of the Divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). This deification, or theosis, is the end goal. In this mystical union by which the individual participates in divine life, this “immortal hypostasis” (Silouan 146) provides the monk with entry

\textsuperscript{128} Writing to a correspondent, Elder Joseph states, “For, as you can see, my good child, I am uneducated. Only by saying the syllables out loud can I barely read the words – and only some, not all” (233).

\textsuperscript{129} The phrase, “St Silouan’s teachings,” should not be construed as a new theological doctrine. Silouan would himself assert that he only sought fidelity with earlier Patristic teaching. Consider, by way of example, the words of St Mark the Ascetic, “The Logos became man, so that man might become Logos” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 155), itself a restatement of earlier salvific theology (the reader may wish to see St Athanasius’ comments earlier in this paper for comparative purposes).
into the eternal, while simultaneously residing in the earthly realm, governed as it were, by the temporal. The monk shares in the divine energies, and it is here that holiness is perceived “not as an ethical but an ontological concept” (Silouan 147). One is holy only to the extent that he becomes god through grace. Prayer, fasting and other ascetical efforts are not holiness; holiness is found only in the divine, and the monk who has attained to theosis becomes holy by partaking of the divine through mystical union to the energies of God. Theosis is occasioned when one becomes “a partaker of uncreated, unoriginate Life” (Silouan 174).

It must be stressed that such an occasioning is understood by the monastics as a synergy, or cooperation between God and man. Thus it is not a passive state. An individual will not become deified without the sanctioning of such a union. As St Diadochos of Photiki states, “Our likeness to God requires our co-operation” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 288). This co-operation protects the dignity inherent in our free will. Also, an individual will not become deified apart from struggles and exertion; consent alone will not lead to ascent – travail and exertion are necessary. Elder Joseph likens such efforts to a farmer cultivating a field. The farmer must dig the earth, uproot the weeds, sow the harvest at appropriate times, and perform other related agricultural activities. However, he is reliant upon God to “send rain and favourable winds at the appropriate time” (372) in order that the field may be successfully cultivated. This partnership is useful to understanding the synergy involved in theosis.130

The reason we reiterate an emphasis on theosis here is on account of its being the telos of Eastern monastic education, the end to which things tend. What is the result if one fails to

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130 The archetypal figure for such synergy is the Theotokos. According to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, the Incarnation cannot be understood merely as an act of the Godhead. It cannot be understood apart from the co-operation of the Mother of God. According to Nicholas Cabasilas, “Just as God became incarnate voluntarily, so He wished that His Mother should bear Him freely and with her full consent” (Ware, “Church” 259).
actualize this end goal? St Silouan replies as follows: “When man does not arrive at deification ... the very meaning of his existence disappears” (157). This accounts for Adam’s lament upon his removal from paradise. He was grieved that he had been separated from the divine; “He was heartsick for God” (Silouan 448). *Theosis* engenders a return to the paradisiacal state of union between God and man, a communion that fashions man into god. Surely this is why Adam’s misery is only removed when such a union is occasioned. St Silouan tells us that at this point, Adam exclaims, “The Lord is in me and hath made me like unto himself” (453). It is this fashioning, this transfiguration, to which the monk aspires. What is the telos of education? In a word: *theosis*.

Archimandrite Sophrony asserts that St Silouan could rightly expound upon Adam’s joy at union with the divine, for he had tasted of such joy, and drunk from the fount of divinity.

The Staretz was a man of a single idea, but this idea is the most profound, the most beautiful, the most ontologically perfect there is – and most importantly of all – he realised it in his own life ... Indeed, the Holy Spirit made him like unto Christ Himself, Whom he was deemed worthy to behold, and of the resemblance to Whom he so often spoke, quoting the words of the Great Apostle: ‘We shall be made like him; for we shall see him as he is.’” (266-7)

To become “like unto Christ” through participation in the divine energies is the end of education. This answers the first of our two questions above. To the second of these queries we must now direct our attention. Having established the goal – beginning with the end in mind, as some moderns may put it – we must now work backwards from this end to discern how such a *telos* is actualized. We will now examine the pedagogical methodology that was both advocated and practiced to occasion *theosis*.131

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131 For the sake of clarity, we must stress again that *theosis* cannot be occasioned simply by human efforts. The assertion that one may be saved (i.e. become deified) apart from the grace of God is a Pelagian doctrine – the Orthodox Church would be comfortable defining this doctrine a heresy – which Eastern monastics have carefully avoided.
b) Eastern Monasticism’s Pedagogical Approach

The life and teachings of both St Silouan and Elder Joseph are indicative of a conviction that one cannot arrive at a deified state apart from what the Patristic teachers termed praxis, the practice of the virtues. All elements of asceticism – from prostrations and vigils to fasting and psalmody – are properly directed as a means to obtaining divine grace. They must never be understood as an end in themselves, but rather as a means to an end. The end is to become God, through partaking in the divine energies. Silouan and Joseph assert that such union will never become reality apart from struggle. To partake of the resplendent and transfigured Christ on Mt Tabor, one must first bear the cross to Golgotha, and share in the sufferings at the place of the skull.

One cannot help but be reminded of the impetus for the initial desert hermits taking flight to the desert. When the possibility to share in the Lord’s suffering through red martyrdom was no longer feasible, they sought to share in his passion through ascetic efforts. Both Silouan and Joseph shared the same attitude toward the monastic life – an attitude bequeathed from the early anchorites to the Athonite monks of the present – that saw in monasticism the road leading to Golgotha. St Silouan spoke of the necessity to “die a daily death” (241), while Elder Joseph called his life “a daily martyrdom” (162). In such martyrdom, we find a strange paradox, one articulated by Jesus of Nazareth when he said, “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” It is in attempting to be faithful to the paradox of this Gospel precept that the monastic desires to lay down his life. Authentic being is found in no other way, and consequently, “The way of the Christian always means martyrdom”

(Silouan 197). With respect to this martyrdom, let us first consider prayer, for as Staretz Silouan taught, “To pray for others is to shed blood” (46).

For the Eastern monastic, living a life of constant prayer is the foremost enterprise. Anything that detracts the monk from this employment detracts him from the primary work of his vocation. This is why the practice of hesychasm reigns on Mt Athos, and why St Silouan, like other “newly-arrived postulants” (23) to the Holy Mountain, was immediately immersed in hesychasm and instructed to practice it unceasingly. It is through prayer that the monastic serves others. Thus Kallistos Ware is able to assert, “It is not so much what a monk does that matters, as what he is” (“Church” 38). St Silouan proclaims, “A monk is someone who prays for the whole world, who weeps for the whole world; and in this lies his main work” (407). It is a work that calls him to become prayer. He services all mankind through this endeavour, it is an endeavour not to be taken lightly. St Silouan states, “There is nothing on earth more difficult than prayer” (71), while Elder Joseph refers to it as “toilsome work” (311). The monastic battle is fought against incorporeal foes, and in this warfare, prayer is the strongest weapon. As such, monastics frequently report that demonic attacks come most strongly during their efforts to pray. Describing St Silouan’s nocturnal prayer, Archimandrite Sophrony says, “Words cannot convey the agony of even a single night of that wrestling ... [and] struggles with the devils which so tormented him” (41, 42). Elder Joseph recounts similar experiences of his “frightful war with the demons” (132) every night for nearly a decade. The Elder relates the following story in an effort to describe the horrors of these attacks.

\[133\text{ With respect to this unceasing prayer of the heart, Elder Joseph the Hesychast writes, “Noetic prayer is to me as any other man’s trade is to him, because I have been working at it now for more than thirty-six years” (39).}\]

\[134\text{ The reader will do well to recall what we have seen above, specifically the observation by pilgrims who said of the early desert anchorites, “These are they by whom the world is kept in being.”}\]
By chance an acquaintance of ours came from the world to see us. That night I put him in my small hut to sleep. When the demons came for me as usual, they started beating him, and he started screaming! The man was horrified – he almost lost his mind. I came running at once.

‘What’s wrong?’ I asked him.

‘The demons nearly strangled me!’ he said. ‘They almost beat me to death!’

‘Don’t be afraid,’ I told him. ‘That was intended for me, but tonight they thrashed you by mistake! But don’t be alarmed.’ I told him also other cheerful things to calm him down, but it was impossible. He could stay no longer in that place of martyrdom. (133)

Such stories no doubt shock the modern sensibility. We may expect to find such tales recorded in the fourth century Life of Antony, but to hear them from the likes of twentieth century figures strikes us as improbable. Our inclination is to dismiss the stories as either fabrications created to convey the semblance of some spiritual grace, or perhaps the product of a hallucination brought about on account of a sleep-deprived mind and malnourished body. It is not for this paper to investigate the veracity of these accounts. What we instead concern ourselves with here is that such tales demonstrate a belief in the efficacy of prayer, and the superb struggle requisite in unceasing prayer. From the passage above, it is also important to note Elder Joseph likening the locale of his ferocious struggle to a “place of martyrdom.” In prayer we find the furtherance of the topos of the monastic life as a voluntary martyrdom.

The impetus for this prayer is derivative of love – both love for God and love for humanity (for, as we have observed above, Eastern theology dictates that to love others is to love God). Thus we are not surprised to find St Silouan asserting that the natural outcome of such love is that prayer “cannot be interrupted” (63). Silouan maintains that in prayer, he desired but one thing, namely “to pray for all men as for myself” (102). Why, in Elder Joseph’s synodia, did they have a typikon that prescribed nightly vigils? The Elder makes manifest such a rule emanated from love. As he wrote to a correspondent, “We here, my sister, don’t sleep at all at
night. Every night we have a vigil. We pray for the whole world all night” (226). Such was the intensity and fervour of his ardent love that Elder Joseph could elsewhere write, “Ah, and who could be beside me to hear my prayers, the sighs of my heart, to see the tears that I shed for my brothers? All night long I pray and cry out, ‘Either save Thy servants, O Lord, or erase me as well from the Book of Life. I do not want paradise without them’” (203). Both Silouan and Joseph believed that God is love, created everything out of love, and desired nothing more from humanity than that love.

Let us now direct our attention to the specific pedagogical methodology practiced to occasion theosis. It is pedagogy of asceticism “tempered and forged through the centuries” (Silouan 22). Its varied components include – but are not limited to – poverty, obedience, silence, solitude, vigils and fasting. Those who tread this road journey along “the path of God, which the sore feet of the saints walked” (Elder Joseph 367).

Acquiescing to the request of a younger monk, Elder Joseph outlines how a monastic ought to pass a twenty-four hour day. Beginning at daybreak, the monk is permitted to have something to drink along with “80 grams of bread or rusk” (339). After this small meal, the monk is encouraged to attend to his daily work. Examples of such labour include gardening, fashioning stamps for prosphora, or other like tasks that can be performed in simplicity without interrupting noetic prayer. An important element to note is that the specified tasks are not left to the individual monk’s discretion, but are imposed by his spiritual father, to whom he must be completely obedient. Elder Joseph is clear that regardless of the task, the work is to be

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135 Elder Joseph maintains that obedience is important as a means of acquiring humility (58). Its importance to the monastic life has long been derivative of obedience being viewed as a means of emulating two archetypal figures: Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. The emulation of Christ is obvious, in that he was obedient to His Father’s will, obedience that involved insults, suffering and death on a cross. The emulation of the Virgin Mary may not be quite
accompanied with unceasing prayer. One is reminded of St Seraphim of Sarov’s admonition, “Let your hands be always at work and your lips always at prayer.”

With the arrival of noon, the monk is forbidden to “speak with anyone: neither a monk nor a layman” (340). This rule of silence must be kept, and the Elder forbids it to be violated for any reason. At 2:00 in the afternoon, the monk is permitted to eat once again. On this occasion, the monastic is permitted to combine either legumes or rice with “as much as 35 grams of oil” (340). Should the monastic possess “some cheese, egg, a sardine, or ten olives” (340), he is also permitted to partake of these items. Of course, during fasting periods, this diet would be restricted. It is interesting to observe that the monk is prohibited from restricting this specified nourishment at his own discretion. He is instructed to “eat and have humility” (340), lest he become proud of his ascetical efforts and judge others.

Following this meal, the monk is permitted to sleep for three or four hours. Upon waking, he must say Vespers, and then begin his prayer vigil that will last throughout the night. He is directed to engage in this activity standing up if his health permits, and to pray without speaking. When tired, the monk is permitted to sit down. However, if he feels sleep coming upon him, he is instructed to stand. This vigil includes a variety of different prayers as obvious, but is equally important. In the Most Holy Virgin, monastics observe her complete submission to the Divine will. For the Incarnation to occur, she had to first offer her fiat: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word” (Luke 1:38).

The Eastern Orthodox Church has a number of specific fasting periods. Well known examples are Great Lent and Advent, with other examples being the Apostles’ Fast as well as the Dormition of the Mother of God. Throughout the entire year, Wednesday and Friday are observed as fasting days (Wednesday in memory of the day Christ was betrayed, and Friday as a remembrance of the day of crucifixion). With respect to fasting, there are two main modes. The first involves “total abstinence from food and drink” (Schmemann 49), while the second involves abstaining from certain foods (e.g., cheese, eggs, et cetera) for specified periods of time.

St Silouan maintains, “All ascetic striving must be directed toward acquiring humility” (43), while Elder Joseph simply states that we must “become like mud” (69).

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the day begins at sundown. Thus evening prayers (i.e. Vespers) are concurrent with the arrival of a new day.

We are told by St Silouan that he would ward off sleep by sitting on a backless stool (39).
that the monk has received from his spiritual father. When the specified prayers have been completed, he is instructed to read from *The Synaxarion* or other “compunctious and beneficial books” as directed by his spiritual father. This concludes with the arrival of daybreak, and the cycle is begun anew.

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140 The prayer rule will vary for each monastic based on instructions from their spiritual father. An example of one such prayer rule is found in *The Way of a Pilgrim*. Initially, the pilgrim is instructed to repeat, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!” three thousand times per day. As he becomes more experienced, this number is raised to six thousand times per day. As the habit is strengthened, the spiritual father instructs him to “repeat the prayer, without fail, twelve thousand times a day” (11).

141 It is imperative to note that hagiographical tales are not understood by monastics as a mere collection of stories. True, they do tell wonderful stories, tales of those born onto purple cloth and those born without threads; those united in matrimony and those who chose celibacy; those in the city and those in the desert; those who shed tears and those who shed blood. Yet reading the church’s hagiography is more than gathering new information about the tales of bygone eras. To read *The Synaxarion* is to be put into contact – mystically – with individuals now departed this earthly life. The men and women whose lives form the hagiographic anthologies are not dead, but rather “have become fellow-citizens with the Angels and brethren of Christ” (“Synaxarion - Vol. I” vii). As such it enables one to have a participatory means in which to partake of a way of life unto holiness. Approaching *The Synaxarion* in this manner, one is met by the fragrant “scent of Paradise” (“Synaxarion - Vol. I” vi), an aroma that is the emanation of holiness. The mystical nature is apparent in words from Hieromonk Makarios, who writes, “The work of our Lord Jesus Christ and even his Person, at once divine and human, are recapitulated and extended in the Church by the lives of the saints through the action of the Holy Spirit” (“Synaxarion - Vol. I” x). It is this action of the Paraclete that manifests grace upon the faithful, and has made *The Synaxarion* of primary importance in monastic teaching. Any attempts to understand the lives of the saints outside of this mystical nature are incomplete in comprehending their significance in the church’s history as a didactic method. For, of course, this is not an education merely of acquiring new information; it is, rather, the very means of acquiring grace and entering into relation with Limitless Love. If one examines the icons and frescoes of the saints, one is struck by the similar nature of their faces. It is as if they have but one face, and, in a mystical sense they do: the face of Christ (“Synaxarion - Vol. I” xi). Their likeness to Christ emanates from the ability to become partakers of the divine nature; they are united to Him in both his suffering and glory. And just as the saints are mystically united with Christ, so too are they mystically united with those who approach them in faith. When one approaches the saint in the spirit of veneration, they are present among the faithful. Their presence is didactic: they teach how to work and how to rest; how to think and how to act; how to read and how to pray. However, the monastics maintain that these lessons are only accessible to those who read or hear the lives of the saints in the spirit of faith and humility. As Hieromonk Makarios observes, “What some people have described as ‘uncertain stories and legends’ are, in fact, the true story of Man in his relation to God that the tradition of the Church brings to us in its own particular way” (“Synaxarion - Vol. I” xviii). Reading the hagiographies illuminates the path which every monastic must trod.

142 Although in this specific instance, Elder Joseph does not specify examples of such texts, from elsewhere in his writings, we find a number of examples. These include, but are not limited to, *The Ascetical Homilies of St Isaac the Syrian*, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, *The Philokalia* and *Holy Scripture*.

143 In this daily cycle, we clearly observe that the Eastern monastics are continually denying the body. How is this behaviour to be understood? Kallistos Ware provides us with a response. The monastic understanding of the human person is holistic; it is “an integral unity of soul and body” (“Church” 274). Striving to attain a deified state thus necessitates the efforts not only of the intellectual faculties but also the bodily members. On account of their holistic
Having observed Elder Joseph’s instructions for how a monastic should pass a twenty-four hour day, we may now highlight some of the primary principles at work: simplicity, poverty, temperance in food and speech, prayer, reading of spiritual books, as well as obedience to one’s spiritual father. What is striking about this list is that in all of these elements, we find very close parallels to the manner of living practiced by St Antony the Great in the fourth century. The Eastern monastics attempt fidelity to the way of life he embodied, and seek to emulate it accordingly. It is these elements that constitute the primary pedagogical principles informing a philosophy of religious education. It is an education not so much of the head, but rather of the heart.¹⁴⁴

This emphasis, of a pedagogy directed to the heart, is the central feature of Eastern monasticism. Indeed, it has been such since the days of the eremitical ascetics in the Egyptian desert. Consider Antony’s words:

“[Some] leave home and cross the seas in order to gain an education, but there is no need for us to go away on account of the Kingdom of God nor need we cross the sea in search of virtue. For the Lord has told us, ‘The kingdom of God is within you.’ All that is needed for goodness is that which is within, the human heart.” (Ward xxii)

Antony’s pedagogical vision is shared by both St Silouan and Elder Joseph. Juxtaposing this approach to education with what developed in the West makes for a sharp contrast. In the West, education developed as a series of intellectual postulates, and pedagogical practice sought to teach according to this aim. St Silouan describes this approach when he states, “The rationalist-theologian is concerned with a multitude of problems whose solution he seeks ... mainly from the rational sphere ... He counts his scientific erudition and intellectual experience as spiritual understanding of the individual, Eastern monks strive to “manifest the spiritual in and through the material” (“Way” 50). It is this belief that contributes toward their ascetic efforts.

¹⁴⁴ Heart understood in this context involves not only a physical, but also a spiritual dimension. It is with the depths of this “immeasurable abyss” that the Eastern monastic is concerned. Upon the sacrament of baptism, it is understood that grace dwells within the heart, and it is here that God is “made manifest” (Elder Joseph 399).
riches” (190). This led to a very specific approach to knowledge acquisition, namely that which consisted “in directing the cognitive faculties outwards” (Silouan 103). However, in the East, a different approach proved sovereign, an approach that sought after knowledge by turning toward “the treasure house that is within” (John Climacus 51). As Silouan maintained, it was an education that “consists not in the manipulation of abstract concepts but in participation in being” (105). The former method concerns itself with Object rather than Person, gives birth to Idea rather than Indwelling, and elevates Reason over Relation.
VI. John Henry Newman’s Pedagogy in Dialogue with Eastern Monasticism

Thus far, we have been focused on pedagogical aims and methodologies evident in the lives of Eastern monastics. In this section we shall seek to use John Henry Newman’s philosophy of education as a lens through which to read this monastic pedagogy. We shall specifically limit Newman’s own pedagogical philosophy to that embodied and expressed in his 1852 discourses at Dublin. The lectures themselves grew out of a desire on the part of Archbishop Paul Cullen of Armagh to found the Catholic University of Ireland. In the ensuing years, this series of talks became known as The Idea of a University. Why do we choose to place Newman in dialogue with our topic? For one, Newman himself once reflected, “From first to last, education ... has been my line” (Pelikan 5). He was immersed in academia – first as a student, and later as teacher and administrator – and had a profoundly pedagogical mind. However, more to the point, he provides a conceptualization of education that was both shaped by – and would come to shape – Western pedagogy. According to Frank Turner, “Thinking and rethinking through Newman’s arguments, values, and presuppositions is to probe the intellectual ... heritage of the West and its transmission” (Newman ix). As such, putting Newman’s discussion on education into dialogue with our topic makes for a stark contrast with that of Eastern monastic perspectives.

a) Knowledge Its Own End

Considering the opening lines from the Preface to Newman’s discourses affords us with an opportunity to discern a very different attitude toward education than what we have

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145 Newman was rector of this institution from 1851-1858 (Pelikan 5).
146 This work was initially published as Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education. Addressed to the Catholics of Dublin (Newman xiii).
147 Newman wrote his Preface on 21 November 1852.
observed in the likes of St Silouan or Elder Joseph. Newman states that the object of education is “intellectual, not moral” (3). Eastern monastics would disagree with this decree; they would reverse such a sentiment, on the grounds that education ought to be concerned not so much with the head as it is with the heart. From his initial point, Newman proceeds to state that the object of education is thus concerned with “the diffusion and extension of knowledge” (5). The very words employed – diffusion and extension – are indicative of demonstrating, yet again, just how greatly East and West diverge. When one thinks of diffusion, one is immediately confronted with thoughts of expansion and outward dissemination. However, this notion is at odds with that found in Eastern monastic practice. It is not a movement outward but inward that is desirable; it is not so much outward propagation as inward concentration toward the heart. At the outset, then, we are struck by these opposite perspectives. The very gazes are oriented in polar directions; the West to objects without, the East to the person within.

Looking, as they do in opposing directions, it is not therefore surprising that their telos of education varies. We have previously identified the end goal of Eastern pedagogy as that which seeks to bring the pupil into communion with God. In short, education’s primary end is to occasion theosis. The Eastern gaze is thus directed toward this deified vision. Newman is oriented toward a different direction and to a different end. What is his telos for education? He writes, “Knowledge is capable of being its own end” (78).148 Newman’s justification for upholding the acquisition of knowledge as pedagogy’s chief end he expresses as follows: “Not to know the relative disposition of things is the state of slaves or children; to have mapped out the Universe is the boast, or at least the ambition, of Philosophy” (85). How would Eastern

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148 Reflecting on the central premise of The Idea of a University, Martha McMackin Garland suggests that Newman’s text “leads to a greater appreciation of learning for its own sake” (281). Therein resides its telos.
monastics respond? We may envision them making a threefold reply. First, they would likely call to mind the dominical teaching that we must “become like little children”\footnote{For the entire passage, see The Gospel According to St Matthew, chapter 18, verse 2.} if we are to attain to the Kingdom of Heaven. Second, they would likely ask why one desires to map out the outer universe while the inner universe goes unknown. Third, it is probable they would question Newman’s rationale regarding philosophy’s ambition. Consider these words, from St Gregory of Sinai: “A true philosopher ... is he who through ascetic purification and noetic contemplation has achieved a direct union with God” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 245, 246). Thus, from an Eastern perspective, philosophy’s ambition differs from Newman’s articulation. Newman understands the ambition as a movement outward toward the things of the universe, whereas the Eastern monastic sees its ambition as a unifying force to experientially partake of the universe within.

Although the gazes may differ, it is interesting to observe how points of divergence are entwined with point of convergence. For example, consider the following passage: “The common sense of mankind has associated the search after truth with seclusion and quiet” (5-6).\footnote{Following Jaroslav Pelikan’s observation that “the university has deep roots ... in the monastery” (45), it is not surprising to find this insistence from Newman on seclusion and quiet. However, we must stress a point here. The monastery which Pelikan has in mind is most certainly a Latin institution. As such, it had become the seat of learning for much of the Middle Ages. As we have noted above, the development of Eastern monasticism, especially through its hesychastic influence, evolved in very different fashion (and thus developed a very different attitude toward education).} In the latter portion of Newman’s statement, we find telling similarities with Eastern attitudes. By way of example, we may consider St Hesychios, who states, “When the heart has acquired stillness it will perceive the heights and depths of knowledge; and the ear of the still intellect will be made to hear marvellous things from God” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 185), as well as St Neilos the Ascetic, who urges us to “embrace solitude, the mother of wisdom” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 231). Eastern monastics have long sought to practice the “seclusion and quiet” of which
Newman speaks. However, there is a telling difference. For Newman, this solitary silence is extolled for its value in assisting one to ascertain truth and become acquainted with one’s own thoughts (Pelikan 65). Eastern monastics would alter this sentiment; it is not so much ascertaining truth as it is being put into relation with Truth. In the former, truth is an objective entity that corresponds with reality; in the latter, Truth is a Person with whom one enters into relation.151

b) Newman’s Pedagogical Approach

Further differences become apparent when we examine Newman’s pedagogical approach. For example, this is evident regarding the merits of employing ideas from individuals who lie outside of Christianity. Speaking specifically of Roman Catholicism, Newman states, “The Church has ever appealed and deferred to witnesses and authorities external to herself” (17). And, of course, the development of Latin Christendom bears witness to the veracity of this claim. This is not to suggest that Western theology was corrupted by such practice; there are numerous instances whereby it was strengthened in power and beauty by such inclusion. Such external authorities should not be understood as a corrupting influence on the faith, for, as G.K. Chesterton notes, “St Thomas did not reconcile Christ to Aristotle; he reconciled Aristotle to Christ” (10). However, yet again, we are struck by a difference in emphasis between East and West. We are not for a moment suggesting that Eastern theology, and specifically much of the Patristic literature emanating from the East, is devoid of Platonic or Aristotelian concepts. These emphases may be noted. What must be stressed, however, is the emphasis and frequency of such appeals to external authorities. In all of St Silouan’s writings, we are unable to observe a single reference to witnesses and authorities external to the Orthodox Church. There are no records of

151 By way of contextualization, see The Gospel According to St John, chapter 14, verse 6.
occasions when Elder Joseph urged another individual to take recourse to such literature or thinkers. One most frequently finds Eastern monastics reticent on this matter, but, if not silent, then often antithetical to their employment. By way of example, consider St John of Karpathos, who refers to such knowledge as that derivative of “secular learning ... that we have already renounced” (“Philokalia - Vol. I” 301). For hesychastic practitioners, their simple way of life, a life of prayer, affords no room for such learning. For Eastern monastics, their “witnesses” are the Saints; their “authorities” are Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

At this point, a word must be spoken with respect to differing approaches to theology in East and West. Newman advocates teaching theology. “Religious doctrine is knowledge, in as full a sense as Newton’s doctrine is knowledge. University Teaching without Theology is simply unphilosophical. Theology has at least as good a right to claim a place there as Astronomy” (40). Standing as he does in the Latin tradition, Newman articulates a preference for cataphatic theology. This is sometimes referred to as positive theology or the way of affirmation, and stands in contrast to an apophatic theology – favoured by Eastern monastics – often known as negative theology or the way of negation (Lossky 25). The primary difference between the two is that cataphatic theology seeks to provide affirmations of the divine, whereas apophatic theology employs negations. Eastern monastics hold that by the nature of God’s transcendence, any cataphatic statements “about God become gravely misleading”152 (Ware, “Way” 14). The mystical theology employed in the East holds that only through unknowing may one come to knowledge of the divine (Lossky 25). Writing in the seventh century, St Maximos the Confessor expresses his preference for the way of negation.

152 It would be both uncharitable and unfair to suggest that Newman is unaware of this danger. He acknowledges, “What we do not know and cannot even imagine of Him, is far more wonderful than what we do and can” (52).
If you theologize in a negative or apophatic manner, through the stripping away of positive attributes, you make the Logos spirit or God as He was in His principal state with God: starting from absolutely none of the things that can be known, you come in an admirable way to know Him who transcends unknowing. (“Philokalia - Vol. II” 147)

It is not to our purposes to examine these two approaches in greater detail, nor is it for us to pass judgment on the merits of the cataphatic and apophatic ways. What is more to our purpose, however, is to note that even in the very approach taken toward theology, East and West are separated by a chasm.

Although approaches may at times vary, Newman identifies one premise that is maintained by East and West alike: “All knowledge forms one whole” (45). Borrowing from St Maximos once again, there is a “single unifying light” that may be gathered into a knowledge that is “one simple, true and pure” (“Philokalia - Vol. II” 280). That final word – pure – raises an important question. If the sum of knowledge makes a unified whole, what does this say for the presence of evil in the world? This is a question that both East and West must answer; and, as they agreed on the original premise on the unity of knowledge, so too do they agree on a response to the query. Both willingly assert that everything that exists comes from God. Yet if this unified whole is intrinsically good, and evil exists, does it not follow that evil also comes from God? Clearly this question, if answered in the affirmative, raises serious problems about a God understood to be Limitless Love. Naturally for Christians – of both East and West – the latter question must be answered in the negative. The rationale is that evil does not exist. John Henry Newman explains how this can be so. “Evil has no substance of its own, but is only the defect, excess, perversion, or corruption of that which has substance” (53). In making this articulation, Newman follows Patristic writers of both East and West (Ware, “Way” 47). St Silouan maintains that “evil, in the literal sense does not, and cannot exist” (117). Silouan
appears to be echoing the Cappadocians in their assertion that evil “is not a substance in its own right” (Ware, “Way” 47). Whether we agree with this line of reasoning or no, the primary aim in mentioning it here has been to indicate that on this point – the unity inherent in knowledge – East and West do share a common ground.

Yet even here this concurrence in belief is tenuous at best. Both East and West will share Newman’s assertion that “all branches of knowledge are connected together” (77). Surely this is why the future Cardinal is so adamant that various disciplines be cultivated at a university. On Newman’s reasoning, Mathematics and Medicine, Astronomy and Political Economy, Law and Literature, must all be taught because they constitute parts of a whole. Yet this very approach returns us yet again to the traditional Western approach to pedagogy – directing the senses outward. As we have observed above, for Eastern monastics, the focus of study is not outward but inward; they seek to explore the inner universe of the heart. For the monk, there is but one subject of study, that of the heart. Any knowledge divorced as it were from self-knowledge, 153

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153 In reading the Eastern monastic tradition through Newman’s lens, what becomes apparent is that there are two very different understandings of knowledge between East and West. The latter affirmed that different forms of knowledge may self-exist. It also acknowledged an externality of this knowledge. What accounts for how the West came to understand knowledge? Being infused with Aristotelian concepts led to a belief that “the study of the humblest fact [could] lead to the study of the highest truth” (Chesterton 66). On this view, conceptual analysis and reasoning are both important elements of education. And note well how one’s understanding of knowledge engenders very different perspectives on education. What is it that the Eastern monastic strives to know? In contrast with the scholastic learning of the West, how is it to be known? Also, how will it be transmitted from one generation to the next? The mystical nature of Eastern theology makes answers to these questions somewhat difficult to come by. However, in response to the first, we may take recourse to a saying recorded by St Peter of Damaskos, “Gain possession of God within yourself” (“Philokalia – Vol. III” 100). In short, the monk strives to know God (not in His essence, but rather His energies). Such knowledge is occasioned experientially; the Psalter’s, “Taste and see,” is ubiquitous throughout their writings. Experiential knowledge, from an Eastern view, necessitates self-suffering and ascetic efforts. The monk must yearn and strive for such knowledge. According to St Silouan, “There is no comfortable armchair in the study for the monk ... In the silence of the night, remote from the world, unheard and unseen, he falls down before God and weeps the prayer of the publican, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner,’ or cries with St Peter, ‘Lord, save me’” (166). As for our final question – that of transmission – we must turn our attention the elder, “a monk of spiritual discernment and wisdom, whom others ... adopt as their guide and spiritual director” (Ware, “Church” 39). Those under an elder must conduct their lives in obedience to his precepts and emulation of his actions. Such pedagogy will inevitably prove ascetic in nature, as the elder strives to direct the spiritual child to the God within.
will never receive sanction from the monastics. According to St Symeon the New Theologian, “Anyone who thinks himself intelligent because of his scholarly or scientific learning will never be granted insight into divine mysteries” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 46-7). Symeon asserts that immersion in the divine mysteries cannot be occasioned through logic, reasoning, prose or poetry. Such knowledge necessitates the guidance and illumination of the divine, located, according to monastics within the heart. Who is the teacher of the things of the heart? For the one able to go within, Symeon tells us, “He will then be taught by God” (“Philokalia - Vol. IV” 47).

Throughout his work, Newman espouses his preference for liberal education, and he remains faithful to his belief that education’s aim is the dissemination of knowledge. For Newman, the university serves as the storehouse of knowledge, and from this repository must come its diffusion. He divorced the function of teaching from discovery (4), and with respect to intellectual discoveries, he viewed such enterprises as beyond pedagogy’s purview. According to Frank M. Turner, Newman could not conceive of education’s role as giving birth to new ideas or concepts, and in fact his text demonstrates that he was “largely uninterested in new knowledge” (284). This reluctance toward the genesis of new knowledge on the part of the pupil led Newman to an educational theory which upheld the teacher as the depositor of knowledge. Sara Castro-Klarén argues that in Newman’s pedagogical vision, the student “passively receives the teacher’s elaboration, inclusion, exclusion, interpretation, and disposition of knowledge” (323). This view holds knowledge to be a fixed entity. The teacher occupies the position of authority, imparting knowledge to the pupil who is merely a passive recipient. How would Eastern monastics respond to this pedagogical perspective? On the one hand, there is an element
of agreement. Theirs is a pedagogy that seeks neither discovery nor novelty. Theirs is a pedagogy that seeks to be faithful to the words of the Prophet Jeremiah: “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.”\textsuperscript{154} Yet on the other hand, their agreement can be at most partial. Here, as elsewhere in their theology, a paradox is at work. For Eastern monastics, education necessitates inquiry on the part of the pupil. The student can never be merely a passive recipient, but must act as an active agent in the process. It is an inquiry into the human heart and, upholding the uniqueness of all humans, such inquiry must inevitably lead to new knowledge; they seek not “knowledge itself,” but rather “knowledge of self.” Thus, although they concur with the Prophet Jeremiah’s decree about walking in accordance with established paths, they are every aware of the Prophet Isaiah’s exclamatory decree giving voice to the Lord: “Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”\textsuperscript{155} For the Eastern monastic, on account of this “new thing,” a heart of wilderness becomes cultivated; a heart of desert expanse becomes fertile ground.

We have previously observed that, for Newman, knowledge serves as its own end. However, he does proceed to elaborate on his initial statement, assigning a somewhat more pragmatic rationale for pedagogy. “If then a practical end must be assigned to [education] ... I say it is that of training good members of society” (125).\textsuperscript{156} In this statement, one cannot help but note an anticipation of the sentiment expressed by the Squire in Tom Brown’s Schooldays shortly before he sends Tom off to Rugby. “If only he’ll turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling

\textsuperscript{154} The passage comes from The Book of Jeremiah, chapter 6, verse 16.
\textsuperscript{155} The passage comes from The Book of Isaiah, chapter 43, verse 19.
\textsuperscript{156} According to Jaroslav Pelikan, Newman clearly held that education had a duty toward the betterment of society, of positive improvement at local, national and international levels (138).
Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian, that’s all I want” (Hughes 74). This meditation embodies Newman’s desire, namely that pedagogical institutions will give birth to individuals who shall serve as productive members of society. At first blush, to attend to Eastern monasticism, with its prototype of a desert hermit living out a solitary existence, one may be tempted to conclude that nothing could be further from Newman’s vision than the life of the anchorite. Yet upon closer inspection, when we attend to their manner of living and the articulation of their beliefs, we may find that they are – in their own way – living in accordance with the ideal of the productive societal member. Surely their productivity and worth will not be found in any contemporary index of such benefits. They will, for example, do little to enhance a country’s gross domestic profit. However, by living a life of love, by shedding tears for all humanity, by praying day and night for the eternal salvation of all, we may conclude that perhaps, in their own way, they have become “good members of society.”¹⁵⁷ In this sense, both Eastern and Western approaches are conducive to the enrichment of human life.

Throughout this section, we have often referred to putting Newman in dialogue with Eastern monasticism, and on numerous occasions, have sought to give voice to possible articulations made by these monastics. However, such a methodology may have been slightly misleading. Abhorring “too much intellectualization” (Braga 35), it is probable that the Eastern monastic practice of simplicity would have rendered the monks reticent. If a response were given, it would likely not have been, “Let us discuss,” but rather, “Let us pray” (Braga 69). Their pedagogy cannot be divorced from their prayer, and, as such, all linguistic efforts to delineate their educational beliefs substitute postulations for prayer (i.e. substitute theory for

¹⁵⁷ Of course, others may very well arrive at a different conclusion, namely that Eastern monastics are using social wealth for non-social ends. In this sense, they would be parasitic at best.
relation). Perhaps the experience of Archimandrite Roman Braga describes this best. Imprisoned under Romania’s Communist government in the twentieth century, Archimandrite Roman spent over a decade incarcerated. Of this time, approximately three years were spent in solitary confinement. Archimandrite Roman refers to this as “the best theological institute” (51) he could ever have attended. Deprived of so much as a pencil and paper or books to read, it forced his orientation within; there was nowhere else to go. What was the corollary of this interior journey? “You discover God there” (Braga 97).
VII. Conclusion

Let us conclude by hearkening back to the Egyptian desert of the fourth century. Returning once again to Scetis, we observe a simple and humble anchorite, John the Short, living his life in meekness and humility. Although diminutive in stature, he was a giant in virtue. The externals of his life give us little to record, but we are told he lived a life of peaceful solitude, faithfully seeking “to be united to God through constant prayer” (“Synaxarion - Vol. II” 79). Steadfast in the practice of asceticism, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* records a teaching attributed to John the Short (Ward 6). In this passage, John invents for us a man who had attained perfection in the practice of every virtue. He tells us that such an individual would be patient and loving, temperate in speech and not given to overindulgence in food, live a life of voluntary poverty and continually pray for the salvation of the world.

In its brevity and simplicity, this teaching outlines the central features of the monastic life we have observed throughout this thesis. Antony the Great, John of the Ladder, Gregory Palamas, Silouan the Athonite and Elder Joseph the Hesychast are all marked by the humility, simplicity and love manifest in John the Short. To make this summary as succinct as possible, these individuals sought union with God (i.e. *theosis*), and this union was occasioned by ascetic acts and the practice of the virtues (i.e. *praxis*). In this is found the fullness of Eastern monasticism’s *telos* and pedagogical methodology.

We may be tempted to ask ourselves the following question: Why does all of this matter? In our consumer-driven and urbanized world, surely it is both unrealistic and untenable to suppose that people will live in accordance with monastic principles. And what importance does this hold for education? How can St Antony’s solitary existence in the Egyptian desert so long
ago possibly shape pedagogy in a meaningful way? What do Elder Joseph’s nocturnal vigils have to do with informing educational theory? These questions – and the multitude of related queries derived from the ideas presented in this thesis – are important to be both asked and answered. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address these queries. Rather than respond to these questions, we shall simply express the following hopes.

At the very least, Eastern monasticism’s pedagogy serves as a reminder that there is more to education than standardized testing and data-driven instruction; it is not only the head, but also the heart that must develop, and such development is neither nourished nor quantified as easily as some may think. With respect to the monastics, may we attend to their silence, emulate their humility and be captivated by their love. We do not wish to be given to unbridled or unwarranted enthusiasm, but perhaps we can go even further. Our monastic pedagogy reacquaints us with the teachings of an ancient Pedagogue, one who states, “I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”158 In accordance with this sentiment, the lives and teachings of Eastern monasticism demonstrate that wisdom is found in simplicity, abundance in poverty, and fulfillment in denial.

Works Cited


