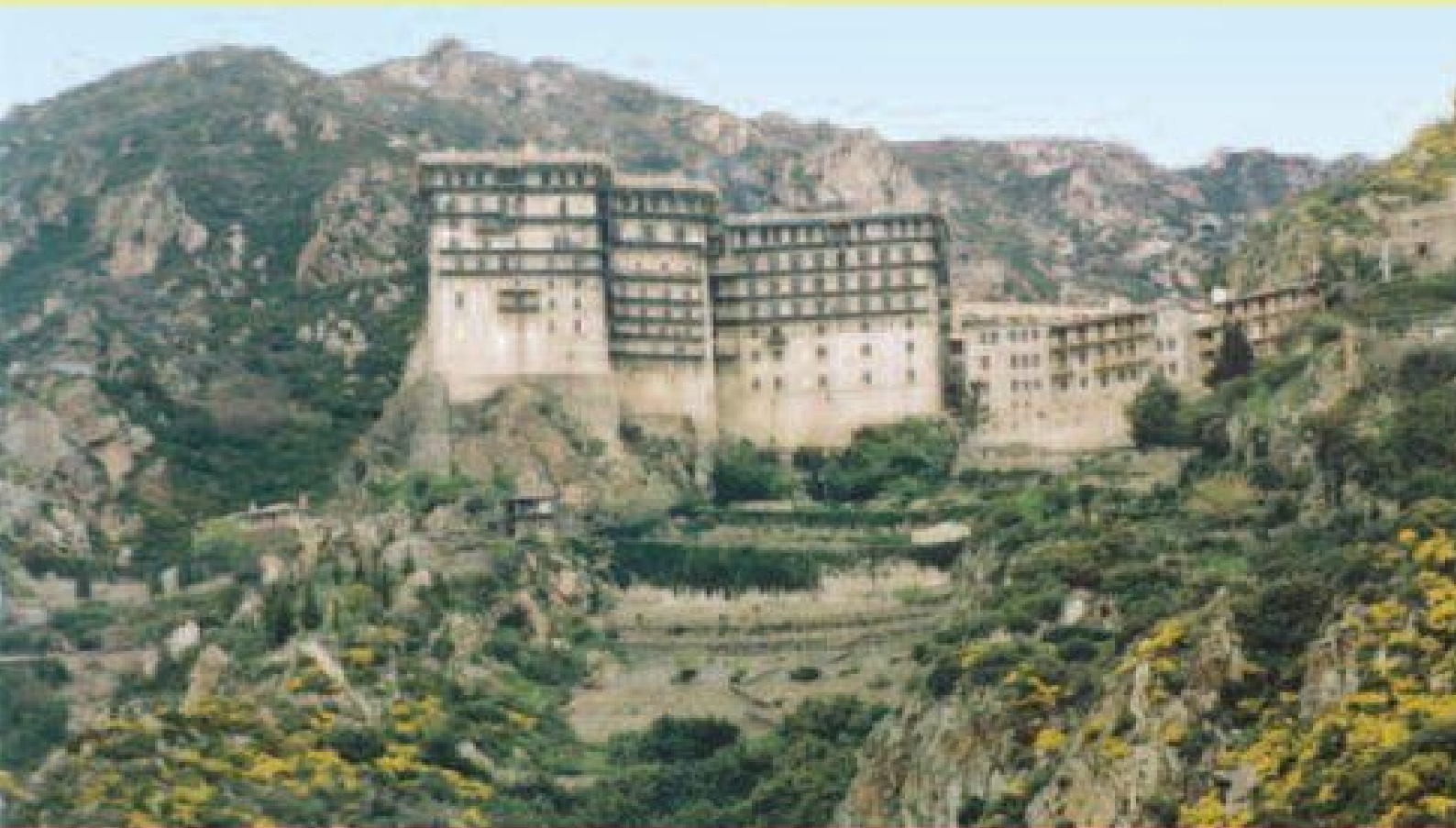


# The Monks of Mount Athos

A Western Monk's  
Extraordinary Spiritual Journey  
on Eastern Holy Ground



M. Basil Pennington, ocsa  
Foreword by Archimandrite Dionysios

# The Monks of Mount Athos

A Western Monk's  
Extraordinary Spiritual Journey  
on Eastern Holy Ground



M. Basil Pennington, ocsso  
Foreword by Archimandrite Dionysios

---

# The Monks of Mount Athos

A Western Monk's  
Extraordinary Spiritual Journey  
on Eastern Holy Ground

M. Basil Pennington, OCSO  
Foreword by Archimandrite Dionysios

*Walking Together, Finding the Way*  
SKYLIGHT PATHS Publishing  
Woodstock, Vermont

*The Monks of Mount Athos:*

*A Western Monk's Extraordinary Spiritual Journey on Eastern Holy Ground*

---

2010 Quality Paperback Edition, Second Printing

© 2003 by M. Basil Pennington

Foreword © 2003 by Archimandrite Dionysios

Originally published in part as *O Holy Mountain! Journal of a Retreat on Mount Athos* by Doubleday © 1978.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information regarding permission to reprint material from this book, please mail or fax your request in writing to SkyLight Paths Publishing, Permissions Department, at the address / fax number listed below, or e-mail your request [permissions@skylightpaths.com](mailto:permissions@skylightpaths.com).

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following for permission to use previously copyrighted material: Cistercian Publications, William of Saint Thierry's *Golden Epistle*. Scripture texts used in this work are taken from the *New American Bible* © 1970 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., by permission of copyright owner. All rights reserved.

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Pennington, M. Basil.

The monks of Mount Athos: a western monk's extraordinary spiritual journey on eastern holy ground / by Father M. Basil Pennington; foreword by Archimandrite Dionysios.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-1-893361-78-2 (quality pbk.)

ISBN-10: 1-893361-78-0 (quality pbk.)

1. Pennington, M. Basil—Diaries. 2. Cistercians—United States—Diaries. 3. Athos (Greece) I. Title.

BX4705.P423A3 2003

271'.81949565—dc21

2002154857

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Manufactured in the United States of America

SkyLight Paths Publishing is creating a place where people of different spiritual traditions come together for challenge and inspiration, a place where we can help each other understand the mystery that lies at the heart of our existence.

SkyLight Paths sees both believers and seekers as a community that increasingly transcends traditional boundaries of religion and denomination—people wanting to learn from each other, *walking together, finding the way*.

SkyLight Paths, "*Walking Together, Finding the Way*," and colophon are trademarks of LongHill Partners, Inc., registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Walking Together, Finding the Way®

Published by SkyLight Paths Publishing

A Division of LongHill Partners, Inc.

Sunset Farm Offices, Route 4, P.O. Box 237

Woodstock, VT 05091

Tel: (802) 457-4000 Fax: (802) 457-4004

[www.skylightpaths.com](http://www.skylightpaths.com)

---

To Archimandrite Aemilianos  
and his sons,  
with gratitude

Foreword by Archimandrite Dionysios

Preface to the Jubilee Edition

Before: An Introduction

1. First Days

2. Simonos Petras

3. Stavronikita

4. Aghios Panteleimonos

5. Back at Simonos Petras

6. The Feast

7. Ormia

8. The Light of Tabor

9. Around the Mountain

10. Last Days on the Mountain

11. Rome

Glossary

*About SkyLight Paths*

*Copyright*





As the staff of Moses struck the rock of Rephidim (Exod.17:1–7) at Sinai or the mythologic Athenian spear the boulder of the Acropolis, the desire, thought, and persistence over a five-month period of the Reverend Dom M. Basil Pennington of St. Joseph’s Abbey, Spencer, Massachusetts, that I write the foreword to the jubilee edition of his book *O Holy Mountain!* being reprinted with the title *The Monks of Mount Athos*, struck my heart, constrained by the desire more resolute than granite that this foreword be written by my Elder—who shines more brightly than “fine gold and topaz” (Ez. 1:18:127) tried in the dewy furnace (Dan. 3:24–25) of the extreme affliction of his health, as radiant as ever, even from the womb of his mother. And thus, inasmuch as it falls to me, I render the admiration due to this man, Father Basil Pennington, blessed according to his intention and his effort to the end as mighty as a cedar of Lebanon, the meek, gentle (Is. 66:2), and perfect disciple and friend of the last mystic theologian and poet of the Western Church, that monk in America, Thomas Merton.

It was in 1973 that Father Basil Pennington telephoned us at the Sacred Monastery of Great Meteoron, dedicated to the Transfiguration (1340 A.D.), the first of the group of ancient monasteries and hermitages on the rocky cliffs of Thessaly collectively called the Meteora. He was then in England, where he got to know one of our novices, a post-graduate student at King’s College, London while presiding at the “Orthodox-Cistercian Symposium” at Oxford University. He called to ask the blessing of our Elder and Abbot, the Very Reverend Archimandrite Father Aemilianos, to come and stay with us for a period of time at Meteora, if possible.

To be sure, the daily waves of pilgrims and visitors arriving at Meteora were incessant, even the monks and guests were never lacking at our monastery, as many from abroad as from Greece. But a long-term visit by an important Roman Catholic clergyman had never before taken place at our monastery, or at any other monastery in Greece.

Father Basil came and stayed, participating in all the life of the brotherhood, quietly serving in his tranquil tasks, first in attendance at all the services, courteous and careful, cheerful and ready to hear, to learn, to absorb, to ask with his eyes and with his manner, what it was that was being performed and what was hidden in Christ within every event of our lives at the Great Meteoron; what was the Lord’s will for him. For in essence the Lord’s Prayer teaches us to seek His will in every moment, as St. Gregory the Theologian says in his first Oration, “We ought to think of God even more often than we draw our breath.”

All the while Father Basil was keeping notes in his heart, but also in his “tablets” and papers, like the good monk whom St. John Climacus describes in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, who continually confesses, keeping his notepad and pencil in his belt, to record some of all that was registering in front of him or within him, out of the marvelous Taboric beauty of the Great Meteoron and all the Meteora from the spiritual cloud (1 Cor. 10:1–2) that, through the teachings of our Abba, our Elder and Archimandrite Aemilianos, was washing over us and leading us up to noetic heights, to the Cloud of Unknowing, as St. Dionysios the Areopagite describes it in his work *On Mystical Theology*. And again, oftentimes we were washed also in the cloud from heaven after the showers, of which even the ranges of the proud portal of the Pindos Mountains across the way, called the Koziakas, were jealous.

The fully frescoed royal catholicon of our monastery (the original structure was built by the blessed Athanasios, former Hagiorite and thereafter Meteoran, together with his disciple the glorious king and most esteemed among Monks, Ioasaph, and composes only the altar area in the magnificent Byzantine-style church as it was later enlarged by the hegumen Symeon); the regiment of holy Relics; the services night and day; the vigils and night liturgies; the extremely bare Refectory; the intense ascetic life devoid of even rudimentary comforts; the company of the eagles; the cave of our Elder



where that great man, our father, spent hours every day and especially his nights, interceding to the Lord with sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8:26, 33) for the sight and vision (Num. 24:4) of Him, likewise his spiritual children from my birthplace of Trikala and its environs, from all of Greece and from abroad, like soaring eagles coming for confession, as the first fruits (Rom. 11:16) of the Lord's generation, beginning with my first brothers there, the Monks Silouan, Theoktistos, Gervasio, Ioustinos, Hesychios, Bessarion, Prochorus, Tychon, Mitrophanes, and Athanasios, the little leaven (Matt. 13:33) for an entire dough, the little flock (Luke 12:32) under our shepherd becoming a great flock—all were a fathomless font of faith unto a renewed spiritual baptism for our visiting dignitary, Father Basil Pennington.

The tenderness, discretion, forethought, and love of our Elder gave the blessing such that, according to the practice of the Roman Catholic Church, Father Basil could perform his liturgy alone in his cell. This naturally deepened Father Basil's trust in the person of our Elder and in his "freedom of ethos" (C. Yannaras, trans. Briere, *The Freedom of Morality*). Thus it happened that Father Basil, at the conclusion of the very first Divine Liturgy he attended, came quickly, after everyone else, like a thirsty hart (Ps. 41:1) to receive antidoron (a morsel of unconsecrated bread taken from the same loaf as the eucharistic host and distributed to all the Orthodox faithful, after or instead of receiving the Holy Eucharist) from the hand of my Elder, the celebrant. At that moment, I was holding the platter of antidoron with my left hand, and with my right I signaled to him fraternally, conveying that which the glance of my Elder was simultaneously signaling to me, namely, not to come forward to receive antidoron; and he returned to his stall with rejoicing, humility, and full comprehension. A year earlier in July of 1972 at the Duomo of Florence, Italy, where we were with professors and graduates of the Theological School of the University of Athens, the cardinal who was celebrating had approached me with the chalice for Communion. Ultimately, though, it is sincerity, love, and responsibility for the others that constitute the mystical holy communion-spoon capable of transmitting to them the precious pearl (Matt. 13:46), Christ. This truth delighted the monks of the Roman Catholic monastic communities of the ancient monasteries in France when, twenty years ago, my Elder was visiting the branches of our Monastery of Simonos Petras, Mount Athos, and at their request he spoke to them of the concrete pre-conditions for the Common Chalice. At the end they were thanking him with tears of joy and kissing his hands for his boldness, which in fact was his tender loving care and the expression of the liberating (John 8:32) truth.

Our Elder's Elder, Dionysios, the modern confessor of the faith and Metropolitan of Trikkis and Stagon, from his childhood lived as a monk at St. Athanasios' Great Lavra on the Holy Mountain, where he slept with St. John Chrysostom's books in his arms (Metropolitan Dionysios of Trikkis and Stagon, *Martyrs* [Damaskos, Athens, 1949], the diary of his incarceration at the concentration camp of Dachau). It was he who established our Elder and us, his offspring, on the precipice of the Great Meteoron. But after the breath of the Holy Spirit took us up (Ps. 79:8) from the Meteora and transplanted us like a grapevine upon the rock of St. Simon the Myrrh-gusher on the Holy Mountain, Father Basil hastened to surrender himself for many months of 1976 to our life there, and from there, as from a springboard, he traversed all of the Holy Mountain with humility, seeking after God and His will.

It is a divine gift for someone to be able to use, which means to sacrifice, his time. We human beings are afraid to sacrifice a glance, a word, a thought, a visit, a sojourn, an act of communication, a meeting, a reference, an expectation, indeed an "eager longing" (Rom. 8:19) for the Holy Spirit or for the other person emerging out of the abyss (Ps. 41:7) of his own being. We calculate the time for everything myopically, regardless of what is in our interest eternally. Yet Father Basil, in this aforementioned quest of his, did not hesitate to leave his writings; the monasteries he had all over the world; his spiritual children and his disciples; his lectures and books; his serene life at Spencer Abbe

where he had gathered together the stones with his own hands like St. Pachomios, laid foundations and raised up the monastery together with his disciple monks, showing it forth as the largest and most dynamic Roman Catholic community of America, in order to come to the Holy Mountain for such a long period of time. He aimed to cast off every interior impediment in order to seize (Matt. 11:12) and heavenly message.

At that time the outward conditions of daily life in the Holy Mountain were no less rugged than they had been during all the previous centuries of monastic life, which life Father Basil, out of deep existential nostalgia, lived with the zeal of an authentic lifelong novice monk, praying, studying, and working together, undistracted by any worldly communication. With a disciple's spirit he would hurry to the synaxes and catechisms granted to us by our Elder and characterized by the rich, neptic, and seasoned words inspired by God in his homilies, which comprise whole volumes capable of attracting and nurturing a multitude of lovers of the divine life, timelessly, beyond the frontiers (Archimandrite Aemilianos, *Catechisms and Homilies 1–4: The Authentic Seal*, 1995; *Life in the Spirit*, 1998; *O Come Let Us Sing to the Lord*, 1999; *Divine Worship: Expectation and Vision of God*, 2001 [Ormylia, Greece: Ormylia Publishing]).

It was to Father Basil's deep pleasure as often as our Elder responded to his obvious desire for personal communication and time with him, not as much posing questions as enjoying, or rather undergoing, the neptic and mystical initiation of the Holy Spirit, something which made him stand before the Elder with the comprehension and the sensation of blessed Ephraim the Syrian when he found himself in the presence of Basil the Great (described by Gregory of Nyssa in his *Encomium of Our Holy Father Ephraim*). His spirit, his soul, his heart, his eyes, his memory, all of him became a sponge to soak up and to not miss even a second or a single movement of the Elder, that generator and patriarch of contemporary monasticism. From within himself he was irrepressibly drawn to be initiated, to be inspired, to commit himself, and like Basil the Great, who visited all the monasteries of his time, to collect the honey of the angelic life of the monks, storing up a treasure which cannot be stolen (Luke 12:33), and capable of enriching innumerable persons, out of the wealth that he tried to record and depict.

We deeply appreciate the change in title of the present book from *O Holy Mountain!* to *The Monks of Mount Athos*. We perceive it as Father Basil's greatest veneration toward the monks of the Holy Mountain, both new and old, who "transformed the wilderness into a Sanctuary," in the words of our contemporary blessed man of the Holy Mountain, our neighbor also by virtue of his birthplace of Theban soil, Father Ephraim Katounakiotes. From the depths of his profoundly monastic innermost personality, Father Basil sought to see Christ in the face of every Hagiorite monk—or of even just one monk, as he did see Him in the eyes of my Elder. And as the bride in the Song of Songs (2:5) laments spiritually, "I am wounded by love," so also his heart was and still is wounded by love for the monks of the Holy Mountain. He perpetually recalls them to mind and reflects on them in memory, visiting them in his soul and in his prayer, to imitate ones such as the very reverend perennial monk, Elder Theokletos Dionysiates—that writer even more prolific than himself and on a level with the "new Chrysostom of the Church," St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite—in order to touch that mystical grace which God grants to all those who seek Him, His friends and His intimates. And these, the monks, are primarily martyrs of conscience, ready like soldiers "with their loins girded about" (Luke 12:35), who through their silence and their authentic, voluntary renunciation and subjection, possess "words of eternal life" (John 6:68) for "all those who ask" (1 Pet. 3:15), belonging to Christ alone, and thus, for all. Rather than negating the place allotted to the Holy Virgin, the sacred mountain peninsula of Athos which Xerxes himself could not master and Alexander the Great spared so that it might be given to Christ the true King, the monks keep it in night watches (Luke 2:8), courageously bearing the icy cold of winter and the blistering heat of the day, "in mountains and caves and dens of the earth" (Heb.

11:38), and as “ripe grape clusters” and select wheat from heaven, they likewise bear the person pulverization that comes of community life, all for the sanctification, blessing, and salvation of world which is bleeding—unsacrificially. Such monks unassumingly constitute “the voice of man waters” (Rev. 1:15, 19:6) toward all the churches under heaven, for “abandoning the first love” (Rev. 2:4), in order that Christ’s anxiety not be increased in His asking: “when the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Father Basil’s great joy was his every moment there on the peak of St. Simon, across from the peak of Athos, in a space which his love and trust for the Elder and his children defined, prepared, gave meaning to, blessed, and granted to him. He knew that he was living there a honeymoon of many moons, which he would have liked never to end. But the Roman Catholic Church in America would have been poorer and without the resource that it has now in his person, and so he had to return there where he is the joy and inspiration of his monks; where on planes and trains and whenever they have the chance, Americans are reading his books and again expecting others, the others, always, like the new wine in Cana which seeks the new wineskins (John 2:3–10; Matt. 9:17).

The hour came for him to leave. And like the final gesture of Anthony the Great to Athanasios recounted by Athanasios in his *Life of Anthony the Great* (“distribute my clothing; and to Bishop Athanasios give the one sheepskin and the cloak on which I lie...”), he left with me his felt coat returning to America with only his cassock, never forgetting all that he saw, all that he heard, all that he felt, and all that rose up in his heart (1 Cor. 2:9), living for such a long period near a contemporary saint. And returning to his own, he published this book in 1978, dedicating it to our Elder Aemilianos and his spiritual children.

For our Elder, Father Basil was a precious friend and brother; and that is why from the time he left the Elder was always asking me, “When will Father Basil come back?”

In October of 1980, invited by the former Archbishop of North and South America Iakovos, I had the opportunity to meet with our old acquaintance Metropolitan Silas of New Jersey, of blessed memory. When I entered his office, the Metropolitan received me with a copy of *O Holy Mountain!* in his hands. On his own initiative, and without my knowledge, he had arranged a seat for me on a flight to Boston, saying, “This man has written about you in his book, and you won’t go to see him!” Metropolitan Silas also contacted the Dean of Holy Cross School of Theology in Boston, the Reverend Father Alkiviades Calivas, a devout Levite of the Lord whose teaching and deanship have shaped both the history of the Theological School and the souls of its students. Father Alkiviades had vibrant dreams and great zeal for Orthodox monasticism and the future of America, which were sparked within him from the time of his first pilgrimage to Great Meteoron, together with other Greek American priests, in July of 1971. That was our first acquaintance and spiritual connection in Christ. He was waiting for me at the Boston airport to drive me to St. Joseph’s Abbey at Spencer to visit its founder, Father Basil Pennington.

On the way to the monastery I saw all the colors of the rainbow and more, not in the sky but right and left on the hills and valleys embellished with the variegated fallen autumn leaves of the beautiful thick woods. Our car raced towards Spencer.

Father Basil and Father Damianos welcomed me and I stayed that day, participating in the life of the brotherhood, especially during their night-time service. Beforehand, with much love, they had given me a tour of all the spaces and kinds of work in the monastery, including the barns and fields where the cleanliness, order, and good housekeeping silently spoke of a preparation and thirst for blessing like so many loaves prepared for offering in the liturgy. Before I departed Father Basil gave me a white sheepskin for the prostrations in the cell, along with the first American-made cloth vestments for our Elder and my brothers at Simonopetra, from their sewing room.

In the summer of 1999, when I was passing through New York, invited by the Metropolitan of

Panama Athenagoras of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in order to found a monastery in Mexico, Father Basil went to the effort of coming to speak in the great hall of Holy Trinity Church, New Rochelle, New York, at the celebration organized by our spiritual children in America for the thirtieth anniversary of my monastic tonsure at Great Meteoron on August 17, 1969. Father Basil was enthusiastic and moved, seeing “mighty men” (1 Chron. 5:24) wishing to see resurrected the longstanding yearning of the former Archbishop Iakovos for the well-known St. Basil’s Academy at Garrison, New York, to become a monastery at last, with the help of our hieromonk Chrysostom, a Chicago native and graduate of Hellenic College who studied in the Holy Cross Theological School in Boston and served our Elder for years as a monk. For in March of 1982, having called me as confessor to the aforementioned Hellenic College and Holy Cross Theological School, Archbishop Iakovos with his Synodal Hierarchs and Archons had proposed that I shoulder the planting of Orthodox monasticism in America, but I remained steadfast in my course of returning to my Elder, even though the Archbishop persistently reiterated this request, by sending Metropolitan Silas and the patrologist Professor Panagiotes Christou to Simonopetra in July of that same year, 1982, bearing an olive branch. Naturally, Father Basil was aware of these antecedents. And since the Roman Catholic monastery of the Capuchin Order dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary on the banks of the great Hudson River across from the United States Military Academy at West Point, neighboring St. Basil’s was being sold in 1999, while this was the very monastery, more magnificent than any other of its genre, where Father Basil spent some time as a young man when deciding to become a monk, I promptly wrote to the then President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Christian Unity, his friend Edward Cardinal Cassidy, seeking to facilitate this process. Negotiations for the monastery proper were already being carried out on behalf of the Dalai Lama, whose circles however did eventually obtain it.

Still Father Basil’s heart would not rest. In March of 2002, on the very day that the Metropolitan of Atlanta Alexios invited us in writing to found a monastery in his area, Father Basil, then still abbot of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit at Conyers near Atlanta, Georgia, was writing to us that he wanted to become neighbors, ready even to forgo title to an expanse of property for this purpose, certainly without any prior knowledge of the Metropolitan’s parallel initiative.

As Father Basil sails through his eighth decade, we fraternally wish that the Lord will grant him even more decades, with health, strength, transparency, and purity, “setting his mind on things that are above” (Col. 3:2). And being as he is lofty in stature like Athos itself, may he perceive with his natural and spiritual antennae, like Moses at Sinai (Exod. 19:2) and the Prophet Elias at Horeb (3 Kings 19:12), the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, which through even one person, can breathe life into the world so that it becomes peaceful. We need this now more than ever before, as the drums of war within and without (2 Cor. 7:5) sound ever more loudly, deafeningly, because they “that be judges of the ends of the earth, that rule the people, and glory in the multitude of nations, for power is given them of the Lord, and sovereignty from the Highest” (Wisdom of Sol. 6:1–3), do not want, and thus make excuses (Ps. 140:4) that they are not able, to communicate and attain to one mind. Meanwhile the Church goes on without pause, praying intensively “for the peace of the whole world” (The petition of the Great Litany, Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom), especially with the voiceless cries (Exod. 14:15) of the prayers of the real monks, who are consumed like the oil in God’s unsleeping lamp “shining in the darkness” (John 1:5) of the people.

The Lord, Himself our road, our “way” (John 14:6), told us that neither in Gerizim nor in Jerusalem is God to be worshiped, but in every place of His dominion, “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). And in order to find Him it is worth going to the ends of the earth—and how much more, to Athos—while He will be ahead of us, telling us: “while thou art yet speaking, behold, here am I” (Is. 58:9). Or He will be sending us His servants, like He sent St. Symeon the New Theologian his Elder, St. Symeon the

Pious, an event which in practice made him teach us, that God will bring our soul's messenger and guide from the other end of the world. Or if we should have the daring, we will go ourselves to the other end of the world, as the first settler on the Holy Mountain, Peter the Athonite, went from Rome to Athos. It was to him, alone all his life, that the Theotokos gave Her promises to protect the Mountain as Her garden.

This, She does. For during all-night vigil for the Feast of St. Athanasios the Athonite, Her minic par excellence, my patron and friend, on July 5, 1977, when the cenobitic order had been restored to his monastery after centuries, his tomb gushed myrrh throughout the night, to the astonishment and awe of all the great multitude of pilgrims. His monastic commitment in Athos had rocked the entire Byzantine Empire in the tenth century, while he went on to found the Great Lavra, putting the seal on Eastern Orthodox Hagiorite monasticism from then on, and serving as the Elder, not only of the Emperor Nicephoros Phocas of Constantinople, but also of any novice from the remotest hinterland. Indeed, to a large number of Latin monks of whom St. Athanasios was the Elder, he ceded a fortified tower neighboring his Lavra called Amalphinon, so that he would never have to exit Athos again—not even his relics, since fire flashes from his tomb as often as an attempt is made by his Holy Monastery to transfer them.

At other times, the Lady Theotokos Herself exits the Holy Mountain, as She did to accompany the Hagiorite from his earliest youth, Gregory Palamas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Thessalonica, when he emerged for the sake of “the life of the world” (Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*) that would be fed by the milk, the oil, the wine, the honey, the fragrance, and the beauty which according to Dostoyevsky, will save the world: the mesmerizing beauty of Christ comprehended in Gregory's mystical theology. This Gregory who at seventeen had expounded Aristotle's philosophy in its entirety at the University of Magnavra in Constantinople, astonishing the emperor and the senate in the historic affirmation that Aristotle himself could not have expressed himself so well, a continuation led even Western intellectualism by the hand, and still does whenever it is willed, initiating through his life and teaching, with all the results that please God. As Paul captivated Rome himself bound in chains, so Gregory, chained up on the shores of the Black Sea, “netted” (Matt. 13:47) Islam, potentially captivating it, evangelizing in the presence of the Emir Orkhan to the effect that the roots which Islam wants to have in Judaism lead to Christ, as John Meyendorff recounts in *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*. Right up until today St. Gregory Palamas is waiting for his spiritual descendants to “sort the good into vessels” (Matt. 13:49).

The Lady Theotokos likewise accompanied Kosmas the Aetolos, propelled from the Holy Mountain by Christ and by his own zeal, becoming the enlightener of the Balkans, a hieromartyr equal to the apostles. More especially, the Holy Virgin accompanied the exodus of St. Dionsyios of Olympus whose monastery is blossoming these days like a lily with many flowers, when he was expelled from the Holy Mountain, and the contemporary blessed Ieronymos the Simonopetrite.

Father Basil Pennington truly received from his patron saint and protector, not only his name, but also the grace to be as St. Basil the Great was to St. Gregory the Theologian, a faithful and honest friend, unspoiled by the years and the permutations, by the disguises (2 Cor. 11:13–15) and deceptions of this present deceptive age, awaiting to the end, continually and unceasingly, the entrance of the great king, our Lord Jesus, in the heart, in time, in the world, in history, awaiting Him “Who is everywhere present and fillest all things,” Christ our God.

Archimandrite Dionysios  
Founder of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross Monastery  
322 00 Thebes Boeotias Greece  
March 2000

It has been a wonderful experience for me, reading this volume again, reliving my days on the Holy Mountain. Many very happy and gracefilled hours returned, insights were renewed, friendship and love in Christ were made warmly present again.

I am in a way grateful that this journey took place half a lifetime ago. For life on the Holy Mountain was a rugged affair, hard enough to handle then, more, I am afraid, than I could manage now: the rugged mountain trails, the primitive accommodations, the strange timetables, the heat and humidity, the language barriers—all made more than bearable because it was all seasoned with fraternal love and deep prayer. In some respects things have become a bit more humanized on the Mountain with the introduction of electricity, more vehicles, and other conveniences. But in fact, the Holy Mountain has remained very much itself.

Some of the great spiritual fathers have passed on. Younger men, sometimes more zealot, have taken their place. But numbers have not greatly increased and the rhythm of life is much the same. Tradition evolves slowly, slowly. And on the Holy Mountain it is tradition that is lived, a living tradition that gives life. Mount Athos has a life, a culture of its own. And its apartness has enabled it to preserve that very special culture even as a more superficial, worldwide, consumer culture pervades the rest of the world. The young men, or not so young, who come to join the Holy Community leave behind not only mother, father, sister, brother, and lands for the sake of the Lord but even the country and their culture. It is a slow process, this profound conversion of a person, but coming to Athos one has time. Under the sure guidance of a Spiritual Father, with the support of loving brothers, one gently, little by little, sheds the culture of his youth and lives ever more fully in harmony with the creating and life-giving Lord.

Perhaps more significant for us here in North America is the fact that Athonite monasticism has come to our shores. Spiritual Fathers from the Holy Mountain have engendered small communities for men and for women in different parts of the United States and Canada. May these seeds that have been sown not only be well watered by heavenly grace and grow and multiply, but may they bear abundant fruit for the Orthodox Churches of North America and for the whole of our nations.

This volume has taken on some historical significance in that it recounts in various places how ordinary natives of different Orthodox countries, in the course of their conversation with me on the Holy Mountain, shared what they then saw in regard to the contemporary political situation in their respective countries. In the light of the more recent evolution in such countries as Russia, where the Church is now free and politically powerful, and Yugoslavia, with its diverse entities, these particular concerns and hopes are read with a certain poignancy. Be that as it may, these pages remain primarily a spiritual journal, speaking of a spiritual journey. That which is more important is beyond time, is of time. It is in the eternal now: The reality of who we are in the eternal I of God. Monastic life, yesterday and today, whether it is lived on the Holy Mountain or in Spencer, Massachusetts, or any other place, is to enter ever more deeply into this mystery so that we can be ever more fully a “yes” to the Reality. It says we do not need to earn God’s love but simply be open to it, accept this total, gratuitous gift of a most prodigal Father and respond to it with a total surrender of our very being.

I am grateful to Jon Sweeney and the editors of Skylight Paths Publishing for the opportunity to bring these pages to print yet one more time. Being with the text again has been for me a grace, and I hope that is true for everyone who picks up this volume. I do want to say a special word of thanks to my esteemed and much-to-be-revered friend, Archimandrite Dionysios, for his gracious words that opened this new edition. He shares many pages with me and did much to make my visit on the Holy Mountain the grace that it was. I have had the great joy and privilege of welcoming him to our abbey.

here at Spencer and of sharing other significant occasions with him. As an unprecedented sign of honor and affection, to support me in my eighth decade, he has sent me the pastoral staff of his most revered and loved spiritual father, Archimandrite Aemilianos. It is a sign to me not only of personal bonding but of the support we in the West can receive from a sister Church in these confusing times. The tradition is like a most impressionable mass of clay. As it has been passed on, it has not been dropped; it retains its essential shape. But many have left their prints upon it, some so deep that it is not always easy to discern the essential form. It is good that a more stable tradition stands at our side to help us with the discernment.



“Although I was in the middle of the first row below the balcony of Saint Peter’s, in 1958, when the new Pontiff stepped out, I shared the common difficulty of getting that roly-poly little pastor in white to focus in the spot that so long had been occupied by the lean ascetic figure of Pius XII. Certainly as I bowed my head to receive his first papal blessing, I had no suspicion how much Pope John was to affect the course of my own life—as well as that of the rest of the human family.”



I don't know in what century the Swiss invented the cuckoo clock, but this distracting little item along with the printed books that filled the high bookcases and the few photographs on the walls, was the only indication that we were not witnessing a scene from the twelfth or fourteenth century. Archimandrite Aemilianos sat in the corner behind a small table with a rich covering, as is the practice of prelates in the Byzantine world. His attire, the simple black robe of the monk, the heavy leather belt, the black skouphos—does it take its origin from the fez? It looks quite like it—in itself gave no indication that this was the Hegumen, the superior of the monastery, but his whole bearing spoke of dignity. And the calm of his well-rounded face and his limpid eyes spoke of something more—an ever-present Vision of Peace, a ray of the Taboric Light.

Across from the prelate, on a wicker settee, sat another monk in a somewhat different habit—one that I know would recognize it as the humble gray robe of the twelfth-century Cistercian. That monk was myself. The scene was in the corner reception room of the hegumenate of the medieval Athos Monastery of Simonos Petras. The Archimandrite had just said: "It is unheard of. Never before has a Catholic monk stayed so long on the Holy Mountain." But love was to transcend history in this historic place, so bound by the traditions and customs of history. And thus began my retreat, one which I certainly had not intended to be a historical landmark or even a significant ecumenical event, but which perhaps in God's designs will prove to be that.

It may seem strange to some, the idea of a Trappist monk going on retreat. Isn't his whole life a retreat? It is in a way. He does ordinarily go apart and stay apart. But strictly speaking, a retreat is a temporary thing—a stepping back for the moment, in order to be able to step forward with renewed vigor to fuller accomplishment. Every person—no matter what be his course in life—needs retreat, whether they be quiet moments of daily meditation and reflection or longer periods of withdrawal. And the monk is no exception. It is true, he would ordinarily find this time of retreat within his own monastery, in the heart of his monastic community, or perhaps in a hermitage in the woods behind the abbey. But there are exceptions to every rule. And this particular monk was convinced that at this particular moment in his life's journey the Lord wanted him to go a bit farther apart for his retreat, and his Father Abbot confirmed this discernment.

When I was a young religious I was one day working with a group of monks landscaping our newly constructed retreat house. As we were easing an eighteen-foot maple into the hole prepared for it, it suddenly lunged forward. And there was Brother B., arms and legs waving excitedly, the tree resting squarely on his tummy. At this point he came forth with one of those classical statements: "That wasn't in the postulants' guide!" I have always retained that "word" as something of a résumé of my life as a monk.

Although I was in the middle of the first row below the balcony of Saint Peter's, in 1958, when the new Pontiff stepped out, I shared the common difficulty of getting that roly-poly little pastor in whom to focus in the spot that so long had been occupied by the lean ascetic figure of Pius XII. Certainly as I bowed my head to receive his first papal blessing, I had no suspicion how much Pope John was to affect the course of my own life—as well as that of the rest of the human family.

Three months later I joined the mob that crammed the street cars going to Saint Paul's-Outside-the-Walls. We weren't even beginning to get used to this Pope who moved about so freely—a lover of tradition, of history, an incarnation, as it were, of them, and yet so free of them. Oh, how he enjoyed the papal pomp, this childlike pastor! He went up and down the nave and all four aisles of the great basilica on his portable throne, surrounded by the ostrich fans and the arcs of powerful lights, the silver trumpets vying with the shouts of the wildly enthusiastic crowd: *Viva il Papa!* And then I

entered the monastery next door, dropped all the fine trimmings, and joined the monks in a cup of coffee. Again, as the Holy Father spoke of a vision—of a synod, a council, a new code of Canon Law—I had no glimmer of what this might mean for me and for all my brothers and sisters across the face of the earth.

The Synod came and went, not much of a ripple on the face of the sea of time—just as had been predicted. Then came the Council. And again—one of those things not in the postulants' guide—I found myself in the Square as the river of white miters flowed into Saint Peter's. Like so many others in Rome at that time, I was caught in its current, one of many quasi *periti* (experts). It was exciting—yes! It was demanding—yes! It was hopeful—yes! It was heartbreaking—yes, yes! How could we ever bring home to our brothers or even live out in our own lives what the Spirit gave us in those days? We had to try—and pay the price.

One thing led to another. Code was to follow Council. I soon had a couple of degrees in Canon Law. But the new Code for this Church that was happily becoming aware of the fact that it is a people of every tribe and tongue and nation—and must be that and rejoice in it and respect it—her new Code could only be very generic, trace out only the broadest and most fundamental lines of communal structure and life. The particular laws of national conferences and religious institutes and monastic federations would be more significant. And so we began those journeys to meetings at home and abroad to prepare the new laws—the section for monks in the new Code, the constitutions for our own Order.

But law must follow life, not make life conform to it. Renewal must begin in the hearts and spirits of persons and communities. For us this meant getting in touch with our Cistercian Fathers. We had to get to know them, their times, their wisdom, if we are to live out of their fullness in today's world. And so soon I was engaged in an immense translation project, in a new publishing house, in international symposia, in a center for studies.

The years were full and busy. And there were other dimensions, above all the ecumenical—discovering the richness of contemplative and monastic life among our Anglican brothers and sisters; exploring our common roots with our Orthodox brethren; and beyond the ecumenical—discovering a communality with the ancient monastic traditions of the Far East.

I have always believed that the Church is the whole of the People of God and that every baptized Christian should exercise fully his or her responsible part in the daily program, leaving those called to special ministries free to fulfill them in holiness. So in 1973 I was happy to turn over the responsibilities for the translation project, the publications, the meetings, the conferences, and the symposia to the capable people at the newly established Institute for Cistercian Studies and go off to Europe to the Orthodox-Cistercian Symposium at Oxford University. This rich and enriching sharing proved to be the first step toward my retreat on Mount Athos. After the symposium I went East to return the visits of our Orthodox confreres and paid my first visit to the Holy Mountain. It was a fairly short visit, though longer than those ordinarily allowed. I was deeply impressed. In fact, my soul was marked, I am sure, indelibly.

In a way I think we can say Mount Athos is the monk's native land. Certainly, it is the only monastic republic existing in the world today. And it boasts of being the oldest existing republic. Over ten centuries ago the first Synod was formed. And still today the Holy Mountain is ruled by the Synod consisting of the representatives of the twenty autonomous monasteries: Megisti Lavra, Aghios Pavlou, Dionysiou, Grigoriou, Simonos Petras, Xeropotamou, Aghios Panteleimonos, Xenophontos, Docheiariou, Konstamonitou, Zographou, Chilandari, Esphigmenou, Vatopedi, Pantokratoros, Iviros, Stavronikita, Koutloumousiou, Philotheou, and Karakallou; you will meet most of these names again in the course of the book. The Synod in its turn chooses a Council of four men, one of whom, the Protos, is the head of the Holy Government. In practice, it is the Secretary of the Iera Kinotis (Holy

Community) who handles most of the daily affairs. There is a Greek governor resident on the Holy Mountain and a small contingent of soldiers, but they are supposed to concern themselves only with external affairs. Spiritually, Mount Athos is directly under the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Besides the twenty monasteries, and dependent upon them, are a variety of other types of monastic establishments. A kellion is a small, relatively independent community under the guidance of a Gerontas (Elder, or Spiritual Father). It has its own liturgical life and order of Services (Offices) and usually supports itself by crafts and its garden and orchard. The name “skete” is used to denote various types of monastic communities. Some of the Russian sketes (Aghiou Andreou [Saint Andrew’s], Propheti Iliou [Prophet Elijah’s]) and the Romanian Skete (Prodromou [the Forerunner, i.e., Saint John the Baptist’s]) were quite large—larger than many of the monasteries—yet the Greeks did not want to give them the status of monastery in order to keep secure control of the Mountain. (There are seventeen Greek monasteries, one Russian [Aghios Panteleimonos, or Saint Panteleimonos], one Bulgarian [Zographou], and one Serbian [Chilandari]. Each monastery has one vote in the Ierarchikon Kinotis.) So they were left with the rank of sketes. “Skete” usually means a very small household of two or three to six or so monks (today it sometimes means one) or a cluster of such households like Kavsokalyvia or Aghia Anna. And then there are the many hermitages where monks seek a life of the fullest possible solitude. One is very slow to encroach upon this. In all there were about fourteen hundred monks living on the Holy Mountain at the time of my retreat. This is perhaps three hundred more than I found in 1973.

The hermit and the monk in the skete will usually have his rule of life—his canon—blessed by his Spiritual Father, although there is a basic general rule for the skete providing especially for those who live in a colony of households. These would maintain a common church—a kyriakon—where they would gather on Sundays and feasts and a guesthouse—a kanonikon. On most days they would hold Services—or Offices, as we call them in the West—in their own house-chapel, perhaps have Liturgy if one member is a priest, but the Services would be simpler than those in the monastery, and “prayer of the rope”—the repetition of the Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me”) counted on the knots of the prayer cord, the komvoschinion—might replace some of the Services altogether.

In the monasteries, the Services hold a central place. This is not to say that the Hegumen may not exempt particular monks from many or even all the Services so that they can prolong their prayer in the cell or complete the necessary work of the monastery—cooking, baking, gardening, maintenance, hospitality, study, icon painting, etc. The content (psalms, hymns, canticles, troparia [antiphons and responsories], readings) and structure of the Services are very similar to that in the West, the division being determined by the common tradition. But the brothers on the Mountain tend to celebrate several Services at the same time. The Midnight Service (Vigils, or Matins), Orthros (Lauds), and the First Hour (Prime) are celebrated in the early morning, sometimes with the addition of the Third and Sixth Hours (Tierce and Sext). The Ninth Hour (None) is celebrated before Vespers in the evening, and Apodeipnon (Compline) at sunset. In fervent communities, Liturgy (Mass) is offered daily after the First or Sixth Hour, though on fast days (usually Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) it is not celebrated in the main church, the katholikon, but in one of the small chapels about the monastery. In addition on the fast days before the meal (there is only one community meal on fast days, though a little something left over from lunch may be taken by the individual monk in the evening) the Paraklisis, Service of Comfort (in the sense of strengthening), is sung. In the evening before Apodeipnon the monks will pray the long and very beautiful Acatlist Hymn in honor of the Holy Virgin Mother of God.

The monks’ day begins—as Saint Benedict legislates for the monks of the West—at the seventh hour of the night, an hour or so after midnight. But on Mount Athos it is more literally that, for on the

Holy Mountain they follow Byzantine time. Twelve o'clock is when the sun goes down. (But, perhaps as a witness to the freedom that ever prevails among monks, one monastery—Iviron—computes its time from sunrise. This, though, has its practicality, for they are on the eastern side of the Mountain.) Some monasteries do change their clocks each day; others, only every month or so. Each monastery has its own time. (Throughout the book, I ordinarily use Greek civil time as being a sort of standard time.) And the Mountain has its own calendar, too. Though all the rest of the Orthodox world—except the Greek Schismatic Church and the zealot Russian Church-Outside-of-Russia—has accepted the calendar reform of Pope Gregory XIII, on Mount Athos they still follow the Julian calendar. The Julian calendar is now thirteen days behind the Gregorian. Hence, you will notice a shifting of dates in my journal and references to the West celebrating different feasts.

When they first rise, the monks on the Mountain have a period of prayer in the cell, more frequent with a particular canon (a rule determining what prayer they will say—so many *komvoschinions* and so many *metania* [prostrations]) from their Spiritual Father. They will then gather for the Midnight Service in the *liti* (the outer part of the *katholikon*, the narthex). This is followed by *Orthros*, the First Hour, and Liturgy in the *katholikon*. On an ordinary day these might last four or five hours. Then the monks return to their cells for rest, prayer, or study, or they may have work to do. Each one's schedule is worked out with the *Gerontas*. The Third and Sixth Hours or the *Paraklisis* precedes the meal, which comes around midmorning. The siesta is not as common as one would have expected. Work is in order after lunch, though it might be preceded by some time of relaxation. The Ninth Hour (in the *liti*, the lesser Hours serve as a sort of preparation for the principal Hours in the *katholikon*) and *Vespers* come two or three hours before sunset and are followed by a meal on nonfast days.

On the eve of great feasts and Sundays (though there are many exceptions) Little *Vespers* is celebrated (a half hour instead of an hour or more) and there is no *Apodeipnon*. About an hour after sunset the *Agripnia*—the All-Night Vigil—begins, which includes Great *Vespers* and *Orthros*, possibly special processions and the blessing of water, and goes on to Liturgy and a festive meal. The whole might be a twelve- or fourteen-hour nonstop Service, though more usually it runs only eight or nine hours and may have a break before Liturgy.

The program I have described is that of the *cenobium*. There are basically two types of monasteries: *cenobitic* and *idiorrhythmic*. In the former the monks live a shared life, eat in a common refectory, and obey a *Hegumen* whom they have elected for life. In the renewed monasteries the *Hegumen* is usually also the *Gerontas*, or Spiritual Father, of the community, but not always. According to the *typicon* (constitution) of Mount Athos, he must be a priest. Monks in *idiorrhythmic* monasteries have relative independence. Each receives an allowance from the common income of the monastery and can add to it (and might well need to) by his own labors. He is subject in some ways to his chosen Spiritual Father. The monks might elect a *Hegumen* on the eve of the monastery's feast so that there will be someone to preside. But he will resign the next day. As *Pro-hegumen* (resigned *Hegumen*), he might, with an elected council, be asked to oversee the administration of the monastery. It can readily be seen that such a system is open to serious abuses or at least a certain amount of laxity. It is in the *idiorrhythmic* monasteries that one finds some glaring economic inequalities and such indulgences as smoking, eating meat, and reading newspapers. There were historical reasons for the rise of *idiorrhythmic* monasticism in the fourteenth century, and some *idiorrhythmic* monasteries are very fervent. But today it is the *cenobitic* communities that are getting all the vocations and some of the *idiorrhythmic* houses have returned to [cenobitism](#).

It has been with a certain amount of misgiving that I have decided to share the pages of my journal by publication. They were not originally written with publication in view. Things had to be filled out somewhat to be at all intelligible. Much of the lore was recorded for its flavor more than for its content. It would take volumes to put everything fully into context. Entries which, standing by

themselves, seem flat and uninspired have immense meaning for the writer because they attempt to capture a moment of light, an insight pulsating with life, because it was a moment of communication with the Beloved. The behavioral people tell us that in a conversation the words are a very small part of the communication—the presence is the thing that really communicates. We all know this from experience. And a journal only captures the words—the small part. And these words—what there are of them—are words out of silence. It was the silence that was more significant.

If one feels very vulnerable sharing a journal, that vulnerability is heightened by this inadequacy of expression. But in the case of this particular journal, there is one added fact that makes it even more limited and inadequate expression. It comes from a time of retreat when the writer was purposefully stepping back or out of his usual world vision and concern and centering upon his own personal being before his God. This leads to a certain tunnel vision, productive of a helpful intensity during a time of retreat but crippling if it is carried over into the pilgrimage of life.

Yet in spite of misgivings, I have decided to share these pages with you and others. Even if it does leave me exposed and vulnerable—we are all called by our Master to lay down our lives for one another—I hope our good Lord will use this revelation of my weakness and struggles and hopes and his great goodness and mercy to bring a little more hope and love into your life.

While it was not intended, my visit on the Holy Mountain seems to have been a healing thing, a step, however small, in the coming together in love of the separated sister Churches. By this frank and humble sharing, perhaps the healing can be furthered. Mount Athos is the heart of Orthodoxy. Many writers have previously tried to present it to the West. But I do not think that ever before has one from the West been able so to experience it. As a monk who has long lived the monastic life and was allowed to live within the Athonite community for an unprecedented period of time, I have been able to acquire a specially intimate acquaintance with life on the Holy Mountain. Perhaps some of the details I share here will be of interest only to other monks. But my experience indicates a widespread interest in what goes on in monasteries and monastic life. Perhaps it is that bit of monk that resides in every person that is responding to something precious to it.

I hope that what I am sharing will not in any way be misunderstood or cause any misunderstandings. I hope there is nothing that in any way will offend my Orthodox brothers and sisters, whom I sincerely love. I wanted to share very deeply their life; I am grateful that I was allowed to; I consider it a privilege. I want in no wise to be critical. But I do want to be honest and so have let stand my own thoughts and feelings as they were expressed.

There is one significant addition to the journal, as it was originally written. I integrated into it essentially in the section “Around the Mountain,” updated pages from my 1973 journal in order to give a fuller picture of the Holy Mountain. At that time I did go all around the Mountain. This time—retreat—I moved about as little as possible.

If in the course of reading *The Monks of Mount Athos* you feel at times a bit confused—or more than a bit—by the way dates and time change, by the inconsistency between theory and practice, by a sense of vagueness as to how it all fits together, please do not be surprised. That was certainly my own experience and in presenting the journal with a minimum of editing I hope to allow you to share that experience. Mount Athos is in many ways truly another world, a world apart. It is good to sense that. At the same time, this book speaks frankly of the daily life of the monks even down to intimate and homely details, and will explode some of the popular myths that surround the Holy Mountain, such as the oft repeated one purporting that the exclusion of females extends even to the animal kingdom. There are, in fact, lots of hens and mother cats who find their homes among the monks.

I have added at the end of this volume a glossary of places and terms which would be unfamiliar to the average reader. The first time each of these appears in the text it is marked with an asterisk (\*). If all the Greek terms so commonly used had been deleted from the format of the book, it would have

lost some of its flavor and lost some of its value for those who are reading it to increase their feel  
the Orthodox monks and the traditions and practices of Eastern Christianity.

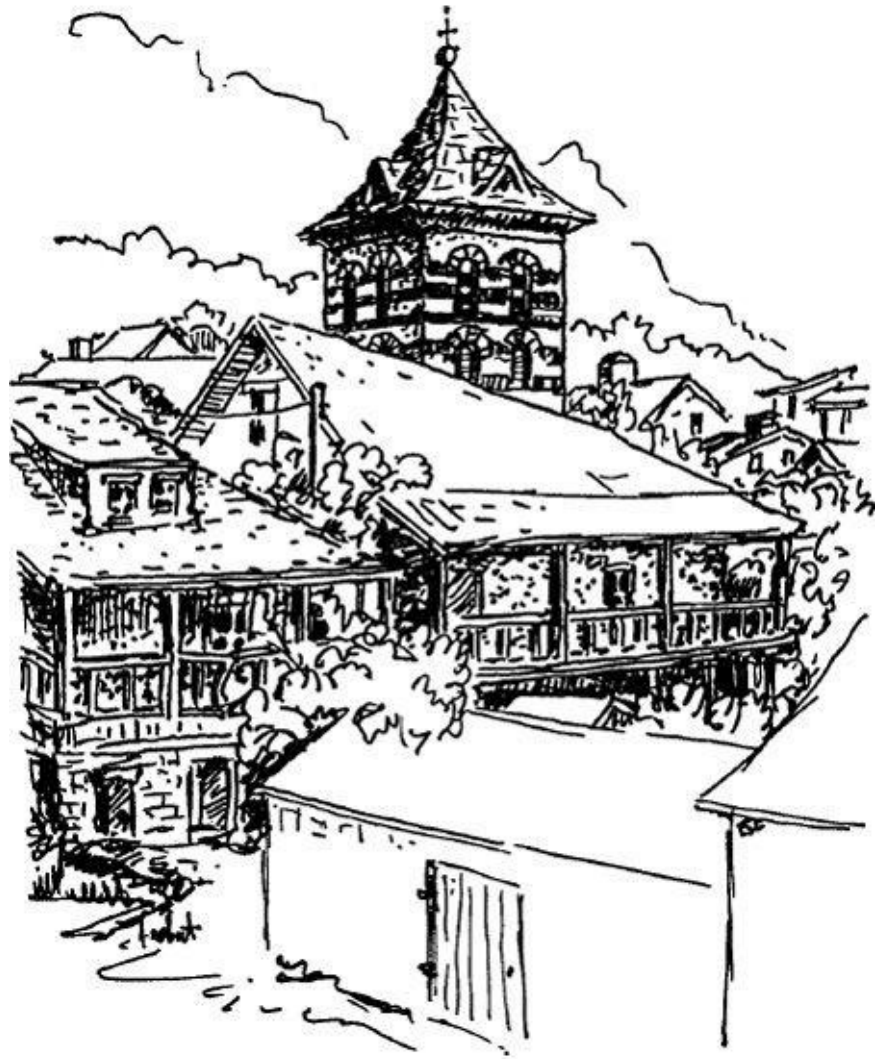
I want to express publicly my very deep and sincere gratitude to Archimandrite Aemilianos and his  
community. This man of God is one of the truly great persons I have had the privilege to know in my  
lifetime. His great love for me as a brother in Christ called forth the love and respect of his  
community and the acceptance of the brethren on the Holy Mountain. His kindness was fully human  
and reached down to details that only love can dictate. Not one of the least joys of heaven—if it does  
not come sooner—will be when we can fully enjoy our complete oneness in Christ. I thank all my  
Fathers and Brothers on the Holy Mountain.

I want also to express my gratitude to my own Father in Christ, Abbot Thomas of Spencer, another  
truly great Spiritual Father, and all my Brothers at Spencer, for allowing and supporting this time of  
retreat, and indeed my whole monastic life. And I must add a special word of thanks to my brother  
Father Robert, who produced the sketches for this volume.

And last but not least, a thank-you to Sister Mary Whalen of the Sisters of Providence of Holyoke  
for the many long hours of work and infinite patience it took to turn my raw material into a readable  
typescript. May the Lord reward her as only he can.



“While it was not intended, my visit on the Holy Mountain seems to have been a healing thing, a  
step, however small, in the coming together in love of the separated sister Churches. By this  
frank and humble sharing, perhaps the healing can be furthered. Mount Athos is the heart of  
Orthodoxy. Many writers have previously tried to present it to the West. But I do not think that  
ever before has one from the West been able so to experience it.”



*Karyes*



***Monday, May 31, 1976***

***Feast of the Visitation of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary***

In ways it has been a busy day—in other ways a day filled with waiting and praying. Now I sit at Logan International Airport with an hour or so before the takeoff. I feel good, trusting, yet little spurts of nerves arise—so much ahead is question. What will the Lord ask in these days and months ahead? Very much, I hope.

Seven months is a big piece of life, but if, by his mercy, it is a time of real growth, new full commitment, the end of self-seeking, the beginning of truly seeking God—that's a lot. Ask and you shall receive. And so, Lord, I do ask. Create in me, Lord, a truly Christian heart, a monastic heart, a pure heart. After years of compromise in my monastic life, I hope, by your grace and life I can begin to live a total "yes." Help me, Lord. And make all my goings, like Mary's Visitation, a bringing of Christ with his joy and peace and grace to all I encounter. I renew my total consecration to you, Mary. And now I pray for the journey, for Germany, for Greece, for those I leave behind and those I will meet.

***Tuesday, June 1—A.M.***

We are approaching Frankfurt. They have fed us too much on the plane and there was only time for two hours of sleep at the most. When we boarded they gave us, or rather offered us, newspapers. I took two. After spending a lot of time reading them, I turned to the Bible, which I much enjoyed. I am beginning the New American version. I wonder why I get so sucked into the "news." This morning my neighbor was reading *Time*. I found my eyes straying. Curiosity is very strong in me. This leads to distraction. Seek first the Kingdom—and all will be added. Your Father knows your needs. I shall work at constant prayer in full presence to the "now." Father, please help me.

***Wednesday, June 2***

We arrived in good time at Thessaloniki\* but I had to wait a long time for the bus from the airport. Most took taxis. I was glad I waited—as a poor monk should—for when I arrived at the terminal Dimitrios Maniotis was waiting for me. He looks very good, with a fine beard now. I was disappointed to learn that I had to wait till today to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office. His father, a lawyer, investigated. We went to the Kaimakis house. Then I visited the Maniotises. Later Panos Kaimakis and I visited churches—some real gems of Byzantine architecture, though relatively little good icons or frescoes. They eat very late here—around eleven. I got to bed near twelve after two long days.

This morning we celebrated the Ascension. All the children came to Liturgy\* at Aghia Sophia. Father Kaimakis presided at the Liturgy. The sacristan spoke English and was very kind. It is difficult to know what to say or do. Feelings are very varied toward Catholics and toward Americans. Father Kaimakis expressed his surprise that I should be able to stay so long on the Holy Mountain. We shall see.

Mr. Maniotis took me to the Ministry office at eleven. There was much paper work. If one is a clergyman the Metropolitan has to get him permission from the Patriarch of Constantinople. Then the Ministry gives permission to stay on the Mountain, but for only four days. Then the police (on the

other side of the city) give permission to go out to the Mountain. We returned to the Ministry office—two taxi rides across the city—to try to arrange for a longer stay, but got nothing more.

At one, everything closes down in the city for lunch and siesta. John Kanonides came at four and took me to his house. His father is a retired school teacher. He said I would always be welcome there. We talked for four hours. John is studying medicine and hopes to come to America after he finishes at the university. John represents that very small percentage of Greek students who are not all taken up with politics, but are dedicated to the Church and intent on leading a deep Christian life and working for the renewal of Orthodoxy. We had ice cream and they invited me to dinner, but I had a date at eight with Dimitrios. He and I visited more churches and ruins, from the Roman period in Thessaloniki, and he spoke at length on art history. Also he voiced the Greek antipathy, especially strong among the students, toward Kissinger and America's intervention in the Cyprus affair on behalf of Turkey.

### ***Thursday, June 3 / May 21***

I arose around five and slipped out without disturbing my hosts. The bus left at six. It was warm and humid in the bus but the three-and-a-half-hour ride over the mountains was beautiful. Driving around many hairpin turns didn't seem to bother the driver. He kept up a lively conversation all the way. I am sure this long complicated journey is an important part of my retreat. A going out, a seeking, a feeling of loneliness, a certain dying to self, to known patterns, usual comforts, secure surroundings, into the unknown. I sense more the need of a certain stability, security, to be free to enter into deeper prayer. I am trying to pray constantly, but necessary attention to what is around me, which is prayer, drifts into curiosity and forgetfulness.

Ouranoupolis\* has greatly grown since my visit three years ago. But the area down by the jetty and the old tower is unchanged. The little wicker chairs in front of the café are the same as the ones I sat on then waiting for the boat. And Mrs. Loch's door still stands open to offer monk and pilgrim a hearty cup of good English tea.

At eleven the boat left for Daphni.\* Among the passengers was an American now living in Rome but originally from Newton, Massachusetts—Richard Kamm, a sculptor. Also, there was Father Athanasios, a monk from Simonos Petras\*, who has gone with five others to help the depleted Monastery of Konstamonitou.\* He is Secretary of the Holy Community\* for this year. He welcomed me most warmly with the traditional offerings after we finally got to his office in Karyes.\* But first we had a two-and-a-half-hour boat ride—a glorious and exciting experience: the fantastically blue sea and sky, the rugged mountain coast, the ancient monasteries, one after the other leaping suddenly in view or gradually arising on the horizon—a bite of pasta with the American sculptor, an hour bus ride up to Karyes, and a visit to the police. And we lost thirteen days in the bargain—we are back to May 21.

Father Athanasios asked how long I wanted to stay, said he could give me only seven days permission, then I would have to see the governor, who would readily give me up to a year. He also informed me that Father Vasileios, the Hegumen\* of Stavronikita\*, and Father Aemilianos, the Hegumen of Simonos Petras, were both away but would return in five or six days.

I took the bus at four-thirty, after a brief visit to the Protaton\*, and then walked on down to Stavronikita. The situation is difficult here. Father Vasileios will be away ten days or more. Father Grigorios, the assistant superior, is very kind. And Father Symeon, from Athens, who speaks English, has been at pains to make me feel comfortable and welcome. But they have indicated in a tactful way that some of the community are opposed to my presence. This was evident at Vespers.\* As I started to enter the nave with the other guests, a young monk went out of his way to ask each one if he were Orthodox, and when I said I was Catholic, he told me I could not enter but must stay in the liti.\* Father

---

sample content of The Monks of Mount Athos: A Western Monks Extraordinary Spiritual Journey on Eastern Holy Ground

- [download Philosophical Logic \(Princeton Foundations of Contemporary Philosophy\)](#)
- [Brewing Classic Styles: 80 Winning Recipes Anyone Can Brew.pdf](#)
- [download online Addresses to the German Nation \(Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought\) for free](#)
- [Mutant \(Dr. Richard Steele, Book 1\) book](#)
  
- <http://bestarthritiscare.com/library/Node-js-in-Practice.pdf>
- <http://cavalldecartro.highlandagency.es/library/Life-Lessons-From-Byron.pdf>
- <http://www.1973vision.com/?library/Addresses-to-the-German-Nation--Cambridge-Texts-in-the-History-of-Political-Thought-.pdf>
- <http://cambridgebrass.com/?freebooks/Code-of-the-Krillitanes--Doctor-Who--Quick-Reads--Book-5-.pdf>