

“This book presents one of the first views from inside a new type of monastery in the church. Drawing on John Michael Talbot’s twenty-five plus years in community, it breathes the air of honest-to-God daily experience of monastic life, and in a very complex type of community, comprising celibates, marrieds, singles, and children. The new monasticism, with its many ways of participating, provides access from wherever you are into an ancient contemplative path.”

—*Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB*
Subiaco Abbey, Arkansas

“John Michael Talbot is the real deal. Here is a guide to new monasticism that exudes wisdom and carefully considers the questions that have arisen through decades of practice. If you’re serious about asking what monasticism means for the church today—about what it means for you—read this book.”

—*Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove*
Author of New Monasticism
Co-compiler of Common Prayer:
A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals
Member of the Rutba House community in
Durham, North Carolina

The Universal Monk

The Way of the New Monastics

John Michael Talbot



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Introduction

The Universal Monk, the Way of the New Monastics

There is a new monasticism on the rise. It is monasticism for everyone, for all states of life, and for people of all faiths. It is for those who live in monasteries and for those who do not. It speaks to the monk within us all, the universal monk. But it also calls those who long to live in monasteries, and to those who already do. From it the Spirit is raising new monasteries up for our time.

Much like the early monks of Egypt this is a charismatic phenomenon of the Spirit. It is the result not merely of good ideas but of the Spirit stirring within people's hearts. The Spirit is calling us to something more than what is normally available in the parish church or the secular world. Like the first Christian monks of the desert, this stirring of the Spirit cannot be stopped or manipulated. It is a sovereign work of God in the hearts and souls of people. But it can, at least to some degree, be described.

The essential characteristic of these new monasteries is the contemplative life for all people from all states of life that overflows into action that changes the world for the better. These communities become workshops of prayer that is tested

and tried in some form of community life. It is in solitude that we find deeper meditation and contemplative union with God. It is in community that the authenticity of that union is tested and tried. When the two come together, they are called “communion” or “common union.” That form is based on ancient monastic patterns but is adapted to modern life.

There are several better-known published current streams in the new monasticism today. The first, and most widely known, is the new monasticism from the Baptist tradition (they actually coined the phrase) that emphasizes an evangelical, community-based social justice movement. This is reminiscent of the communities of the late 1960s that are not so much monastic as simply communal. The second is an interfaith integrated monasticism that values the theology of folks like Raimon Pannikar. This is also in the stream of Bede Griffiths’s vision and dream. The “New Friars” are a social justice community based on Franciscan spirituality. Also, the Boiler Room evangelical and interdenominational communities of Europe, sometimes called the “Punk Monk” movement, used the Rule of St. Benedict when looking for an established rule for more intense community living. But there is much more.

I write this book at the invitation of Liturgical Press from the perspective of a founder of one of these many new monastic expressions within the Catholic Christian tradition. They are being raised up everywhere, from the ancient Christian countries of Europe to Hindu India to our own religiously pluralistic United States and Canada. Most communities include some integrated form of monastic community that serves as a base, as well as those who live in their own homes who associate with those monasteries in some meaningful way. Alternative forms of community life and powerful new ministries are spreading the word to all who will listen. It is a true phenomenon of the Spirit.

These monastic expressions can be traditional or new, or both. In the Catholic Church after Vatican II, many new forms of community have come and gone. A few have persevered. Some of these were overly experimental, but some were properly creative. The use of the Rule of St. Benedict has been inevitable by some, and most surprisingly by the new monasticism movement within the Anabaptist tradition. There are also new expressions in almost every major religious family in the church. With the recent conservative swing in the Catholic Church, communities that attempt to reestablish traditional patterns of consecrated life within the established spiritual families are numerous. There are also completely new communities that are both conservative and progressive. At the beginning of the appearance of these new communities, an integration of spiritualities and states of life and the empowerment of the laity was pretty normative. Today the more conservative communities are moving back into old models. Some of this is good, and some of it is a matter for concern. The church is watching all of this unfold with great interest in order to assist where she may to help facilitate this wind of the Spirit who is raising up these new monastic communities and associations.

I write from the perspective of my own experience in the community I helped found. After the ideal of simple gospel living, our community is based on the ideal of integration. We integrate states of life and spiritualities. We have celibates, singles who can marry, and families in one monastic community. We also have domestics (based on the word “domicile,” or “home”) who live around the country and the world in their own homes. We integrate solitude and community with hermits and community dwellers, a contemplative base and active ministry. We also integrate charismatic and contemplative, liturgical and spontaneous spiritualities. Some have said that we have integrated too much to keep a more narrow

focus. We believe that these integrations are a sign and hope for the church in the future.

It has taken a few decades to see our community unfold, and it is still unfolding with its first generation of members. In this book I will discuss the vision of our community, how it fits in the church and the world, and where it may still develop.

To illustrate the new interest in integrated monastic communities, a story might be helpful. My wife and I were once asked to address a Benedictine congregation's general chapter about integrated monasticism as a possible way of revitalizing older communities that are closing due to low numbers. I gave a normal presentation of our integrated monastic life, and it met with a reserved, favorable response. I did not get the impression that these abbots were all that anxious to go out and try the integrated model!

I was then disheartened when the next speaker gave his presentation. He is an abbot from a community in Europe that had tried the integrated model and failed. At first I felt like my talk had been completely torpedoed. But as I listened further, I realized that he was actually affirming our new integrated monastic community.

Interestingly, it did not work in the older monastery because the lay community brought such life and did so much of the needed work that unforeseen rivalry between the older celibate community and the lay community inevitably arose. Though the abbot came from the lay community, one of his first actions as abbot was to formally separate the lay monastic community from the older celibate community and find them a new facility in which to live and from which to minister. They have prospered ever since. But that is not the point.

The abbot shared his belief that ultimately many of the older monasteries will inevitably pass away and that new monasteries will be birthed from the lay communities themselves. This filled me with affirmation and hope.

This is really our experience as well. We tried a new model with traditional Franciscans at a retreat center, but it didn't really work. Ultimately we had to move away and start fresh in order for the new model to work without hindrance.

As founder, I received three "words" that helped us with this process. The first said not to put "new wine into old wineskins." The second said to "die to Franciscanism." The third was to "build community by not building community." The community received these words enthusiastically, but living them out has been a process. The first two were pretty easy to understand but not easy to do. I have a great love of all things Franciscan, and finding a church home in pastoral practice, or in canon law, is far from easy to accomplish.

The third was most enigmatic, and we are still discovering its deeper meaning. We believe it means that it is more important to live and share the content of community life than to simply propagate its outer form. It is tempting to promote an organization but much harder to spiritually grow a living community.

But this is not the end of the story. After founding the monastery on ancient but new ideals, we have continued to develop. We were birthed from a few dreamers who came mainly from the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s and found greater ancient roots and gospel radicalism in monasticism and the Catholic faith. We also included those who were Catholic from birth. At the beginning, we were very orthodox in our Catholic faith but also very open ecumenically. Today we are still orthodox but are going deeper into the contemplative tradition that is appropriately open to interfaith dialogue and experience. While retaining our orthodox base, we have found these ecumenical and interfaith integrations most enriching.

We are also reaching out in ministry. As we travel around the world and share the gospel message, we are finding that there are thousands interested in living a monastic spirituality

at home in the secular world with some form of loose-knit associational community. They are not called to join the monastic expression as such, but they are called to participate in some meaningful way.

We are seeing a renewed interest in our domestic expression. We are starting new groups that emphasize simple gospel living and meditation that lead to deeper understanding of Jesus, the church, and our place in the modern world. Some of these members join our community as domestics or monastics. Some do not. Either way is OK as long as we are bringing them closer to Jesus who renews their life through changed lifestyle and meditative prayer.

Almost eight hundred years ago St. Bonaventure wrote in his *Collations on the Six Days of Creation* of the “Contemplative Church of the Future” that would be poor like Jesus and a “Seraphic Order” of contemplatives that would include and transcend all orders and states of life (see col. 22). It would confirm and be rooted in the old, but progress in the Spirit into the new. I believe that this prophecy is no less true today than it was over seven hundred years ago. In fact, as it was being realized in the new religious orders of St. Bonaventure’s time, so it is still being realized today.

This book will be an attempt to present some of the teachings on community and prayer that are being met with such great success by so many. I pray that you will join me as we go deeper into the subjects mentioned only briefly in this introduction.



Basics

Almost every monastic rule begins with a statement of basic vision. For Christian monks, it is usually living the gospel in a more intense way. For Franciscans, it is “observing the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” For Benedictines, it is found in various statements in the Rule of St. Benedict like, “Prefer nothing whatever to Christ,” or establishing a “school of the Lord’s service.” The prologue and first seven chapters of this rule form a spiritual core from which all the other sixty-five chapters flow.

The same is true of our new monastic community. Let’s look at some of the basic words of the Constitution of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity, the rule our community follows, and apply them to modern living.

“The Brothers and Sisters of Charity is a Catholic community of singles, celibates, and families called as a monastic and domestic spiritual family into deep love relationships with and in Jesus Christ.” (Basic Principles and Vision, Constitution of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity, chap. 1)

Catholic

We are a new monastic community in the church, but we are built on ancient and firm foundations. One of the most ancient is the concept of being Catholic. The word

“Catholic” means “universal” and “full.” There is an ecclesial and a personal aspect to this word. On the ecclesial level, St. Vincent of Lerins says that to be Catholic means to believe what the church has always believed since the beginning and what she believes everywhere. It is “universal.”

On a personal level, I prefer a nondoctrinal definition. I would like to suggest that it means to be universally filled with Jesus from head to toe, from the inside out. Jesus calls us to an “abundant life.” This abundance is a spiritual richness that is found when we divest our old self of self through the poverty of Jesus.

Called

We are called. We did not initiate the universal new monasticism. There is a new monasticism that calls the universal monk within us all. A force greater than ourselves draws us. We were called by Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It is an almost irresistible urging of the Spirit to a life beyond the status quo of any religion. But it fulfills every religion.

I can remember being called by the Spirit when I first read *The Silent Life* by Thomas Merton and having that call confirmed as I visited monastery after monastery. I had the same sense of being called when I heard about St. Francis and the Franciscans at Alverna Retreat Center in Indianapolis. Something wonderful and mysterious was happening inside of me. It was like falling in love, not with a woman, but rather with a specific way of life that fulfilled my every dream and calling in Jesus. It was like discovering what had been within me all along ever since my birth. It was like coming home.

Those called to the universal new monasticism experience something similar, each in his or her own way. Each person must hear the call for himself or herself, but the call is heard in everyone who feels compelled to respond.

Family

Those who hear this call hear it personally, but as soon as we respond we discover that others have heard the same call. We discover a whole new spiritual family. Though we are very different in family and ethnic origins, we all find a common bond with each other because we have all heard the same call from Jesus. The call bridges every human barrier. It is universal.

The monks of old called the leader of their communities an abbot, or spiritual father. This was not to place the abbot in some kind of cultish role but to emphasize that we are indeed a spiritual family. The monastery is a place where spiritual children, brothers and sisters in Jesus, gather together to help one another along our monastic and mystical spiritual way. Yes, we test one another through our human failings and sins, but we support one another through our mutual call to this universal monasticism within each of us.

Monastic and Domestic

This call is not only for those who move into geographic monasteries but also for those who live in their own homes. Some are called to leave their families, their jobs, and their homes to follow Jesus in a completely new environment. Even some families leave everything—except the family God has called them to foster—in order to live in the integrated monastery. But many more hear the call right within their own homes. In the midst of the secular world, they are called to renew the secular world by embracing a monasticism that is hidden. They are in the world but not of the world.

Personal Love Relationship with and in Jesus Christ

In our new monastic community, “personal love relationships with and in Jesus Christ” form the foundation on which

our whole way of life exists. We often hear our evangelical brothers and sisters of Christ speak of a personal love relationship with Jesus Christ, and many would correctly say that it is essential to the salvation experience itself. It is certainly basic to our Christian experience and to the new monasticism of Christianity. Each word of this phrase deserves some attention.

Personal

Our relationship with God is personal. No one else can do it for us. Others can pray for us and help us, but we must ultimately make a decision ourselves to give our lives for a higher spiritual purpose through Jesus. It is personal and even intimately private.

Our relationship is personal with a personal God. But what is a “person”? On one level, it is exactly what we think. It is the stuff that makes us who we are. We are not just things or impersonal objects. In Semitic anthropology the spirit, soul, and body are not seen as segregated parts of our human being. They form an integrated whole that we call a “person” or “being.”

On another level, person is like the Greek word *prosopon*, or the mask that was used by the actors in the Greek mystery plays. In other words our “person” is much deeper than our mere personality. In fact, our real person is often very different than our personality. Our personality is often the persona we have learned to put on in order to hide from the often difficult and even violent outer world. The sad thing is that we often get confused and think that our personality is our person. We lose touch with ourselves and with everything around us. We end up living an illusion because we do not really even know who we are anymore. Jesus comes to restore us to ourselves. St. Augustine says that Jesus is closer to us than we are to ourselves. He knows us even more than we know ourselves. He comes to restore us to our real person. It is the deepest “us” that makes us who we really are.

God is also personal. He emanates or flows forth into creation. The Father does this through his revelation through creation itself, through the various religions of the world, in a formal way through the Hebrew law and the prophets, and finally through His Son Jesus. He also reveals his person through the various manifestations of the Spirit. The things of his emanations are “knowable” through sense, thought, and emotion. They can be defined in part. We need this in order to know him in the created world of phenomenal existence.

God is also transcendent, or utterly beyond anything in the limited created world. He creates the world as an emanation of his selfless love, and creation reflects his being, but the fullness of his being is beyond creation. He is simply too big to be enclosed in a created form or idea. He is the “Name above all names.” His complete being is certainly beyond our human understanding and perception by any of our faculties. So, we can perceive God through our human faculties but only once they have been purified from the false personality, and then only in part.

Love

Our relationship is one of love. There are several words for love in Greek. *Phileo* is the kind of love between friends. As Jesus said, no greater love has anyone than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. *Agape* is most commonly used for divine love and means a love that is completely without self-interest but finds itself fulfilled in giving itself completely. *Eros* is where we get our word “erotic” and has sometimes been avoided in Christian usage. But Pope Benedict XVI has taught us that even *eros* was used by the early church fathers to describe a love that was so passionate that it was lifted up above selfish interests to be totally self-giving.

The key to all of this is the word “selfless.” Jesus was “self-emptying,” according to Philippians 2, and the great “love

chapter” of 1 Corinthians 13 says that love does not seek itself. So, real love cannot give in order to get. It gives and finds that it receives the greatest gift when giving without expecting anything in return. Real love never uses people or manipulates them for what it can get out of them.

Relationship with Jesus

We must really “relate” to Jesus. To relate means to have a causal connection between two entities and to account to one another. And we must do this not just once but as a state of life. It is not just relation but a relationship. It is real and ongoing. Many go to church, temple, or mosque to simply “do” religion. That is not enough for the new monasticism. We must actually have a relationship with God. As Christians we do this through the person of Jesus. This relationship is as real as one that we have with the one who is closest to us in the entire world. It is as real, or even more real, than our relationship with a wife, husband, family member, or very best friend. It is that real. But it is even more real than these! Husbands or wives may leave us or pass away. Family members drift away. Friends may come and go. But Jesus remains forever. He never leaves and never dies. Our relationship with Jesus is the most real and longest-lasting relationship we will ever have in all eternity.

Relationships in Jesus

Our love relationship with Jesus includes relationships with one another. It is “with and in Jesus Christ.” Sometimes we are only too happy to give up everything and follow Jesus. The problem is that once we do so we look around and wonder who the heck all the other people are! Many of them are not folks we would naturally choose to hang out with. We might think we love Jesus, or at least our idea of him, but we might

not like all the other folks much at all. But this is where our love for Jesus is really tested. That is also why community came to be heralded as a basic monastic principle in Christianity. It is also true with the new monasticism today.

Personal relationship with God through Jesus; common union, or communion, with each other in him; and the cross and resurrection as the means and end to that mystical union and communion are from and for which every other discipline that forms our way of life exists. Without the one, the other just becomes vain religion.

Many people think that monasticism is an escape from the unpleasant realities of the church or the world. Many come to our monastery trying to escape the violence of the big bad world, or the shortcomings of the church. No doubt, it is a way to go deeper than the status quo of either. But it is not escape. It is getting to the real core issues that challenge our church and our world today.

The first Christian monks in the Egyptian deserts went there to escape the world in the sense that they were trying to provide an environment for undistracted prayer and meditation. But they also went there precisely because Egyptian myth said that was where the demons that were afflicting the world lived. In other words, they went there to get to the root of the problem of the world, not to run from it! Plus, they had the humility to admit that the problems with the world began with themselves and not with others. They did not run from themselves or from the world. They were trying to solve the problems of the world by getting to the spiritual root of the problems and by beginning with themselves. This is not a bad model for our modern culture that all too often tries to heal only the symptoms, and not society's deeper illness, and usually ends by pointing the finger at someone else by playing the "blame game." The monks of old ruggedly confronted these and have much to teach us in the new monasticism.

If you embrace the new monasticism in order to get away from people in the church or the world, you will find that you simply cannot escape people. They are part of life on planet earth. Plus, trying to escape others is often just an attempt to escape ourselves. I have learned that no matter where I run, I cannot get away from “me.” Wherever I have tried to run to get away from the things that bother me most about a person or situation, I seem to repeat it again with another set of people and circumstances if I do not first get to the heart of the problem and solve it in Christ. Those problems are usually within myself and not really so much in others. Often what we dislike in others is our own greatest challenge and is the greatest testing ground for how far we ourselves have grown spiritually.

Jesus Christ

Who is Jesus? This is a question so basic that we might think it out of place in a treatment of monasticism. But we are talking about the “new monasticism,” which is found in the Evangelical as well as the Anglican and Catholic traditions of Christianity. It is predominantly Christian but also includes interfaith expressions. So the question, “Who is Jesus?” is important.

Jesus falls squarely into the quasi-monastic and mystical traditions of the world religions. He probably looked and organically “felt” a whole lot more like a Hindu sannyasi, a Buddhist bhikshu, a Taoist or Confucianist sage, a Jewish prophet or Essene, or even an Islamic Sufi than a modern day megachurch pastor, minister, or priest. He certainly has little in common with today’s “relig bizz!” In this sense, Jesus complements all the great founders and mystics of the other religions of the world.

On another level, he completes them. He does not do this out of human pride or religious one-upping. He does not fall into the “my religion is better than your religion” syndrome of so many exclusivist and fundamentalist religions seen today. Jesus simply *is* the fullness of the Mystery as found in the

Paradox of the incarnation and the paschal mystery of the cross and resurrection. He does not simply preach the paradox or point to it, though he certainly does both. He *is* the Paradox of paradoxes. He *is* the Mystery of mysteries. This is what makes Jesus unique. So, Jesus satisfies the conservative Evangelical and the progressive interfaith approaches to the new monasticism and harmonizes them in himself.

Jesus was the fullness of God incarnate in humanity. In order to die for another human being, he had to be fully human yet without any sin. In order to carry the debt of all creation, he had to be fully God. Jesus was both. Other religions claim avatars and incarnations. But no other incarnation carries the entire debt of sin, opens a mystical doorway through embracing the paradox and legal fulfillment of the cross, and is raised from the dead to confirm his victory over sin and death. In this Jesus complements and completes all other religions. In this he is unique.

In Hebrew Jesus is called “Jeshua,” or “Joshua.” This means “savior.” The problem is that many of us are religious because we think it is the right thing to do. But in order to follow Jesus we must realize that our life needs saving. We must have reached the end of our rope by trying to do life on our own. To be saved we must realize that we are lost. Today the word “salvation” has probably lost much of its power because we have simply used it so much. It has become casual rather than powerful. It is a lofty ideal rather than an in-the-trenches experience.

I often think that only those who have bottomed out can know what it really is to be saved. In some ways, those who follow a twelve-step program after some form of addiction know more about being saved than the typical church-going Christian. This is deeply personal and emotional stuff. And only those who have gone through it can know what it is all about.

Those in the early monastic tradition were often the ones who had gone through a powerful personal conversion. In later times parents sometimes gave children as an “oblation”

to God in a monastery, and these often became solid monks and filled the ranks of large monasteries. But the founding generations of monastic movements were usually made up of people who had been “saved.” The new monasticism of today is much the same.

Christ

The word “Christ” means “anointed.” Anointed by what or whom? In the Christian tradition we say that the Spirit anointed Jesus. He is “the Christ.” A “Christian” means to be “like Christ,” or anointed like Jesus.

But what does it mean to be “like Christ”? Sometimes we think that we are anointed, but we are really only excited! It is good to be enthusiastic about God and Jesus and such, but sometimes we mistake mere enthusiasm for the real anointing of the Spirit. Cardinal Suenens gave legitimacy to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, calling it a source of *enthusiasm in the Spirit*, but John Wesley also once wrote tracts against enthusiasm! There is a balance between the two. When we are anointed we find a wholesome enthusiasm in the Spirit that is much deeper than mere religious excitement. We rediscover its original meaning of being “in God” or “in *theos*.”

To be “like Christ” really means to be “like Jesus.” We cannot go back to the Holy Land of Jesus two thousand years ago and mimic his culture and time. We are to imitate Christ, but we should not parrot him. That would make a cartoon out of genuine imitation of Jesus. Real imitation of Jesus means to take the universal aspects of Jesus’ life on earth and apply it to our culture and time today.

What are these things? Love, forgiveness, mercy, and compassion that go beyond mere law to spirit come to mind. This includes building a world of peace that is built on justice, and a justice that is built on forgiveness. A mystical relationship with God that is truly spiritual is at the root. A willingness to

lay down one's life for the benefit of others is its fruit. These are just a few things that come to mind.

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel, the love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, or the self-emptying canticle of Philippians 2 are great Christian Scriptures to meditate on in order to find the character of a real anointed life "like Christ," or "like Jesus." These speak his heart to any who will listen.

But there is another aspect to a life in the Spirit. The Spirit is the very essence of God. In Eastern Christian hesychasm there is a difference between energies and essence. In the West we tend to emphasize essence united with and through energy, but they are still distinct aspects of the whole. God's energies are seen in his emanations in anything that can be perceived about God in the created world through the human faculties of sense, emotion, or thought. This is the realm of doctrine and theology or active ministry. God's essence is within these yet beyond any name, concept, or form perceptible through the normal human faculties of sensations that cause thought and emotion. Pure essence can only be perceived by pure spiritual intuition beyond names, concepts, or forms. This is the place of pure contemplation.

Those who are of the new monasticism are those who are actively open to the things of the Spirit. They must be seekers of the Mystery of mysteries, searchers for the Paradox of paradoxes. The monastic life is one that provides the support of like-minded people who embark on this journey in a very intentional and specific way. We do it in a way that builds on the monasticism of old but is at once both ancient and new.

Monastic

Monasticism is not unique to Christianity. Hindu sannyasi, Buddhist bhikshus, Taoist and Confucianist sages, Islamic Sufis, Jewish Essenes, and holy men and women are all expressions of the monastic religious impetus in humanity.

In historic Christianity, monasticism was the repository of radical gospel living and the mystical expression. Only after it became morally and spiritually bankrupt did the other expressions of consecration surface with the mendicants of St. Francis and St. Dominic, the Carmelites, and then with the societies of apostolic life with St. Ignatius of Loyola's Society of Jesus and those who followed.

The Protestant Reformers brought the radical gospel life back to the average person and pretty much abandoned monasticism altogether. But even then quasi-monastic communal expressions of those interested in giving their life to God remained. Mennonites, Quakers, and the Amish are examples of how even families gave their lives to God in a special way of radical gospel simplicity and mystical union with God.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus remain the highest expression of the radical gospel lifestyle and the mystical union with God it facilitates. And personal love relationships with and in Jesus are what our entire spiritual life as individuals and as a community is all about.

Every religion teaches some basic faith and morality about the spiritual and the divine and about how we are to live as people who follow that spiritual path. These things are objective and to some degree they are logical. But every major religion also teaches a mystical reality that is beyond objective ideas and concepts. This mystical path is best expressed through paradox. A paradox is an apparent contradiction that tells of a deeper and almost self-evident truth. Examples of such paradoxes are finding a spiritual word in silence, communion in solitude, wealth in simplicity, freedom in obedience, and so on. The greatest expression would be finding new life in death, death to the old self. Most folks have had moments of intuitional breakthrough when such truths enlighten them in often life-changing ways.

Monastic life is a way to make an extra commitment to follow a way to such breakthroughs, a way of life supported by others. It can be experienced without the monastic life. But the support of others dedicated to this spiritual path is most helpful and has arisen as a normative expression in most religions. Christianity is no exception.

In the Brothers and Sisters of Charity we say that we have personal love relationships “with and in Jesus.” We have a personal love relationship with Jesus, but we also have appropriate love relationships with each other in Jesus. This brings us to the concept of *communio*, or communion, or “common union.” This is not only an individual experience of relationship with Jesus. It is personal but also communal. It was this balanced idea that drove the *Pachomian Koinonia* of the first cenobitical monks of the upper deserts of Egypt. *Communio* comes from the Greek *koinonia* and means “community.”

Let’s look more deeply into some of the basic ideas of the universal monk, the way of a new monasticism.