

In principle little has changed over the course of time. Today we live in a world wherein the incessant demands to satisfy the cravings of human appetite, fuelled by a powerful and sophisticated mass-media, have stimulated an unprecedented growth in world Consumerism, a term that refers to the economic philosophy that emphasises the acquisition of material goods and services as a social imperative that is good for society and social progress.

Consumerism, along with many developments in science and technology have effected major cultural changes in the intellectual and emotional life of our civilization, and where the political landscape, increasingly dominated by a materialistic philosophy, not only rejects but is frequently hostile to religion, the spiritual life, and all spiritual thinking. As a consequence, unrestrained Consumerism has become the driving force shaping our civilisation. More people are engaged in the design, production and marketing of 'stuff' than in essential services such as food production or nurturing natural resources. It appears to be the case that if we are not creating 'stuff' we are consuming 'stuff'.



The Product

Clearly there are benefits to such productivity, but there are also obvious defects in this social and economic force; perhaps the most significant defect being that unrestrained Consumerism encourages greed and ambition above all else.

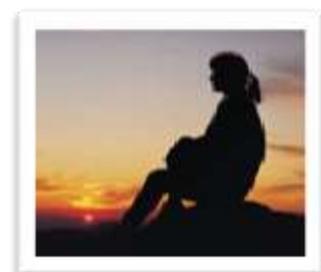


The Bye-product

This has resulted in the unsustainable use of natural resource causing immense damage to the fabric of our world; particularly the poisoning of the oceans through dumping toxic waste, the deforestation of continents, the extinction of countless species of plant and animal life – including the senseless destruction of the vital bee population, the indiscriminate proliferation of genetically manipulated crops and the barbaric use of factory-farming... This list is almost endless, but

it should be noted that none of these alarming events are happening in the name of religion or spirituality, no they are happening in the name of 'Profit' and 'Progress' as unbridled greed and ignorance drives our unbalanced 'consumer culture'.

It is, then, not difficult to understand how growing numbers of people are seeking to redress the balance with values derived from living a spiritual life, which is the only real antidote to consumerism. However, the social constraints of our civilisation mean that for legal or economic reasons many of us are not free to enter into the wilderness and follow the solitary way of life. Also, some of us have family responsibilities requiring our presence, our time, and our attention to



Reflection

manage domestic affairs, which need funding, so we must work. However, the work-place is very demanding as employers expect more and more of an employees' time; furthermore, spiralling costs force many into maintaining two or more jobs. Thus, we are being turned into consumers responding to the demands of market forces, which are many, leaving us little time to take stock of our lives and get to know who we really are.



Inner light

With all of this in mind, the 'new model' of monasticism is not something new, nor is it a radical departure from what we already know; but it is revolutionary – indeed it always has been – because it offers everyone without exception an alternative to the perpetual merry-go-round of a secular culture driven by consumerism. It applies equally to men and women, to young and old, to rich or poor, to those who are either pursuing a busy secular career or running a household. There is no qualification other than a willingness to engage with the 'interior life', because the monastic ideal embodied from its beginning more than seventeen hundred

years ago, and continues to embody today, the principle of 'spiritualising' one's life, which is achievable whether we live in the wilderness or in an urban environment.

In either case it entails entering into the interior 'wilderness' of the soul – a solitary endeavour that is the essence of monasticism – and engage in the daily observance of Prayer and Meditation through which we may learn something of our own spiritual nature and come to see the divine not only within ourselves but within all living things. Such a way of life enables us to accept the challenges we encounter as opportunities to transform our own unruly nature (the wilderness), and 'make a difference' every single day of our life. It is this change of focus that constitutes the new model of monasticism, which unites the secular and the spiritual dimensions of our life, and empowers us to bring meaning and purpose into our lives and the lives of our families and friends, and links us with a growing community of people living the contemplative life – *the greatest of all undertakings*.



Morning Prayer