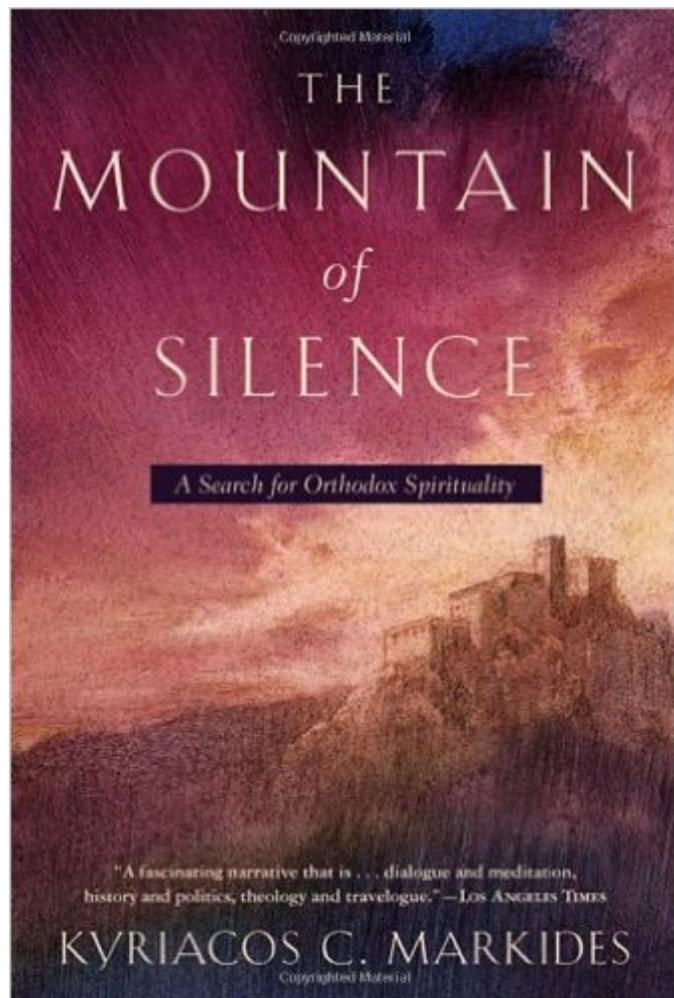


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The Mountain Of Silence: A Search For Orthodox Spirituality



Synopsis

An acclaimed expert in Christian mysticism travels to a monastery high in the Trodos Mountains of Cyprus and offers a fascinating look at the Greek Orthodox approach to spirituality that will appeal to readers of Carlos Castaneda. In an engaging combination of dialogues, reflections, conversations, history, and travel information, Kyriacos C. Markides continues the exploration of a spiritual tradition and practice little known in the West he began in *Riding with the Lion*. His earlier book took readers to the isolated peninsula of Mount Athos in northern Greece and into the group of ancient monasteries. There, in what might be called a "Christian Tibet," two thousand monks and hermits practice the spiritual arts to attain a oneness with God. In his new book, Markides follows Father Maximos, one of Mount Athos' monks, to the troubled island of Cyprus. As Father Maximos establishes churches, convents, and monasteries in this deeply divided land, Markides is awakened anew to the magnificent spirituality of the Greek Orthodox Church. Images of the land and the people of Cyprus and details of its tragic history enrich the Mountain of Silence. Like the writings of Castaneda, the book brilliantly evokes the confluence of an inner and outer journey. The depth and richness of its spiritual message echo the thoughts and writings of Saint Francis of Assisi and other great saints of the Church as well. The result is a remarkable work "a moving, profoundly human examination of the role and the power of spirituality in a complex and confusing world."

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Customer Reviews

Having read Markides' account of his contact with the monks of Mount Athos, and being quite familiar with the literature on the subject of Eastern Christian mysticism/theology, I have to say that

this book was a real means of grace for me. To further make my point, one needs only to read who recommends the book on the back cover- Bishop Kallistos Ware, the preeminent spokesman for Eastern Orthodoxy in the West and the retired professor of Eastern Orthodox studies at Oxford University! I can positively remark that this book accurately depicts the practical outcome of anyone who follows the guidance of the Christian East. Holiness and wisdom are not reserved only for the monks, but for all those who seek Christ with a pure heart. The wisdom of Father Maximos, a main figure in the book, is simply a distillation of the wisdom of 2000 years of prayer and worship as found in the East. If it happens to reflect in some ways current New Age mentalities, it is not, believe me, a sign that the Eastern Church has somehow taken their advice! I have the suspicion that those who understand Christianity through Western Protestant eyes would find this work a bit odd to say the least. Monks who are clairvoyant, can change someone else's perception of time, etc are not common in Protestant Christianity. But then again, they have not had the benefit of a 2000-year-old tradition of spirituality and prayer. This is not to put the Protestants down, it is only the observation that there is no need to reinvent the wheel when the East already has a very succinct and proven method of spiritual development that goes much beyond the non-accountable, individualistic spirit of much of the Christian West.

Rarely have I underlined the text of a book as much as I recently did with "The Mountain of Silence," by Kyriacos C. Markides. Markides, a sociology professor at the University of Maine, was born on Cyprus into an Eastern Orthodox family, but became secularized while coming of age during the Sixties in the United States. The sociological research for his earliest books brought him into contact with the mystical traditions, shamanism and Occultism of the Orient. A serendipitous experience in 1991 caused him to begin investigating the mystical traditions of the Orthodox Christian faith of his youth, which is covered in his previous book, "Riding with the Lion." For this book, Markides had intended to spend a sabbatical on Mount Athos, the "Holy Mountain" on a remote peninsula in Greece set aside for over a thousand years as the home to a number of Eastern Orthodox monasteries. Upon learning that his main contact had returned to Cyprus to become the abbot of Panagia Monastery, he changed his plans to spend several months there with Father Maximos and the other monastics under his supervision. While this book is an amazing travelogue, which also contains some engrossing history lessons about Cyprus, monasticism and the Christian faith, it is primarily a series of personal conversations between Professor Markides and Father Maximos. It was the many enlightening comments by the abbot that I found myself voraciously underlining in my copy of the book. While "The Mountain of Silence" has appendices for chapter endnotes and a

helpful glossary of Greek terms used throughout the book, it unfortunately does not contain an index.

I regard this book as very good... as far as it goes. Its main problem is that, overall, it offers an examination of spirituality without Christ. Mind you, I don't know whether the author (and certainly not the main subject of the book, "Fr. Maximos"!) had this intention, but it came across to me as a serious blindspot in the book's presentation of Orthodox spirituality. Much is made of the Threefold Way and the mystical-ascetical tradition of the Orthodox Church, and that is good. Generally, this is the stuff that many Christians are missing and need. But there is a decided lack of integration of this presentation of Orthodox tradition with the central reality of the Christian life, namely, Jesus Christ the God-man. Certainly, the reader can come away with some mind-blowing revelations regarding the supra-rationality of Orthodox mystical tradition and the application of that tradition to the life of every Christian, but I think the author rather assumes that the reader already knows Jesus in some sense and doesn't bother to bring Him into the picture. Or perhaps he doesn't see Christ's centrality to the Church. I very much doubt that the relative absence of Christ is something that "Fr. Maximos" (a pseudonym for Fr. Athanasius, now Metropolitan of Limassol in Cyprus) communicated to Markides. Anyone who has had any contact with authentic Athonite monasticism knows that such monks are "all about Jesus," to put it colloquially. There certainly is much discussion of God, the Holy Spirit and grace in the book, but Christ, Who is the Door to Paradise, is hardly mentioned. One would have a hard time getting the impression from *The Mountain of Silence* that the very object and purpose of all this spirituality is Christ.

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