

A CALL FROM APOSTOLIC MISSION TO EREMITICAL LIFE: EXPLORING THE JURIDICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CCEO CANON 570

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Abstract

After a brief account of the meaning, essence, and forms of eremitical life in ancient times, the author examines canon 570 of the CCEO, which addresses the possibility of religious within apostolic communities embracing an eremitical life. The author then outlines the following themes: theological and liturgical foundations, the implementation of canon 570, and eremitical life in an *Ecclesia sui iuris*, in the early Carmelites, and in the CMC. The last part is devoted to the establishment of the CMC contemplative house, the lifestyle of CMC ascetics, and its challenges in modern society.

Keywords: Ascetics, Eremitical Life, Contemplation, *Ecclesia sui iuris*, Religious Institute - CMC

Introduction

The call to consecrated life within the Eastern catholic Churches has historically followed two primary paths: communal monastic life and apostolic religious life. However, within apostolic congregations, there has been a growing interest in the eremitical vocation- an ancient form of Christian asceticism that emphasizes solitude, prayer and contemplation. This movement raises significant canonical and theological questions regarding the transition from an active apostolic mission to a more contemplative and eremitical existence.

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The *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (CCEO)¹ canon 570 addresses the possibility of religious within apostolic congregations or any other communal forms of Institutes of consecrated Life embracing an eremitical life. Unlike the *Codex iuris canonici*² (CIC c. 603) which explicitly provides for diocesan hermits, CCEO c. 570 situates eremitical vocations within the framework of already established religious institutes. This regulation reflects the Eastern canonical traditions, which generally integrates eremitical life within communal structures rather than fostering independent hermits.

Despite its significance, c. 570 has received extensive scholarly attention. Many religious institutes within an *Ecclesia sui iuris*, for example, in the Syro-Malabar Church (SMC), envisioned to interpret and implement its provision, especially in balancing the communal nature of their charism with the eremitical aspirations of individual members. This article seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive canonical analysis of canon 570, examining how it can be applied within active apostolic congregations, with reference to the eremitical life of the Congregation of the Mother of Carmel (CMC),³ and exploring the canonical, theological and liturgical implications of such a transition.

1. Ancient Eremitical Life and Ascetics

An ascetic is someone who practices self-denial and abstinence from worldly pleasures for spiritual or religious reasons. The term "ascetic" comes from the Ancient Greek word "askēsis," which means "to exercise," "to practice," or "to train."⁴ The ascetics dedicated to a life of spiritual discipline and holiness, have played a vital role in the spiritual and communal life of the Church, particularly in institutes of

¹ *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Latin-English Edition, Washington D.C., Canon Law Society of America, 1992; CCEO cc. 410-572 depicts canonical norms of *Monks and Other Religious as well as Members of Other Institutes of Consecrated Life*.

² *The Code of Canon Law*, New Revised English Translation, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 1997.

³ The Congregation of Mother of Carmel (CMC), in the Syro-Malabar Church, has already started a contemplative or cloister house for sisters who are practicing asceticism. There are 13 sisters leading a life of contemplation through ascetical practices in a community of eremitical life. This special house of contemplation is started in 2012 in Karukutty, Ernakulam District in Kerala and they are following the directives, based on CMC Constitution, specially designed and recognized for them by the general synaxis.

⁴ For more details see Clement Pujol, *La Vita Religiosa Orientale*, Roma 1994, pp. 345-48.

consecrated life. Their commitment to self-denial, prayer, contemplation and apostolic service reflects the Church's mission to embody Christ in the world.

The eremitical life, which is rooted in solitude, silence, and a profound communion with God, holds a timeless place in Christian spirituality. Emerging from the practices of early desert hermits, this vocation became a cornerstone of both Eastern and Western Christian traditions. The Second Vatican Council's decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 15 highlights the Eastern origins of Christian monasticism, a heritage that Pope John Paul II celebrated by recognizing the first Christian monks as emerging from the East.⁵

The spirituality of the Christian East has been profoundly shaped and guided by monastic experiences. Monasticism has provided centres of continuity, endurance and spiritual renewal for both the Eastern and Western Churches, even in turbulent political conditions. More deeper understanding of early monasticism gives actual spirit of its lifestyle that can be the source of ascetics in an institute of religious in this modern time.

1.1. *Anchoretism and Coenobitism*

The origins of Eastern monasticism are deeply rooted in the eremitic (solitary) lifestyle, as exemplified by figures like St Anthony of Egypt, who withdrew to deserts and remote locations for prayer, asceticism and solitude. Later, St Pachomius introduced coenobitic (community-based) monasticism in the East, more simplified and modified by St Basil the Great, emphasizing shared living under a common rule. These two approaches- eremitic and coenobitic- are considered the foundational forms of monastic life in the early centuries⁶.

The monks and nuns who live alone⁷ are the persons who wish to introduce oneness and simplicity into their life, persons who busy themselves with God only and seek nothing but union with Him. They "are Christians who, setting aside the manifold activities of the world, devote themselves to the one work of their faith."⁸ All monks/nuns are

⁵ John Paul II, *Orientale Lumen*, An Apostolic Letter, 02-05-1995, Vatican City 1996, n. 09.

⁶ P. Kirshner, "Monasticism," in *Encyclopaedia of Monasticism*, Vol. 2, ed., William M. Johnston, London, Fitzroy Dearbone Publication 2005, pp. 319-320.

⁷ Augustinus, "Enarrationes," *Patrologiae latina (PL)*, 221 Vols. Vol. 37, Ps. CXXXII, 6, pp. 1732-1733.

⁸ P. Orosius, "Historiarum," *PL* 31, cap. XXXIII, pp. 1145.

by definition, "solitaries," and this is the original meaning of their name which comes from the Greek word *monachos*, derived from "monos" which corresponds to the Latin word "solus" means "alone."⁹

The term monasticism was applied to two principal types, the hermits who lived alone or in small unorganized groups – Anchorites- and the Coenobites who lived in community. Generally, the word hermits (*eremitæ*) include all solitary ascetics of one sort or another; other resignations in early ecclesiastical writers are *virī dei*, *renunciantes*, *continentes*, *cellulani*, *inclusi*, *monachi*, etc., and later, *religiosi*.¹⁰

The life of St Anthony of Egypt offers a vision of anchoritism made flesh in a person.¹¹ His legacy is not limited to monks but is received by many Christians. The term "anchorite" refers to one who lives apart or in seclusion, means "withdrawal." Hearing God's call, monks and nuns give up many things- property, possessions, family, friends, fame- to live a life devoted to Christ. They are Christianity's true authorities, for they take the Gospel literally at its word; it is true because their intention is to practice with love the fundamentals of Christian faith such as prayer, hospitality and charity. The early monks and nuns were well immersed in the practice of the fundamental Gospel virtues of love, compassion and humility.¹²

The central characteristics of eremitical life is ascetical practices, such as literally follow the words of Jesus, renunciation, single-mindedness, become a lover of God, *fuga mundi*, fighting with demons, fasting, solitary life, fraternity, practice purity of heart, stability in life and tranquillity of soul, contemplation, solitary life, sharing and services, communion, unity, participation, known as people of God and Church, chanting psalms, manual labour, alms giving and taking care of the pilgrims.¹³

⁹ P. Miquel, "Signification et motivations du monachisme," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique Doctrine et Histoire*, 16 Vols. Vol. 10, col. 1549; P. Simpson, *Cassell's New Latin-English Dictionary*, London 1971, p. 560.

¹⁰ G. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1983, pp. 1605-1606.

¹¹ Athanasius, "Vita et conversatio S. Antonii, J. P. Migne, ed., PG 26, pp. 839-846; Athanasius, *The Life of St Anthony*, trans., T. Vivian in *Coptic Church Review* 15 (1994), pp. 1- 102.

¹² J. Dubois, "L' ordo monasticus chrétien," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, Vol. 10, col. 1558.

¹³ Athanasius, *The Life of St Anthony*, pp. 1-102; Sibi V. *Religious Community as Koinonia in the Ancient Canonical Sources and in the CCEO*, Romae 1997, pp. 14-20.

The Coenobitic monasticism, founded by St Pachomius,¹⁴ became the cradle of community life in the consecrated world. He himself provided structures for organization, instructions and rules¹⁵ for the smooth running of the community life (*Coenobium*) and consecration.¹⁶ Characteristics of Coenobitism are Common *ora et labora*, *koinonia* living in the community, sharing the fruits of the labour with other people and members of the community, unity, fellowship and common life.¹⁷

1.2. Basilian Coenobitism

A systematic community life has evolved and framed by St Basil, the father of Eastern *coenobitic* monasticism, an inspiration received from St Pachomius.¹⁸ The creation of true *cenobitical* monasticism and its rules, were widely receptive to all classes, was substantially the work of St Basil. The dominant features of Basilian eremitical life are common houses, common table, prayer in common, services for the people in need, detachment from the 'specialties' of the world and embracing of the common life, sanctity, love of God and *neighbour*, spiritual direction, quantity and quality of food and clothing, practice of humility, charity and obedience, corporate fellowship, studying and writing down the Scriptures.¹⁹ All these became constant and permanent nature in modern consecrated life with slight modifications according to the needs of the people in various places.²⁰

Because of the paramount obligation of charity toward one's fellow men, Basilian *coenobia* are established in towns instead of deserts and mountains' top.²¹ The monks dwell amid their brethren so as through their conduct they set a model for true Christian living. The formulation

¹⁴ "Vita S. Pachomii," PL 73, pp. 232-249; A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans., Vol. I: *The Life of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*, Kalamazoo – Michigan 1980.

¹⁵ A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans., Vol. II: *Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, Kalamazoo – Michigan 1981.

¹⁶ M. McCarthy, "Pachomius St.," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 10, p. 853.

¹⁷ A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans., Vol. III: *Instructions, Letters and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples*, Kalamazoo – Michigan 1982.

¹⁸ D. Amand, *L'ascèse monastique de Saint Basile: Essai historique*, Mardous 1948, pp. 38-39; 45-52.

¹⁹ Sibi V. *Religious Community as Koinonia*, pp. 26-32.

²⁰ Cf., M. Basil, *Ascetica*, M. Wagner, trans., *St. Basil Ascetical Works*, Washington D. C. 1950.

²¹ W. Clarke, *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, trans., London 1925, p. 13; Wagner, *Basil, Ascetical Works*, p. xi.

of Rules by Basil²² is considered as very important regulation for the formation of the whole Church of Christ, even for today's ascetical practices of religious life. His wonderful oratory, defence of faith, administrative capacity and service to the development of eremitical spirituality constitute a sufficient claim to greatness. Basil organized very well the practices of asceticism and obedience among the fellow brothers of his *coenobitic* communities, but the end is union with God for that attainment need separation from the world not from the fellow being. The first condition demanded is solitude, namely, seclusion means from the distractions of the world, not from neighbours in need.²³

One of the greatest advantages of community life is that it provides an opportunity for the practice of humility. For Basil, community life with its common rule of discipline and its one centre of authority, was to be a field for the cultivation of what was then a much-needed virtue, obedience. In short, the ascetical practices which he recommended were essentially "fruits of love."²⁴ In the community life, common work was essential and obligatory, regulated and organized and, above all, unselfish. Along with these norms included many aspects such as renunciation, continence, common life and, for certain degree, stability in life (for Basil stability of residence) also required.

The most striking characteristic of community lifestyle is its comprehensiveness. It is presented in all its fullness and with all its implications. The fixed centre of the monastic life is love of man for God and the desire for union with Him. The method for the attainment of such union is the ascetic way of renunciation and self-denial, involving discipline, obedience, work and prayer. The best environment for the fulfilment of all these prospects is that of common life in a community.

The summary of eremitical lifestyle is reflected to express as someone who saw the monks and nuns would say, "Good are your dwellings, Jacob, and your tents, Israel; like shady groves and like gardens beside the rivers, and like fruit beside the waters" (Num 24, 5-6). "Earning one part on bread and another part on those in need."²⁵ At the heart of monasticism, the individual is linked with the community and the

²² M. Basilius, "Regulae fusius tractatae," et "regulae brevius tractatae," J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeco-latina* (PG), Paris 1857-66, 161 Vols. Vol. 31, pp. 898-1051; 1051-1306.

²³ E. Morison, *St Basil and His Rule*, Oxford 1912, pp. 31-32.

²⁴ E. Morison, *St Basil and His Rule*, Oxford 1912, pp. 38, 57.

²⁵ Athanasius, *The Life of Anthony*, *Coptic Church Review*, Vol. 15, 1994, p. 5.

salvation of every person. The action of monastic life is prayer, prayer without ceasing, prayer not divorced or separated from work and the rest of life, prayer as life and life as prayer.²⁶

2. Ascetics/Hermits in CCEO

The Eastern Code cc. 481-485 have recognize hermits who are isolated, independent from every monastery or being the part of any monastery. *CIC* c. 603 also is specified the same character of hermits and their eremitical life. For better understanding of hermits let us have a random view on these canons.

CCEO c. 481 establishes that the Eastern hermits, whether male or female, is a member of a monastery *sui iuris* and is separated from the world and people, even members of the monastery, to dedicate himself or herself totally to a life of heavenly contemplation and prayerful simplicity.²⁷

Canon 482 outlines three requirements to become a hermit. In order to undertake eremitical life, member of the monastery will need:

1. The permission of the superior of the monastery *sui iuris*,
2. The consent of the council,
3. To have lived in the monastery for six years after perpetual profession.

CCEO c. 450, 4° speaks about minimum age of eighteen is required to enter the novitiate and **c. 457 §1** gives minimum duration of novitiate in a monastery is three years. The perpetual monastic profession cannot be made before the member is 21. Hence c. 482 effectively prescribes a minimum age of 27 for the member of a monastery *sui iuris* to seek permission to become a hermit. According to Eastern monastic tradition this permission is granted only to those of tried value and mature spiritual life, this assures time for adequate reflection and preparation on the part of the member.

Canon 483 prescribes that the superior of the monastery is to designate the location of the hermitage, which is to be separated from the world and at least other part of the monastery. If the hermitage is, in fact,

²⁶ Athanasius, "Vita S. Antonii," PG, Vol. 26, p. 846.

²⁷ For more details regarding cc. 481-85, see W. Becket Soule, "Hermits in Current Eastern Catholic Legislation: CCEO cc. 481-485," *Folia Canonica (FC): Review of Eastern and Western Canon Law*, 5 (2002), pp. 149-161.

located outside the monastery's walls or enclosure, the written consent of the eparchial bishop is also needed.

Canon 484 describes the Eastern hermit, as a member of the monastery *sui iuris*, is dependent upon the superior of that religious institute. According to **c. 418 §1**, the superior is also the hermit's major superior with respect to the common law canons on monks and other religious. The hermit is obliged by those norms as well as by monastery's *typicon*, to the extent that they can be reconciled with the eremitical life. By way of subsidiarity, the Eastern Code has left much room here for the *typicon* to establish more detailed norms in order to regulate the eremitical life.

Canon 485 implies that the superior of the monastery is to exercise some control or supervision over the hermits and his or her lifestyle. For a just cause and with the consent of the council, the superior can impose an end to the eremitical life, even against the hermit's will.²⁸

2.1. Juridical Framework of Canon 570

CCEO canon 570 specifically recognizes ascetics who are said to imitate eremitical life in the institutes of consecrated life other than monasteries. The ascetics belonging to an Institute of Consecrated life is rooted in the broader framework of the Eastern Catholic Churches' regulation of consecrated life. This is where the particular law of each church *sui iuris* can make more detailed norms to foster eremitical life in the modern world, and it can be included the governance, discipline, community life, vowed life and particular lifestyle of ascetics in religious institutes, ensuring that their mission and spiritual life align with the Church's objectives.

2.2. Scope and Purpose of Canon 570

The canon 570 is part of the section in the *CCEO* governing Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (cc. 410-572). It ensures that ascetics in active apostolic congregations maintain their spiritual identity while effectively engaging in solitary life and 'apostolic works.' The canon reflects the Eastern Churches' emphasis

²⁸ For example, entertaining too many visitors is a just cause of termination, since it is not the intention of eremitical life of heavenly contemplation as see in c. 481; when the hermit become physically or mentally sick as a result of the life style, it is a just cause, that the superior can call back the hermit to the monastery, even against his or her will. For more canonical details about monasteries, its norms and specialities, see *CCEO* cc. 433 – 503.

on the integration of asceticism and apostolic mission; a distinctive characteristic not compared to the Latin tradition.

2.3. Ascetics in an Institute of Consecrated Life

The Ascetics in this context are individuals, living in a community, who dedicate themselves to a life of prayer, penance, purity of heart, practicing virtues and doing 'apostolic services,' bound by vows of obedience, chastity and poverty. Their life is shaped by the charism and statutes of the Institute to which they belong, fostering both individual sanctity and communal service in the community and taking care of the people in need.

2.4. Justice in Rules, Governance and Apostolates

The canon should have emphasized specifications of justice within the framework of ascetics belonging to an Institute of Consecrated Life. The provision regarding this form is left to the Particular Law of the Church *sui iuris*. Mainly the following matters must be considered in particular law.

Rules must be made only for the ascetics: - Though Constitution is the same for all the members, but Statutes/directives must be specified and made separate for the ascetics living within the framework of the congregation. They must practice daily ascetical disciplines, but at the same time, do service to others while residing in the eremitical community specifically made for them.

Ascetics or solitaries must have emphasis on prayer, fasting, and spiritual exercises to deepen their union with God, structured routines promoting detachment, humility and interior discipline, support from the communal environment fosters accountability and shared growth.

Rules must contain norms for eremitical lifestyle: - The entire internal and external life and mission of the eremitical life should be reflected in the Rules. Ascetics' internal life should fully reflect in the Rules, such as unceasing prayer, seven times of prayer, effective living of liturgy and manifold ascetical practices.

At the same time what are their mission being the part of the Church and of the congregation, following matters should be included. Such as activities or mission like intercessory prayer, media ministry, Bible messages, music ministry, retreats, reflections for monthly recollections, writing books, articles, Bible commentaries, creating liturgical and craft items and *ora et labora*.

The ascetics can do many missions for the people outside the eremitical community namely, hosting and guiding people or visitors staying for payer days, retreats and ascetical practices, training for other religious or people for leading ascetical communities, offering pastoral counsel, spiritual accompaniment for the people or religious and providing other services that align with the need of the people, such as sacramental preparation or catechetical instructions. This model fosters a lifestyle that integrates contemplation, asceticism and service, allowing the members to live out their vocation to do mission in the Church while respecting their special rules and regulations.

2.5. Blending Asceticism and Contemplation in the Eremitical Life

The blending of ascetical practices and contemplation in a community of ascetics who are belonging to an Institute of Consecrated Life, particularly an eremitical contemplative style, requires a structured yet flexible approach to harmonize the active and passive dimensions of the spiritual life. Canon 570 provides a foundation for this, emphasizing importance of ascetical practices within such communities and attaining contemplative union with eternity.

2.6. Theological Foundation

The ascetical practices are outward expressions of an inward striving for holiness, emphasizing prayer, penance, fasting, vigils and manual labour. They purify the soul and detach the individual from worldly distractions, creating a fertile ground for contemplation. Contemplation is the passive reception of divine grace, focusing on interior prayer and the loving awareness of God. Contemplation deepens the fruits of ascetical efforts by allowing the ascetic to rest in God's presence. The synergy lies in recognizing that ascetical practices prepare the soul for contemplation, while contemplation infuses ascetical practices with divine meaning.

2.7. Implementation of CCEO c. 570

In the Eastern Catholic tradition, CCEO provides specific guidelines for the life and conduct of Monasteries in general and ascetics/hermits in Monasteries *sui iuris* in particular, ensuring their actions and responsibilities align with the Gospel's demands. But canon 570 stands out as a significant norm, emphasizing the principle of justice as foundational to the vocation of ascetics within the framework of Institutes of Consecrated Life. Universal Law gives enough space for each Church *sui iuris* that Particular Law can provide more justice to this communal form of consecrated life. Justice ensures fairness and

respect for the rights and obligations of individuals within an institute. This principle is particularly critical for ascetics, who are called to witness to Gospel not only through their personal holiness but also through their relationships within their community and with the wider Church.

We are trying to explore the application of the norms of justice in the context of this canon 570, with a particular focus on **ascetics belonging to an Institute of Consecrated Life**. By examining the theological, canonical and practical dimensions of this canon, it aims to provide insights into how ascetics can live out their vocation authentically while fostering a spirit of justice being the part of an Institute of consecrated life.

This paper will also consider the specific challenges and opportunities faced by ascetics in the active apostolic congregations in *Ecclesia sui iuris*. This study hopes to underscore the enduring relevance of Canon 570 in shaping the life and mission of ascetics and propose practical recommendations for having new settlements of community of ascetics within the framework of apostolic institutes.

In the history of the evolution of canons on consecrated life in *CCEO* we can see, instead of strictly dividing the consecrated life into either religious or secular institutes, as in the Latin Code, the *Coetus de monachis* ultimately proposed six institutional forms of consecrated life, three individual forms and societies of apostolic life. While highlighting the importance of monasticism in the Eastern Churches, *CCEO* encourages the growth of monasticism in all its forms and it could recognize ascetics (c. 570) who, belonging to an institute of consecrated life imitate the eremitical life.

The ascetics, belonging to an institute of consecrated life is an institutional form of religious life. It can be established and are more specifically regulated by particular law. Here *CCEO* specifies that ascetics/hermits can be the members of a congregation or of any other institutional forms of consecrated life. But as far as we know, *Ecclesia sui iuris* are not yet made any particular law regarding the establishment and specifications of this form of consecrated life.

Though some of the men and women congregations in Syro-Malabar Church have already started cloistered life for the members who like to lead purely contemplative lifestyle within the Institute. But it is not yet a pure style of eremitical life as we see in early monasticism as depicted in *CCEO*, cc. 481-485, which is the most traditional form of religious life

in the East.²⁹ Whereas the Latin Code (CIC c. 603) is recognized only hermits not belonging to an institute of consecrated life.

At present some of the Eastern congregations are under the process of making settlement for the members who are already living a cloister life, now practising to lead an ascetical life as being the part of an institute. For this rediscovering of the eremitical tradition or ascetical life we need to adapt insights from *Ecclesia sui iuris*, where the eremitical house is initiated along with Eastern Christianity, traditions of the religious institute and its charism.

As a part of the Eastern tradition, the Syro-Malabar Church inherits this rich eremitical legacy. Grounded in its Eastern roots, the Church cherishes the spiritual wisdom of solitude and divine intimacy, as exemplified by the fathers and mothers of the desert. This enduring tradition continues to inspire the faithful, drawing them toward God through silence, simplicity and prayer, fostering a deep connection with their spiritual ancestry.

Deeply rooted in the heritage of the *Ecclesia sui iuris* and inspired by the spiritual legacy- renowned for its eremitical way of life- religious institutes who are following ascetical lifestyle within the framework of the Institutes must harmoniously blends contemplation, asceticism and apostolic dimensions in its mission. While celebrated for its apostolic works, religious institutes also foster a profound eremitical aspiration among members drawn to solitude, silence and prayer. For those inclined toward a more contemplative vocation, the Congregations must offer an opportunity to embrace an eremitical lifestyle that is dedicated to prayer, fasting, and seclusion. Notably, this special vocation is not exclusive to any particular congregation.³⁰

This increasing inclination underscores an urgent need for canonical recognition and appropriate guidelines to support this way of life, ensuring its alignment with the Church's spiritual mission and regulatory framework. To address this pressing issue, here we can propose to explore three key dimensions: the eremitical life within the

²⁹ PCCICOR, *Nuntia*, 31 Vols. (1975 to 1990), Vol. 16 (1983), p. 4.

³⁰ At present a growing interest of eremitical living also seen in different religious institutes in Kerala. Some of the active congregations in the Syro-Malabar Church, namely, CMI, CMC, FCC, SD, SH, SABS, CHF and MSMI have started contemplative wings to follow cloister lifestyle while being the part of their respective congregations. CMC has already established a house specifically meant for the sisters who are interested to lead contemplatives' lifestyle. Now slowly they are practicing asceticism to have an eremitical lifestyle within the framework of active life of CMC.

Ecclesia sui iuris, the eremitical tradition of the spirituality followed by religious institutes, the unique lifestyle and charism of the particular congregation.

3. Eremitical Life in *Ecclesia sui iuris* (ESI)

The Eastern Catholic Churches rooted in every part of the world embody a profound spiritual heritage steeped in the ascetic and monastic traditions of early Christianity. The rise of eremitical life within these Churches is intricately tied to its apostolic foundations, its enduring links with Eastern monastic practices, and the pervasive influence of homeland's ascetic ethos. India is a unique place where all these characteristics are flourishing well throughout centuries. The unique confluence has led to the distinctive identity of Eastern Christians in India, who are often described as "Indian in culture, Christian in religion and Oriental in worship."³¹ Hence the emergence of eremitical life within the Eastern Churches can be appreciated through historical, theological and cultural perspectives.

Historically, the Church's roots in the apostolic mission usually by one of the apostles of Jesus fostered a fertile environment for contemplative spirituality. Theologically, its liturgical and ecclesial practices resonate with the mystical depth of Eastern Christianity. Culturally, the ascetic traditions of the country provided a natural complement, enriching the Church's spiritual landscape. This harmonious synthesis of influences highlights the Church's spiritual richness and its ability to unite diverse traditions in a cohesive expression of faith.

3.1. Historical Reasons for the Emergence of Eremitical Life in ESI

The eremitical life in the Eastern Churches developed due to a unique blend of historical circumstances that influenced the spiritual practices and expressions of the ancient Christian communities everywhere. There are number of special historical key factors included in this topic.

3.1.1. East Syriac Liturgical Tradition

The one of the Eastern Churches in India, namely Syro-Malabar, maintained strong ties with the Church of the East where existed an intrinsic link between liturgical prayers, spiritual tradition and monastic life. In the initial stages of the Church of St Thomas Christians had to depend upon the neighbouring church, i.e., the Church of the East, the Chaldean Church. The Syro Malabar Church was, therefore,

³¹ Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, Bombay 1970, p. 21.

depending upon this Church for her growth in many respects, especially in the development of her liturgical practices.³²

3.1.2. Role of Desert Fathers and Eastern Christian Influences

Through the East Syriac tradition, the Desert Fathers, particularly those from Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, profoundly impacted Eastern Christian thought. Their ideals of silence, solitude and detachment resonated with the Syro-Malabar faithful. These teachings encouraged individuals to seek God in quiet places, fostering an environment where eremitical vocations could flourish.

3.2. Theological Reasons for the Emergence of Eremitical Life in the ESI

The emergence of the eremitical life in the Syro-Malabar Church is deeply rooted in a variety of theological principles, drawn from Biblical teachings, ascetical practices, liturgical life and the broader spiritual traditions of the Eastern Christian Church. We explore here the theological reasons for the emergence of the eremitical life in the Syro-Malabar context.

3.2.1. Biblical Theology: Imitation of Christ's Solitude

The theological foundation of eremitical life in the Syro-Malabar Church is closely tied to the Biblical example of Jesus Christ, who frequently withdrew to solitary places for prayer and communion with His Father (Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16). Jesus' model of solitude is understood as an essential part of His relationship with God, providing an intimate space for personal communion and spiritual replenishment. Early Christian hermits saw in Christ's own retreat into the wilderness a radical invitation to follow His example.

Additionally, figures like the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist, who lived ascetical lives in the wilderness, were seen as exemplars of a life of radical discipleship. Elijah's retreat in the desert (1Kg ch.19) and John the Baptist's ministry in the wilderness (Mt 3:1-4) symbolized a prophetic call to repentance and deep communion with God. For the Syro-Malabar tradition, these figures stand as archetypes of a life lived in solitude and contemplation, challenging followers to embrace a more intense discipleship.

³² James Puliurumpil, *Syro-Malabar Church Towards Patriarchate*, Kottayam, OIRSI 2017, p. 329.

3.2.2. Deification (Divinization): Union with God

The central to the Syro-Malabar Church's theology is the concept of **deification**- the process by which human beings are invited to participate in God's divine nature. This concept, rooted in Eastern Christian thought, holds that the ultimate purpose of human life is to become like God, to grow from image to likeness. Hence all elements of life must serve, directly or indirectly, this ultimate goal and they must do this in such a way that practical life becomes truly deified: permeated by the Holy Spirit of God, organized according to the Gospel and in the tradition of the Church.³³

Rooted in Eastern Christian theology, the eremitical life reflects the doctrine of *theosis* (deification), where the hermit seeks transformation into the likeness of God through prayer, contemplation and self-emptying. By withdrawing from the distractions of the world and focusing on prayer, penance and spiritual discipline, the hermit creates space for God's trans-formative presence in their life. The Syro-Malabar tradition places a strong emphasis on the sacramental life, especially the Eucharist, which is understood as the highest means of participating in God's divine life. The solitude of the hermit is thus not seen as an escape from the world, but as a means of aligning oneself with the divine will and being transformed by God's presence.

3.2.3. Liturgical Theology: Eucharistic Centrality and Divine Praises

The 'conversion from the world' in order to put faithful on to the 'eschatological track' is the basis to the Eastern Spirituality, its first and foremost purpose is to gear our life praising to God and this is expressed by the Eucharist and Divine Praises. Hermits, in their solitary lives, often centre their existences into a deep Eucharistic devotion. Since eremitical life draws its reason-of-being from its eagerness to live the Gospel fully the monks were eager to celebrate the paschal mysteries of Christ.³⁴

Additionally, the **Divine Praises** plays a critical role in the eremitical life. The daily rhythm of prayer, including the recitation of Psalms and other scriptural prayers, aligns the hermit with the cosmic and communal dimensions of salvation. This structure of daily prayer is not only a form of spiritual discipline but also a means of participating in the universal worship of God. Even in solitude, the hermit is united

³³ Archimandrite Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism and the Future of the Church*, Kottayam, OIRSI 1993, p. 183.

³⁴ Archimandrite Boniface, *Eastern Monasticism*, p. 133.

with the larger Church, praying for the salvation of the world and reflecting the Church's ongoing worship.

3.2.4. Ascetical Theology: Mortification and Detachment

The eremitical life emphasizes **asceticism**- the practice of self-denial and mortification -as a means of spiritual purification and growth. In this context, **detachment** from the world and its distractions is understood as a necessary step toward greater freedom to encounter God. Eremitic asceticism may include fasting, vigils, silence and manual labour, all intended to foster spiritual discipline and deeper reliance on God's providence.

The Syro-Malabar Church, with its deep roots in the asceticism of the early Christian tradition, particularly in the monastic and desert traditions of the East, emphasizes the role of ascetic practices in the sanctification of the soul. These practices help the hermit detach from worldly comforts and temptations, making space for a deeper encounter with the divine.

3.2.5. Theology of Solitude: Encountering God in Silence

In the Syro-Malabar tradition, **solitude** is not understood as mere isolation but as a sacred opportunity for encountering God in silence and prayer. This distinction is crucial: solitude is not about withdrawal from community, but a reorientation of one's life toward God. The hermit's silence is an active and purposeful silence, a silence that opens the heart to the presence of God.

The eremitical life, therefore, is a witness to the reality of God's kingdom, which transcends the temporal world. Through solitude, the hermit bears testimony to the eternal truth of God's presence, which is not confined to the distractions of the material world. In solitude, the hermit cultivates an intimacy with God that is beyond human understanding, pointing to the ultimate reality of the Kingdom of Heaven that lies beyond the visible world.

3.3. Cultural Reasons for the Emergence of Eremitical Life in the SMC

The emergence of eremitical life within the Syro-Malabar Church is deeply influenced by the cultural and religious context of India. By integrating these cultural elements with Christian spirituality, the Syro-Malabar Church developed a unique expression of eremitical life that harmonized with its Indian environment and spiritual heritage. Important cultural reasons are enumerated below.

3.3.1. Indian Spiritual Heritage of Renunciation

Indian culture has long revered asceticism and renunciation as paths to spiritual enlightenment. Concepts like *sannyasa* (renunciation of worldly life) and *tapasya* (austerity and meditation) are deeply ingrained in Indian traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The cultural reverence for ascetic practices resonated with the Christian eremitical ideals of solitude, prayer and self-denial.

3.3.2. Integration of Eastern Christian and Indian Asceticism

The East Syriac tradition, to which the Syro-Malabar Church belongs, shares similarities with Indian ascetic practices, including an emphasis on fasting, prayer and simplicity. Asceticism consists in leading a hard and austere life of continuous fast and voluntary and self-inflicted punishment. For, they regarded penance as absolutely necessary to reach the final status of perfect being with the Supreme Being.³⁵ Cardinal Antony Padiyara, the late Major Arch Bishop of the Syro Malabar Church, while addressing the synod on Consecrated life in 1994, stated: "India being a land of sages and seers who follow a radical form of world renunciation in search of the infinite, it is not unlikely that the first Christians who were converts from the Indian religions accepted some of the Indian ascetical ways of life."³⁶

3.3.3. Cultural Emphasis on Meditation and Silence

Indian culture values meditation and silence as means to achieve inner peace and spiritual clarity. These practices align with the eremitical focus on contemplative prayer and interior communion with God. The Syro-Malabar hermits adopted these culturally familiar practices within a Christian framework, enhancing their appeal and legitimacy within the community.

3.4. Canonical Recognition of Eremitical Life in SMC

Hermits are bound by canonical norms, which provide a framework for their life of solitude, prayer, and penance which is described in canons 481-485 in CCEO. The Syro-Malabar Synod, in alignment with CCEO, still needs to recognize eremitical life as a distinct form and part of institute of consecrated life. Since most of the religious institutes in

³⁵ N. Mannarath, *A Renewed Vision and Mission for Consecrated life in the Syro Malabar Church*,
p. 220.

³⁶ Antony Padiyara, *L'Osservatore Romano* 45 (9 November 1994), p. 4.

India, are already raised into the rank of pontifical right, can even make their own particular norms for ascetical lifestyle.

4. Eremitical Life in the Carmelite Tradition

Before delving into the eremitical life within the Congregations, especially of CMC, it is important to explore eremitical tradition in the broader Carmelite heritage, as CMC draws much of its spiritual inspiration from the Carmelite Order. By understanding this foundational tradition, we can better appreciate how it has shaped the CMC's own understanding and practice of the eremitical vocation.

4.1. The Origin of Carmelites

The Carmelites trace their origins to a contemplative and eremitical community³⁷ established on Mount Carmel in Palestine during the late 12th and early 13th centuries. They were known as "the hermit brothers of Mount Carmel."³⁸ These early hermits settled near the spring of Elijah, embracing a life of prayer, silence, and manual labour inspired by the prophet Elijah, a figure deeply associated with solitude and communion with God. Guided by the Rule of St. Albert of Jerusalem (1209-1214), their spiritual path emphasized mainly meditation and reflection, unceasing prayer, withdrawal from the distractions of the world, living in individual cells and living in simplicity.

The Carmelites' transition from being known as "the hermit brothers of Mount Carmel" to becoming recognized as "Mendicants"³⁹ marks a significant evolution in their way of life and mission, reflecting both their adaptability and their commitment to their contemplative ideals. Initially, their lifestyle was deeply rooted in solitude, silence, and contemplation. Living in individual cells, members focused on unceasing prayer, meditation, and reflection, cultivating an atmosphere where they could withdraw from the distractions of the world. Their presence in remote locations, such as Mount Carmel, embodied this withdrawal from society, emphasizing a life dedicated

³⁷ The Carmelites were hermits/solitaries not in the restricted, legal western use of the word. They were hermits in the Eastern and prophetic sense of the word and as such were able to coordinate their apostolic enterprises with a life of solitude in a cave or hermitage separated from their brethren. The Elijan tradition demands that the hermit, under the inspiration of the spirit and at the direction of the prior, leave his solitary retreat for the precise apostolic business at hand. In a way it was a more inspired type of eremitism than the hermit's life in other tradition.

³⁸ Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Journey to Carith. The Sources and Story of the Discalced Carmelites*, Trivandrum, CIPH 2018, p. 47.

³⁹ Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Journey to Carith*. p. 64.

to God through solitude. The silent, eremitical nature of their existence, inspired by the prophet Elijah, was central to their identity as "hermits."

In the 1230s, political and religious upheaval in the Holy Land dramatically altered the Carmelites' way of life. The fall of the Latin state of Palestine led to the destruction of the last Carmelite convents, and those who chose to remain in the region were massacred by the Mamelukes. Forced to abandon their homeland, the Carmelites relocated to Europe, where they faced a new set of challenges.

Their transition to life in European cities marked a significant departure from their eremitical existence on Mount Carmel. They encountered hostility from secular clergy and rival mendicant orders, who viewed them as competitors. In 1247, seeking to adapt to these new circumstances, the Carmelites petitioned Pope Innocent IV to modify the Rule of Saint Albert of 1209. This revision, often referred to as the first mitigation of their rule, enabled them to shift from a solitary life to one of active ministry while retaining their contemplative spirit.

This transformation allowed the Carmelites to embrace their role as mendicants, relying on alms and engaging directly with the communities they served. The revised rule formalized their integration into European society, blending their contemplative roots with a mission of active service. By maintaining this balance, the Carmelites demonstrated a capacity to adapt without abandoning the spiritual foundation of their order.⁴⁰

The fall of the state of Palestine led to the destruction of the last Carmelite convents and they had forced to abandon their homeland, the Carmelites relocated to Europe, where they faced a new set of challenges, but very fast their spirituality was influencing the life of the people.

In the 16th century, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross initiated reforms to restore the order's eremitical and contemplative spirit. The Discalced Carmelites, a branch of these reforms, emphasized a return to strict enclosure, solitude and an austere lifestyle, aligning more closely with the ideals of their pioneering spirit. Throughout history, the Carmelites have maintained a unique balance between contemplation and adaptation, defining their enduring legacy.

⁴⁰ Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Journey to Carith*. pp. 55-64.

4.2. Foundational Practices of the Eremitical Life in Early Carmelites

The following distinct practices and elements reflect the hermit lifestyle of the early Carmelites:

Dwelling in Separate Cells: Each hermit lived in individual cells⁴¹ and meditates on the "law of the Lord," and keeps quiet, according to the norm, providing space for prayer, meditation and reflection.

Communal but Contemplative Lifestyle: The cells were arranged around the chapel,⁴² symbolizing unity in prayer while preserving personal solitude. Hermits gathered for communal prayer, particularly the Liturgy of the Hours, in which solitude was blended with fraternity.

Silence: As required by the Rule⁴³, silence was essential to creating an environment of prayer and reflection. A key component of Carmelite spirituality is meditation on God's law, which is fostered by silence.

Solitude and Withdrawal from the World: Choosing the remote location of Mount Carmel symbolized their wish to distance themselves from worldly distractions. Physical withdrawal facilitates a deeper union with God.

Meditation and Contemplation: The Rule encouraged daily meditation on scripture, thus laying the foundation for the contemplative prayer tradition.

Devotion to the Virgin Mary: The Blessed Virgin Mary, Patroness of the Order, was venerated as a model of humility and contemplation. The members built a chapel on Mount Carmel⁴⁴ making her a central figure in their spiritual lives.

⁴¹ Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Journey to Carith*, p. 40.

⁴² Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Journey to Carith*, p. 40.

⁴³ "The Apostle would have us keep silence, for in silence he tells us to work. As the Prophet also makes known to us: Silence is the way to foster holiness. Elsewhere he says: Your strength will lie in silence and hope. For this reason, I lay down that you are to keep silence from after Compline until after Prime the next day. At other times, although you need not keep silence so strictly, be careful not to indulge in a great deal of talk, for, as Scripture has it- and experience teaches us no less -Sin will not be wanting where there is much talk, and He who is careless in speech will come to harm; and elsewhere: The use of many words brings harm to the speaker's soul. And our Lord says in the Gospel: Every rash word uttered will have to be accounted for on judgment day. Make a balance then, each of you, to weigh his words in; keep a tight rein on your mouths, lest you should stumble and fall in speech, and your fall be irreparable and prove mortal. Like the Prophet watch your step lest your tongue give offence, and employ every care in keeping silent, which is the way to foster holiness."

⁴⁴ Peter Thomas Rohrbach, *Journey to Carith*, p. 46.

Fasting and Austerity: The Rule states that “You have to fast every day, except Sunday, from the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter Day, unless bodily sickness or feebleness, or some other good reason, demand a dispensation from the fast; for necessity overrides every law. You are to abstain from meat, except as a remedy for sickness or feebleness.” This austerity was seen as a way to purify the body and strengthen the spirit for prayer and contemplation.

Manual Labor⁴⁵: The hermits were encouraged to engage in manual labour, such as gardening or other forms of work, as a means of supporting themselves and maintaining their solitude. This also reinforced the spirit of humility and simplicity.

In the Congregation of the mother of Carmel (CMC), this rich heritage continues to inspire their understanding of the eremitical vocation, blending the timeless ideals of the early Carmelites with the needs of the modern world and contributing to the enduring legacy of the Carmelite Order.

5. Eremitical Life in the Congregation of the mother of Carmel

Imbued with the visionary spirit of our founder, St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who envisioned a “house of austerity,” an “abode of virtues” and a “home of vision” and guided by the inspiration of our Co-Founder, Rev. Fr. Leopold Baccaro, CMC established its first and only contemplative house in Karukutty, 2012. This significant milestone, achieved under the discerning leadership of then Superior General, Mother Sancta and her council, reflects a faithful adherence to CMC Constitution⁴⁶ no. 62 §2 and its canonical foundation based on CCEO c. 570.

⁴⁵ “You must give yourselves to work of some kind, so that the devil may always find you busy; no idleness on your part must give him a chance to pierce the defences of your souls. In this respect you have both the teaching and the example of Saint Paul the Apostle, into whose mouth Christ put his own words. God made him preacher and teacher of faith and truth to the nations: with him as your leader you cannot go astray. We lived among you, he said, labouring and weary, toiling night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you; not because we had no power to do otherwise but so as to give you, in our own selves, as an example you might imitate. For the charge we gave you when we were with you was this: that whoever is not willing to work should not be allowed to eat either. For we have heard that there are certain restless idlers among you. We charge people of this kind and implore them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they earn their own bread by silent toil. This is the way of holiness and goodness: see that you follow it.

⁴⁶ CMC Constitution, the 4th Revised Version, CMC Generalate, Aluva 2014. Approved by the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Vatican, 2014.

Rooted deeply in the spiritual heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church and the eremitical traditions of the Carmelite order, this house draws its inspiration from the solitude of Christ in prayer and the profound biblical legacy of "desert" pioneers like Elijah and John the Baptist, who stand as patrons of this eremitical endeavour. In the following reflections, we will refer to them interchangeably as CMC contemplatives, in accordance with the CMC Constitution, and CMC ascetics, in alignment with CCEO c. 570, as both terms encapsulate the same profound essence.

5.1. Initiatives of CMC to Cultivate the Contemplative Life

The CMC has implemented the following initiatives to foster and nurture the contemplative life. CMC is the pioneer who initiated contemplative along with eremitical life within the framework of this Institute of active consecrated life. Actually, the contemplative lifestyle in CMC is started in 1974 at Karukutty by Servant of God Mother Mary Celine, the first Superior General of unified CMC, but that was not exactly the proper life pattern of cloister life. From that time onwards this contemplative lifestyle was undergoing various modifications and changes, and at the end in 2012, May 16th it became a proper contemplative house for CMC ascetics in its strict sense.

5.2. Establishment of the CMC Contemplative House

A CMC Contemplative House is exclusively designated and approved⁴⁷ for sisters who have made their profession in CMC. It functions under the direct guidance and oversight of the Superior General and Council. The establishment of new houses, the appointment of the prioress and spiritual animator, the admission of new members and the conferral of permanent membership are all fall within the purview of the General Council, ensuring a unified and faithful adherence to the charism of the congregation.

5.3. Rule of Life for the CMC Ascetics

The congregation upholds a structured rule of life, carefully aligned with Church regulations and traditions. In 2016, a specific directive⁴⁸ was promulgated for the contemplative house within the CMC. This directive outlines guidelines for daily prayer, ascetical practices, restricted interaction with the outside world and ongoing spiritual

⁴⁷ The decision is taken by CMC General Synaxis in 2021. Soon it is approved by The Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Vatican City, Prot. N. 133/2021.

⁴⁸ *CMC Directives of Contemplative Houses*, pp. 196-214 in *CMC Directives*, 5th Edition. Approved by the CMC General Synaxis, Aluva, 2016.

formation, all designed to support the continuous growth in their vocation.

5.4. Continued Relationship with Congregation

Though the sisters embrace an eremitical life, they remain deeply connected to the wider CMC family. Regular communication with the Major Superiors, participation in general synaxis and their unwavering commitment to intercessory prayer and support exemplify their integral role in the congregation's mission. Community prayers, feast days and significant liturgical celebrations serve as spiritual and emotional bridges, fostering a profound sense of unity and solidarity with the congregation.

5.5. Lifestyle of CMC Ascetics

The commitment of CMC ascetics⁴⁹ to eremitical life, as outlined in the matters provided, highlights a deeply contemplative and disciplined approach to spiritual living. The characteristic features of CMC ascetics, particularly in the context of eremitical life, are briefly narrated here.

Solitude and Silence: CMC ascetics prioritize both external and internal silence. They live in enclosure, often in a solitary cell, to minimize distractions and foster an environment conducive to prayer. This solitude is not just physical, but also extends to avoiding unnecessary interactions, making space for God (*Vacare Deo*).

Prayer and Contemplation: Central to their lifestyle is a commitment to unceasing prayer and contemplative practices. They engage in the Liturgy of the Hours, interior recollection, deep meditation and mental prayer, aiming to unite their hearts and minds with God through sustained focus and devotion.

Liturgy of the Hours: CMC ascetics practice the seven canonical hours of the Syro-Malabar Church, which include *Ramsa*: the evening prayer, which takes place at 6.00pm; *Lelya*: the night liturgy, which takes place at 9.00pm; *Qala d-Shahra*: the vigil liturgy at 3:45am; *Sapra*: the morning liturgy, at 6.00am; *Quta'a*: the third hour liturgy, which takes place at 9.00am; *Endana*: the noon liturgy, at 12.00pm; *D-Bathsha Shayin*: the ninth hour liturgy, which takes place at 3.00pm. These hours of prayer connect them to the universal rhythm of praise and intercession, aligning their daily lives with the Church's ongoing worship.

⁴⁹ CMC Directives, pp.196-214.

The Jesus Prayer: The repetition of the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner") is central to the contemplative practice of CMC ascetics. This prayer fosters continual remembrance of God and deepens their communion with Him. It is recited both aloud and mentally, eventually becoming a natural rhythm of the heart. Additionally, they write the name of Jesus each morning as an act of devotion and spiritual focus.

Liturgical Mysticism: It is a profound, experimental immersion in the Divine Mystery through the Church's sacred rites, drawing the soul beyond mere ritual observance into a transformative union with God. For CMC ascetics, this path deepens their awareness of the divine presence, especially in the Holy Qurbana, the Divine Praises and the sacramental life, which lay at the heart of their vocation. Through these sacred rhythms, they are shaped into a living sacrifice of praise, intimately united with Christ's Paschal Mystery across the liturgical year. Silence, solitude and contemplation further deepen this union, allowing their hidden life to become a wellspring of grace and intercession for the Church and the world.

Scripture and Spiritual Reading: The daily practice of CMC ascetics includes reading and contemplating Scripture, as well as reflecting on the writings of the Church Fathers, the Desert Fathers, and other ascetical saints. This meditation deepens their understanding of the faith and strengthens their soul, guiding them toward greater spiritual growth.

Hesychia (Inner Stillness): Following the principle of Hesychia, CMC ascetics aim to cultivate inner stillness- freedom from distractions and inner turmoil. This peace is achieved through focused prayer and asceticism of mind allowing them to encounter God more fully and experience spiritual transformation.

Desert Day: A single day set aside for complete solitude, silence, and prayer, often referred to as a "desert day." It serves as a retreat from daily activities, allowing for introspection, renewal of spiritual focus, and a deepened connection with God. On this day, solitaries dedicate themselves entirely to the personal prayer, meditation, and reflection on Scripture, refraining from external engagements.

Solitary Days: The practice of solitude is a cornerstone of the spiritual journey for CMC ascetics. Through designated periods of solitary living- ranging from 50 days, 25 days, to even 7 days -individuals seek to deepen their communion with God. These sacred intervals are

marked by silence, prayer, and ascetic disciplines, serving as a path to spiritual purification and renewal. By embracing these moments of solitude, they reinforce their commitment to the eremitical vocation, fostering a profound union with God and the Church.

Enclosure: Enclosure embodies both a physical and spiritual discipline, enabling CMC ascetics to dedicate themselves fully to a life of solitude, prayer, and asceticism. The physical enclosure involves residing in a cell, a space set apart from the distractions and demands of the world. The physical separation provides the ascetic with an environment conducive to focusing solely on their relationship with God, unburdened by societal pressures or material concerns. Beyond the physical aspect, the spiritual enclosure entails a deliberate detachment from internal distractions, such as worldly desires, anxieties, or attachments. This inner discipline fosters silence, peace, and a profound union with God, nurturing their vocation and spiritual growth.

Vigil (Night Prayer): For CMC ascetics, staying awake in prayer at night symbolizes watchfulness and readiness for the Lord. It expresses the soul's longing for God and often involves prolonged prayer during the night, accompanied by meditative silence, deepening their connection with God.

Asceticism: They embrace ascetic practices, such as fasting, simple living, bodily discipline and control senses. These practices help detach them from worldly comforts and desires, keeping their focus on spiritual growth and reliance on God.

Asceticism of the Mind: It is a corner stone of CMC ascetics, focusing on cultivating mental discipline by letting go of distractions, desires and the unchecked flow of thoughts and curiosity. This practice aims to foster clarity, focus and lasting inner peace. Unlike physical asceticism, which involves abstaining from material comforts, mental asceticism emphasizes self-mastery, emotional control, the letting go of attachments and the adoption of a non-judgemental mindset. The path to mental asceticism involves mindfulness, deep contemplation and consciously detaching from external influences that cloud judgment or disrupt inner harmony. It is a journey of learning to govern the mind, rather than being controlled by the fleeting waves of thought and emotion.

Fasting and abstinence: Fasting is an important means of subduing bodily desires and focusing on spiritual nourishment. CMC ascetics observe strict fasts, including complete abstinence from meat and fish,

and extended fasts during the *Paschal Triduum*. Abstinence is observed on all Wednesdays and Fridays. There is one meal on First Fridays, and chain fasting is practiced on special occasions to deepen their spiritual discipline. The seasonal fasts include the major fasting seasons of the Syro-Malabar Church, like weeks of Great Fast -50 days, the weeks of annunciation- 25 days, fifteen days fast, eight days fast, three days fast (eighteen days before the Great Fast) are observed with heightened rigor. Their meals are often vegetarian.

Simplicity of Life: Simplicity is essential for CMC ascetics. They live a humble life, minimizing material possessions and comforts to remain detached from the world and focused on their spiritual calling.

Manual Labor: CMC ascetics often engage in manual labour, which serves both as a means of sustenance and an opportunity to offer their efforts as prayer. This integration of work and contemplation creates a harmonious balance in their lives.

Spiritual Discipline: CMC ascetics maintain a disciplined spiritual routine, characterized by regular times for prayer, reflection, and study. This structure supports their efforts to remain faithful to their eremitical vocation.

Commitment to Intercession: Despite living in solitude, CMC ascetics offer their prayers and sacrifices for the wider Church and the world. Their life of silence and isolation is seen as a form of intercession, where they pray for the needs and spiritual well-being of others.

5.6. CMC Ascetics – A Model TIMETABLE

The timetable is given below is the model that CMC ascetics are already using to practice asceticism in the contemplative house.

3.15 am	-	Rising
3.45 am	-	Liturgy of the hours (<i>Khala d'shahara</i>)
4-5 am	-	<i>Lectio Divina</i> , Jesus Prayer
5- 6 am	-	Mental Prayer I
6 - 6.30 am	-	Liturgy of the hours (<i>Sapra</i>)
6.30 am	-	Holy <i>Qurbana</i>
7.45 am	-	Breakfast
8- 9 am	-	Spiritual Reading
9 - 9.15 am	-	Liturgy of the hours (<i>Khuthaa</i>)
9.15-10.45am	-	Cooking & Personal Works

10.45-11.40am	-	Life in Cell (<i>Kaivelakal</i>)
11.40 am	-	Jesus Prayer
12 .00 pm	-	Liturgy of the hours (<i>Endhana</i>) Particular Examination of Conscience
12.30 pm	-	Lunch
1.10 pm	-	<i>Siesta</i>
2- 3 pm	-	Rosary, Liturgy of the hours (<i>Di-bus-sha shaien</i>)
3- 5.30 pm	-	Manual labour
6.00 pm	-	Liturgy of the hours (<i>Ramsa</i>)
6.45-7.30 pm	-	Mental Prayer II
7. 30-pm	-	Dinner
7.50-8.30 pm	-	<i>Satsang</i>
8.30 pm	-	Liturgy of the hours (<i>Lelya</i>)
9.30 pm	-	To Bed

5.7. Guidance from the Congregation

Since ascetics belonging to an Institute of Consecrated Life, must get guidelines and principles from the Constitution or Directives of the institute and constant guidance from the superior general and council. About the governance, what is specified in the Statutes, defined for ascetics, need to be followed. The Rules of ascetics should highlight the balance between community life, ascetical discipline, contemplative focus and services for the people in need, stay as being the part of the framework of eremitical community.

5.8. Community Dynamics

The eremitical community always need **supportive environments**. While eremitical life values solitude, occasional community gatherings for mutual encouragement and discernment help balance individual and communal aspects. Recreation once a day, using Radio for a particular time to know the news, computer and mobile phone (common) for media ministry and necessary contacts, occasional special meals with 'outing in the *clausura*,' once a year meeting relatives are some of the aspects needs for effective eremitical community living of the ascetics.

The leadership in the forms of a spiritual guide for accompaniment and a prioress of the community ensure that ascetical practices are neither excessive nor lax, allowing each member to progress in their unique spiritual path.

The scholarly advancement for the members is always must for writing books, articles, monthly recollections, Bible commentaries, using media for spiritual assistance for people, religious of same institute and other congregations, training for newly starting ascetical communities in the Church. All should have advanced studies and training for better understanding of spirituality in this lifestyle. Ascetics must have secular studies before entering the eremitical life, later, according to the needs in the ascetics, some of the selected members should have religious and language higher studies (e.g., from B Ph, B Th to PhD; higher studies in Syriac, Sanskrit, Malayalam, English, Hindi languages etc.).

The main task or responsibility in the life of the ascetics is **service to others**. This lifestyle encourages ascetics to provide service for others, even while maintaining their contemplative focus. This service could include intercessory prayer, spiritual direction, liturgical celebrations (include people from outside), taking care of the people come for payer days or retreats or long-term spiritual renewal in the cloister, training ascetics from different congregations, making liturgical articles and crafting items etc., are sustaining the community and ready for integrating their asceticism with services for people in need.

5.9. Challenges and Solutions

Over emphasis on asceticism could lead to burnout. This is mitigated by emphasizing that ascetical practices are means to a deeper contemplative life, not an end in itself. Even in eremitical settings, fostering mutual charity through occasional communication is essential. Members need to find enough time and enthusiasm to share their experience and feelings to each other, confession once a week, extraordinary confession once in three months, participation in the general synaxis by prioress, canonical and occasional friendly visitation by Superior general, daily *satsang* and occasional 'celebrations' must be included in the Statutes.

By weaving ascetical disciplines into the fabric of a solitary contemplative lifestyle, a community can achieve the dual purpose of sanctifying its members and offering a silent yet powerful witness to the world. This approach should reflect in the particular law of the Church *sui iuris* as mentioned in Canon 570 and the broader tradition of the Eastern Churches.

What is more challenging to an ascetical style of life in an Institute is the true formation of the candidates who are seeking for it. CMC has to take candidates directly to the house of ascetics and appoint a person as a true formator, the one who is accompanying candidates, need to be a pure

ascetic well trained and practiced asceticism in the contemplative community life. Again, a proper house is designed only for the ascetics in a place of solitary and panoramically fitting for eremitical life.

Conclusion

The life of CMC ascetics is a profound testament to the beauty of eremitical vocation, characterized by unwavering dedication to solitude, prayer and asceticism. Through their commitment to silence, the divine praises, Jesus' prayer and Scripture meditation, they create an atmosphere of continual communion with God. Their practices of enclosure, fasting, manual labour and simplicity of life reinforce their spiritual focus, while the principles of *hesychia* and designated periods of solitary living deepen their interior transformation.

Despite their seclusion, the ascetics remain deeply connected to the traditions and spirit of the *Ecclesia sui iuris*, of own country, of the school/s of spirituality and to the world through their intercessory prayers and sacrifices. This lifestyle is centred on inner stillness and ascetic discipline are the sources of spiritual renewal not only for themselves but also for the wider Christian community. By embracing the eremitical path with humility and devotion, CMC ascetics exemplify a life fully dedicated to God, inviting others to witness the transcendent value of seeking Him in the stillness and simplicity of the heart.

The summary of this eremitical lifestyle is reflected to express as someone who saw the sisters would say, "How good are your dwellings, Jacob, and your tents, Israel; like shady groves and like gardens beside the rivers, and like fruit beside the waters" (Num 24, 5-6). "Earning one part on bread and another part on those in need."⁵⁰ At the heart of eremitical life, the individual ascetic is linked with the community and the salvation of every person. The action of contemplative ascetics' life is prayer, prayer without ceasing, prayer not divorced or separated from work and the rest of life, prayer as life and life as prayer.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Cf., Athanasius, *The Life of Anthony*, *Coptic Church Review*, Vol. 15, 1994, p. 5.

⁵¹ Cf., Athanasius, "Vita S. Antonii," *PG*, Vol. 26, p. 846.