

*On the*  
**Roles and Functions**  
**of Monks, Priors, Priests and Abbots**  
*a Synopsis for the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West*

As a dynamic and growing Order, periodically we need to revisit our understanding of the roles and functions of Monks, Priors, Priests and Abbots that make up the body of the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West. This particular synopsis re-envisions these four roles and their characteristic features and functions. Principally, Monks, Priors, Priests and Abbots are responsible for the *transmission* of an important aspect of the sacred Tradition to which the Order belongs. It is crucial to say that this transmission does not focus on the exoteric dimensions of Christianity, but specifically upon the inner or esoteric dimensions of a particular stream of traditional Christianity—namely the one issuing from the Orient as it flowed from its sacred source in Yeshua. We are the **keepers** of this inner dimension, and we attempt to hold open the door to the Way (its Path) of transformative and contemplative change as **transmitters**. This is our vocation.

Together we take responsibility for the transmission of that stream, as we understand it at this particular place and time. After individual discernment and the community's guidance, each one of us does so in the particular mode and vocation that has been given us, at our own level of responsibility and circle of influence. The responsibility for transmission must, of course, be taken up with great care and deliberation in each of these roles so as to awaken, nurture and provide a rich environment for the first glimmerings as well as the full maturation of spiritual life wherever and however it is found. We might envision, therefore, the particularities of each level or domain of responsibility in these specific ways:

Monk

- A monk in the world is the primary responsibility of us all. Fundamentally the work of a monk is to be a sage, a priest, a shaman, or at times a spiritual warrior or prophetic voice in the *kosmos* (the human order created in the world).
- In the sacred tradition of the Orient we are each meant watchers for and guardians of the holy fire of wisdom that Yeshua cast into the *kosmos*.
- A monk is a guide for pilgrims and for those wandering, lost across the landscape and terrain of an unknown and difficult world.
- A monk is a spiritual site or a node in the web of creation and of Spirit where the higher order and spiritual realities from another Realm may enter and get through into this world.
- A monk is a well of water for thirsty souls and a spring of refreshment in a parched land providing the inner refreshment of wisdom and Spirit.
- Like Yeshua, a monk becomes bread for the world, and provides the bread of heaven meant to feed those on the journey in this hungry world.
- As far as possible a monk is a living embodiment, manifestation and image of the qualities of heaven representing God's kingdom here on earth.

### Prior

- A prior is a nurturer of human hearts and a mentor-teacher of souls on the journey
- He or she creates hospitality, a hearth (a center of warmth) around which others may gather
- A prior provides temporary encampments and oases on the journey through the wilderness through retreats, meditations spaces and sanctuaries in small groups.
- A prior makes a space for community to gather in contemplative prayer and silence, study and reflection, and human fellowship, feeding and providing nourishment for others
- A prior empowers others, helping them to move forward and find their way on the spiritual path through the world.
- A prior provides guidance and spiritual direction as needed for those in the priory.
- Any member or friend of the Order may be appointed as prior in order to serve a local community of spiritual pilgrims and wisdom seekers.

### Priest

- A Priest is a healer-hospitaler who oversees the health and well-being of pilgrims on the path. Priests provide sacramental blessing and anointing at those places of transition, transmutation, and at the milestones of life-change in a person's sojourn through earth. These include births, baptisms and initiations, weddings, burials, unction for healing and pain, and presiding over Eucharistic celebrations of various communities.
- In some deep sense a priest is a shaman-healer who walks between the worlds and interfaces, and other liminal or spiritual spaces bringing strength and healing—*therapeia*.
- A Priest works with the spiritual equivalents of the four fundamental elements in the way that Yeshua did using earth, water, wind and fire alchemically for the transformative good of others.
- Using, for example, material bounty, divine quality and life, interior refreshment, freedom of Spirit, uncreated light, awakening and enlightenment, consciousness and energy, a priest works for the transformation of human being and consciousness.
- Clergy from other lines of transmission are fully accepted as priests and ministers of the Order with its rights and responsibilities without relinquishing any of their duties to other Orders.

### Abbot

- An Abbot is a visionary watcher, maintaining perspective with and connection to the past, present and future as well as the perspective of Transcendence and Immanence along the vertical axis.
- He or she is a servant exercising pastoral oversight for the health and maintenance of the previous functions as outlined above in the communities they serve.
- An Abbot is responsible for maintaining the transmission of the sacred tradition not as an institution, ritual, or custom, but as a transformative process in an environment in which individuals and communities can grow and flourish.
- An Abbot also serves the web of spiritual energies which is the Kingdom of God,

- offering those energies and transmitting them as faithfully as possible.
- An Abbot takes responsibility for the widening extensions of the web as an embedded hierarchy of care and compassion in which all are held and in which all care for one-another.
  - An Abbot acts as a gentle shepherd helping to guide these processes—empowering others to do their work, walk their paths, love their lives, and become compassionate toward the world in which they live.

### The Work of All

Analogically, when one takes up responsibility to pass along life through the generations by becoming a parent, one does so as an adult (at least theoretically). Such a responsibility for the transmission of human life across the ages is by definition generative and creative, and so it is with spiritual transmission. One is deemed to be a spiritual adult in order to perform these duties. An individual becomes a parent spiritually by participating in spiritual reproduction, gestation, birth, nurture and care-giving, all of which are implicit in the assuming these responsibilities.

The primary difference between the roles and functions of monks, priors, priests, and abbots, first of all, has to do with the scope of the field or focus of the work of spiritual transmission. Monks are distributed across the landscape of the world, alert to signs of spiritual awakening in the world immediately around them. Priors and priests primarily perform their functions locally for intentional pilgrims in terms of a particular community in a specific geographic location. Abbots have responsibility for the larger collectivity of the Order that typically includes multiple locales, specific communities and ministries of various kinds spread out over a larger geographic area. Implicitly the role and function of an Abbot may include all of the above, though he or she works to assist, guide, and oversee the ministry of many monks, priors, priests, and multiple communities in the world, while having, perhaps, direct responsibility for one particular community as well.

No matter our sphere of work or our calling to a particular vocation, our primary responsibility is for the life of the world, for we have set out as wisdom seekers and transmitters into the “monastery of the world” ministering as best we can to any and all who are in need.

*--Revised and presented to the Order by the Abbots  
prior to the 2016 gathering.*