

Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics: Lifestyles for Self-Discovery

by Marsha Sinetar (Paulist Press, 1986), 182 pp.

This book in the Lending Library describes an unusual case study that began with the following advertisement:

"Local author / researcher wishes to interview unique individuals, over age 35, who, despite life's ups & downs:

- *Live alone (by choice) in a positive contributive relationship to others.*
- *Possess a highly developed sense of aesthetics, ethics and universal order.*
- *Experience their work and/or daily activity as devotional, a calling, or as service.*
- *Have designed their lives to be as simple, orderly and uncomplicated as possible.*

"Also, legally married couples who fit this description would be ideal for participation in this lifestyle study.

"If you know of someone interested in participation (confidential questionnaire), please ask him or her to review this ad and respond to: Box Holder, P.O. Box 1, Stewarts Point, CA 95480."

A volunteer reviewer on Amazon.com summarized the book better than I ever could, so here is that review by OAKSHAMAN of the Vine Voice:

This book deals with those individuals who leave the common, collective world in order to seek wholeness (self-actualization in modern jargon.) The goal is the same--obedience to the law of each person's higher nature. These people withdraw from distraction and the control of others in order that they might confront their Self.

Two paths are outlined, but they are not at all mutually exclusive. The first is the path of social transcendence, of deliberate detachment and independence from social influences to varying degrees. The author equates this with the path of the monk. However, given the fact that these people must provide their own structure and discipline independent of a traditional order, I would describe them more as in the tradition of the hermit.

The second path goes further, for it is that of self-transcendence. Here it is not merely society that is transcended but one's own petty ego. This is the path of direct union with something higher. It is difficult to express but recognizable by such figures as Plotinus, Dante, Blake, Swedenborg, Whitman, Bucke, etc. While those on the path of the monk often would not recognize themselves as such (they might not even see themselves as spiritual), those who are on the mystic's path invariably recognize that they are mystics.