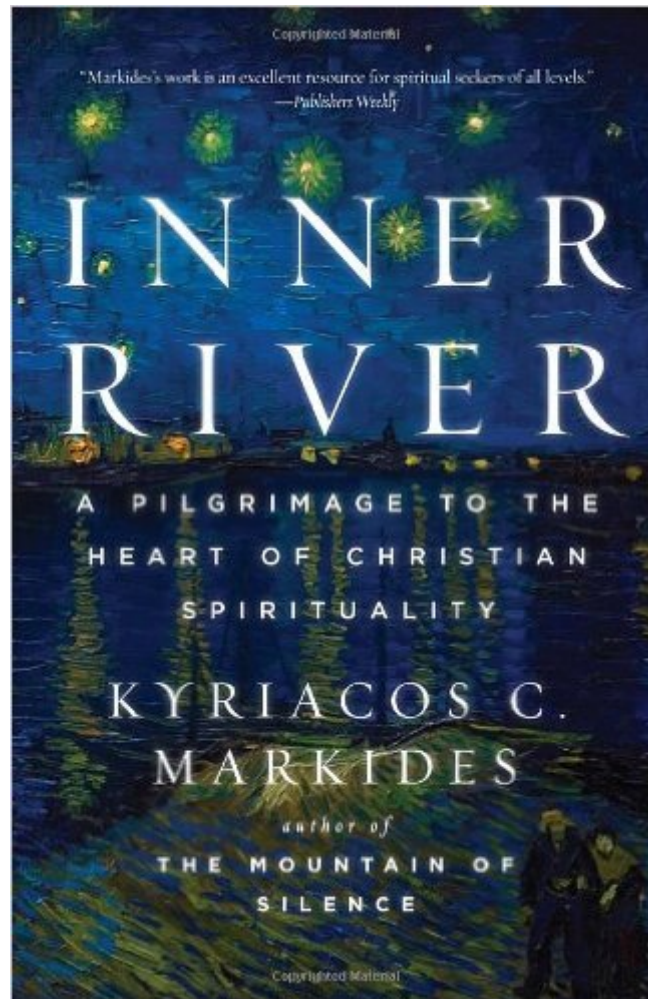


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# Inner River: A Pilgrimage To The Heart Of Christian Spirituality



## Synopsis

With his engaging blend of travelogue, conversations with a wise and charismatic spiritual father, and musings on the big questions of life and death, Professor Markides takes us as companions on his journey of discovery. The insights that he communicates with such enthusiasm are timely ones: here at last is a writer who challenges the seeker after mystical understanding and Eastern spirituality to discover Christianity.

Dr. Elizabeth Theokritoff, independent scholar and co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*

In *Inner River*, Kyriacos Markides—scholar, researcher, author, and pilgrim—takes us on a thrilling quest into the heart of Christian spirituality and mankind's desire for a transcendent experience of God. From Maine's rugged shores to a Cypriot monastery to Greece's remote Mt. Athos and, ultimately, to an Egyptian desert, Markides encounters a diverse cast of characters that allows him to explore the worlds of the natural and the supernatural, of religion and spirit, and of the seen and the unseen. *Inner River* will appeal to a wide range of readers, from Christians seeking insights into their religion and its various expressions to scholars interested in learning more about the mystical way of life and wisdom that have been preserved in the heart of Orthodox spirituality. Perhaps most important, however, is the bridge it offers contemporary readers to a Christian life that is balanced between the worldly and the spiritual.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have read (and re-read much of) "The Mountain of Silence," though I confess that I have yet to

resume "Gifts of the Desert" after reading 60 pages and losing interest. For this reason, it would be unfair to officially call this my third book by Kyriacos Markides, but I have read enough of him to know what to expect... for the most part. "The Mountain of Silence" is one of those books about Orthodoxy that "broke through" the Orthodox world and has become better known. It is one I have recommended to many people. In recommending that book, though, I also provide with the recommendation a piece of advice: Listen to everything Fr. Maximos says, but be very careful of the author's interpretation of his words. He's often off just by a bit, but that's enough to cause big issues. For me, "The Mountain of Silence" is 85% really good stuff, and that good stuff is incredibly engaging and powerful. This book was a bit different... The sociological and... shall we say, syncretistic... worldview from which the author approaches topics of Orthodox spirituality (or "mysticism," as it is often referred to, though I have hesitations about using this word) are often what made me pause when reading "The Mountain of Silence." As I said, he is sometimes just a little bit off in his understanding, but he's off enough to give me pause in recommending the book. At other times - and far more rarely - he is far more than being just a little off; he outright wrong in his understanding of certain theological truths.

Markides' *\*Inner River\** is a helpful introduction into Eastern Orthodox Christian spirituality, and most especially a glimpse into the wisdom of hermetic and monastic traditions. Readers--whether familiar or unfamiliar with Eastern Orthodoxy--will hopefully come away with some of the gems of its mystical tradition and an appreciation for the wisdom contained within, most especially a more integrated understanding of the natural and spiritual aspects of the world. Markides begins his book by focusing on a discussion with Fr. Maximos, a former Athonite monk who is now a bishop in Cyprus. Fr. Maximos discusses the "fruit of the spirit" in the most helpful way I've ever heard, indicating the importance of each one, and how they are a progression from the least/easiest (self-control) to the greatest (love). He ties this in with the Orthodox understanding of the progression from *\*Catharsis\** (purging/purification) to *\*Photisis\** (enlightening) to *\*Theosis\** (union with God). While there is a description of each of these stages in the Orthodox understanding of salvation, for those unfamiliar with Orthodoxy it might be a little confusing simply because of the vast differences between Eastern and Western theology. This book attempts to be accessible to any Christian and/or religious scholar, and I think the wisdom in it is vastly applicable, but this is not a full and complete treatment of Eastern Orthodox theology and should not be treated as such. After Markides' discussion with Fr. Maximos, we see some of his journeying to different Orthodox monasteries such as Mt. Athos and St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai, before journeying back to

Cyprus and having other conversations with Fr. Maximos.

The good professor from Maine has done it one more time with his interviews and travels with the monks of Mt. Athos, specifically Fr. Maximus of Cyprus. The tough question for me now is: do I give away as gifts his Mountain of Silence or this latest work? Having found the faith in Evangelical Protestantism back in the 60s, what a delight to hear of a deeper river, a faith that goes beyond the football field rah, rah Jesus rally's and the parking lot sized churches to the dark walls of smoke stained prayer rooms with mumbling old guys huddled at the klaros, the chanter stand, lost there in the business of being found with God. Having visited St. Catherine's in Egypt just two years after Markides, his tales of his journey there were dear to me. But mostly, it's the interviews here in Inner River with Fr. Maximus that are key. I guess I should use a better title for him as he is now the top Orthodox Church hierarch there in Cyprus; but he always comes across as a monk not a prelate. Some of my Orthodox friends are annoyed when Markides slips in his New Age approach to the Big Questions but I like it. He pushes the monks he interviews to address concerns that touch us where we live. The author's affection for his wife, his connections with workaday friends just trying to be better people, better Christians--that's what makes his book the kind you want to box up and send to your kids, friends in prison, hand out as Bible tracts. The Eastern Christian way is always a beginning, always one more step up the ladder. My heart takes off when I hear answers like the one Fr.

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