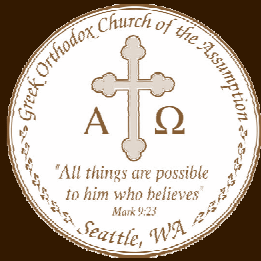


GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

Studies in the Faith

The Role of Monasticism in the Orthodox Church



**GREEK ORTHODOX
CHURCH
OF THE
ASSUMPTION**

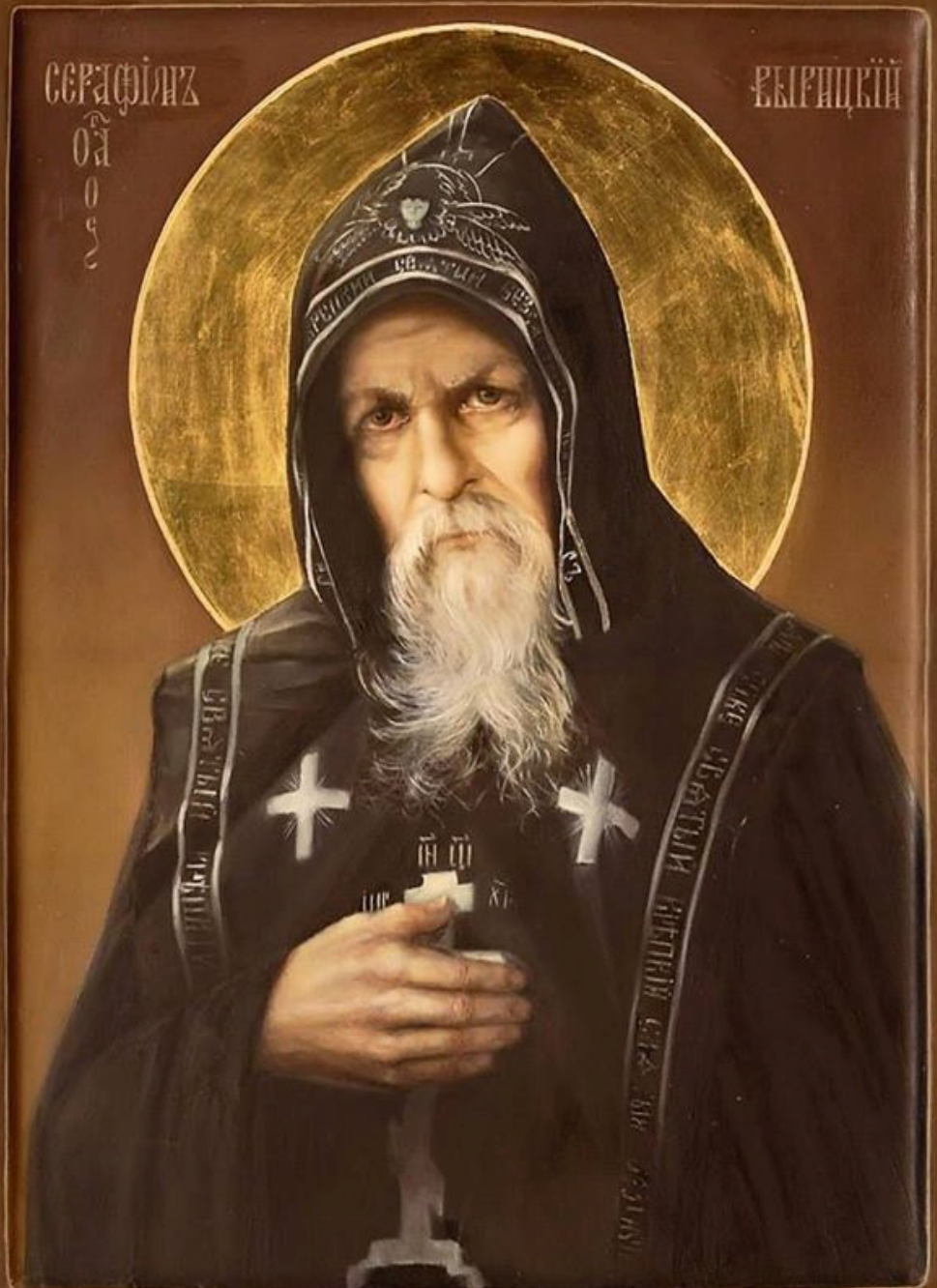
1804 Thirteenth Avenue
Seattle, Washington
98122-2515

Phone: (206) 323-8557

Fax: (206) 323-1205

Email: [officemanager@
assumptionseattle.org](mailto:officemanager@assumptionseattle.org)

Presented by
**Fr. Dean
Kouldukis**



MONASTICISM AND ORTHODOXY

The best way to penetrate Orthodox Spirituality is through Monasticism.

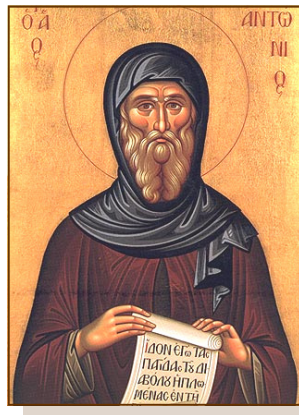
THE BASIS FOR THE MONASTIC MOVEMENT (John 17:13-16)

In the middle of the 2nd century, Christians reacted by raising their own personal standards of austere Christian life. They lived by themselves or in special houses as a community of believers. By the middle of the 3rd century, they began to flee to the desert.

MONASTICISM HAS TAKEN THREE CHIEF FORMS

The three chief forms of monasticism were established in 350 A.D. and are still found in Orthodoxy today:

1. Hermits (Anchorite): Ascetics leading a solitary life in caves, huts. A great model of this type of monasticism is St. Anthony of Egypt (251-356). St. Anthony is considered the father of monasticism.



2. Community Life (Cenobitic): Monks dwell together under a common rule, monastery, or convent. The pioneer was St. Pachomios of Egypt (286-346). Western monasticism is patterned after community monasticism.



3. Semi-hermitic: Many small settlements, each containing two to six members. All communities are loosely knit.

- In monastic life, a monk's primary task is to lead a life of prayer—through prayer he serves others.
- Because of its monasteries, 4th century Egypt was regarded as a second Holy Land.
- Since the 10th century, the chief center of Orthodox monasticism has been Mt. Athos (in Greece) - contains 20 monasteries.
- There are no orders in Orthodox monasticism.
- Monasteries are guided by elders—a monk who may or may not be a priest.
- As Marriage is a Sacrament of the Church, it is a holy institution. Tonsure to monastic orders is not. In 343 A.D., the Council of Gangra condemned those who advocated monasticism for all denying salvation through marriage.
- Tonsure: Superior to lay people, but subordinate to the clergy.
- St. Basil developed the rules of monasteries (community) - "Great Rules" and "Brief Rules" (West as well).
- Even though monasteries are communal, there is a hermitic emphasis which prevails to this day in the East. In the West, the spirit is more communal since St. Benedict modified the monastic rules of St. Basil, giving western monasticism a communal emphasis.
- Goal: To become Holy.

THE ROLE OF MONASTICISM IN ORTHODOXY

Monastics became involved in defending the Church against Christological heresies. Also within monasticism, some heresies manifested themselves. Eutychos, a monk from Constantinople, developed the heresy of monophysitism (single divine nature of Christ vs. the two natures). Monks also played a large part in defending the Church against iconoclasm (those who did not want icons).

FIVE GOOD REASONS NOT TO VISIT A MONASTERY

The temptations of monastic maximalism

Hieromonk Jonah (Paffhausen)

of the Monastery of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco

The priest looked out of the altar, checking to see if the choir director was ready to begin the hours before the Divine Liturgy. Just as he was ready to say, "Blessed is our God," his newest convert, Bill, made a grand entrance into the church, having just gotten back from his latest pilgrimage to another monastery. Bill—or Vasili, as he now insisted on being called—had been a normal young evangelical convert; clean-cut, single, and working his first job out of college. Then he discovered Orthodoxy in a bookstore, and with great zeal embraced the Faith. He was chrismated after a usual six-month →

➔ catechumenate, during which he read just about every book in print on the Orthodox Faith.

After a year or so, Bill had decided to go visit monasteries. This is where his change began. He became more pious and more serious about his faith, but also started to become, well, weird. Like this Sunday morning. Bill/Vasili was not content to come in like everyone else. Rather, prayer ropes flying from his wrists, he made grand bows at the entrance to the nave, and again, the entire congregation watching, with a flourish prostrated before virtually every icon in the church. It was such a display that no one listened to the hours.

Then, just before the time the Liturgy should have begun, Bill came up to the door of the altar and announced he must have confession, or he'd be in big trouble with the holy elders. Father, being patient with zealous youths, went to hear the confession.

"I am the worst of all sinners!" Bill began as usual. Then he read his list, only four pages this morning. "And I only could do two hundred prostrations, not my usual three hundred, and only read four akathists, so I am not fully prepared for communion," he said. "Besides, I just had to have a cup of coffee, but since everyone else does anyway, can I still go to communion?"

The priest had heard it all before. What does one say? "You did all those prayers, and still had to have a cup of coffee?"

"Well, the Elder said I had to do the prayers, but I couldn't stay awake to finish them all. So I had some coffee. But doesn't everyone in this jurisdiction even have breakfast before Liturgy? I heard that Bishop So-and-so even had coffee with those godless Catholics right before Liturgy. Besides, it was at three a.m. when I had the coffee, and it's almost ten now."

A little after, thought the priest. "Why didn't you start your rule a little earlier?"

"Well, the book I just read said it must only be done after midnight, as that is the time to battle demons. Besides, Madonna was on `Saturday Night Live.' Uh ... the video clips of hers really led me into a big temptation ... so I did all those prostrations."

Father really did not know what to address first. "Father," Bill asked, "don't you think it's time to start being more traditional, to get rid of those paraffin candles and use real beeswax? It is more Orthodox. It really bothers me that the choir reads half the texts of the vigil, instead of singing them, like last night. And on the wrong calendar too. It took me three hours just to repeat the vigil on the right calendar! I'm afraid I am going to have to find another jurisdiction that is more Orthodox. Am I the only one in this parish who knows how to do things right? Besides, I have invited my Elder to meet you, and he'll set you straight on all this stuff. He told me we have to do everything correctly, like they do it, otherwise we'll all burn in hell."

Father was losing patience, looking at his watch, 10:20 and counting. "Okay, Vasili, look, there are a number of issues here, and we need to talk about them, but not while the whole church is waiting for you to finish. When did you go to confession last?"

"Yesterday, at the monastery. I think I have finally found a spiritual father worthy of my obedience."

"And who is he?"

"Fr. So-and-so, from the monastery in the mountains. He is coming to serve with you next Sunday."

"Bill..."

"Vasili."

"Okay, Vasili, then. That guy was defrocked years ago. I can't serve with him! Who gave you a blessing to go see him? Much less submit yourself to him? Much less invite him here?"

"Oh, so you too are continuing to persecute that righteous man! I know in my heart he is truly Orthodox! Besides he baptized me yesterday, making up for what you did not do by chrismating me. Actually," getting excited, "why am I here anyway? I should really go be with him as the true criterion of Orthodoxy.. . Not in this modernist, ecumenist jurisdiction. My spiritual father may have been defrocked, but he is obedient to God, not those godless bishops! I know it because I feel it in my heart ..."

"So," said Father, rather irritated, "why do you want to go to communion here anyway?"

"What! You would deny me my right to go to communion!" he whined, as he stormed out.

MONASTERY LIFE vs. PARISH LIFE

This story is a rather extreme, but not entirely uncommon, example of what can go wrong when lay-people especially those who are spiritually immature take to visiting monasteries for the wrong reasons and in the wrong spirit.

The growth of monasteries in North America over the past thirty years, and especially in the past five years, has brought about a tremendous opportunity for faithful Orthodox Christians to visit monasteries as pilgrims and be exposed to monastic tradition. A monastery, among other things, is a place which practices the liturgical and spiritual life in a maximalist way. This maximalism is expressed in a number of ways, including long, full services, strict ascetic discipline, and very conservative attitudes in everything from language, style, and dress to how one conducts one's personal life. Many confuse monastic maximalism and conservatism with a kind of reactionary ethnic agenda. This is a great mistake, however.

The monasteries incarnate Orthodox culture, regardless of what ethnic flavor it may have. It is the timeless, universal (Catholic) culture passed on by the holy fathers and mothers of the Orthodox Church, through personal discipleship and obedience. The monastic culture is nothing other than obedience to the Gospel, through discipleship to our spiritual fathers, who convey the tradition of how to live out the Gospel in its fullness. To visit an Orthodox monastery is not just to visit that particular community in that place at that time. It is to enter into that living Christian culture which has been handed over from generation to generation by the holy fathers.

Monasticism, the way of repentance, is a radically different way of life from living in the world, with a family, a job, and in a parish. Parishes are the front lines of where the Church meets the world, where a culture is sanctified and transformed by the Gospel. People lead busy lives in the world, and are not able to lead as active a liturgical life as in a monastery. Parish life seldom is and often cannot be maximalist in ethos. Yet a parish is not a compromise, a second-class way of being a Christian. Being a Christian in the world is taking the Gospel to the world, and living and witnessing to Christ while participating fully and actively in the culture. This is a very high calling!

Monastics have a different calling. To be "not of this world," and to structure their lives solely by the Gospel, and by the traditions of the Church, especially the liturgical cycles. It is very important to remember that there is no difference between the services prescribed for a parish and those of a →

➔ monastery. There is no difference in the rules of fasting, prayer, or piety. The main difference is that people in parishes are engaged in the world, and monks are not. The monasteries are critically important to the life of the parishes: they constitute the reservoir of the living Tradition, in its purity, where people can experience the Gospel lived out in a radical way. Monasticism can inform their lives, inspire faithful laity to greater dedication of their lives to Christ and the Gospel, and provide a place of healing and spiritual consolation.

But as Bill/Vasili's story illustrates, there are also some great temptations that people can fall into in visiting monasteries. These temptations are all centered around spiritual pride, and the prelest (delusion) which can go along with it.

THE TRAP OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE

1 Spiritual pride is an easy trap for those new to the faith, who are newly exposed to monastic life, and who are seeking and striving to live an authentic Orthodox spiritual life. It can especially be a trap for those visiting monasteries, seeking spiritual direction, and not knowing what an authentic Orthodox life in the world, in a parish, is all about.

faithful people go to monasteries, and see people's piety and how things are done in that monastic tradition, and want to emulate it-but without understanding it. Pilgrims go and encounter spiritual elders and monks who live lives which, in their view, are more "spiritual" than that of their own parish priest-so they judge him as inadequate to fit their spiritual needs. They go to confession, develop a spiritual relationship with a spiritual father or mother in a monastery, and think that theirs is the only way to salvation. They receive spiritual direction which they may interpret wrongly. Sometimes, people just get some bad advice, and uncritically turn it into the ultimate criterion of spiritual life. And sometimes people will go to a monastery or spiritual father who has been disciplined by the Church, and disregarded the discipline. Then the pilgrim-turned-disciple gets caught up in the self-justification of the errant elder, which in some cases has created a schism.

Excessive external piety, false humility, preoccupation with gossip and "issues" in the life of the Church, judging people on their piety or stance in these issues, complete assurance that one knows exactly how things should be done, and perhaps most dangerous of all, idolizing a person or place as the ultimate criterion of Orthodoxy, can all be symptoms of this malady. They are all aspects of spiritual immaturity. What is missing in all this is Christ and the real spiritual struggle with oneself.

EXCESSIVE PIETY

2 Zeal for Christ and the Church are great and wonderful things; but authentic zeal is very different from a zeal that comes from one's passions. Carnal zeal always has some element of self-gratification or self-centeredness, by which one justifies oneself as truly Orthodox, truly pious, and "in the know." Authentic zeal is not directed towards anything but union in Christ, or against anything but one's own fallen-ness. With true zeal, there is no hypocrisy. False zeal, the delusion of spiritual pride and conceit, is always hypocritical.

Piety is an important way of personalizing the experience and mystery of the faith. Bowing, making the sign of the cross, behaving reverently, and all the other forms given to us by the Tradition are very useful in this. But they are never to be used except to express one's own love for God. They should never be used to "teach" others who are doing things "wrong," or to try to "convict" people of their impiety;

much less, to show others that "I know how to do things 'right'." In many monasteries, the rules for external expression of piety—bowing, crossing oneself, prostrations, and so forth—are observed very carefully; in parishes, however, they often are not. One should never attract attention to oneself through external piety. That only feeds the pride and self-centeredness that is in us, and distracts other people from their prayers.

The rules of fasting also fall into this category. Monasteries generally follow the rules quite strictly. And there is no difference whatsoever in the rules for fasting between monks and laity. That does not mean, however, that one should ever judge another, much less comment, on how someone fasts or doesn't fast. Not only is it usually hypocritical, but it misses the point. Fasting, and all the other rules of the Church, are a means and not an end. If we fast, and feel proud about it, and condemn another for not being so strict, it would have been better for us if we had not fasted at all (Romans 14:3 ff).

The same rule applies to the liturgical life of the Church. Monasteries, by their very constitution, serve the liturgical services very fully and according to the ancient St. Sabbas Typikon. Services can go on for hours and hours, sometimes, and occupy a major proportion of each day. There is no difference whatever, at least in the Slavic traditions, in the services prescribed for monasteries and those for parishes. For a pilgrim to a monastery, while at first the services may seem a real chore, and too long, eventually they grow on you, and you want nothing else. Parish services, abbreviated out of pastoral necessity, can seem incomplete.

There are a couple of temptations here. The first is to think that the monasteries are doing it "right," while the parish is doing it "wrong" The second temptation is to think that there is not as much grace in the parish services, and that the services and liturgical/spiritual life are not being taken seriously. This inevitably leads to judging the parish priest as less "spiritual" and lazy because he cuts the services. Little do we remember that at our first monastic services we were the first to sit down when we had a chance, and glance at our watches every five minutes, wondering if and when it was ever going to end! Parishes abbreviate out of pastoral necessity, and at the discretion of the pastor. One must not judge a priest or parish when they are doing all they can!

JUDGMENTALISM

3 The biggest sin is to judge someone, especially the priest. The standard we set for the priest is usually impossibly high, something we ourselves could never live up to. Thus, any such judgment is immediately hypocrisy. The life of a parish priest is very different, filled with completely different cares, concerns, and responsibilities, from that of a priestmonk in a monastery. The laity see very little of the actual life of their priest. Many think he only works for two hours on Sundays! But to be a pastor is actually an eighty-plus-hour-a-week job. How can the laity judge him? And especially his "spirituality"?

The priestmonk may appear to be more "spiritual" because he is in church for six or eight hours a day, and has few other responsibilities. Try to do that with a family, and dozens or hundreds of parishioners to serve! The asceticism of being in the world and serving Christ, whether as priest or layperson, is equally as great as that of a monk in a monastery. It takes as profound a "spirituality" to do it. But the details will differ with the circumstances.

ABUSE OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

4 Often people will go to monasteries for spiritual guidance and confession. It is a venerable →

➔ and ancient Orthodox tradition to have a priestmonk in a monastery as a spiritual father, and to submit one's life to him. Sometimes people will go to a great elder, mostly for the big questions in life. It is also true that some people will connect better with their parish priest than others. This should be supported by the parish clergy.

If the Church is a spiritual hospital, the monasteries are the intensive care wards, with the specialists. You don't go to a family doctor for cancer; but you also don't go to a neurosurgeon for a cold. The great elders are those specialists who through years of ascetic purification and experience know how to deal with many of the big questions in life that people bring. Many have great spiritual gifts. Many do not. Most monastics are not elders by any stretch of the imagination. This does not compromise their ability to serve as confessor, consoler, and spiritual father. Whether it is a parish priest, a priestmonk, an eldress, or a great elder, the source of the advice and consolation is ultimately the same: God.

A true elder is one who always leaves a person with a profound sense of freedom, even when he reveals to a person the will of God. There is never any manipulation or personal agenda. The elder simply wants the salvation of the person, and is a vessel for him of God's love and forgiveness. The great temptation is to idolize the elder, and even substitute him/her for Christ. A personality cult leads to the destruction of both the elder and the disciples.

Obedience is very important in the spiritual life. Obedience, however, is always within certain boundaries. It can never involve doing what is illegal or immoral. True spiritual obedience has one end: to lead us to obedience to God. It is always within the Church, always toward a more profound level of communion, both ecclesially and personally.

A great temptation, especially for Americans, is to try to find an elder (read also priest or bishop) who is "worthy of my obedience." This is complete spiritual pride and delusion. We may think that we need a great elder, only the best, to submit ourselves to, because only such a gifted one could understand us, and "I could only associate myself with someone who could recognize and develop my unique potential." This is presumption, conceit, and arrogance, presuming oneself to be on the highest of spiritual planes. In reality, especially if we have such an attitude, the last person we would be able to deal with would be a great elder of profound spiritual life, who would quickly cut us down to size. Our pride could not handle that, and we would disregard his advice-even, paradoxically, if what he advises would be the best thing for us.

ECCLESIASTICAL GOSSIP

5 A last great temptation is to get involved in gossip about people, places, practices, and especially the "issues" confronting the Church. Whether it is who is doing what, how they serve this or that service and with whom, or the like, which is all gossip; or whether it involves the greater problems confronting the Church, such as ecumenism, the calendar, or what they are or are not teaching at such and such a seminary; there is very little fruitful and much more that is sinful in all that idle talk. The Lord said that we will be accountable for each word.

Not only does this gossip involve judging people, especially hierarchs, clergy, and teachers who will have to answer for themselves before God; it distracts us from the one thing needful: to pursue our own salvation. We are only accountable to God for our own salvation, not for issues which we can have no effect on. One of the saddest things is that monasteries tend to attract people who in the name of being serious about their spiritual life fall into this delusion, while all this kind of gossip and

factionalism actually destroys their souls.

It is bad enough that people talk about such things in person; many also read whole publications that are essentially scandal sheets. The Internet is perhaps the worst vehicle for such gossip. This is nothing other than ecclesiastical pornography. It must be avoided at all costs!

WHY WE *SHOULD* VISIT MONASTERIES

Faithful Orthodox Christians should go on pilgrimage to monasteries often, should strive to emulate the piety and asceticism of the monastics as far as possible, and should seek the counsel of monastic spiritual fathers and mothers. The temptations and trials come primarily from our own spiritual immaturity and ignorance. We have to be aware of our weaknesses, and strive for the authentic spiritual values of humility, faith, and love.

The prayer of St. Ephraim should always be with us, as the overall guide for our spiritual life:

O Lord and Master of my life, do not give me the spirit of sloth, faintheartedness, lust of power, and idle talk; but give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen!

Hieromonk Jonah is the Econoin of the Monastery of Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco in Point Reyes, California, (OCA).

✠✠✠ ✠✠✠ ✠✠✠ ✠✠✠ ✠✠✠ ✠✠✠ ✠✠✠ ✠✠✠

MONASTICISM IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Rt. Rev. Maximos E. Aghiorgoussis, Th.D.

Bishop of Pittsburgh

The Orthodox Monastic Tradition—The Beginnings

Since the early years of the Christian era, Christians have been called by Christ Himself to live in the world without being of the world (John 17: 13-16). They are distinct from the world, because of their special conduct and their exemplary ethical life. When, toward the middle of the second century of the Christian era, Christian life reached a low ebb, some Christians, both men and women, reacted to this by raising their own personal standards of austere Christian life. They practiced chastity, celibacy, poverty, prayer and fasting (Justic, *I Apology* 15.6; Athenagoras, *Apology* 33; and Galenus, *De Sententiis Politiae Platonicae*).

These people considered themselves Christians selected to live the life of angels (Matt. 22: 30). They lived by themselves or in special houses as a community. At about the middle of the third century, they began fleeing the world and going to the desert, where they established permanent →

➔ habitations, whether by themselves or in small groups. They are known as the "anchorites" (from *anachoresis*: departure, flight); the hermits (from *eremos*: desert); and the monastics (from *monos*: alone, for a monastic lives in the presence of God alone").

A good example of an anchorite monk is Saint Anthony the Great, who fled the world [c. 285] and established himself in the desert of Middle Egypt. Many people imitated his example; they went and lived close to him, thus "populating the desert" (*Troparion* of St. Anthony). These monks lived by themselves in huts and small houses to form a village called "lavra" (later the concept of "lavra" develops, as we will see). St Anthony is considered the Father of Orthodox monasticism, for his kind of monasticism—that of "living alone with God as his only companion" remained the most cherished monastic ideal for the monks of the Eastern Orthodox Church throughout the ages.

The establishment of Christianity as a legal religion of the Roman Empire by Constantine the Great, with the edict of Milan (313), led to a new decline in the ethical life of Christians. In reaction to this decline, many refused to accept any compromises and fled the world to become monastics. Monasticism thrived, especially in Egypt, with two important monastic centers, one in the desert of Nitria, by the Western Bank of the Nile, with Abba Ammoun (d. 356) as its founder, and one in the desert of Skete, south of Nitria, with Saint Makarios of Egypt (d. ca. Egypt 330) as its founder. These monks were anchorites, following the monastic ideal of St. Anthony. They lived by themselves, gathering together for common worship on Saturdays and Sundays only.

Whereas Saint Anthony the Great is the founder of anchorite monasticism, Saint Pachomios of Egypt (d. 346) is the founder, of the so-called "cenobitic" (from *Koinos bios*: communal life) monasticism. Pachomios started as an anchorite himself in the Thebaid, Upper Egypt. Later in that same place, he founded the first "monastery" in the modern sense of the term. St. Anthony's lavra was a village of anchorites who lived by themselves in their own huts and had a life in common, practiced common daily prayer evening and morning, worked in common, had common revenues and expenditures, had common meals, and wore the same identical monastic garb. This garb consisted of a linen tunic or robe and belt, a white goat skin or sheep skin coat and belt, a cone-shaped head-cover or hood (*koukoulion*) and a linen scarf (*maforion* or *pallium*). At this stage, monks were identified with lay people seeking Christian perfection. No religious ceremony was required, and no monastic vows. Monks were prohibited from becoming clergy.

Anchorite monasticism existed in other places besides Egypt. However, "organized monasticism," that is, of the "cenobitic" type, spread to Sinai, Palestine and Syria from Egypt. Two monks from Egypt, St. Illarion (d. 371) and St. Epiphanius, later bishop of Salamis in Cyprus (d. 403), brought organized monasticism to Palestine.

Monasticism at this time was identified with the "charismatics" of the ancient church. This identification of monasticism with the "enthusiastic element" in the church led to some abuses, of which those around Eustathios of Sebastia (d. 380) are good example. Eustathios introduced monasticism into Asia Minor from Egypt. His followers became over-zealous; they taught that marriage and meat-eating made salvation impossible; they were, in fact, advocating monasticism for all Christians. The Council of Gangra (343) condemned these over-enthusiastic practices. Another heresy that affected monasticism during this same time was "Messalianism," which appeared in Mesopotamia (c. 350 A.D.). Messalians were ascetics who practiced poverty, celibacy and fasting. They rejected the sacramental life of the church and pretended to see God with their physical eyes. They spread in Syria and Asia Minor; they finally were anathematized by the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus [431]. Under the influence of the Messalians, the non-sleepers or Vigilant (*Akoimetoi*) type of monasticism was developed

in the area of Constantinople (mid-fifth century). The most famous instance was the *Studion* monastery, renowned for its polemic against the Iconoclasts. St. Symeon of Antioch [ca. 460] also developed the Stylite type of monasticism, living himself on a pole (stylos) for over 36 years.

Monasticism became a strong movement in the life of the church. The church not only condemned anti-church groups and tendencies within monasticism, but also guided and directed the monastic movement to meet its own needs. One of the ways through which this occurred was through a convergence of monasticism and clergy: monks were now ordained in a special religious service at which they subscribed to special monastic vows, thus becoming a special class of Christians standing between the clergy and the laity. This development was mostly due to the efforts of Saint Basil, Archbishop of Caesaria in Cappadocia.

Basil the Great and the Constitution of Orthodox Monasticism

Eustathios of Sebastia introduced monasticism to Asia Minor; he influenced St. Basil, who borrowed whatever was good in his innovations, including the monastic garments, monastic vows, and the special religious service (tonsure) that indicates the special status of a monk, superior to that of lay people, and subordinate to the clergy.

Among the many ascetical works of St. Basil, two are the most significant in terms of regulating the life of monasticism: the "Great Rules" (*Oroi Kata Platos*), and the "Brief Rules" (*Oroi Kat' Epitomen*). These rules regulate the life in the cenobitic monasteries: they extol the monastic life in common as the ideal Christian life, the "life of perfection;" while at the same time indicating the dangers of the solitary anchoritic life. St. Basil's Rules became the *Magna Carta* of Monasticism, both in the East and in the West, throughout the monastic tradition. The difference is that while in the Christian East the anchorite spirit of St. Anthony continues to persist as the original monastic ideal, thus at times reacting against the organized monasticism of a Pachomian, cenobitic type promulgated by Saint Basil in the Rules, the Christian West, after the modifications to the Basilian Rules by St. Benedict, remains faithful to the cenobitic spirit of organized monasticism.

St. Basil set Christian perfectionism as the goal of monastic life. The monks were to practice Christian virtues together, especially love; to practice obedience to a spiritual father; to practice chastity and poverty, and share the common goods of the monastery. After they achieved Christian perfection, they were allowed to come back to the world and help others to achieve Christian perfection. Thus, the monks had the mission of "social workers" as well. St. Basil's institutions, especially his *Basileias*, which was at the same time an orphanage, a "kitchen for the poor," and a school for the illiterate was in practice run by monks. This was St. Basil's way of utilizing the monastic movement to benefit the mission of the Church in the world.

Following St. Basil's example, the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), in its canonical legislation, placed the monastics in a given Diocese under the direct jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop. Only this bishop can allow the foundation of new monasteries in his diocese (Canons 4 and 8). Thus in the Orthodox Church the possibility of the creation of monastic "Orders;" as we see them developing in the West during the Middle Ages, was once and for all eliminated.

Monasticism also spread in the West. Its origins go back to St. Athanasios of Alexandria, who was exiled to the West (339). His *Life of St. Anthony* was translated into Latin by Evagrius of Antioch (380). Two Latin monks, Rufinus and St. Jerome, who lived in Palestine, brought monasticism to the West when they returned, during the second half of the 4th century. St. Ambrose of Milan (d. 395) →

➔ Introduced monasticism in Northern Italy, and St. Augustine (d. 430) in Northern Africa, whence monasticism was transplanted to Spain. St. Martin of Tours (370) introduced monasticism into Northern France (Gaul), and St. Honoratus of Arles into the South. St. John Cassian founded two monasteries near Marseilles (415); he had become acquainted with monasticism in Egypt and Palestine, and was ordained a deacon by St. John Chrysostom in Constantinople. At St. John's deposition, John Cassian returned to Gaul to establish monasticism there.

The Role of Monasticism in the Byzantine and the Ottoman States

With the development of Monasticism during the fourth century and thereafter, many monastics became involved with the various heresies, especially those concerning the Christological dogma. Most of the monastics were the defenders of the Orthodox faith. Still, Eutyches, an archimandrite from Constantinople, headed the heresy of monophysitism. On the Orthodox side, St. Maximos the Confessor (c. 580-662) played an important role in defeating the heresies of monothelitism and monoenergism. The Sixth Ecumenical Council (680) condemned monothelitism and reestablished the doctrine of Chalcedon. During the time of the iconoclastic controversy, the Studite monks, led by St. Theodore the Studite (759-826), played a very important role. In addition to organizing his monastery, the Studion, on the basis of the cenobitic principles of St. Pachomios and St. Basil, St. Theodore also wrote his three *Antirrhetics* against iconoclasm.

After the condemnation of the iconoclasts, monasticism thrived even more. Many representatives of the Byzantine aristocracy became monks. Monks were men of letters; clergy received their education in the monasteries. Bishops, metropolitans, and patriarchs were taken from their ranks; monks were involved with the church affairs, at times for the good of the church, at times creating trouble. Monasteries existed in almost every diocese, with the Bishop as their head, planting a cross in their foundations. Since 879, the right was given to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople of planting a cross in monasteries that were under the jurisdiction of other dioceses throughout the empire. They were called "Patriarchal Stavropighiac Monasteries:" This right exists to our days.

With the Arab conquest of Syria, Palestine and Egypt (during the 7th century), new centers for monasteries were sought and founded, among which were Mount Olympus in Bithynia and the Holy Mount Athos.

During the entire Byzantine period, the monks took an active part in the life of the Church in general. Still, spirituality was their strength. Concerning this tension in Christian anthropology, two schools of thought were represented; that of Evagrios Ponticus (d. 399), who followed a Platonic and Origenistic doctrine pertaining to the "mind," thus de-emphasizing the importance of the human body and becoming dualistic, and St. Makarios of Egypt (or, better, the writings attributed to him), present a more Christian, holistic anthropology; for in this theology man is a psycho-physical entity, and, as such, being a destined to deification. "Prayer of the mind," in the Evagrian spirituality, becomes "prayer of the heart" in the Macarian spirituality. The two schools of thought with the two different anthropologies continue to find representatives throughout the history of the Church.

Saint Symeon, the New Theologian (949-1022), marks an important development in monastic spirituality. A disciple of a Studite monk, he left the Studion to join the small monastery of St. Mamas in Constantinople, where he was ordained a priest and became the abbot. He wrote several works, among which are the fifty-eight hymns of "Divine Love," in which he stresses that the Christian faith is a *conscious experience* of God. St. Symeon is the exponent of an intensive sacramental life, which leads to this personal conscious experience, as we can see in his *Hymns*. In this he is a predecessor of Hesy-

chasm, which also shares this personal experience of God in conjunction with intensive sacramental life.

Finally, the spirituality of Hesychasm, as enunciated in the theology of St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), is of paramount importance not only in the life of monasticism, but also in the life of the entire Church. An Anthonite monk, St. Gregory took it upon himself to defend the holy Hesychasts of the Holy Mountain in their ways of praying and experiencing the presence of God in the "uncreated light" that they contemplated. Barlaam the Calabrian had led the attack against the pious monks and their psycho-physical method of prayer, and accused them of "gross materialism," Messalianism, calling them "navel-souls" (*omphalopsychoi*) and "navel-watchers" (*omphaloskopoi*).

The hesychastic method of prayer consists of regulating one's breathing with the recitation of the "Jesus prayer": "O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." The prayer is repeated constantly until it descends from the lips and minds into one's heart. At the end of the process, the peace of Christ is poured into the heart of the worshipper, and the light itself of Christ shines upon him and around him. This light, as that of the Holy Transfiguration of Christ, may also be seen by our physical eyes.

Saint Gregory established that the experience of the Holy Hesychasts was an authentic one, for it is similar to that of the disciples on Mount Tabor. Theologically it is justified by the distinction between essence and energies in God, this light being the "uncreated light;" or the "uncreated energy" of God, that "can descend toward us," whereas the essence of God "remains unapproachable" (St. Basil).

After the fall of Constantinople, the number of idiorrhythmic monasteries continued to grow, a fact which brought a further decline to monastic life. The 16th century was the lowest ebb. In reaction to this problem, many of the monks themselves, especially on the Holy Mountain, left the main monasteries and turned to idiorrhythmic ones, establishing *Sketai* (dependencies) of the main monasteries, with a more rigorous *typikon* (order). Also, Patriarchs Jeremy II of Constantinople, Silvester of Alexandria, and Sophronios of Jerusalem led the attack against idiorrhythmic monasticism, thus managing to counteract its spread. Cenobitic monasticism prevailed for a while, but the tide soon went in its original direction. Many monasteries of the Holy Mountain, including the mother monastery, the Great Lavra, become idiorrhythmic. Today an idiorrhythmic monastery may become cenobitic but not the other way round. Hopefully, this will guarantee that organized monastic life will finally prevail, according to the Basilian ideal of monasticism.

Monasticism played an important role under the Ottoman Empire, as well. The monks not only kept the faith alive, but they also kept the Greek culture and literature alive. Not only did the education of clergy continue at the monasteries, but the monasteries became the "clandestine school" (*Krypho Scholeio*) for all the Greeks under Turkish occupation. The monks thus prevented the Christian nations under Turkish occupation from being assimilated to them, and thereby became the natural leaders of national ("ethnic") resistance against the oppressors. It is no accident that the Greek Revolution started in 1821 at a monastery in the Peloponnesos, *Aghia Lavra*, with Metropolitan Germanos of Old Patras raising the banner of revolution and blessing the arms of the Greek freedom fighters.

The Monastic Community of the Holy Mount Athos

Monasticism existed on the Mountain even before the tenth century. Many anchorites were living on Mt. Athos, especially in the area of Ierissos. The anchorites lived in their cells (*kellia*), and were organized according to the general pattern, selecting a "leader" (*protos*) from among themselves to →

➔ keep a semblance of order. Some of those cells were built for many anchorites to live in, and some of these joint habitations were called Monasteries." Two of these were in existence on the Mount before the tenth century: *Zogrophou* and *Xeropotamou*.

However, cenobitic monasticism, which is considered to be the beginning of the Great Republic of Monks on the Holy Mountain, only started in 963 when monk Athanasios the Athonite built the cenobitic monastery of *Meghisti Lavra*, with the help of the Emperor Nicephoros Phokas and the continued support of Emperor John Tsimiskis. The community soon became a "pan-Orthodox" community: Iberians (Georgians), Russians, Serbians, Bulgarians and Romanians joined the Greeks to form the pan-Orthodox community, a "Republic of Monks."

Each of the monasteries had its own abbot; one, chosen leader as *Protos*, was installed by the emperor himself. Following the example of Lavra, which was given an autonomous status, all the monasteries were considered royal monasteries, without any ecclesiastical dependence. This was changed by Emperor Alexios Comnenos (1081-1118), who gave the Patriarch the right to supervise the monasteries (Novella 37); all the monasteries thus became "Stavropighiac" and Patriarchal. The Patriarch appointed the Bishop of Ierissos to be his representative at the Holy Mountain.

The multiplication of idiorhythmic monasteries under the Turkish occupation affected the Holy Mountain; they dismissed their abbots and even the *Protos* in the course of the seventeenth century. The abbot was replaced by two or three "trustees" chosen yearly by the monks; the *Protos* was replaced by four supervisors (*Epistatai*) who changed every year. One of them chosen as chief supervisor (*Protepistatis*), as a "first among equals." The Republic, consisting of twenty monasteries, is still represented in the *Synaxis* by as many representatives that meet twice a year, or as necessary. The representative of Lavra presides over the *Synaxis*. This *typikon*, established in 1783 by Patriarch Gabriel IV of Constantinople, still regulates the life of the Athonite republic of monks.

Orthodox Monasticism Today

With the conversion of the Slavs in the ninth and tenth century, monasticism spread to the Slavic countries as well, where it continues to thrive up to our day, in spite of communist oppression. Important monasteries in Russia—Zagorsk, Optimo, and Valamo—continue the hesychastic tradition. Great monks and spiritual fathers were exponents of this tradition, including St. Nilus (1433-1508), St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833), and Father John of Kronstadt (1829-1908), a married priest. Monasticism thrives today in Romania, Serbia, and even Bulgaria.

On the Holy Mountain itself, there is an impressive monastic renewal: several monasteries, inactive in the recent past, were recently populated by young, educated, enthusiastic monks, who give new life and a new spirituality, more in conformity with that of St. Basil, to the Holy Mountain. The monastery of Stavronikita is an example. Under the guidance of important spiritual fathers on the Holy Mountain today—among them are Father Ephraim, abbot of Philotheou; Father Aimilianos, abbot of Simonos Petra; and abbot Vassilios of Stavronikita—monasticism is thriving on the Holy Mountain, both spiritually and intellectually. The pattern of cenobitic life prevails at present, and continues to gain ground.

Spiritual fathers from the Holy Mountain visit the States, including Holy Cross Theological School. Interest has been generated among young men and women who aspire to monastic life and wish to see its tradition flourish in America. The St. Gregory Palamas Monastery in Hayesville, Ohio under the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh, has this potential.

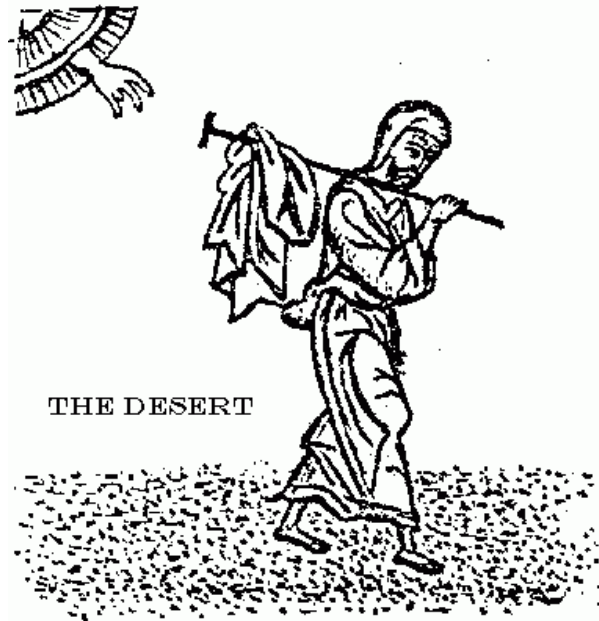
In our day, there is a monastic renewal, as a reaction to the materialist spirit in our society, in almost every Orthodox land. Longovarda Monastery, Nea Makri, and St. John's Monastery on Patmos are some of the active monasteries in Greece outside Mount Athos. As for the States, the major Holy Places, monasteries and shrines connected with them, are under the jurisdiction of the Synodal Church outside Russia. Among these monasteries are: Saint Tikhon's, near South Canaan, Pennsylvania (OCA); Novo-Diveyevo convent, near Spring Valley, New York; Holy Transfiguration Monastery and Convent in Boston, Convent of the Vladimir Mother of God, San Francisco, California, Holy Dormition Monastery, Northville, Alberta, New Skete Monastery, near Cambridge, New York, and Holy Annunciation Monastery (Carpatho-Russian Diocese), Tuxedo Park, New York. ■

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

H. Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, London, 1936.

N.F. Robinson, *Monasticism in the Orthodox Churches*, London, 1916.

C. Cavarnos, *Anchored in God*, Athens, 1959.





Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption
Seattle, Washington