

The Angelic Life



a VISION OF
ORTHODOX MONASTICISM



THE ANGELIC LIFE

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ORTHODOX MONASTICISM



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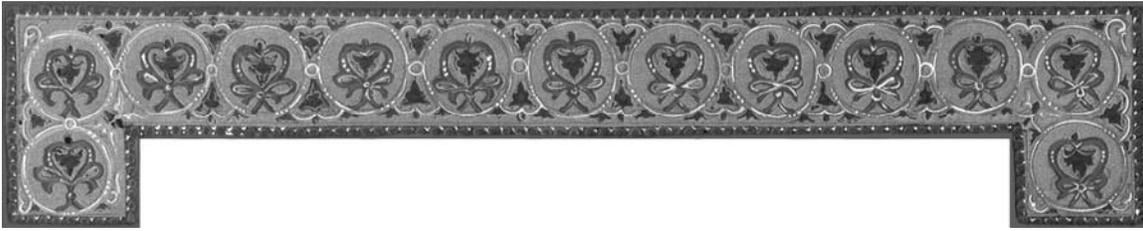
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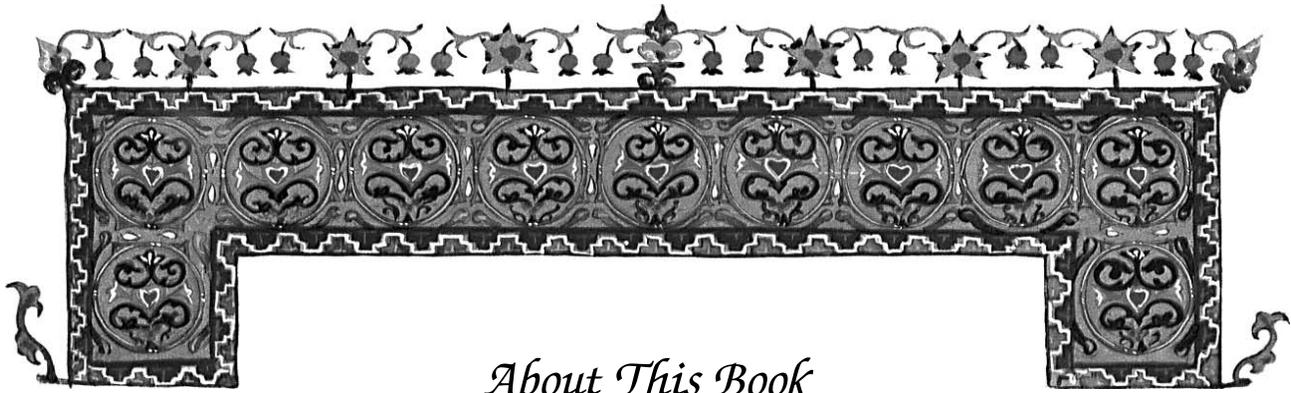
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*«Ἰσάγγελος γίνεται μοναχὸς
διὰ τῆς ἀληθοῦς προσευχῆς»
—Ὁσίου Νείλου Ἀγκύρας*

*A monk becomes equal to the angels
through true prayer.
—St. Neilos of Ancyra*



About This Book



WHEN ELDER EPHRAIM of Arizona suggested to me that I establish my own monastic community, it occurred to me that a crucial element for the success of such an undertaking would be to have a clear vision of what our monastic life is all about. Having this vision would not only keep our community connected to its purpose and deeper values but would also help new members grasp our mindset. Therefore, I began to put down in writing precisely what this vision was that I had acquired after studying the Bible and the holy Fathers, after my years of living on Mount Athos, and after being Elder Ephraim's cell attendant in Arizona for more than two decades and closely witnessing a contemporary, living example of holy monastic life.

When I had completed writing several dozen pages, I translated them into Greek for Elder Ephraim to examine. He was delighted to see the direction this book was heading and encouraged me to continue writing. In the years that have passed since then, I expanded this book considerably.

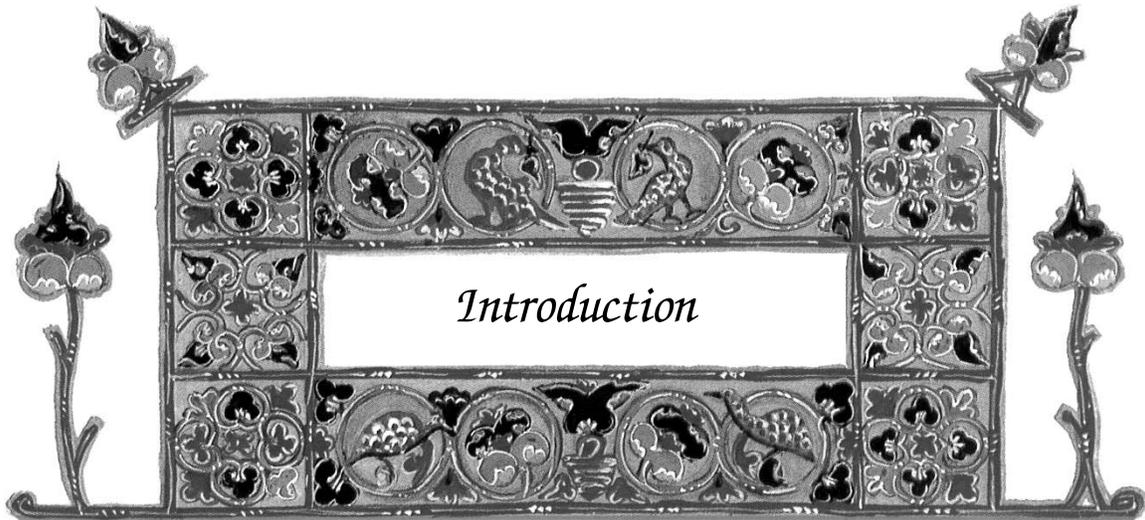
Being aware of my many shortcomings and how difficult it is to write a comprehensive book on a topic with such breadth and complexity as the monastic life, I shared rough drafts of this book with many people around the world (especially monastics) who have more experience and wisdom than me in order to receive constructive criticism. Both the monastics and laymen who read it found tremendous benefit and inspiration from what I had written. Several of them began reading it at their monasteries during meals; others gave it to their novices as a monastic primer; some expressed regret for not having had such a book when they were beginners; one of them began translating it into Russian, and others into Romanian and German; and many urged me to publish it.

I hesitated to publish this book, fearing that my limited experience and failures to live up to the ideals presented in it would mar my attempt to teach others. Furthermore, I am constantly finding new ways to expand and improve this text, and I would not want to publish something incomplete or erroneous. I certainly don't consider myself wiser than St. Basil the Great who was dissatisfied with the original drafts of his monastic rules and

saw the need to revise them continually, or than St. Caesarius of Arles who destroyed the first draft of his monastic rule after revising it for twenty-two years. I also hesitated to publish my personal vision of monasticism as if it were a definitive exposition of Orthodox monasticism in general, bearing in mind the wide variety of approaches that can be found among holy monasteries. But since my fellow monastics convinced me that there is a great need for such a book today—and since 90% of this book is not my own poor words but simply verbatim quotes from the holy Fathers (some of which would be appearing in English for the first time)—I proceeded to publish this labor of love.

My hope and prayer are that many more monastics and laymen will find benefit and inspiration from this attempt of mine to capture the beauty and heart of Orthodox monasticism—the angelic life.

Hieromonk Ephraim
St. Nilus Skete, Alaska



MONASTERIES ARE THE “nerves and support of the Church”¹ as well as her boast² and adornment³ because they directly contribute to the Church’s primary work, which is to save souls. Monasteries accomplish this in several ways:

- 1) They provide a place conducive for salvation for people who want to dedicate themselves to God in the traditional, Orthodox way.⁴

¹ St. Theodore the Studite, *Κατηχήσεις, Λόγος ριδ’* [114], (PG 99:657). St. Theodore also calls monks “the salt of the earth and the light of the world,” “a light for them that sit in darkness,” and “an example and a declaration.” Fr. Alexander Schmemmann observed: “According to St. Theodore the monks must be in the Church her active inner kernel, a perpetual reminder of the Christian’s ultimate calling, the ‘support and affirmation’ of the Church” (“Byzantium, Iconoclasm and the Monks,” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly*, 3.3 (1959): 30).

² See St. Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homily 11*: “The boast of the Church of Christ is the monastic way of life” (*The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, [Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Revised Second Edition, [2011], 196).

³ “Monasticism is the glory of the Church, and the monastics—as St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches—are the hair of the head of the body of the Church and are a real adornment of the head. For monastics are dead to the world as strands of hair are dead, yet they shine and radiate the light of Christ” (in Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, «Ο Ὑγιής και ὁ Ἀρρώστος Μοναχισμός», *Ενιαύσιον 2013*, [2014]: 41). [Note: Quotations taken from books written in Greek or Russian are presented here in our own English translation.]

⁴ As St. Sophrony of Essex said: “To me, a monastery is a place where our entire life is dedicated to following Christ, to attaining the mind of Christ Himself, Who bears within Himself all of mankind... As monastics we put caring for anything in the material realm off to the side. This does not mean that we do not help our fellow men materially; we do that constantly. But our primary concern does not lie in this but in our abiding in God” (Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ: μέσα μας και στοὺς ἀδελφούς μας*, vol. 1 [Essex:Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, 2014], 143, 154).

- 2) They offer a warm, peaceful, and theocentric place of pilgrimage for laypeople who have been drained by the cold, noisy, and egocentric world, and who feel the need to “recharge their batteries.”⁵
- 3) St. John of Sinai wrote: “Angels are a light for monks, and the monastic life is a light for all men. Hence monks should spare no effort to become a shining example in all things.”⁶ Monastics who are devoted to God and focused on the spiritual life will naturally inspire others by their good example.⁷
- 4) A monastery with a priest can serve the Divine Liturgy daily, bringing great benefit to those attending⁸ as well as to the many souls commemorated, both living and

⁵ Archimandrite George Kapsanis, the former abbot of Gregoriou Monastery, explained how a theocentric place touches people: “When one is on the Holy Mountain [or in any monastery], one has the sense of being in another world with different criteria with other goals, and the sense of another kingdom: the kingdom to come. One tastes and communes with this kingdom. Then one realizes that the egocentric criteria and goals of the world cannot be correct, and one feels the need to conform one’s life to the criteria of the Holy Mountain, which are none other than the theanthropic criteria of Orthodoxy. This explains the transformation in the life of many pilgrims, who after their pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain begin to live a pious life in a more ecclesiastical, traditional, and Orthodox manner” (Αρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου, *Ορθόδοξος Μοναχισμός και Άγιον Όρος*, [Άγιον Όρος: Ίερά Μονή Όσίου Γρηγορίου, 1998], 40). Fr. Theodoros Zeses observed: “St. John Chrysostom repeatedly admonishes the faithful to visit monasteries so that they might see for themselves that the application of Christianity’s ascetic principles is not some utopian dream, but rather something entirely possible” (Protopresbyter Theodoros Zisis, *Following the Holy Fathers*, trans. Rev. Dr. John Palmer [Columbia: New Rome Press, 2017], 40).

⁶ *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. Colm Luibhéid, Norman Russell (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 234. Similarly, St. John Chrysostom called monks “lights of the world” (*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, Philip Schaff, ed. [New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895], 400).

⁷ St. Athanasios of Athos began his *Canonical Rule* for monks with the importance of inspiring laymen: “Those who exert themselves in journeying along the single-minded way of the solitary life and who do not deviate in striving to attain its holy goal, who by purity of mind and soul and body have conditioned themselves for the brilliant enlightenment which comes from the Holy Spirit, end up by suffusing not only themselves with light, or, to put it more correctly, a godlike appearance, but also everyone in the world with whom they converse. They enlighten other people of any rank or calling whatever. They challenge them and incite them on to a like goal, drawing and attracting them as the light of a beacon fire or a magnet” (*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, ed. [Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000], 250). And as St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote: “Through their ascetical struggles and monastic way of life, first they purified themselves and then set out to purify others; first they were enlightened and afterwards enlightened others; first they were perfected and then perfected others. To put it succinctly, first they became holy and afterwards made others holy” (Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον* [Ἀθήνα: Ἔκδοσις Βιβλιοπωλείου Νεκτάρου Παναγόπουλου, 1999], 30).

⁸ St. Gregory the Dialogist said: “We need, then, to eschew the present life with our whole mind, looking upon it as already lost to us, and to offer up each day the sacrifice of the Flesh and Blood of the Lord. For only this sacrifice has the power to protect the soul from eternal death” (*The Evergetinos, A Complete Text*, vol. 4, ed. Archbishop Chrysostomos and Hieromonk Patapios [Etna: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2008], 346–48).

- departed.⁹ The priests can also offer the Mystery of Confession to pilgrims, which can be helpful especially for people who would otherwise not go to confession.¹⁰
- 5) Because monastics are free from the burdens of the married life, they typically have more time to help the world through prayer, and can also use their talents to do God-pleasing activities, such as writing books, painting icons, composing hymns, etc. Larger monasteries have also been known for their effective social work in the form of caring for orphans, the elderly, the poor, the sick, etc.¹¹
 - 6) The spiritual focus of monasteries has enabled them to preserve authentic Christianity in times when other Christians have been overcome by the spirit of this world.¹²

⁹ St. Gregory the Dialogist also said: “Is it not then obvious that if the Bloodless Sacrifice [i.e., the Divine Liturgy], when offered for those who have reposed, is of such benefit, as we have elsewhere said, that it has even greater power to benefit the living?” (Archbishop Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, vol. 4, 346). St. Cyril of Jerusalem taught: “We commemorate . . . all who in past years have fallen asleep among us, believing that it will be a very great advantage to the souls, for whom the supplication is put up, while that Holy and most Awful Sacrifice is presented” (F. L. Cross, ed., *St. Cyril of Jerusalem’s Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* [New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995], 74). And St. John Chrysostom said: “Not in vain did the Apostles order that the remembrance should be made of the dead in the dreadful Mysteries. They know that great gain resulteth to them, great benefit” (Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 13, *Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889], 197).

¹⁰ Archimandrite George Kapsanis noted: “It often happens on the Holy Mountain that many people who came without the intention of confessing [in its monasteries] end up confessing. And others who do confess in the world, when they visit the Holy Mountain, they confess sins that they had either been unaware of or lacked the courage to confess” (Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου, *Ὁρθόδοξος Μοναχισμὸς καὶ Ἅγιον Ὄρος*, 33).

¹¹ St. Basil the Great taught that a monk should “admonish the undisciplined, encourage the faint-hearted, minister to the sick, wash the feet of the saints, and be mindful of the duties of hospitality and fraternal charity” (*Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, trans. Sister M. Monica Wagner, C. S. C. [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1962], 34). Following this injunction, St. Theodosios the Cenobiarch built a monastery with “hostels and hospitals for monks, for worldly visitors, and for the poor; a home for the aged; and a ‘monastery within a monastery’ for monks mentally afflicted after excessive or ill-judged asceticism” (Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1966], 109). Bearing this and other examples in mind, Elder Ephraim said: “If we examine various time periods in history, we will observe the role of monasteries in society. With schools, homes for the elderly, and hospitals, monks and nuns rallied all their material and spiritual abilities to alleviate their neighbor’s pain” (from the manuscript of a homily “What does Monasticism offer to Society?”). Nevertheless, despite these natural expressions of love for one’s neighbor by monastics, social work has never been the focus of Orthodox monasticism. This point is elaborated in chapter 6) section 11) on page 325.

¹² Fr. Theodoros Zeses wrote: “Authentic Christianity, Christianity in its fullness, is cultivated in the monasteries, and the preservation of this is the greatest contribution to the world and to society imaginable. . . . Should it ever become impossible, or at least very difficult, for the Gospel to be applied in the world, it will be far from the world in monasteries and sketes that authentic, ascetical, heavenly-minded, eschatological Christianity will be preserved. . . . where both authentic man, man according to the image of Christ, and the natural environment, so cruelly ravaged by industrialization, are both safeguarded. . . . A Christianity lacking asceticism, continual struggle, afflictions, hardships, self-mortification, the renunciation of a worldly manner of life and thought, is a Christianity which has lost its true character” (Zisis, *Following the Holy Fathers*, 30, 31, 40).

- 7) Last (and certainly not least), throughout the history of the Church, time and time again it was the monasteries and the monastic hierarchs that preserved the Orthodox faith in its purity.¹³ St. Ignatius Brianchaninov taught that even faith itself will disappear without the presence of monasteries,¹⁴ which act as “barometers”¹⁵ of the Church. St. Barsanuphius of Optina added: “The whole world is upheld by this monasticism. When monasticism will no longer exist, then will come the Dread Judgment.”¹⁶

+ + +

The Focus and Aim

The focus of all Christians is to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and mind, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself.¹⁷ This central role of love is even more pertinent for monastics, who are called to be exemplary Christians. This is why St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain declared: “The whole work of a monk is love.”¹⁸ Elder Aimilianos said: “What kind of life

¹³ The long list of monastic saints who helped safeguard Orthodoxy includes Sts. Anthony the Great, Macarios the Great, Basil the Great, Eftymios, Ephraim the Syrian, Melanie, Theodosios the Cenobiarch, Symeon the Stylite, Savas the Sanctified, Maximos the Confessor, John the Damascene, Stephen the New, Theodore and Theophan the Branded, Gregory Palamas, and Mark of Ephesus. At the Seventh Ecumenical Council, 136 of the 350 fathers participating were abbots and monks. As St. Amphilochios Makris of Patmos said: “Monks guard the castle walls of our Church and protect her from her enemies, who like wolves are pouncing to tear her up in this contemporary materialistic era of ours. Alienation from the Orthodox mindset will only occur when the monasteries—the castles of Orthodoxy—are empty” (*Ο Γέροντας της Πάτμου Αμφιλόχιος Μακρής (1889–1970), Βίος - Υποθήκαι - Μαρτυρία*, [Πάτμος: Ίεράς Μονής Εὐαγγελισμοῦ, 2007], 202). St. Theodore the Studite declared: “The work of a monk is not to bear the slightest innovation in the Gospel, so that they will not give laymen an example of heresy” (Θεοδώρου Στουδίτου, *Ἐπιστολή λθ’, Θεοφίλω Ἡγουμένω*, PG 99:1049).

¹⁴ According to St. Sophrony: “St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (1807–1867) said that without the monasteries, the world will not be able to keep even faith. Which faith? The faith that God Himself, the Creator of the world, came on earth, became man, spoke with us, and made known to us the plan He has for us—His plan from before the ages” (Sakharov, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, vol. 1, 418).

¹⁵ “Monasticism is a barometer that stands in a secluded room, closed from every side, showing an exact condition of the weather outside” (*Игнатий Брянчанинов, свт. Полное собрание писем: В 3 томах. Т. 1: Переписка с архиереями Церкви и настоятелями монастырей / Сост. О. И. Шафранова. — М.: Паломник, 2011. С. 127*). Archimandrite Ambrose explained this statement of St. Ignatius as follows: “The height or decline of the spiritual life of the Church in each epoch is defined by the condition of monasticism in that period” (Archbishop Antony of San Francisco, *The Young Elder: a biography of blessed Archimandrite Ambrose of Milkovo* [Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1974], 15).

¹⁶ Victor Afanasiev, *Elder Barsanuphius of Optina* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), 264.

¹⁷ Cf. Lk. 10:27.

¹⁸ Γέροντος Παϊσίου Ἀγιορείτου, *Πνευματικὴ Ἀφύπνηση, Λόγοι Β΄* [Σουρωτὴ Θεσσαλονίκης: Ἱερόν Ἡσυχαστήριον "Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος," 1999], 319.

is monastic life? First of all, as we live it and feel it, it is a life of love.”¹⁹ When Elder Paisius of Sihla was asked: “How must monks live in order to save their souls?” he replied: “Live in love, for the Savior says, ‘By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another’ (Jn. 13:35).”²⁰

St. Paul warned: “Even if we speak with the tongues of men and of angels, have the gift of prophecy, know all mysteries and all knowledge, have all faith to move mountains, give away all our possessions, and surrender our body to be burned but have not love, we are nothing.”²¹ In the same spirit, St. Athanasios the Great said: “No matter how hard a person labors, if he lacks love for his neighbor he has labored in vain,”²² and St. Maximos the Confessor taught: “Every asceticism lacking love is foreign to God.”²³ St. Achard of Jumièges (in seventh-century Gaul) on his deathbed warned his monastic disciples: “You have borne the yoke of penance and are grown old in the exercise of religious duties in vain if you do not sincerely love one another.”²⁴ St. Anthony the Great became the greatest monk in Egypt not by being the most ascetical monk but by loving God the most.²⁵ St. Sophrony of Essex remarked: “If in our monastic life we do not learn to love, how can the meaning of monasticism be esteemed?”²⁶ Thus, the most serious accusation we could ever hear—assuming the accusation has some basis in reality, of course—is that we lack love, whether collectively or individually.

Since we are called not only to love God with our whole heart but also to love our neighbor as ourselves, a monastery not only should be dedicated to worshipping God, but

¹⁹ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, «Μοναχισμός, Πορεία πρὸς τὸν Θεόν», ἐν *Σύναξις Εὐχαριστίας· Χαριστήρια εἰς Τιμὴν τοῦ Γέροντος Αἰμιλιανού* (Ἀθήναι: Ἰνδίκτος, 2003), 53.

²⁰ Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan, *A Little Corner of Paradise: The Life and Teaching of Elder Paisius of Sihla*, trans. the Sisters of St. Nilus Skete (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2016), 204.

²¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 13:1–3.

²² PG 28:277A.

²³ PG 90:941D.

²⁴ Rev. Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints*, vol. 9 (Derby: Richardson and Son, 1866), 153.

²⁵ “Abba Amoun of Nitria came to see Abba Anthony and said to him, ‘Since my rule is stricter than yours how is it that your name is better known amongst men than mine is?’ Abba Anthony answered, ‘It is because I love God more than you’” (Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975], 67).

²⁶ Sakharov, *Οἰκοδομάντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, vol. 1, 22. St. Sophrony also wrote: “I understand monasticism as a special form of love. Love can take various forms. Sometimes it brings joy and makes life with other people pleasant and rewarding. But there can also be another form of love: love which torments and burdens people and makes life unbearably hard until its last desire for the salvation of all others is satisfied; and the paths which lead to the attainment of this love are out of the ordinary” (Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, *Striving for Knowledge of God: Correspondence with David Balfour* [Essex: Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2016], 252–53).

also should care for others: by offering advice and hospitality to pilgrims, by giving material and spiritual alms to the needy, and especially by praying for the entire world. For as the Theotokos revealed, a monk is someone “who prays for the whole world.”²⁷

Abba Moses taught: “The aim of our [monastic] profession is the Kingdom of God, . . . but our [temporal] objective is a clean heart, without which it is impossible for anyone to reach our aim.”²⁸ Thus, our primary work is to attain a clean heart by uprooting the passions and cultivating the virtues: love, obedience, humility, chastity, prayer, fear of God, silence, repentance, patience, watchfulness, fasting, self-denial, authenticity, detachment, simplicity, seriousness, forcefulness, zeal, transforming anger, self-reproach, remembrance of death, etc.

St. Basil the Great taught: “The ascetical life has one aim—the soul’s salvation—and all that can contribute to this end must be observed with much fear as a divine command.”²⁹ Thus, the purpose of a monastery is the salvation of souls, and in this book we shall attempt to outline “all that can contribute to this end.” This spiritual typikon summarizes our understanding and application of the monastic life, based on the Bible and on the writings and lives of the saints of the Church. Special attention is given to the mindset and traditions we have received from our holy spiritual forefathers (namely, Elder Ephraim of Arizona and St. Joseph the Hesychast). In the spirit of the Three Hierarchs, St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, and many other Church Fathers, the findings of contemporary scientific studies and historical details have been included wherever they are relevant and helpful. Also following the example of St. Nicodemos, we have included many lengthy footnotes. These asides were relegated to the bottom of the page not because they are unimportant but simply to avoid interrupting the flow of the main text.

²⁷ St. Silouan the Athonite wrote: “The Lord chooses out men to pray for the whole world. When [Saint] Parthenios, the ascetic of Kiev, [in the 19th century after receiving the schema] sought to know what the strict monastic observance was, the Mother of God told him, ‘The monk who wears the schema is a man who prays for the whole world’” (Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* [New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991], 493). Likewise, St. Symeon of Thessalonica declared that for monks, “this is what should be done above all: to pray. Through prayer, these [monks] are like fire in their yearning and become partakers of the age to come” (D. Balfour, *Αγίου Συμεών Θεσσαλονίκης, Έργα Θεολογικά* [Πατρι-αρχικὸν Ἰδρυμα Πατερικῶν Μελεῶν: Θεσσαλονίκη, 1981], κεφ. 26, στ. 574–82, 450). Elder Ephraim also said: “Monasticism’s greatest offering is its testimony that Jesus is Christ and its prayer for the world” (from the manuscript of a homily “What Does Monasticism Offer to Society?”).

²⁸ *John Cassian: Conferences*, Colm Luibhéid, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 39 (Conference 1). St. Sophrony of Essex also reminds us that correcting our ethical behavior is merely the means to an end: “The goal of asceticism is the accomplishment of the will of God. Our goal, eternal life, consists in knowing God (Jn. 17:3), and not in correcting our ethical behavior. This does not of course mean that we do not have to grow in moral rectitude. But the first and greatest commandment is to love God (Mt. 22:37). When we lose touch with the memory of God, when we forget God, we sin against this commandment” (Sakharov, *Striving for Knowledge of God*, 289)

²⁹ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 217.

As pertaining to non-dogmatic matters, we have not limited ourselves to extracting benefit and inspiration from the wise sayings of Orthodox Christians only, since we agree with the consensus of the holy Fathers that the heterodox also have helpful insights that the Orthodox should take advantage of.³⁰ Furthermore, we have drawn from the wisdom of monastic saints and rules of Western Europe that were Orthodox (that is, from well before the Great Schism), even though historically the rest of the Orthodox Church has unfortunately been neglecting them merely out of ignorance until just recently.³¹

We are hopeful that this book will prove to be beneficial not only for monastics but also for laymen, because the spiritual principles in this book apply to all people, both monastics and laymen. St. John Chrysostom taught: “When Christ orders us to follow the narrow path, He addresses Himself to all. The monastics and the lay person must attain the same heights.... Those who live in the world, even though married, ought to resemble the monks in everything else. You are entirely mistaken if you think that there are some things required of ordinary people, and others of monks.”³²

If *all* the writings of the holy Fathers on monasticism were collected into one place, they would easily fill dozens of volumes. Rather than doing such an exhaustive task, we have attempted here instead to capture only the *essence* of what they have said. This book could have been a fraction of its current size if we had simply summarized in our own words what the holy Fathers taught instead of quoting them verbatim. However, we chose not to do this because we perceive much grace in their inspired words. Besides, there already exist many such “monastery typika” nowadays which summarize the teachings of the holy Fathers on monasticism. The drawback of many of these documents is that they come across as a cold set of rules because they usually focus on answering only the practical questions: “What?” “Who?” “When?” “Where?” and “How?” while underemphasizing the most important question for us rational human beings: “Why?” We believe that the most effective way to address all those questions and especially the latter existential question, is to let the holy Fathers speak for themselves.

³⁰ Since quoting the heterodox in a book about Orthodox monasticism might seem inappropriate to some readers, we have included an appendix (see page 449) to demonstrate that this approach is indeed patristic.

³¹ A zealous supporter and catalyst of the contemporary Orthodox movement to venerate the saints of the West was St. John Maximovitch (St. Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum: The Life of the Fathers*, trans. Fr. Seraphim Rose [Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988], 13).

³² As quoted in David G. R. Keller, *Oasis of Wisdom: The Worlds of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), xx. (*Epist. Ad Haeb.*, 7, 4; 7,41 and *Adv. Oppugn. Vitae monist.*, 3, 14.) Echoing this sentiment, St. Gregory Palamas said: “The commandments of the Lord are directed to all, married and celibate, without exception. The only difference is that monks pursue the more perfect application, according the words of the Lord, ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and come and follow me’ (Mt. 19:21)” (*Φιλοκαλία, Τόμος Δ’* [Αθήνα: Άστήρ, 1976], 92).

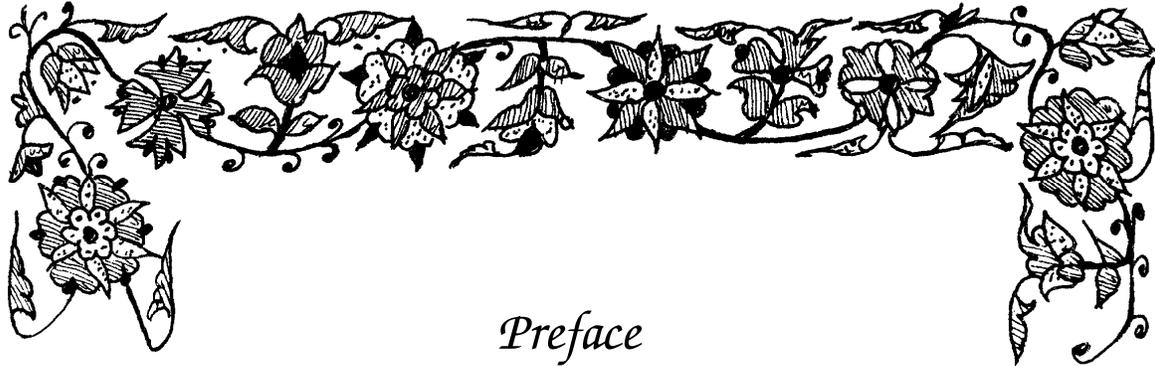


Dedication



*To our dear Elder Ephraim
whose love and humility
have touched the
hearts of us all*





Preface

by Archimandrite Aimilianos³³
Former Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras

A MONASTIC RULE should be an embodiment, preservation, and presentation of the canons of the Church concerning monasticism.... It should not be one more law among many, a new burden, a new order for monks to learn well—if they want to be monks today—nor a systematic and detailed inventory of duties and rights, but a living, concrete, contemporary presentation of the holy canons adopted centuries ago by the Church which nursed the problems of monasticism, as flesh of its own flesh.... It should not restrict the brotherhood, for then it will be loathsome, but should stimulate it to live.... Where there is no rule to embody the spirit of the Gospel, there is no oneness of spirit, and then the brotherhood is doomed to fall apart.

Today, most monastery regulations resemble secular rulebooks comprising matters related to the practical life. Theosis is the center around which the thought and the heart of the monk should revolve. The Regulation should therefore be a spiritual document—not a bill of law—which will awaken the hearts of the monks and rouse them to spiritual combat, so that they are drawn by the vision of the Kingdom of God and live with their gaze fixed on precisely this aim of theosis. Emphasis should be placed on the genuine cenobitic life, which manifests itself in obedience and discipline, poverty, prayer, and study, in the martyr's outlook, and in desire for Christ. It should be an aid to theological and mystical understanding and to the experience of the mystery of deification in Christ and of liturgical

³³ This preface consists of excerpts from Elder Aimilianos's presentation in 1973, "On the Preparation of an Internal Regulation for the Holy Monasteries of the Church of Greece," his "Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation Ormylia, Halkidiki," as published in *The Authentic Seal*, 36–37, 75–77, 160–61, and his commentary on the Rule of St. Macarius, as published in *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοὶ Κανόνες*, 355. I am grateful to Abbess Nikodimi for her permission to include quotations from her holy elder's books.

life. The cenobium [i.e., the monastic community] should again become “a heaven on earth”³⁴ and “an assembly convoked by God,”³⁵ a likeness of the Apostolic assembly.

The aim of the foundation of the holy cenobitic community is for the sisters [or monks] to live together in one place and, with God’s protection and aid, by living in perfect imitation of the life of our Lord in the flesh, and with much labor, many struggles and the continuous study of His commandments, to achieve the salvation of souls, that perfection which is elevating and pleasing to God, and blessed deification.... It shall not be mere cohabitation on the part of cold individuals, but a drawing together of souls, a common course pursued by persons united in affection in one body, “rejoicing in each other lovingly in divine delectation,”³⁶ venerating with one mouth and one heart the Lord “Who is the head, from Whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is in harmonious operation, makes increase of the body for the edification of itself in love.”³⁷

The Scriptures and the Fathers should have their rightful place [in the life of the monastics]. Theology should shed light on everyday problems. Dogma should be regarded as a basis for piety. The typikon of the Church should be observed in its spirit. Communion should again be taken with the frequency ordained by the sacred canons. The spirit of worship should be interpreted every day in the monastery. Continuous prayer should be regarded as the fundamental criterion for spirituality. Youth should be respected and its enthusiasm fostered. The elevated spiritual life and the vision of the glory of God should be studied as the ultimate desire for the monk.

Moreover, pre-eminence should again be given to the Patristic principle of individual training. The person should not be stifled, the personality should be cultivated, the individual understood. The manual worker as well as the labourer in spiritual matters should learn that they both serve God in like manner, though the unity of the brotherhood must be preserved, and spirituality must be cultivated by living within it. The cenobium must once again start filling the Church with saints.

³⁴ *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Revised Edition, (Brookline: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2001), 44.

³⁵ PG 141:740.

³⁶ St. Dionysius the Areopagite, PG 3:536B; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibhéid, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 247.

³⁷ Eph. 4:15–16.



Chapter One: *Becoming a Monk*

1) What is a Monk?



PEAKING FROM THEIR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, different saints have found different ways to define what a monk is. Abba Zacharias stated: “He is a monk who forces himself in everything.”³⁸ St. John of Sinai explained: “A monk is one who holds only to the commands of God in every time and place and matter. A monk is one who constantly constrains his nature and unceasingly watches over his senses. A monk is he who keeps his body in chastity, his mouth pure and his mind illumined. A monk is a mourning soul that both asleep and awake is unceasingly occupied with the remembrance of death.”³⁹ Likewise, St. Eftymios the Great taught: “Brethren, strive for what brought you out here, and do not neglect your own salvation. You must at all times stay sober and awake. As Scripture says, ‘Keep awake, and pray not to enter into temptation.’⁴⁰ ... [Monks] must always await and ponder the hour of death and the dread day of judgment, fear the threat of eternal fire and desire the glory of the kingdom of heaven.”⁴¹ St. Nilus of Ancyra wrote: “It is said that a monk is

³⁸ PG 65:180A; see also Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 67.

³⁹ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 4.

⁴⁰ Mt. 26:41.

⁴¹ Cyril of Scythopolis, *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, trans. R.M. Price (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 12–13.

an altar on which and from which pure prayers are offered to the Most High God.”⁴² Similarly, St. Maximos the Confessor stated: “A monk is a man who has freed his intellect from attachment to material things and by means of self-control, love, psalmody and prayer cleaves to God.”⁴³

St. Paisius Velichkovsky gave the following definition of a monk:

What is a monk? A monk is a fulfiller of the commandments of Christ, a perfect Christian, an imitator of and a participant in the passion of Christ, a daily martyr, a voluntary dead man who willingly dies in spiritual struggles. A monk is a pillar of patience, a depth of humility, a fount of tears, a treasury of purity, one who laughs at all that is considered splendid, sweet, glorious, and attractive in this world. A monk is a soul that is pained, constantly meditating on the memory of death, both in wakefulness and in sleep. A monk is one who constantly forces nature, and who guards his feelings without weakening. A monk is of the order and condition of the fleshless ones, though preserved in a material body, having in mind at all times, in every place, and in every work, only what is divine.⁴⁴

St. Nectarios of Aegina described the monastic life as follows:

A monk’s way of life consists of ceaselessly seeking God’s countenance, yearning for Him, possessing a strong love for Him, and perpetually hastening toward Him. The monk offers his heart as a sacrifice to Him alone—an offering that is holy, pure, and perfected in love. Truly, he does not live for himself, but for the Lord, and the Lord visits him mystically; He mystically reveals Himself to the eyes of the soul of the monk who is devoted to Him, and such a monk receives the betrothal of the grace of the future vision of the Lord’s countenance.⁴⁵

Several saints emphasized the necessity of withdrawing from the world in order to be a monk. For example, St. Isaac the Syrian said: “A monk is he who remains outside the world and is ever supplicating God to receive future blessings.”⁴⁶ And St. Eustathios of Thessalonica wrote: “A monk is primarily he who has formed (or rather renewed) his heart in solitude and understood all the works of God. This deep understanding is a manifestation of his theoretical training and virtuous life.”⁴⁷

St. Eustathios also gave the following advice to a monk to remind him of his calling:

Bear in mind that you are an angel of light even though you are wearing black. You have been appointed to stand beside the true Light. You are now a close friend of

⁴² *Epistle to Andreas the Presbyter*, III:32; PG 79:388A.

⁴³ *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, eds. (London: Faber&Faber, 1979), 74.

⁴⁴ St. Paisius Velichkovsky, “Field Flowers,” *The Orthodox Word* 21, no. 1 (12) (Jan.–Feb. 1985), 25.

⁴⁵ Cleopas Strongylis, *St. Nectarios of Pentapolis and the Island of Aegina: The Monastic Ideal*, vol. 2, The Catechetical Letters, trans. Christopher Tripoulas (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012), 120 (Letter #44).

⁴⁶ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 170–71 (Homily 6).

⁴⁷ PG 135:848AB.

God Himself and have vowed to acquire various virtues. Therefore, you have a great obligation, O magnificent monk, so do not delay in fulfilling your duty.⁴⁸

A monk holds a torch from the Father of Lights, and from there he radiates light that shines and illumines, if not the whole world as the Apostles did, then at least many places of the earth. This is what is typically accomplished by lanterns perched in high places. They emit light that warns of an enemy onslaught, or as a lighthouse they show where rocks lie beneath the surface so that people avoid dangerous reefs, and they do other such salvific things.⁴⁹

A true monk is a citizen of heaven, not of the earth, even though he dwells on the earth. His way of life is ethereal; he is celestial since he flies above everything earthly.⁵⁰

St. Symeon the New Theologian declared that a monk is he who has withdrawn “truly from the world and the things in it” and has ascended “perceptibly to a height of spiritual theoria through the working of the Commandments,” and “he clearly perceives the transformation that has taken place within him.”⁵¹ Elsewhere he added the following lofty characteristics of a true monk:

The monk is one who is not mixed with the world and always converses with God alone. Seeing he is seen, loving he is loved, and he becomes a light mysteriously shining.⁵²

The one who is one with God is no longer alone, even if he lives alone or inhabits the desert or even a cave. But if he has not found Him, has not known Him, and has not received fully the Word become flesh, he is not a monk, absolutely not!⁵³

The real monks and solitaries are those who are alone with God and are in God, detached from every type of discursive reasoning, who see only God in a mind empty of thought, secured in light like an arrow in the wall or a star in heaven, or in any other manner which I cannot express.⁵⁴

St. Paisius Velichkovsky encouraged monastics to be far from the world:

It is better to battle alone with the demons, and in hunger, nakedness, and every sorrow to die with a small struggle in the desert, fleeing the world, than to seek great labors for salvation in the midst of the world—for the flame of the passions of this world ignites and scorches the monk who returns to it. If one may be dispassionate,

⁴⁸ PG 135:905C.

⁴⁹ PG 135:904C.

⁵⁰ PG 135:838A.

⁵¹ As quoted in Αρχιμ. Χριστοδούλου, *Ορθόδοξος Μοναχισμός: Έκκοσμίκευση ή Αναδρομή προς τὸ Αρχαῖον Κάλλος*; (I. Μονὴ Ἁγίου Συμεῶν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου, 2001), 32.

⁵² *Divine Eros: Hymns of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, trans. Daniel K. Griggs (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2010), 48 (Hymn 3).

⁵³ Archbishop Basil Krivocheine, *In the Light of Christ: Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022), Life-Spirituality-Doctrine*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1986), 150–51 (Hymn 27. 18–27).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 151 (Hymn 27. 73–81).

even such a one in the world will suffer harm. And he who is passionate will be tangled up in every sinful net....

Therefore, O monk, be sober with your mind, be sober [i.e., watchful]. Find for yourself a melancholy place which is absolutely useless to men, from where you cannot be banished, a place remote from the world. Lead there your silent life, where, even if you wish to do some kind of worldly activity, there will be no opportunity for this, thanks to the remoteness from the world. In the desert, by the sole fact of having withdrawn from the world, a man is delivered from the passions.⁵⁵

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain saw self-sacrifice as a key part of being a monk:

The monk is helped naturally by his whole way of life to have love and sacrifice. He has set out to die for Christ. In other words, he set out for sacrifice....

If a monastic is making slow progress in this matter [of self-sacrifice], then he is not a monastic. Then where is the spirituality? There is no spirituality when there is no sacrifice. All the spiritual disciplines which a monk does without sacrificing himself are nothing....

When someone takes seriously the struggle that must be carried out in this life, there is a divine flame in him. If this divine flame is missing, then he is useless. It is this that gives him joy, courage, *philotimo* [a sense of honor, or eager goodness]. This is what the Lord said, *I came to cast fire upon the earth.*⁵⁶

St. Nicephoros the Monk viewed monasticism as a lofty art and science: “The monastic life has been called the art of arts and the science of sciences, because this holy way of life does not bestow on us what is corruptible, diverting our nous from higher to lower things and completely stifling it. On the contrary, it offers us strange and indescribable good things, that ‘the eye has not seen, and the ear has not heard, and man’s heart has not grasped’ (1 Cor. 2:9).”⁵⁷

St. Maximos the Confessor taught that becoming a monk only outwardly is insufficient:

He who has renounced things such as marriage, possessions, etc., has made his outer self a monk but not yet his inner self. Only he who has renounced the passionate thoughts of these things has made a monk of the inner self, which is the nous. It is easy to make a monk of one’s outer self if one wants to; but no small struggle is required to make one’s inner self a monk.

Who, then, in this generation has been completely freed from passionate thoughts and has been granted continuous, pure, and immaterial prayer which is the mark of the inner monk?⁵⁸

St. John Chrysostom declared that a monk is superior to a king:

⁵⁵ St. Paisius Velichkovsky, “Field Flowers,” 26–28.

⁵⁶ Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain, *Spiritual Counsels, Volume II: Spiritual Awakening* (Souroti: Holy Monastery “Evangelist John the Theologian,” 2008), 236–37.

⁵⁷ Νικηφόρου Μονάζοντος, «Λόγος περι νήψεως και φυλακῆς καρδίας» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος δ΄ (Ἀθῆναι: Ἀστῆρ, 1991), 18; see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 194–95.

⁵⁸ Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, «Περὶ ἀγάπης ἑκατοντὰς τετάρτη» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος β΄ (1991), 46 (κεφ. ν΄–να΄); see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 106.

Unlike the king, the monk displays self-control. Too often a king is a slave to his passions. His desire for glory and wealth leads him to warfare. His love of luxurious living leads him to feast on rich food and drink and to adornment in gems and gold and fine clothing. By contrast, the monk enters battles only to overcome the wicked forces in the world. He dresses simply, eats lightly, and drinks water with more pleasure than those who drink fine wine.⁵⁹ ...

If you want to examine the warfare conducted by each, you will find the one fighting and resisting and defeating demons and being crowned by Christ ... but the king is [merely] fighting barbarians. Just as demons are much more fearsome than men, likewise he who resists and defeats them is much more illustrious. And if you want to determine the motivation of each for fighting, you will find them greatly unequal. One fights the demons for the sake of piety and the worship of God ... whereas the other fights barbarians for the sake of seizing places or mountains or money.⁶⁰

Several other saints also lauded the lofty state of monasticism. St. John of Karpathos wrote: “Monks should not consider anything worldly as superior to their own monastic vocation; for, without any contradiction, monks are higher and more glorious than crowned monarchs, since they are called to be in constant attendance upon God.”⁶¹ St. Theodore the Studite added: “I acknowledge that the monastic life is lofty and exalted, even angelic, purifying every sin on account of its perfect way of life.”⁶² St. Nectarios of Aegina elaborated:

What, indeed, is more honorable than this [monastic] way of life? What is more resplendent? It adorns our “image” (Gen. 1:27) and gives it its original beauty; it leads to blessedness; it beautifies the one who lives it; it leads to spiritual philosophy; it reveals mysteries; it teaches the truth; it makes the word of God dwell in the heart; it safely leads to the desired end; it renders man a citizen of heaven; it turns one’s breath into a ceaseless melody; it makes one’s entire life a harmony; it unites man with the angels; it renders man Godlike; it raises him to the Divine; it unites him with God.⁶³

2) The Novitiate

i) Whom to Accept

There are three categories of people living in a monastery: postulants (ὑποψήφιοι), novices (δόκιμοι), and monks (μοναχοί). A postulant is simply a layman who has been

⁵⁹ Stephen K. Black, “John Chrysostom on Power and The Episcopacy in the Late Fourth Century,” 3 www.firstpalto.com/downloads/JohnChrysostom.pdf.

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, *A Comparison Between a King and a Monk/Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, vol. 13, trans. David G. Hunter (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 71; PG 47:389.

⁶¹ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 326.

⁶² PG 99:1816CD and Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 76.

⁶³ Constantine Cavarinos, *Modern Orthodox Saints 7: St. Nectarios of Aegina*, Second Edition (Boston: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1988), 186; and Αρχιμ. Τίτου Ματθαίακη, «Επιστολή πρὸς Μοναχόν», *Ὁ Ὅσιος Νεκτάριος Κεφαλαῖς* (Ἀθήναι, 1955), 261.

given permission to stay at the monastery for an extended visit because he is considering monasticism.

Saint Paisios of the Holy Mountain said: “It is most important for a beginner, while still in the world, to find a spiritual father who will be a friend of monasticism, because most of the spiritual fathers in our times are *monachomachoi* (“monk-fighters”) and war against monasticism in many different ways.”⁶⁴

Elder Aimilianos recommended in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation*: “It is a good thing for postulants to visit the monastery often for a number of days or longer periods over a length of time before coming to reside there [permanently].”⁶⁵ After the seriousness of his intent to become a monk has become clear to himself and to the abbot (which is typically after one to six months), the abbot can clothe him as a novice. Only after being a novice for several years can he be tonsured a monk.

When St. Basil the Great was asked whether all applicants to the monastery are to be received, he replied:

It is not without danger to reject those who come to the Lord through us. ... Yet, it is clearly our obligation to inquire thoroughly into the past life of those who come... to ensure that they are not unstable in character and quick to change their decisions.

The fickleness of such persons renders them suspect, since not only do they themselves have no benefit, but also they harm others by reviling, telling lies, and wickedly slandering our work. Inasmuch, however, as everything can be corrected through diligence, and since the fear of God overcomes all kinds of defects of the soul, we should not immediately give up on these people. Rather, they should be led to practice suitable disciplines, and if we find in them some indication of stability after their resolution has been tested by time and laborious trial, they may be safely admitted. Otherwise, they should be sent away before they are a part of the community, so that their trial period may not harm the community. It is also necessary to examine to ascertain whether a man who has previously fallen into sin confesses with deep contrition his secret shameful acts and condemns himself...

A general method of testing everyone is to ascertain whether they are prepared to bear all humiliations without false shame, so that they accept even the most menial tasks, if it seems reasonable that these tasks are useful. And after all humiliations each candidate has been proved a useful vessel for the Lord, so to speak, and ready for every good work through exhaustive scrutiny by those competent to examine such matters, let him be counted among those who have devoted themselves to the Lord.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain, *Epistles*, (Thessaloniki: Holy Monastery of the Evangelist John the Theologian, 2002), 31.

⁶⁵ Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra, *The Authentic Seal: Spiritual Instructions and Discourses*, (Ormylia: Evangelismos tis Theotokou Monastery, 1999), 169.

⁶⁶ Βασιλείου Καισαρείας τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἄπαντα τὰ Ἔργα: Ἀσκητικά Α'*, τόμος 8, μετάφρασις Κωνσταντίνου Καρακόλη, Ἑλληνικοὶ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πατερικαὶ Ἐκδόσεις «Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς», 1973) 242–45; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 259–61 (Question 10 of the Long Rules).

The Council in Gangra (held in 340 A.D.) forbade people from becoming monastics if they have children to raise or elderly parents to care for.⁶⁷ Likewise, the fifth-century “Canons of Marūtā” state:

When the *rišdairā* [i.e., the abbot] receives a brother into the monastery, there shall be an examination; he has to interrogate accurately that one who is being received, as to what his profession is and from whence he comes and regarding the reason why he wants to become a monk. If he is a slave and his master a faithful, he shall not receive him except his master permits him. If he is a freeman, and has faithful parents and these do not agree, they shall not receive him. If he is separated from his parents, is independent and dwells by himself, he shall be received. If he has a wife and his wife does not agree, he shall not receive him. If, however, he has sons and daughters, even if his wife agrees, he shall not be received. A man whom his wife persecutes and has fled from her, shall be received. A brother who has killed someone but did not hate him since yesterday and beforetime, and did not kill him willfully, shall be received.⁶⁸

Similarly, the *Rules of Iṣō' Bar Nūn* declare:

If there is a man who has a wife, and they both in common conclusion want to separate themselves for life in holiness—not that the marriage is impure in their eyes but holy and pure but since they have desired for a higher life—it is lawful to do so. If somebody wants to sanctify himself, but as husband or wife they are bound in the yoke of marriage, if one partner does not want, then the other who wants to sanctify has no authority, for not the one of them has authority over his body but his partner, says the divine apostle (vid. 1 Cor. 7:4).⁶⁹

Quoting Abba Paphnutius, St. John Cassian taught that there are three kinds of calling to monasticism:

The first is from God, the second comes by way of man, and the third arises from necessity. The vocation from God comes whenever some inspiration is sent into our sleepy hearts, stirring us with a longing for eternal life and salvation, urging us to follow God and to cling with most saving compunction to His commands....

The second type of calling is, as I have said, that which comes through human agency when the example and the advice of holy people stirs us to long for salvation....

The third kind of vocation is that which comes through necessity. Imprisoned by the riches and pleasures of this world, we are suddenly put to the test. The danger of death hangs over us. The loss or seizure of our property strikes us. The death of those

⁶⁷ Canon XV: “If anyone should abandon his own children, or fail to devote himself to feeding his children, and fail, as far as depends on them, to bring them up to be godly and to have respect for God, but, under the pretext of ascetic exercise, should neglect them, let him be anathema.” Canon XVI: “If any children of parents, especially of faithful ones, should depart, on the pretext of godliness, and should fail to pay due honor to their parents, godliness, that is to say, being preferred with them, i.e., among them, let them be anathema” (Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, trans. D. Cummings [Boston: The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1957], 528).

⁶⁸ Arthur Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*, (Stockholm: Etse, 1960), 142–45.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

we love reduces us to sadness. And we are moved to turn in haste to the God whom we had neglected in the good times....

Of these three types of call, the first two seem to have the better beginnings. Yet I have occasionally found that some who started from the third level, that which seems the lowliest and the least committed, have turned out to be perfect men.... So it is the conclusion that counts. Someone committed by the beginnings of a glorious conversion can prove to be a lesser man because of carelessness, and someone constrained by some necessity to become a monk can, out of fear of God and out of diligence, reach up to perfection.⁷⁰

St. Christodoulos of Patmos wrote the following in regards to whom to accept as a novice:

Whenever a layman arrives asking to be admitted on the grounds that he wishes to enter the lists for Christ [and prove his mettle] in submission, first he must be carefully interrogated by the superior, and closely examined concerning his circumstances, lest he be come to the monastery not simply out of the love of God and desire to save his soul, but constrained by earthly contingencies, creditors, perhaps, or extreme poverty and disinclination to work, or numerous children, so that he is come to the monastery as to a refuge that will furnish escape and dispense from effort. If his initiative is recognized as having this kind of basis, if these are the cracked and rotten foundations he is laying for the laborious edifice of virtue, he must be allowed as much assistance as is possible, but, with benevolence, alms and the appropriate admonition, he must be sent away.⁷¹

St. Seraphim of Sarov “regarded as true monks and nuns only those who had embraced the monastic life for no other reason than love for God and for the sake of the salvation of their soul.”⁷² In the same spirit, St. Nikolai Velimirovich wrote to someone considering monasticism:

If you have doubts, my child, know that you are more likely to be for marriage than for a monastery.... You say that you often sit with your mother by the fire and you count pros and cons together. But I tell you this—no matter how much you count up, it is not pros and cons that will decide which way you go, but attractiveness. Love is above all reasons. If love for God does not lead you to quiet monastic solitude, then love for the world will keep you in the world and lead you into marriage....

Great love for God does not tolerate the world, it does not love company, it seeks solitude. That love has moved thousands of souls to depart the wide path of the world and head for the deaf deserts in order to secretly meet with their Creator who is all love, both by name and by essence. But most of all, they head for the desert in order to make themselves worthy of that vision and that meeting....

I write to you thus, not to attract you to monastic life, but rather to turn you away from it, because if you depart the world in the spirit of doubt, I am afraid that yearning for the world will increase in you and overcome you. You will be in a monastery bodily,

⁷⁰ Luibhéid, *John Cassian: Conferences*, 83, 84, 85 (Conference 1).

⁷¹ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 592.

⁷² Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, *St. Seraphim of Sarov: A Spiritual Biography* (Blanco: New Sarov Press, 1994), 258.

but in the world with your soul. And the world torments one more in the mirror of the soul than in reality.⁷³

St. John of Sinai, however, realized that coming to a monastery with good intentions is not necessarily a prerequisite or a guarantee of success. He wrote:

Nor let us abhor or condemn the renunciation [i.e., renouncing the world and joining a monastery] due merely to circumstances. I have seen men who had fled into exile meet the emperor by accident when he was on tour, and then join his company, enter his palace, and dine with him. I have seen seed casually fall on the earth and bear plenty of thriving fruit. And I have seen the opposite, too.⁷⁴

The holy Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council decreed that a person may choose to become a monk no matter what sins he has committed,⁷⁵ since the monastic life represents a state of repentance.⁷⁶ Likewise, St. John of Sinai wrote: “Let no one, by appealing to the weight and multitude of his sins, say that he is unworthy of the monastic vow.... Where there is much corruption, considerable treatment is needed to draw out all the impurity. The healthy do not go to a hospital.”⁷⁷

When the nuns of St. Nectarios of Aegina informed him about a young lady who was interested in joining their convent, he wrote them a letter in which he outlined the qualities that a monastic aspirant should have:

Above all, I want to know if her love burns for the Divine; if she loves prayer with all her heart and longs for it greatly and exceedingly; if she can exercise self-denial; if she can deny her will; if she can subject herself to someone else’s will; if she can perform something contrary to her will; if she does not answer back and receives orders without protest; if she is able to say to the Lord, “Not as I wish, Lord, but as You do”; if she is able to withstand temptation; if she unequivocally believes in divine help and

⁷³ *A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality, Volume 6*, (Third Lake: New Gracanica Monastery, 2008), 14–15.

⁷⁴ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 8.

⁷⁵ Canon XLIII: “It is permissible for a Christian to choose the ascetic mode of life and abandoning the turbulent whirl of ordinary life to enter a Monastery, and to take a tonsure in accordance with monkish habit, even though he should have been found guilty of any offense whatsoever. For our Savior God said: “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). As therefore monastic life represents to us a state of repentance as though engraved upon a pillar, we join in sympathizing with anyone that genuinely adopts it, and no one shall prevent him from accomplishing his aim” (Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 341). Commenting on this last sentence, Georgios Apostolakis (a canon law expert) wrote: “Since no one can prevent a legally qualified Christian from becoming a monk, it is unacceptable to claim that the bishop as the chief shepherd of his diocese has the authority to prevent a Christian from exercising this right of his by refusing to give him his approval for being tonsured” (excerpt from a personal correspondence 12/17/2014).

⁷⁶ St. Symeon of Thessalonica taught: “The most sacred schema of monks is included in this [sacrament of] repentance” (PG 155:197A).

⁷⁷ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 8.

protection; and finally, lest I pose more questions, if she is able to forgive all that her sisters may do, before the sun goes down, for the sake of the commandment of love.⁷⁸

St. Sophrony of Essex taught: “The authentic behavior of a person who comes and wants to be accepted in a monastery is to feel that he is unworthy to be accepted. Each person should feel his weakness, his passions, and should be full of a spirit of repentance. Without repentance, progress is impossible.”⁷⁹ “The foundation of spiritual life is repentance.”⁸⁰

An ancient monastic tradition is not to accept monks who have already been tonsured elsewhere. For example, the angel who appeared to St. Pachomios instructed him: “A stranger from another monastery having another rule shall not eat or drink with them, nor enter into the monastery unless he finds himself on a journey.”⁸¹ The *Incipit Tertia Patrum Regula Ad Monachos* (“The Third Rule of the Fathers” from sixth-century Gaul) only accepts monks from another monastery under the condition that they have the blessing of their abbot.⁸² Likewise, the fifth-century Syriac *Rules of Rabbūlā for the Monks* state: “No one shall receive a brother that moves from monastery to monastery without a word (assignment) of the *rišdairā* with whom he stayed.”⁸³ St. Ferréol of Uzès (in sixth-century Gaul) wrote: “We absolutely refuse, forbid, and prohibit a monk or cleric belonging to another place or monastery to be received for any reason, exercising precaution in such matters out of zeal for charity, in case he introduces some novelty, thus giving rise to the sordidness of scandal.”⁸⁴

These rules excluding previously tonsured monks were written because every monastery has its own mindset, and a person from another monastery will already have grown accustomed to a particular approach to the monastic life. It is unlikely that he will be both willing and able to renounce his previous understanding of monasticism in order to conform to the new brotherhood’s understanding. Thus, these conflicting outlooks are likely to be a constant source of friction and temptations both for him and for the rest of

⁷⁸ Strongylis, *St. Nectarios of Pentapolis and the Island of Aegina*, vol. 2, 73 (Letter #15).

⁷⁹ Sakharov, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, Τόμος Α΄*, 291.

⁸⁰ Sakharov, *Striving for Knowledge of God*, 305.

⁸¹ *Pachomian Koinonia, Volume Two: Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, trans. Armand Veilleux, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 127 (32:5).

⁸² Vid. *Early Monastic Rules: The Rules of the Fathers and the Regula Orientalis*, Carmela Viricillo Franklin (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1982), 59.

⁸³ Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, 33.

⁸⁴ *Regula Ferreoli*, as translated in St. Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel, *Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, trans. David Barry (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2007), 493.

the brotherhood. Nevertheless, Elder Ephraim made exceptions to this rule on occasion, as did Sts. Theodore the Studite⁸⁵ and Athanasios of Athos.⁸⁶

Even though St. Athanasios of Athos sometimes accepted monks from other monasteries, he did not want such monks to become the new superior immediately. He wrote:

If ... the superior should die ... the [new] superior must be selected only from this particular community. He should not be a man who has come here from some other monastery, been formed anew in a single day, and right then and there be put in charge. For he brings with him nothing that would aid the brothers in the practice of virtue, except that he wants them to vote for him as their leader, although they know nothing of his manner of life. Let the holy assemblage of the brothers be sure of this, that we regard it as essential that a stranger coming from another monastery should not straightaway assume the superiority.⁸⁷

St. Nilus Sorsky was very hesitant to accept monks in his community. He wrote:

It is proper to follow the example of the ancient and blessed Fathers, even if we are not able to equal the exploits. If anyone does not wish to follow this basic approach, let him cease harassing me, even though I also am a poor sinner. I turn away such persons and have nothing to do with them. I do not wish to be their master, and still they come and try to force me to lead them. Also for those who live together with us, if they do not care to observe our teaching which I give them from the holy Writings, I do not wish to answer for them, for I am not guilty of their self-will. But for those who really desire to live our style of life freely and without any worldly thinking, I accept such. I teach them the word of God, even though I myself do not always perfectly observe it.⁸⁸

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain foresaw a grim future for the next generation of monastic candidates:

This generation [i.e., of the late 20th century] starts out for monasticism on the best of terms, with ideals, but the devil renders useless all this potential. The next generation won't be like this. Many will come to the monasteries who will not be suitable for the monastic life. They will be in such a state that they will be forced to become monks. They will be worn out and wounded by the world. Married couples will be divorced, with or without the blessing of the Church, and these spouses will go their separate ways to live in the monasteries. Young people who are weary of the worldly life will go to the monastery, some for the salvation of their soul, and others to find some peace and serenity. Others who really want to marry, but who are afraid to commit themselves to another person, will become monks. In other words, in the coming years people with mental illness and others who hesitate to start a family will perhaps come to the monasteries. They will be saying to themselves, "What will I find in married life? What will I do in the world? It's better to go and become a monk."

⁸⁵ Vid. Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 108.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁸⁸ *Nil Sorsky: The Complete Writings*, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. George A. Maloney (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 40.

In other words, some people will take monasticism to be a life of ease and idleness. Now, as to what kind of spiritual progress they may make, well, that's another matter. No one will come in a spirit of repentance. People will be in such a state that they'll be forced to become monks. Their motives won't be pure. This is the danger. It's different if someone sets out specifically to become a monk. These people will need a great deal of help, because, having tasted the pleasures of the world, the devil will oppose them more strenuously, while the rest of us will not be opposed so vigorously. With us the devil will try to prevent our spiritual work, to weaken our resolve with negligence or slothfulness, so that those who follow us will not find any spiritual yeast to ferment their own spiritual life.⁸⁹

ii) Age Limits

In the old days, some saints would allow young children to join the monastery. For example, St. Benedict wrote: "Let children and boys take their places in the oratory [i.e., the monastery's church] and at table with all due discipline; outdoors, however, or wherever they may be, let them be under custody and discipline until they reach the age of understanding."⁹⁰ St. Caesarius of Arles wrote in his *Rule for Nuns* in the early sixth century: "If possible, never, or at best with difficulty, let little girls be received into the monastery, unless they are six or seven years old, so that they are able to learn their letters and to submit to obedience."⁹¹ A century later, St. Donatus of Besançon paraphrased this same rule in chapter 6 of his *Regula ad Virgines*. St. Fructuosus of Braga even allowed "the tiniest children who are still in the cradle" to join the monastery along with their parents.⁹² Canon XL of the Sixth Ecumenical Council sets the minimum age of submitting to the monastic yoke at ten years of age.⁹³

St. Basil the Great elaborated on this matter:

Since the Lord says: "Suffer the little children to come unto me" (Mk. 10:14), and the apostle praises him who has known the Holy Scripture from infancy (2 Tim. 3:15) and also orders that children be reared "in the discipline and correction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), we consider every time of life, even the very earliest, to be suitable for receiving postulants.⁹⁴

Although St. Basil allows children to *enter* the monastery, he also makes it clear that they should not make the vow of celibacy until they have matured. For he wrote:

⁸⁹ Elder Paisios, *Spiritual Awakening*, 378–79.

⁹⁰ *Rule of St. Benedict*, Chapter LXIII.

⁹¹ *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles*, trans. Maria Caritas McCarthy (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1960), 173.

⁹² Vid. *The Fathers of the Church: Iberian Fathers, Braulio of Saragossa, Fructuosus of Braga*, trans. Claude W. Barlow, vol. 2, #63 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1969), 186.

⁹³ Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 336.

⁹⁴ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἀσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 252–53; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 264 (Question 15 in the Long Rules).

The name *virgin* is given to a woman who voluntarily devotes herself to the Lord, renounces marriage, and embraces a life of holiness. And we admit professions dating from the age of full intelligence. For it is not right in such cases to admit the words of mere children. But a girl of sixteen or seventeen years of age, in full possession of her faculties, who has been submitted to strict examination, and is then constant, and persists in her entreaty to be admitted, may then be ranked among the virgins, her profession ratified, and its violation rigorously punished. Many girls are brought forward by their parents and brothers, and other kinsfolk, before they are of full age, and have no inner impulse towards a celibate life. The object of the friends is simply to provide for themselves. Such women as these must not be readily received, before we have made public investigation of their own sentiments.⁹⁵ ...

When reason and the ability to discern come [in a child who has reached maturity] ... permission to make the vow of virginity should be granted, inasmuch as his decision is now certain, since it comes from his own volition and judgment after reaching the age of reasoning.⁹⁶

Despite these saints allowing children to join a monastery, most of the holy Fathers did not permit beardless youths to become novices. For example, the Emperor John Tzimiskes wrote in the “Tragos” (a typikon for the Holy Mountain): “We must strictly enjoin that boys, beardless youths, and eunuchs who journey to the Mountain to be tonsured should not be received at all.”⁹⁷ Likewise, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain wrote these comments in *The Rudder* on the aforementioned Canon XL of the Sixth Ecumenical Council:

But inasmuch as this generation of ours has become prone to passions, ... those about to adopt the monastic style of life [should wait] until they reach the point of growing a beard, since this is also more to the interest of the very persons themselves who are going to become monks, in order that the judgment of their reasoning faculty may be rendered more perfect (i.e., more maturely developed), and consequently the trial likewise.⁹⁸

This is why the Charter of the Holy Mountain states: “In order to be tonsured a monk, one must have undergone a trial for one to three years and be eighteen years old.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, vol. 8, Basil: Letters and Select Works*, Philip Schaff, “Letter to Amphilochios Concerning the Canons,” (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), 237 [PG 32:720].

⁹⁶ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἀσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 258–59; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 267 (Question 15 in the Long Rules). Since, according to St. Basil, an individual’s own choice is a necessary for becoming a monk, the canon law expert P. Panagiotakis opined that a pathologically ill person whose mental illness prevents him from making rational choices should not become a monk (Vid. *Σύστημα τοῦ Ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ Δικαίου κατὰ τὴν ἐν Ἑλλάδι ἰσχὺν αὐτοῦ*, τόμος Δ΄, Τὸ δίκαιον τῶν μοναχῶν, 58, 59).

⁹⁷ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 238.

⁹⁸ Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 338.

⁹⁹ Article 93

A further problem with teenagers is that they rarely have the maturity and stability needed for living monastically. If a person lacks the maturity to live monastically, he is not ready to become a novice. For as St. Paisius Velichkovsky said, “He who lives in a monastery, whether he be tonsured or not [i.e., whether he is a monk or a novice], must observe the monastic way and take an example from his elders.”¹⁰⁰

According to St. Palladios, novices must spend three years doing the most difficult tasks before becoming monks.¹⁰¹ In the *Epistle to Castor* attributed to St. Athanasios the Great, the trial period lasts only one year.¹⁰² According to the typikon of the monastery of St. Theodore the Studite, the trial period for novices was a mere two or three weeks.¹⁰³ But the fifth canon of the First-and-Second Council imposed a three-year minimum, which could be reduced to six months under exceptional circumstances.¹⁰⁴ Thereafter, some typika of monasteries in the Byzantine era set the minimum at six months,¹⁰⁵ others set it at one year,¹⁰⁶ others at two years,¹⁰⁷ and others at three years.¹⁰⁸

In the early years of St. Anthony’s Monastery in Arizona, Elder Ephraim tonsured novices (making them rasophore monks) after they had been at the monastery only one or two years. But after a couple recently tonsured monks returned to the world, he realized that two years was not nearly enough for novices here in contemporary America, and he began to wait five or even ten years before tonsuring them.

As for a maximum age for accepting novices, there should be no upper limit. In the words of St. Ephraim the Syrian: “Do not disregard old men when they decide to come and labor in the monastic life.... You do not know whether this old man may be a chosen

¹⁰⁰ Schemamonk Metrophanes, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, The Man Behind the Philokalia*, trans. Fr. Seraphim Rose (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1976), 178.

¹⁰¹ Παλλαδίου, *Λαυσαϊκόν*, ΕΠΕ Φ6, 216.

¹⁰² Μεγάλου Ἀθανασίου, *Ἐπιστολὴ α΄ πρὸς Κάστορα*, PG 28:853D.

¹⁰³ Vid. Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 108.

¹⁰⁴ See footnote #2345 on page 442.

¹⁰⁵ Vid. “Typikon of Timothy for the Monastery of the Mother of God Evergetis,” Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 494–95; “Typikon of Michael VIII Palaiologos for the Monastery of the Archangel Michael on Mount Auxentios near Chalcedon,” *ibid.*, 1228.

¹⁰⁶ “Typikon of Athanasios the Athonite for the Lavra Monastery,” *ibid.*, 263.

¹⁰⁷ Vid. “Typikon of Athanasios Philanthropenos for the Monastery of St. Mamas in Constantinople,” *ibid.*, 1010.

¹⁰⁸ Vid. “Rule of Neilos, Bishop of Tamasia, for the Monastery of the Mother of God of Machairas in Cyprus,” *ibid.*, 1140; “Typikon of Empress Irene Doukaina Komnene for the Convent of the Mother of God Kecharitomene in Constantinople,” *ibid.*, 685; “Typikon of Nikephoros Blemmydes for the Monastery of the Lord Christ-Who-Is at Ematha near Ephesos,” *ibid.* 1203; “Typikon of Theodora Palaiologina for the Convent of Lips in Constantinople,” *ibid.*, 1270; “Rule of Christodoulos for the Monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos,” *ibid.*, 593.

vessel.”¹⁰⁹ But St. Nectarios of Aegina set the maximum age limit at forty-five for novices wishing to join his convent.¹¹⁰

A common challenge faced by older people wishing to become novices is that the non-monastic way they have been living for decades has become second nature, and they encounter great difficulties trying to conform their way of life and especially their way of thinking to that of the monastery. As St. Fructuosus of Braga (in seventh-century Portugal) explained in his *General Rule for Monasteries*:

Some old novices regularly come to the monastery and we know that many of them promise observance of the rule out of want and weakness and not to profess the religious life. When such are found, they must be investigated very carefully, and amid the other legal questionings they are to answer only what is asked. For they have a way of never giving up their previous customs and of wandering into idle tales, as they were long trained. When they are corrected by some spiritual brother, they immediately burst into anger and, for a long time, they are urged on by the ills of spiritual weakness and they never completely cease from rancor and bitterness. And when they slip into such faults, so often and so extensively, when even their spiritual weakness leaves them, they usually lose their restraint to the extent of the telling of idle stories and in laughter.

Accordingly, they are to be introduced to the monastery with this precaution, that they are not to tell idle stories day or night, but are to give themselves to sobs and tears, to ashes and sackcloth, and are with throbbing hearts to do penance for their past sins and not again to commit acts that require penance. The degree of pravity which they previously devoted to sin must be doubled in the full devotion paid to lamentation. Since for seventy and more years they have so abundantly sinned, it is fitting that they be bound in severe penance, just as a surgeon cuts into a wound more deeply when he sees rotten flesh. Such are to be corrected by true penance; if they are unwilling, then, they are to be punished immediately with excommunication [i.e., expulsion]. If they have been warned twice seven times and have not given up this vice, they are to be brought to an assembly of elders and there, for the last time, are to be examined. If they do not permit themselves to amend their ways, they must be dismissed.

On the other hand, we may show mercy to them as to little children; we may honor them as fathers, if they are quiet, simple, humble, obedient, frequently in prayer, deploring their own sins as much as those of others, daily risking their lives, always keeping Christ on their lips, not being idle when they have strength to work, guided by the opinion of their elders rather than by their own, completely abandoning all family affection, giving all they have to Christ’s poor rather than to their relatives, keeping nothing for themselves, with all their mind and courage observing the law of God and their neighbors, day and night meditating on the law of the Lord. They may be excused from duties in the bakery and kitchen and may be free from working in the field and on heavy jobs, except that some of the lighter tasks may be assigned to them, lest their weary years be completely broken before their time.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos, Book I*, 234; Παύλου Μοναχοῦ, *Εὐεργετινός*, τόμος Α΄ (Αθήναι: 1977), 401 (Ἐφραῖμ Σύρου, κζ’).

¹¹⁰ Vid. *The Charter of the Holy Monastery in Aegina of The Holy Trinity*, Article 5:5.

¹¹¹ Barlow, *The Fathers of the Church: Iberian Fathers*, vol. 63, 187–89.

iii) How to Evaluate a Novice

Elder Aimilianos set forth the following criteria for evaluating whether a novice is ready to be tonsured in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation*:

Novices shall learn the New Testament, the Psalter, the Old Testament, basic ascetic literature and the monastic way of life and shall practice guarding the intellect and participating actively in worship. Moreover, they shall learn perfect discipline in everything, deep and incontrovertible inner obedience, effacement and forgetfulness of themselves and all things, courtesy and delicacy in manner and speech, manifest and natural respect and the silence becoming to saints. They shall be instructed in the cenobitic way of life, tolerating and being tolerated, honouring others and supporting them. Their lives shall be subject to the present Typikon and to the statutes and prescriptions envisaged by it.

During the period of their novitiate, which is “a test of the worth of them and their parents,”¹¹² the following shall be assessed:

- * Whether there is communion of spirit.
- * Whether they can abandon parents, property and their own will and opinions.
- * Whether “they are prepared to undergo without false shame all humiliations.”¹¹³
- * Whether they have stout resistance to bodily temptations and those of the soul and spirit, especially when these are unexpected.
- * Whether they love study and value manual labor “and will accept the most humble of tasks.”¹¹⁴

Equally, enquiry shall be made as to whether they are perhaps “unstable and quick to judge,”¹¹⁵ whether they are afflicted with serious psychological problems which strongly influence their volition or make their personalities immature and irresponsible.

They shall be further tested as to: their capacity for liturgical life, their desire for Christ and the martyrs’ spirit, their perseverance and ascetic struggle, their ability to remain indifferent to their thoughts (λογισμοί) or to overcome them, the purity of their intentions, the ease with which they take to the communal life and their ability to survive without the need for the support of others.

Should any novice prove unable to adapt to the conditions, the tasks, the programme, the order, the life and the spirit of the Community, or if for any reason she is scandalized by it or by the sisters, is troubled, taciturn, idle or sickly, then it is not in her own best interest to stay in the monastery. The novitiate leads to the tonsure, as long as the new member is able to live in the monastic community without problems and in joy. This is to safeguard the spiritual interests and the future of the novice.

Those who are slothful or suspicious, who bewail their lot, moan or judge the actions of others, who are undisciplined, importunate, disobedient, who persist in their own opinions or ideas, disrupt the unity of the Community, speak ill of the Abbess or the Administration, pervert souls, reveal secrets, cause scandal or infringe these Regulations shall never be tonsured. Should any such have received the monastic habit and persist in this state, they should be expelled from the Cenobium as vessels replete with passions and as ruins.... Lack of curiosity as to the affairs and *diakonemata* [i.e.,

¹¹² Halkin, 14,1.29–15, 1.1.

¹¹³ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 261 (Question 10 in the Long Rules).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 260.

assigned tasks] of others, as well as dedication to the performance of one's own task are fundamental principles of the spirituality of the monastic profession.¹¹⁶

iv) When to Tonsure a Novice

St. Basil the Great taught that one should only take monastic vows after reaching “the age of discretion.”¹¹⁷ Although he set that age at sixteen or seventeen for people in the fourth century, in today's frivolous Western society (for example, the average teenager spends more than one hundred hours per month wasting time with electronic entertainment), the minimum age for tonsuring should be increased many more years. The fifth-century Synod in Carthage suggested that the minimum age for tonsuring should be twenty-five.¹¹⁸ In Palestine from the fifth to seventh centuries, “the period of novitiate in the coenobium was likely to last about ten years or more, until the candidate reached maturity—roughly the age of thirty—and had become an experienced monk.”¹¹⁹

St. John of Sinai warns: “Let the superior be circumspect in his reception of sheep, for in every instance God does not forbid refusal and dissuasion.... Before a man gains understanding through experience, let us not lay our hands quickly upon him [i.e., tonsure him], lest ... they make vows while they are still in ignorance, [and] they afterwards come to know our way of life, and are unable to endure its weight and burning heat, and desert us and return to the world. This will not be without danger for those who tonsure prematurely.”¹²⁰ Because as St. Basil the Great warns: “If he [i.e., a monk] has consecrated himself to God and has afterward turned aside to another mode of life, he is guilty of sacrilege.”¹²¹

Patriarch Theodore Balsamon explained that the period of the novitiate is necessary

so that he who is to be tonsured may be nourished as with milk, come of age through obedience, grow up through prayer, become a man through abstinence, and reach full growth through humility. And in this manner, as an unassailable soldier of Christ he may stand before Him Who enlisted him as a noble, heavy-armed, javelin-throwing warrior, wearing chastity as a breastplate, repentance as a shield, obedience as a helmet, prayer as a bow, hesychia as a spear, abstinence as a sword, patience as a scabbard, and humility as a leather sack.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 169–71, 177.

¹¹⁷ Vid. Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 806 (Canon XVIII of St. Basil the Great).

¹¹⁸ Vid. *ibid.*, 703 (Canon 135).

¹¹⁹ Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 264.

¹²⁰ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 244, 241.

¹²¹ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 264 (Question 14 in the Long Rules).

¹²² *Ἐπιστολὴ χάριν τῶν ρασοφόρων*, PG 138:1377C.

v) The Departure of Novices

When a novice decides to leave the monastery, he may not take any of his monastic clothes with him. As St. John Cassian wrote:

When someone has been received [into the monastery as a novice], all his former possessions are removed from him, such that he is not even permitted to have the clothing that he wore. He is brought to the Council of the brothers, stripped of what is his in their midst, and clothed in the garb of the monastery at the hands of the abba. Thus he may know not only that he has been despoiled of all his former things but also that he has put off all worldly pride and has stooped to the poverty and want of Christ...

Thenceforth, knowing that he will be clothed and fed from there [i.e., from the monastery], he will learn both to possess nothing and never to be worried about the morrow, according to the words of the Gospel, and he will not be ashamed to be on a par with the poor—that is, with the body of the brotherhood...

The clothing that he has taken off is deposited with the bursar and kept until, thanks to various trials and tests, he has made progress and they clearly recognize the virtue of his way of life and of his endurance. And when they see, as time goes on, that he can stay in that place and maintain the same fervor with which he began, they give it to the poor. But if they notice that he has committed the sin of complaining or is guilty of an act of disobedience, however slight, they stripped him of the garb of the monastery with which he had been clothed and, just once more in what he used to wear, which had been laid aside, they drive him out. For no one is allowed to depart with what he received, nor do they permit anyone to continue to dress as such when they see that he has even once veered away from the rule of his training.¹²³

Because novices are not officially a part of the brotherhood, they may still have their own money. But since novices in a cenobium have no need to spend money (because the monastery covers all their expenses), typically they put whatever money they brought with them to the monastery in an envelope, which the abbot keeps in a safe place. If the novice chooses to leave the monastery, the abbot is obliged to return to him the contents of that envelope. But if the novice becomes a monk, then the money in the envelope is given to the monastery.

Likewise, any property that a novice owned in the world becomes the monastery's when he becomes a monk, as Blessed Augustine wrote: "Let those that had property in the world at the time of their entry into the monastery be prepared willingly to place all in common."¹²⁴ In the same vein, the *Rule of Macarius*¹²⁵ states that the entrant is to understand that "he shall not from that hour be the judge, not only of the property that he brought

¹²³ *John Cassian: The Institutes*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Newman Press, 2000), 80–81.

¹²⁴ Hugh of St. Victor, *Explanation of the Rule of St. Augustine* (United Kingdom: Forgotten Books: 1901) 12.

¹²⁵ This monastic rule was not written by St. Macarius the Great but was composed in Orthodox Gaul in the fifth century.

but even of himself.”¹²⁶ The *General Rule for Monasteries* by St. Fructuosus of Braga explains that those who seek to enter the monastery must be carefully questioned “whether they have done everything which they have heard in the words of Verity in the Gospel, which says: ‘He who has not renounced all that he possesses cannot be my disciple,’¹²⁷ ... and ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, follow me and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.’¹²⁸ ... But if any of these ... renounce falsely and leave so much as a single coin anywhere, we order him to be thrown out immediately, for we see him not in the number of the apostles, but rather a follower of Ananias and Sapphira.¹²⁹ You should know that he cannot live up to the measure of a monk in a monastery, nor stoop to the poverty of Christ, nor acquire humility, nor be obedient, nor abide there continuously.”¹³⁰

3) Renunciation of the World

The holy Apostles taught that Christianity and “the world” are incompatible. St. James wrote: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”¹³¹ He also said: “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God is ... to keep oneself unstained by the world.”¹³² St. Peter warned: “If, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.”¹³³

Since “monasticism is nothing but Christian life in its perfection,”¹³⁴ it naturally follows that a fundamental aspect of monasticism is renunciation of the world. As St. Symeon of Thessalonica explained:

The world has nothing in common with monks, just as it has nothing in common with the crucified Savior and His disciples, who lived the same way of life [as monks] and were dead to the world.... The true monk loves Christ, and nothing can separate him from the love of Christ, as Paul says. He desires to depart and be together with

¹²⁶ Chapter 24 of the *Incipit Regula Macharii Abbatis*, as translated in Franklin, *Early Monastic Rules*, 49.

¹²⁷ Cf. Lk. 14:26.

¹²⁸ Mt. 19:21.

¹²⁹ Vid. Acts 5:1–11.

¹³⁰ Barlow, *The Fathers of the Church: Iberian Fathers*, Vol. 63, 183.

¹³¹ Jas. 4:4.

¹³² Jas. 1:27

¹³³ 2 Pet. 2:20.

¹³⁴ Αρχιμανδρίτου Αθανασίου, *Η Φωνή Ένδος Μοναχοῦ* (Κύπρος: Ίεράς Μονῆς Τροοδιτίσσης, 1998), 35.

Christ, and he manifests this desire in practice by fleeing to the desert, to the mountains, to solitude, for Christ's sake.¹³⁵

Evgenia Zhoukova observed the central position that renunciation has historically held for monasticism:

In the currently used *Service of the Great Schema*, renunciation is presented first in line among other vows of the candidate monk.... Already from the position this vow has in the modern-day service, we can get an inkling of its original importance as a vow.... We have also observed that in several Lives of the Saints of the first generation [of monks], coming to monasticism was rarely accomplished by performing some *Service of the Monastic Schema* or by tonsuring....

On the contrary, the sense of renunciation—which was expressed in different ways and had various nuances—is clearly presented as the entrance to monasticism.... [In particular,] the saints proceeded to: 1) free themselves from their possessions, 2) depart from their home, and 3) go to the place of their asceticism. This renunciation of theirs is what rendered them monks and ascetics. As an external sign of their renunciation of the world, 4) changing their garments was also required....

All catechisms [in the early days of monasticism] had renunciation of the world as a most fundamental theme with which they usually begin. Thus, the purpose of the catechism is to prepare the candidate for renunciation and to teach him that renunciation is the most basic aspect of monastic life.¹³⁶

St. Basil the Great viewed renunciation as a prerequisite for pleasing God:

The discipline for pleasing God in accordance with Christ's gospel is accomplished by detaching oneself from the cares of the world and by withdrawing completely from its distractions....

If we do not estrange ourselves from both fleshly ties and worldly society, being transported, as it were, to another world in our manner of living, as the one who said, "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), it is impossible for us to achieve our goal of pleasing God, inasmuch as the Lord said unequivocally: "Thus, every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33).¹³⁷ ... Also—and this is the chief point—it is the first step toward the likeness to Christ, who, being rich, became poor for our sake (2 Cor. 8:9).¹³⁸

St. John Chrysostom lamented that monastics have no choice but to flee society to avoid sin:

Would that such conditions prevailed in society, that so many would not have to flee the world in order to avoid sin and vice; would that those who have fled might be able to return! However, since evil prevails in the world, criticizing those who teach and admonish young people to become monastics is like criticizing one who hastens

¹³⁵ Αγίου Συμεών Θεσσαλονίκης: *Έργα Θεολογικά*, 178.

¹³⁶ Εύγενία Β. Ζουκόβα, *Γέννηση και Έξέλιξη τής Ακολουθίας του Μοναχικού Σχήματος: Κατά τους Δ'–Ζ' αιώνες βάσει αγιολογικών πηγών* (Αθήνα, 2010), 158–59, 183, 249–50.

¹³⁷ Βασιλείου του Μεγάλου, *Άσκητικά Α'*, ΕΠΕ 8, 206–07; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 242–43 (Question 5 of the Long Rules).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 256 (Rule #8 of the *Long Rules*).

to get the inhabitants out of a burning house in order to save them, rather than simply letting them burn.¹³⁹

Thus, one aspect of renouncing the world is to be geographically distant from people. As Abba Ammonas (a disciple of St. Anthony) wrote:

The soul cannot know God unless it withdraws itself from men and from every distraction. For then the soul will see the adversary who fights against it. And once it has seen the adversary and has overcome him every time he engages it in battle, then God dwells in the soul, and all the labour is changed to joy and gladness....

This is why the holy fathers also withdrew into the desert alone, men such as Elijah the Tishbite and John the Baptist. For do not suppose that because the righteous were in the midst of men it was among men that they had achieved their righteousness. Rather, having first practised much quiet, they then received the power of God dwelling in them, and then God sent them into the midst of men, having acquired every virtue, so that they might act as God's provisioners and cure men of their infirmities. For they were physicians of the soul, able to cure men's infirmities. This was the need for which they were dragged away from their quiet and sent to men. But they are only sent when all their own diseases are healed. For a soul cannot be sent into the midst of men for their edification if it has some defect of its own. And those who go before they are made perfect, go at their own will and not at God's. And God says in reproof about such, "I sent them not, but they ran of themselves" (Jer. 23:31). For this cause they are neither able to guard themselves, nor to edify another soul....

Many monks at the present time have been unable to persevere in quiet because they could not overcome their self-will. For this reason they live among men all the time, since they are unable to despise themselves and flee from the company of men, or to engage in battle. Thus they abandon quiet, and remain in the company of their neighbours, receiving their comfort thereby, all their lives. Therefore they have not been held worthy of the divine sweetness, or to have the power dwelling within them. For when that power looks down upon them, it finds that they receive their comfort in this present world and in the passions that belong to the soul and the body. As a result it cannot overshadow them any more, for love of money, human vainglory, and all the soul's sicknesses and distractions, prevent that divine power from overshadowing them.¹⁴⁰

Echoing this opinion of Abba Ammonas, St. Gregory the Theologian wrote:

Elijah on Mount Carmel dedicated himself to philosophy [St. Gregory here and elsewhere speaks of monastic solitude as "philosophy"] with joy, and John [the Baptist] did so in the desert. Jesus himself did many actions for people, but in order to dedicate himself to prayer went to silent and desert places. For which reason? I think, in order to furnish us with a law according to which, for a pure association with God, one must remain in tranquillity and at least to a small degree raise one's intellect from deceitful things.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ "Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life," PG 47:328, as translated in Zisis, *Following the Holy Fathers*, 39.

¹⁴⁰ *The Letters of Ammonas*, trans. Derwas J. Chitty (Oxford: SLG Press, 1979), 18–19 (Letter XII).

¹⁴¹ *Disc.* 26, 7, 8–16.

Evagrios the Solitary (as well as St. Theodoros the Great Ascetic who paraphrased him)¹⁴² encouraged monks to be far from the world:

I tell you, love isolation from the world. It frees you from the circumstances of your own land and makes you enjoy only the benefits of quietude. Avoid tarrying in a city, and persevere dwelling in the wilderness. “Lo,” says holy David, “I have fled afar off and have dwelt in the wilderness” (Ps. 54:7). If possible, do not go to a city at all. For you will see nothing of benefit, nothing useful, nothing profitable for your way of life. The same holy man again remarks: “I have seen iniquity and gainsaying in the city” (Ps. 54:9). Therefore, seek places that are free from distractions and solitary.¹⁴³

In the same spirit, St. Eustathios of Thessalonica wrote:

Are you unaware that an ascetic should live far from the world so that he is inaccessible to the crowds, or at least difficult to access? ... Since a monk comes from the world, he must transcend the world. But if a monk is in contact with the world as everyone else is, how will he live up to his calling of transcending the world? How can this ostensibly supernatural person avoid being ridiculed for depending on the world?¹⁴⁴

Abba Dorotheos explained: “[The holy Fathers] have realised that by living in this world they could not attain virtue easily. So they decided to seek a separate life, a separate way. This is the monastic life. So they started to leave the world and live in the deserts; fasting, sleeping on the ground, keeping vigil and other hardships, renouncing their native land, relatives, money and possessions, they crucified the world in themselves.”¹⁴⁵ This is why St. Gregory the Theologian stated: “Those are wiser than the majority who have separated themselves from the world and consecrated their life to God. I mean the Nazarites [i.e., monks] of our day.”¹⁴⁶ Elder Ephraim explained: “Realizing that worldly things constitute a hindrance in overcoming their falling away from God, monks decide to withdraw from the world in order to attain salvation.”¹⁴⁷

Likewise, St. Isaac the Syrian wrote:

If flight [from men] and watchfulness is profitable for Anthony and Arsenius, how much more is it for the infirm? And if God esteemed the stillness of these men—whose words, presence, and help the whole world was in need of—higher than succor given

¹⁴² Vid. Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 24

¹⁴³ Παναγιώτη Παπαευαγγέλου, *Εὐαγγίον τοῦ Ἀσκητοῦ καὶ Νεῖλου τοῦ Μοναχοῦ, Ἄπαντα τὰ Ἔργα*, 11A (Θεσσαλονίκη: Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, 1997), 66–69; see also Constantine Cavaros, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1 (Belmont: The Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2008), 129; and Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 34.

¹⁴⁴ PG 135:856BC, 840A.

¹⁴⁵ Constantine Scouteris, *Abba Dorotheos: Practical Teaching on the Christian Life* (Athens: 2000), 76–77.

¹⁴⁶ *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Volume VII (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), 405.

¹⁴⁷ From the manuscript of a homily “What does Monasticism offer to Society?”

to all the brethren, nay rather, to all mankind, how much more will this be the case with the man who is unable perfectly to guard himself?¹⁴⁸

Fr. Dumitru Staniloae explained why monks leave the world:

Monks take one road, Christians in the world another. Monks take the surest, the most radical, the shortest way. They know that the passions have become entrenched in human nature and so man must fight the battle of controlling himself. But they also know that their own will is weakened by these passions and the battle with them is made easier by taking away from them the opportunity of getting started and being stirred up, in other words by taking from the passions the material which allows them to develop and catch on fire. So they choose to leave the world. Thus from the beginning they cut off the starting and arousal power of the passions. For monks, from here on, the problem is to persist in this withdrawal, because an appetite deprived for a long time of material to satisfy it, or of the chance to be active, withers away, and no longer becomes a passion, or at least it is weakened.¹⁴⁹

Archimandrite George Kapsanis also observed: “There is an apparent contradiction: a monk strives after true sociability by withdrawing from society. This is something inexplicable with worldly logic. He flees people in order to acquire dispassion and thus loves people as God does.”¹⁵⁰

When St. Macarius the Great was asked which way is the easiest to be saved, he replied: “Whosoever leaves the world and goes to a quiet place and cries over his sins finds his salvation”¹⁵¹ because “the thoughts of the world drag the mind away toward worldly and corruptible things and do not permit it to love God or to be mindful of the Lord.”¹⁵² Likewise, St. John Chrysostom said: “The wilderness is the mother of stillness.”¹⁵³ St. Isaac the Syrian wrote: “Stillness cuts off the occasions and causes that renew thoughts, while within its walls it makes the memories of predispositions grow old and wither.”¹⁵⁴ St.

¹⁴⁸ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 353 (Homily 44).

¹⁴⁹ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. Archimandrite Jerome and Otilia Kloos (South Canaan: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002), 150.

¹⁵⁰ Αρχιμανδρίτου Γεωργίου, *Ὁρθόδοξος Μοναχισμὸς καὶ Ἅγιον Ὄρος*, 53–54.

¹⁵¹ *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, January* (Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 2003), 647.

¹⁵² *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, trans. George A. Maloney, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 113–14.

¹⁵³ “For what purpose doth He go up into the mountain? To teach us that wilderness and solitude are good when we are to pray to God. For this reason, you see, He is continually withdrawing into the wilderness, and there often spends the whole night in prayer, teaching us earnestly to seek such quietness in our prayers, as the time and place may confer. For the wilderness is the mother of stillness; it is a calm and a harbor, delivering us from all turmoils” (*St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 300 (Homily L); Migne PG 58:504).

¹⁵⁴ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 465 (Homily 65).

Eustathios of Thessalonica concurred: “The purpose of stillness is to make the soul impassive (ἀταραξία).”¹⁵⁵

In the same vein St. Basil the Great wrote:

We must strive after a quiet mind.... The wilderness is of the greatest use for this purpose, inasmuch as it stills our passions and gives reason for leisure to cut them out of the soul. Let there then be such a place as ours, separate from intercourse with men, that the continuity of our asceticism be not interrupted from without....

Quiet, then, as I have said, is the first step in our sanctification; the tongue purified from the gossip of the world; the eyes unexcited by fair color or comely shape; the ear not relaxing the tone or mind by voluptuous songs, nor by that especial mischief, the talk of light men and jesters. Thus the mind, saved from dissipation from without, and not through the senses thrown upon the world, falls back upon itself, and thereby ascends to the contemplation of God.¹⁵⁶

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote: “The benefit of stillness is greater than money, glory, and worldly pleasures, according to St. Gregory the Theologian: ‘Quiet and freedom from affairs is more precious than the splendour of a busy life.’¹⁵⁷ And according to the wise St. Nilos: ‘The life of stillness is more splendid than a large fortune,’¹⁵⁸ for according to St. Basil the Great: ‘Stillness is the first step in our soul’s purification.’¹⁵⁹ St. Isidore of Pelusium also says: ‘Departure into solitude has given me a fair amount of knowledge. For he who lives amidst turbulence and wants heavenly knowledge has forgotten that “whatever is sown in thorns is choked by them, and he who lacks stillness cannot know God.”^{160,161} This is why David said: ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’^{162,163} St. Joseph the Hesychast declared: “Anyone who has found grace found it in hesychia.”¹⁶⁴

In his commentary on the second Hymn of Ascent in first mode (“For those in the desert, divine longing becometh unending, in that they are outside the vain world.”), St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote:

¹⁵⁵ PG 135:788C.

¹⁵⁶ PG 32:225BC; *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, Letter 2, 110, 111.

¹⁵⁷ *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, 478 (Letter CXXXI to Olympius).

¹⁵⁸ PG 79:748A; see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 214.

¹⁵⁹ *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, Letter 2, 111; PG 32:228A.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted from a homily attributed to St. Athanasios the Great: *Λόγος διακριτικός, και εις τας εντολας του Θεου τοις αποταξαμένοις και σωθῆναι θελουμένοις* (PG 28:1416C).

¹⁶¹ Ἐπιστολή YB’ Θαυμασίω.

¹⁶² Ps. 45:10.

¹⁶³ Νικοδήμου του Αγιορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 23–24.

¹⁶⁴ *Letters and Poems: St. Joseph the Hesychast*, Letter 77; *Γέροντος Ἰωσήφ του Ἡσυχαστου - Ἐπιστολές και Ποιήματα: ἐκ του ἀρχείου τῆς Ι.Μ.Μ.Β., 60 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴν κοίμησή του, β’ ἔκδοση διορθωμένη και ἐπαυξημένη*, (Ἄγιον Ὅρος: Ἱερὰ Μεγίστη Μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου, 2019), 315.

The love and longing of monks dwelling in the desert and in stillness are not attracted by any material and vain thing... Since God is infinite and inexpressible by nature, the hermits' longing for God never ends but is ceaseless and ever-moving, always increasing and rushing to what is above...

Those who are sitting in the desert and leading a life of stillness despise all pleasures and things desired by other people, and they gather their nous in their heart away from every worldly disturbance and thought, and there they pray without ceasing, meditating on the most desired and sweetest name of Jesus, saying with love, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." With this unceasing prayer and continuous meditation of the divine name of Jesus, they ignite in their heart a yearning and eros for God alone, and they extend their nous to contemplate the beauty of God. Enraptured by that exquisite beauty, they are beside themselves and are forgetful even of food and water and clothing and even the natural needs of the body.¹⁶⁵

St. Basil the Great wrote the following about where he lived in seclusion as a monk:

Someone else might admire the abundant flowers or the multitudinous songbirds, but to these I do not have leisure to turn my mind. The greatest praise we can give of this place is that, besides being suited, because of its singularly apt location, for the production of every kind of fruits, it nourishes the sweetest of all fruits to me: solitude; not only because it is free from the uproar of the city, but also because it is removed from the encroachment of travelers, except for those who come to us for the purpose of hunting.¹⁶⁶

When the evil thought starts up and says, "What is the good of your passing your life in this place? What do you gain by withdrawing yourself from the society of men?" ... Oppose it ... and say: ... For this reason I flee to the mountains "as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers."¹⁶⁷ For, I have been delivered as a sparrow. And I pass my life, O evil thought, in this solitude in which the Lord dwelt. Here is the oak of Mambre;¹⁶⁸ here is the ladder leading to heaven and the companies of angels which Jacob saw; here is the desert in which the people, having been purified, were given the laws, and, thus entering the land of promise, saw God. Here is Mount Carmel on which Elias, taking up his abode, was well-pleasing to God. Here is the plain into which Esdras withdrew and at the command of God produced his divinely inspired books. Here is the desert in which the blessed John ate locusts and preached penance to men. Here is the Mount of Olives which Christ ascended to pray, teaching us how to pray. Here is Christ, the lover of solitude. For, He says: "Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them."¹⁶⁹ Here is the narrow and close

¹⁶⁵ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Νέα Κλίμακα: Ἑρμηνεία τῶν Ἀναβαθμῶν τῆς Ὀκτωήχου* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη, 2009), 14–16.

¹⁶⁶ *Saint Basil: Letters, Vol. 1, Fathers of the Church*, vol. 13, 47 (Letter 14 "To Gregory his Companion"). If cities in the 4th century (which were incomparably less populous than contemporary cities) disturbed St. Basil with their "uproar" (even though this was long before the industrial revolution filled cities with noisy machines), what would he say about cities in the 21st century replete with noise pollution—not to mention their air pollution, soil pollution, light pollution, electromagnetic pollution, and water pollution?

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Ps. 124:7.

¹⁶⁸ Gen. 13:18, 18:1.

¹⁶⁹ Mt. 18:20.

way that leads to life.¹⁷⁰ Here are the teachers and prophets, “wandering in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the earth.”¹⁷¹ Here are apostles and evangelists, and monks living as citizens of the desert.¹⁷²

St. John Chrysostom also praised the solitude of monastic living:

This life which seems to you to be a galling and wearisome life, I mean that of the monks and of them that are crucified, is far sweeter, and more to be desired than that which seems to be easy, and more delicate.... Observe from their retreats at once the first signs of their tranquillity. For they have fled from market places, and cities, and the tumults amidst men, and have chosen the life in mountains, that which hath nothing in common with the things present, that which undergoes none of the ills of man, no worldly sorrows, no grief, no care so great, no dangers, no plots, no envy, no jealousy, no lawless lusts, nor any other thing of this kind. Here already they meditate upon the things of the kingdom, holding converse with groves, and mountains, and springs, and with great quietness, and solitude, and before all these, with God. And from all turmoil is their cell pure, and from every passion and disease is their soul free, refined and light, and far purer than the finest air.¹⁷³

St. John Cassian declared: “The solitary life is greater and more sublime than that of the cenobia.”¹⁷⁴ St. John of Sinai also believed that living in complete solitude can have greater benefits but also greater dangers. Since he was writing to monks in a cenobium, he admitted: “we hesitate to philosophize in our discourse about the haven of stillness”¹⁷⁵ because “we do not consider it permissible to talk about peace to the courageous warriors of our King who are struggling in the battle [in a cenobium].”¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, he did mention a few ways in which a monk living alone in stillness is superior to a monk in a cenobium:

A monk living with another monk is not like a monk living as a solitary.... The former is often helped by his brother; but an angel assists the latter. The noetic hosts unite in worship with him whose soul is quiet, and dwell lovingly with him.¹⁷⁷

Those whose mind has learned true prayer converse with the Lord face to face, as if speaking into the ear of the emperor. Those who make vocal prayer fall down before Him as if in the presence of the whole senate. But those who live in the world petition the emperor amidst the clamour of all the crowds.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Mt. 7:14.

¹⁷¹ Heb. 11:38

¹⁷² *Saint Basil: Letters, Vol. 1*, 108–10 (Letter 42).

¹⁷³ *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 399.

¹⁷⁴ *John Cassian: The Conferences*, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 57, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 399.

¹⁷⁵ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 197.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

Why did the holy fathers of Tabennisi never have so many lights [i.e., saints] as those of the Scete? Those of you who can, understand this. I cannot speak, or rather, I do not want to.¹⁷⁹

St. Photios the Great explained what St. John meant in that last paragraph: “This means that the work of stillness is great and results in greater progress than living in a cenobium. He did not want to say this for the sake of those who are weaker.”¹⁸⁰ Tabennisi was where St. Pachomios had his foundation famed for its cenobitic character, whereas the desert of Scetis was a center for hesychasts.¹⁸¹

Regarding the dangers of solitary life, St. John of Sinai wrote:

He who is sick in soul from some passion and attempts stillness is like a man who has jumped from a ship into the sea and thinks that he will reach the shore safely on a plank.¹⁸²

Stillness has received many experienced men but has rejected them by reason of their self-rule [ἰδιορρυθμία], and shown them to be lovers of pleasure. Others she has taken, and by fear and the concern for the burden of their condemnation, has made them zealous and fervent.¹⁸³

He who has not yet known God is unfit for stillness, and exposes himself to many dangers. Stillness chokes the inexperienced; not having tasted the sweetness of God, they waste time in being taken captive, robbed, made despondent and subjected to distractions.¹⁸⁴

St. Isaac the Syrian also viewed living in stillness as the loftiest monastic path. He wrote:

The commandment that says, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” [Mt. 22:37], more than the world, nature, and all that pertains thereto, is fulfilled when you patiently endure in your stillness.¹⁸⁵

Do not compare those who work signs and wonders and mighty acts in the world with those who practise stillness with knowledge. Love the idleness of stillness above providing for the world’s starving and the conversion of a multitude of heathen to the worship of God. It is better for you to free yourself from the shackle of sin than to free slaves from their slavery.¹⁸⁶

The man who sighs over his soul for but one hour is greater than he who raises the dead by his prayer while dwelling amid many men.... The man who follows Christ in

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 202–03.

¹⁸⁰ PG 88:1117C.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 203f.

¹⁸² Ibid., 199.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 203.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 206–07.

¹⁸⁵ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 353–54 (Homily 44).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 144 (Homily 4).

solitary mourning is greater than he who praises Christ amid the congregations of men.¹⁸⁷

True is the word of the Lord which declares that no man possessing love for the world can acquire the love of God, nor can any who has communion with the world have communion with God, nor can any who has concern for the world have concern for God.¹⁸⁸

Every kind of virtue you can name, and every labor by which righteousness is accomplished, can be practised, acquired, and perfected outside of stillness; but dispassion and purity cannot be acquired outside of stillness.¹⁸⁹

A man who possesses this gift in perfection [i.e., the gift of rapture in prayer and continuous tears] will not readily be found, nay, scarcely at all. For this power is a gift of the watchfulness of stillness; and because there is no one in our dispirited generation who has embraced perfect stillness and complete watchfulness, we are also devoid of its gifts.¹⁹⁰

Because of all these benefits, St. Isaac advocated the solitary form of monasticism and taught monks how to live in this manner:

This is the definition of stillness: silence to all things. If in stillness you are found full of turbulence, and you disturb your body by the work of your hands and your soul with cares, then judge for yourself what sort of stillness you are practising, being concerned over many things in order to please God! For it is ridiculous for us to speak of achieving stillness if we do not abandon all things and separate ourselves from every care.¹⁹¹

We should not mix the work of stillness with care for anything at all, except for the things that are proper to stillness. Let every discipline be honored in its own place, lest we become confused in our disciplines. He who has many cares is the slave of many; but he who has forsaken all and cares only for the state of his soul, the same is a friend of God. Consider that there are many men in the world who give alms and fulfill [the commandment of] love of neighbor in matters pertaining to the body; but toilers in complete and beautiful stillness, and men entirely devoted to God, are scarcely to be found and are exceedingly few. Who among men in the world, who give alms or accomplish another form of righteousness through material things, has attained to one of the gifts which those who remain in stillness receive from God?

If you live in the world, practise virtuous disciplines suitable to laymen; but if you are a monk, distinguish yourself in the works wherein monks excel. If, however, you wish to practise both, you will quickly fall from the one and the other alike. These are the works of monks: freedom from worldly things, bodily toil in prayer, and unceasing recollection of God in the heart. So judge for yourself whether without these things the worldly virtues will suffice you.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 461 (Homily 64).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 428 (Homily 59).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 554 (Appendix A).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 551 (Appendix A).

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 235 (Homily 21).

Question: Is it really true that a monk who endures hardship in stillness cannot acquire the two modes of virtue—the outward and the inward, I mean—to keep in his heart both care for God and solicitude for other men?

Answer: I am of the opinion that even though a man who wishes to dwell in stillness abandons all things, takes concern for his soul alone, and is without any care for the things of this life, he will still be unable perfectly to perform the work of stillness; therefore, how much more so if he has solicitude for others?¹⁹²

We do not make our habitation alone with our soul, and practise stillness and seclusion, for the sake of the many works of the monastic ordinances and in order to accomplish these. For it is well known that fellowship with many facilitates this because of bodily vigor [i.e., the body is better sustained in a community and has more strength to complete the various regulations]. But if these works were necessary, there would not have been Fathers who abandoned the company and fellowship of men, some of whom inhabited tombs and others who chose seclusion in a solitary place. Such men greatly enfeebled their bodies in this manner, and neglected them, and could not fulfill their rules because of their weakness and the physical hardship.... They said no psalm and they did nothing else that is performed with the body. Instead of all the monastic ordinances, the infirmity of their body and their stillness sufficed them. This was their way of living all the days of their life. And in all this supposed idleness not one of them wished to forsake his cell, nor, because they did not perform any of the monastic canons, did they wish to wander about outside [their cells] or to be gladdened by the chanting in the churches and by the divine offices performed by other men.¹⁹³

This is virtue: that in his mind a man should be unoccupied with the world. As long as the senses have dealings with external things, the heart cannot have rest from imaginations about them. Outside of the desert and solitude, the bodily passions do not abate, nor do evil thoughts cease.¹⁹⁴

As a moderate way of practicing stillness, St. Isaac the Syrian mentions the practice of some monks “who have not chosen total stillness (that is, not to meet with any man), but who hold to the rule of stillness throughout the week or for periods of seven weeks.”¹⁹⁵ He taught that such monks are imperfect and should also do good works for other people out of brotherly love:

The fulfilling of the duty of love with respect to providing for physical well-being is the work of men in the world, or even of monks, but only those who are imperfect, who do not dwell in stillness, or who combine stillness with brotherly concord and continually come and go. For such men this thing is good and worthy of admiration. Those, however, who have chosen to withdraw from the world in body and in mind so that they might establish their thought in solitary prayer by deadness to what is transitory, to concern over all affairs, and to the sight and recollection of worldly things, should not serve in the husbandry of physical things and visible righteousness.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Ibid., 232 (Homily 21).

¹⁹³ Ibid., 460–61 (Homily 64).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 113–14 (Homily 1).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 528 (Homily 76).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 230–31 (Homily 21).

St. Symeon the New Theologian praised the benefits of solitary life in his poems:

For truly these are monks and solitaries living alone,
 these who are alone with God alone, and in God,
 stripped of considerations and all sorts of thoughts,
 seeing God alone in their mind without thoughts,
 in a mind fixed on the light like an arrow stuck in a wall,
 or like a star in heaven, or how I cannot say.
 Equally, they inhabit their cells like another shining bridal chamber
 and believe they live in heaven, or truly so do they live.¹⁹⁷

...

Being like an island in the middle of the sea,
 they ought to dwell
 and to consider the whole world
 as utterly inaccessible for settlement by themselves,
 as though a great chasm were established
 around their whole monastery,
 so as those who are in the world
 do not pass through to the monastery
 nor do those on this island go over to them in the world,
 and look upon them with strong affection,
 nor turn a memory of them in heart or mind,
 rather monks ought to be disposed like corpses to corpses,
 regarding them as not perceived by their senses,
 and they become as lambs, truly willing victims.¹⁹⁸

St. Zosima Verkhovsky, a Russian hesychast, described from his own experience the joys and sorrows of living in solitude:

[Through solitude] the soul has means for salvation in the Lord, is able to stand mentally before God, has purity of prayer, sobriety of memory, unrestrained powers of thought, motivation to please God, control of the mind which keeps it from vain wandering, sorrow and joy in the Lord: sorrow over one's own sins and careless way of life, joy at having been created a rational creature, and having been chosen from amongst the worldly multitude and led to this angelic brotherhood, and even having been granted to emulate the holy Fathers in a life of silence, established by God's Providence for His servants.¹⁹⁹

The inner desert, I trust, will be a teacher leading one to spiritual advancement. There are no comforts there, as in the world, with which the soul might busily preoccupy itself; there is no need for excessive handiwork, and there is no one to visit for entertainment or idle conversation. You would have no visitors with whom you might share a comforting and fine meal except for your disciple (or a pilgrim) with whom you would eat only the strictest fast food. One must suffer the horror of demons, the loneliness and languishing of daily and continuous confinement and seclusion. The

¹⁹⁷ Griggs, *Divine Eros: Hymns of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, 206–07 (Hymn 27).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 300–01 (Hymn 41).

¹⁹⁹ Abbess Vera Verkhovsky, *Elder Zosima: Hesychast of Siberia*, trans. Gregory Dobrov and Barbara McCarthy (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press, 1990), 96.

fear of death settles continuously in one's soul, frightening it with thoughts of being attacked and possibly killed by animals, snakes, and evil people. One suffers extreme need in everything, dire poverty, and lack of the most essential things, living in a meager hut which has nothing in it save a few books which are one's only joy and consolation. One hears neither of his friends and how they live, nor of the health of his relatives, nor of his loved ones. All the pleasures of his past life have departed. In a word, he has died to the world, and the world to him. There is nothing temporal over which to rejoice, thus darkening the mind, drawing it away from God. The whole mind, reason, memory and feelings, the whole person is immersed in God, ascending to Him through the contemplation and vision of His wisdom, His greatness, and His Providence in His works. Heaven and earth are as two constantly open books before him in which he reads of the greatness and wisdom of our God. To Him alone he weeps day and night, prostrating himself in supplication, begging to be strengthened and preserved till the end of his days in this way of life, the demands of which exceed his strength, but which he nevertheless undertook for God's sake. I trust that for his life of constant seclusion without exit from the desert, poverty and complete isolation from everything and everyone, the Lord will grant such a one the gift of tears, as a kind of betrothal to the joy and salvation of his soul to come.²⁰⁰

[In the deep forest,] every occasion, each object seen and heard turns one to contemplation on the omnipotence, the wisdom, the goodness of God... We learn how much the desert-dwelling life enhances non-acquisitiveness and passionlessness. Besides, it becomes more apparent that everything which occurs in this world, all passing, corrupt and fleeting things, and even we ourselves, are actually not dwellers of this world, but involuntarily feel in our souls absolute repulsion to all that is in this world. And we only regret that up until now we have not realized what a sweet-melancholy life and what a transcendence in mind is given to those who live for God in the desert.²⁰¹

I believe that if one departs for the inner desert overcome and persuaded by a divine love for Christ, he will truly live as if in Paradise. No longer hindered by any obstacles, he will be free to delight constantly in the thought of God and in sweet prayer of the heart and mind, with God and in his God. No longer shedding tears of grief alone, but weeping in joyful sorrow, he will dwell in the mountain heights as a heavenly bird, offering sweet songs to his Creator and Redeemer. Separated from all persons and things, as a beloved lamb of Christ, he will graze and take his fill in joy of the heart through the grace of Christ. Indeed, such a person would not trade his desert life for royal chambers that require excessive care, for living this way he may constantly contemplate the Kingdom of Heaven with ease.²⁰²

Contemporary studies have also found non-spiritual benefits of solitude. One recent survey of relevant literature concluded that solitude provides three crucial benefits: "new ideas, an understanding of self, and closeness to others."²⁰³ Another study of great historical figures

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 104–05.

²⁰¹ *Little Russian Philokalia, Vol. III: A Treasury of Saint Herman's Spirituality* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988), 184–85.

²⁰² Verkhovsky, *Elder Zosima*, 107.

²⁰³ Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 98.

found that solitude is necessary for obtaining “clarity, creativity, emotional balance, and moral courage.”²⁰⁴ Sherry Turkle wrote: “In recent years, psychologists have learned more about how creative ideas come from the reveries of solitude.... Our brains are most productive when there is no demand that they be reactive.”²⁰⁵

Despite the many benefits of being *geographically* removed from the world, the holy Fathers taught that being *inwardly* detached from the world is even more important. St. Nicetas Stethatos taught: “To become a monk does not mean to abandon men and the world, but to renounce the will of the flesh, to be destitute of the passions. If it was once said to a great spiritual master, ‘Flee men and you will be saved,’ it was said in precisely this spirit: for even after he fled, he dwelt among men and lived in inhabited regions along with his disciples. But because he so assiduously fled in a spiritual sense at the same time as he fled visibly, he suffered no harm from being with other men.”²⁰⁶ And St. Palladios wrote: “We are concerned not with the place where they [i.e., the exemplary monks] settled, but rather it is their way of life that we seek.”²⁰⁷

St. Theoliptos of Philadelphia also emphasized the inner renunciation of the world:

The monastic profession is a lofty and very fruitful tree whose root is detachment from all corporeal things, whose branches are the soul’s freedom from passionate cravings and total alienation from the things you have renounced, and whose fruit is the acquisition of virtues, a deifying love, and the uninterrupted joy that results from these things.... Flight from the world bestows refuge in Christ. By “world” I mean attachment to sensory things and the flesh.²⁰⁸

Even St. Isaac the Syrian said: “No one can draw nigh to God save the man who has separated himself from the world. But I call separation not the departure of the body, but departure from the world’s affairs.”²⁰⁹ And according to St. Symeon the New Theologian:

Neither does being in the middle of a city prevent us from executing the commandments of God as long as we are eager and vigilant, nor do stillness and withdrawing from the world benefit us if we are negligent and lazy....²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Raymond M. Kethledge, Michael S. Erwin, *Lead Yourself First: Inspiring Leadership Through Solitude* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2017), xiii.

²⁰⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 62.

²⁰⁶ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 99.

²⁰⁷ Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, Ancient Christian Writers, trans. Robert T. Meyer (New York: Newman Press, 1964), 29.

²⁰⁸ Θεολήπτου Μητροπολίτου Φιλαδελφείας, «Λόγος τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ κρυπτὴν ἐργασίαν διασαφῶν» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος δ΄ (1991), 4; see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 177.

²⁰⁹ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 113 (Homily 1).

²¹⁰ Ἁγίου Συμεῶν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου, «Κατηχητικὸς λόγος κβ΄», *Φιλοκαλία*, ΕΠΕ (Θεσσαλονίκη: 1989), τόμος 19Δ, 256, παρ. 9, στ. 18–21.

Renunciation of the world and complete withdrawal from it—if it includes complete withdrawal from all worldly things, habits, opinions and people, and the disowning of body and will—in a very short time will bring great profit to a man who is fired with such zeal....²¹¹

Who would not weep for me, who would not grieve deeply, because I fled the world and the things in the world (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15), and yet I am not separated from the world in my senses? I have put on the habit of monks, yet I love the things in the world just like the worldly: glory, wealth, both pleasures and enjoyments.²¹²

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov wrote that true withdrawal from the world consists of enclosing one's mind within oneself:

Outward prayer alone is not enough. God pays attention to the mind, and they are not true monks who fail to unite exterior prayer with inner prayer. Strictly defined, the word "monk" means a recluse, a solitary. Whoever has not withdrawn within himself is not yet a recluse, he is not yet a monk even though he lives in the most isolated monastery. The mind of the ascetic who is not withdrawn and enclosed within himself dwells necessarily amongst tumult and unquietness. Innumerable thoughts, having free admission to his mind, bring this about; without purpose or necessity his mind wanders painfully through the world, bringing harm upon itself. The withdrawal of a man within himself cannot be achieved without the help of concentrated prayer, especially the attentive practice of the Jesus Prayer.²¹³

St. John of Sinai held renunciation in such high regard that he set it as the basis of monastic life by making it the first step in his *Ladder*. He wrote:

Those who enter this [monastic] contest must renounce all things, despise all things, deride all things, and shake off all things, that they may lay a firm foundation. A good foundation of three layers and three pillars is innocence, fasting and temperance....²¹⁴

All who have willingly left the things of the world, have certainly done so for the sake of the future Kingdom, or because of the multitude of their sins, or for love of God. If they were not moved by any of these reasons, their withdrawal from the world was unreasonable.... The man who renounces the world from fear is like burning incense, that begins with fragrance but ends in smoke. He who leaves the world through hope of reward is like a millstone, that always moves in the same way (that is, revolves round itself, is self-centered). But he who withdraws from the world out of love for God has obtained fire at the very outset; and, like fire set to fuel, it soon kindles a larger fire.²¹⁵

²¹¹ *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 98 (Precepts #5).

²¹² Griggs, *Divine Eros: Hymns of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, 193 (Hymn #24).

²¹³ Igumen Chariton of Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky, E. M. Palmer (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1966), 54.

²¹⁴ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 6.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 4, 7.

According to St. John Cassian, Abba Paphnutius taught that there are three kinds of renunciation necessary for monks: “The first renunciation has to do with the body. We come to despise all the riches and all goods of the world. With the second renunciation we repel our past, our vices, the passions governing spirit and flesh. And in the third renunciation we draw our spirit away from the here and the visible and we do so in order solely to contemplate the things of the future. Our passion is for the unseen.”²¹⁶ St. John of Sinai, however, held a different view of what the three kinds of renunciation are: “No one can enter crowned into the heavenly bridechamber without making the three renunciations. He has to turn away from worldly concerns, from men, from family; he must cut selfishness away; and thirdly, he must rebuff the vanity that follows obedience.”²¹⁷

Both Abba Dorotheos of Gaza and St. Theodoros the Great Ascetic understood monastically the verse of St. Paul: “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, in order that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”²¹⁸ Abba Dorotheos commented on this: “Likewise we should also strive to be free from any concern of this world and to be occupied only with God, and, as it says, be like a virgin devoted and without distraction (1 Cor. 7:34–35).”²¹⁹ And St. Theodoros concluded:

The monk, therefore, must be detached from material things, must be dispassionate, free from all evil desires, not given to soft living, not a drinker, not slothful, not indolent, not a lover of money, pleasure, or glory. Unless he raises himself above all these things, he will not be able to achieve this angelic way of life.... This spiritual life and its activities are full of delight, and is “the good portion that shall not be taken away” (Lk. 10:42) from the soul that has attained it.²²⁰

St. Peter of Damascus taught that a monk wanting to be more devoted to God will naturally reduce material cares: “A sensible person struggles intelligently to minimize, so far as he can, the needs of his body, so that he may devote himself to the keeping of the commandments with few or no material preoccupations. Indeed, the Lord Himself says, ‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will put on’ (Mt. 6:25).”²²¹

In order to protect the clergy and monastics from secular cares, the holy Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council declared:

²¹⁶ Luibhéid, *John Cassian: Conferences*, 85.

²¹⁷ Luibhéid, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 83.

²¹⁸ 2 Tim. 2:4.

²¹⁹ *Abba Dorotheos: Discourses and Sayings*, trans. Eric Wheeler (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 80.

²²⁰ Θεοδώρου τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀσκητοῦ, «Κεφάλαια πάνυ ψυχοφελῆ ρ’» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος α’ (1991), 311–12 (κεφ. μθ’); see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 23 (ch. 49).

²²¹ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 3, 153.

No Bishop, Clergyman, or Monk shall henceforth be allowed to farm any estate or office, or to involve himself in secular cares, unless he be unavoidably called by laws to the guardianship of minors, or the Bishop permit him to take care of the affairs of the church, or of those of orphans or widows unprovided for, and of persons in especial need of ecclesiastical assistance, for the fear of God.²²²

St. Isaac the Syrian taught: “One of the saints said: ‘It does not befit the rule of your manner of life to feed the starving and to make your cell a hospice, for this is the laymen’s portion and it is meet for them to practise this as something good, but not for anchorites, who are liberated from care for visible things, and keep guard on their minds through prayer.’”²²³

In the same spirit, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain said:

[Anti-monastic clergymen] in waging their war even make use of Fathers of the Church who were involved in important social work, such as Saint Basil the Great and his *Vasileiada*.²²⁴ I don’t wish to refer to the life of Saint Basil the Great before he began the *Vasileiada* [when he lived as a hermit], but simply express my thought: What would Saint Basil the Great do if he lived in our era? I am of the opinion that he would again retreat to a cave with his prayer-rope, watching the flame of love (of the social work of other holy Fathers) being spread everywhere; not only to the faithful but even to the unfaithful, who all together constitute Social Providence.... In other words, social welfare is shouting every day: “Holy Fathers of our times, leave charity to us, the lay people, who are not in a position to do something else, and look to concern yourselves with something more spiritual.”

Unfortunately, however, some clergymen not only do not follow this exhortation, since they do not understand it, but they also prevent those who do understand it and want to dedicate themselves entirely to Christ, feeling intensely the inclination to depart from the world.... [Such clergymen] even make the unreasonable demand that monks leave the desert and come to the world to take up the social work and philanthropy....

The monk departs far from the world not because he hates it, but because he loves it. In this way he will, through his prayer, help the world more in those matters that are, being humanly impossible, only possible by God’s intervention. This is how God saves the world.... I want to stress the great mission of the monk, which is of greater importance than human philanthropy....

External stillness combined with discerning asceticism rapidly brings internal stillness (i.e., peace of the soul), which is a necessary prerequisite for refined and exacting spiritual labour. For, the more someone becomes alienated from the world, the more the world is alienated from within him. Then, worldly thoughts are expelled and man’s mind is purified and he becomes a man of God....

The undistracted nature of a hesychast’s life in the desert greatly assists prayer with its many prerequisites.

Love the blessed desert and respect it, if you want the desert to assist you with its sacred seclusion and sweet serenity, that you become serene and your passions

²²² Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 248 (Canon III).

²²³ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 409 (Homily 54).

²²⁴ *Vasileiada* was the name given by the successors of Saint Basil (*Vasileios* in Greek) the Great to his social and philanthropic work.

devastated, so as to draw near unto God. Be careful not to adapt the holy desert to your passionate self, for this shows great impiety. (It is like going on pilgrimage to Holy Golgotha with *bouzoukia* [i.e., guitars].) The desert is for a higher spiritual life, the angelic, and for more physical asceticism and not for more bodily comfort, as if on vacation. Therefore, love the desert with all its harsh seclusion if you want to quickly make fruitful your sterile soul and become incorporeal.²²⁵

When St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain was asked why monks do not stay in the world to do social work, he explained:

Aren't lighthouses supposed to be always out on the rocks? Are you saying they should go to the cities and be added to the streetlights? Lighthouses have one mission and street lights another. A monk is not a little street light to be put in the city at the side of the road to shine on pedestrians so they don't trip. A monk is an isolated lighthouse, high on the crags of a rocky shore, providing light and direction for those on the seas and the oceans to guide their ships to reach their destination: God.²²⁶

4) Stability

In general, a monk is obliged to remain in his “monastery of repentance” (i.e., the monastery in which he was tonsured and chose to live a life of repentance) until the end of his life, and this ideal is implicit in the vows of the great schema.²²⁷ The *Greek* version of this vow for the great schema says: “Do you [vow to] remain in the monastery and in the ascetic life until your last breath?”²²⁸ However, the *Slavonic* version of the same vow takes into consideration the possibility of going elsewhere under obedience: “Do you vow to abide in this monastery, or in that to which under holy obedience you will be sent, and in the ascetic life until your last breath?”²²⁹

St. Basil the Great explained the reason for monastic stability:

Once someone has joined and lived with a spiritual brotherhood ... he has entered an agreement of spiritual cohabitation having an indissoluble and eternal connection and cannot separate and cut himself off from those with whom he has been joined...

If he says that some of the brethren are bad and carelessly prevent what is good and neglect decorum and fail to keep the exactitude proper for ascetics, and therefore

²²⁵ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 31–35, 55, 98, 119, 205.

²²⁶ Elder Paisios, *Spiritual Awakening*, 320; Γέροντος Παΐσιου, *Πνευματική Αφύπνιση*, 320. Likewise, St. John Chrysostom said that monasteries “are as lights shining from a lofty place to mariners afar off” (*The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, vol. 13, Homily 14 on Timothy [New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895], 456).

²²⁷ For more about the great schema and levels in monasticism, see chapter 7) section 2) on page 386.

²²⁸ *Τάξις καὶ Ακολουθία τοῦ Μεγάλου καὶ Ἀγγελικοῦ Σχήματος*, 20. The first patristic mention of this vow of stability is found in the catechism of St. George of Hozeva who lived in the ninth century (vid. Ζουκόβα, *Γέννηση καὶ Ἐξέλιξη τῆς Ακολουθίας τοῦ Μοναχικοῦ Σχήματος*, 245).

²²⁹ *The Great Book of Needs*, vol. 1 (South Canaan: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1998), 364.

he must separate himself from them, such a person has not contrived a sufficient justification for leaving.²³⁰

St. Eftymios the Great warned: “Just as a tree which is continually transplanted cannot bear fruit, so the monk who moves from place to place cannot produce virtue.”²³¹ And St. John of Sinai wrote: “If you have bound yourself by obligations and perceive that the eye of your soul is not becoming lucid, do not request leave to quit. The proven are proven everywhere, and the reverse is equally true.”²³² St. Maximos the Confessor taught: “In a time of temptations do not leave your monastery but stand up courageously against the thoughts that surge over you, especially those of sorrow and listlessness. For when you have been tested by afflictions in this way, according to divine providence, your hope in God will become firm. But if you leave, you will show yourself to be worthless, unmanly and fickle.”²³³

The Seventh Ecumenical Council institutionalized these teachings by decreeing: “A monk or nun must not leave his or her monastery or nunnery, respectively, and go away to another. But if this should occur, it is necessary that he or she be afforded a hospitable reception as a guest. But it is not fitting that he or she be entered without the approval of his abbot, or of her abbess, as the case may be.”²³⁴ In his interpretation of this canon, St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain explained that a monk or nun who has gone to another monastery “must not be held to be enrolled in the brotherhood or sisterhood there, as the case may be, without the approval and a dismissory letter from his own abbot (or from her own abbess, if it be a nun).”²³⁵

The First-And-Second Council also stated:

If any monk runs away from his own monastery to another or riotously enters a worldly resort, both he himself and the one receiving him shall be excommunicated until the absconder has returned to the monastery which he has wrongly fallen out of. But if, in any particular case, the bishop should wish to send away to another monastery some of the monks of proven reverence and decorousness of life for the purpose of stocking the other monastery, or should wish to transfer them even to a mundane house for the purpose of compassing the salvation of the inmates thereof by establishing the

²³⁰ Βασιλείου Καισαρείας τοῦ Μεγάλου: Ἄπαντα τὰ Ἔργα, 9, Παν. Κ. Χρήστου, Ἀσκητικαὶ Διατάξεις 21:1,2, (Θεσσαλονίκη: ΕΠΕ, 1973), 496, 498.

²³¹ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos, Book I*, 353; *Four Great Fathers*, trans. Leo Papadopoulos (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2007), 16.

²³² Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 46.

²³³ Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, «Ἐκατοντὰς πρώτη τῶν περὶ ἀγάπης κεφαλαίων» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος β' (1991), 8 (κεφ. νβ'); see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 58 (ch. 52).

²³⁴ Agapius and Nicodemos, *The Rudder*, 450 (Canon XXI).

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 451.

monks therein, or should see fit to place them elsewhere, this course shall not render either the monks or the ones receiving them subject to any penalty.²³⁶

Commenting on this canon, St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain added: “The ornament of a monastery is the condition of having monks stay in it permanently in quietude and not keep going away.”²³⁷

However, St. Basil also taught that a monk may depart from his monastery if he is being harmed there or if he is fulfilling the Lord’s command:

He who is withdrawing from his brethren because he is being harmed should not keep his motive hidden within himself, but should censure the wrong done to him, in the manner taught by the Lord, Who said: “If thy brother sin, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Mt. 18:15), and so on. Then, if the amendment he desires is effected, he has not only gained his brethren but also has not dishonored their union. But if he sees that they persist in the evil and are not willing to correct it, he will report this to those empowered to judge in such cases, and then, after several have given testimony, he may withdraw. In this manner, he will not be separating himself from brethren but from strangers, for the Lord compares one who persists in evil to a heathen and publican: “let him be to thee as the heathen and publican” (Mt. 18:17). If, however, he leaves the society of his brethren because of his fickle nature, let him cure his own weakness, or, if he will not do this, let the brotherhoods refuse to accept him. And if, by the Lord’s command, one is attracted to some other place, such do not sever their relations, but they fulfill the ministry. There is no other acceptable reason for the brethren to leave their community.²³⁸

The Synod of Patriarch Nicholas of Constantinople taught the same thing:

Question VI: If perchance anyone is tonsured as a monk at whatever place he may be, and afterwards finds that he is being harmed there as respects his soul and he wishes to depart thence on account of the harm, but receives a prohibitive tether from his Superior not to leave, what ought he himself to do—ignore the harm his soul is suffering, or ignore the Superior’s tether?

Answer: He ought first to tell his Superior the cause of the harm he is suffering, and if that harm and the peril incurred by his soul are manifest, he ought to depart thence, and not bother about the Superior’s tether.²³⁹

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain added the following comment to this:

It is implied here that if the Superior fails to correct the scandal and the cause of the harm, the monk ought to leave. Such being the case, however, the monk ought to take care to get the tether of his Superior untied or loosed if the latter will consent to untie it for him; but if he refuses to do so, he ought to go to the local Bishop and have it untied by the latter, and not by anyone else, just as Apostolic canon XXXII prescribes

²³⁶ Agapius and Nicodemos, *The Rudder*, 459–60 (Canon IV).

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἀσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 338–41; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 305 (Question 36 of the Long Rules).

²³⁹ Agapius and Nicodemos, *The Rudder*, 972–73.

[for excommunicated presbyters and deacons]; for no one can untie himself by himself.²⁴⁰

Canon XVII of St. Nicephoros the Confessor likewise states: “A monk is permitted to leave his monastery for three reasons: 1) if perchance the abbot is a heretic; 2) if women come into the monastery; or 3) if children are learning secular letters in the monastery.”²⁴¹ St. John the Prophet, however, says: “If it is determined accurately that the abba proclaims heresy, then the brother should indeed abandon him. If, however, there is only a suspicion about this, then the brother should neither abandon him nor examine what he believes. For what is concealed from people is revealed to God.”²⁴²

St. Sophrony of Essex observed that the vow of stability

is not an imprescriptible [i.e., inviolable] mark of monasticism, as are the other vows. The monastic life can be lived outside the monastery: in the world, in the desert. In the lives of a great many saints who were monks we read of their voluntarily or involuntarily abandoning the monastery in which their vows were made, without this being considered a fall or even any violation of the monastic state. Many of them were taken from their monasteries and set to perform some hierarchical service in the Church; many, for one reason or another, were transferred to other monasteries, many received the blessing of their superiors to leave for a good purpose; and finally, there are instances of flight from the monastery because of the “difficulty of salvation” there.²⁴³

St. Savas of Kalymnos demonstrated the flexibility of the vow of stability when he appeared in a vision to a nun of his monastery whose conscience was reproving her for having left her “monastery of repentance” in order to join his monastery. He drew a circle around the two monasteries and told her: “Look, my daughter; these are both ours. That one is a convent, and this one is also a convent!”²⁴⁴

Likewise, the authors of *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* mentioned in their preface: “During the monastic reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when many monks sought a more austere life, [the vow of] stability was increasingly seen in

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 452. St. Nicephoros explained that the reason why children should not be taking secular school lessons in the monastery is “because it is improper for them to reveal the good things being done in the monastery, for it says in the Gospel: ‘Do not sound a trumpet before thee when thou doest good’ (cf. Mt. 6:2)” (*Spicilegium Solesmense*, J. -B. Pitra, Vol. IV [Paris: 1858], 392).

²⁴² *Barsanuphius and John, Letters*, vol. 2, trans. John Chryssavgis (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 126 (letter 537).

²⁴³ Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, *Truth and Life* (Essex: Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, 2014), 103–04.

²⁴⁴ Ἱερομονάχου Δημητρίου Καββαδία, *Γέροντας καὶ Γυναικεῖος Μοναχισμὸς* (Ἅγιον Ὄρος: Ἱερᾶς Μεγίστης Μονῆς Βατοπαιδίου, 2015), 268.

terms of profession rather than of place, and transfers were not only permitted but in some cases encouraged, especially from a lower to a higher, or stricter, monastery.”²⁴⁵

Elder Aimilianos made a distinction between subjective and objective reasons for wanting to leave one’s monastery. He taught:

We have cases of monastics who are no longer happy in their monastery.... Thoughts enter the monk and tell him: “The Elder is not good; he doesn’t love me; I can’t stand it here.” Because of these thoughts his heart yields to the pressure, and since he is not living a Christian and happy life he decides (or they decide) that he should leave the monastery with the hope that elsewhere he will be able to live under circumstances that are somewhat more humane and comfortable. This is in itself an illicit divorce; it is not permitted by the Church. For the rest of his life, this person will be guilty before God.

There is only one case which permits me to leave my monastery: when I am not at rest for objective reasons. The life at the monastery is such that I can neither pray nor read or keep vigil; my soul is overwhelmed and cannot survive with such a life. So why would I remain in this monastery? This could happen if the monastery becomes a tourist attraction, and I do not feel my heart thriving, or if the monastery has a propensity for working so much that afterwards I collapse out of extreme exhaustion and sleep and am unable to have a spiritual life. In this case a monk may insist many times, with courtesy and dignity, to change monastery. Especially when the Elder or the Eldress has fallen asleep to whom he had been under obedience, it is easier. Usually the spiritual fathers grant the possibility to a monk to go somewhere else.²⁴⁶

St. Benedict outlined how a monk should be received when returning to his monastery:

If a brother, who through his own fault leaveth the monastery or is expelled, desireth to return, let him first promise full amendment of the fault for which he left; and thus let him be received in the last place, that by this means his humility may be tried. If he should leave again, let him be received even a third time, knowing that after this every means of return will be denied him.²⁴⁷

St. Waldebert expanded on this in his own rule for nuns and wrote:

If a sister is ever lost to the Christian religion and flees from the walls of the monastery and, having fled outside, later recalls her original religion and returns full of fear of eternal judgement, she must first make all emendation to the monastery. Afterwards, if her penance is believable, then she may be received again within the monastery walls. Even if this happens two or three times, she shall be extended like piety though she will be placed in the last place among the penitents and examined for a long time until some proof of her life [sincerity] is discovered. But if after a third

²⁴⁵ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, xviii.

²⁴⁶ Ἀρχιμ. Αἰμιλιανοῦ Σιμωνοπετρίτου, *Νηπτικὴ Ζωὴ καὶ Ἀσκητικοὶ Κανόνες: Ἑρμηνεῖα στοὺς Ὅσιους Πατέρες Ἀντόνιο, Ἀύγουστῖνο καὶ Μακάριο* (Ὁρμύλια: Ἴερὸν Κοινόβιον Εὐαγγελισμοῦ τῆς Θεοτόκου, Ἰνδίκτος, 2011), 24–25.

²⁴⁷ *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, chapter 29.

reception she again incurs the stain of sinful flight, she should know that afterwards she will be denied all chance to return.²⁴⁸

5) The Monastic Struggle

Ever since the beginning of monasticism the first thing novices are traditionally told when they come to a monastery is how difficult monasticism is. For example, when St. Paul the Simple came to St. Anthony's cell in order to become a monk, St. Anthony did and said everything he could to discourage him.²⁴⁹ Abba Pinufius (in fourth-century Egypt) warned postulants how difficult monasticism is as follows:

According to the words of Scripture, now that you have set out "to serve the Lord, remain in the fear of God and prepare your soul" not for peace or security or pleasure but "for trials and difficulties" (Sir. 2:1). For "we must enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations" (Acts 14:21), inasmuch as "the gate is narrow and the path is strait which leads to life, and few there are who find it" (Mt. 7:14). Consider, then, that you are one of the chosen few, and do not grow cold through the example and the lukewarmness of the multitude, but live as do the few, so that with the few you may deserve to be found in the kingdom. "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Mt. 20:16). And "small is the flock" (Lk. 12:32) to whom the Father is pleased to give the inheritance.²⁵⁰

Similarly, St. Caesarius of Arles said in a homily to monks: "In this place, dearly beloved, we have gathered not to enjoy quiet, not to be secure, but rather to fight and to engage in combat. It is to struggle that we have advanced here."²⁵¹ St. Columbanus in sixth-century Ireland concluded his monastic rule with this description of the struggle:

The monk shall live in a monastery under the rule of one father and in the company of many brethren, in order that he may learn humility from one, patience from another. One will teach him silence, another meekness. He shall not do what pleases him; he shall eat what is set before him, clothe himself with what is given him, do the work assigned to him, be subject to a superior whom he does not like. He shall go to bed so tired that he may fall asleep while going, and rise before he has had sufficient rest. If he suffers wrong, he shall be silent; he shall fear the head of the monastery as a master,

²⁴⁸ *The Rule of a Certain Father to the Virgins*, trans. J. A. McNamara, J. Halborg, in J. A. McNamara, *The Ordeal of Community*. Peregrina Translation Series 5, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Peregrina, 1993), chapter 21.

²⁴⁹ Vid. *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church: March*, 141–43; or Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos, Book 1*, 218–19.) Similarly, Abba Palamon also tried to intimidate St. Pachomios by telling him: "You cannot withstand the type of austerity and deprivation I go through here" (*Four Great Fathers*, 45). St. Pachomios in turn tried to discourage St. Macarios in a similar manner (Vid. Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, XVIII). Others who did likewise were Helle the Ascetic (vid. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980], 91) and Abba Gregory the Anchorite (vid. John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, trans. John Wortley, Series #139 [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Studies, 1992], 73).

²⁵⁰ Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes*, 99.

²⁵¹ St. Caesarius of Arles, "A Homily of Saint Caesarius to Monks," chapter 1. http://www.academia.edu/1860501/Caesarius_of_Arles_On_Living_in_Community

and love him as a father, being ever convinced that what he commands is profitable to him; nor shall he criticize the words of the elders because it is his duty to obey and to do what he is bidden, as Moses says: “Attend, and hear, O Israel” (Deut. 6:4).²⁵²

St. Basil the Great warned:

Do not think that all who live in a monastery are saved, the bad as well as the good, for this is not so. Many, indeed, come to the life of virtue, but few bear its yoke. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the violent and “the violent take it by force”—these are the words of the Gospel (vid. Mt. 11:12). By “violence” is meant the affliction of the body which the disciples of Christ voluntarily undergo by denying their own will, refusing respite to the body, and observing the commandments of Christ. If, then, you wish to seize the kingdom of God, become a man of violence; bow your neck to the yoke of Christ’s service. Bind the strap of the yoke tightly about your throat. Let it pinch your neck. Rub it thin by labor in acquiring virtues, in fasting, in vigils, in obedience, in stillness, in psalmody, in prayer, in tears, in manual labor, in bearing all the tribulations which befall you at the hands of men and demons.²⁵³

These warnings and counsels were eventually formalized and included in the Service of the Great Schema as the “catechism.” Ninth- and tenth-century manuscripts of this service have various texts as a catechism,²⁵⁴ but in contemporary practice, the only catechism used is the one presented on page 397 of this book.

St. Sophrony of Essex also told his monastics how difficult our life is: “You all know that the loftier the goal, the more difficult it is to achieve. So we should not be surprised that the monastic life is the most difficult and grievous thing in the world... We must have a deep awareness of the fact that monasticism is almost always a state of living in sorrow, for we monastics are crucified beside the crucified Christ. What is strange about this? When our mind is immersed in the contemplation of the eternal realities that Christ spoke about, we find ourselves by grace in a state in which we are not aware that we are suffering.”²⁵⁵

Abba Pinufius outlined the stages of monastic progress for beginners as follows:

The beginning of our salvation and the preserving of it is the fear of the Lord.²⁵⁶ For by this the rudiments of conversion, the purgation of vice, and the preserving of virtue are acquired by those who are being schooled for the way of perfection. When this has penetrated a person’s mind it begets contempt for all things and brings forth the forgetfulness of one’s family and a horror of the world itself. By this contempt, however, and by being deprived of all one’s possessions, humility is acquired. Humility, in turn, is verified by the following indications: first, if a person has put to death

²⁵² *Celtic Spirituality*, Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 256. See also: <http://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/Columbanus.html>

²⁵³ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἀσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 122–23; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 30.

²⁵⁴ Ζουκόβα, *Γέννηση και Ἐξέλιξη τῆς Ἀκολουθίας τοῦ Μοναχικοῦ Σχήματος*, 248.

²⁵⁵ Sakharov, *Οἰκοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, Τόμος Α΄*, 139, 431.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Prov. 9:10.

in himself all his desires; second, if he conceals from his elder not only none of his deeds but also none of his thoughts; third, if he commits nothing to his own discretion but everything to his [elder's] judgment and listens eagerly and willingly to his admonitions; fourth, if in every respect he maintains a gracious obedience and a steadfast patience; fifth, if he neither brings injury on anyone else nor is saddened or sorrowful if anyone else inflicts it on him; sixth, if he does nothing and presumes nothing that neither the general rule nor the example of our forebears encourages; seventh, if he is satisfied with utter simplicity and, as being an unfit laborer, considers himself unworthy of everything that is offered him; eighth, if he does not declare with his lips alone that he is inferior to everyone else but believes it in the depths of his heart; ninth, if he holds his tongue and is not a loudmouth; tenth, if he is not ready and quick to laugh.²⁵⁷ By such indications, and by others like them, true humility is recognized. When it is possessed in truth, it will at once bring you a step higher to love, which has no fear.²⁵⁸ Then all the things that you used to do out of a certain dread of punishment you will begin to do without any difficulty, as it were naturally, and no longer with a view to punishment or fear of any kind, but out of love for the good itself and out of pleasure in virtue.²⁵⁹

Perhaps the most common pitfall for zealous beginners in a monastery is to judge the imperfections of the other monks and novices, since people typically come to monasticism with an idealized image of it. The sad reality nowadays, however, is that most (if not all) people in a monastery are still only somewhere in the beginning of their long journey towards perfection, and thus still have plenty of vices which they are struggling to overcome. Aware of this reality, Abba Pinufius continued his teaching: "In order to attain more easily to this [perfection], you should seek out, while you live in the community, examples of a perfect life that are worthy of imitation; they will come from a few, and indeed from one or two, but not from the many."²⁶⁰ If in the fourth century examples of a perfect life were rare, now in the twenty-first century they should be almost non-existent. For according to the prophecies of several saints, monks in the end times would be pitifully weak compared to those in the early days of monasticism.²⁶¹

Because of this, Abba Pinufius continued his teachings to beginners as follows:

In order to be able to lay hold of all of this [spiritual progress] and to abide permanently under this spiritual rule, you must observe the following three things in the

²⁵⁷ For more on the matter of monastic laughter, see chapter 5) section 16) on page 234.

²⁵⁸ Cf. 1 Jn. 4:18.

²⁵⁹ Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes*, 99–100.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁶¹ "Once, when the holy Fathers were making predictions about the last generation, they said, 'What have we ourselves done?' One of them, the great Abba Ischyron replied, 'We ourselves have fulfilled the commandments of God.' The others replied, 'And those who come after us, what will they do?' He said, 'They will struggle to achieve half our works.' They said, 'And to those that come after them, what will happen?' He said, 'The men of that generation will not accomplish any works at all and temptation will come upon them; yet those who will persevere in that day will be greater than either us or our fathers'" (Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 111).

community, in accordance with the words of the Psalmist: “Like one who was deaf I did not hear, and I was like one who was mute and did not open his mouth. And I became like a man who did not hear, not having any rebukes in his mouth” (Ps. 37:13–14). Thus you too should set out as one who is deaf and mute and blind, so that, apart from looking upon him whom you have chosen to imitate by reason of his perfection, whatever you might see that is less than edifying you will not see, being as it were blind....

If you hear that anyone is disobedient, insolent, or disparaging, or that anyone is doing something differently than was taught to you, you should not stumble and be inveigled into imitating him because of such an example, but, like one who is deaf and does not hear these things in the least, you should ignore them all. If insults or injuries are inflicted on you or on anyone else, be steadfast and pay heed to a vindictive retort as would a mute person, repeating over and over again in your heart the verse of the Psalmist: “I said: I will guard my ways lest I sin with my tongue. I set a guard at my mouth when the sinner stood against me. I was dumb and was humbled and was silent even from saying good things” (Ps. 38:1–3).²⁶²

Yet despite the manifold hardships inherent to monasticism, this path contains a mystical and hidden joy, for the holy Fathers recognized it as the “light yoke” of which Christ spoke.²⁶³ For example, St. Theodore the Studite said that the cenobium is our “light, our life, and our true joy, for nothing is more joyous than a soul being saved.”²⁶⁴ The *Rule of St. Comghall* (from sixth-century Ireland) says: “The service of the Lord is light, wonderful, and pleasant. It is an excellent thing to place oneself in the hands of a holy mentor, that he may direct one’s path through life.”²⁶⁵ Elder Aimilianos explained this in more detail in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation*:

The nuns shall ever have the perfect joy of Christ within them. This joy shall be accompanied by the spirit of contrition and repentance, which comes to the true believer as a visitation from the Holy Spirit. To each one, the Lord shall show “what great things she shall suffer for My name’s sake.”²⁶⁶ Suffering for Christ, endeavoring with all her might to behold the glory of God, and her divine calling to the monastic life shall make her a participant in the ranks of the Apostles. Each nun shall thus wage her own combat in the common arena to achieve the goal of Christianity which, according to St. Basil the Great, is “the imitation of Christ according to the measure of His Incarnation, insofar as is conformable with the vocation of each individual.”^{267,268}

²⁶² Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes*, 100–01.

²⁶³ “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt. 11:29–30).

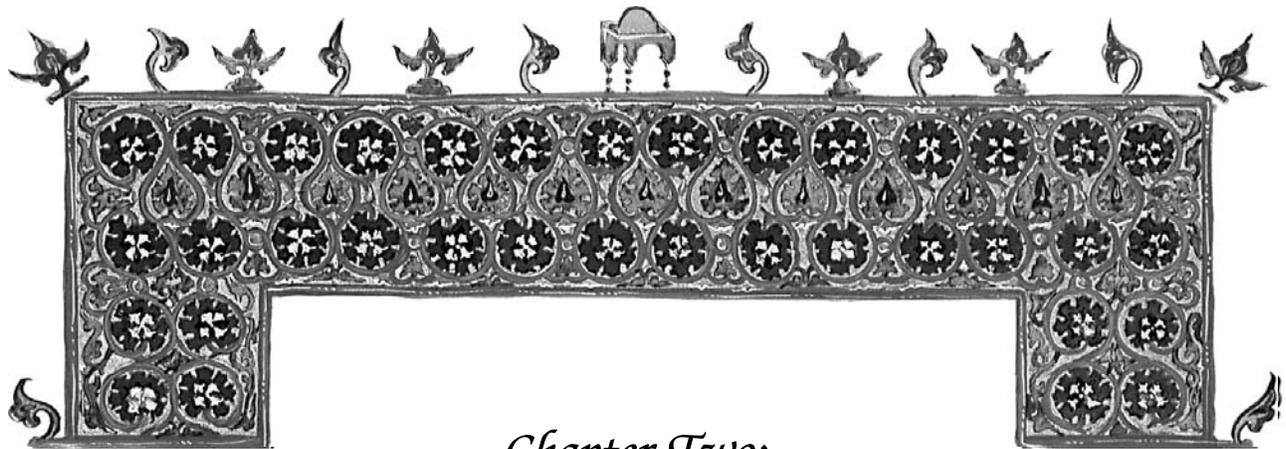
²⁶⁴ Θεοδώρου Στουδίτου, *Μεγάλη Κατήχησις*, 470.

²⁶⁵ Uinseann Ó Maidín, *The Celtic Monk: Rules and Writings of Early Irish Monks* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1996), 33.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Acts 9:16.

²⁶⁷ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 319 (Question 43 in the Long Rules).

²⁶⁸ Cf. Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 180.



Chapter Two: The Abbot

1) His Characteristics



SAINT BASIL THE GREAT believed that “instruction how to lead the Christian life depends less on words than on daily example.”²⁶⁹ Therefore, he taught: “The superior ... should make his life a clear example of the keeping of every commandment of the Lord.... To consider first, then, that which is indeed first in importance, he should be so confirmed in humility by the love of Christ that, even if he is silent, the example of his actions may afford more effective instruction than any words.... Therefore, meekness of character and humility of heart should characterize the superior.”²⁷⁰ St. Basil also taught that an abbot should be “chosen in preference to the rest after a thorough examination of his life and character and consistently good conduct. Age should also be taken into consideration where special honor is to be accorded. It is somehow in keeping with man’s nature that what is more aged is more worthy of respect.”²⁷¹ St. Basil added that the abbot should be someone who is “skilled in guiding those who are making their way toward God, who will be an unerring director of your life. He should be adorned with virtues, bearing witness by his own works to his love for God, conversant with the Holy Scripture, undistracted from worldly matters, free from avarice, a good, quiet man, tranquil, pleasing to God, a lover of the poor, mild, forgiving, laboring hard for the spiritual advancement of those who come to him, without

²⁶⁹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, Volume VIII, Basil: Letters and Select Works*, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), 208 (Letter 150).

²⁷⁰ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Άσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 370–71; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 319 (Question 43 in the Long Rules).

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

Pages 46-114, 128-149, 184-273, 306-339, and 386-433
are not included in this preview.

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St. Sophrony of Essex wrote to a monk: “If you accomplish any task out of obedience in all good conscience, you are dispensed from answering for it before God. The one who gave you the order answers, and thus your conscience remains always at peace.”⁶⁴²

To resolve the apparent contradiction between these teachings *encouraging* obedience to sinful orders and the aforementioned teachings *prohibiting* such obedience, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov concludes:

Obedience to elders in the form in which it was practised in ancient monasticism is not given to our time.... An indispensable condition of such submission is a Spirit-bearing Guide who by the will of the Spirit can mortify the fallen will of the person subject to him in the Lord, and can mortify all the passions as well....

It is obvious that the mortification of a fallen will which is effected so sublimely and victoriously by the will of the Spirit of God cannot be accomplished by a director’s fallen will when the director himself is still enslaved to the passions. “If you wish to renounce the world and learn the life of the Gospel,” said St. Symeon the New Theologian to the monks of his time, “do not surrender [entrust] yourself to an inexperienced or passionate master, lest instead of the life of the Gospel you learn a diabolical life.” ...

According to the word of the Lord: *If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a ditch* (Mt. 15:14)... Elders who take upon themselves the rôle of the ancient holy Elders without having their spiritual gifts should know that their very outlook or way of thinking, their reason or understanding, and their knowledge are self-deception and diabolic delusion which cannot fail to give birth to a corresponding fruit in the person guided by them....

It will be useless to point out to us that St. Zachariah who was living in obedience to an inexperienced elder ... or St. Acacius found salvation while living with a cruel elder.... Both were in obedience to incompetent elders, but they were guided by the counsels of Spirit-bearing Fathers and the most edifying examples which were in abundance before their eyes. Therefore, they could only have remained in outward obedience to their elders. These cases are outside the general rule and order....

Perhaps you retort: “A novice’s faith can take the place of an incompetent elder.” It is untrue. Faith in the truth saves. Faith in a lie and in diabolic delusion is ruinous according to the teaching of the Apostle: “They refused to love the truth that would save them [he says of those who are voluntarily perishing]. Therefore, God will send them [i.e., will permit them to suffer] a strong delusion, so that they will believe a lie, that all may be condemned who do not believe the truth but delight in falsehood.”⁶⁴³ ...

There have been instances (they are very, very rare) when faith, by the special providence of God, has operated through sinners and achieved the salvation of these sinners.... Instances of this kind are exceptions.... We shall act very wrongly if we take these instances as models for imitation....

Monastic obedience in the form and character in which it was practised by the monks of old is a lofty spiritual mystery. Its attainment and full imitation have become impossible for us. We can only examine it reverently and intelligently, and appropriate its spirit. We show right judgment and evince salutary intelligence when, in reading about the rules and experiences of the ancient Fathers and of their obedience ... we see

⁶⁴² Sakharov, *Striving for Knowledge of God*, 290.

⁶⁴³ 2 Thes. 2:10–12.

at the present time a general decline of Christianity and recognize that we are unfit to inherit the legacy of the Fathers in its fullness and in all its abundance.⁶⁴⁴

Although some of St. Joseph the Hesychast's⁶⁴⁵ and Elder Ephraim's⁶⁴⁶ teachings give the impression that the grace of obedience will always magically protect a disciple from harm, this is not the whole story. For when I discussed this matter with Elder Ephraim and asked: "When does the grace of obedience protect a disciple from harmful orders?" his reply was: "The orders must be right." And then to illustrate his point, he told me about a pregnant woman who had suffered harm by obeying the medical advice of her spiritual father who was an abbot. Furthermore, St. Joseph the Hesychast once explained to St. Ephraim of Katounakia that the reason why he had lost some grace while obeying his elder was because the order was sinful.⁶⁴⁷ When St. John of Sinai mentions the case of a disciple suffering damage while under obedience, he concludes: "though he has fallen, he is not dead," thus acknowledging the damage but also showing that it is not too serious.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁴ Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, 43–47.

⁶⁴⁵ For example, St. Joseph the Hesychast taught: "When a person is obeying an elder, it doesn't matter if the command is wrong; it will turn out well for him simply because he is being obedient" (Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 182. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 255).

⁶⁴⁶ Elder Ephraim wrote: "Even if the command that the disciple is given is wrong, God will bless it anyway for obedience's sake" (Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 167. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 125). He also gave the example of the time he blindly obeyed the bad advice of Fr. Arsenios to plant onions upside-down. Elder Ephraim said: "Not only did they all sprout, but they even turned out wonderfully. It was due to exact obedience that they turned out all right" (Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 238. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 329–30).

⁶⁴⁷ During World War II, an international philanthropic organization sent tons of canned food to Greece in order to help those who were homeless and starving because of the war. It was decided (unjustly) that each brotherhood in Katounakia would also receive a large hamper with 75 pounds of canned foods. Elder Nikephoros sent his disciple, St. Ephraim of Katounakia, to take a hamper of canned foods for their brotherhood. But as soon as St. Ephraim picked it up, he perceived that all his spiritual strength was depleted, and he felt as if he were just a biological mass of flesh and blood with no soul, like a brute beast. Afterwards he asked St. Joseph the Hesychast why he had lost so much grace, and he replied: "My child, do you know that I didn't go and get a hamper? I had also heard about it, but I didn't send any of my disciples to get one. I want to be fed by the sweat of my brow, by carving wooden crosses, not by things I didn't earn. Didn't you realize that those alms were for people who had lost their homes and were suffering? How could you go and take them?" "But I'm under obedience!" objected St. Ephraim. "I agree; I'm not denouncing you. You had no choice. But your elder does not have such precise criteria. Nevertheless, God allowed *you* to suffer this loss of grace, so that tomorrow you could teach your spiritual children that such actions are sinful." (This unpublished anecdote was related to me on 10/24/2011 by Fr. Nectarios of Vigla, a disciple of St. Ephraim of Katounakia.)

⁶⁴⁸ The entire quotation of St. John of Sinai is as follows: "If, without constraint, anyone receives some task from his father, and in doing it suffers a stumble, he should not ascribe the blame to the giver but to the receiver of the weapon. For he took the weapon for battle against the enemy, but has turned it against his own heart. But if he forced himself for the Lord's sake to accept the task, though he previously explained his weakness to him who gave it, let him take courage; for though he has fallen, he is not dead" (Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 39).

Elder Ephraim also in his own life once found it beneficial to be intentionally disobedient to his holy elder St. Joseph the Hesychast and even to lie to him when his elder was sick and refused medical help.⁶⁴⁹ The surprising thing about this incident is that when Elder Ephraim later admitted what he had done, St. Joseph commended him and told him with a smile and a hug: “This little head is full of brains!”

Even St. Ephraim of Katounakia (who attached extreme importance to obedience) concluded that an experienced disciple may disobey his elder. He once wrote to a beginner:

Obedience with discernment [i.e., not blindly obeying everything] comes after years of struggle. You, at this young age, should have “blind obedience.” Do you see what St. John of the Ladder says? Once an elder visited a novice and someone who had been a monk for fifteen years. He said to the novice, “Sing a worldly song.”

“May it be blessed,” he replied and began to sing.

Then the elder turned to the monk and said, “Sing a worldly song.”

“Forgive me,” the monk replied and did not sing.

Both of them acted well. The monk’s reply to the elder is not considered disobedience. However, if the novice had acted in this way, he would have been disobedient since he was still a novice. You must first pass through the stage of blind obedience. You ought to say nothing else but, “May it be blessed.” After ten or fifteen years comes obedience with discernment, which is the result of blind obedience.⁶⁵⁰

These incidents demonstrate one should not absolutize the virtue of obedience, since there are rare occasions in which exceptions can be made. Nevertheless, this requires great caution and discretion.

6) Obedience and Freedom

Typically, obedience is understood as doing something that one does not want to do. Curiously, however, St. Basil the Great and St. Pachomios mention that obedience to the abbot should be *voluntary*: St. Pachomios wrote in his monastic rule: “Let there be peace and harmony among them, and let them *willingly* [emphasis added] be subject to their superiors.”⁶⁵¹ And St. Basil wrote: “This head should exercise such authority, the brethren *voluntarily obeying* [emphasis added] only in submissiveness and humility.”⁶⁵² What this means for the disciple is that when he is asked to do something that he doesn’t want to do, not only does he need to execute the request, but also he needs to refocus his attention so

⁶⁴⁹ See Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 607–08.

⁶⁵⁰ *Elder Ephraim of Katounakia*, trans. Tessy Vassiliadou-Christodoulou (Mount Athos: H. Hesychasterion “Saint Ephraim,” 2003), 193.

⁶⁵¹ *Regula Pachomii*, Praec. ac Leges 179; PL 23:83C; as translated in Barry, *Commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict*, 435.

⁶⁵² Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 210; Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἀσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 132.

that he can voluntarily choose to obey the request.⁶⁵³ In other words, he needs to remind himself of the value of obedience or reconnect with the love he has for his elder so that his obedience will be voluntary and thus joyful.

The question then arises: What happens when a disciple is unable to obey *voluntarily*? In other words, since St. Basil says that obedience should be done voluntarily, does this give a disciple the right to disobey whenever his own will prevents him from voluntarily obeying because he does not like the abbot's orders? The dozens of patristic quotes regarding obedience in the previous pages clearly indicate that this is not what St. Basil meant. Besides, immediately after that sentence, St. Basil continues:

As, according to the Apostle, authority established by God should not be resisted (for they who resist the ordinance of God are condemned⁶⁵⁴), so it is appropriate also in this case for the rest of the community to be persuaded that such power is given to the superior not arbitrarily but by the divine will, so that progress as God would have it may be unhindered, while he commands what is useful and profitable to the soul, and the others receive his good counsels with docility. It is in every way fitting that the community be obedient and under subjection to a superior.⁶⁵⁵

St. Basil was calling obedience voluntary in the same spirit that Christ said, “if anyone *wants* to come after me...,”⁶⁵⁶ “if you *want* to be perfect...,”⁶⁵⁷ etc. Christ showed us that genuine Christian service and love are not coercive. Thus, these words of St. Basil are also a reminder for the *abbot*, since he needs to bear in mind that when his disciples do not want to obey him, it is not his duty to become a dictator by forcing them with threats and punishments. As Elder Aimilianos expressed in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation*: “The Abbess shall act and shall command the nuns with authority, but also with discernment and respect ‘not by constraint but by consent’ (1 Pet. 5:2).”⁶⁵⁸

The Church teaches that we are to imitate God in His respect for human freedom. According to a second-century Christian text: “God persuades, he does not compel; for force is no attribute of God.”⁶⁵⁹ St. Barsanuphius the Great had the same understanding, for he advised John of Beersheba: “Do not force the will, but only ‘sow in hope.’”⁶⁶⁰ For

⁶⁵³ One method that helps to accomplish this is to reconnect with one's deeper values and principles. A way of doing this is presented in more detail in chapter 5, section 13) vii) on page 222.

⁶⁵⁴ Vid. Rom. 13:1–2.

⁶⁵⁵ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἀσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 132–35; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 210.

⁶⁵⁶ Mt. 16:24.

⁶⁵⁷ Mt. 19:21.

⁶⁵⁸ Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 175. St. Iosif Volotsky also understood these words of the Apostle Peter as being applicable to an abbot (vid. Goldfrank, *The Monastic Rule of Iosif Volotsky*, 242).

⁶⁵⁹ *Epistle to Diognetus*, vii, 4.

⁶⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 9:10.

our Lord, too, did not force anyone, but only preached the Gospel, and whoever wanted, listened.... You know that we have never placed a bond on anyone, let alone on ourselves.”⁶⁶¹ Thus, the goal of a spiritual father is to love his disciples as God loves man: respecting his freedom.

This respect for man’s freedom was taught by the Apostle Peter, who wrote: “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily.”⁶⁶² Commenting on this, St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain explained:

The chief of the Apostles is teaching spiritual pastors to shepherd their rational flocks through their voluntary free will and not use force or compulsion to lead them on the straight and royal road of virtue, since they have been honored by God with free will and freedom of choice. For this reason they should not be coerced like irrational beasts. Since irrational beasts lack rationality and free will, we domineeringly drag them where we want and do not let them go where they themselves irrationally rush. But since men have free will and the ability to discern rationally between good and evil, they must be freely and voluntarily guided by their rational shepherds and only through words should be taught, not only dogmatic truths but also virtuous deeds, so that what is good and virtuous will not lack a reward by being done through compulsion instead of voluntarily. This is why also the Lord did not force anyone to follow Him, but He encouraged those who were willing by saying: “If anyone wishes to come after me” (Mk. 8:34).⁶⁶³

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware elaborated on the importance of voluntary obedience as follows:

The obedience offered by the spiritual child to the abba is not forced but willing and voluntary. It is the task of the starets to take up our will into his will, but he can only do this if by our own free choice we place it in his hands. He does not break our will, but accepts it from us as a gift. A submission that is forced and involuntary is obviously devoid of moral value; the starets asks of each one that we offer to God our heart, not our external actions. Even in a monastic context the obedience is voluntary, as is vividly emphasized at the rite of monastic profession: only after the candidate has three times placed the scissors in the abbot’s hand does the latter proceed to tonsure him. This voluntary offering of our freedom, however, even in a monastery, is obviously something that cannot be made once and for all, by a single gesture. We are called to take up our cross *daily* (Lk. 9:23).⁶⁶⁴

Likewise, St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia explained:

If a monk is to make progress in a monastery, he needs to engage willingly in spiritual struggle without pressure from anyone else. He needs to do everything with

⁶⁶¹ Chrysavgis, *Barsanuphius and John: Letters*, vol. 1, 52, 66 (letters 35, 51).

⁶⁶² 1 Pet. 5:2.

⁶⁶³ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὰς Ἐπὶ Καθολικὰς Ἐπιστολάς τῶν Ἁγίων καὶ πανευφήμων Ἀποστόλων Ἰωκώβου, Πέτρου, Ἰωάννου καὶ Ἰούδα* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη, 1986), 317–18.

⁶⁶⁴ Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, “The Spiritual Guide in Orthodox Christianity,” (<http://churchmotherofgod.org/articleschurch/articles-about-the-orthodox-church/2348-the-spiritual-guide-in-orthodox-christianity.html>).

joy and eagerness and not as a chore. A monk is not a person who is forced to do something mechanically and reluctantly. Whatever he does, he does solely out of love for the heavenly Bridegroom, out of divine eros. He doesn't bring thoughts of hell or death into his mind.⁶⁶⁵ Monasticism mustn't be a negative flight from the world, but a flight of divine love and divine worship....

Whatever you do under compulsion and whatever causes your soul to kick instinctively and protest, causes you harm. This is something I've said many times. I have seen monks and lay people of every age leaving the Church and abandoning God entirely, because they are unable to bear the inner pressure and the pressure from other people. Pressure causes a person not only to react negatively against the Church, but not to want the Church at all. It does not have a positive effect. It bears no fruit. He does whatever it is, albeit reluctantly, because his elder or spiritual father told him to. He says to himself, for example, "Now I must go to Compline." Yes, he does the thing, but whatever is done in a mechanical way is harmful and not beneficial.

You are often forced to do what is good. But it mustn't be done under duress; it's not beneficial, it's not spiritually edifying. Take, for example, the Jesus Prayer. If you force yourself to say it, after a time you will weary of it and you will throw it away; and then what happens? If you do it as a chore, the pressure builds up inside you until it bursts out in some evil. Pressure of this kind can even make you not want to go to church at all. Go to church in a different spirit, not with pushing and shoving, but with pleasure and joy.⁶⁶⁶

For this same reason, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain used to say:

A person who is sick must eat whether or not he has an appetite, because he knows that the food will do him good. Likewise, when we are not in the mood for spiritual things, we should move ourselves to action through love, knowing that it will do us good, even if we don't feel like doing so. It takes forcefulness [βία], not forcing oneself [ζόρισμα] and pressure. Spiritual forcefulness is not forcing oneself, but it is something helpful.⁶⁶⁷

In other words, our ascetical struggles should not be done because we are telling ourselves that due to extrinsic reasons we "should" or "must" do them. This would be *forcing oneself*

⁶⁶⁵ At first glance, this statement of St. Porphyrios may seem to contradict the many saints who recommend remembering death. (For some examples of this, see "remembrance of death" in the index of this book.) Upon deeper examination, however, it becomes clear that St. Porphyrios is simply teaching that love is superior to fear, which is the lowest of three ways to please God. As explained by Abba Dorotheos of Gaza: "There are three dispositions of the soul, as St. Basil the Great tells us [vid. PG 31:896B], by which we can be pleasing to God. That is, we can be pleasing to God either when we fear damnation (and therefore find ourselves in the situation of a slave); or fulfill the commandments of God because we seek the gain that we will receive as a reward from God for our personal benefit (and at this point we resemble a hireling); or for goodness itself (thus finding ourselves in the position of a son)" (Metropolitan Chrysostomos, *Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza*, 76–77).

⁶⁶⁶ Chrysopigi, *Wounded by Love*, 158, 165–66.

⁶⁶⁷ Ἱερομονάχου Ἰσαάκ, *Βίος Γέροντος Παϊσίου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου* (Χαλκιδική: Ἱερὸν Ἠσυχαστήριον «Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος», Μεταμόρφωσις, 2004), 428. See also Hieromonk Isaac, *Elder Paisios of Mount Athos*, trans. Hieromonk Alexis (Trader) and Fr. Peter Heers (Chalkidiki: Holy Monastery "Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian," 2012), 403.

through involuntary pressure and coercion. On the contrary, we need to exert ourselves and make the effort (that is, use *forcefulness*) to reconnect with our deeper values and our love for God and neighbor. Once we have refocused in this manner, then out of love—and love entails sacrifice when it is genuine and selfless—we can voluntarily follow the commandments of God and of our elder because we are intrinsically motivated, which gives rise to joy and peace. St. Theophan the Recluse saw the importance of intrinsic motivation in the spiritual life and taught that the law of God should “imprint itself on the heart, and man, acting according to this law, will act as if from himself, unconstrained, so that this law will not lie on him, but will as it were proceed from him.”⁶⁶⁸

Archimandrite Symeon Kragiopoulos explained the difference between a healthy forcefulness rooted in intrinsic motivation and an unhealthy coercion coming from extrinsic circumstances:

When you, as a free being with volition and awareness decide to constrain yourself to do what you have determined what needs to be done as a rational person who knows the truth, this is not coercion....

Although you are compelling yourself, this is not a form of coercion. No. When you notice yourself trying this way and that to get out of doing something—to be lazy, to be overcome with sloth and indifference, to pretend that you don’t understand—you sit yourself down and tell yourself: ‘You *shall* do it.’ Of course, this has value in the spiritual struggle—not when circumstances oblige you to do something, but when you freely do it.⁶⁶⁹

In line with this approach, Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos observed:

The desire for the monastic life must be free from all compulsion, that is, it must develop in a spirit of freedom, because “Salvation belongs to those who choose it, not to those who are compelled by force.”⁶⁷⁰ Besides, free will is a characteristic of the divine image that man received from God, and not even God Himself violates it, since “this would be the same as destroying free will and the human being” (St. Nicholas Cabasilas). A person should choose the monastic life as a result of various influences, which may be psychological, material, and this-worldly.⁶⁷¹

St. Sophrony of Essex also saw that compulsion is foreign to true Christian liberty:

A spiritual director never tries to subject a novice’s will to his own human will, but in the course of everyday life it might happen that he would find himself obliged to insist on having his directions obeyed—a situation in which no obedient novice would place his *staretz*. In virtue of his high responsibility before God, the ascetic

⁶⁶⁸ St. Theophan the Recluse, *The Path to Salvation*, trans. Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, new edition (Safford: Holy Monastery of St. Paisius: 2016), 17.

⁶⁶⁹ π. Συμεὼν Καραγιωπούλου, *Ψυχαναγκασμός* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Ἱερὸν Ἀνδρῶν Ἡσυχαστήριον «Ἡ Αγία Τριάς», 2019), 19, 20.

⁶⁷⁰ St. Maximos the Confessor, “On the Lord’s Prayer” in Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 289.

⁶⁷¹ Ἱεροθέου, *Ὁ Ὄρθόδοξος Μοναχισμός*, 523; Hierotheos, *Orthodox Monasticism*, 468–69.

effort required of a *staretz* is much more onerous than that required of the novice. But this responsibility occurs only when the novice gives unqualified obedience; where this is not the case the novice bears the full weight of responsibility for his actions and loses the benefits of obedience. It is no part of the *staretz*'s purpose, however, to relieve his disciple of responsibility, but to teach him the true Christian life and true Christian liberty, for which it is necessary to overcome in oneself, through the spiritual feat of obedience, the passions of self-will and love of power. Anyone who seeks to dominate his fellow-man, or even to encroach on his liberty, thereby inevitably destroys his own liberty too, since the very fact of such an infringement of another person's freedom involves a breach with the divine life of love to which man is called.

...

Monastic obedience is not a "discipline." Now the very existence of every human institution or society depends upon the co-ordination of the actions of its members; and this co-ordination is achieved through discipline, the essence of which lies in the subjection of the will of the youngest to that of the oldest or of the "majority." Such subjection is usually enforced by compulsion; but, even where there is a willing and reasoned acceptance of discipline as being an essential condition for the continued existence of the community, discipline does not cease to be discipline, since its underlying principle is the subordination of one man's will to that of another.

Monastic obedience, on the other hand, is a religious act and, as such, must be freely consented to or it loses its religious significance. Such obedience can be spiritually fruitful only when it betokens the voluntary submission of will and judgment to one's *staretz* for the sake of arriving at *God's will*. It is in its relation to this search for the will of God that the essence of our obedience lies.

The novice recognizes his own incapacity to discover for himself the will of God, and so he turns to his spiritual father, whom he believes is more worthy than he to know God's will. The *staretz* does not try to destroy the novice's will and does not subjugate it to his own arbitrary will, but assumes the heavy burden of responsibility, and thereby becomes a collaborator with God in the divine act of the creation of man.... If the abbot and other elders in the monastery are ever obliged to have recourse to "discipline" to constrain the brethren, this is a sure sign of the debasement of monasticism and, possibly, of a total forgetting of its purpose and essence.⁶⁷²

Discipline imposed by others does not help in repentance and does not help the soul to develop and become a person.⁶⁷³

Elaborating on this, St. Sophrony's disciple Archimandrite Zacharias added:

Obedience, like every other Christian virtue, must be a free and voluntary act in order to have eternal value before God.... The free will of man, together with his reason, are the most precious of his natural gifts; and when obedience is at work, it offers these two faculties, the will and the reason, as the most pleasing sacrifice to God.... From the above it is clear that obedience is radically different from discipline, and surpasses it as heaven surpasses earth. Discipline means submission to a superior human will for the sake of earthly benefit. Discipline subjects man in an impersonal way to a "rule,"

⁶⁷² Sakharov, *Truth and Life*, 85, 88–89.

⁶⁷³ Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, "*I Know a Man in Christ*": *Elder Sophrony the Hesychast and Theologian*, trans. Sister Pelagia Selfe (Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2015), 300.

to the “Law,” the “Typicon,” the “Institution,” the “Administration.” Discipline favours the general over the particular, or the majority over the individual. In contrast, obedience is a free act of faith in God and is always accomplished in His name.... By cutting off his own will and denying his own reasonings the monk does not lose his personality, nor does he come to self-annihilation, as it seems to people in the world. On the contrary, he rises above the limits of his created nature and becomes manifestly a true person-hypostasis. He becomes the bearer of divine life, and a bearer of all humanity.⁶⁷⁴

Bishop Irenei (Steenberg) expressed a similar outlook:

In the monastic tradition we see obedience not as the oppressive avenue of mindless slavery, but as the life-creating context of authentic freedom. It is only the one who is willing—freely—to offer up his well-practiced regime of self-rule to the guidance and care of another, who begins to see just how enslaving his former “freedom” had truly been. Within the monastic culture the monk or nun begins to see how obedience to the self (which is the context from which every person comes into monasticism, whatever his background in particular terms) had in fact been a shackle; how the lack of obedience to another in fact meant an absolute and unlimited obedience to one’s own desires, one’s understandings, one’s evaluations, all of which are profoundly deformed by the wound of sin.⁶⁷⁵ Just as Adam’s troubles began when he determined not to let God be his Lord, but instead to let his mind be lord over him—deciding for himself what was good and what was bad, and how to act—so the monastic comes to realize that he has fallen prey to the same self-enslavement, and that the only true freedom comes from wholly attaching the heart to the God who would set it free.

This emphasis upon freedom is another characteristic of the monastic life, given birth by these three vows [of chastity, poverty, and obedience]. While to outside eyes it may appear that the monk lives a quite constrained life—prescribed clothing, prescribed hours, prescribed prayers, proscribed activities—the irony of the monastic life, the “foolishness” it presents to the world (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18), is that the monk or the nun is often the person who feels the most free in all of God’s creation. Yes, there are hard labors and long struggles; but through them tired and world-beaten hearts find a new communion in the “life-creating Spirit,” Who bears them up to a life that soars as if in flight. This can only be done through a full respecting of each person’s full freedom. There is, there can be, no coercion in monasticism. Everything undertaken is undertaken of free choice, knowingly, with assent....

[A monk] is obedient to his elder, to the monastery abbot, but never out of obligation and never as a denial of his freedom. Genuine obedience is a shaping of freedom, not an elimination of it. Thus through dedication to his chastity, poverty, and obedience, the monastic finds himself set free to discover the authentic person God has called him

⁶⁷⁴ Archimandrite Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart* (Dalton: Mount Thabor Publications, 2006), 224–29.

⁶⁷⁵ Similarly, St. Joseph the Hesychast said: “When we are not obeying our elder, we will end up obeying many ‘elders,’ that is, many wills, many passions, many demons, and in the end we will be enslaved to them in hell” (Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 234. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 326).

to be, and will spend the remainder of his life growing into the maturity of that calling.⁶⁷⁶

Along the same lines, Metropolitan Jonah (Paffhausen) taught:

Authentic monastic obedience is profoundly personal, a communion of love, a willing self-offering by the disciple which is devoid of coercion or compulsion. It is through this profound personal relationship of love that the disciple is transformed and empowered to transcend his ego and passions and to control his thoughts. Through this relationship the disciple is enabled to work out his growth to maturity through purification by self-denial. Being loved, he can grow in love, and be illumined by the grace of God, which is love, forgiveness, acceptance, and healing. The spiritual father becomes God's co-worker in bringing a man up from the state of an isolated individual into an authentic person. The authentic relationship of elder and disciple in holy obedience can only work in the context of complete freedom, as the disciple's free offering to God of his obedience to his elder. The grace of self-denial in obedience breaks down the ego, self-centeredness, and self-will. Thus the father begets a son, who in turn becomes a father. The community becomes one in Christ in the bond of love."⁶⁷⁷

Igumen Chrysostomos Koutloumousianos expressed the same viewpoint:

In monasticism, obedience is the way to maturity in Christ. The final goal of obedience is not a submission of one's conscience to another person's will. The final goal is the attainment of humility and discernment through the willing suppression of one's self-centered will. In this route, both the elder and the spiritual child are struggling to see and follow God's will. The spiritual child does not merely learn how to practice blind obedience, he learns to see his own condition and discern and judge his own demeanor, and understand what is really blessed in his life. Thus, the spiritual father must try to stir up the gentleness of his child's soul to respond to God's love. To stimulate free obedience that heals and liberates the soul instead of the irresistible obedience that harms the soul and renders her coarse.

Spiritual paternity culminates in *kenotic* [i.e., self-emptying, sacrificial] love. It becomes the conduit through which the spiritual child is initiated into the spiritual freedom of God's ineffable love. This means that the spiritual father is not expected to impose his will or assert himself in an authoritarian manner. If he applies methods of coercion that crush the [spiritual] child's conscience, no matter his best intentions, he engraves into the soul of his child the image of a transcendental tyrant obstructing his spiritual progress. The human being does not line up either by use of military discipline, austerities, or penances. Commenting on such and similar cases in pastoral work, St. Paisios the Athonite says: "If you try to correct someone by beating him, you succeed nothing. On the Day of Judgment, Christ will say to you: 'Were you another Diocletian?' And to the corrected man He will say: 'Whatever good you did, you did it under coercion.' Therefore, we shall not strangle the other with a view of sending him to Paradise."

...

⁶⁷⁶ Alexei Krindatch, *Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries*, Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (Boston: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2016), 6–7.

⁶⁷⁷ *Divine Ascent: A Journal of Orthodox Faith*, no. 5, Holy Monastery of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, 13.

As an icon and a servant of Christ, the spiritual father is a servant of his reasonable flock. In all his activities and conduct—in thought, word, and deed—he must not exercise dominion but rather service, *διακονία*. And since this word *διακονία* has become a sort of cliché, we must repeat that *διακονία* entails love, respect, truth, discretion, and active concern for the other’s edification. The model for the spiritual father can be drawn from the beautiful metaphor given by St. Paul: “As a nurse cherisheth her children, willing to impart not only the word but also his own soul.”⁶⁷⁸ Such a portrayal displays the maternal aspect of spiritual paternity, which is, after all, shared also by the spiritual mothers.

A description of the spiritual father is rendered also in the life of St. Pachomios: “Abba was utterly tranquil. His conduct was such that nobody would hesitate in disclosing his own thoughts. The brothers revealed everything to him, receiving immediately their healing, for they saw him joyful and welcoming.” The spiritual father cannot be but sober, joyful, and approachable. It goes without saying that he sends nobody away and that he knows how to listen. As a great American novelist Henry David Thoreau says: “It takes two to speak the truth: one to speak and another to hear.”⁶⁷⁹ So the spiritual father’s empathy overwhelms even the justified urge to express severe criticism or condemnation.⁶⁸⁰

Elder Ephraim grasped and lived these concepts of authentic spiritual fatherhood. His genuine, heartfelt care for his disciples inspired us to love him and voluntarily obey him. In the thousands of interactions I had with him, not once did he use his authority as a means of forcing me to do something, nor did he stoop to the level of threats, punishments, or even rewards to sway my will. This is not to say, however, that he never gave me orders or never cut off my will. Whenever he did cut off my will, though, my submission sprang from the love and trust which he had earned.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. 1 Thes. 2:7–8.

⁶⁷⁹ Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), 352

⁶⁸⁰ https://www.ancientfaith.com/specials/oca_diocese_of_the_south_2019_pastoral_conference/spiritual_paternity_therapeutic_relationship_or_manipulation



Chapter Four: Virginity

1) Reason for Virginity



CORE ATTRIBUTE of monastics is virginity, which is why it is included in the monastic vows for receiving the Great Schema.⁶⁸¹ St. Ambrose of Milan explained the benefit of virginity for those who want to be dedicated to God: “Virginity cannot be commanded, but must be wished for, for things which are above us are matters for prayer rather than under mastery. ‘But I would have you,’ he [St. Paul] says, ‘without cares. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.’⁶⁸² I am not indeed discouraging marriage, but am enlarging upon the benefits of virginity.”⁶⁸³ Thus, since virginity leaves a person more free to care for pleasing God, it is natural that people who want to dedicate themselves to God have embraced virginity ever since the beginning of Christianity.⁶⁸⁴

St. Ambrose elaborated further on the advantages of virginity:

⁶⁸¹ In the tonsuring service of the Great Schema, the postulant is asked by the abbot: “Will you keep yourself in virginity, chastity, and piety even unto death?” And the postulant replies: “Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father” (*The Great Book of Needs*, vol. 1, 333).

⁶⁸² 1 Cor. 7:32–34.

⁶⁸³ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume X: Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, Philip Schaff, ed. (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 367.

⁶⁸⁴ For example, St. Athenagoras the Philosopher in the second century wrote: “You would find many among us, both men and women, growing old unmarried, in hope of living in closer communion with God” (*Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Philip Schaff, ed. [New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887], 146. See also Justin, *Confession* 1, 15, 6).

The days shall come when they shall say: “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare” (Lk. 23:29). For the daughters of this age are conceived, and conceive; but the daughter of the kingdom refrains from wedded pleasure, and the pleasure of the flesh, that she may be holy in body and in spirit. I do not then discourage marriage, but recapitulate the advantages of holy virginity. This is the gift of few only, that is of all... I am comparing good things with good things, that it may be clear which is the more excellent. Nor do I allege any opinion of my own, but I repeat that which the Holy Spirit spake by the prophet: “Blessed is the barren that is undefiled” (Wis. 3:13). First of all, in that which those who purpose to marry desire above all things, that they may boast of the beauty of their husband, they must of necessity confess that they are inferior to virgins, to Whom alone it is suitable to say: “Thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured on Thy lips” (Ps. 44:2). Who is that Spouse? One not given to common indulgences, not proud of possessing riches, but He Whose throne is for ever and ever.⁶⁸⁵

Contemporary Orthodox authors have observed: “Marriage is an image of the union of Christ with the Church,”⁶⁸⁶ whereas, “monastic life does not constitute an image, but it itself is the mystical marriage of the soul with the heavenly Bridegroom.”⁶⁸⁷

2) Value of Virginity

In the first century, St. Clement of Rome pointed out that Christ and the greatest saints were virgins:

It was the Virgin’s womb which bore the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ; and the body which our Lord put on, and in which He accomplished His combat in this world, He took from the Holy Virgin. Know in this the majesty and glory of virginity. Dost thou wish to be a Christian? Imitate Christ in all things. St. John [the Baptist] was an angel, sent before the face of the Lord, and among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than he, and this holy angel of the Lord was a virgin... Another John, who lay on the breast of the Lord, Who loved Him greatly, was also holy,⁶⁸⁸ which was why the Lord so loved him. Then there were Paul, Barnabas, Timothy and others whose names are written in the Book of Life; they all loved this form of holiness and continued in purity to the end of their ascetic lives, thus proving themselves true imitators of Christ and sons of the living God ... for those who are like unto Christ are in perfect likeness of Him.⁶⁸⁹

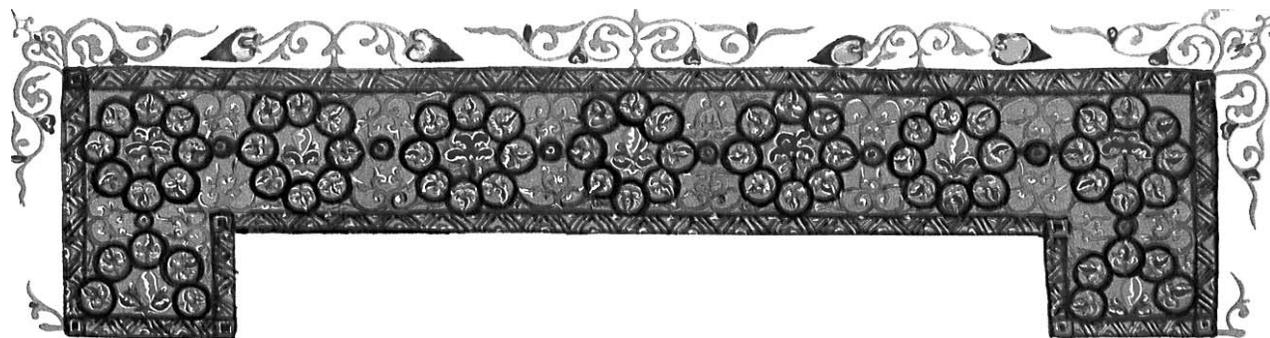
⁶⁸⁵ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume X: Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, 369.

⁶⁸⁶ Παταπίου Μοναχού Κausοκαλυβίτου, «Η Άκολουθία του Μεγάλου Σχήματος. Έρμηνεία και θεολογία τῶν εὐχῶν τῆς μοναχικῆς καθιερώσεως», *Θεολογία*, 1/2011, 166.

⁶⁸⁷ Αρχιμανδρίτη Νικοδήμου Μπαρούση, *Άγίου Νικηφόρου Καλλίστου, Βίος και Πολιτεία τῆς Όσίας Εύφροσύνης*, εισαγωγή (Άθήναι: 1998), 13.

⁶⁸⁸ A footnote in *Truth and Life* states: “From the context it is obvious that the words *holy* and *holiness* (three lines below) here mean *virgin* and the *state of virginity*” (Sakharov, *Truth and Life*, 93).

⁶⁸⁹ As translated from the Greek and Latin text of PG 1 in: Sakharov, *Truth and Life*, 92–93.



Chapter Five: Monastic Behavior

1) Schedule

AS SAINT JOSEPH TAUGHT,⁸⁰⁷ it is of prime importance to have a regular daily schedule with appointed times for personal prayer, liturgical worship, work, and rest. The general order of Athonite monasteries is as follows: In the middle of the night the monks keep vigil in their cells for a few hours. In that time they say the Jesus prayer noetically and/or orally, do prostrations, *stavrota*,⁸⁰⁸ and perhaps some spiritual reading. After this, they gather together in the church for the Midnight Office, Orthros, First Hour and Divine Liturgy.⁸⁰⁹ At Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos we received communion every day following a fasting day, which usually meant every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, as well as every other Sunday, and daily during fasting periods. On fasting days we did not eat fish, eggs, dairy products, and (unless a feast day falls on a fasting day) oil and wine. After an optional light breakfast (without talking unless absolutely necessary) we had a brief rest.⁸¹⁰ After waking, each of us began

⁸⁰⁷ “St. Joseph the Hesychast would never change his schedule “because he knew that changing it would adversely affect his prayer. He emphasized in his teachings: ‘If you work less or more during the daytime, your body will be affected analogously. This will scatter your nous, which will reduce your eagerness for prayer.’ This is why he kept his schedule with great precision, even at times in his life when it was difficult to do so” (Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 190. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 267).

⁸⁰⁸ *Stavrota* (σταυρωτά) denotes the practice of making the sign of the cross each time the Jesus prayer or some other brief prayer is repeated.

⁸⁰⁹ In his monastic rules, St. Athanasios of Meteora “ordained that all the brothers in his charge should assemble in the church not only for the night offices on Sunday and the other great feasts, but that without fail they should also perform the service each day according to the correct tradition of the *typikon*. For often enough they can become careless either because of the malice of the enemy or sluggishness of the body, at times too because of distraction or too much to eat” (Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1460–01).

⁸¹⁰ The practice of breaking up sleep into two separate times is an ancient tradition originating in the Mediterranean where most people take a siesta, especially in the summer. The fifth-century “Canons of Marūtā” advise monks: “In the summer, when the days are hot, they shall work early as long as it is cool; and when

whatever tasks he had been assigned. Abba Isaiah recommended: “When you wake up each morning, first study the word of God before resuming your manual labor.”⁸¹¹ At midday we had lunch together while one of the fathers read. Afterwards, we resumed our assigned tasks until about half an hour before the evening services, which consisted of the Ninth Hour, Vespers, Dinner, and Small Compline. After this, we retired to our cells for a little bit of private time, and then went to sleep early so that we would be able to wake up for our vigil well rested.

An ancient monastic tradition is to seek forgiveness from each other at the end of every day, which is why in Athonite monasteries the monks do a full prostration to the others at the end of Compline. For example, the *Rule for the Monastery of Compludo* states:

As they say farewell to each other [before bedtime] and stand by one another in reconciliation and absolution, they shall make mutual forgiveness of their sins; and by humble piety those who have been separated from the company of the brothers because of slight faults shall earn forgiveness.... Then, going to their cells in deep silence and with composed countenance and quiet step, no one walking closer to another than the space of a cubit or even daring to look at another, each shall go to his bed.⁸¹²

Abba Dorotheos taught: “A person should examine himself every evening as to how he spent the day, and again every morning as to how he spent the night.”⁸¹³ Likewise, Abba Nistherus said: “A monk is obliged to make account each evening and morning. ‘What have we done that God wants, and what have we not done of that which He does not want?’ He should thus examine himself throughout his whole life.”⁸¹⁴ St. Basil the Great taught in the same vein: “When the day is over and all work, both bodily and spiritual, has come to an end, before going to rest it is fitting that each man’s conscience be examined by his own

the day becomes hot they shall sit for reading until the time of mid-day-service; after the service they shall take food and rest until the turn of the day (i.e., early evening): and when the day becomes cool they shall go out for work until the time of evening meal, and they shall take food after the service” (Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, 143). Likewise, *The Rule of the Master* says: “Immediately after Sext [i.e., the Sixth Hour, which is at noon] has been said, whether it is after dinner or during a fast, let everyone take a moderately long nap on his bed. Thus they will sleep through the midday period and the burning heat, and for their bodies fatigued by fasting and labor the supplement of sleep at noontime will compensate for the shortness of the nights in this season [of summer], and the brother will then be alert when he rises during the night in summertime since he has had some sleep during the day” (Eberle, *The Rule of the Master*, 212). St. Symeon the New Theologian also suggested taking a nap only in the summer: “After you have risen from the meal [at mid-day] ... run off to your cell ... and pick up your book. When you have read for a short time, if it is summer, lie down on your mat and take a short nap.... If it is winter, after reading a little take hold of your manual work” (C.J. de Catanzaro, *Symeon the New Theologian: Discourses*, 281). Research suggests that most cultures practiced some kind of segmented sleep until the late 17th century (vid. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* [New York: Norton, 2005], 303–04).

⁸¹¹ Chryssavgis and Penkett, *Abba Isaiah of Scetis*, 50.

⁸¹² Barlow, *The Fathers of the Church: Iberian Fathers*, vol. 63, 157.

⁸¹³ Wheeler, *Abba Dorotheos: Discourses and Sayings*, 182.

⁸¹⁴ Abba Nistherus, PG 65:308C; see also Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 155.

heart. And if anything improper has occurred—a forbidden thought or speaking beyond what is fitting, negligence in prayer or inattention in psalmody or desire of the ordinary life of the world—the sin should not be concealed, but confessed publicly, so that through the prayers of the community the malady of the one who has fallen into such an evil may be cured.”⁸¹⁵ Elder Ephraim described how his holy elder implemented this: “A monk should examine his conduct every evening to see where he made progress and where he stumbled so that he can make a new beginning of repentance and correction. When St. Joseph the Hesychast did this, he would scrutinize how his day had passed, where he had made mistakes, which passions were active, which weaknesses were still an issue, and what thoughts had passed through his mind.”⁸¹⁶

Elder Ephraim taught that when we lie down it is important to continue saying the Jesus prayer until we fall asleep, because this helps protect us from the carnal temptations that typically assault us at such times. Likewise, St. Isidore of Seville wrote:

The couch of the monk should not be involved in any shameful thought but only in the contemplation of God. While he is reclining, let him have rest of body and quiet of heart and by embracing good thoughts drive evil thoughts away. Let him reject evil and shameful thoughts, for the movement of the mind is disturbed by its own imagination and the thought of the waking person will be such as the image that occurs in sleep. He who is polluted by a nocturnal emission should not delay to make this known to the father of the monastery and deservedly attribute this as his own fault. He secretly should do penance knowing that unless a disgraceful thought of his mind had gone before it, the flow of unclean pollution would not follow disgracefully. An illicit thought comes before it and unclean temptation swiftly makes him foul. He who has been deceived by a nocturnal dream will stand in the sacristy at the time of office and will not dare to enter the church the same day before he is washed with water and tears. Indeed in the law, those who are polluted by a nocturnal dream are ordered to go out of the camp and not to return before they wash at evening.⁸¹⁷ And if carnal people did this, what should a spiritual servant of Christ do? He ought to consider his defilement greater and be kept far from the altar, and to fear greatly in body and mind, and with the symbolism of water produce tears of penitence so that not only should he be eager to wash with water but also with tears because he is polluted by an unclean defilement.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁵ Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου, *Ἀσκητικά Α΄*, ΕΠΕ 8, 142–43; see also Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 215.

⁸¹⁶ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 274. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 383.

⁸¹⁷ Deut. 23.

⁸¹⁸ *Monastic Studies*, no. 18, 20.

2) Prayer

St. Christodoulos of Patmos wrote in his monastic rule on the central place of prayer for a monk:

Before all else it is assuredly fitting to speak of our true employment, that which has priority over all others, I mean the doxology of praise to God. For it is in view of this one thing that, from very “not being” (of this I am convinced) “we have been brought into being”⁸¹⁹ and adorned with reason, in order to honor the Creator with uninterrupted hymn-singing. Besides everything else, the fact that the character and pursuit of the monastic life is called angelic leads to this conclusion. Hence it is that God’s creature, man, is shown to be, in the words of [Gregory] the Theologian, “the angels’ descant (ἀντίφωνον),” repeating what they do as closely as his nature will allow.⁸²⁰

Then let this hymn be uninterrupted and unlimited. Whence our blessed and inspired fathers, having broken off every kind of human relationship and earthly care, clinging spiritually with all their might to their supreme desire, spent the whole “time of their exile”⁸²¹ in prayers and spiritual hymns, seeking, not carelessly but steadfastly, “the kingdom of heaven within them”⁸²² according to the Lord’s saying in the Gospels. Because of their constant prayer and their unwavering hope, they found it, having traded prudently and most profitably, and, like the merchant who is deemed happy, bought for all the visible world the pearl that may well be called precious.⁸²³ They had heard and understood the holy psalmist David shouting “Let my mouth be filled with praise that I may hymn thy glory, and thy majesty all the day,”⁸²⁴ and again “I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be continually in my mouth,”⁸²⁵ and the Apostle exhorting: “Pray without ceasing,”⁸²⁶ but also our Lord and Savior himself, on one occasion weaving into a parable the obligation to pray and not lose heart,⁸²⁷ on another giving an explicit order and saying: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”⁸²⁸ ... [The fathers] obeyed eagerly and observed the [command] strictly.⁸²⁹

⁸¹⁹ Cf. *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, vol. 1, F. E. Brightman, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 369, lines 27–29 and 384, lines 27–28.

⁸²⁰ Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Carmina*, I, PG 37, col. 513A, and Ps.-Basil, *Constitutiones asceticae*, PG 31, col. 1384B.

⁸²¹ 1 Pet. 1:17.

⁸²² Lk. 17:21.

⁸²³ Mt. 13:46.

⁸²⁴ Ps. 70:8.

⁸²⁵ Ps. 33:1.

⁸²⁶ 1 Thes. 5:17.

⁸²⁷ Vid. Lk. 18:1.

⁸²⁸ Mt. 26:41.

⁸²⁹ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 586–87.

Abba Isaac (in fourth-century Egypt) also saw prayer as the highest work of monks: “Monastic perfection and the purity of heart consist in the acquisition of unceasing prayer. But since man is weak and instable and prone to evil, his entire spiritual struggle is focused on the acquisition of purity and dispassion. And this is precisely why we persistently pursue bodily labor. For bodily labor leads to contrition of heart.”⁸³⁰

St. Basil the Great also emphasized the central role that prayer and labor have in monasteries:

I wish you to know that we rejoice to have assemblies of both men and women, whose conversation is in heaven and who have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof; they take no thought for food and raiment, but remain undisturbed beside their Lord, continuing night and day in prayer. Their lips speak not of the deeds of men: they sing hymns to God continually, working with their own hands that they may have to distribute to them that need.⁸³¹

Regarding the role of prayer in the monastic life, St. Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia taught: “The whole secret is prayer, self-giving, and love directed towards Christ. Monastic life is carefree and joyous. A monk must taste the sweetness of prayer and be attracted by divine love. He will not be able to endure the monastic life if he does not know the sweetness of prayer. Without this he will not be able to stay in the monastery.”⁸³² Likewise, St. Joseph the Hesychast believed that prayer is so central to monasticism that he said: “A monk who has not learned to say the Jesus prayer does not know why he became a monk.”⁸³³

Not only do we set time aside for saying the prayer during our private vigil, but also during the day we say it out loud as much as we can while doing our daily tasks. According to our spiritual forefathers, saying the Jesus prayer orally has numerous benefits: it keeps us connected with God; it burns the demons; it discourages idle talk; it benefits those who hear us; it sanctifies our work, and it even leads to dispassion.⁸³⁴ Elder Ephraim taught: “A beginner who is taught the prayer must begin by saying with his mouth, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,’ and must make an effort to pull his nous away from worldly things. The sound produced by his voice will attract his nous to pay attention to the prayer, and thus, little by little it will get used to being collected instead of scattered.”⁸³⁵

⁸³⁰ As quoted by St. John Cassian in *Αββᾶ Κασσιανοῦ: Συνομιλίαι μετὰ τοῦς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐρήμου*, Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Τιμίου Προδρόμου, Τόμος Α΄ (Καρέα: Ἐκδόσεις «Ἐτοιμασία», 2004), 327–28 (see also Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Conferences*, 329).

⁸³¹ *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, 247.

⁸³² Chrysopigi, *Wounded by Love*, 158.

⁸³³ Γέροντος Ἰωσήφ, *Ἐκφρασις Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας*, 363. See also *Monastic Wisdom*, 311.

⁸³⁴ These teachings of St. Joseph the Hesychast and Elder Ephraim are explained in Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 392–404, and Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 291–366.

⁸³⁵ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 426. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 341.

In his *Testament*, St. John of Rila also encouraged saying the Jesus prayer orally: “Manual labor must not be neglected by you, however, but work must be in your hands, and the prayer ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner’ must be permanently on your lips, as well as the memory of death in your mind. This was the practice of the ancient desert fathers.”⁸³⁶

St. Gregory of Sinai taught that we should alternate oral and silent prayer:

Some fathers teach that the prayer should be said aloud; others, that it should be said with the nous. I recommend both ways. For at times the nous becomes listless and cannot say the prayer, while at other times the same thing happens to the mouth. Thus we should pray both vocally and with the nous. But when we pray vocally we should cry out quietly and calmly and not loudly, so that the voice does not disturb and hinder the nous’s perception and concentration.⁸³⁷

Elder Ephraim recommended (citing the example of what St. Joseph the Hesychast had told his nuns from Pontus whose native language was not Greek) that each person should say the Jesus prayer in the language with which he feels most comfortable. Elder Ephraim also commented sadly on some monks who did not have the good habit of holding a prayer-rope during the day at least when their hands were free. St. Theodore of Sanaxar also viewed this as an important habit, for he wrote in his monastic rule: “The prayer rope, which is always to be carried by the monk, is a weapon, constantly reminding him of noetic prayer borne in the heart. Not only the monastic brethren but every new novice in the Sanaxar Monastery goes to every service with his prayer rope for a constant reminder of inner prayer.”⁸³⁸ St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain similarly taught: “The prayer-rope must never leave your hand, for it is the rope we pull one, two, five, or ten times so that our spiritual oil is finally liquified and our spiritual engine of unceasing prayer ignites. Even after your engine has started, do not set aside your prayer-rope so that the others are not encouraged to put theirs aside as well before they have even begun.”⁸³⁹

St. John of Sinai described the value of prayer as follows: “Prayer is the mother and also the daughter of tears, the propitiation for sins, a bridge over temptations, a wall against afflictions ... a source of virtues ... food for the soul ... the wealth of monks ... the reduction of anger, the mirror of progress ... the queen of virtues.”⁸⁴⁰

⁸³⁶ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 133.

⁸³⁷ Γρηγορίου τοῦ Σιναΐτου, «Περὶ τοῦ πῶς δεῖ καθέξασθαι τὸν ἡσυχάζοντα», ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος δ΄ (1991), 80; see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 276.

⁸³⁸ S. Miloskovsky, *Little Russian Philokalia, Volume V: Saint Theodore of Sanaxar* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2000), 163.

⁸³⁹ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 70.

⁸⁴⁰ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 212.

St. Sophrony of Essex taught: “The aim is not to pray without ceasing (when it is done mechanically and formally); the aim is our communion with God, which is also achieved through prayer.”⁸⁴¹ Thus, he wrote to a hieromonk:

Remember that the commandment about love for God with all our heart, with all our thought, with all our mind, also tells us that when we stray from God with our mind, this means we are sinning against the first commandment. For this reason we, who are incapable of remaining in prayer—let alone pure prayer—must try to arrange things, to organize our life and allocate our time in such a way that if possible we can be perpetually immersed in a spiritual atmosphere: in prayer, reading, services, reflecting on the things of God, etc., alternating between these various activities.⁸⁴²

Likewise, Elder Ephraim taught us that a monk should be doing two things constantly: prayer and contemplation. By “contemplation” (*θεωρία*) he meant contemplating divine things: the glory of heaven, the darkness of hell, our departure from this life, things written in the Bible and by the holy Fathers, etc.⁸⁴³ One benefit of this kind of contemplation is that it will keep us in a spiritual mode of thinking, which enables us to face temptations and address problems more effectively. Elder Ephraim explained:

We should never stop contemplating death and other such meditations. All these contemplations bring watchfulness to the soul and purify and cleanse the mind so that it may feel the contemplation better. This contemplation is a barrier for evil thoughts. When we have this spiritual contemplation within us, we shut out evil thoughts; there is no room for them in us because that contemplation has occupied the space of the mind. When we do not have godly contemplations, then we are indeed overcome by passionate contemplations instead.⁸⁴⁴

The remembrance of death is also a powerful aid in keeping the commandments. The Wisdom of Sirach teaches: “Remember thy last, and thou shalt never sin unto eternity.”⁸⁴⁵ St. Anthony the Great explained this principle to his disciples as follows: “In order not to be negligent or to retreat before ascetic labors, it is good to remember always the words of the Apostle, who says, ‘Each day I die to myself’ [1 Cor. 15:31]. For if we too lived our lives as though we were dying each day, we certainly would not sin.”⁸⁴⁶ St. Gregory the Theologian added: “Always bear in mind that frigid death awaits you, and you will encounter a

⁸⁴¹ Hierotheos, “*I Know a Man in Christ*,” 382.

⁸⁴² Sakharov, *Striving for Knowledge of God*, 158–59.

⁸⁴³ Although the Greek word *theoria* (*θεωρία*) is also used in reference to a lofty state bestowed by God on man during noetic prayer, Elder Ephraim is referring here to man’s voluntary mental contemplation of divine things, as is evident from his description of *theoria* in Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast* on page 83.

⁸⁴⁴ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 199. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 152–53.

⁸⁴⁵ Sir. 7:36.

⁸⁴⁶ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, Book I, 37.

less fearsome death.”⁸⁴⁷ The *Enchiridion* attributed to St. Neilos of Ancyra says: “Above all keep death before your eyes every day, and you will neither think of trivialities nor have excessive desires.”⁸⁴⁸ St. Theodore the Studite wrote: “How should one struggle? By having the fear of God in one’s heart. Where there is fear, there is keeping of commandments from meditating on death. Where there is meditation on death, there is deliverance from passions.”⁸⁴⁹ And St. John of Sinai devoted an entire step of *The Ladder* (Step 6) to this fundamental virtue.⁸⁵⁰

Another benefit of contemplation is that it will fortify our prayer. St. John Cassian taught:

Before the time of prayer we must put ourselves in the state of mind we would wish to have in us when we actually pray. It is an inexorable fact that the condition of the soul at the time of prayer depends upon what shaped it beforehand. The soul will rise to the heights of heaven or plunge into the things of earth, depending upon where it lingered before the time of prayer.⁸⁵¹

St. John of Sinai also observed how the remembrance of God throughout the day clears the path for progress in prayer:

Prepare yourself for your set times of prayer by unceasing prayer in your soul, and you will soon make progress. I have seen those who shone in obedience and who tried, as far as they could, to keep in mind the remembrance of God, and the moment they stood in prayer they were at once masters of their minds, and shed streams of tears, because they were prepared for this beforehand by holy obedience.... The time and discipline of prayer show the monk’s love for God.⁸⁵²

Our prayer should continue even when we are not in church. As St. Silouan the Athonite said:

The soul that loves the Lord cannot help praying, for she is drawn to Him by the grace she has come to know in prayer. We are given churches to pray in, and in church the holy offices are performed according to books. But we cannot take a church away with us, and books are not always at hand, but interior prayer is always and everywhere possible. The Divine Office is celebrated in church, and the Spirit of God dwells therein, but the soul is the finest of God’s churches, and the man who prays in his heart has the whole world for a church. However, this is not for everyone.⁸⁵³

⁸⁴⁷ Γρηγορίου Ναζιανζού, *Ἐπη Ἠθικά: Γνωμαὶ Δίστιχοι λα΄*; PG 37:911A.

⁸⁴⁸ Νείλου Ἀσκητοῦ, *Ἐγχειρίδιον (Ἐπικτήτου)*, κεφ. κη΄; PG 79:1296A.

⁸⁴⁹ Θεοδώρου Στουδίτου, *Ἐπιστολὴ ρλδ΄*; PG 99:1429.

⁸⁵⁰ Vid. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 66–70.

⁸⁵¹ Luibhéid, *John Cassian: Conferences*, 139–40.

⁸⁵² Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 216–17.

⁸⁵³ Sakharov, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 294.

Likewise, St. Basil the Great taught: “Prayer time should cover the whole of life, but since there is absolute need at certain intervals to interrupt the bending of the knee and the chanting of psalms, the hours appointed for prayer by the saints should be observed.”⁸⁵⁴

The traditional way to achieve unceasing prayer is through the Jesus prayer. According to the text that Sts. Callistus and Ignatius Xanthopoulos attributed to St. John Chrysostom:

A monk when he eats, drinks, serves, travels or does any other thing must continually cry: “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!” so that the name of Jesus, descending into the depths of the heart, should subdue the serpent ruling over the inner pastures and bring life and salvation to the soul. He should always live with the name of Lord Jesus, so that the heart absorbs the Lord and the Lord the heart, and the two become one.⁸⁵⁵

It is crucial that monastics pray not only for themselves but also for the whole world. St. Silouan the Athonite said:

A monk is someone who prays for the whole world, who weeps for the whole world; and in this lies his main work.... It is not for the monk to serve the world with the work of his hands. That is the layman’s business. The man who lives in the world prays little, whereas the monk prays constantly. Thanks to monks, prayer continues unceasing on earth, and the whole world profits, for through prayer the world continues to exist; but when prayer fails, the world will perish.... But if a monk be lukewarm and indifferent, and has not arrived at a state wherein his soul continually contemplates the Lord, then let him wait upon pilgrim travellers and assist with his labours those who live in the world. This, too, is pleasing to God. But rest assured that it is not the monastic life by a long way.⁸⁵⁶

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain warned of the danger monastics face if they fail to pray for the world:

When the monk forgets his family and doesn’t think of others either, that is, doesn’t pray for the world, this is very bad. We come to the monastery, we abandon our family, and we end up forgetting not only our family but even more so the others. We see things spiritually, but we don’t share in others’ pain spiritually. We don’t make spiritual progress, to be able to feel their problems, and there is a danger of becoming insensitive. Indifference creeps in and the heart becomes like stone.⁸⁵⁷

A monk in order to progress spiritually must soften his hard heart, and try to make it like a mother’s heart.⁸⁵⁸

If monks and nuns aren’t careful, their hearts can become very hard. Lay people see accidents, the suffering of others, and are pained. We don’t see this suffering and may pray only for ourselves. That is, if we don’t work on ourselves to learn to feel the misfortunes of others, so that we will be able to pray for them from the heart, we may

⁸⁵⁴ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 212.

⁸⁵⁵ E. Kadloubovsky and G. E.H. Palmer, *Writings from the Philokalia: On Prayer of the Heart*, 193–94.

⁸⁵⁶ Sakharov, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 409–10.

⁸⁵⁷ Elder Paisios, *Spiritual Awakening*, 349.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 362.

become hard-hearted. We may reach the point of wanting to make ourselves comfortable and having a heart stony from indifference, a condition that is contrary to the Gospel. The monk must care for, be pained over, and in general pray for the people. This is not a distraction, but, on the contrary, he himself is helped by the prayer, and so are the others.⁸⁵⁹

St. Theophan the Recluse taught: “One of the means of renewing the Jesus Prayer and bringing it to life is by reading, but it is best to read mainly about prayer.”⁸⁶⁰ Therefore, to facilitate this, we have included the following list of books on prayer in chronological order. We have placed an asterisk beside the ones we have found especially helpful or inspiring:

On Prayer in General:

- The Philokalia*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware
- * *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Step 28), St. John of Sinai
 - The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery
Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) “The Second Part,” trans. Sebastian Brock
 - * *The Evergetinos* (Book Two: Hypotheses X, XI; Book Four: Hypotheses VIII–XIV)
 - The Arena: An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism* (Chapters 17–26), Bishop [St.] Ignatius Brianchaninov
 - The Path of Prayer*, Saint Theophan the Recluse
 - * *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Part I, Chapter 6; Part II, Chapter 2), Saint Sophrony
 - On Prayer*, Archimandrite [Saint] Sophrony (Sakharov)
 - Living Prayer, Beginning to Pray, and Courage to Pray*, Metropolitan Anthony Bloom
 - Wounded by Love* (Part Two, On Prayer), Saint Porphyrios
 - * *Fire from the Holy Mountain*, Elder Ephraim⁸⁶¹
 - Elder Ephraim of Katounakia*, (Part Two: Prayer)
 - Spiritual Awakening* (Part Five, Chapter One), Saint Paisios of the Holy Mountain
 - On Prayer: Problems and Temptations*, Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra
 - The Beginnings of a Life of Prayer*, Archimandrite Irenei Steenberg

On the Jesus Prayer:

- * *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. Kadloubovsky and Palmer
- The Philokalia: Volume 5*, Anna Skoubourdis
- Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 349–50.

⁸⁶⁰ Igumen Chariton of Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 92.

⁸⁶¹ This is Elder Ephraim’s private prayer diary—*Περίπτερα Πυρός* in Greek—which I translated into English with the title: *Fire from the Holy Mountain*. Although it has not been published yet in Greek or English, my preliminary English translation may be downloaded from: www.stnilus.org/fire.pdf

- Holy Hesychia: In Defence of the Holy Hesychasts, Book One*, Saint Gregory Palamas
Elder Basil of Poiana Marului: Spiritual Father of St. Paisy Velichkovsky
- * *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel* (Chapter 10)
Unseen Warfare (Chapters XLVI–LIII), Saints Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and
 Theophan the Recluse
- The Watchful Mind: Teachings on the Prayer of the Heart*, by a Monk of Mount Athos
- * *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*
On the Prayer of Jesus, Bishop [Saint] Ignatius Brianchaninov
- * *The Art of Prayer*, compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo
On the Invocation of the Name of Jesus, by a Monk of the Eastern Church (Lev Gillet)
The Jesus Prayer, by a Monk of the Eastern Church (Lev Gillet)
The Name of Jesus, Irénée Hausherr
- The Power of the Name: The Jesus Prayer in Orthodox Spirituality*, Kallistos Ware
His Life is Mine (pp. 99–128), Archimandrite [Saint] Sophrony (Sakharov)
- * *Counsels from the Holy Mountain* (Chapter 15), Elder Ephraim
- * *The Art of Salvation* (Vol. I: Homilies 11, 33; Vol. II: 2, 28, 30), Elder Ephraim
- * *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain*, Archimandrite Hierotheos Vlachos
Obedience is Life: Elder Ephraim of Katounakia (Chap. 4c), Elder Joseph of Vatopedi
Abbot Haralambos Dionysiatis: The teacher of noetic prayer (Part 2, Chapter A)
The Enlargement of the Heart (pp. 114–163), Archimandrite Zacharias
Two Elders on the Jesus Prayer, Igor V. Ksenzov
- * *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, Fr. Deacon Stephen Muse
*Saint John Chrysostom and the Jesus Prayer: A Contribution to the Study of the Philo-
 kalia*, Frs. Maximos Constas and Peter Chamberas

3) Prayer Technique

Several Fathers of the Church described techniques that assist prayer. St. Symeon the New Theologian taught: “Sitting in a quiet cell, alone in a corner, do what I tell you: Close the door and lift up your mind from all that is vain and passing. Then rest your beard on your chest and direct your physical eyes with all your mind toward yourself. And hold your breath a little, in order to keep your mind there and to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul are used to being found.”⁸⁶²

St. Nicephoros described the practical method of saying the Jesus prayer as follows:

Seat yourself, then, gather your nous, and lead it through your nose into the respiratory passage through which your breath passes into your heart. Put pressure on your nous and compel it to descend with your inhaled breath into your heart....

⁸⁶² As quoted in Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 264.

Moreover, when your nous is firmly established in your heart, it must not remain there silent and idle, but it should have as its ceaseless work and meditation the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” and should never stop doing this. For this prayer keeps the nous from distraction, renders it impregnable to assaults of the enemy, and every day increases its love and desire for God.

If, however, in spite of all your efforts you are unable to enter the realms of the heart in the way I have enjoined, do what I now tell you and with God’s help you will find what you seek. You know that everyone’s discursive faculty is in his breast; for when our lips are silent we speak and deliberate and formulate prayers, psalms and other things in our breast. Banish, then, all thoughts from this faculty—and you can do this if you want to—and give to it the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,” and compel it to cry out this prayer always instead of other thoughts. If you continue to do this for some time, the entrance to your heart will undoubtedly open to you through this method in the way we have explained, and as we ourselves know from experience.⁸⁶³

St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain elaborated on this technique:

Since the nous—the activity of the nous—from a very early age is accustomed to being scattered toward the perceptible things of the world, when you say this sacred prayer do not breathe continually as is natural to our nature, but restrain your breath until your inner voice says the prayer once. Then continue breathing, as the holy Fathers also teach. First of all, by slightly restraining your breathing, the heart is pressed and troubled and feels pain for not receiving its natural amount of oxygen. Through this method, the nous is much more easily collected and returns to the heart, not only because of the pain and suffering of the heart but also because of the pleasure that is created from this warm and vivid remembrance of God. For when God is remembered, one experiences pleasure and gladness, as the psalmist said: “I remembered God and was made glad.”⁸⁶⁴ The nous naturally returns and is collected to any member feeling pain or pleasure, according to the philosopher Aristotle. Secondly, by slightly restraining one’s breathing, one’s hard and thick heart is refined, and the liquids within the heart are warmed through this moderate suffering. Consequently it becomes soft, sensitive, humble, and more capable of contrition and of pouring out tears. Likewise, the brain becomes more refined, as the activity of the nous also becomes more refined, more unified, more clear, and more capable of uniting with God’s supernatural illumination. . . . This restraining of the breathing also unites all the powers of the soul to return to the nous and through the nous to God, which is a marvelous thing.⁸⁶⁵ . . .

Once you have brought your nous into the heart, it should not just stay there, looking and doing nothing, but should find reason (λόγον), that is, the inner voice (ἐνδιάθετον λόγον) of the heart through which we think, compose essays, make judgments, analyze, and read whole books silently, without saying a single word with the mouth. After the nous has found this inner voice, do not let it say anything else except

⁸⁶³ Νικηφόρου Μονάζοντος, «Λόγος περὶ νήψεως καὶ φυλακῆς καρδίας» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος δ΄ (1991), 27–28; see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 205–06.

⁸⁶⁴ Ps. 77:3.

⁸⁶⁵ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 161–63; see also Chamberas, *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 160–61.

this short, single-phrased prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” But this is not enough. It is also necessary to activate the soul’s will so that you say this prayer with all your will and power and love. To put it more clearly, let your inner voice say only the prayer, let your nous pay attention through its spiritual vision and hearing to the words of the prayer alone and especially to the meaning of the words, without imagining any forms, shapes, or any other perceptible or intelligible thing, internal or external, even if it is something good.... Let all your will cleave to the same words of the prayer with love, so that the nous, the inner voice, and the will—these three parts of your soul—will be one, and the one three, for in this way man, who is an image of the Holy Trinity, is united with the Prototype.⁸⁶⁶

Elder Ephraim taught: “As you inhale, say the prayer once, following it to the heart, and as you exhale, repeat the prayer once again. Establish your nous where the breath stops, in the place of the heart, and without distraction follow, by inhaling and exhaling, the prayer being inhaled and exhaled: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!’”⁸⁶⁷ He also taught that we can say the prayer faster (i.e., more than one time while inhaling or exhaling) or slower (i.e., half the prayer while inhaling and the other half while exhaling).

He also recommended restraining the breathing slightly: “The nous is accustomed to run around and only remains where we feel pain. Therefore, pause momentarily after you inhale; do not exhale immediately. This will cause a slight, harmless pain in the heart, which is the place where we want to establish our nous. This small pain greatly assists by attracting the intellect like a magnet and holding it there to serve the nous somewhat like a servant.⁸⁶⁸ Elder Ephraim told us: “When we were on the Holy Mountain ... we said the prayer for two, three, four, five hours with inhaling and exhaling. Of course, when sleep fought us, we would get up and go outside to say the prayer out loud for more ‘relaxation,’ so to speak. But when sleep was not an issue, we would stay inside all night.”⁸⁶⁹

St. Ephraim of Katounakia attached less importance to breathing techniques. For when he was asked if we should control our breathing when we practice noetic prayer, he replied: “No, this is the beginning of mental [noetic] prayer. Mental prayer itself is an act of the holy grace. When the soul is ready, then God promotes it to the perfection of mental prayer. Until then, we ought to pray by repeating the Jesus prayer, always having obedience as our firm foundation. One’s breathing does not necessarily have to be connected to prayer. This

⁸⁶⁶ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 161; see also Chamberas, *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 159–60.

⁸⁶⁷ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 417. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 338.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁹ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 441. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 350.

is a secondary element. More importantly, prayer should not be related to the heartbeat, but rather with the place of the heart; not with the heartbeat, no.”⁸⁷⁰

Similarly, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain taught that repentance is much more important than methods when praying:

In order to gather our mind in our heart at the hour of prayer, it is very helpful to hold our breath slightly, but not constantly, for the heart is harmed by this bodily contraction. The heart, of course, is not cleansed by this bodily contraction, but rather through a humble, *philotimo* sigh of repentance, originating from the depth of our heart. This sigh brings divine consolation, while physical contraction, when one pressures himself egotistically and without discernment, brings despair and anxiety.”⁸⁷¹

A disciple of St. Paisios, noted that he

considered the external elements [of prayer] spoken of by the fathers of the *Philokalia*, such as a small stool, darkness ... the inclination of the head, one’s breathing, and so on, to be nothing more than aids. If these aspects of prayer are overemphasized, they can cause psychosomatic harm or lead a person into delusion. He accepted the use of breathing methods associated with the Jesus prayer when they were joined to it in a natural rather than an artificial manner.”⁸⁷²

St. Gregory Palamas explained the role of breathing techniques for beginners in prayer:

To teach beginners especially to look at themselves and to bring their mind within through respiration isn’t something reproachable. Because it wouldn’t be right for any sensible man to prevent him who hasn’t yet the mind capable of contemplating itself, to concentrate by just any method. The mind of those who are at the beginning of this struggle, even when it concentrates, jumps around continually and therefore must be brought back continually because they are inexperienced. Their mind, being very unstable, gets away from them all the time and contemplates itself with difficulty. For this reason there are some that counsel them to watch their respiration and to hold their inhaling and exhaling a little and to thus succeed in concentrating the mind by it. This continues until, making progress with the help of God toward the good and making their mind inaccessible to what is around it and making it pure, they will be able with precision to bring it back to a “unified recollection.”⁸⁷³

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain taught that prayer is a shortcut to purification. He wrote: “This method [of noetic prayer] purifies our nature faster [than asceticism], because the

⁸⁷⁰ Vassiliadou-Christodoulou, *Elder Ephraim of Katounakia*, 121–24.

⁸⁷¹ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 123.

⁸⁷² Hieromonk Isaac, *Elder Paisios of Mount Athos*, 471–72.

⁸⁷³ «Υπὲρ τῶν Ἱερῶς Ἠσυχασζόντων», Λόγος 1.2.7 (ΕΠΕ 54, 132), as translated in Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 272–73.

very work and subject matter with which it is occupied is the first, catholic, and most comprehensive commandment of all: for man to love God with all his soul, all his heart, all his power, and all his mind.”⁸⁷⁴

Elder Ephraim also viewed prayer and watchfulness as a shortcut to purity of heart:

Our Fathers have left us a tremendous inheritance of limitless value, which cannot be measured, weighed, or calculated. This inheritance is called watchfulness. Watchfulness means attention to thoughts, fantasies, and the movements of the senses....

Before the holy Fathers—those teachers of watchfulness—systematized noetic prayer, monks would occupy themselves primarily with virtues belonging to praxis. Ascesis done with the body is called praxis, whether it is fasting, abstinence, prostrations, vigil, the church services, obedience, humility, etc. They called this praxis “somewhat beneficial,” while they called watchfulness “greatly beneficial.” ...

But when the work of watchfulness came to light as a systematic method, then the amount of ascesis was reduced—not as something unnecessary, but because the Fathers dedicated themselves more to spiritual work than to praxis. Through the work of watchfulness they were liberated from thoughts, and the passions were reduced. The work of watchfulness granted them purity of heart. This is why they did not have such an absolute need for bodily ascesis in order to attain purity of soul....

For when the work of watchfulness purifies the nous and heart, while giving prudent care to the exterior senses of the body as well as to the interior senses of the soul, then a monk does not need much ascesis to reach the same goal.⁸⁷⁵

Dumitru Staniloae summarized the patristic writings on the method of prayer as follows:

1. These methods are not considered absolutely necessary, but only auxiliary means for those who haven’t been able to gather their minds within and to recite without interruption the words of the Jesus Prayer....

2. Until we attempt to use these methods, it is necessary for us to get used to saying it in a more simple way, and less systematically, but ever more frequently and with our thought concentrated, either on the whole of the Jesus Prayer, or at least on two or three words of it: “Jesus! Lord Jesus! Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!” At the same time we must be advanced in freedom from the passions and from care.

3. When we begin to apply the recommendation of these methods we are not on the highest steps of the spiritual life....

4. Prayer during these phases isn’t yet mental prayer, but the Jesus prayer. It becomes mental prayer when there is no longer the need for either words or methods, and the mind is occupied with it unceasingly, along with the heart.⁸⁷⁶

Repentance is a key ingredient in prayer. According to Elder Sergei of Vanves: “In prayer, the most important thing is our spiritual attitude. A spirit of contrition must accompany our

⁸⁷⁴ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 168; see also Chamberas, *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 163–64.

⁸⁷⁵ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 391–93. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 315–16.

⁸⁷⁶ Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 282.

prayers. Christ did not come to bring us a technique but to teach us to repent.”⁸⁷⁷ St. Nikolai Velimirovich said: “Prayer without repentance is of no use, but as soon as prayer is linked with repentance, God hearkens to it.”⁸⁷⁸ The anonymous hesychast quoted by Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos in *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain* taught: “I must emphasize that the awareness of our unworthiness is absolutely necessary for the Jesus prayer to act within us.”⁸⁷⁹ Likewise, St. Sophrony of Essex said: “True prayer comes exclusively through faith and repentance accepted as the only foundation. The danger of psychotechnics is that not a few of us attribute too great significance to method *qua* method. In order to avoid such deformation the beginner should follow another practice, which, though considerably slower is incomparably better and more wholesome—to fix attention on the Name of Jesus Christ and on the words of the prayer. When contrition for sin reaches a certain level, the mind naturally heeds the heart.”⁸⁸⁰

St. Sophrony of Essex also emphasized the importance of repentance in prayer. He wrote to a hieromonk:

As far as the Jesus prayer is concerned, though I have already spoken to you about the union of the mind with the heart while one is practising the prayer, it will be better, however, if you simply accustom yourself to the words of the prayer, enclosing your mind in the words. And it is good if the heart all the while is sharing with feeling in the prayer, which includes repentance. “Have mercy upon me, a sinner.” And when the heart, by feeling the words of the prayer, delights in the name of Jesus Christ, the mind is then attracted of its own accord towards the heart. Only one thing is necessary: sweet repentance before our Lord Jesus Christ, with full concentration....

We should not direct our efforts towards achieving the highest spiritual dispositions or states, as you are. I told you that man is led into contemplation by divine grace after repentance, after great and deep humility, and that contemplation comes utterly unexpectedly to man; that the path to adoption as a son of God is repentance.⁸⁸¹

Continuing these teachings of his elder, Archimandrite Zacharias added:

What we seek as we practise this prayer is the union of the intellect with the heart. It is impossible to achieve this union through techniques. Some procedures can help the attention of the intellect to find entry to the heart, but not to establish its abode in the heart. There is a great danger that beginners and inexperienced ascetics may overvalue such physical methods, and this can lead to a distortion in spiritual life. Authentic prayer is born out of faith and repentance. These are its solid basis. In continuity with

⁸⁷⁷ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Elder Sergei of Vanves: Life & Teachings*, trans. Monastery of St. John of San Francisco (Manton: Divine Ascent Press, 2012), 124.

⁸⁷⁸ Nikolai Velimirović, *Homilies: A Commentary on the Gospel Readings for Great Feasts and Sundays throughout the Year*, Volume Two: Sundays after Pentecost, trans. Mother Maria (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1998), 111 (Homily on the 11th Sunday after Pentecost).

⁸⁷⁹ Hierotheos Vlachos, *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain*, Second Edition, trans. Effie Mavromichali (Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1995), 65.

⁸⁸⁰ Sakharov, *His Life is Mine*, 112–13.

⁸⁸¹ Sakharov, *Striving for Knowledge of God*, 191–92, 305.

the ancient tradition of the holy Fathers, Fr. Sophrony recommends, as the most correct and sure way of praying, the concentration of the mind's attention on the name of Jesus Christ and the words of the prayer. Even though this is a slower means of joining the action of heart and mind, it is more natural physiologically and more beneficial than any exterior technique. When brokenheartedness over one's sin is intensified, and conformity to the commandments of Christ reaches a certain fulness, the intellect then unites with the heart in an organic, natural way.⁸⁸²

Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet also pointed out the secondary role played by psychosomatic techniques in prayer: "As the Jesus Prayer in its full perfection is permanent pure prayer, presupposing the whole of the ascetic life as a prerequisite, it requires that all the stages of praxis be successfully completed. In light of these spiritual requirements, the psychosomatic method appears to be secondary and would be useless apart from this combination of conditions.... The description of the former [i.e., the psychosomatic method] only takes up several pages in the *Philokalia*, while the presentation of the latter [i.e., the ascetic life] takes up hundreds of pages."⁸⁸³

4) Vigil

The night has always been viewed as the best time for prayer. The monastic canons attributed to St. Anthony the Great advise: "Perform your prayer at night before going to church."⁸⁸⁴ St. Chrodegang explained the reason why prayer should be done at night:

That the zeal for holy vigil was chosen as singularly desirable for the saints of God goes back to ancient origins. Sanctus [Prophet] Isaiah said the following about vigils, "In the night my soul awakens to You, God." And David said, "In the middle of the night I arose to praise You, Lord, for the rightfulness of Your justice." ...

Also in His gospel the Saviour announced His future coming at the same time as He taught His followers how to keep vigils, and He said this: "Blessed are the servants whom their lord finds watching when he comes. Whether he will come in the evening," He said, "at midnight, or at cock-crow, blessed are those whom he finds awake." ...

And our Lord did indeed not only teach through words how to keep vigils, but also confirmed it through His own example. Truly the gospel says that the Saviour was persevering in divine prayers all through the night. Likewise Paul and Silas, when they were in public jail, prayed to God at midnight....

Therefore then it befits us to chant during these hours and to have the zeal for our prayers during the Divine Office, and to strengthen and arm ourselves securely for our last day in such expectation. There is a kind of heretics who believe that holy vigils are worthless, and they say, "Night was created for rest, just as day for work." These

⁸⁸² Zacharias, *Christ, Our Way and Our Life*, 162. See also *On Prayer*, Archimandrite Sophrony, 142.

⁸⁸³ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Therapy of Spiritual Illnesses: An Introduction to the Ascetic Tradition of the Orthodox Church*, vol. 2, trans. Fr. Kilian Sprecher (Montréal: Alexander Press, 2012), 110–11.

⁸⁸⁴ Rule #13, PG 40:1067C. Cited also in Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Άσκητικοί Κανόνες*, 40, 516.

heretics are called “Nyctates” in Greek, and we in our language may call them slumberers, or sleepyheads, and they may also be called dozers.⁸⁸⁵

This is why ever since the beginning of monasticism, monks have placed special emphasis on rising at night for prayer. St. Chariton in the early fourth century required that monks stay awake six hours⁸⁸⁶ during the night, which was the accepted quota.⁸⁸⁷ Likewise, St. Basil the Great advised: “Divide the time of night between sleep and prayer.”⁸⁸⁸

St. Isaac the Syrian boldly wrote: “Prayer offered up at night possesses a great power, more so than the prayer of the day-time. Therefore all the righteous prayed during the night.... There is nothing which even Satan fears so much as prayer that is offered during vigilance at night.... Let every prayer that you offer in the night be more precious in your eyes than all your activities of the day.”⁸⁸⁹ Similarly, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain observed: “Prayer during the night is much more beneficial than prayer during the day, just as nighttime rain is more favourable to plants than rain during the day.”⁸⁹⁰ St. Joseph the Hesychast taught from his experience: “Keeping vigil with awareness of its true nature and with watchfulness and prayer bestows great spiritual gifts upon a Christian who works at it.”⁸⁹¹

In the same spirit, Elder Aimilianos taught his monks:

One hour of prayer at night has more power than ten hours of prayer in the daytime. Whoever fails to use these nighttime hours usually passes his hours and days very unproductively. Are you sleeping at midnight? Your life will always be a weak life. Your being is paralyzed when you don't have the night your own because you cannot receive the Spirit. God knows and recognizes the night, but ‘the night’ means keeping vigil at night continually. Whether you are in your cell or out of the monastery, you should be before God at night. Know that this time belongs to God. This time is the time when you will wrestle and will face God. And God must become *your* God. It is the time of your own ladder.⁸⁹²

⁸⁸⁵ Langefeld, *The Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang*, 367.

⁸⁸⁶ In the Near East and Europe until about the 14th century, night and day were each divided into twelve “hours,” regardless of the season. (“Are there not twelve hours in the day?” –Jn. 11:9) Thus, the duration of six such “hours” at night at St. Chariton’s latitude of 32° lasted 5 modern hours on the summer solstice and 7 modern hours on the winter solstice, as is evident from an astrolabe.

⁸⁸⁷ Vid. Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, 225.

⁸⁸⁸ *Homily on the Martyrdom of Julitta*, 4.

⁸⁸⁹ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 523 (Homily 75), 450 (Homily 64).

⁸⁹⁰ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 121.

⁸⁹¹ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 276. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 386.

⁸⁹² Γέροντος Αἰμιλιανοῦ, *Νηπτική Ζωή καὶ Ἀσκητικοὶ Κανόνες*, 455–56.

St. Isaac the Syrian warned that carelessness during the daytime can ruin our prayer in the nighttime:

I deem it impossible that a man who has chosen for himself this great and divine labor [of keeping vigil] ... should not guard himself by day from the disturbance of encounters and the cares of occupations, lest he be found destitute of the wondrous fruit and the great delight which he looks to enjoy from his vigil. And I dare say that whosoever neglects this does not know why he toils and refrains from sleep, suffers hardship in his prolonged psalmody, in the weariness of his tongue, and in night-long standing, since his mind is not in psalmody nor in his prayer....

Why do you wear yourself out, when at night you sow, but during the day you dissipate your toil which is thus rendered unfruitful, when you scatter the wakefulness, sobriety, and fervor which you have gained through night vigil, and without a reasonable excuse you vainly undo your labor by your disturbing intercourse with men and with things?⁸⁹³

Elder Aimilianos also taught his monks about the struggle of keeping vigil at night:

The night is the realm into which a monk immerses himself and truly lives. The night has great importance because it is the hour and place of mystical encounters, the experience of our pain and struggle. It is also the darkness of our souls and our hope of light. The night is a direct confrontation of our self, which is nothing but nakedness and poverty. At night there is no one for you to speak with; there is no friend or the consolation of having someone else; there is no praise, nor is there even a response, which itself is a form of love. It is like a place bare of trees, and when you see this boundless dimension you are overcome with despair. This is why many lack the strength and endurance, the martyric perseverance and patience to proceed in this struggle of the night.... The monks who keep vigil are the voice of the Church.⁸⁹⁴

St. Joseph the Hesychast explained why it is beneficial to begin saying the Jesus prayer as soon as we wake up: “After sleep the nous of man is fresh and clear. It is in an ideal state for us to give it, as its first spiritual food, the name of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.”⁸⁹⁵ Elder Ephraim said: “Be careful with your first thoughts after sleep. Dreams, fantasies—whether good or bad—whatever sleep bequeathed to us, we must obliterate immediately. And right away we must immediately take the name of Christ as the breath of our soul. Meanwhile, after we throw a little water on our face to wake up, and after we have a cup of coffee or something else [such as a piece of bread or some fruit] to invigorate us—as long as our vigil begins long before midnight—we say the Trisagion [preceded by ‘Heavenly King’⁸⁹⁶], recite the Creed, and ‘It is truly meet’ to the most holy Theotokos,

⁸⁹³ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 222–23 (Homily 20).

⁸⁹⁴ Αρχιμ. Ἐλισαίου, «Ἡ Μοναχικὴ Κλίμαξ τοῦ Γέροντος Αἰμιλιανοῦ», ἐν *Σύναξις Εὐχαριστίας· Χαριστήρια εἰς Τιμὴν τοῦ Γέροντος Αἰμιλιανοῦ*, 23.

⁸⁹⁵ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 414. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 335.

⁸⁹⁶ Vid. Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 346.

and then we sit in our place of prayer with the weapon against the devil—the prayer rope—in hand.”⁸⁹⁷

The reason why Elder Ephraim advised having coffee and/or a snack only if it is before midnight is because ancient tradition dictates that one should partake of Holy Communion or antidoron only on an empty stomach. St. Nicodemos wrote in his comments of Canon XXIX of the Sixth Ecumenical Council:

If anyone is in danger of dying, he must commune even after having eaten, according to Canon IX of Nicephoros. When St. Chrysostom was blamed for having administered the communion to some persons after they had eaten, he wrote in his letter to Bishop Kyriakos: “If it is true that I did this, may my name be stricken from the book of bishops. But if they say this to me once, and start quarreling, let them consider St. Paul, who baptized a whole household right after supper. Let them also consider Christ Himself, who gave the Communion to the Apostles right after supper.” Hence it is evident that those who are about to commune have permission up to midnight to drink water, and thereafter they must not put anything in their mouth until they have communed.⁸⁹⁸

In the event, however, that the Divine Liturgy is served only a few hours after midnight (as is commonly done on the Holy Mountain), Elder Ephraim taught that ideally at least five or six hours should have passed from the last time we ate or drank something. Similarly, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain said that prior to receiving Holy Communion a person should not have eaten anything for at least six hours and not drunk water for at least four hours.

Bearing in mind the historical development of fasting before Holy Communion gives us a more full understanding of this practice. According to the liturgical historian Ioannis Fountoulis:

[In Apostolic times] fasting was not considered a prerequisite for approaching Holy Communion. The Divine Liturgy was performed in the evening at common meals, the “love-feasts” (ἀγάπη), after everyone had already eaten at the common table. That is, they repeated with precision the practice of the Lord, Who established the Mystery “after dinner” (Lk. 22:20) in the upper chamber of holy Sion. Later, out of reverence, the Divine Liturgy was separated from meals and took place in the morning. Then the custom of abstaining from all food from midnight until the time of communion gradually began to appear. This was—and continues to be until today—the official and required preparatory fast for Holy Communion.... This “eucharistic fast” is required by many canons.⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁹⁷ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικὰὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 415–16. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 336.

⁸⁹⁸ Agapius and Nicodemos, *The Rudder*, 325.

⁸⁹⁹ Ἰωάννου Μ. Φουντούλη, *Ἀπαντήσεις εἰς Λειτουργικὰς Ἀπορίας*, Τόμος Α΄, ἔκδοσι στ΄ (Ἀθήνα: Ἀποστολικὴ Διακονία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, 2006), 120–21. The canons requiring a eucharistic fast are Canon XLVIII in Carthage, Canon XXIX of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, and Canon IX of St. Nicephoros the Confessor.

Fasting for many days (eating dry food, that is, and not the complete abstention from food) as preparation for Holy Communion was unknown to the ancient Church. The most distinctive proof of this is the Sunday liturgy. Serving the liturgy presupposes that the faithful will commune. But how could they commune if fasting the previous day were obligatory, considering that fasting on Saturday (except for only Holy Saturday) is forbidden by the canons with strict penances?⁹⁰⁰

This practice [of eating dry food the previous day or days] probably began during the Turkish Occupation [of Greece], and is due to an attempt to make the faithful as perfectly prepared as possible, as well as to make them approach the Mystery at less frequent intervals.⁹⁰¹

Regarding our bodily stance during vigil, Elder Aimilianos taught:

But where should I sit? Do I prefer to sit in an armchair? I may. Does sitting in an armchair make me sleepy? I will sit in another chair or on a bench or on my low, wooden bed. Also, I may sit on a stool with three legs so that if I fall asleep, I will fall over and wake up. I may do whatever I want, as long as I am peaceful. For when I am peaceful, I am in control of my breathing, the beating of my heart, my spirit, everything. Then I can say: “Come, my God,” and I will notice it. But when my heart is beating irregularly, when my breathing is irregular, when within me I am strong-willed, how will I notice God? ... So I need to be at peace, to be rested—not so much physically as spiritually. Subordinating sleep and being at peace are a preparation.⁹⁰²

Elder Ephraim said that his elders “began their vigil by reciting the Trisagion, the Creed, and Psalm 50. Then they sat down for a while and meditated on death, hell, the joy of the righteous in heaven, and other such thoughts that would benefit their souls. They concluded this stage of contemplation by pondering that everyone else would be saved, while only they would go to hell. In this manner, they acquired compunction, mourning, and repentance. However, they would not spend too much time in that stage of contemplation. As soon as their nous was collected and their heart felt contrition, they began saying the prayer. Francis [i.e., St. Joseph] said it noetically, whereas Fr. Arsenios whispered it quietly.”⁹⁰³

Elder Aimilianos taught his monks what inner stance we need during prayer:

How should we stand before God? First of all, we stand as His simple children. Our vigil is the time of our love with God. Just as people in the world have the hours when they want to love and be loved, likewise we have the hours when we live with our dear Christ, the hours when we await Him, and He awaits us; when we try to show our love in a way that He appreciates. If you bring to me a candy, you win my heart.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 121. For the canons forbidding fasting on Saturday, see Apostolic Canon LXIV and Canon LV of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

⁹⁰¹ Ιωάννου Μ. Φουντούλη, *Απαντήσεις εις Λειτουργικές Απορίες*, Τόμος Β΄, έκδοση δ΄ (Αθήνα: Αποστολική Διακονία της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, 1994), 65. Since the custom of eating dry food on the day or days prior to Holy Communion is only a historically recent practice in the Church, it follows that this cannot be an inherent prerequisite for receiving Holy Communion, despite its great benefit.

⁹⁰² Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοί Κανόνες*, 461.

⁹⁰³ Γέροντος Έφραίμ, *Ο Γέροντάς μου Ίωσήφ*, 67. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 83.

You win the heart of someone else by bringing him a book. If you bring him a candy, you fail. It is the same with God. He wants you to bring him His kind of gifts and presents—the ones that He appreciates.⁹⁰⁴

Only “a heart contrite and humbled will God not despise.”⁹⁰⁵ When, however, I have an awareness of my virtue, my gifts, my holiness, when I seek from God divine illumination, when I seek from Him that I, too, become great, I cannot have contrition of heart.⁹⁰⁶

Contrition of heart may be attained also through my stance and with certain thoughts that I will have about God or with anything else. All these things are of course merely introductory exercises. I may also kneel before God and beseech Him to forgive my sin, of which I am probably unaware. I don’t imagine it, but I know that I am a sinner.⁹⁰⁷

In order to help our heart and mind to repent, we try to create an atmosphere that is serious, dignified, contrite. At that time, and especially at the most lofty and beautiful moments, if something comes to mind, don’t write it down; let it go.⁹⁰⁸

I seek contrition of heart and prostrations not as a magical means but as something I need. God doesn’t need contrition. God does not even need my virtues or my vices or even the contrition of my heart. I am the one who needs contrition in order to be able to stand before Him.⁹⁰⁹

Elder Aimilianos also emphasized the importance of purity in prayer:

After contrition of heart and repentance comes the purity of life by which we see God... With the term “purity” we mean the purity from sin, and above all the purity of the mind. Especially at this stage [during vigil] we must not let our mind occupy itself with something else besides prayer. When you are doing your vigil, a very beautiful thought might come. Drive it away. You might have a remembrance of God’s love, Who was crucified for you. Keep thoughts about the Cross away from you at that time. You don’t need anything. The only thing you need is purity, that is, the emptying of the mind of everything good or bad. You might have the desire to say: “My dear God, may I be dead and empty for Thy sake.” No; nothing of the sort. At that time the mind must remain without colors, empty; it must be freed from everything so that you can fill it with the Jesus prayer or with other short prayers of the saints. If we are unable to do noetic prayer continuously, it is possible to fill our time with many prayers. Certainly noetic prayer is the prayer that is the most positive, the most concise, the most decisive, the most fruitful, and the most pleasing to Christ. Purity of the mind is a basic prerequisite for us to obtain thereafter the purity of the depth of our soul from the passions.⁹¹⁰

⁹⁰⁴ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοί Κανόνες*, 458–59.

⁹⁰⁵ Ps. 50:19.

⁹⁰⁶ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοί Κανόνες*, 461.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 462.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 463.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 465–66.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 466–67.

So we strive to empty our mind and fill it with the words we are saying to God. Our mind goes only to the words and the meaning of the words.⁹¹¹

Elder Aimilianos taught that a further ingredient to prayer is joy:

Likewise, in our prayer we will seek joy of our heart from God; we seek this joy as evidence of His presence and love. We have the right to seek this. When we do not know God and live without Him, our life is so heavy and harsh that we need something that will make our life lighter and our prayer ethereal so that it may ascend more easily. We can achieve this through joy. Joy is a celebration of the heart, an excursion, a relaxation and enjoyment of the mind, an experience of the soul, something that remains with us in life. Joy gives us great boldness and eagerness and happiness to begin our vigil, to desire it, to increase it. But what if our vigil is as hard as dying, as dark as the blackness of the night, and as heavy as the heaviest cloud that can fall upon us? Then what do we do? Then, let us weep, let us labor, let us beg God and threaten Him to give us joy. We shall not stop our vigil; we will make it an offering of our heart, as a struggle, as a sacrifice.⁹¹²

The final ingredient needed in prayer is fire. Elder Aimilianos said:

In our vigil, we need something else in addition: a flaming fire. This is not something we can obtain on our own; only God can give it to us. God is He Who “maketh His ministers a flame of fire.”⁹¹³ The flame is the fire that ignites within us, the desire to keep vigil, the uplifting of ourselves, our flight, which makes us not only bear to keep vigil but even makes us not want to stop. Two, three, seven, fifteen hours may pass, and we will think that only five minutes have passed. The time comes for us to stop, since our responsibilities require it, and it hurts to stop our vigil. But when God makes us into a fire at the time of vigil, gradually our entire life becomes fire. Just as the fingers of the saints would become lit torches,⁹¹⁴ and their light would ascend to heaven, our own existence can become like that. Without fire, the spaceship doesn’t ascend to the moon, so how will I ascend to heaven without fire? So let us entreat God to make fiery our prayer, our ascents, our vigil, the cries of our hearts, our prostrations, our labors, our asceticism, everything. Through contrition of heart, prostrations, the purity of mind by which we see God, with the joy, and the flaming fire (which is necessary for us to be transported to the other life), our vigil, our prayer, our cell, our soul become a fruitful place where one can find God and embrace Him. And the Farmer—God—can cultivate our being.⁹¹⁵

⁹¹¹ Ibid., 467.

⁹¹² Ibid., 468.

⁹¹³ Ps. 103:4.

⁹¹⁴ “Abba Lot visited Abba Joseph [of Panepho] and said to him: ‘Abba, to the best of my ability I do my little *synaxis*, my little fasting; praying, meditating, and maintaining *hesychia*; and I purge my logismoi [thoughts] to the best of my ability. What else then can I do?’ The elder stood up and stretched out his hands to heaven; his fingers became like ten lamps of fire. He said to him: ‘If you are willing, become altogether like fire.’” (Wortley, *The Alphabetical Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 152; PG 65:229D).

⁹¹⁵ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοί Κανόνες*, 469–70.

Interspersing different kinds of prayer enables us to remain spiritually alert. St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain wrote: “Variety in vigil is very helpful. When one is alone, he may first do full prostrations, then small ones, and then say the Jesus Prayer sitting down or kneeling and repeat this sequence depending on the time he has to offer. This method is very helpful, for it creates spiritual liveliness and drives away the weariness of inaction through interspersed spiritual movements, prostrations. Moreover, it drives away sleepiness and brings spiritual lucidity during prayer.”⁹¹⁶

Elder Aimilianos taught that the most important time for a monk is his vigil:

The prayer rule is the marrow of our existence, the most refined and serious part of the monastic life. It shows if we have God or if we don’t have Him, if we have the desire to acquire Him or not. Whoever does not do a prayer rule is certainly fooling himself if he thinks he has the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not operate and speak in us if we have no night life. And if we lack the appropriate conditions for the night life, let there be at least the desire and yearning to create such conditions, so that someday we may have this night life. God will see our desire and will accomplish it. . . . This vigil brings illumination to the soul and unites it with God. During vigil, man is illumined, his intellect is purified, thoughts depart, and the mind remains alone so that it may fly and ascend to God, and enjoy Him and love Him and become acquainted with Him. For henceforth God becomes *his* God and not some unknown God. Of course, no matter how unknown our God is, we will not abandon our vigil. We shall become tired and shall suffer in order to live with Him.⁹¹⁷

The central role of the night life for a monk led Elder Aimilianos to this bold conclusion: “Monastic life is completely immersed in the night, with only a part of it extending its branches into the daytime.”⁹¹⁸

The daily prayer rule that Elder Ephraim gave his monks (in addition to attending all the services) is to do three 300-knot prayer-ropes *stavrota*, i.e., at each knot making the sign of the cross and saying, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” as well as one 300-knot prayer-rope *stavrota* saying “Most Holy Theotokos, save me.” Health permitting, a monk will also do 100 prostrations daily as a novice or rasophore, or 300 as a great-schema monk.⁹¹⁹ St. Theoliptos of Philadelphia advised: “Do not neglect prostration. It provides

⁹¹⁶ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 123–24. Once when I sat beside Elder Ephraim in an airplane, I expected that he would be praying with his prayer-rope throughout the entire flight, since he had told us the importance of saying the Jesus prayer continuously. But to my surprise, soon after takeoff he put away his prayer-rope and began reading Vespers silently from his prayer book. Puzzled, I asked him: “Geronda, what’s going on? I thought we’re supposed to say the Jesus prayer all the time.” He replied, “No, my child; we need variety in prayer. Just as you get tired of eating the same food all the time, likewise you get tired of praying if you don’t have variety in prayer.”

⁹¹⁷ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοί Κανόνες*, 451–52.

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 511.

⁹¹⁹ St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote: “The prayer rule of great schema and perfect monks, according to the Holy Fathers, is that every twenty-four hours they do 300 genuflections—full prostrations, that is (see *Philokalia*, page 1053). According to the authorities in Mount Athos, however, they should do 120 genuflections and twelve full prayer-ropes of lesser (i.e., bowing) prostrations. As for small-schema and

an image of man's fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ [e.g., the Jesus prayer], so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the grace of the God of souls and bodies."⁹²⁰

The duration of each monk's private vigil will depend on numerous variables, especially on his need for sleep and if his *diakonema* [i.e., assigned task] requires him to go to bed late. Elder Aimilianos recommended: "The vigil should last as long as possible, but we begin with one hour, and then we proceed to two, to four, to five hours. This comes naturally; your constitution grows accustomed to it... Likewise, the time at which we do our vigil differs. Some of the holy Fathers preferred to continue their day with their vigil and to rest in the morning hours. Others (who were the majority) did the opposite. They would rest and then get up fresh to do their vigil. Others slept a little, kept vigil, and then again rested a little. Each person may have his own way. Be that as it may, what is more suitable to our context is to prefer the hours at or after midnight for keeping vigil."⁹²¹

Vigil is generally kept in one's own cell, but it may also be kept outdoors (weather permitting) or in a chapel. Since noetic prayer is the most profitable method of prayer (when done with attention), we endeavor to spend most of our time occupying ourselves with it. When, however, we are unable to focus on noetic prayer, we say the prayer in a whisper or out loud. We also read prayers (such as the Prayers for Preparation Before Holy Communion and the Salutations to the Theotokos).

A monk may also read spiritual books during his vigil. St. Joseph the Hesychast recommended: "Read the lives of saints [during your vigil] and other compunctious and beneficial books."⁹²² Since, however, reading brings less profit than praying, only a small fraction of time during vigil is allotted to reading. As St. John of Sinai instructed: "Devote the greater part of the night to prayer and only what is left to recital of the psalter."⁹²³ Elder Aimilianos explained this approach in more detail:

When we are unable to pray much during our prayer rule [at night], we read the Old and New Testament, the Fathers of the Church, or the Psalter in order to assist our human weakness. In reality however, these hours are for prayer, as St. Anthony says.⁹²⁴ Nevertheless, our reading then is not just any reading but that which cultivates more our heart, our nous, and peace, so that we can make our prayer livelier. It is not just a

stavrophone monks: 100 genuflections and six prayer-ropes with bows; and rasophores: 100 genuflections and three prayer-ropes with bows" (Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 457–58).

⁹²⁰ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 185.

⁹²¹ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοὶ Κανόνες*, 454–45.

⁹²² Γέροντος Ἰωσήφ, *Ἐκφρασις Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας*, 399. See also Elder Joseph, *Monastic Wisdom*, 339.

⁹²³ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 210 (Step 27:77).

⁹²⁴ See footnote #884 on page 166.

matter of praying, but our prayer should be God-bearing, a piercing cry that will reach heaven and shake it. Consequently, we incorporate reading into our prayer time because it promotes prayer. However, the more a soul progresses, reading diminishes and prayer increases.⁹²⁵

Elder Aimilianos was once asked: “When reading fails to inspire us but we are in the mood for work, can we use the time of vigil for working?” He replied: “In only one situation can this be done: when a person is unable to do a long prayer rule and wants to do some handicraft so that he can pray and be at peace. Then this is in line with tradition. He can do this as long as he needs to. In the old days, the Desert Fathers did their handicraft also at night. In this manner, their minds did not wander, their prayer ascended to God, and their eyes filled with tears. This can be done, but the elder’s blessing is necessary.”⁹²⁶ This is in line with what St. John of Sinai wrote: “I wanted to forbid those who were still children [i.e., spiritually immature] all bodily work at the time of vigil, but he who carried sand all night in his cloak restrained me”⁹²⁷—referring to St. Pachomios who did this in order to resist sleep and remain in vigil. Likewise, St. Theoliptos of Philadelphia advised: “To dispel sleep and indolence while practicing mental prayer you may occupy your hands with some quiet task, for this, too, contributes to the ascetic struggle. All such tasks when accompanied by prayer quicken the intellect, banish listlessness, give youthful vigor to the soul, and render the intellect more prompt and eager to devote itself to mental work.”⁹²⁸

Elder Aimilianos added that work during vigil must be done with a sense of God’s presence:

When the hours of vigil are endless, a monk may even decorate the time with written work that does not distract him but is a break, with the realization that he is setting God before him, and he is writing or doing some particular work. Am I a pastor? I may do my pastoral work or study the canons of the Church. Am I a disciple? I may do something connected to my tasks of obedience, or I may read a theological book.... I may also read some Church services.... So I may read, pray, work with my hands, and enrich my time, as long as I do not stop being before God.⁹²⁹

5) Reading

The holy Fathers taught that reading helps us in three ways: it teaches us how to fulfil our spiritual duties, it concentrates the mind to pray better, and it inspires us to live with greater zeal. St. Isaac the Syrian taught: “Combine spiritual reading with prayer, for this

⁹²⁵ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοί Κανόνες*, 41.

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹²⁷ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 211 (Step 27:84).

⁹²⁸ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 185.

⁹²⁹ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοί Κανόνες*, 477–78.

destroys the confusion that comes from without, provides material for mental prayer, and concentrates the mind.”⁹³⁰ Likewise, St. Basil the Great wrote: “The study of inspired Scripture is the chief way of finding our duty.... Prayers, too, after reading, find the soul fresher and more vigorously stirred by love towards God.”⁹³¹ Similarly, St. John of Sinai said: “Reading enlightens the mind considerably, and helps it concentrate.”⁹³² St. Ignatius Brianchaninov said: “The chief occupation of a novice in his cell should be the reading and study of the Gospel and of the whole New Testament.”⁹³³ He even advised monks: “Never cease studying the Gospel till the end of your life. Do not think you know it enough, even if you know it by heart.”⁹³⁴ St. John Chrysostom said: “It is not possible for anyone to be saved without continually taking advantage of spiritual reading.... The ignorance of Scripture is a great cliff and a deep abyss; to know nothing of the divine laws is a great betrayal of salvation.”⁹³⁵

To encourage his monks to read, St. Theodore the Studite had a lending library and a librarian, and he set aside a time in the middle of the day for them to read or take a nap.⁹³⁶ Likewise, most of the early monastic rules of Western Europe allotted a specific time for daily reading. For example, *The Rule of Tarn* orders: “From the sixth hour until the ninth, let them have time for quiet and also for reading.... But in the wintertime once Matins and Prime [i.e., the First Hour] have been finished, all will be allowed to have time for reading until Terce [i.e., the Third Hour].... Those who are in charge of the cultivation of the fields cannot be bound by this regulation on account of the harshness of their work; as their time or work demands, the labor itself will manifest the tasks to be imposed. Let them be governed by the judgment of the prior in such a way that they nonetheless have leisure for two hours of reading.”⁹³⁷

St. Pachomios encouraged his monks to memorize Scripture: “There shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read and does not memorize something of the Scriptures. One should learn by heart at least [!] the New Testament and the Psalter.”⁹³⁸ And his second successor Horsiesios wrote: “Let us be wealthy in texts learned

⁹³⁰ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, Book IV, 158.

⁹³¹ *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, 111 (Letter 2).

⁹³² Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 210.

⁹³³ Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, 21.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15. St. Ignatius explained that with the word “Gospel” he means the whole New Testament (vid. *ibid.*, 21).

⁹³⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine Roth (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 60.

⁹³⁶ Νικολάου, «Ἡ Θεολογία τῆς Κοινοβιακῆς Ζωῆς», 49.

⁹³⁷ *Monastic Studies*, no. 17, 227–28.

⁹³⁸ Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, 166.

by heart. Let him who does not memorize much memorize at least ten sections along with a section of the Psalter.”⁹³⁹ Likewise, St. Gennadius the Patriarch of Constantinople in the 5th century attached such great importance to memorizing Scripture that he would not ordain anyone who did not know the Psalter by heart.⁹⁴⁰

When the successor of St. Paisius Velichkovsky asked a general of the demons, “What is your greatest weapon against the monastics in these our times?” the demon was constrained by the might of God to confess: “Our whole concern at present is to keep monks and nuns away from spiritual occupations, especially prayer and the reading of those smoky books. Why don’t you spend more time taking care of your gardens and vineyards, of your fishing and schools for the young, of your hospitality for all those good people who come here during the summer for the fresh air and pure water? The monastics who busy themselves in such pursuits are caught in our nets like flies in a spider’s web.”⁹⁴¹

Elder Aimilianos recommended in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation*: “Another important occupation of the sisters, apart from poring over and delighting in the Scriptures, shall be the fruitful study of Patristic and theological writings, since they provide the knowledge and conditions necessary for cenobitic behavior and spiritual duties.”⁹⁴² One reason why reading improves cenobitic behavior is because it helps us maintain a philosophical outlook towards life without getting bogged down in trivialities. As St. Nectarios of Aegina wrote to his nuns: “Your life is Christian philosophy. A philosopher is never distressed.... Philosophical thought is the chief characteristic of your [monastic] way of life.”⁹⁴³ Likewise, St. Sophrony of Essex advised his monastics: “You need to be serious in the daily life of our monastery and always keep your spirit in the depths of spiritual matters. With this stance you will avoid all the petty conflicts that make our life—how can I put it—petty, measly.”⁹⁴⁴

The amount of time a monk should read depends on several factors, such as how much free time he has, how much he benefits from reading (as opposed to praying or working or helping someone else), how much he already knows, how much he needs to know, etc. This is why when St. Sophrony of Essex was a young monk (and had already studied theology) his spiritual father advised him: “Read only a few pages—a quarter or half an

⁹³⁹ Ibid., 202.

⁹⁴⁰ See the prolegomena of the Canonical Epistle of St. Gennadius in *The Rudder*. To be sure, part of the reason why these early saints emphasized the memorization of Scripture was because few people in those days possessed their own manuscripts of the Bible.

⁹⁴¹ Metrophanes, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, 261.

⁹⁴² Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 161–62.

⁹⁴³ Strongylis, *St. Nectarios of Pentapolis and the Island of Aegina*, vol. 2, 57–58 (Letter #8).

⁹⁴⁴ Sakharov, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, Τόμος Α΄, 320–21.

hour a day—but with attentiveness, and apply them in your life.”⁹⁴⁵ In the same spirit, St. John of Sinai wrote: “Let what you read lead you to action, for you a doer. Putting these words into practice makes further reading superfluous.”⁹⁴⁶

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain also emphasized the importance of applying what one reads:

Be eager to read ... not merely for the love of learning but also for the sake of ascetic endeavors and discipline, as St. Mark [the Ascetic] wrote: “Understand the words of Holy Scripture by putting them into practice, and do not fill yourself with conceit by speaking at length on theoretical ideas.”⁹⁴⁷ Another Father said: “He who loves knowledge must also love discipline, for mere knowledge does not light a lamp.”⁹⁴⁸ You will acquire this light if you contemplate on the ordinances found in Scripture and ponder that they were written to correct you and not the others, as again St. Mark said: “The humble person who has a spiritual life reads the Holy Scripture and understands everything to refer to him and not to others.”^{949,950}

Elder Aimilianos taught that the amount of time spent reading depends on the intensity of one’s prayer:

The more time passes, the more prayer increases and reading decreases. We read as much as is necessary to have excellent and perfect prayer. But there is another reason for reading. One might be able to say that he can pray all night and doesn’t need to read. This is not right because he can become isolated in his prayer, grow callous within himself, fall into haughtiness, and slip away from the path of the Fathers. He must continually be fed with the word of God, either through the mouth of the prophets and Apostles, or through the mouth of the great preachers—the great Church Fathers. If he is not being fed, his prayer runs the risk of becoming barren. This is why the saint [i.e., the Gallic author of *The Rule of Macarius*] especially emphasized reading.

The saint wanted monks to be a complete man, not just someone who prays. When you are on fire and illumined by the Holy Spirit, and your nous and heart penetrate the heavenly world, and you enter Paradise while still in this life, and mysteries are revealed to you; when you see the cherubim and the seraphim and perceive what the All-holy Trinity means and how the saints and the angels are, then you can stop reading. You no longer need the light of books.⁹⁵¹

⁹⁴⁵ Sakharov, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, Τόμος Β', 24.

⁹⁴⁶ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 210.

⁹⁴⁷ cf. Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 116.

⁹⁴⁸ Hesychios the Presbyter, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 80; see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 176.

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁹⁵⁰ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 215–16; see also Chamberas, *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 190.

⁹⁵¹ Γέροντος Αἰμιλιανοῦ, *Νηπτική Ζωή καὶ Ἀσκητικοὶ Κανόνες*, 378–79.

The following is a list of some of the most beneficial books (in our opinion) that should be read by monastics in addition to the Bible:

Monastic Classics:

The Life of Saint Anthony
The Ladder
Abba Dorotheos of Gaza
The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (i.e., the *Gerontikon*)
The Evergetinos
The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian

Writings of the Holy Fathers:

Saint Basil the Great (especially his *Long* and *Shorter Rules*)
 Saint John Chrysostom
 Saint John Cassian
The Philokalia

Lives of Monastic Saints:

Saint Seraphim of Sarov
Saint Paisius Velichkovsky
 Elders of Optina

Books about Recent Saints:

Saint Nectarios of Aegina
Saint Silouan the Athonite
Saint John Maximovitch

Teachings of our Elders:

Monastic Wisdom
My Elder Joseph the Hesychast
Counsels from the Holy Mountain
The Art of Prayer and the unpublished homilies of Elder Ephraim at Philotheou

Books by or about Contemporary Elders:

Saint Paisios the Athonite
 Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia
 Saint Ephraim of Katounakia, etc.

Other Books:

The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos
The Synaxaristes (Lives of the Saints for every day of the year)
The Way of a Pilgrim
The Explanation of the New Testament by Blessed Theophylact

Since many monastics find reading a book more pleasant than doing work, a common temptation for them is to let others work while they read. St. Isidore of Seville warns such monks: “If anyone wants time for reading so as not to work, they are in opposition to the

same reading because they do not do what they read there. For it is written, ‘Let those who work eat their own bread’ (2 Thes. 3:12).”⁹⁵²

St. Eustathios of Thessalonica believed that reading also secular books helps monks:

The monastic life is the art of arts and science of sciences and is the standard of philosophy, since he who lives alone, trusting in God and looking to Him, is a true philosopher. But how can one philosophize if he neither has the “salt”⁹⁵³ of an education nor has experienced the illumination of spiritual praxis? The most important thing of all for a monk is to be close to God, as this is his calling, and this is why he must be a learned man (*σχολαστικός*). If he is close to Him, then he beholds Him, as it is written: “Study (*σχολάσατε*) and know God.”⁹⁵⁴ But how can someone know God if both his eyes are incapacitated? It is understood that one eye symbolizes practice and the other theory, and the distance separating them is as small as the width of a hair. This is because perfect theory goes hand in hand with the practical application of virtue, and practice without theory is blind. A theoretical understanding of many things is acquired through books, in which there are sacred doctrines and analyses of difficult scriptural passages and sacred narratives. These books are instructive representations of divine facts, and they are lights that lead to good deeds, exemplify good behavior, and exhort to do what is correct.

As for me, I would prefer that monks make anthologies also of secular writings, opinions, and sayings. The most holy Fathers in the old days selected these things and made honey, storing them up in those sweet books of theirs, in which they put words sweeter than honey and honeycomb, and pleased God by working in this manner. I myself would love to have such monks here. But instead, the monks here scorn non-Christian books as well as Christian books, especially the books that delve deeper into God and divine matters. I hope they acquire some prudence and stop behaving foolishly like this.⁹⁵⁵ ...

You peasant monk, what will you do if some serious controversial ecclesiastical matter arises, and the people of the Church need to fight for the truth? You and those around you are members of the Church and not just ordinary members. What will you do then? How will you speak, since you have in a sense pulled out your tongue and cut it off along with your lips? In other words, you lack the suitable theological education by which complex issues are primarily solved and corrected. What use will your knowledge of material matters be then? You squander countless hours on them and have abandoned studying books and reading things that lead you to lofty matters that help us approach God. Not only do you not strive for such a good thing, but you even attack those who do. The only three things you boast doing are venerating in church, going to your cell, and going to the refectory. You don’t understand that these things are insufficient to bring a true monk to perfection. What he needs more than anything else is knowledge. And I am speaking not only of theological knowledge but also of knowledge which proceeds from various and different fields of learning (as I have already said), by which one becomes useful to whomever one meets.

⁹⁵² *Monastic Studies*, no. 18, 12–13.

⁹⁵³ Vid. Col. 4:6: “Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt.”

⁹⁵⁴ Cf. Ps. 45:10. Most saints have understood this psalm verse to mean: “**Be still** (*σχολάσατε*) and know that I am God.” But the verb *σχολάζω* can mean either “to study” or “to be still,” depending on the context.

⁹⁵⁵ PG 135:848C–849A.

Besides, how did those great saints become wise? Was it perhaps by roaming through villages and cities, examining the roads and alleys, wasting their time with sockets and blocks? Or was it by isolating themselves and occupying themselves with all kinds of reading?⁹⁵⁶

Likewise, St. Basil the Great also perceived the benefit of being proficient in worldly knowledge. He wrote: “Since many people in their zeal for these [worldly studies] have neglected knowledge about God and have grown old in their vain search, an understanding of learning is necessary to enable one not only to choose learning that is beneficial but also to avoid the learning that is foolish and harmful.”⁹⁵⁷

St. Nectarios of Aegina explained that although St. Basil objected to monks abandoning their monastic life in order to pursue worldly studies, St. Nectarios felt that it is not improper for monks to study something practical in their spare time. He wrote:

The spirit of what I wrote [to Sister Akakia] was in accordance with what St. Basil the Great had expressed. He said that after joining monasticism it is satanic to turn away from it in order to pursue a worldly education, since such a person leaves the divine wisdom from heaven, abandons the knowledge coming from revelation, and seeks to know human wisdom. In my opinion, he is speaking about those who lose the desire for heavenly wisdom and abandon their philosophical life in the monastery in order to be taught human wisdom, which distances them from God and cools their love for the Lord. However, I do not believe that learning a little grammar [of Koine Greek] in a practical manner for correctly reading and writing and understanding the texts of Scripture is contrary to the spirit of monasticism, since it does not require leaving the monastery, nor does it make a person abandon monastic life and divine eros, but during one’s spare time one merely learns in a practical and methodical way the forms and rules of grammar.”⁹⁵⁸

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain also perceived the benefit of much learning. He wrote:

The wise Isocrates said: “If you love to learn you will become very knowledgeable; what you have learned keep by constant study, and whatever you have not yet learned, seek to do so through the sciences. In this manner, you will learn quickly what others have discovered with difficulty.”⁹⁵⁹ Another wise man said: “The award of victory is given to those who run the race, whereas primacy in understanding is given to those who are disciplined. Ignorance, as a harsh illness, is followed by many sins, while education, as a pleasant field, produces all good things.”⁹⁶⁰ Indeed, “there is no substitute for a cultivated soul.”⁹⁶¹ “A multitude of wise men is the salvation of the

⁹⁵⁶ PG 135:849D–852B.

⁹⁵⁷ PG 31:397BC (Homily 12 on Proverbs 1:6).

⁹⁵⁸ Strongylis, *St. Nectarios of Pentapolis and the Island of Aegina*, vol. 2, 157 (Letter #79); *Άγιος Νεκτάριος Πενταπόλεως, Κατηχητικαὶ Ἐπιστολαί*, Ἐπιστολή 79.

⁹⁵⁹ Ἴσοκράτους, *Πρὸς Δημόνικον* 18.

⁹⁶⁰ From the life of St. Cyril Phileotes.

⁹⁶¹ Sir. 21:17.

world, and a sensible king (and a bishop) is the stability of his people.”⁹⁶² It is indisputable that the love of learning and constant reading produces well-educated people even out of those who were unlearned.⁹⁶³

At first glance, one might think that St. Gregory Palamas completely disagreed with what St. Eustathios wrote on the previous page, since St. Gregory wrote: “We do not forbid anyone to initiate himself in worldly education if he wishes, at least if he has not adopted the monastic life. But we would not advise anyone to devote himself to this unendingly, and we absolutely forbid them to expect any accurate knowledge of divine things from it, since it is not possible to extract any teaching about God from such an education.”⁹⁶⁴

However, a closer look at St. Gregory’s stance reveals that his primary objection was regarding those who, because of their failure to differentiate between worldly and divine wisdom, presumed that a worldly education by itself could lead to salvation and the knowledge of God.⁹⁶⁵ He perceived a potential benefit from secular writings, for he wrote: “Worldly education serves natural knowledge. It can never become spiritual unless it is allied to faith and love of God, and it can never become spiritual unless it has been regenerated not only by love, but also by the grace which comes from love.”⁹⁶⁶ In other words, he is saying that a worldly education *can* be spiritually beneficial by God’s grace if the person has faith and love of God. And St. Gregory also taught: “There is something of benefit to be had even from the profane philosophers.”⁹⁶⁷

This is why, according to St. Athanasios Parios: “In his youth, St. Gregory Palamas devoted himself to the study and acquisition of external (secular) philosophy. For it was proper for his noble nature to be equipped with the instruments provided by philosophy.... Then he became proficient in physics and logic, and in other subjects on which Aristotle had written.”⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁶² Wis. 6:24.

⁹⁶³ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 223; see also Chamberas, *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 194.

⁹⁶⁴ Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts: Book 1*, trans. Robin Amis (Hermitage: Praxis Press, 2002), 44.

⁹⁶⁵ St. Gregory Palamas “pointed out that knowledge by itself has not benefitted anyone, because it is incapable of securing man’s purification, spiritual perfection, or knowledge of God. Therefore, St. Gregory emphasized that secular wisdom is not only unnecessary for man’s salvation and perfection, but it can even become destructive if it is changed from a preparatory occupation to an end in itself” (Γεωργίου Π. Θεοδωρούδη, *Θεία καὶ Ἀνθρώπινη Σοφία κατὰ τὴν Πατερικὴν Παράδοσιν τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, [Θεσσαλονίκη: Κυρομάνος, 1998], 170.).

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹⁶⁷ See footnote #2423 on page 456 for the entire quotation.

⁹⁶⁸ Constantine Cavarnos, *Saint Athanasios Parios* (Boston: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 2006), 82.

6) Behavior in Church

St. Symeon the New Theologian taught how one should behave in church:

Let it be noted that he who has already outwardly laid aside the earthly man with his attitude of mind, and by assuming the monastic habit clothed himself with the heavenly man, must rise at midnight before Orthros and recite the prescribed prayer. After so doing he must rise with all to go to the service of praise, and with attention and vigilance go through the whole service. He must pay particular attention to the beginning of the hymnody, that is, the six psalms, the psalm verses, and the lections [from the *Synaxarion*], with great concentration, without relaxation of body or putting one foot in front of another or leaning on walls or pillars, but holding his hands securely together, the feet equally being on the ground, and the head immobile without nodding here and there. The mind must not wander off, nor the thoughts be occupied with curiosity or interest in the more careless brethren as they talk or whisper to each other. On the contrary, the eye and the soul must be kept free from distraction and pay attention to nothing else but the psalmody and the reading and, as far as possible, to the meaning of the words of the divine Scripture that are being sung or read, so that not one of these words may pass in vain, but rather that his soul may derive nourishment from all of them and attain to compunction and humility and the divine illumination of the Holy Ghost.⁹⁶⁹

Go off with all the rest to the Office and stand in the temple as though you were in the company of angels in heaven, with trembling because you regard yourself unworthy even to stand there with your brethren. As you stand pay heed to yourself so that you do not look around you with curiosity at the brethren, how each of them stands or how he sings, but pay attention to yourself alone, to the psalmody, and to your sins. Remember also the prayer that you offered in your cell; do not at all carry on any conversation or speak any idle word to anyone during Office, nor depart from thence before the final prayer. If you are able, do not sit down even for the reading, but withdraw to a hidden spot and listen standing. Listen as though it were God Himself speaking to you through the reader, God Who “is above all” (Rom. 9:5). But if you yourself are told to read the lessons, do so with the attitude that you are unworthy that your mouth should read the divinely inspired Scriptures to the brethren.⁹⁷⁰

Many other Church Fathers also emphasized the importance of paying attention to the meaning of liturgical texts. For example, St. John Cassian wrote about the monks of fourth-century Egypt: “For it is not a multitude of verses but rather the understanding of the mind that pleases them, and this they pursue with all their strength: ‘I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the understanding as well’ (1 Cor. 14:15). Hence they consider it better to sing ten verses with a modicum of comprehension than to pour out the whole psalm with a distracted mind.”⁹⁷¹ Blessed Augustine said (and was quoted by St. Caesarius of Arles):

⁹⁶⁹ C.J. de Catanzaro, *Symeon the New Theologian: Discourses*, 274–75.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁹⁷¹ Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes*, 44 (ii. 11.1).

2) Work

Countless monastic fathers of the Church emphasized the value of manual labor because it leads to humility and salvation, and it enables a monk to support himself and even give alms.

St. Athanasios the Great wrote about the monks of Egypt: “Each one of them procures so much profit for the monastery every day from their own work and sweat that it is sufficient not only for their own needs but also for serving the guests and providing for the poor.”¹⁴⁶⁰ St. Basil the Great saw the same benefit in work: “We must toil with diligence and not think that our goal of piety offers an escape from work or a pretext for idleness, but occasion for struggle, for every greater endeavor.... Not only is such exertion beneficial for bringing the body into subjection, but also for showing charity to our neighbor in order that through us God may grant sufficiency to those of the brethren who are in want.”¹⁴⁶¹ It was this understanding of work that led Abba Achillas to say: “Since yesterday evening up to this time, I have been plaiting rope at full pace, though, in fact, I do not need to do so much work. However, I am working thus, lest God find it necessary to chastise me, saying, ‘Why, despite the fact that you are able, do you not work?’ Therefore, I labor with all my strength.”¹⁴⁶²

St. Eftymios the Great also saw the importance of working productively:

In addition to keeping watch on the thoughts within, monks, especially young ones, ought to practise bodily labor, remembering the words of the Apostle, “We labor day and night so as not to be a burden on anyone” (1 Thes. 2:9), and “These hands ministered to me and to those with me” (Acts 20:34). While those in the world endure labor and hardship in order to support wives and children from their work, pay the first-fruits to God, do good according to their power and in addition be charged taxes, it is absurd if we are not even to meet the needs of the body from manual labor but to stay idle and immobile, reaping the fruit of the toil of others, especially when the Apostle orders the idle not even to eat (vid. 2 Thes. 3:10).¹⁴⁶³

The Rule of Paul and Stephen understood work as a way to avoid passionate thoughts while also helping the needy:

[The Apostle Paul] said of himself that he labored with his own hands in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, by day and by night so that neither he nor those with him might lack anything necessary. On the other hand, since we have a second set of clothes and shoes for our own use and a provision of food daily from the gifts of God that is more than enough, we exhort you not to love idleness. Rather each of you should work together and, as you are able, with sincerity and single-heartedness....

¹⁴⁶⁰ “Letter to Castor,” PG 28:856D.

¹⁴⁶¹ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 306 (Question 37 in the Long Rules).

¹⁴⁶² Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, Book II, 48.

¹⁴⁶³ Cyril of Scythopolis, *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 13.

The monk who does not keep his body busy can never keep his mind free from sordid thoughts, as Solomon says: “The lazy are beset by their passions” (cf. Prov. 13:4), and “idleness contrives many wicked things” (Sir. 33:29). Let those who have been lazy up to now shed this vice, and let them promptly take up every work, for it is written: “Do not hate hard work or farm work which was created by the Most High” (Sir. 7:15). Then, by the Lord’s gift and our own work, we can find for ourselves an abundance of goods that we need each day, and we can respond in reasonable and moderate ways to those whom spiritual love invites us to visit. Through our due service, we can help those in grave need by our own labor, for it is certain that the Lord our Redeemer has commanded that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).¹⁴⁶⁴

The holy Fathers believed that toil is inherent to monasticism. “One of the Fathers asked Abba John the Dwarf, ‘What is a monk?’ He said, ‘He is toil. The monk toils at all he does. That is what a monk is.’”¹⁴⁶⁵ In the same spirit, Abba Isidore the Priest said: “Brethren, haven’t we come here to find toil? But now there is no more toil here. So I am going to take my sack and go where there is toil, and there I will be at rest.”¹⁴⁶⁶

With the same understanding of toil being characteristic of true monks, St. Benedict wrote in his rule: “If, however, the needs of the place, or poverty should require that they do the work of gathering the harvest themselves, let them not be downcast, for then are they monks in truth, if they live by the work of their hands, as did also our forefathers and the Apostles. However, on account of the faint-hearted let all things be done with moderation.”¹⁴⁶⁷ He also said: “No person is ever more usefully employed than when working with his hands or following the plough, providing food for the use of man.”¹⁴⁶⁸ As written in the Wisdom of Sirach: “Life will be sweet for the self-reliant and the hardworking.”¹⁴⁶⁹

Several saints taught that we will receive a future reward from God for our work. For example, St. Pachomios taught his monks: “About him who watches over the grinding or the milling. Let them apply themselves to the work they are doing, in the fear of God and without any relaxation, knowing that no good deed that man does for God shall be lost. On the contrary, our good deeds will be a relief to us all on the day of the great judgement.”¹⁴⁷⁰ Likewise, St. Ephraim the Syrian wrote: “This is no shame for you if you are in obedience in the Lord, and do with your own hands what is good; for this distress and this affliction,

¹⁴⁶⁴ Barry Hagan, “The Rule of Paul and Stephen,” ch. 33–34.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 93.

¹⁴⁶⁶ As quoted in Ἱεροθέου, *Ὁ Ὀρθόδοξος Μοναχισμός: Ἐκκοσμίκευση ἢ Αναδρομὴ πρὸς τὸ Ἀρχαῖον Κάλλος*, 102.

¹⁴⁶⁷ *Rule of St. Benedict*, Chapter XLVIII.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Alfred Wesley Wishart, *A Short History of Monks and Monasteries* (New Jersey: Albert Brandt, 1902), 403.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Sir. 40:18.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, 212.

which you endure for the Lord's sake, will become for you a cause of eternal life."¹⁴⁷¹ St. Basil the Great said: "An ascetic should undertake even the most menial tasks with great zeal and eagerness, knowing that everything done for God is not small but great and spiritual and worthy of heaven, yielding heavenly rewards."¹⁴⁷² Aware of these rewards, St. Joseph the Hesychast "worked very much and would only stop at the times allowed by our schedule. He told me [i.e., Elder Ephraim], 'When a monk comes to realize that he is working for God, he becomes very eager.'"¹⁴⁷³

Some of the early Desert Fathers worked not for the sake of producing something but purely for spiritual benefit. For example:

Abba Paul, one of the most upright of the fathers ... lived in the vast desert ... and could not do any other work to support himself because his dwelling was separated from towns and from habitable land by a seven days' journey.... He used to collect palm fronds and always exact a day's labor from himself just as if this were his means of support. And when his cave was filled with a whole year's work, he would burn up what he had so carefully toiled over each year, to that extent proving that without manual labor a monk can neither stay in one spot nor ever mount to the summit of perfection. And so, although the obligation of earning a livelihood did not demand this course of action, he did it just for the sake of purging his heart, firming his thoughts, persevering in his cell, and conquering and driving out *acedia* [i.e., listlessness].¹⁴⁷⁴

St. Anthony the Great was taught by an angel to alternate work and prayer in order to avoid listlessness:

Once when the holy Abba Antony was residing in the desert, overcome by *accidie* [i.e., listlessness] and a great darkening of *logismoi* [thoughts], he was saying to God, "Lord, I want to be saved and my *logismoi* do not leave me alone. What am I to do in my affliction? How am I to be saved?" Going outside his cell a little way, Antony saw somebody like himself, sitting working—then standing up from his work and praying; sitting down again, working at rope-braiding, then standing to pray once more. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct Antony and to assure him. And he heard the angel saying: "Act like this and you shall be saved." He experienced much joy and courage on hearing this and, acting in that way, he went on being saved.¹⁴⁷⁵

St. John Cassian also understood how work safeguards monks from temptations. He wrote: "There is a saying among the ancient Fathers of Egypt that a monk who is working is tempted by one demon, while an idle one is attacked by a numberless multitude of

¹⁴⁷¹ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, Book I, 223.

¹⁴⁷² *Δσκητικά Διατάξεις*, κεφ. κγ', ΕΠΕ, Τόμος 9, 518–20.

¹⁴⁷³ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 355. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 435.

¹⁴⁷⁴ *St. John Cassian: Institutes*, 233 (x. 24).

¹⁴⁷⁵ Wortley, *The Alphabetical Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 31 (Antony 1).

demons.”¹⁴⁷⁶ He also said: “It is hardly possible to determine what depends on what here—that is, whether they practice manual labor ceaselessly thanks to their spiritual meditation or whether they acquire such remarkable progress in the Spirit and such luminous knowledge thanks to their constant labor.”¹⁴⁷⁷

One of the Desert Fathers taught: “The path that leads to humility is that of bodily labors that beget understanding.”¹⁴⁷⁸ Commenting on this, Abba Dorotheos asked:

What relationship does bodily labor have with the disposition of the soul? I will explain this to you: When the soul fell away from the keeping of the commandments of God to disobedience, it gave itself over ... to love of pleasure ... having to come to love the things of the body.... From then on, therefore, this wretched soul has suffered together with the body and conforms with all that it does. This is why the Elder said that bodily labor leads to lowliness of mind.... Labor, therefore, humbles the soul. And when the body is humbled, the soul is humbled with it.¹⁴⁷⁹

Likewise, Elder Aimilianos explained in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation* that manual labor “is a commandment of God, an instrument of humility and of bonding between the sisters and a way of contributing to society itself.... [But] work aimed exclusively at increasing wealth or at expending the strength of a nun is a deviation from the monastic way.”¹⁴⁸⁰

In the tradition of cenobitic monasteries, each monk is assigned his own *diakonema*.¹⁴⁸¹ In some monasteries, the monks rotated *diakonemata* on a regular basis, while in others a monk would keep the same *diakonema* for years. For example, St. John Cassian described how monasteries in the Holy Land had a different monk to cook each week, whereas in Egypt a monk was appointed to be the cook permanently:

But among the Egyptians ... there is no weekly taking of turns, lest as a result of this activity anyone be hindered from obligatory work. Instead, the responsibility for provisions and for cooking is committed to a very trustworthy brother, who continues to carry out this task with regularity so long as his strength and his age permit. For he is not worn out with any great bodily labor inasmuch as they do not devote much care to preparing and cooking their food, since they mostly make use of dry and uncooked

¹⁴⁷⁶ *St. John Cassian: Institutes*, 233 (x. 23).

¹⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 46 (ii. 14).

¹⁴⁷⁸ Metropolitan Chrysostomos, *Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza*, 64.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

¹⁴⁸⁰ “Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation Ormylia, Halkidiki” in Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 161, 177.

¹⁴⁸¹ A *diakonema* (διακόνημα in Greek, plural *diakonemata*) is the task assigned to a monk. The Russian word for this is послушание, which is the same word used in Russian also for “obedience,” i.e., the act of obeying. Because of this, many monastic texts translated from Russian into English call the task assigned to a monk his “obedience.” But since which of the two meanings of the word “obedience” is not always clear from the context, we prefer to use the transliterated word *diakonema*.

food, and the leaves of leeks that are cut every month, charlock, granulated salt, olives, and tiny salted fish, which they call maenomenia, are their highest pleasure.¹⁴⁸²

St. Sophrony of Essex pointed out the danger of a *diakonema* being monopolized by only one monk: “For every task, for every *diakonema*, we must have two people completely capable of doing them, so that one may replace the other in the event that some difficulty arises. Otherwise, the monastery’s entire life will depend on the ‘eccentricities’ of whom-ever, and everything will be stuck.”¹⁴⁸³

St. Sophrony of Essex reminded his monastics to incorporate love into their work:

Begin with a desire to serve others with love, as [Saint] Silouan did, who, when they asked him, served hundreds and thousands of monks in the refectory. He was very happy that Christ loves these people who are God’s children, and he served them with great love. This person was simple, but his thought was grand and very pleasant. If you maintain this attitude, then all the necessary tasks of daily life—even those that aim to serve those who come to our monastery—can become like a delicious food for you. And at night, due to this attitude in serving, your heart will be very tender, and you will weep before God because of your failings and because of your love.¹⁴⁸⁴

When we work, it is important to maintain our inner peace. As Abba Dorotheos taught:

Whatever should happen, whether of small or great importance, let us not show undue concern about it and let us not give it great regard. Of course, indifference is a bad thing. But neither is it, once more, a good thing for one to become so preoccupied with something that happens that he loses his irenic [i.e., peaceful] disposition, such that the soul is harmed.... Be convinced that every task that you fulfill, great or small, as I earlier said, is but an eighth of what is asked of us. Indeed, to maintain your peace, even if thereby you should fail at your obedience, is four eighths, or half, of what has been asked of you. Do you see the difference?

Therefore, if you undertake some task, and you wish to do it perfectly and fully, take care to do it perfectly, which is, as I said, an eighth of the task; but also take care to keep your internal state unharmed, which is four eighths of the task. If, however, for some reason you drift away from or violate this command, and you or another suffers harm, you have gained nothing, since, in fulfilling your obedience, you are losing four eighths, i.e., your irenic disposition, for the sole purpose of protecting the one eighth, i.e., the completion of your task.... If I should happen to send anyone among you to do any obedience whatever, and you should see any disturbance or harmful thing at all arise, cease immediately....

Should one yet see, at some moment, his neighbor or himself aggrieved, stop, back down, and do not persist to the point that there ensues spiritual harm. For it is better, and I say this a thousand times over, for some work not to come about as you wish and as circumstances demand, than contumaciously [i.e., stubbornly] or according to one’s

¹⁴⁸² Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Institutes*, 89–90.

¹⁴⁸³ Sakharov, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, Τόμος Α΄*, 295.

¹⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

prerogative, since it is obvious that the latter course will upset you and grieve others. You will thus lose the four eighths. And there is a great difference in the harm done.¹⁴⁸⁵

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain was asked if we should take our time and work slowly in order to maintain our calm, and he replied: “Yes, because when we work calmly, we maintain our serenity, and then our whole day is sanctified. . . . Our goal should not be to do many things and be in constant anxiety.”¹⁴⁸⁶ Furthermore, when he was teaching some boys to learn carpentry, “they worked diligently, but also took frequent breaks to read from the Lives of Saints. ‘If we work constantly,’ he explained, ‘we will forget God.’”¹⁴⁸⁷

St. Paisios also taught that one’s inner disposition while working is transmitted to the work:

When monastic handicrafts are made with peace of mind and prayer, they are sanctified and they also sanctify the people who use them. Then it makes sense for lay people to seek these handiworks from us as a blessing. On the contrary, any work made with haste and nervousness transmits this demonic condition to others. Work done with haste and anxiety is the mark of a very secular person. Instead of giving people a blessing, what these troubled souls impart on others with their handiwork is their troubled state. A person’s state affects not only the work that he does, but also the materials, the wood that he is using! The final product of a man’s work reflects his spiritual state. If he is upset and angry and swears, his work will not bring a blessing to others. But if he chants, if he says the Jesus Prayer, his work is sanctified. The first condition is demonic, the other is divine.¹⁴⁸⁸

Likewise, Elder Ephraim said that because his elder St. Joseph while cooking “said the prayer constantly out loud, God’s grace sanctified the food and made it delicious.”¹⁴⁸⁹

Tasks that require little mental concentration are more suitable for monks because they do not hinder prayer. St. Sophrony of Essex wrote to a monk: “If work is done with obedience and without passion, one’s peace of soul is not disturbed but consolidated. And if the *diakonema* is very simple (digging, cutting wood, cooking, etc.) the working of prayer is not hindered even during one’s *diakonema*. This is why genuine monks prefer simple

¹⁴⁸⁵ Metropolitan Chrysostomos, *Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza*, 92–94.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 206–07.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Chamberas, *Saint Paisios the Athonite*, 196.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 207; Γέροντος Παϊσίου Αγιορείτου *Λόγοι Α΄: Μὲ Πόνον καὶ Ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Σύγχρονο Ἄνθρωπο*, Β΄ ἔκδοσις (Σουρωτή, Ἱερὸν Ἡσυχαστήριον «Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος», 1999), 192.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 260. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 370.

work.”¹⁴⁹⁰ For this same reason St. Joseph the Hesychast “did not like making wood carvings with great variety or fancy designs with fine details because the mental concentration needed for such work would captivate the mind and hinder it from turning to God.”¹⁴⁹¹

A nun once asked St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain: “When a task is mental, such as translation, how can one possibly say the Jesus prayer to sanctify the work one is doing?” He replied: “When the task requires mental concentration, your work will be sanctified when your mind is focused on God. Then you will be living in the atmosphere of God, even if you are not able to say the prayer.... Make sure that you take a short break every one or two hours and say the Jesus prayer.”¹⁴⁹²

Another beneficial occupation while working is to chant ecclesiastical music (assuming this would not disturb someone else nearby). *The Rule of Tarn* advised: “Let the plowman holding his plow handle sing ‘alleluia,’ the sweating reaper refresh himself with psalms, and while the vinedresser cuts the curved vine branch, let him sing something from the Psalms of David. Let these be your poems; these, so to speak, your love songs; these, the whistling of the shepherd; these, the tools of agriculture.”¹⁴⁹³ St. Athanasios of Athos wanted his monks to sing psalms in order to avoid idle chitchat: “He did not permit the brethren who were engaged in manual labor ... to accompany their labors with idle chitchat, but he made it an unbreakable rule that they were to sing psalms and not engage in idle conversation, so that their work would be blessed and their souls hallowed.”¹⁴⁹⁴ Since, however, the Jesus prayer is much more beneficial than chanting,¹⁴⁹⁵ we endeavor to spend more time praying than chanting.

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain believed that a monk is helped to mature spiritually when he has the freedom to regulate his own work schedule. When he served at the wood-working shop at the Monastery of Esphigmenou, he

moved about with spiritual freedom in regard to his scheduled work. For example, on a day [prior to] when a vigil was scheduled, he worked many hours without rest. On the day after, however, and for as many days as the spiritual condition that had been generated in him by the vigil lasted, he did not go to the woodworking shop, but instead, did spiritual work in his cell: study, praying using his *komboschoini* [prayer-rope] and prostrations. Thus, there were times that he worked in the woodworking shop for fifteen hours a day and times that he worked spiritually in his cell for three consecutive days.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Αρχιμανδρίτου Σωφρονίου, *Αγώνας Θεογνωσίας: Η Αλληλογραφία τοῦ Γέροντος Σωφρονίου μετὰ τὸν Δ. Μπάλφουρ* (Ἔσσεξ: Ἱερά Πατριαρχική καὶ Σταυροπηγιακή Μονὴ Τιμίου Προδρόμου, 2004), 323.

¹⁴⁹¹ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 357. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 436.

¹⁴⁹² Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 208.

¹⁴⁹³ *Monastic Studies*, no. 17, 227.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Richard P. H. Greenfield and Alice-Mary Talbot, *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, 255.

¹⁴⁹⁵ See footnote #1789 on page 332.

That was the type of spiritual freedom that pervaded the Monastery of Esphigmenou. Each Brother loved the monastery as his home, and also loved his work and his spiritual duties, and in accordance with his spiritual condition, was also able to fully utilise his time in a *philotimo*-filled way....

Having experienced for himself the benefit of that spiritual freedom, he recommended that that same spirit be present in coenobitic monasteries, because, as he used to say, it helps the monk to mature spiritually. “The monk,” he said, “must move about with a type of freedom that does not mean that he will have his own will, but that he will utilise his time such that he completely gives himself over, both to chores and to spiritual duties. For this to happen, however, one must cultivate obedience, *philotimo*, and spiritual nobility. The heart of the monk must be aflame with the spirit of sacrifice; he must love the monastery even more than his home—otherwise, he may fall into the habit of loafing about. In other words, freedom is very good, but if there is no *philotimo*, it can be dangerous.¹⁴⁹⁶

St. Paisios warned of the danger of becoming attached to one’s work:

Give your legs and your hands to work but not your heart. [In other words,] you should not give your heart to material things. Some people give their whole self to material things. They spend the entire day trying to do a job well and don’t think of God at all.... When a task is simple, it helps if the mind is not absorbed by it. But when the task is complex, then it makes sense to become somewhat absorbed mentally, but don’t let that take over the heart.... When you work, you should not forget Christ. Do your work joyfully, but keep your mind and your heart focused on Christ. If you do this, not only you will not get tired, but you will also be able to do your spiritual work.¹⁴⁹⁷

St. Paisios also warned of the dangers of working excessively:

Those who work too hard and are full of worries forget God.... It is advisable for people who wish to live spiritually, especially monastics, to avoid certain pursuits, which obstruct them from their spiritual goal. They should not get involved in endless tasks, for there is never an end to work. If monks or nuns do not learn to do the internal, spiritual work, they will seek to escape in external activities. People who attempt to complete endless tasks will end their lives with all kinds of spiritual imperfections....

Many times, unfortunately, even a monk will be deceived and draw a worldly form of pleasure from his work. It is in man’s nature to do good because his Creator is good. But the monk is striving to transform himself from a human being into an angelic being. This is why when it comes to material things, his work must be limited to the bare necessities, so that he will have time for spiritual work. Then, the joy that he feels will come from the fruit of his spiritual labor; it will be a spiritual joy, abundant nourishment for himself and for everybody else.¹⁴⁹⁸

Much care is needed so as not to expend all our bodily strength on handwork. If we are careless, we won’t be able to carry out our spiritual duties, or, we will do them,

¹⁴⁹⁶ Chamberas, *Saint Paisios the Athonite*, 134–35.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 205–06.

¹⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 210–11.

but without motivation, waiting impatiently for ... [our prayer rule] to come to an end.¹⁴⁹⁹

One holy tradition that helps us not to be too caught up in endless tasks is to rest from work on Sunday. The holy canons state: “Christians must not Judaize and rest on Saturday but must work on this day preferring to rest as Christians on Sunday if able to do so.”¹⁵⁰⁰ Therefore, on Sundays and great feast days of the Church we only do work that is absolutely necessary (e.g., cooking, washing dishes, caring for any plants and animals that require daily attention, etc.). Other tasks that are not time-sensitive (such as construction) are not done on such days, even though it could be justified by the reasoning that it is for the Lord and therefore permissible on the Lord’s day.¹⁵⁰¹ Such a justification is following the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law.

Sundays should not merely be a day of minimal work but should also be a day devoted to spiritual tasks, and thus truly be the Lord’s day. St. Ignatius the God-bearer wrote (to laymen): “Let each one of us take his Sabbath spiritually, by rejoicing in meditation of the law, not in comfort of the body, not in dancing and noises, in which there is no sense.”¹⁵⁰² In the same vein St. Athanasios of Athos wrote to his monks: “It should be noted that we must not spend the days on which we are free from manual labor in idleness and laughter, but rather in prayer and reading, so that on feasts such as these we may receive enlightenment of soul and spiritual grace, and not condemnation.”¹⁵⁰³

3) Hardship

Enduring hardships is such an essential aspect of monasticism that it has been included in the catechism of receiving the monastic schema as follows:

If, therefore, you have chosen to follow Him in truth, and if you ardently desire to be called, not falsely, His disciple, be prepared from this present time, not for comfort, nor for freedom from care, nor for physical nourishment, nor for any of the pleasing and sweet things upon earth, but for spiritual struggles, for abstinence of flesh, for purity of soul, for spiritual and bodily poverty, for sincere mourning, for all the sorrowful and painful things of the joy-giving life in God. For you must be hungry, and thirst, and endure nakedness, and accept reproach and ridicule, insult and persecution, and lay up many other grievous things, by which life in God is distinguished.¹⁵⁰⁴

¹⁴⁹⁹ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 125.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 564 (Canon XXIX of the Synod in Laodicea).

¹⁵⁰¹ The word for Sunday in Greek is *Κυριακή*, which literally means “the Lord’s [day].”

¹⁵⁰² Pseudo-Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians 9*, ANF I, 62–63.

¹⁵⁰³ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 228.

¹⁵⁰⁴ *The Great Book of Needs*, vol. 1, 365. The full text of the catechism is found below on page 397.

St. Basil the Great warned against living a soft life:

“I chastise my body and bring it into subjection”¹⁵⁰⁵ lest at any time, because my blood is in good condition and overheated, my corpulence may become an occasion of sin. Do not flatter your flesh with sleep and baths and soft coverings, but say always these words: “What profit is there in my blood, whilst I go down to corruption?”¹⁵⁰⁶ Why do you treat with honor that which a little later shall perish? Why do you fatten and cover yourself with flesh? Or, do you not know that the more massive you make your flesh, the deeper is the prison you are preparing for your soul?”¹⁵⁰⁷

In the same spirit, St. Eustathios of Thessalonica wrote to a monk: “You have selected the rough life. Why are you now following the easy way which is dangerous and will likely lead to defeat? You have already chosen the harsh life. Therefore you should avoid delicate living.”¹⁵⁰⁸ St. Isaac the Syrian explained: “The path of God is a daily cross. No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease.”¹⁵⁰⁹ He also said: “Afflictions suffered for the Lord’s sake are more precious to Him than every vow and sacrifice; and the odor of their sweat surpasses every fragrance and choice incense. Regard every virtue performed without bodily toil as premature, stillborn fruit of the womb.”¹⁵¹⁰ Elsewhere he wrote: “Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul, and they can injure her more than the demons. The demons are unable to act where the soul resides in light, that is, in the laudable labors of virtue.”¹⁵¹¹

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain agreed:

The easy life does not help. Comfort is not appropriate for a monk; it’s a disgrace for those living in the wilderness. Perhaps you were raised spoiled, but now, if you are in good health, you must get used to hardship. Otherwise you are not a true monk... Deprivation helps a lot. When people are deprived of something, they come to appreciate it more. When we deprive ourselves voluntarily, with discernment and humility for Christ’s love, we feel spiritual joy... Today most people are not deprived of anything and for this reason they lack *philotimo*. If one has not worked hard, he cannot appreciate the hard work of others.¹⁵¹²

Elder Aimilianos also noted the spiritual value of deprivation: “Only a person in deprivation while being content with what he has can love God and have a spiritual life.... [St.

¹⁵⁰⁵ 1 Cor. 9:27.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Ps. 29:8.

¹⁵⁰⁷ *Saint Basil: Exegetical Homilies*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 223 (Homily 14 on Psalm 29).

¹⁵⁰⁸ PG 135:904A.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 430 (Homily 59).

¹⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 177 (Homily 6).

¹⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 371 (Homily 48).

¹⁵¹² Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 166, 161, 162; Γέροντος Παϊσίου, *Μὲ Πόνον καὶ Ἀγάπην γιὰ τὸν Σύγχρονο Ἄνθρωπο*, 156.

Paul said:] ‘I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am ... and to be in want.’¹⁵¹³ He who has learned how to be in want is happy. He who desires to have everything—just in case he catches a cold or is in pain or gets a little wet or tired—is incompetent for survival. But the more you learn to bear suffering, the more you become a suitable instrument of God’s grace.”¹⁵¹⁴

St. Gregory of Sinai explained in more detail the importance of toil:

Here we should set forth the toils and hardships of the ascetic life and explain clearly how we should embark on each task, lest someone who coasts along without exerting himself, merely relying on what he has heard, and who consequently remains barren, should blame us or others, alleging that things are not as we have said. For it is through travail of heart and bodily toil that the work can properly be carried out. Through them the grace of the Holy Spirit is revealed. This is the grace that we and all the faithful are given at baptism but which through neglect of the commandments has been stifled by the passions. . . . No activity, whether bodily or spiritual, unaccompanied by toil and hardship bears fruit; “for the kingdom of heaven is entered forcibly,” says the Lord, “and those who force themselves take possession of it” (Mt. 11: 12), where “forcibly” and “force” relate to the body’s awareness of exertion in all things.

Many people for many years may have been working spiritually without exerting themselves, or may still be working in this way; but because they do not assiduously embrace hardships with heartfelt fervor and have repudiated the severity of bodily toil, they remain devoid of purity, without a share in the Holy Spirit. Those who work spiritually, but do so carelessly and lazily, may think that they are making considerable efforts, but they will never reap any harvest because they have not exerted themselves and basically have never experienced any real tribulation. A witness to this is he who says, “However exalted our way of life may be, it is worthless and bogus if our heart does not suffer.”¹⁵¹⁵ Sometimes when we fail to exert ourselves we are in our listlessness carried away by spurious forms of distraction and plunged into darkness, thinking we can find rest in them when that is impossible. The truth is that we are then bound invisibly by unloosable cords and become inert and ineffective in everything we do, for we grow increasingly sluggish, especially if we are beginners. For those who have reached the stage of perfection everything is profitable in moderation. The great Ephraim also testifies to this when he says, “Persistently suffer hardships in order to avoid the hardship of vain sufferings.” For unless, to use the prophet’s phrase, our loins are exhausted by the weakness induced through the exertions of fasting, and unless like a woman in childbirth we are afflicted with pains arising from the constriction of our heart, we will not conceive the Spirit of salvation in the earth of our heart.¹⁵¹⁶ Instead, all we will have to boast about is the many profitless years we have spent in

¹⁵¹³ Phil. 4:11–12.

¹⁵¹⁴ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Άσκητικοί Κανόνες*, 329, 260.

¹⁵¹⁵ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σιναΐτου, *Κλίμαξ* PG 88:816A. See also Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 79 (step 7:64).

¹⁵¹⁶ Cf. Is. 21:3; 26:18.

the wilderness, lazily cultivating stillness and imagining that we are somebody. At the moment of our death we will all know for certain what its fruit was.¹⁵¹⁷

A text attributed to St. Athanasios the Great emphasized the need for tremendous labors: “The saints despised this world, knowing what good things they were about to inherit. Thus, he who has rest in this world should not hope to receive the eternal rest, for the kingdom of heaven does not belong to those who rest here but to those who seek that life in great affliction and anguish. For they who have received the kingdom have not received it free but with tremendous labors and copious sweat.”¹⁵¹⁸

Archimandrite Zacharias of Essex explained why monastics need hardship: “The Lord said that we enter the kingdom through the ‘strait gate,’ through the ‘narrow way.’¹⁵¹⁹ Monasticism tries to create this ‘narrow way’ for us to go through, and to leave behind the ‘old skin,’ like the snake. The snake goes through a narrow hole in order to leave behind its old skin, and it comes out with a new one. Monasticism tries to organize life in a way that will give the monk opportunities to endure certain hardships, so that he may thereby leave behind the ‘old skin.’”¹⁵²⁰

Even the non-Orthodox have observed that hardships and suffering in general are what forge character. As Edwin Chapin put it: “Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.”¹⁵²¹ Aeschylus wrote: “Wisdom comes alone through suffering.”¹⁵²² Henry Ward Beecher said: “We are never ripe till we have been made so by suffering”¹⁵²³ And Louis E. Bisch observed: “Suffering is a cleansing fire that chars away triviality and restlessness.”¹⁵²⁴

The underlying principle is that moderate challenges are what strengthen us. In the realm of physical strength, bodybuilders select weights that are neither trivially light nor impossibly heavy to lift. Likewise, in the realm of mental strength, educators present to pupils concepts and problems that are neither obviously self-evident nor completely unfathomable. So, too, in the spiritual realm, we who want to increase our spiritual strength

¹⁵¹⁷ Γρηγορίου τοῦ Σιναΐτου, «Περὶ ἡσυχίας καὶ περὶ τῶν δύο τρόπων τῆς προσευχῆς» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, τόμος δ' (1991), 78–79 (κεφ. ιδ'); see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, 272–74 (ch. 14).

¹⁵¹⁸ *Pseudo-Athanasius on Virginity*, Corpus scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 593 (2002).

¹⁵¹⁹ Mt. 7:14.

¹⁵²⁰ Zacharias, *The Enlargement of the Heart*, 243.

¹⁵²¹ Josiah Hotchkiss Gilbert, *Dictionary of Burning Words of Brilliant Writers* (New York: Wilbur B. Ketcham, 1895), 567.

¹⁵²² David R. Slavitt, *Aeschylus*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), x.

¹⁵²³ Stanley Irving Stuber, Thomas Curtis, *Treasury of the Christian Faith: An Encyclopedic Handbook of the Range and Witness of Christianity* (New York: Clark Association Press, 1949), 707.

¹⁵²⁴ Andy Zubko, *Treasury Of Spiritual Wisdom A Collection Of 10,000 Powerful Quotations For Transforming Your Life* (San Diego: Blue Dove Press, 2003), 456.

will benefit by facing challenges and temptations that are neither trivial nor overpowering in magnitude. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “With a small affliction Thou didst instruct us.”¹⁵²⁵

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain pointed out that toil strengthens both our body and soul, whereas modern conveniences do the opposite:

In the past, people worked with tools that made them stronger. Nowadays, the tools that we use at work make us need physiotherapy and massages.... When conveniences become excessive, man is rendered useless and lazy. Even though we can turn something by hand, we think to ourselves, “No, I’ll just press a button and it will turn by itself.” When someone gets used to doing things the easy way, he wants to have it easy all the time.... Modern comforts have stupefied people, and the sloth we see in so many today has brought on many diseases.¹⁵²⁶ In the past, it would take so much work just to thresh the wheat! The labour was hard but then the bread was so sweet!¹⁵²⁷

Because modern conveniences have exceeded all bounds, they have become inconveniences. Machines have multiplied and so have distractions; man has been turned into a machine.... All of these modern comforts make the cultivation of conscience in people difficult. In the old days, people used to work with animals and were more compassionate. If you overloaded an animal and the poor thing kneeled down from the weight, you felt bad for it.... Today people own lots of devices made of steel, but, unfortunately, even their own hearts have turned into steel.¹⁵²⁸

Make sure that you advance in spiritual matters and not in equipment and comfort. Do not delight in these things. If monasticism abandons the ascetic life, it will not be monasticism anymore. If you put convenience above monasticism, above asceticism, you will not prosper. The monk avoids conveniences because they do not help him spiritually.... In doing our chores, we sometimes may [try to] justify the use of machines or other conveniences to do our work faster and have more time for our spiritual life. As a result our life becomes stressful and full of concerns and anxieties, and we come to resemble lay people rather than monks.¹⁵²⁹

¹⁵²⁵ Is. 26:16 (LXX).

¹⁵²⁶ Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet made a similar observation: “The development of domestic appliances ... reduces physical activity in a way that harms health.... [This] reduces or eliminates for the habitually inactive even the light activity of household chores that might have improved their body tone” (Jean-Claude Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family and our own Soul*, trans. Archibald Andrew Torrance [Jordanville: Holy Trinity Publications, 2019], 77). Specifically, numerous studies have shown that physical exertion of the body improves: sleep quality, stress levels, mood, self-esteem, mental focus, bone density, muscle mass, cardiovascular health, gene expression, skin quality, blood pressure, cholesterol, metabolic rate, the immune system, insulin sensitivity, lung function, strength, endurance, coordination, balance, flexibility, life expectancy, and overall fitness. It also decreases the risk of coronary disease, diabetes, strokes, dementia, migraines, cancer, glaucoma, and injuries. Exercise has also been shown to reduce the intensity of the following chronic health conditions: osteoporosis, depression, Parkinson’s disease, arthritis, and fibromyalgia. Furthermore, a physically strong body mitigates the effects of aging.

¹⁵²⁷ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 163, 161. Hard-earned bread is sweet because accomplishments requiring exertion (whether spiritual, mental, or physical) naturally give rise to a wholesome satisfaction. Labor-saving devices deprive us of this.

¹⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 152–53.

¹⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

Technology can offer some help for daily needs. However, where do the needs end? One thing leads to another, and we become unable to stop at any given point. Simplify your needs and cast the daily cares out of your life.¹⁵³⁰

One day, Elder Theophylactos of New Skete saw Satan going past the huts of the skete with his tongue out, mocking the monks and saying: “Ha, ha, ha! The monks have abandoned the Jesus prayer and have worldly distractions. They have got lots of work to do.” When some monks had installed the telephone link in the skete, Elder Theophylactos had seen Saint John the Baptist looking very sad.¹⁵³¹

St. Sebastian of Optina also understood the value of physical labor and avoiding ease, for when he “was somewhat younger and stronger in health, he refused to use transportation, saying, ‘I’m a monk; I should go on foot and not ride.’ And he would walk long distances.”¹⁵³²

4) Poverty

St. Sophrony of Essex explained what is meant by monastic poverty:

The third basic [monastic] vow, that of *non-acquisition* (ἀκτημοσύνη), known in the West as the vow of poverty, naturally completes the first two [vows (of obedience and chastity)], and with them forms an indissoluble unity for the attainment of pure prayer and, at the same time, a more perfect identification with God through likeness to Christ, Who has so little concern to possess the things of this world that He “had not where to lay His head.”¹⁵³³ Experience shows every man that in order to arrive at pure prayer it is essential to free the mind from burdensome preoccupation with material possessions.

The monastic vow to renounce the spirit of acquisitiveness stresses the struggle against the passion for acquiring (πλεονεξία) and the love of money (φιλαργυρία) and things. The monk promises not so much to live in poverty as to free his spirit from the desire to possess. The sign of success here is the appearance of a powerful desire not to possess, so that the true ascetic does not even spare his own body. Only thus is it possible to live a really royal life of the spirit....

The love of possessing banishes love for God and one’s fellow-man. People do not see this, and do not want to understand that their unrighteous aspirations are the source of the sufferings of the whole world. St. John Climacus says: “Love of money (that is, cupidity) is ‘called the root of all evil’¹⁵³⁴, and this is indeed so, for covetousness gives rise to theft, envy, separations, enmities ... cruelty, hatred, murder and wars.”¹⁵³⁵

¹⁵³⁰ Chamberas, *Saint Paisios the Athonite*, 462.

¹⁵³¹ Elder Paisios, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, 155.

¹⁵³² Torstensen, *Elder Sebastian of Optina*, 368.

¹⁵³³ Mt. 8:20.

¹⁵³⁴ 1 Tim. 6:10.

¹⁵³⁵ PG 88:929A.

Therefore, to break free from the bondage of petty cares, in order to purify our minds and allow our spirits to delight in a truly imperial liberty—or, more exactly, in a God-like liberty—renunciation of this sphere, too, is essential.¹⁵³⁶

St. Basil the Great began his *Discourse on Ascetical Discipline* by stating: “First and foremost, the monk should own nothing in this world.”¹⁵³⁷ And St. Synkletike taught:

Poverty, for those who can endure deprivation, is the greatest good. Those who endure it suffer in the body, on the one hand, yet, on the other hand, grant comfort and delight to their souls. Just as well-made clothing is washed and made clean the more that one beats it and wrings it out, so the more one beats and wrings out the strong soul with willful monastic poverty, the more it is strengthened.

On the contrary, those souls that are ill in thought and show love for ruinous material goods come to suffer. These souls, as soon as they are beset even slightly by material deprivations, are lost; just as worn and torn clothing cannot withstand washing, so, in the same manner, these souls are lost, since they cannot withstand the harsh cleansing of virtue....

The Lord addressed these same people [who seek the virtues], saying: “Take no thought for the morrow” (Mt. 6:34). “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather unto barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them” (Mt. 6:26). And these poor people, having nothing, the Devil has few ways to harm, since the majority of sorrows and gains follow on the heels of incursions for the purpose of looting money.

Hence, where there is poverty, the nemesis of our souls can do no evil. Do they have holdings to burn? Indeed, they have none. Beasts of burden to kill? Where to find such things? An opportunity to harm their beloved relatives? They too have been left behind. From all of this, we can conclude that monastic poverty constitutes the greatest victory over the Enemy and is the most valuable treasure of life.¹⁵³⁸

St. Ephraim the Syrian said: “A monk who loves material things is like unto a barren palm tree; contrarily, a poor monk is like a palm tree rich with leaves and which rises up to Heaven.”¹⁵³⁹ Antiochos of Pandects added:

Poverty indicates that the monk who applies it in his life is sincere. The monk who has no possessions resembles an eagle, who flies high above the earth. The monk who has not a single possession shows himself to be only temporarily on earth. Since he has acquired none of the temporary goods of this world, by this indifference to them it is obvious that he desires things eternal. A poor man mimics, by his poverty, Elias, John (the Baptist), and the Disciples of the Lord. Like them, he can say: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Mt. 19:27). And he, like them, will hear that which the Savior said: “You, having abandoned all and

¹⁵³⁶ Sakharov, *Truth and Life*, 101, 102–03.

¹⁵³⁷ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 33.

¹⁵³⁸ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos, Book IV*, 6–7.

¹⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

having followed Me, shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life (cf. Mt. 19:29).¹⁵⁴⁰

In the same spirit, St. Gregory Palamas said:

Let us cleanse the eye of our understanding by reaching up with our deeds, words and thoughts towards God. There would be nothing to drag us down if we were only to look, as far as we can, at John [the Baptist]’s way of life. He went around without a roof over his head, so let us be content with a small shelter, and may each one of us gladly accept the modest room which the superior gives us, remembering him who was homeless all his life long. He was satisfied with “locusts,” the name of a type of fruit, and “wild honey,”¹⁵⁴¹ a plant which grows wild in the desert, the roots of which were used as food by the Fathers who dwelt there after him. So he lived on fruit and plant roots, or honey from the mountains, had only one garment, and wore a girdle of skin about his loins, thus showing ... that he possessed the virtue of poverty.¹⁵⁴²

An ascetic Elder in the *Gerontikon* explained: “Greatly love poverty; do not desire to have valuable objects and various other material goods in your cell. When your soul seeks something and does not attain it, it sighs and is humbled. Indeed, in this condition, God intervenes and comforts your soul, granting it compunction.”¹⁵⁴³

St. Isaac the Syrian had much to say about the benefits of poverty and non-possessiveness:

Love poverty with patience, that your mind may be collected and secured from wandering. Detest superfluity, that you may preserve your thoughts untroubled.¹⁵⁴⁴

Nothing brings such serenity to the mind as voluntary poverty.¹⁵⁴⁵

Without non-possessiveness the soul cannot be freed from the turmoil of thoughts; and without stillness of the senses she will not perceive peace of mind.¹⁵⁴⁶

No one can achieve true non-possessiveness unless he resolves within himself to endure tribulations with gladness. And no man can endure tribulations unless he believes that there is something more excellent than bodily comfort, the which he will receive in recompense for the afflictions that he has prepared himself to undergo. The love of afflictions must first have stirred in the man who has prepared to deprive himself of possessions, for only thereafter does the thought come to him to possess none of the things of this world. And every man who draws nigh to affliction is first made steadfast by faith, and then he approaches afflictions.¹⁵⁴⁷

¹⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁴¹ Vid. Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6.

¹⁵⁴² *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, vol. 2, trans. Christopher Veniamin (South Canaan: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002), 220–21 (Homily 40).

¹⁵⁴³ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, Book IV, 21.

¹⁵⁴⁴ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 143 (Homily 4).

¹⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 150 (Homily 4).

¹⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 159–60 (Homily 5).

¹⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 340 (Homily 42).

The beginning of the path of life is continually to exercise the mind in the words of God, and to live in poverty. For when a man waters himself with one, it aids in the perfection of the other. That is to say, to water yourself with the study of the words of God helps you in achieving poverty, while achieving freedom from possessions affords you the time to attain to constant study of the words of God; and the help provided by them both speedily erects the entire edifice of the virtues.¹⁵⁴⁸

The more the mind takes leave of care for these visible things, my beloved brethren, and is concerned with the hope of future things (according to the measure of its elevation above care), the more it is refined and becomes translucent in prayer. And the more the body is freed from the bonds of worldly affairs, the more the mind is also made free.... Therefore the Lord gave as a commandment that before all else a man should hold fast to non-possessiveness, and withdraw from the turmoil of the world, and release himself from the cares common to all men. He said, "Whosoever forsaketh not his entire human state and all that belongeth to him, and renounceth not himself, he cannot be My disciple."¹⁵⁴⁹

As long as a man chooses to be free of possessions, departure from life always arises in his mind. He makes the life after the resurrection his continual study, and at all times he contrives to make preparation that will be useful yonder. He acquires disdain for every suggestion of honor and bodily ease that is sown in his thoughts, and the thought of scorning the world is lively in his mind at every moment. His mind becomes bold, and he acquires a heart that is always strong and courageous in every fear and danger of impending death; and he does not even fear death itself, because his attention is always upon it, as something that approaches him, and he awaits it.¹⁵⁵⁰

The love of God, therefore, comes by converse with Him; the converse of prayer comes through stillness; stillness comes through non-possessiveness; non-possessiveness through patience; patience through the hatred of passionate desires; the hatred of passionate desires is born of the fear of Gehenna and the earnest expectation of blessings. The passionate desires are hated by the man who knows their fruits, and what they prepare for him, and of what good things they deprive him. Thus every discipline is connected with that which is higher. But if one of these middle ones should fail, those following will be unable to stand, and it will appear that all are undone and lost. What is more than this lies beyond explanation.¹⁵⁵¹

Furthermore, St. Isaac the Syrian believed that afflictions stemming from poverty have a beneficial effect on the soul. He wrote:

How much benefit, thanksgiving, and humility is produced by the incursion of these spurs [of afflictions] is an easy matter for all to learn for themselves.... God has made these instructors plentiful for you, lest being free from them, and immune to and having no part in tribulations, and feeling yourself superior to every fear, you should forget the Lord your God and turn away from Him, and fall into believing in many gods, just as many have done. For although these men had a passible nature like your own, were subject to want, and were scourged with these very griefs, yet in a brief

¹⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 113 (Homily 1).

¹⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 444–45 (Homily 63).

¹⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 509 (Homily 74).

¹⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 446 (Homily 63).

space of time, because of paltry riches, fleeting power, and ephemeral health, they not only fell into polytheism, but in their madness they had the audacity to declare themselves god by nature.

... For this reason, then, He has made His remembrance abound in your heart by means of sufferings and griefs, and He has spurred you toward the gate of His mercy with the fear of hostile forces. And by means of deliverance from these things, He has implanted in you seeds of love for Him.... Then He will cause you to perceive both the holiness of His glory and the secret mysteries of His nature's goodness. Whence could you have known these things, if adversities had never befallen you?¹⁵⁵²

Despite the many spiritual advantages of lacking possessions, the primary danger of possessions is becoming attached to them. Abba Zosimas always liked to say: "It is not possessing something that is harmful, but being attached to it."¹⁵⁵³ Although Abba Gelasios demonstrated that it is possible to maintain an inner non-possessiveness while living in a monastery with many possessions,¹⁵⁵⁴ Elder Ephraim commented that this feat of Abba Gelasios is extremely difficult.

Monks have taken a vow of poverty¹⁵⁵⁵ and ideally have forsaken all things in order to follow Christ and attain perfection. As Christ said: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me."¹⁵⁵⁶ If this ideal is implemented by living simply, a significant result will be that people who see monks without fancy conveniences will be inspired by their genuine dedication to the Gospel rather than scandalized by their luxuries. This is crucial, for as St. Isaac the Syrian taught: "The monk ought to be in his appearance and all his actions an exemplar of profit to those who see him,"¹⁵⁵⁷ and he warned: "He who creates temptations

¹⁵⁵² Ibid., 162–63 (Homily 5).

¹⁵⁵³ John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Bloomington: World Wisdom: 2008), 69.

¹⁵⁵⁴ "They used to say of him [i.e., Abba Gelasius] that he undertook a life of poverty and withdrawal in youth. There were many others who, at that time, embraced the same way of life as he in the same parts. Among them there was an elder of supreme simplicity and poverty, living alone in one cell until he died, even though he had disciples in his old age. He disciplined himself until death to observe the commandment not to possess two tunics nor (together with his companions) to take thought for the morrow. When (at the instigation of God) Abba Gelasius came to set up the coenobion, much land was offered to him. He also acquired beasts of burden and oxen for the needs of the coenobion. He [i.e., an angel] who at first revealed to the godly Pachomius that he should set up a coenobion was working with this father too in all that concerned the setting up of the monastery. The above-mentioned elder, seeing him immersed in these things and maintaining a sincere affection for him, said to him: 'Abba Gelasius, I am afraid that your *logismos* [thinking] is attached to the lands and the rest of the property of the coenobion,' to which he replied: 'Your *logismos* is more attached to the needle with which you work than is the *logismos* of Gelasius to the property'" (Wortley, *The Alphabetical Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 87 [Gelasius 5]).

¹⁵⁵⁵ For the details of this vow, see footnote #2100 on page 396.

¹⁵⁵⁶ Mt. 19:21.

¹⁵⁵⁷ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 196 (Homily 11).

for laymen will not behold the light.”¹⁵⁵⁸ Likewise, St. John of Sinai wrote that “the monastic life is a light for all men ... and they should give no scandal in anything they say or do. For if the light becomes dark, then all the deeper will be the darkness of those living in the world.”¹⁵⁵⁹ If our calling as monastics is to be a light to laymen and to inspire them by our good example, we may fall short of living up to this calling if they see us living with just as many (if not more) worldly comforts as they have.

Elder Ephraim was very concerned about people being scandalized when seeing monks owning something fancy. For example, when someone wanted to buy him a brand new luxury car, he was appalled at the extravagance and was strongly opposed to having something so fancy. He refused to accept that car also because he was concerned about what people would say when they saw a monastery having something so luxurious. He wanted to get a good used car instead, for one-third the price, or a less luxurious new one for half the price.

St. John Chrysostom was also concerned about the impression made on laymen by what monks possessed:

And their [monks’] dress is suitable to their manliness. For not indeed, like those with trailing garments, the enervated and mincing, are they dressed, but like those blessed angels, Elijah, Elisha, John, like the apostles; their garments being made for them, for some of goat’s hair, for some of camel’s hair, and there are some for whom skins suffice alone, and these long worn.... [When a poor man] shall see [monks who are the] children of rich men and descendants of illustrious ancestors clothed in such garments as not even the lowest of the poor, and rejoicing in this, consider how great a consolation against poverty he will receive as he goes away.¹⁵⁶⁰

St. Palladios also pointed out the benefit of merely seeing a monk with humble attire: “The appearance of their faces abloom with grey hairs, and the arrangement of their dress, together with their conversation so free from arrogance, and the piety of their language—all this and the grace of their thoughts will increase your strength, even should you be afflicted with spiritual dryness. ‘The attire of the man and the gait of his feet and the laughter of his teeth show him for what he is’ (Sir. 19:30) as Wisdom says.”¹⁵⁶¹

Moreover, we should embrace poverty not merely for the sake of what other people might think of us but also for its inherent spiritual benefit. Christ warned us: “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!”¹⁵⁶² “And He said to them all, ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and

¹⁵⁵⁸ As quoted in Goldfrank, *The Monastic Rule of Iosif Volotsky*, 178 (referring to Nikon of the Black Mountain, *Pandektes* 33:248).

¹⁵⁵⁹ Luibhéid, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 234.

¹⁵⁶⁰ *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 400.

¹⁵⁶¹ Palladius, *The Lausiak History*, 29.

¹⁵⁶² Lk. 18:24.

follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”¹⁵⁶³ This is why the fifth-century Syriac *Rules of Rabbūlā for the Qeiāmā* declare: “All those who have become disciples of the Messiah shall not be covetous to possess more than their needs, but they shall distribute it to the poor.”¹⁵⁶⁴ In the same spirit St. Nilus Sorsky wrote: “We must not have in our own possession in our cells any dishes or any objects of great value and beauty. So also the structure of the hermitage and other buildings of the skete monastery should be built of cheap and unadorned materials, as Basil the Great says, namely, that the building materials should be easily found everywhere and purchased at low cost.... Nor should these be the cause for any cares and preoccupations and worries so that we do not fall into contact with the spirit of the world.”¹⁵⁶⁵

Chariton the Superior wrote on the importance of poverty for monastics in his testament for Koutloumousiou Monastery on the Holy Mountain:

I beg them [i.e., the monks], call upon them, and as a father I advise them that they preserve poverty as the paternal inheritance we have received from those old monks whose memory is eternal. The monks are well aware of the benefits which derive from poverty.... Is there any way in which monks who have made promises to deny the world and what is in the world, can then justify betraying their promises? ... They have to face the wrath of God because not only have they not denied themselves, according to the commandments, and taken up their cross and followed (Mt. 10:38; Lk. 14:27), but on the pretext of fulfilling the Savior’s command which forbids [giving] to God ... they strive for something.¹⁵⁶⁶

Elder Arsenios Boca said: “Whoever for God’s sake lives in poverty acquires a treasure that is never lost. The more a person renounces worldly comforts, the more he is counted worthy of enjoying the delights and blessings of God through the Holy Spirit. The further away from the world you are, the nearer you are to God.”¹⁵⁶⁷

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov explained why poor and simple buildings help monastics achieve their goal:

It was not without reason that the holy fathers observed extreme simplicity in their clothing, in the furniture and appurtenances of their room or cell, in their monastic buildings, and even in the construction and adornment of their churches. The thought and heart of a weak person correspond with his or her outward circumstances. This is something quite incomprehensible for inexperienced and inattentive people. If a monk wears elegant clothes, if his cell is carefully furnished with an air of taste and luxury, if even the churches of a monastery are magnificent buildings, shining with gold and

¹⁵⁶³ Lk. 9:23–24.

¹⁵⁶⁴ Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, 42.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Maloney, *Nil Sorsky: The Complete Writings*, 45, 78.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1426–27.

¹⁵⁶⁷ *Γερωνικὸ Ρουμάνων Πατέρων*, 189.

silver, and provided with rich vestries, then the monk's soul will certainly be vain-glorious, full of conceit and self-satisfaction, and he will be a stranger to compunction and the realization of his sinfulness. Filled with vainglorious pleasure and gratification which is taken for spiritual joy, such a soul remains in darkness, self-delusion, hardness and deadness, as if in the midst of a triumphant festival. On the other hand, when a monk's clothing is simple, when he lives like a pilgrim in his cell as if he were in a tent or hut and has only what is essential in it, when the church serves as a place of prayer and thanksgiving, confession and weeping, without distracting and enrapturing him by its splendour, then his soul borrows humility from his outward surroundings, is detached from everything material, and is transported in thought and feeling to that unescapable eternity that confronts all men. Such a soul endeavours by repentance and the fulfilment of the Gospel commandments to prepare himself in good time for a blessed reception in eternity.¹⁵⁶⁸

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain also saw great inherent benefit in monastic poverty and simplicity:

I know monks who cannot really enjoy the spiritual spirit; they rejoice in the worldly spirit. They have never felt this thrill of joy, the joy that comes from simplicity. Austerity is a great help to the spiritual life. A monk should only own what he needs and what befits him. He should limit himself to what will ease his life a bit and not aspire to worldly possessions. For example, a military blanket will take care of his needs; he does not need a colourful or embroidered blanket. This is how simplicity and spiritual valour set in! Give things to a monk and you will destroy him. It's when he rids himself of what he owns that he finds rest. Collecting things will destroy a monk.¹⁵⁶⁹

Monks should love the poverty that they promised God they would observe. Unfortunately, however, they do not limit themselves to bare necessities, to simple things, so much for themselves as for the monastery in general.¹⁵⁷⁰

All those things that lay people use to make their lives easier will enslave the monk instead of helping him. The monk must try to minimize his needs and simplify his life. Otherwise he will not be set free. There is a difference between being clean and enjoying luxury. Using the same tool for different jobs will make the monk less demanding. At Sinai Monastery, I used a can for making both tea and porridge.¹⁵⁷¹

In general, it helps a lot to keep things simple. You should own simple and sturdy things. What is humble and simple is appreciated even by laypeople and it will certainly help the monk. It will remind him of poverty, of pain, and of the monastic life. Once King George [in the early 20th century] visited the Monastery of Great Lavra on Mount Athos and the fathers served him on a silver tray. When he saw it he said, "I was expecting something simpler from you, perhaps a wooden tray. I am tired of silver trays."¹⁵⁷²

¹⁵⁶⁸ Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, 157–58.

¹⁵⁶⁹ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 175.

¹⁵⁷⁰ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 55.

¹⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 176–77.

When St. Paisios was asked how a monk should use modern conveniences, he replied:

He should always have fewer and simpler things than the rest of the people. I feel much better when I use wood for heating, cooking, and handiwork....

If a monk or a nun does not think in a monastic way, then everything becomes a necessity and he becomes worse than those who live in the world. Monks must live in humbler circumstances than they did when they lived in the world, never better. We should not have better things here than we did at home. In general, the monastery must be poorer than the homes in which we were raised. This will help the monk with his interior life and will also be of help to lay people. God has provided that we do not find peace in possessions and comforts. If laymen are troubled by all these modern comforts, you can imagine how much more they trouble the monk.¹⁵⁷³

Secular people say, 'How lucky are the wealthy people who live in palaces and have all kinds of conveniences!' On the contrary, blessed are those who have succeeded in simplifying their lives and freeing themselves from the yoke of worldly progress, of the many conveniences that have become inconveniences, and have consequently rid themselves of the dreadful anxiety that plagues so many people today.... The more people distance themselves from a natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety.... Worldly stress is the result of worldly happiness, worldly pleasures, and self-indulgence.¹⁵⁷⁴

I could ask others to help me take care of my hut, but I can make do with the way things are. Why should I spend money on a wall when there is so much need elsewhere? ... If I have a 500-drachma bill, I prefer to buy small crosses and icons and give them to someone in need, to help him. It gives me great joy to give to others. Even if I need something, I will not spend the money on myself.... You must pray and only do those chores that are absolutely necessary. All these things that usually take our time are really so short-lived. Is it worth wasting our time when so many are suffering and people are dying from starvation? The simple buildings and the humble belongings transport the monastics mentally to the caves and the austere dwellings of our holy Fathers, and are of great spiritual benefit. Worldly belongings remind monks of the world and turn them into secular souls.

Christ was born in a manger. If we find comfort in worldly things, Christ will turn His back to us, something He never did to anyone. He will say, "I had nothing; why did you need so much? Is that what is written in the Gospels? Did you see Me do as you are doing? You do not live in the world, you are monks. What should I do with you? Where should I put you?"¹⁵⁷⁵

We should be worried about the right things. Christ will ask us what spiritual work we have accomplished, how we helped the world in spiritual matters. He will not ask what buildings we made. He will not even mention them. We will be held accountable for our spiritual progress. I want you to grasp what I am trying to say. I am not saying that one must not construct buildings and not construct them well, but one must take care of the spiritual life first and then mind the rest, and do all that with spiritual discernment.¹⁵⁷⁶

¹⁵⁷³ Ibid., 157.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 182, 167; Γέροντος Παΐσιου, *Μὲ Πόνο καὶ Ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Σύγχρονο Ἄνθρωπο*, 171.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 180–81; Γέροντος Παΐσιου, *Μὲ Πόνο καὶ Ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Σύγχρονο Ἄνθρωπο*, 170–71.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 181; Γέροντος Παΐσιου, *Μὲ Πόνο καὶ Ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Σύγχρονο Ἄνθρωπο*, 170.

Nevertheless, St. Paisios did acknowledge that monasteries involved in philanthropic work could have wealth and some modern conveniences. He said of St. Athanasios of Athos: “The monastery had eight hundred to one thousand monks during his time and many people sought help there. There were numerous poor and hungry people who gathered at the Lavra Monastery to find food and shelter.... He had to create a modern kind of oven so that he would have bread to give to people. The Byzantine emperors had endowed the monasteries with a lot of property because they served as charitable institutions. The monasteries were established to help people spiritually and materially, which is why the emperors endowed them so well.”¹⁵⁷⁷

According to the 13th-century *Typikon for the Monastery of the Archangel Michael*, “the accumulation of wealth by monasteries is morally indefensible while others live in poverty.”¹⁵⁷⁸ Specifically, it stated:

The superior should not be eager to store up money in the monastery.... To those then who have renounced the world and those in the world and for this reason also the bitter ruler of this world, and who have promised to live on a higher plane and to partake of the angelic manner of life to the best of their strength, how much pardon would this practice deserve? Or what defense will those who, after their holy monastic promise, have engaged in such practices make to the implacable, fearsome Judge? How can they enrich themselves while others in the world are poor and worn out by the deprivation of necessities?¹⁵⁷⁹

The Emperor Nicephoros Phokas (who nearly became a monk) declared in a novel (i.e., a law) which he ordained in the tenth century:

The Word of God the Father taught us that wealth and many possessions prevent our salvation and that it is difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom. He wanted us to live so simply that He not only wanted us to have no staff, bag, or second tunic,¹⁵⁸⁰ but He even prohibited worrying about tomorrow’s food.¹⁵⁸¹

But now I see in monasteries and sacred convents a conspicuous illness (and I call this greed an illness), and I know not what cure to contrive or how to correct the excess. What caused this? Which fathers taught them such extravagance and led them to “false frenzies”¹⁵⁸² (to quote the divine David)? They endeavor to acquire endless stretches of land, luxurious buildings, herds of horses, oxen, camels, and countless other animals. By directing all their soul’s attention to these things, they have made the monastic life no different than the worldly life, even though God on the contrary has ordered us to be free of such things. For He said, “Do not worry about what to eat or drink,”¹⁵⁸³ and

¹⁵⁷⁷ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 160.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1208.

¹⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1226.

¹⁵⁸⁰ Vid. Lk. 9:3.

¹⁵⁸¹ Vid. Mt. 6:34.

¹⁵⁸² Ps. 39:6.

¹⁵⁸³ Cf. Mt. 6:25.

gave us the example of the birds to reproach us.¹⁵⁸⁴ What did the divine Apostle say? “These hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me,”¹⁵⁸⁵ and: “If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.”¹⁵⁸⁶

Look at the lives of the holy Fathers who shone forth in Egypt, Palestine, Alexandria, and everywhere else, and you will find them living so frugally and simply that it was as if they lived only for their soul and approached the incorporeality of the angels. After all, Christ said that the Kingdom belongs to the forceful, and the forceful seize it¹⁵⁸⁷ and that through many tribulations we must enter it.¹⁵⁸⁸

So when I see those who have vowed to follow this kind of life and are marked for this lifestyle by the pledge of the schema completely breaking their vows and contradicting the schema, I know not how to avoid calling this thing a farce. I would say that it blasphemes the name of Christ.¹⁵⁸⁹

This emperor’s attempts to fight the illness of greed in some monasteries were apparently unsuccessful, considering that two centuries later St. Eustathios of Thessalonica addressed the same problem:

Monastic life means a rejection of the world—not a desire for it. It means withdrawing from it—not approaching it. It is a life free of worldly cares—not a life full of them. But for you, renouncing the world has meant becoming more worldly.... You are led away from your goal by working too much, which makes you worry about many things. You have abandoned your primary work while occupying yourselves with secondary matters. You are ignorant of the refined things that bring you in contact with angels, while you strive for coarse and heavy things by which the nous which God gave you is dragged down to earth, paralyzed and unable to ascend.... It is this kind of discordant, unharmonious, sloppy, and completely inappropriate behavior of these superficially great monks that the memorable emperors of old decided to prohibit in the monasteries they themselves established, as if they had foreseen what would happen if they would not take certain wise measures. This counterfeit practice, which destroys monastic life, does not benefit the monks themselves and harms those who would imitate them.¹⁵⁹⁰

In the same spirit, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain warned his nuns:

Unfortunately, the secular spirit has entered many monasteries, because, nowadays, some fathers promote the monastic life through a secular channel and do not lead souls to the Patristic spirit of Grace. I discern an anti-patristic spirit prevailing in the monasteries today. They do not accept what is truly good, the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. They do not live in a patristic manner; instead, they level the spiritual heights

¹⁵⁸⁴ Vid. Mt. 6:26.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Acts 20:34.

¹⁵⁸⁶ 1 Tim. 6:8.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Cf. Mt. 11:12.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Cf. Acts 14:22.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Νικηφόρου Φωκά, «Ἡ Νεαρά» ἐν Ράλλη καὶ Ποτλῆ, *Σύνταγμα τῶν Θείων καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων*, Τόμος Ε΄, 261–62.

¹⁵⁹⁰ PG 135:820CD, 824BC, 832A.

in the name of obedience and the breaking of the will, and then go on to serve their own secular desires....

We should not aim to surpass the secular people in secular achievements. This secular progress harms even those who live in the world, let alone the monk. We should run so fast spiritually that lay people will be forced to do something. If we just behave like a very spiritual lay person, we will not help them, because they already have an example of lay people who are highly spiritual. We must surpass them....

Why don't we give some thought about the holy Fathers whom we study continually, where and how they lived? The Lord said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head."¹⁵⁹¹ What a tremendous thing! And you see how they were trying to imitate Christ in those caves! They experienced Christ's joy, because they emulated Christ in everything. Their full attention was focused on that one thing. The holy Fathers had transformed the desert into a spiritual state, and we today are turning it into a secular state. While the Church of Christ is departing to the desert in order to be saved, we are converting the desert into a secular state, and we scandalize people who will not only remain helpless but will also have nothing to hold on to....

Today, there are monks who live the monastic life on the outside. They do not smoke, they live a chaste life, they read the *Philokalia*, and they constantly talk about the Fathers of the Church. They are not different from lay people who are pleased with themselves because as children they did not tell any lies and always made the sign of the cross, went to Church and later as adults were careful with moral matters. Well, that's what is happening in some monasteries today, and many lay people find that attractive. But, as they get acquainted with the monks or nuns, they realize that they maintain a secular spirit and are not really different from people who live in the world.

How can a monk move the heart of a layperson, when he is spiritually drained? Alcohol will lose its pungency if we leave the bottle open. It can no longer kill germs and neither will it ignite if you light it. And if you put it in the gas stove or lamp, it will also destroy the wick. Likewise, if the monk is not careful, he drives divine Grace away and, in the end, is left only with his Monastic Habit. He too will be like the alcohol that has lost its spark. He won't be able to cauterize the devil. "Angels are a light for monks, and monks are a light for men."¹⁵⁹² He will not even be a light to others. Do you realize how destructive this secular spirit is? If this true spirituality leaves monasticism, nothing is left.... The greatest contribution to society will be made by monasteries that do not have the secular mindset and have reached a spiritual state. They will not need to say much or do anything else, because they will be able to speak through their way of life. This is what the world needs today....

If we are to enjoy spiritual health and angelic delights, we must detach ourselves from the spirit of secular progress.¹⁵⁹³

Let us lay our cell bare of wealth and our soul of passions so that our life and mission as monks acquire meaning, for where there is material wealth there is spiritual poverty.¹⁵⁹⁴

¹⁵⁹¹ Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58.

¹⁵⁹² Luibhéid, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 234.

¹⁵⁹³ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 80–86.

¹⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

Likewise, a contemporary Athonite monk who became a metropolitan (Nikolaos Hatzinikolaou of Mesogea and Lavreotiki) wrote:

Monasteries are traditionally known for their voluntary poverty, frugality, and simplicity in living. The truth is that this tradition has been somewhat shaken in our days. But wherever it does exist, it gives the best answer to the deceit of hyper-consumerism and to the dead end of pleasure-seeking materialism. This constitutes the priceless treasure of monastic life, and it must in no way be lost. The narrow and low doors; the dimmed lighting; the lack of worldly comforts; the profound connection with nature and natural ways ... make the outline of a very gentle life with an exceptionally frugal use of the senses that is certainly rare and especially brings rest. All these things are missing from contemporary life, but as a rule are endemic to monasteries. This is why every visit to a monastery—in addition to the blessing of the pilgrimage and the stillness—rewards people with a rare relaxation of their soul's deepest parts. "Stillness mortifies the outward senses and resurrects the inward movements, whereas an outward manner of life does the opposite, that is, it resurrects the outward senses and deadens the inward movements."¹⁵⁹⁵ The atmosphere of life in a monastery wakes up our inner world and gives rest to the natural man....

The classic pastoral approach is usually based on knowing the customs of the contemporary world and era, and consequently on being completely informed and up-to-date. On the contrary, the monastic pastoral approach could draw its strength and base its outreach not on being up-to-date but by relying on well-tested timelessness and by being qualitatively different. In other words, the more removed one becomes from the things of the world, the more one can help the world."¹⁵⁹⁶

A counterintuitive benefit of poverty is that it actually makes one *more* eager to share instead of less eager. As Simon Sinek observed: "When we have less, we tend to be more open to sharing what we have. A Bedouin tribe or nomadic Mongolian family doesn't have much, yet they are happy to share because it is in their interest to do so ... because their survival depends on sharing, for they know that they may be the travelers in need of food and shelter another day. Ironically, the more we have, the bigger our fences, the more sophisticated our security to keep people away and the less we want to share."¹⁵⁹⁷

One pitfall for successful monasteries is that their success can lead to a material wealth that distracts them from their spiritual goals. As one historian observed in regards to monasteries in Western Europe:

Ascetic work ethics and rational design of work roles made the medieval monasteries the most efficient production organizations of that time. They accumulated immeasurable wealth which trapped those monks who strove for the monastic ideal of

¹⁵⁹⁵ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 303 (Homily 37).

¹⁵⁹⁶ "The Contribution of Women's Monasticism in the Pastoral Life of the Church" http://www.imml.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=289:gynaikios-monaxismos&catid=19:2012-01-29-11-12-07

¹⁵⁹⁷ Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 117.

an ascetic life led in poverty, and brought about severe conflicts. Thus the medieval monastery became the first bureaucratic “iron cage.”¹⁵⁹⁸

Due to this phenomenon, “by the seventh century, monasticism [in Western Europe], which had originally arisen from the desire for self-mastery, self-transcendence, and union with God, embracing the ideal of the voluntary removal of the individual from society, had become closely identified with land-owning and the interests of royalty and aristocracy.”¹⁵⁹⁹ Although St. Eustathios of Thessalonica in the 12th century sharply criticized monks who made *deliberate* efforts to acquire wealth, he believed that it is not reprehensible but even praiseworthy for them to become rich when someone bestows wealth on them out of reverence for their virtuous lifestyle.¹⁶⁰⁰ However, this opinion of his conflicts with the stance of the many monastic saints quoted earlier in this chapter.

5) Luxury

Luxurious living is diametrically opposed to a life devoted to God. The Apostle Paul wrote that a celibate woman ostensibly dedicated to God “that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.”¹⁶⁰¹ St. Cyril of Jerusalem warned: “Every worldly luxury is sweet at the time it is used, but it greatly darkens and terribly inebriates him who accepts it.”¹⁶⁰² St. Isaac the Syrian emphasized the importance of avoiding comforts and embracing hardships:

A man can never learn what divine power is while he abides in comfort and spacious living.... You wish to ascend to Heaven, and to receive that Kingdom, communion with God, the consolation of the spiritual goods of yonder blessedness, the fellowship of the angels, and immortal life, and you ask if this path requires toil? Great is this marvel!¹⁶⁰³

It is the spirit of the devil, not the Spirit of God, that dwells in those who pass their life in ease. The Spirit of God is not pleased with bodily comforts, nor does He find a life of ease acceptable but one of hardship.¹⁶⁰⁴

One of those who love God [i.e., St. Paul] said, “I have given oath that I die daily” [cf. 1 Cor. 15:31]. By this the sons of God are set apart from the rest of mankind: they live in afflictions, but the world rejoices in luxury and ease. For it is not God’s good pleasure that those whom He loves should live in ease while they are in the flesh. He

¹⁵⁹⁸ “From Asceticism to Administration of Wealth. Medieval Monasteries and the Pitfalls of Rationalization,” Kieser, A., *Organization Studies* 8, 1987, 104.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism*, 207.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Vid. PG 135:784D–788A.

¹⁶⁰¹ 1 Tim. 5:6.

¹⁶⁰² *Κόρυλλος Ἀλεξανδρείας*, τόμος β΄ τῆς ὀκτατ., 918.

¹⁶⁰³ Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 504, 505–06 (Homily 72).

¹⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 433 (Homily 60).

wishes them rather, so long as they are in this life, to abide in affliction, in oppression, in weariness, in poverty, in nakedness, isolation, want, sickness, degradation, buffetings, contrition of heart, bodily hardship, renunciation of relatives, and sorrowful thought. He wishes them to possess an aspect differing from all creation, a habitation unlike that of the rest of men, and to live in a solitary and quiet dwelling, unknown to the sight of men and bereft of any sign of the gladdening things of this life; mourning is found within [their dwelling], and cheerfulness far from it; distresses press frequently upon it; nor do they fully have the body's needs as do the rest of men; their bedding is the ground.... they are sombre, but the world is joyous; they fast, but the world lives in pleasure.¹⁶⁰⁵

The seventh-century Celtic *Rule of Carthage* includes “restraint in the use of comforts” as one of the basic characteristics of monastics.¹⁶⁰⁶ St. Gregory Palamas said that wealth and luxury “prevent the ripening of the [spiritual] fruits worthy of the divine harvest.”¹⁶⁰⁷

According to St. Joseph the Hesychast, “one does not become a monk through luxury and comforts.”¹⁶⁰⁸ The following incident from his life reveals that he even believed that luxuries hinder a monk's prayer and deprive him of the right to ask God for mercy:

Using all the money he had earned through iconography, Father John had bought the most luxurious items: sofas, fancy chandeliers, and even a gas-powered refrigerator! Such things were unheard-of on the Holy Mountain in those days. When St. Joseph the Hesychast saw all this, he sadly commented: “Can a monk living in a place like this say, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have *mercy* on me’? He has already received mercy! I doubt a person can say the prayer in here.”¹⁶⁰⁹

In the same spirit, St. Sophrony of Essex said: “When we are truly broken [i.e., humble], God hears our prayers; when we are comfortable, He does not answer.”¹⁶¹⁰

St. John Chrysostom preached that luxuries harm the body and blind the soul:

Now then that unbelievers should have these feelings [of sadness due to the fleeting nature of pleasures], is no marvel; but when they who have partaken of so great mysteries and learned such high rules of self-denial concerning things to come, delight to dwell in things present, what indulgence do they deserve? [None.] Whence then arises their loving to dwell in present things? From giving their mind to luxury, and fattening their flesh, and making their soul delicate, and rendering their burden heavy, and their darkness great, and their veil thick. For in luxury the better part is enslaved, but the worse prevails; and the former is blinded on every side and dragged on in its maimed condition; while the other draws and leads men about every where, though it

¹⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 434 (Homily 60).

¹⁶⁰⁶ Vid. Maidin, *The Celtic Monk*, 78.

¹⁶⁰⁷ *Saint Gregory Palamas: Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, 41.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Γέροντος Ἰωσήφ, *Ἐκφρασις Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας*, 53. See also Elder Joseph, *Monastic Wisdom*, 54.

¹⁶⁰⁹ *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου*, 672. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 583.

¹⁶¹⁰ Sakharov, *Οἰκοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, Τόμος Α΄, 191.

ought to be in the rank of things that are led.... It is not the body which blinds the soul; far from it, O man; but the luxury.¹⁶¹¹

If this is how he warned *laymen* of the harm of luxuries, one could only imagine how he would have censured *monastics* living in luxury. For the following teaching of his shows that he associated voluntary virginity with voluntary poverty:

In truth there is a great difference between virtue and evil, and a great difference. One is wide and easy, but the other is narrow and full of tribulation. Luxury is wide and easy, but poverty and need are narrow and full of tribulation. So just as in this life the ways are opposed—the person who chooses virginity travels the narrow road of tribulation, and so does the person who pursues chastity, embraces voluntary poverty, and scorns vain glory ... —so also in the time of punishment and recompense, there is a great distance to be found between their requitals.¹⁶¹²

St. Lazaros of Mt. Galesion taught that comforts destroy monasticism:

The fathers of old always sought out the deserts and the most uncomfortable places, not those which had springs and leafy trees and other physical comforts. For this reason they were well able to subordinate their irrational carnal impulses because they did not easily find the materials that beget the passions. For in the Skete [of Egypt], just as the holy fathers themselves predicted, as long as the place was uncomfortable it abounded in the lodgings and dwellings of the monks but, from the moment when, one after another, they began to transport fertile soil from elsewhere for growing vegetables and set up trees and cisterns in front of their doors, the Skete went into decline and was delivered to destruction.¹⁶¹³

St. Maximos the Confessor likewise observed that comforts destroy a monk:

The achievements of worldly people constitute the failings of monks, and the achievements of monks constitute the failings of worldly people. For example, the achievements of worldly people are wealth, fame, power, luxury, comfort, children, and what is consequent upon all these things. But the monk is destroyed if he obtains any of them. His achievements are the total shedding of possessions, the lack of fame and power, self-control, hardship, and all that is consequent upon them.¹⁶¹⁴

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain ridiculed the monastic pursuit of conveniences:

Who could doubt that with all of the modern conveniences the monastery can function more easily? If every monk could have his mother by his side to take care of him, no doubt, that would also be convenient. And, if there were a tape player in the church playing the prayers, that would also be very relaxing. But still more soothing would it be if the stalls [the wooden seats in church] were converted into beds. It would also certainly be relaxing for an ascetic if he had a small machine made just for the

¹⁶¹¹ Homily 39 on 1st Corinthians.

¹⁶¹² Roth, *On Wealth and Poverty*, 139.

¹⁶¹³ Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, 310.

¹⁶¹⁴ Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, «Ἐκαντοντὰς τρίτη περὶ ἀγάπης» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπιτικῶν*, τόμος β' (1991), 38 (κεφ. πδ'); see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 96–97 (ch. 85).

turning of his prayer-rope and a phony straw ascetic to do his prostrations and the prayer-ropes, while he could get a soft mattress to lie down and rest his worn-out flesh. Without a doubt, all of these things comfort the flesh but leave the soul empty and miserable, besides generating feminine sentimentality and worldly anxiety....

All monks should avoid, as much as possible, modern means in the operation of the monastery, and should respect the desert by adapting to it. Then, the desert will grant us its divine stillness and we shall be assisted in the desertion of our souls from the passions. It is not right to want to adapt the desert to our worldly self, for it is a sin to abuse the desert. Any of the modernistic monks may build a monastery on top of an apartment building so that he may have all the conveniences of the world he wants and so that he may enjoy the city lights and ascend to the third heaven via the elevator, and let him leave the desert in peace.¹⁶¹⁵

The greatest enemy of our soul's salvation—even greater than the devil—is the worldly spirit, for it sweetly misleads us and in the end eternally embitters us. Yet, if we saw the devil himself, we would be terrified and forced to run to God, and then we would secure Paradise. Monks who compete with worldly people in all fields of worldly development reveal that they have taken a wrong turn. Besides, they themselves are able to perceive this in the worldly anxiety they suffer.¹⁶¹⁶

Metropolitan Nikolaos Hatzinikolaou also lamented the modernization of Mount Athos and wrote:

You meet God more easily walking along a path than on the road in a car, with its exhaust fumes, the clouds of dust, and the noise, speed and convenience. “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life (Mt. 7:14).” ... The feet are replaced by wheels ... exhaust fumes take the place of exertion ... instead of the scents of nature there is the stench of petrol or diesel fumes ... instead of an animal we see an engine ... instead of feeling the heat of the sun on one's face, the dust of the road covers one's hair and clothes ... we replace what is natural and divine with the arrogance of human achievement.¹⁶¹⁷

Henry David Thoreau's experiment of living a simple life in the wilderness for two years led him to discover that simplicity fosters a deeper understanding of life, which makes one more “awake” and able to “live deliberately,” whereas luxuries do the opposite. He wrote:

Only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred million to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake.... I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.... I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life.¹⁶¹⁸

¹⁶¹⁵ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 56–58.

¹⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁶¹⁷ Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia, *Mount Athos: The Highest Place on Earth* (Athens: En Plo Editions, 2007), 136–38.

¹⁶¹⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1854), 142–43.

Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.¹⁶¹⁹ ... In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness.¹⁶²⁰

St. Sophrony of Essex believed that seeking comfort and less menial tasks in a monastery are petty desires stemming from lack of faith that ruin monasticism. He said:

If we have firm faith we can make our life in the monastery truly suitable for eternal salvation. This is a heavenly mystery. But if in the monastery we seek petty things, such as comfort and tasks not so menial, then everything surely will go to waste.... Remember the noteworthy maxim that a monk on the Holy Mountain once told me: "There is no task that in itself debases the grandeur of man's being; only sin debases the divine life within us." And I will add that the most suitable tasks for monastic life are those from which we do not run the risk of acquiring passions.¹⁶²¹

One ascetic elder in the *Gerontikon* was asked: "Why, Father, is it not possible for those of our generation to maintain the ascetic life of the Fathers before us?" "Because," the elder answered, "it neither loves God, nor does it flee away from people, nor does it disdain the material goods of this world; for in the soul of a man who flees from other men and from materialism, there begins to be born a spontaneous contrition and desire for the ascetic life.... A man, if he does not flee to a place where he earns his bread only with great labor, cannot succeed in the ascetic life."¹⁶²² An abbot of a monastery asked Abba Poemen, "How can I acquire the fear of God?" Abba Poemen replied: "How can we acquire the fear of God when our belly is full of cheese and preserved foods?"¹⁶²³

Nevertheless, St. Basil the Great recommended moderation between abstinence and luxury: "The best rule and standard for abstinence is this: to seek neither luxury nor mortification of the flesh but to avoid the immoderation of both, so that the body may neither be disordered by obesity nor yet rendered sickly and so unable to perform the commandments."¹⁶²⁴ Although St. Joseph the Hesychast lived most of his life with tremendous deprivation and asceticism, he would have agreed with this moderate approach. For he said: "The conclusion I have drawn now after so many years and so much asceticism is that

¹⁶¹⁹ Henry David Thoreau, "Walden" in Carl Bode, ed., *The Portable Thoreau* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 269.

¹⁶²⁰ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1854), 499.

¹⁶²¹ Sakharov, *Oikodomóntas τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, Τόμος Β΄*, 17, 386.

¹⁶²² Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos, Book I*, 106.

¹⁶²³ Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 192. This quote has not been included to denounce eating cheese and preserved foods but merely as a reminder of how important deprivation was to the holy Fathers.

¹⁶²⁴ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 211.

the ideal monastic path is to find a spiritual guide, to have light physical labor, and to have a schedule for prayer and fasting.”¹⁶²⁵

Yet in churches and chapels of a monastery, many saints of the Church wanted to use the absolutely best materials. For example, St. Neophytos, the founder of Docheiariou Monastery on Mount Athos wrote: “I added [to the existing buildings] the most precious cloths, and holy silver vessels, and all-venerable icons and holy books . . . and I erected this most sacred and holy church . . . and I adorned it with every beauty within my power, and as such I presented it for all to see. Nevertheless, all these things are for the glory and praise of God, and not for my own vain satisfaction.”¹⁶²⁶ Likewise, St. Caesarius of Arles and St. Donatus of Besançon wrote in their monastic rules: “You will not use silver except in the services of the oratory.”¹⁶²⁷

Elder Ephraim, also believed that monastery churches should be richly adorned. One day during a meal in trapeza when the reading was the life of a Byzantine monastic saint that described how he adorned the church he built, Elder Ephraim leaned towards me and whispered with a smile, “Do you see how lavishly he adorned his church?”

Some saints, however, had a different approach and believed that even a church should be unadorned. For example, St. Nilus Sorsky wrote:

Concerning the adornments of churches, St. John Chrysostom writes: “If anyone should wish to donate sacred utensils or any other adornment for the church, tell him to distribute his money to the poor, for no one has ever been judged for not decorating the church.” And other saints say the same thing. St. Eugenia the Martyr also, when sacred silver vessels were offered to her, said: “It is not fitting for a religious in a monastery to have silver possessions.” For this reason it is not fitting that we also should possess gold and silver objects, not even for sacred vessels and other unnecessary adornments except to have only the bare necessities for the church.¹⁶²⁸

Similarly, when St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain was asked how much decoration is appropriate in a church, he replied: “Considering the era in which we live, which is not Byzantium, the simpler the decoration is, even in a church, the better, for simplicity always helps.”¹⁶²⁹

¹⁶²⁵ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 406–07. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 587.

¹⁶²⁶ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1307.

¹⁶²⁷ Donatus of Besançon, “Regula ad Virgines: a Working Translation,” ch. 63. See also McCarthy, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles*, 185.

¹⁶²⁸ Maloney, *Nil Sorsky: The Complete Writings*, 44.

¹⁶²⁹ Elder Paisios, *With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, 179. Both St. Nilus and St. Paisios supported their stance by citing the story of St. Pachomios who intentionally made the pillars of his church crooked (vid. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, 55–56), although Derwas Chitty questioned the veracity of this story (vid. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 119).

until she is on her way out or even until she comes again before instructing her about appropriate attire for a monastery. If the first thing visitors hear when coming to our monastery is that they have broken Rule #476, they might never return and may justifiably conclude that we have failed to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, Who dealt with “sinners” in a very different way. Woe to us if our behavior leads them to say these cutting words of Mahatma Gandhi: “I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”¹⁸²⁵

Regarding this issue, Monk C. in Greece explained: “We have to be tolerant. If a woman comes to the monastery wearing pants or a man comes in sport pants and the monks scold them, what will be their impression of the Church? We have to be tolerant in order to bring them into the Church, and then we tell them about this and that.... [We] welcome the people without judging them in order to bring them to God.”¹⁸²⁶ Commenting on this, a contemporary Orthodox writer concluded: “The visitor is Christ in their midst, an opportunity to serve rather than condemn. They are to be embraced in fraternal love, not sent out in the cold. A monastery without love has no hope for the cultivation of holiness in any form.”¹⁸²⁷ Nevertheless, this matter requires some discernment, since love and permissiveness are not equivalent.

14) Internet

Using the internet provides many advantages which are already evident to most people: it quickly provides information on almost any subject matter for free; it facilitates communication and collaboration (via email, Zoom, etc.) with people who might otherwise be nearly inaccessible; it enables one to conduct business online and to locate and purchase useful items quickly that would otherwise be more expensive or even impossible to find. For monastics this is especially helpful, since it allows them to remain longer in their monasteries without needing to go out into the world. Furthermore, when going outside is dangerous (because of a deadly pandemic, a violent neighborhood, etc.), doing tasks online could even save one’s life. In a nutshell, the internet can increase the number of things we are able to do, and it can decrease the time, money, effort, and potential danger needed to do them.

Notwithstanding these many benefits, a prudent person will adopt a tool or approach only when its benefits outweigh its drawbacks. Sadly, the vast majority of internet users

¹⁸²⁵ Ramnarine Sahadeo, *Mohandas K. Gandhi - Thoughts, Words, Deeds* (Mississauga: Xlibris, 2011), 22.

¹⁸²⁶ Stephen R. Lloyd-Moffett, *Beauty for Ashes: The Spiritual Transformation of a Modern Greek Community* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 174.

¹⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

(including myself at first)¹⁸²⁸ have adopted the “any-benefit” approach: if there is any benefit at all to a tool, it will be used regardless of how many and how serious its drawbacks are. This approach leads to a “digital maximalism,” supported by the unchallenged underlying assumption that the more we use the internet the better off we are. Commenting on this approach, William Powers wrote

This is a simple idea but one with enormous implications ... [making it] very clear how to organize your screen time and, indeed, every waking hour.... You can't be too connected, they say, so we should seek at all times to maximize our time with screens and minimize our time away.... When a crowd adopts a point of view en masse, all critical thinking effectively stops. The maximalist dogma is particularly difficult to challenge because it's all about joining the crowd, so it's self-reinforcing.¹⁸²⁹

This chapter will attempt to challenge this point of view by exploring the numerous drawbacks of using the internet, categorizing them into *spiritual*, *physical*, *psychological*, and *cognitive* harm. My hope is that this chapter will help us make a more informed choice in deciding how much to use the internet.

i) Spiritual Harm

Internet access harms monastics spiritually because it exposes them to many worldly influences. Also, by having email, a monastic can be overwhelmed by dozens of emails and notifications every single day. All this is the opposite of the “solitude” and the “renunciation of the world” which the holy Fathers traditionally viewed as fundamental conditions for monastic life to flourish.¹⁸³⁰ For example, St. Basil the Great wrote:

Quiet ... is the first step in our sanctification; the tongue purified from the gossip of the world; the eyes unexcited by fair color or comely shape; the ear not relaxing the tone or mind by voluptuous songs, nor by that especial mischief, the talk of light men and jesters. Thus the mind, saved from dissipation from without, and not through the senses thrown upon the world, falls back upon itself, and thereby ascends to the contemplation of God. ... We must strive after a quiet mind.... The wilderness is of the greatest use for this purpose, inasmuch as it stills our passions.¹⁸³¹

¹⁸²⁸ In fact, it was precisely because of my access to the internet that I was able to gather so much information for this book. Prior to completing my research on the adverse effects of the internet, I assumed the harm was negligible, and therefore I used it whenever I wanted to acquire more information about a topic or locate a quote. But now that I am fully aware of its many dangers, I have limited my internet usage to a bare minimum by not having access to it most of the time. To anyone else who would like practical advice how to regain a healthy balance in their use of the internet, I highly recommend reading *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* by Cal Newport, as well as the chapter “Prevention and Treatment” in *The New Media Epidemic* by Jean-Claude Larchet and *Hamlet's Blackberry* by William Powers.

¹⁸²⁹ William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 35, 49.

¹⁸³⁰ See chapter 1) section 3) on page 19 for more about solitude and renunciation of the world.

¹⁸³¹ *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, 111, 110 (Letter 2); PG 32:225BC.

It seems unlikely that St. Basil would say that the passions of a monk even in the deepest wilderness are being stilled if he has a satellite connection to the internet.

Since St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain asked: “What will I get from [external] stillness ... if I have a radio with me?”¹⁸³² one can only imagine what he would have said about having internet access in the wilderness. The advice of Abba Moses: “Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”¹⁸³³ is certainly not applicable in the way he intended if a monk sitting in his cell can google anything that piques his curiosity! On the contrary, what Abba Moses meant was that minimizing external distractions leads to introspection, which leads to watchfulness and finding the Kingdom of God, which is within us. The internet takes us in the opposite direction.

Another problem is that it is nearly impossible to visit web pages without sometimes being exposed to provocative pictures. To avoid this kind of exposure is one of the reasons why several men’s and women’s monasteries are completely off-limits to visitors of the opposite gender. For “seeing begets desire,” according to the maxim of the Hellenic philosophers quoted by St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain.¹⁸³⁴ Thus, monastics in such monasteries who use the internet will be negating the benefit they would have had from their isolation. As Patriarch Kirill of Moscow pointed out: “Many monks act, in my view, quite unreasonably. On the one hand, they leave the world in order to create favorable conditions for salvation, and on the other hand, they take their mobile telephone and start to enter the Internet where, as we know, there is a large number of sinful and tempting things.”¹⁸³⁵

St. Gregory Palamas expressed a similar sentiment to his fellow monks, centuries before it was possible to leave one’s monastery by going online: “What good does it do us to take flight from the world once and for all and find refuge in houses of prayer consecrated to God, but then to leave them daily and become involved in the world again? Tell me how, if you love frequenting the town squares, you will avoid the incentives to passions which bring about the death of the soul, separating a man from God? The death comes upon us through our senses, as if through windows within us.”¹⁸³⁶ When we are online, our senses of seeing and hearing are wide open windows to deadly spiritual influences.

Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet elaborates on what these deadly spiritual influences are that tempt us:

¹⁸³² Hieromonk Isaac, *Elder Paisios of Mount Athos*, 455.

¹⁸³³ Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 139.

¹⁸³⁴ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγορείτου, *Συμβουλευτικὸν Ἐγχειρίδιον*, 40. See also St. Nicodemos’s comments on guarding one’s eyes quoted in footnote #805 on page 149 herein.

¹⁸³⁵ <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2013/06/10/russian-orthodox-patriarch-kirill-urges-monks-to-shun-internet-temptations/>.

¹⁸³⁶ Veniamin, *St. Gregory Palamas: The Homilies*, 397.

The new media are always a temptation to turn from the task in hand, and also from our neighbor, our own spiritual benefit, and from God Himself.... The companies that manage the Internet organize it so that the user sees as much as possible of everything to which he is easily tempted. If we review the basic list of all the passions, compiled by Eastern Christian Tradition to guide man in his spiritual progress, we can see that there is not one to which the new media cannot tempt us, and that they cannot arouse, feed, maintain, or develop. They are as follows: love of the belly, or gluttony; avarice, or the love of money and the desire to acquire more money and goods; lust, or attachment to sexual pleasure; anger, which includes all forms of aggression; fearfulness, which includes disquiet and anxiety; sadness; *acedia*, the state of dissatisfaction, disgust, laziness, and instability; self-love, vanity or vain glory; and pride.¹⁸³⁷

Pride and vanity are reinforced by counting the “likes” received, and by showing that one can collect more followers on Twitter, or “likes” from the so-called friends of Facebook than the next man. Those who use Facebook tend to show a flattering image of themselves, which surpasses reality. Their faults are erased and their qualities exaggerated. They even claim qualities that they never had. This has a bad effect not just on themselves, but on others who may feel put down by the outrageous exaggeration they see in the images that they take to be true. Psychologists have even found that it is a cause of depression, which concords with the teaching of the holy ascetics who saw pride and vanity as sources of sadness and *acedia*, two states that resemble what we now call depression.¹⁸³⁸

The new media, especially the television, the Internet, and the social media, have created a world in parallel to the real world, a virtual world where the most important thing is to speak about what one does or intends to do, or to get others to speak of it. This has become more important than actually doing it. One’s image is more important than one’s identity.... [Thus] the Internet and Facebook have become fields where narcissism can easily develop.¹⁸³⁹

Fr. Deacon Stephen Muse has observed that using the internet puts us in a disembodied state that renders us more susceptible to temptations. He wrote:

I have determined that for myself, extended internet use is monological and depletes the soul’s vitality, leaving me empty inside. This is masked by the false sense of presence connected to the immediacy and interactive engagement with images coming from it. Attachment to mental images through the digital screen is contrary to the embodied state advocated by the Fathers who call for the *nous* to be gathered within the body in order to pray,¹⁸⁴⁰ rather than pouring out through the senses and imagination. As St. Theophan the Recluse noted, “Thoughts in the head are the place of deception.” I think we can say the same for the power of internet as being a kind of proxy for “images in the mind” functioning as hypnotic suggestions that more easily

¹⁸³⁷ Jean-Claude Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family and our own Soul*, trans. Archibald Andrew Torrance (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Publications, 2019), 147–48. All quotations herein from this publication are used by permission.

¹⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁸³⁹ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 39, 81, 97, 102, 146.

¹⁸⁴⁰ Muse elaborates on the importance of embodied prayer in his profound book: *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Prayer and the Embodied Life* (South Canaan: St. Tikhon’s Monastery Press, 2018).

by-pass critical faculties and disrupt the collected watchfulness and inner silence needed for monastic life. After extended periods of use of digital media required for work, spending further time on the internet, as a distraction from tiredness, leaves a person more susceptible to craving stimulation and sensual excitement as a kind of compensation for being too long in a disembodied state. In actual fact, what is needed to replenish the devitalized inner state is deeply embodied presence with intentional collectedness in silence. Manual labor can also be restorative and reorient us to more natural rhythms of life disrupted by prolonged mental identification with digital media.¹⁸⁴¹

Likewise, Dr. Larchet describes how the internet divides and conquers the inner unity of our faculties, rendering us vulnerable to passions:

The new media encourage strongly two elements of ancestral sin: (1) the loss of the inner unity of the faculties, which once were united in knowledge of God and doing His will, dispersing them among physical objects and their representations (thoughts, memories, and images), or the objects and passions that they arouse; (2) the resulting division, chopping up, and inner dispersion, which according to St. Maximus the Confessor, “breaks human nature into a thousand fragments.”¹⁸⁴² As other holy ascetics have said, the intelligence is then constantly distracted, floating, erring, and wandering here and there¹⁸⁴³ in a state of permanent agitation,¹⁸⁴⁴ quite the opposite of the deep peace it experienced in its former contemplation. The thoughts that once were united and concentrated become manifold and multifarious, spreading out in a ceaseless flow.¹⁸⁴⁵ They divide and disperse,¹⁸⁴⁶ leaking out in every direction,¹⁸⁴⁷ dragging and dividing the whole being of man in their wake. This leads St. Maximus the Confessor to speak of: “the scattering of the soul amongst outer forms according to the appearance of sensory things,”¹⁸⁴⁸ for the soul becomes multiple in the image of this sensory multiplicity that, paradoxically, she has created for herself, and which is simply an illusion arising from her incapacity to perceive the objective unity of beings through her ignorance of their relation to the One God in their origins and their end. Once the intelligence becomes dispersed and divided among the swarm of thoughts and sensations that it has engendered, all the faculties follow. Stirred up and excited by a multitude of passions, they pull in many directions, often opposed, at once, and make of man a being divided at every level. This process of the fall of man, described by the Church Fathers of Late Antiquity, continues today faster than ever, driven on by the new media.¹⁸⁴⁹

¹⁸⁴¹ Excerpt from a personal correspondence, 5/23/21.

¹⁸⁴² *Questions to Thalassios*, 137.

¹⁸⁴³ Cf. Macaire d’Égypte, *Homélies (coll. II)*, IV, 4; Isaac le Syrien, *Discours ascétiques*, 68.

¹⁸⁴⁴ Cf. Callisto et Ignacio Xanthopouloi, *Centuries*, 19, 23, 24, 25.

¹⁸⁴⁵ Macaire d’Égypte, *Homélies (coll. II)*, XXXI, 6.

¹⁸⁴⁶ Cf. Nicétas Stéthatos, *Centuries*, III, 2; 6; 19.

¹⁸⁴⁷ Macaire d’Égypte, *Homélies (coll. II)*, VI, 3.

¹⁸⁴⁸ *Mystagogie*, XXIII, PG 91:697C.

¹⁸⁴⁹ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 151–52.

A further problem with internet access is that it intensifies the temptation for us to waste time. As Dr. Larchet points out:

The new media are a source of distraction and entertainment, far beyond anything known in the past, since they can be permanent and limitless. Formerly, someone who sought entertainment had to make a physical and psychological effort to move to the right place and pay the price demanded. The television and Internet bring it all into the home, offering a huge choice that requires no effort of any kind to be accessed.¹⁸⁵⁰

The new media ... bring into the home a host of amusements that allow the real world to be forgotten with all its difficulties. They facilitate diversions in the sense Pascal gave to this word: they turn one's attention from one's own existential poverty and the anguish that it arouses.¹⁸⁵¹

The value of this painful awareness of one's own existential poverty is that it can lead one to repentance, prayer, and a search for deeper existential meaning.

Thus, the internet fosters escapism, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "the tendency to seek, or the practice of seeking, distraction from what normally has to be endured."¹⁸⁵² If a person repeatedly copes with difficulties in life by distracting himself instead of by enduring them, his capacity for bearing hardship will erode. Such a person will lack the fortitude to deal with unpleasant things in life, making him impatient.

Surprisingly, a study published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* found that our working memory and problem-solving skills are reduced by the mere presence of a cell phone in the same room, even when it is turned off and out of sight if the person knows it is there.¹⁸⁵³ More seriously, its presence degrades the quality of connection between people. As Sherry Turkle wrote:

Studies show that the mere presence of a phone on the table (even if a phone is turned off) changes what people talk about. If we think we might be interrupted, we keep conversations light, on topics of little controversy or consequence. And conversations with phones on the landscape block empathic connection. If two people are speaking and there is a phone on a nearby desk, each feels less connected to the other than when there is no phone present. *Even a silent phone disconnects us.*¹⁸⁵⁴

Something analogous happens also in the spiritual plane. In the experience of us monks and nuns on remote islands in Alaska, we have observed a tangible difference in the spiritual "feeling" or "atmosphere" of our monasteries when no devices are present that can connect to the internet. One of the monastics here described this feeling as a "sense of inner freedom" and "as if a hazy cloud over my soul has lifted."

¹⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 150.

¹⁸⁵¹ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 95.

¹⁸⁵² As quoted in <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escapism>.

¹⁸⁵³ www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/691462.

¹⁸⁵⁴ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 21.

It should be no surprise that the internet creates a “hazy cloud,” considering that it puts us repeatedly into an excited and distracted state that is the opposite of the quiet and focused state that is conducive to prayer. Dr. Larchet elaborates on this concept:

The hyper-relational nature of the new media is to some extent dangerous for the personality. If it is too much with others, it has no time to be with itself. To develop and blossom, the person needs solitude as much as, if not more than, relationships. This is borne out by the experience of hesychast spirituality, which grew up in the Christian East as the ultimate means of self-development. The term “hesychia” means calm, isolation, and solitude. Psychiatrists are aware of many cases of emotional collapse, which are often marked by symptoms of depression and are caused by self-forgetfulness in people who are totally immersed in social activities. They also know the importance of solitude for self-construction through facing up to oneself. This is what Pascal emphasized long ago when he said, “All the troubles of men come from one thing only, which is that they do not know how to dwell at rest in a room.”¹⁸⁵⁵

The new media destroy what the Eastern Spiritual Tradition refers to as hesychia. In truth, this state can only be lived to the full by monastics. Yet all who would lead a serious spiritual life need it in some measure. Hesychia is a way of life that requires solitude, outer silence, and inner calm. These three things are indispensable for spiritual life, especially in one of its essential activities: concentrated, attentive, and vigilant prayer. In contrast, the continual prompts from the new media are incompatible with the creation and maintenance of hesychia, not only in its fullness but also for even the briefest periods. It has no chance against the visual and audible signals to which most connected people respond immediately.¹⁸⁵⁶

Those who use the new media lose the initiative in their inner life and can no longer manage it. They are always on the watch for external stimuli.... There is no space left for those times of solitude that contribute to the construction and stability of psychological and spiritual life. There are no more times for the silence that is required for deep thought and the contemplation that nourishes spiritual life. The flow of inner life is constantly interrupted by phone calls that distract the attention with their ring tones, by emails, or by tweets with their sonorous alerts. The habit of immediately reacting and replying further fragments inner life and turns the life of the soul into a chain of inarticulate events.¹⁸⁵⁷

Spiritual life requires and cultivates stability in life, and to this end gives great importance to regularity, which comes from discipline and contributes to the mastery of all the faculties. The effects of the new media are quite the opposite of this state. As we have seen, using them often gives rise to disquiet that increases with use, or to dissatisfaction that the user seeks to assuage by always seeking something new. They drag all the powers of the soul into a continuous fast-flowing stream of disordered and disconnected impressions.¹⁸⁵⁸

¹⁸⁵⁵ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 98.

¹⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

Dr. Larchet observes that the internet has even become a replacement for God. He wrote:

Many users give the new media a central place in their lives: the place that God should occupy in the normal religious life of the faithful. They give them much time; they sacrifice their strength to them; they give up many things for them in what resembles a kind of detachment. Like ascetics, they give up food, and especially sleep, in their service and begin and end the day with them, just like religious folk with their morning and evening prayers.¹⁸⁵⁹

The new media have a power of attraction that consumes people's time and distracts them from traditional activities and from the world around them; and in this way they [i.e., the media] have undoubtedly contributed to this disenchantment with Christianity.¹⁸⁶⁰

Alain Finkielkraut observes correctly that with the new technologies: "we abandon a world of contemplation and reaching upwards and enter a world of openness and reaching sideways." As we use the Internet, we see how its web spreads horizontally, and how the movement of the spirit that moves within it is one of permanent alienation.¹⁸⁶¹

Father Constantine Coman, a professor of the Theological Faculty of Bucharest, wrote recently that the new media ... are fertile ground for those worldly attitudes that a spiritual man flees as he seeks "the one thing needful" in depth. For they bring forth distraction, pleasure seeking, levity, curiosity, talkativeness, and empty gossip.¹⁸⁶²

The facts show that connection to the new media competes with connection to God, which is made through participation in liturgical services and through personal prayer.... The new media eat up time. The television does so and even more so the Internet. Through its links it entices the user to navigate further and further, capturing his attention and making him forget the passage of time. Anyone who has used the Internet has often found that a search that should have been quick took far longer than intended.

In this competition between connections, the new media win hands down. In spite of all the love we may have for Him, to connect with God we must make an effort to withdraw from our environment and from our own thoughts in the widest sense (reasoning, imagination, memories, desires, etc.) and be vigilant and attentive; navigating the Internet is easy. It is enough to let oneself go to plunge into a pleasant world that always assuages our desires and passions. Moreover, there is a sense of total freedom, whereas to relate to God within the framework of serious and sincere religious practice implies permanent regularity and discipline.

The monasteries themselves have managed to escape the invasion of the television, but find it harder to resist the new media. More and more monks, for various more or less valid reasons, now have access to a computer. More and more of them have a portable phone, which nowadays is a device that includes all the other media. In a coenobitic monastery, the rule may forbid or limit the use of portable media; but solitaries escape such control. Many hermits pass time on the Internet that could better

¹⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁸⁶² *Ibid.*

have been given to prayer, and many monks spy through that small window every day on the world that they left through the front door.¹⁸⁶³

The new media, especially the Internet, tend to take up time that should be used for prayer, even the time of monks. Those hermits who have become dependent often abbreviate drastically the divine services. Often smartphones remain switched on during the time of prayer, which they disturb with their ring tones. It is not uncommon to see the faithful, monks, or even the celebrants themselves look at their smartphones during divine services. They believe that they are justified by the need to be ready to serve their neighbor and the potential urgency of a call. It is vital to have a strict rule in these matters and to stick to it. The time for prayer must be preserved absolutely inviolable. All those potentially disturbing connections must be switched off.... Prayer can only be fruitful in silence, and so in solitude, in attention without outer or inner distraction, and in continuity for sufficient time without interruption.¹⁸⁶⁴

The distractions caused by internet access are a serious spiritual problem. Abba Poemen, even though living long before the intense and constant distractions of our modern world, observed: “Distraction is the beginning of evils.”¹⁸⁶⁵ One could only imagine what he might say today. Elder Aimilianos also observed how pernicious the temptation for distraction is. He wrote: “The most dreadful enemy created by post-industrial culture, the culture of information technology and the image, is cunning distraction. Swamped by millions of images and a host of different situations on television and in the media in general, people lose their peace of mind, their self-control, their powers of contemplation and reflection, and turn outwards, becoming strangers to themselves—in a word, mindless, impervious to the dictates of their intelligence.”¹⁸⁶⁶

All this outwardness caused by the internet reduces our capacity for watchfulness (*vñψις*), which is a fundamental part of the spiritual life. Deuteronomy teaches: “Take heed to yourself and diligently guard your soul.”¹⁸⁶⁷ Christ frequently instructed His disciples to keep vigilance,¹⁸⁶⁸ and they in turn taught this to others.¹⁸⁶⁹ The holy Fathers also emphasized the great importance of this virtue. For example, St. Peter of Damascus wrote: “Without attention and vigilance of spirit we cannot be saved and delivered from the devil, who, as a roaring lion, walketh about us, seeking whom he may devour.”¹⁸⁷⁰ Likewise, St. Hesychios the Priest taught: “Just as it is impossible to live this present life without eating

¹⁸⁶³ Ibid., 146–47.

¹⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., 170.

¹⁸⁶⁵ PG 65:332C.

¹⁸⁶⁶ Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 350.

¹⁸⁶⁷ Deut. 4:9.

¹⁸⁶⁸ Vid. Mt. 24:42; 25:13; 26:41; Mk. 13:33,37; 14:38; Lk. 21:36.

¹⁸⁶⁹ Vid. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Pet. 5:8.

¹⁸⁷⁰ As quoted in Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 152–53.

or drinking, so it is impossible for the soul to achieve anything spiritual and in accordance with God's will, or to be free from mental sin, without that guarding of the intellect and purity of heart, which is called watchfulness, even if one forces oneself not to sin through the fear of punishment."¹⁸⁷¹

An indirect spiritual danger is that using the internet provides governments and private companies with a tremendous amount of information about our lives. In 2013, the whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed that the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) is recording almost all phone calls, text messages, and emails of people around the world. Furthermore, the NSA knows where we have been and where we are now (whenever carrying a phone or a tablet); it tracks every online search, every website we visit, as well as every online purchase; and it can even clandestinely access the cameras and microphones of our electronic devices in real time.¹⁸⁷² Snowden also revealed that many other governments and corporations around the world are spying on people in a similar fashion.

Snowden said that these institutions can “monitor and record private activities of people on a scale that’s broad enough that we can say it’s close to all-powerful.... They do this through new platforms and algorithms through which they’re able to shift our behavior. In some cases they’re able to predict our decisions—and also nudge them—to different outcomes.... And now [in 2019] these institutions, which are both commercial and governmental, have built upon that and ... have structuralized and entrenched it to where it has become now the most effective means of social control in the history of our species.”¹⁸⁷³

Even if the governments and corporations with all this information were not exploiting it at the present time, this does not mean that they never will. Judging from chapter 13 of the Book of Revelation and from the prophecies of several saints, it will only be a matter of time before governments do persecute Christians. The more information that governments have about people, the more easily they can decide whom they consider potential threats, and the more easily they can locate, manipulate, and persecute them. One can imagine how the anti-Christian regimes of the past could have intensified their persecution if they had access to all the information that current governments have of people who use the internet.

To summarize the foregoing paragraphs, we can say the internet harms us spiritually by: ruining our solitude and hesychia, exposing us to provocative pictures, feeding our pride and all the passions, distracting us, wasting our time, fostering escapism, sacrificing

¹⁸⁷¹ Ἡσυχίου Πρεσβυτέρου, «Πρὸς Θεόδουλον», ἐν *Φιλοκαλία*, τόμος α' (1893), 92 (κεφ. ρθ'); see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 181 (St. Hesychios the Priest 109).

¹⁸⁷² <https://www.expressvpn.com/blog/8-ways-the-nsa-spies-on-you/> See also: Edward Snowden, *Permanent Record* (New York: Pan Macmillan, 2020).

¹⁸⁷³ www.commondreams.org/news/2019/05/31/edward-snowden-technology-institutions-have-made-most-effective-means-social-control

our privacy, and replacing God. Aware of these spiritual dangers, Archimandrite Maximos Constas concluded that the internet is inherently detrimental to monasticism:

Monks are called to live an apostolic life, and the Apostles did not transform the world because they were up on the latest news, or made use of the latest technologies, or because they had flashy web sites, or promoted themselves with the tricks and gimmicks of modern advertising, but because they were transformed by Christ; they were on fire for Christ; and they set the whole world on fire for Him. But a “monk” whose soul is filled with secular ideas and images from the computer, whose soul is informed by and conformed to the form of the world, will never be able to say even one Jesus Prayer without distraction, and will be useless to both God and man. Such a monk is neither crucified to the world, nor the world to him, because he loves the world more than God.¹⁸⁷⁴

ii) Physical Harm

Using the internet is also *physically* detrimental to one’s health in several ways. In a nutshell, it harms our eyesight, leads to sleep deprivation, compromises our posture, exposes us to radiation, compromises our breathing, and leads to an array of bodily ailments associated with a sedentary lifestyle. This section will substantiate each of these statements.

The internet harms our eyesight because almost all people access it by staring at a digital screen. Studies have shown that close computer work can cause light sensitivity, dry eye, blurred vision, double vision, fatigue, and headaches.¹⁸⁷⁵ In fact, about 40% of optometrists’ patients suffer from eye strain due to computer vision syndrome.¹⁸⁷⁶

The internet is also responsible for an increasing number of people suffering from sleep deprivation. As Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet wrote:

The clinical sleep problems related to the new media are associated with a reduction of the time asleep below what is normal for a particular age group. This is not necessarily due to addiction, but may simply be caused by the need to view a late-night program to the end, the need to consult the Internet late at night, or the need to finish off email and SMS correspondence.... The result is tiredness upon waking in the morning, which continues throughout the day.¹⁸⁷⁷

Most people using the internet are doing so in a position that compromises their posture. Especially when they are using a small device (such as a tablet or a smartphone) instead of a monitor mounted at an ergonomically ideal position, the device is typically held or placed far below eye level. This encourages the head to protrude and tilt downward, which increas-

¹⁸⁷⁴ Excerpt from a personal correspondence, 3/14/18.

¹⁸⁷⁵ “The Real Effects of Technology on Your Health,” www.everydayhealth.com/emotional-health/internet-addiction/real-effects-technology-on-your-health/

¹⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷⁷ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 79.

es the pressure on the neck's muscles, tendons, and ligaments as much as five-fold, depending on how bent the neck is.¹⁸⁷⁸ Since the neck is not able to withstand this amount of pressure over a prolonged period, it causes “text neck” (or “tech neck”)—so called because this is the position in which most people send texts and use the internet. According to Dr. David DeWitt:

Text neck typically begins as a relatively mild ache in the neck or upper back.... If not addressed, the continued forward head posture and hunched shoulders may worsen over time, which could lead to even more pain and reduced mobility in the neck, upper back, and shoulders. In some cases the excessive forward head posture may exacerbate or accelerate degenerative conditions in the cervical spine, such as cervical degenerative disc disease and/or cervical osteoarthritis.... Touchscreen element may bring shoulders and head further forward.¹⁸⁷⁹

If the internet is accessed while seated, many physiological problems can ensue. Studies have shown that remaining relatively motionless for a long period of time (whether sitting at a desk or driving a car) damages one's physical health in many ways. In particular, doing this:

- 1) increases risk of heart disease by up to 64%.¹⁸⁸⁰
- 2) impairs the body's ability to handle blood sugar, causing a reduced sensitivity to the hormone insulin, which helps carry glucose from the blood into cells where it can be used for energy, leading to diabetes,¹⁸⁸¹
- 3) increases likelihood of cancer,¹⁸⁸²
- 4) leads to metabolic syndrome,¹⁸⁸³
- 5) reduces one's non-exercise activity thermogenesis,¹⁸⁸⁴

¹⁸⁷⁸ www.spine-health.com/conditions/neck-pain/how-does-text-neck-cause-pain

¹⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸⁰ Warren TY, Barry V, Hooker SP, Sui X, Church TS, Blair SN, “Sedentary behaviors increase risk of cardiovascular disease mortality in men,” *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, May 2010, 42(5): 879–85 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19996993>

¹⁸⁸¹ E. Grandjean, W. Hünting, “Ergonomics of posture—Review of various problems of standing and sitting posture,” *Applied Ergonomics*, Volume 8, Issue 3 (September 1977): 135–40. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0003687077900023>

¹⁸⁸² Wei Zheng, Xiao Ou Shu, Yu Tang Gao, Joseph K. McLaughlin, Wong-Ho Chow, and William J. Blot, “Occupational physical activity and the incidence of cancer of the breast, corpus uteri, and ovary in Shanghai,” *Cancer*, vol. 71, Issue 11, (1 June 1993): 3620–24. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/1097-0142%2819930601%2971:11%3C3620::AID-CNCR2820711125%3E3.0.CO;2-S/abstract>

¹⁸⁸³ Marc T. Hamilton, Deborah G. Hamilton, and Theodore W. Zderic, “Role of Low Energy Expenditure and Sitting in Obesity, Metabolic Syndrome, Type 2 Diabetes, and Cardiovascular Disease,” (September 2007): <http://diabetes.diabetesjournals.org/content/56/11/2655.short>

¹⁸⁸⁴ Ibid.

- 6) slows the clearance of fat from the blood stream and decreases the effect of insulin,¹⁸⁸⁵
- 7) increases all-cause mortality by seven percent,¹⁸⁸⁶
- 8) can lead to obesity due to lowered energy expenditure,¹⁸⁸⁷
- 9) compromises posture by causing the pelvis to rotate backward which puts pressure on the lumbar discs and forces the head forward, causing the shoulders to curve,¹⁸⁸⁸
- 10) creates a prolonged, static loading of tissues, which over time puts undue pressure on the lower back and stresses the surrounding muscles and joints,¹⁸⁸⁹ which can become the symptoms of chronic diseases,¹⁸⁹⁰
- 11) can lead to rheumatic diseases such as osteoarthritis due to the “wear and tear” to the joints from excessive sitting,¹⁸⁹¹ and
- 12) increases the risk of anxiety.¹⁸⁹²

What is even more alarming is that most of these harmful results still apply to people who are physically active during the rest of the day.¹⁸⁹³

A further concern with using the internet is the neurological damage caused by prolonged exposure to the non-ionizing electromagnetic radiation emitted by the devices that are used to access the internet. Such devices harm us not only through their extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields (which all electronic appliances and power lines create) but also through their radiofrequency radiation (which all cell phones and wireless devices emit). While some controversy exists regarding whether these forms of radiation actually harm us, the overwhelming majority of studies have found that they do. Specifically, as of August 2019, adverse biological effects were detected in 72% of the 305 studies

¹⁸⁸⁵ Hidde P. van der Ploeg, Tien Chey, Rosemary J. Korda, Emily Banks, Adrian Bauman, “Sitting Time and All-Cause Mortality Risk in 222,497 Australian Adults,” *Archives of Internal Medicine* (2012): 172(6):494–500. <http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1108810>

¹⁸⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸⁸ Donald D. Harrison, Sanghak O. Harrison, Arthur C. Croft, Deed E. Harrison, Stephan J. Troyanovich, “Sitting bio-mechanics Part I: Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics*, vol. 22, Issue 9 (November 1999), 594–609. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0161475499700205>

¹⁸⁸⁹ Stuart M. McGill, “The biomechanics of low back injury: Implications on current practice in industry and the clinic,” *Journal of Biomechanics*, vol. 30, Issue 5 (May 1997): 465–75. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0021929096001728>

¹⁸⁹⁰ E. Grandjean, W. Hünting, “Ergonomics of posture,” 135–40. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0003687077900023>

¹⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹² Teychenne, Megan et al. “The association between sedentary behaviour and risk of anxiety: a systematic review,” *BMC Public Health* (June 19, 2015): 15:513.

¹⁸⁹³ *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 2010, as cited in “The Real Effects of Technology on Your Health,” www.everydayhealth.com/emotional-health/internet-addiction/real-effects-technology-on-your-health/

on radiofrequency radiation and in 91% of the 229 studies on static fields and extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields.¹⁸⁹⁴ The adverse effects found in these studies include: “cancer, Alzheimer’s, ALS (Lou Gehrig’s Disease), autism, male infertility, miscarriage, insomnia, allergic and inflammatory responses, heart palpitations and arrhythmias, memory loss, concentration/attention issues, and more.”¹⁸⁹⁵ Furthermore, some studies suggest that the radiation from Wi-Fi can cause interruption of the brain glucose metabolism, increased permeability of the blood-brain barrier, interruption of cell metabolism, and breaks in DNA chains.¹⁸⁹⁶

One final way the internet can harm our physical health is through a phenomenon called “email apnea” or “screen apnea.” Linda Stone, a researcher and former executive at Apple and Microsoft, found that most people (about eighty percent) unconsciously hold their breath or breathe shallowly when responding to email or texting. This is serious because, according to research by Dr. Margaret Chesney and Dr. David Anderson:

Holding one’s breath contributes to stress-related diseases and disturbs the body’s balance of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and nitric oxide, which help keep the immune system strong, fight infection, and mediate inflammation. It can affect our well-being and our ability to work effectively. Shallow breathing can also trigger a sympathetic nervous system “fight or flight” response. If we stay in this state of emergency breathing and hyperarousal for extended periods of time, it can not only impact sleep, memory, and learning, but also exacerbate anxiety and depression.¹⁸⁹⁷

Fortunately, there are some ways to mitigate the physiological harm caused by the internet. To protect your eyes from strain when working with screens, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends:

Sit about 25 inches (arm’s length from the computer screen). Reduce screen glare by using a matte screen filter if needed. Take regular breaks using the “20-20-20” rule; every 20 minutes shift your eyes to look at an object at least 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. When your eyes feel dry, use artificial tears to refresh them. Adjust your room lighting and try increasing the contrast on your screen to reduce eye strain.¹⁸⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹⁴ See www.biointiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Lai-Neuro-Percent

¹⁸⁹⁵ See www.greenwavefilters.com/electropollution-and-health

¹⁸⁹⁶ <https://emfacademy.com/wifi-radiation-everything-need-know/>

¹⁸⁹⁷ www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-art-now/201411/email-apnea

¹⁸⁹⁸ www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/are-computer-glasses-worth-it

To help keep a healthy posture, it is best to mount the digital screen at or slightly below eye level.¹⁸⁹⁹ It is also helpful to shift periodically between standing and sitting, but standing most of the time.¹⁹⁰⁰ Adjustable-height desks allow one to work while standing or sitting, and anti-fatigue standing mats enable one to stand for long periods of time while also improving blood circulation and reducing muscle strain.¹⁹⁰¹

Screen apnea can be avoided by being conscious of your breathing and by acquiring the habit of breathing deeply with your diaphragm. The effects of exposure to electromagnetic radiation can be somewhat reduced by keeping electronic devices as far away from your body as possible and by keeping your body electrically grounded when using them.¹⁹⁰²

iii) Psychological Harm

The third category of harm ensuing from internet usage is *psychological*. Specifically, the internet harms our mental health by leading to depression, reducing our ability to empathize, increasing stress, impoverishing the quality of human connections, reducing productivity, and encouraging addictions. This section will address each of these issues.

While it is true that the internet does enable people to communicate more, studies have shown that this form of communication is too shallow to satisfy our need for human connection. One such study by the University of Michigan found that “frequent phone calls, emails, and other types of communication had no effect on [reducing] a person’s risk for depression,”¹⁹⁰³ whereas having face-to-face interactions regularly does reduce the likelihood for depression. Since these healthy face-to-face interactions are increasingly being replaced by shallower digital communications, the result is increasing levels of depression in modern society.

Sherry Turkle pointed out several advantages of face-to-face conversations as opposed to digital ones:

Humans require authentic, face-to-face connections to understand and relate to each other. Digital communication does not provide the vulnerability and real-time responsiveness required for key social abilities to manifest... [Many studies] demonstrate that cell phones diminish conversations’ topical depth, length, and corresponding feelings of closeness, empathy, and trust.¹⁹⁰⁴

Face-to-face conversation unfolds slowly. It teaches patience. We attend to tone and nuance. When we communicate on our digital devices, we learn different habits. As we ramp up the volume and velocity of our online connections, we want immediate

¹⁸⁹⁹ See www.healthycomputing.com/office/setup/monitor

¹⁹⁰⁰ See www.ehstoday.com/health/article/21915080/standing-at-work-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly

¹⁹⁰¹ See www.ehstoday.com/health/article/21915379/new-study-confirms-benefits-of-antifatigue-mats and www.flexispot.com/spine-care-center/yes-you-should-use-a-standing-mat-heres-why/

¹⁹⁰² See www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3265077/ and www.pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27454187/

¹⁹⁰³ www.huffpost.com/entry/depression-in-person-email-phone_n_56127e6be4b0dd85030c8586

¹⁹⁰⁴ <http://www.supersummary.com/reclaiming-conversation/summary/>

answers. In order to get them, we ask simpler questions; we dumb down our communications, even on the most important matters.¹⁹⁰⁵

Atsushi Senju, a cognitive neuroscientist ... [showed] that the parts of the brain that allow us to process another person's feelings and intentions are activated by eye contact. Emoticons on texts and emails, Senju found, don't have the same effect. He says, "A richer mode of communication is possible right after making eye contact. It amplifies your ability to compute all the signals so you are able to read the other person's brain."¹⁹⁰⁶

When you speak to people in person, you're forced to recognize their full human reality, which is where empathy begins.¹⁹⁰⁷

Not only does internet communication encourage superficial relationships, but it also easily leads to misunderstandings. Researchers asked participants in a study to send either serious or sarcastic email to others. While 80% of email senders thought their tone could be readily identified, recipients correctly identified the tone only half the time. Even worse, the recipients believed they could accurately interpret the sender's tone 90% of the time. Overconfidence in our own ability to communicate and interpret emotional tone via email can lead us to take serious offense when none is intended. Even worse, because email is rapid and we cannot see the immediate reaction of the recipient, misinterpretations can lead to hasty, tactless responses.¹⁹⁰⁸ Yet if we don't respond quickly enough to an email, we run the risk of offending the sender. A 2006 Cisco research paper concluded that failing to respond to a sender can lead to a swift breakdown in trust.¹⁹⁰⁹

Although using the internet enables tasks to be done faster, there are invisible costs for this speed. Dr. Larchet observes:

It is by no means sure that that the media [e.g., the internet] make us gain time. Shortening time makes it pass more quickly, so we have less of it, as each activity is lived less intensely. Moreover, the new media multiply the tasks we may perform, leaving us too little time for all of them.... By not having to wait, we gain time; but we lose the psychological and spiritual benefits of waiting: patience, the increase of desire and joy, and the feelings that come from delayed satisfaction. We feel more joy when we arrive at a mountaintop on foot than when we are just left there by a helicopter.¹⁹¹⁰

¹⁹⁰⁵ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 35.

¹⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 170–71.

¹⁹⁰⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/04/books/review/jonathan-franzen-reviews-sherry-turkle-reclaiming-conversation.html>

¹⁹⁰⁸ Kruger, Justin; Nicholas Epley, Jason Parker, and Zhi-Wen Ng. "Egocentrism Over Email: Can We Communicate as Well as We Think?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (December, 2005): 89(6), 925–36.

¹⁹⁰⁹ As cited in John Freeman, *The Tyranny of Email: The Four-Thousand Year Journey to Your Inbox* (New York: Scribner, 2009), 7.

¹⁹¹⁰ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 24.

Not only are we losing the joy of deeper satisfaction, but we are also being poisoned and spoiled by the instant gratification of having immediate access to almost anything. Elder Aimilianos observed: “Anyone who is able to satisfy his needs—and especially if he can do so immediately—becomes very callous towards God and his fellow man.”¹⁹¹¹ Dr. Larchet explained the mechanism behind this phenomenon:

In human life, there is no pleasure without pain, no joy without sadness, no happiness without suffering, no enjoyment without frustration, and no satisfaction without expectation. These things are well known to psychologists, and to writers and mystics. The intensity of joy depends on the intensity of desire, which in turn depends on its distance in space or time from its object. A world where, in reality or virtually, the magic of the Internet provides everything at once becomes a world bereft of true desire, a world without pleasure or joy, without happiness or enjoyment.¹⁹¹²

A further drawback of the internet’s speed is increased stress. Dr. Larchet explained:

Any request that reaches its destination quickly requires an equally rapid reply. This insistence on an instant reaction, implicit in modern communications, clearly stresses the person at the receiving end; but it also stresses the sender, for he no longer has the leisure to reflect, which flowed from the latency of old-fashioned communication. The stress rises with the number of requests coming in from the new means of communication, sometimes all at once. Letters sent by the postal service could be considered at leisure, and answered calmly at a favorable moment. The time needed to write, and the time and expense needed to post the letter limited messages to the essential, not so with emails, text messages, and tweets. Their minimalist style allows their proliferation, swamping those who receive them. Replying to all of them correctly is so hard as to be often impossible, and true communication is paralyzed.¹⁹¹³

[In the days before email] once a letter was written, there was always a delay before it was posted, until the evening or the next morning. This allowed the writer time to re-read it, to reflect and repent, and to correct and improve it where necessary. The ease and speed with which emails can be sent encourages sending the first draft without any pause for reflection.... In the 1960s it was said that these machines would enable a civilization of leisure. But we now see that this was an illusion.¹⁹¹⁴

The idea that IT [information technology] and modern communication technology would free up our time has also been shown up as a mirage. Everything is faster, but the amount of information to be handled has grown just as much, so, in the end, there is no benefit.¹⁹¹⁵

[The internet] encourages the habit of speed, which becomes second nature in psychological life. It creates dependency, impatience, and boredom and disquiet and anxiety when things are slower and do not happen immediately.¹⁹¹⁶

¹⁹¹¹ Γέροντος Αιμιλιανού, *Νηπτική Ζωή και Ασκητικοὶ Κανόνες*, 329.

¹⁹¹² Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 29.

¹⁹¹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

¹⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

Speed, instant access, and just-in-time are the touchstones of the new media and connected man; and speeding up each task along with multitasking creates a way of life with no dead time. But paradoxically, eliminating dead time removes time for living. Man cannot live to the full when he stifles his consciousness with unceasing activity. No more can he live fully in the giddiness of speed, or by surfing the web where he forgets himself, cut off from reality.... Man absolutely needs silence, solitude, and calm to maintain his equilibrium and to be fulfilled. Dead time is where man can take care of himself, can reflect freely, meditate, contemplate, and pray. This is the time he can devote to those dear to him and nourish a true relationship with them.¹⁹¹⁷

Scientific studies have reached the same conclusion that we have a fundamental need for quiet. Nicholas Carr wrote:

A series of psychological studies over the past twenty years has revealed that after spending time in a quiet rural setting, close to nature, people exhibit greater attentiveness, stronger memory, and generally improved cognition. Their brains become both calmer and sharper.... The reason ... is that when people aren't being bombarded by external stimuli, their brains can, in effect, relax. They no longer have to tax their working memories by processing a stream of bottom-up distractions. The resulting state of contemplativeness strengthens their ability to control their mind.... On the internet [there is] no peaceful spot where contemplativeness can work its restorative magic. There is only the endless, mesmerizing buzz of the urban street. The stimulations of the Net ... overwhelm all quieter modes of thought. One of the greatest dangers we face as we automate the work of our minds, as we cede control over the flow of our thoughts and memories to a powerful electronic system, is ... a slow erosion of our humanness and our humanity.¹⁹¹⁸

Solitude is a key ingredient for psychological health. The decades-long research of Sherry Turkle on the social effects of digital communication led her to conclude: "The capacity for solitude is a cornerstone for the capacity for relationship. Only when we can gather ourselves can we turn to others and really hear what they have to say, really hear who they are.... If you don't teach your children to be alone, they'll only know how to be lonely."¹⁹¹⁹

In order to achieve greater solitude, we must distance ourselves from distractions. Commenting on one of Plato's writings, William Powers points out:

In *Phaedrus*, Plato establishes a basic principle on which to build a new way of thinking about digital connectedness: In a busy world, the path to depth and fulfillment begins with distance ... [because] when we're alone, our thoughts and feelings are oriented inward, and experience tends to be relatively quiet and slow. In contrast, in a crowd—whether physical or virtual—our orientation is more external, simply because there's more happening, more demands on our attention.¹⁹²⁰

¹⁹¹⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹¹⁸ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 219–20.

¹⁹¹⁹ "The Empathy Gap: Digital Culture Needs What Talk Therapy Offers" www.psychonet.org/magazine/article/1051/the-empathy-gap

¹⁹²⁰ William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry*, 97–98.

The more we connect [online], the more our thoughts lean outward. There's a pre-occupation with what's going on "out there" in the bustling otherworld, rather than "in here" with yourself and those right around you. What was once exterior and far away is now easily accessible, and this carries a sense of obligation or duty.... In addition, outwardness offers something more potent than mere duty: self-affirmation, demonstrable evidence of one's existence and impact on the world. In less-connected times, human beings were forced to shape their own interior sense of identity and worth—to become self-sufficient. By virtue of its interactivity, the digital medium is a source of constant confirmation that, yes, you do indeed exist and matter. However, the external validation provided by incoming messages and the number of times one's name appears in search results is not as trustworthy or stable as the kind that comes from inside.¹⁹²¹

The twentieth-century philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich pointed out that our language "has created the word 'loneliness' to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word 'solitude' to express the glory of being alone."¹⁹²² Commenting on this, William Powers added:

The best kind of aloneness is expansive and generous. To enjoy your own company is to be at ease not just with yourself but with everyone and everything in the universe. When you're inwardly content, you don't need others to prop you up, so you can think about them more freely and generously. Paradoxically enough, separation is the way to empathy. In solitude we meet not just ourselves but all other selves, and it turns out we hardly knew them.¹⁹²³

The state of distraction fostered by the internet harms even our ability to show compassion. Sherry Turkle wrote: "In 2010, a team at the University of Michigan ... put together the findings of 72 studies conducted over a 30-year period and found a 40 percent decline in the markers for empathy (measured as the ability to recognize and identify the feelings of others) among college students. Most of the decline took place after 2000, which led the researchers to link it to the new presence of digital communications."¹⁹²⁴ Likewise, a study done in 2009 found a connection between distractions from digital technology and a loss of empathy. It concluded:

The more distracted we become, the less able we are to experience the subtlest, most distinctively human forms of empathy, compassion, and other emotions.... It would not be rash to suggest that as the Net reroutes our vital paths and diminishes our capacity for contemplation, it is altering the depth of our emotions as well as our thoughts.¹⁹²⁵

¹⁹²¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁹²² Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now*, Lyceum Editions, vol. 114 (New York: Scribner Library, 1963), 11.

¹⁹²³ William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry*, 42.

¹⁹²⁴ www.psychotherapynetworker.org/magazine/article/1051/the-empathy-gap See also Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 171.

¹⁹²⁵ As cited in Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 221.

Dr. Larchet explained how this happens:

Certain analysts have found that the emotions of those who use the new media are enhanced, but their affections, especially their powers of empathy and compassion, are diminished.... This is due to their [i.e., the new media's] speed, and the rapid reactions required of their users, and to the near endemic state of distraction that they provoke.... [Studies] show that normally, from his own experience of physical pain, a person is able to feel compassion immediately for another who suffers in the same way. But if he is engaged in rapid activity, he is unable to feel such emotions, since they need time to develop. According to one of these researchers, even personal morality is compromised by most activities with the new media.¹⁹²⁶

Another mechanism makes online communication a breeding ground for negative emotions. The techno-philosopher Jaron Lanier explained that “the primacy of anger and outrage online is ... an unavoidable feature of the medium: In an open marketplace for attention, darker emotions attract more eyeballs than positive and constructive thoughts. For heavy internet users, repeated interaction with this darkness can become a source of draining negativity.”¹⁹²⁷

Using the internet even leads to depression. The “Monitoring the Future” survey found in teenagers a direct and strong correlation between screen time and unhappiness.¹⁹²⁸ Other studies on college students¹⁹²⁹ and adults¹⁹³⁰ found a similar correlation between internet use and unhappiness. Several longitudinal studies indicate that it is the internet which is causing the unhappiness rather than vice versa.¹⁹³¹

Many people have personally experienced how the internet strengthens addictions and is in itself addicting. Dr. Larchet elaborates on these two aspects:

Among the worst problems caused by the new media are addictions and dependencies. In extreme cases, which are in fact quite common, the media act as a drug: many people today are driven to use them in the same way as others are driven to use traditional narcotics and are dependent in the same way.¹⁹³²

When speaking of addiction, “cyber-addiction” must be distinguished from “cyber-assisted addiction.” *Cyber-addiction* is an addiction to certain means of communication, especially the Internet and social media. Those who suffer from *cyber-assisted addiction* are not addicted to the new media themselves, but to the realities to

¹⁹²⁶ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 101–02.

¹⁹²⁷ As paraphrased in Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, xii.

¹⁹²⁸ www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/

¹⁹²⁹ Hunt, M. G., Lipson, C., & Young, J., “No more FOMO: Limiting social media decreases loneliness and depression,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 37 (2018): 751–68.

¹⁹³⁰ Sherman, L. E., Mina, M., & Greenfield, P. M., “The Facebook Experiment: Quitting Facebook leads to higher levels of well-being,” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 19 (2016): 661–66.

¹⁹³¹ <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/the-sad-state-of-happiness-in-the-united-states-and-the-role-of-digital-media/>

¹⁹³² Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 105.

which they give quick, easy, and unlimited access: online games, sex, compulsive purchases, etc. ... As the psychiatrists Michel Hautefeuille and Dan Velea have remarked: “it [the Internet] is the dream tool for someone drawn to addiction: it can provide whatever attracts the addict.”¹⁹³³

The worst kinds of addiction ... cause other tasks and relationships, which make up social life, to be abandoned for much of the day.... The worst kinds of addiction to the new media should not blind us to its milder forms that still have negative effects on psychological life. Nowadays, many users of the new media are addicts without realizing it. They tend to see their dependency as unimportant compared to the worst addictions.... Addiction in all its forms is marked by dependency of different degrees. It consists of a more or less irresistible attraction that indicates a more or less pressing need whose satisfaction brings a more or less conscious pleasure. If left unsatisfied it brings frustration, a feeling of missing out that gives rise to a more or less intense feeling of mental suffering. Apart from these inner gauges, the strength of addiction can be measured by the degree to which it degrades adaption to society and presence therein, first in the family, then in school or work, and finally in relations in general.¹⁹³⁴

Social media have actually been designed to foster behavioral addictions. As Cal Newport explained:

People don’t succumb to [spending inordinate amounts of time on] screens because they’re lazy, but instead because billions of dollars have been invested to make this outcome inevitable ... by the high-end device companies and attention economy conglomerates who discovered there are vast fortunes to be made in a culture dominated by gadgets and apps....

Two forces ... repeatedly came up in my own research on how tech companies encourage behavioral addiction: *intermittent positive reinforcement* and *the drive for social approval*.... [Psychological studies have shown] that rewards delivered unpredictably are far more enticing than those delivered with a known pattern. Something about unpredictability releases more dopamine—a key neurotransmitter for regulating our sense of craving.... As whistleblower Tristan Harris explains: “Apps and websites sprinkle intermittent variable rewards all over their products because it’s good for business.” ... Sean Parker, the founding president of Facebook ... [admitted]: “The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them, ... was all about: ‘How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?’ And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever.” ...

The second force that encourages behavioral addiction [is] the drive for social approval. As Adam Alter writes: “We’re social beings who can’t ever completely ignore what other people think of us.... The technology industry has become adept at exploiting this instinct for approval.”¹⁹³⁵

¹⁹³³ Ibid., 106–07.

¹⁹³⁴ Ibid., 107.

¹⁹³⁵ Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 9, 17–24.

These addictive properties of new technologies are not accidents, but instead carefully engineered design features.... Compulsive use, in this context, is not the result of a character flaw, but instead the realization of a massively profitable business plan.¹⁹³⁶

In other words, internet companies are taking advantage of the same psychological weakness that casinos do. Whereas casinos use intermittent positive reinforcement to grab our money, the internet uses it to grab our attention and our time.

Even former executives of Facebook admit that its social media platform is harming people. Chamath Palihapitiya, a former vice-president for user growth at Facebook said: “The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops that we have created are destroying how society works. No civil discourse, no cooperation, misinformation, mistruth.”¹⁹³⁷ Sean Parker, the founding president of Facebook considers himself “something of a conscientious objector” to using social media, for they “exploit a vulnerability in human psychology” by creating a “social-validation feedback loop.... It literally changes your relationship with society, with each other. It probably interferes with productivity in weird ways. God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains.”¹⁹³⁸

One thing it might be doing to children’s brains is causing ADHD, according to Simon Sinek, who said: “The number of children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) shot up 66 percent between 2000 and 2010 and continued to rise between 2011 and 2014. Why the sudden and huge spike in a frontal lobe dysfunction over the course of a decade? ... What I believe is likely happening is that more young people are developing an addiction to distraction, or rather, to the dopamine-producing effects of the digital technologies and online activities that are distracting them.”¹⁹³⁹

Digital technologies are creating attention deficits not only in children but also in adults. William Powers remarked:

Novel psychological conditions and behaviors that some experts attribute to digital overload ... include attention deficit trait.... According to Edward Hallowell, the psychiatrist who first described it ... symptoms include “distractibility, restlessness, a sense of ‘gotta go, gotta rush, gotta run around’ and impulsive decision-making, because you have so many things to do.” Many other [psychological] conditions have been linked to [information] overload, including continuous partial attention, defined as the state of mind in which “most of one’s attention is on a primary task, but where one is also monitoring several background tasks just in case something more important or interesting comes up.”¹⁹⁴⁰

¹⁹³⁶ Ibid., 16–17, 24.

¹⁹³⁷ www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/dec/11/facebook-former-executive-ripping-society-apart

¹⁹³⁸ www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/nov/09/facebook-sean-parker-vulnerability-brain-psychology

¹⁹³⁹ Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 258.

¹⁹⁴⁰ William Powers, *Hamlet’s Blackberry*, 50–51.

Not only does the internet lead to addictions, but it also reduces one's freedom in general. Dr. Larchet observes:

Because they give everyone the power to communicate immediately and permanently with the whole world, the new media seem to remove two major constraints on our freedom: space and time.... However, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the new media place a real restraint on personal freedom at several levels: political, through the surveillance and propaganda that they enable; economic, through the surveillance and exploitation of workers that they permit; and social, through the abolition of the boundary between public and private life that they bring about.

Addiction to the new media, be it cyber-dependence or cyber-assisted dependence is another restriction on freedom in addition to the above. It is worse, since it restricts inner freedom, not simply outer freedom. It gives rise to the same kind of bondage as the passions, both in the modern psychological sense and in the spiritual sense. For these diminish the conscience and the will of the person. They subject the person to the strong attraction of external factors that appear seductive, but in reality are insubstantial, imaginary in the case of the classic passions and virtual for those that attract to the new media. They also act on him through external mechanisms that marshal his energy and disperse his powers in a stream without substance or consistency.¹⁹⁴¹

iv) Cognitive Harm

Finally, using the internet impairs our *cognitive* health by: diminishing our ability to concentrate and think deeply, restricting our inner freedom, hampering creativity, encouraging mental laziness, and leading to cognitive overload. We shall explore each of these problems in this section. Harm of this nature is particularly insidious because it is not immediately evident.

Just as St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain observed that modern appliances make us physically lazy,¹⁹⁴² Dr. Larchet observes how the internet harms our mental health by enabling the mind to become lazy:

Computers have changed memory into a mere index, and intelligence into the simple capacity of using this index. In fact, it leaves the memory empty of any significant content.... Rather than memorize information, we now store it digitally and just remember what we stored....

Because this external store of information exists we refer to it every time we need something stored on the web, and so we no longer use our own faculty of memory and recall....

With calculators integrated into every smartphone we often become incapable of the simplest operations of arithmetic, let alone the more complex such as long division or the extraction of square roots that once could be done by anyone who had finished primary school....

¹⁹⁴¹ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 108–09.

¹⁹⁴² Vid. footnote #1527 on page 286.

This leaves a chasm between our modern digital civilization and the societies of old who valued memory so much that some of them deified it, like the ancient Greeks with their goddess Mnemosyne.¹⁹⁴³

Nicholas Carr explains the mechanism by which the brain becomes weaker through using the internet:

The extensive activity in the brains of surfers [on the internet] also points to why deep reading and other acts of sustained concentration become so difficult online. The need to evaluate links and make related navigational choices, while also processing a multiplicity of fleeting sensory stimuli, requires constant mental coordination and decision making, distracting the brain from the work of interpreting text or other information. Whenever we, as readers, come upon a link, we have to pause, for at least a split second, to allow our prefrontal cortex to evaluate whether or not we should click on it. The redirection of our mental resources, from reading words to making judgments, may be imperceptible to us—our brains are quick—but it's been shown to impede comprehension and retention, particularly when it's repeated frequently. As the executive functions of the prefrontal cortex kick in, our brains become not only exercised but overtaxed.... In reading online ... we sacrifice the facility that makes deep reading possible.... Our ability to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction remains largely disengaged.¹⁹⁴⁴

The key to memory consolidation is attentiveness. Storing explicit memories and, equally important, forming connections between them requires strong mental concentration, amplified by repetition or by intense intellectual or emotional engagement. The sharper the attention, the sharper the memory.... If we're unable to attend to the information in our working memory, the information lasts only as long as the neurons that hold it maintain their electric charge—a few seconds at best.... The influx of competing messages that we receive whenever we go online not only overloads our working memory; it makes it much harder for our frontal lobes to concentrate our attention on any one thing. The [neurological] process of memory consolidation can't even get started. And, thanks once again to the plasticity of our neuronal pathways, the more we use the Web, the more we train our brain to be distracted—to process information very quickly and very efficiently but without sustained attention. That helps explain why many of us find it hard to concentrate even when we're away from our computers. Our brains become adept at forgetting, inept at remembering.¹⁹⁴⁵

As the time we spend hopping across links crowds out the time we devote to quiet reflection and contemplation, the circuits that support those old intellectual functions and pursuits weaken and begin to break apart.¹⁹⁴⁶

This means that even if we are reading spiritual texts online, we will be unable to derive the full benefit from them due to the distractions. Moreover, these distractions are compromising the very purpose of reading envisioned by St. Peter of Damascus, who said: “The

¹⁹⁴³ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 126–27.

¹⁹⁴⁴ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 122.

¹⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

purpose of spiritual reading is to keep the intellect from distraction and restlessness, for this is the first step toward salvation.”¹⁹⁴⁷

Dr. Larchet has pointed out other negative aspects of reading from a screen:

Traditionally, reading was done slowly. The reader took his time. In contrast, reading on the screen is done quickly at a speed imposed by the rhythm of the media, or encouraged by the ambiance of rapidity and reactivity that is theirs, and by the physical and mental frenzy with which they are most often used.... The physical reality of a book gives weight and reality to what is read, while the dematerialized book, read on a digital reader or on-screen as text, makes the [content of the] book seem insignificant. It makes the text lose some of its reality and density, leaving it light and inconsequential.¹⁹⁴⁸

A further problem is that reading online enables only superficial learning. Nicholas Carr wrote: “Dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, educators, and Web designers point to the same conclusion: when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning. ... The Net delivers precisely the kind of sensory and cognitive stimuli—repetitive, intensive, interactive, addictive—that have been shown to result in strong and rapid alterations in brain circuits and functions.”¹⁹⁴⁹

Moreover, a study in 2003 showed that “the digital environment tends to encourage people to explore many topics extensively, but at a more superficial level,” and that “hyperlinks [in the text they are reading] distract people from reading and thinking deeply.”¹⁹⁵⁰ As Dr. Larchet wrote:

Using the new media weakens our ability to reflect, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Reflection is not simply thought, a flow of descriptions, images, and ideas. It is an ordered process that involves the intuition backed by reason, with its logical categories and its rules of organization and argument, and by a critical spirit.... It means stepping back to a certain distance, and taking time. The new media work almost without a pause, pouring forth a continuous flow of information that does not allow our thought to pause and examine itself. Our mental powers go with the flow, almost wholly reduced to dependence and passivity.... Urgency is the hallmark of the new media. Messages must be sent quickly.... This speed prevents reflection, which generally needs time, except in the exceptionally rare case of real urgency.¹⁹⁵¹

A further drawback of internet use is that it naturally encourages the habit of multitasking and frequently shifting our attention. This taxes our mental resources because every time

¹⁹⁴⁷ Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 3, 155.

¹⁹⁴⁸ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 121–22.

¹⁹⁴⁹ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 116–17.

¹⁹⁵⁰ Ziming Liu, “Reading Behavior in the Digital Environment,” *Journal of Documentation*, 61, no. 6 (2005): 700–12.

¹⁹⁵¹ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 124.

we shift our attention, our brain has to reorient itself. As Maggie Jackson explains in *Distracted*, her book on multitasking, “the brain takes time to change goals, remember the rules needed for the new task, and block out cognitive interference from the previous, still-vivid activity.”¹⁹⁵² A moderate estimate is that “unnecessary interruptions and consequent recovery time now eat up an average of 28 percent of the working day.”¹⁹⁵³ The American Psychological Association declared more grimly that “shifting between tasks can cost as much as 40 percent of someone’s productive time.”¹⁹⁵⁴ The economic cost of these interruptions in the corporate world was calculated to be \$900 billion dollars a year in 2009.¹⁹⁵⁵ As for how damaging interruptions are for the monastic world and our inner world, this is harder to quantify. Nevertheless, the following points can give us some idea of this.

Nicholas Carr observed: “Many studies have shown that switching between just two tasks can add substantially to our cognitive load, impeding our thinking and increasing the likelihood that we’ll overlook or misinterpret important information.”¹⁹⁵⁶ William Powers added: “Recovering focus can take ten to twenty times the length of the interruption. So a one-minute interruption could require fifteen minutes of recovery time. And that’s only if you go right back to the original task; jam other tasks in between and the recovery time lengthens further.”¹⁹⁵⁷ Furthermore, Dr. Larchet observes: “On the Net, where we routinely juggle not just two but several mental tasks, the switching costs [of multitasking] are all the higher.... [This] accumulated nervous fatigue leads to decompensations, which can end in depression, but more often take the form of burn out.”¹⁹⁵⁸

These interruptions turn into a self-perpetuating cycle, as Simon Sinek points out:

The more external interruptions we experience, like a text or an e-mail alert, the more we engage in self-interruption, that is, interrupting ourselves mid-task to check our e-mail or phones without any notification from a ring or a bing. In other words, interruptions lead to more interruptions. And more interruptions not only reduce opportunities for focused, deep thought, but they also delay the completion of work and increase feelings of pressure and stress.¹⁹⁵⁹

¹⁹⁵² Maggie Jackson, *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (New York, Prometheus, 2008), 79.

¹⁹⁵³ William Powers, *Hamlet’s Blackberry*, 60.

¹⁹⁵⁴ As cited in Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 257.

¹⁹⁵⁵ Vid. William Powers, *Hamlet’s Blackberry*, 62.

¹⁹⁵⁶ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 133.

¹⁹⁵⁷ William Powers, *Hamlet’s Blackberry*, 58–59.

¹⁹⁵⁸ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 104.

¹⁹⁵⁹ Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 257.

Part of the problem is that we are like the first-century Athenians who “spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.”¹⁹⁶⁰ In other words, we are addicted to the short-term pleasure of hearing new things as opposed to appreciating the lasting and satisfying pleasure of what is important. As Nicholas Carr wrote:

The near-continuous stream of new information pumped out by the Web also plays to our natural tendency to “vastly overvalue what happens to us *right now*,” as Union College psychologist Christopher Chabris explains. We crave the new even when we know that “the new is more often trivial than essential.” And so we ask the Internet to keep interrupting us, in ever more and different ways. We willingly accept the loss of concentration and focus, the division of our attention and the fragmentation of our thoughts, in return for the wealth of compelling or at least diverting information we receive. Tuning out is not an option many of us would consider.¹⁹⁶¹

Research by Clifford Nass has revealed that constant attention switching online has a lasting negative effect on your brain. Summarizing his research, he said: “People who multitask all the time can’t filter out irrelevancy. They can’t manage a working memory. They’re chronically distracted. They initiate much larger parts of their brains that are irrelevant to the task at hand.... They’re pretty much mental wrecks.... They’ve developed habits of mind that make it impossible for them to be laser-focused.”¹⁹⁶² Commenting on this finding, Cal Newport wrote: “If every moment of potential boredom in your life ... is relieved with a quick glance at your smartphone, then your brain has likely been rewired to a point where, like the ‘mental wrecks’ in Nass’s research, it’s not ready for deep work—even if you regularly schedule time to practice this concentration.”¹⁹⁶³ What this means for monastics is that the more we indulge in using the internet as a way to relax, the harder we will find it to concentrate in prayer, which should be our primary work.

Although multitasking appears to increase our productivity, what we are really doing is “learning to be skillful at a superficial level,”¹⁹⁶⁴ according to David Myer, a neuroscientist and leading expert on multitasking. Another neuroscientist, Jordan Grafman, explains that improving our ability to multitask hampers our ability to think deeply and creatively: “The more you multitask, the less deliberative you become; the less able to think

¹⁹⁶⁰ Acts 17:21.

¹⁹⁶¹ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 134.

¹⁹⁶² As quoted in Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 158.

¹⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁹⁶⁴ As quoted in Sharon Begley and Janeen Interlandi, “The Dumbest Generation? Don’t Be Dumb,” *Newsweek*, June 2, 2008.

and reason out a problem.”¹⁹⁶⁵ He argues that you become more likely to rely on conventional ideas and solutions than to challenge them with original lines of thought.¹⁹⁶⁶

Creativity is also hampered by the distracted state created by the internet, as Nicholas Carr explains: “The constant distractedness that the Net encourages ... is very different from the kind of temporary, purposeful diversion of our mind that refreshes our thinking when we’re weighing a decision. The Net’s cacophony of stimuli short-circuits both conscious and unconscious thought, preventing our minds from thinking either deeply or creatively.”¹⁹⁶⁷

Using the internet also reduces the mind’s ability to focus because of its continual interruptions. Nicholas Carr wrote:

The Net seizes our attention only to scatter it. We focus intensively on the medium itself, on the flickering screen, but we’re distracted by the medium’s rapid-fire delivery of competing messages and stimuli.¹⁹⁶⁸

Whenever we turn on our computer, we are plunged into an ecosystem of interruption technologies.¹⁹⁶⁹

The Net is, by design, an interruption system, a machine geared for dividing attention. ... Psychological research long ago proved what most of us know from experience: frequent interruptions scatter our thoughts, weaken our memory, and make us tense and anxious. The more complex the train of thought we’re involved in, the greater the impairment the distractions cause.¹⁹⁷⁰

Dr. Larchet added: “The worst damage caused by the new media is to the faculty of attention, and consequently, to concentration. Their power to distract and disperse make attention more and more difficult, be it to one’s own tasks, to others, or to God.”¹⁹⁷¹

William Powers elaborates on how digital devices both help and harm the mind:

Of the mind’s many aptitudes, the most remarkable is its power of association, the ability to see new relationships among things.... Digital devices are, in one sense, a tremendous gift to the associative process because they link us to so many sources of information. The potential they hold out for creative insights and synthesis is breathtaking. The best human creativity, however, happens only when we have the time and mental space to take a new thought and follow it wherever it leads. William James once contrasted “the sustained attention of the genius, sticking to his subject for hours together,” with the “commonplace mind” that flits from place to place. Geniuses are rare, but by using screens as we do now, constantly jumping around, we’re ensuring

¹⁹⁶⁵ As quoted in Don Tapscott, *Grown Up Digital* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 108–09.

¹⁹⁶⁶ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 140.

¹⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 131, 132.

¹⁹⁷¹ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 171.

that all of us have fewer ingenious moments and bring less associative creativity to whatever kind of work we do.¹⁹⁷²

A further problem for the brain caused by internet usage is cognitive overload, which Nicholas Carr explains as follows:

Imagine filling a bathtub with a thimble; that's the challenge involved in transferring information from working memory into long-term memory. By regulating the velocity and intensity of information flow, media exert a strong influence on this process. When we read a book, the information faucet provides a steady drip, which we can control by the pace of our reading. Through our single-minded concentration on the text, we can transfer all or most of the information, thimbleful by thimbleful, into long-term memory and forge the rich associations essential to the creation of schemas. With the Net, we face many information faucets, all going full blast. Our little thimble overflows as we rush from one faucet to the next. We're able to transfer only a small portion of the information to long-term memory, and what we do transfer is a jumble of drops from different faucets, not a continuous, coherent stream from one source.

The information flowing into our working memory at any given moment is called our "cognitive load." When the load exceeds our mind's ability to store and process the information—when the water overflows the thimble—we're unable to retain the information or to draw connections with the information already stored in our long-term memory. We can't translate the new information into schemas. Our ability to learn suffers, and our understanding remains shallow. Because our ability to maintain our attention also depends on our working memory—"we have to remember what it is we are to concentrate on," as Torkel Klingberg says—a high cognitive load amplifies the distractedness we experience. When our brain is over-taxed, we find "distractions more distracting." (Some studies link attention deficit disorder, or ADD, to the overloading of working memory.) Experiments indicate that as we reach the limits of our working memory, it becomes harder to distinguish relevant information from irrelevant information, signal from noise. We become mindless consumers of data.

Difficulties in developing an understanding of a subject or a concept appear to be "heavily determined by working memory load," writes [John] Sweller, and the more complex the material we're trying to learn, the greater the penalty exacted by an overloaded mind. There are many possible sources of cognitive overload, but two of the most important, according to Sweller, are "extraneous problem-solving" and "divided attention." Those also happen to be two of the central features of the Net as an informational medium. Using the Net may, as Gary Small suggests, exercise the brain the way solving crossword puzzles does. But such intensive exercise, when it becomes our primary mode of thought, can impede deep learning and thinking. Try reading a book while doing a crossword puzzle; that's the intellectual environment of the Internet.¹⁹⁷³

Another reason why interacting with screens is taxing on the brain is because they are unnatural. As William Powers explains:

Among researchers who study how humans interact with technology, there's a theory known as embodied interaction, which says that three-dimensional tools are easier on the mind in certain important ways. This makes intuitive sense. Think of a

¹⁹⁷² William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry*, 60–61.

¹⁹⁷³ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 124–26.

screen with a dozen different documents open, all layered on top of one another, and what a pain it is to try to organize and keep track of them all at once, using just your clicker and keyboard. Sometimes you want to reach in there and grab them, but you can't. Reading and writing on screen, we expend a great deal of mental energy just navigating. Paper's tangibility allows the hands and fingers to take over much of the navigational burden, freeing the brain to think.¹⁹⁷⁴

Being exposed to too much information has a detrimental effect on attention. As Herbert Simon, a Nobel laureate, observed: "What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention."¹⁹⁷⁵ St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain observed this same principle in the spiritual realm. He wrote:

Just as it is necessary to guard the mind from ignorance, so is it equally necessary to protect it from the opposite, namely from too much knowledge and curiosity. For if we fill it with a quantity of information, ideas, and thoughts, not excluding such as are vain, unsuitable, and harmful, we deprive it of force, so that it is no longer able to understand clearly what is useful for our true self-correction and perfection. Therefore, in relation to the knowledge of earthly things, which is not indispensable, even if it is permissible, your attitude should be as of one already dead. Always collect your mind within yourself, with all the concentration you can, and keep it free of thoughts about all worldly things.¹⁹⁷⁶

Considering that St. Nicodemos wrote this two centuries before the "information explosion" of the modern world,¹⁹⁷⁷ one can only imagine how much more he would have emphasized this point had he lived today.

It should not be too surprising that a powerful tool for the brain such as the internet also has grave, negative effects on the brain, for the philosopher Marshall McLuhan pointed out that our tools end up "numbing" whatever part of our body they "amplify."¹⁹⁷⁸ As explained by Nicholas Carr:

¹⁹⁷⁴ William Powers, *Hamlet's Blackberry*, 153–54.

¹⁹⁷⁵ As cited in Thomas H. Davenport and John C. Beck, *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001), 1.

¹⁹⁷⁶ *Unseen Warfare: the Spiritual Combat and Path to Paradise of Lorenzo Scupoli*, edited by Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, and revised by Theophan the Recluse, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 92–93.

¹⁹⁷⁷ The exponential increase of the *existence* of information is nothing new. Since the 15th century it has been doubling about every three decades, according to Rudolph Hanka of the University of Cambridge. Thus, the information available today is roughly 2¹⁸ greater (a 262,144-fold increase) than what it was in 1400. The average person's *consumption* of information, however, began increasing exponentially only in recent decades, primarily due to digital media. According to one study, "in 2008, people consumed three times as much information each day as they did in 1960" (www.nytimes.com/2010/06/07/technology/07brain.html).

¹⁹⁷⁸ As quoted in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding the Media: The Extensions of Man*, critical ed., ed. W. Terrence Gordon (Madera: Gingko Press, 2003), 63–70.

When we extend some part of ourselves artificially, we also distance ourselves from the amplified part and its natural functions. ... [For example, farmers] lost some of their feel for the soil when they began using mechanical harrows and plows.... When we're behind the wheel of our car ... we lose the walker's intimate connection to the land.... The tools of the mind amplify and in turn numb the most intimate, the most human, of our natural capacities—those for reason, perception, memory, emotion.¹⁹⁷⁹

+ + +

Now that we have demonstrated how the internet harms us spiritually, physically, psychologically, and cognitively, we must concede that living in our modern world requires that we use the internet in order to function. Facing this predicament, Dr. Larchet concluded: "Our world is so organized that it is extremely hard to abstain entirely from the new media. Realistically, we must compromise. We can limit our use of the new media to what is essential for our way of life, especially for our work."¹⁹⁸⁰ Similarly, Elder Ephraim was not in favor of his monastics using the internet, but he allowed it only when it was absolutely necessary.

Cal Newport promotes a minimalistic solution to this problem that he explains as follows:

Digital Minimalism. A philosophy of technology use in which you focus your online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value, and then happily miss out on everything else.

The so-called digital minimalists who follow this philosophy constantly perform implicitly cost-benefit analyses. If a new technology offers little more than a minor diversion or trivial convenience, the minimalist will ignore it....

Notice, this minimalist philosophy contrasts starkly with the maximalist philosophy that most people deploy by default—a mind-set in which *any* potential for benefit is enough to start using a technology that catches your attention. A maximalist is very uncomfortable with the idea that anyone might miss out on something that's the least bit interesting or valuable....

[In contrast, digital minimalists] believe that the best digital life is formed by carefully curating their tools to deliver massive and unambiguous benefits. They tend to be incredibly wary of low-value activities that can clutter up their time and attention and end up hurting more than they help. Put another way: minimalists don't mind missing out on small things; what worries them much more is diminishing the large things they *already know for sure* make a good life good.¹⁹⁸¹

Even though there is sufficient evidence to convince most people that using the internet is harmful in theory, many people may find that putting this theory into practice in their own lives is difficult. The primary reason for this difficulty is because most of us have already

¹⁹⁷⁹ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows*, 210–11.

¹⁹⁸⁰ Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 155–56.

¹⁹⁸¹ Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism*, 28–30.

fallen prey to the addictive nature of the internet, at least to some degree. Dr. Larchet recommends some strategies that may help us break this addiction:

Dependency on the new media is similar to dependency on drugs. So in severe cases, psychotherapy is needed with psychiatrists specialized in addictions. ... However, it must be realized that addiction to the Internet and other new media ... is a response to existential problems that are at its root and that must also be treated urgently. These existential problems most often arise from deep spiritual roots and so require a spiritual therapy.

Not all the forms of addiction to the new media are grave enough to need a stay in a hospital or even psychotherapy. The firm intention to reduce exposure ... can be effective if there is personal discipline.¹⁹⁸²

There are more and more reports of the positive results of ... long-term retreats [from connected devices]. Those who cannot cut themselves off completely for so long, often for professional reasons, are advised to unplug regularly for short periods of at least five days. This radical interruption of all types of connection brings psychological and physical rest.¹⁹⁸³

Unplugging [from the internet] is clearly most important for the smartphone, perhaps through time filters, and for emails and text messages. Real-time alerts should be switched off. It is better to look at all the messages at a time of the day or week that is set aside for correspondence.... Online time should be managed so that it remains within set limits.¹⁹⁸⁴

Above all, it is necessary to put into perspective in one's mind the place and importance of the new media. One should realize that there is more to life than information and communication, and that these things should be instruments in the service of the content that precedes and follows them.... [The new media] should also be set against former ways of working, of leisure and relationship, rediscovering the old ways if need be. One will then see that when the media are not absolutely necessary for the work in hand, they do not always improve efficiently or even speed, and that speed is rarely indispensable. It will be seen that the leisure activities proposed by the new media are not always more enriching or relaxing than traditional activities, and that the relationships formed through social networks are not deeper or more satisfying. The pleasure, freedom and depth of the reading of books will be rediscovered. ... The virtue of dead time, of silence, of solitude, of meditation, of contemplation, and of prayer will be ours again.¹⁹⁸⁵

15) Success

When striving to achieve something, it isn't enough merely to know what the goal is—it is helpful to know how successfully progress is being made toward that goal. As Abba Benjamin said: "Follow the royal path and count the miles, and thus you do not become

¹⁹⁸² Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic*, 156–57.

¹⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 158–59.

discouraged.”¹⁹⁸⁶ Commenting on this, Abba Dorotheos explained: “The miles that one covers are the different spiritual states which one must always assess, so as to see where he is. . . . We have an obligation to examine ourselves, not just every day, but also at regular intervals of time—every year, every month, and every week—and to say, . . . ‘Last year, I was overcome by that passion to some extent. Where am I now?’”¹⁹⁸⁷

Thus, one way of measuring a monk’s progress is to assess the intensity of his passions. Another way of measuring progress is to examine the quality of his prayer, since, according to St. John of Sinai, prayer is “the mirror of a monk’s progress.”¹⁹⁸⁸ But what criteria can be used to measure the progress and success of a monastery, which is not an individual person but a group of persons and an organization?

For a worldly organization, success can be approximated by measuring specific, tangible variables such as profit margin, capital, number of employees, employee morale, public image, etc. For a monastery, however, assessing success is much more difficult. Some indicators of corporate success may also incidentally be present in a “good” monastery—such as financial well-being, size and quality of buildings, number of monks, morale of the monks, and public opinion of the monastery. History has shown, however, that many excellent brotherhoods even with a saint for their abbot lacked some or all of these attributes for various reasons. For example, the brotherhood of St. Joseph the Hesychast lacked most of those qualities: they were not wealthy, the size and quality of their living quarters left much to be desired, the number of fathers was small, and several others had a low opinion of them, even suspecting that they were deluded.

St. Nilus Sorsky viewed such criteria as worldly and not spiritual. He wrote: “To have the title of the finest monastery in a place and a multitude of brothers—this is the pride of the worldly, the Fathers said— . . . or success in worldly reputation . . . these are madness.”¹⁹⁸⁹ Therefore, these worldly standards are not very helpful in assessing the state of one’s monastery. Besides, the true measure of success for a monastery is how well it is doing God’s will, which can be quite different for different monastics and different monasteries. For example, Abba Arsenius was doing God’s will by living as a hesychast in silence, whereas Abba Moses in contrast was doing God’s will by giving hospitality.¹⁹⁹⁰

Since the goal of the monastery is to contribute to the salvation of souls, and since there is a correlation between salvation and spiritual health, one can indirectly assess how

¹⁹⁸⁶ PG 65:145A. Similarly, St. Joseph the Hesychast taught: “Man is meant not only to run but should also count the miles on the road” (Γέροντος Ἰωσήφ, *Ἐκφρασις Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας*, 202. See also Elder Joseph, *Monastic Wisdom*, 177).

¹⁹⁸⁷ Metropolitan Chrysostomos, *Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza*, 168–69, 175–76.

¹⁹⁸⁸ Cf. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 212.

¹⁹⁸⁹ Goldfrank, *Nil Sorsky: The Authentic Writings*, 186–87.

¹⁹⁹⁰ Vid. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 17–18.

“good” a monastery is by evaluating how conducive it is to spiritual health. Bearing this in mind, we can make the following list of attributes, which is nothing but an attempt to distill the essence of monasticism as presented in the foregoing pages of this book. Our hope is that monasteries will find this list to be a helpful aid in critical self-examination, and that postulants may use it to select a monastery that is most likely to help them achieve salvation.

Attributes of a Successful Monastery

- 1) *How much the monastics love God*—which is evident in how strong their faith, prayer, humility, and reverence are;
- 2) *how much they love their neighbor*—which is evident in the degree of unity in the brotherhood so that “one soul is seen in many bodies,”¹⁹⁹¹ and in the degree of genuine, selfless love they have for the other monastics, visitors, and the rest of the world;
- 3) *how skilled the abbot (or abbess) is in guiding souls*, which entails: inspiring them to love God, helping them to maintain brotherly love (especially in conflicts), selflessly developing their unique personhood,¹⁹⁹² encouraging them to obey voluntarily instead of enforcing discipline,¹⁹⁹³ and, in general, teaching them through his example, words, and experience to purify their hearts of passions, and ultimately guiding them in noetic prayer to illumination and theosis;
- 4) *to what degree the abbot has earned the love, trust, and respect*¹⁹⁹⁴ *of the fathers*—not merely because of his position but because of his behavior as a person, who as the “good shepherd”¹⁹⁹⁵ lays down his life for the sheep through sacrificial love, which requires that he have the spiritual and psychological health to tend to his disciples’ needs;
- 5) *how well the monastics are progressing in their struggle against the seven deadly passions* (pride, fornication, jealousy, love of money, gluttony, despondency, and anger) as well as other passions, such as laziness, selfishness, impatience, judging, partial love, curiosity, love of power, forgetfulness of

¹⁹⁹¹ For the entire quotation of St. Basil the Great, see footnote #1116 on page 206.

¹⁹⁹² Elder Aimilianos taught that in a monastery “the person should not be stifled, the personality should be cultivated, the individual understood.” See page xviii of preface for the full quotation.

¹⁹⁹³ The difference between voluntary obedience and discipline is explained in chapter 3, section 6: “Obedience and Freedom,” on page 117.

¹⁹⁹⁴ Although there have been instances in history where a saintly abbot was not only disrespected but even persecuted by the other monks (because of the latter’s passions), such exceptions do not invalidate the general rule that an abbot will receive the trust and respect he has earned.

¹⁹⁹⁵ Jn. 10:11.

death, lying, self-justification, unwillingness to repent and confess, remembrance of wrongs, talkativeness, gossiping, attachment to material items, and the lack of meekness, self-reproach, genuineness, and seriousness;¹⁹⁹⁶

- 6) *how much the monastics and the visitors are helped spiritually and physically by the monastery* because of its location,¹⁹⁹⁷ external appearance,¹⁹⁹⁸ cleanliness, and organization.¹⁹⁹⁹ The concept of “organization” includes having a balanced schedule for worship, prayer, reading, rest, and work (without becoming a “Martha”), as well as creating an atmosphere that encourages love, humility, and repentance. Organization also entails wise stewardship of whatever financial and material resources a monastery may have. A monastery can also foster spiritual growth through poverty and hardships²⁰⁰⁰ in moderation, while minimizing luxuries²⁰⁰¹ and internet access;
- 7) *how much equality exists*. Equality means not just holding all possessions in common and behaving as “each others’ equal servants,”²⁰⁰² but it especially means that they believe so firmly that they are members of the same body that

¹⁹⁹⁶ “Seriousness” does not mean a gloomy austerity but a level-headed focus and a vigilant stance of self-control. See also footnote #1229 on page 236.

¹⁹⁹⁷ Many monastic saints have written how inspired they were by the location of their monastic dwelling. For example, St. Joseph the Hesychast wrote: “Ascetical life! Wilderness! Angelic life, full of grace! If only you were here to see us! Oh, if you could only see us! It is an earthly paradise here.... I am the most fortunate of men because I live with no worries, enjoying the honey of hesychia without any interruption. And when grace withdraws, hesychia like another grace shelters me in its bosom. Then the pains and sorrows of this evil and toilsome life seem smaller” (Γέροντος Ἰωσήφ, *Ἐκφρασις Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας*, 262, 298. See also Elder Joseph, *Monastic Wisdom*, 226, 255). And Elder Ephraim once predicted with sorrow that a monastery he visited will never make any progress because its location is depressing rather than inspiring. A contemporary theologian observed: “There is an unaccountable solace that fierce landscapes offer to the soul. They heal, as well as mirror, the brokenness we find within.... [There] you experience a crisis of knowing that brings you to the end of yourself, to the only true place where God is met” (Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 216). Perhaps it was these factors that made Abba Sisoës lament his departure from the desert and say: “Was not the mere liberty of my thoughts enough for me in the desert?” (PG 65:401A; see also Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 218).

¹⁹⁹⁸ St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain explained why the external appearances matter: “The simple buildings and the humble belongings transport the monastics mentally to the caves and the austere dwellings of our holy Fathers, and are of great spiritual benefit.” For the entire quotation, see footnote #1575 on page 295.

¹⁹⁹⁹ When a monastery is disorganized, extra time and effort and worry are spent on secondary matters. Elder Ephraim taught: “Wherever there is order, there is peace, and wherever there is peace, there is God. On the contrary, wherever there is disorder, there is confusion; and wherever there is confusion, there is the devil—not physically present but present in the form of temptations” (cf. Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 165. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 124).

²⁰⁰⁰ For the spiritual value of hardship, see section VI) 3) on page 282.

²⁰⁰¹ For the spiritual harm of luxury, see section VI) 5) on page 300.

²⁰⁰² For the entire quotation of St. Basil, see footnote #1116 on page 206.

this belief is reflected in their daily lives. Equality also entails showing the same respect and care for the least of the visitors as for the greatest and richest.²⁰⁰³ Furthermore, equality means having no cliques within or around the monastery;

- 8) *how well the monastery preserves Orthodox tradition.* This includes dogmatic beliefs, the theory and practice of the spiritual life, the liturgical cycle, and artistic expressions.

It is tempting to include also the following four quantitative attributes as indicative of how successful a monastery is:

- 9) how many monks live in the monastery and how many pilgrims visit;
 10) how many people are benefited by the monastery's alms;
 11) how many beneficial things the monastery produces (such as books, icons, newsletters, recordings, candles, handicrafts, etc.);
 12) how many buildings the monastery has and their quality.

Although a larger number of monks and pilgrims is often indicative of a good monastery, a monastery in a less populated area might have only a few monks and pilgrims even if its monks are living up to their monastic calling. Likewise, how many alms a monastery can give depends on many factors, several of which are unrelated to its spiritual health, such as: how many pilgrims come and how wealthy they are, how actively donations are sought from people (if at all), how lucrative the monastery's handicrafts are, how frugally the monks live, how great a need they have for constructing new buildings or purchasing expensive medicines, etc.

The benefit ensuing from the monastery's products does not belong on this list, considering that a monastery could be excellent at helping the world through prayer (which is the monk's primary task²⁰⁰⁴) while not being particularly talented at producing "things." As Elder Aimilianos explained in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation*: "The monastic community, living according to its own rhythm, shall live essentially in the Church and for the Church, like the heart or some member of the body and shall not be evaluated for any activity it may undertake but principally for the ardent search for God.

²⁰⁰³ On the evil of favoritism, see James 2:1–7. On numerous occasions the Lord has tested saints by visiting their monasteries in the guise of someone poor and despicable.

²⁰⁰⁴ As St. Silouan the Athonite taught: "A monk is someone who prays for the whole world, who weeps for the whole world; and in this lies his main work.... It is not for the monk to serve the world with the work of his hands. That is the layman's business" (Sakharov, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 409).

The nuns shall thus be perfect images of God and shall in this way attract others to the life divine.”²⁰⁰⁵

The number and quality of buildings are unfortunately the primary criteria used by superficial people to evaluate a monastery. Although this aspect usually does contribute positively to the well-being of a monastery, it does so only indirectly, since the main reason why having many buildings is an asset is because this helps the monks and visitors to function more effectively. When an abbot told Elder Paisius of Sihla about the external progress of his own monastery, he replied: “Father Abbot, God will not ask you at the Judgment how many material things you’ve gathered, how many cells you’ve built, or how much cattle you have in the monastery. But he will ask us how many souls were gathered there and how many members of the monastic community were saved. And so, we remain here in vain if we are not attending to our souls.”²⁰⁰⁶

St. Sophrony of Essex provided a helpful perspective on what a monastery really is:

Recently, I have observed that some people have a very vague idea of what a monastery is. Let us begin with that. When we talk about a monastery, we are referring above all to the people and not to the buildings. Monasteries are created when someone is struggling to live in accordance with the Gospel with his whole being as much as possible, and around this person others gradually begin to gather. In this manner most monasteries—at least the best ones—were established: around St. Athanasios of Athos, or St. Sergius in Russia; in Egypt around St. Anthony, St. Pachomios, and others; in Palestine around St. Savas, etc. Incidentally, I could say that the monasteries that were established by such people were always the best, as history bears witness, because the monks enjoyed spiritual freedom. The monasteries that princes and rich people supported with their care (a common phenomenon in Russia) bore the seal of the benefactor, but they were “second-class” monasteries, so to speak, from a spiritual point of view, even though they were often very well organized by the local hierarchs. Paradoxically, these monasteries always had less depth and were less “productive” on the spiritual level. I do not assert this absolutely, but this is what happens to take place in most of the situations I know. The person around whom we here have gathered is our father [Saint] Silouan. His teaching and the example of his life should be for us a guide that is steady, more or less. And you will ascertain that the desire of our father Silouan coincides with that of Christ Himself, Who said to His disciples: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”²⁰⁰⁷ Having this as a basis, the Elder legislated how to live....

All of you—or at least most of you—came and were accepted by me because of the book that mentions the Elder, which is why I am saying that Elder Silouan is the

²⁰⁰⁵ Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 162.

²⁰⁰⁶ Bălan, *A Little Corner of Paradise*, 165. Likewise, St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain likewise said that when we are judged, Christ “will not ask what buildings we made. He will not even mention them.” (For the entire quotation, see footnote #1576 on page 295.)

²⁰⁰⁷ Jn. 13:35.

founder of our monastery. So don't lose what he himself says and teaches in his writings; try to find three or five minutes a day to read a few lines from his writings, as well as from those things that I myself have written.²⁰⁰⁸

Thus, a common attribute of many spiritually successful monasteries is that their elder hails from a holy spiritual lineage. In other words, the monastery's elder had himself been under obedience to a holy elder and inherited his grace. This is why St. Daniel of Katounakia said: "Here on the Holy Mountain there is a tradition: you have to bury an elder in order to become an elder."²⁰⁰⁹ That is to say, you must be obedient to an elder until his death in order to become an elder yourself. This characteristic is so common to the elders of spiritually successful monasteries that we could cite it as a prerequisite for success. This would be inaccurate, however, since there have been exceptions to this rule—the most notable exception being St. Paisius Velichkovsky.

One final aspect of a "good" monastery not listed here is the amount of grace present in it, in the abbot, and in the brotherhood. We have omitted it not because it is unimportant but because it is the hardest to measure. Yet most people (even the non-Orthodox)²⁰¹⁰ who have visited a holy monastery have a sense of what this grace feels like.

16) Failure

History has shown again and again that people (including saints) attain success usually only after numerous mistakes and failures. We do not expect to be exempt from this law of human nature, and therefore we need to be ready to welcome corrections with humility and gratitude and to have the courage to make a new beginning whenever we realize we have strayed from the true path.

Failure comes in various shapes and sizes. Most of the forms of failure for a monastery are simply the opposites of the forms of success listed in the previous section. A more subtle form of failure is to have "group pride." This is a subtle temptation because just as pride is the most difficult passion to detect in oneself on an individual level, it is also the most difficult passion to detect in one's own group on a collective level.

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza warned about this kind of pride: "When therefore we see ourselves getting vainglorious ... because we have a better monastery, or one that is more

²⁰⁰⁸ Sakharov, *Οικοδομώντας τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, Τόμος Α΄*, 34–36.

²⁰⁰⁹ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ὁ Γέροντάς μου Ἰωσήφ*, 70. See also Elder Ephraim, *My Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 105.

²⁰¹⁰ When I gave tours of St. Anthony's Monastery in Arizona to non-Orthodox visitors, invariably they would mention how moved they were by the monastery's quietude. One day I gave a tour while someone was using a loud gasoline-powered blower nearby. To my surprise, they still commented how quiet the monastery was! It was then that I realized that what they were perceiving was not an absence of noise but the presence of grace.

convenient, or when we have more brethren, we ought to see that we have reached a high point of this worldly pride.”²⁰¹¹ With this in mind, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov wrote:

The Fathers forbid postulants to choose a monastery that is famous in the eyes of worldly people. The vainglory which the whole monastery shares must inevitably infect each individual member as well. Experience shows that all the brethren of a community can be infected with the spirit of vainglory, not only on account of the material privileges or superiority of their monastery, but also on account of the high opinion of lay people concerning the special piety of its rule. Hence arises scorn for the brethren of other communities, which implies pride, and this saps the possibility of progress or success in the monastic life which is based on love for our neighbours and humility towards them.²⁰¹²

Fr. Seraphim Rose explained how this temptation could be a challenge for groups establishing new monasteries in America:

Among the chief temptations to such groups, especially if they are very successful, are: outward success can blind them to inward deficiencies; community solidarity and well-being can cause them to become inflated with a false sense of their own importance; and the appearance of “correctness” can produce spiritual smugness and disdain of those outside the group who are not so “correct.” If these temptations are not overcome, a deadly “group pride” can take the place of individual pride and lead the whole community on a fatal path which none of its members can recognize because it is not his *personal* doing; the “renewed” community can become so much out of harmony with the “unrenewed” rest of the Church as to form a virtual “jurisdiction” of its own, and even end in a schism brought about by its own exaggerated feeling of “correctness.” The more such groups stay out of the limelight of publicity and church disputes, and the less a point they make of emphasizing their “correctness” and their differences from the older institutions, the better chance they have for remaining spiritually sound.²⁰¹³

The opposite of “group pride” is what one contemporary author called “corporate humility.” He observed this kind of humility in a monastery in Greece:

Having visited literally hundreds of monasteries in my research, I have collected a great number of mementos bearing the insignias of particular monasteries. I have calendars with pictures of abbots with various famous people; I have glossy books filled with pictures of religious treasures and the monastic way of life; and I have CDs of their choirs chanting. I can show friends publicity newsletters and web sites of monasteries I have visited. Many contemporary monasteries seem to excel at self-promotion.

The monastery in Preveza is very different. It has no newsletter, no colorful calendars, no picture books, and no web site. It does not sell a single item in its store bearing its name. It barely has a sign indicating its presence in Flamboura. This anonymity is not due to a lack of organization but rather to a conscious emphasis by Bishop Meletios that one of the primary virtues of the monk should be *afania* (anonymity)... [There is]

²⁰¹¹ Wheeler, *Abba Dorotheos: Discourses and Sayings*, 97.

²⁰¹² Brianchaninov, *The Arena*, 11–12.

²⁰¹³ *Vita Patrum: The Life of the Fathers by St. Gregory of Tours*, 157.

a conscious recognition that part of the holiness they seek as monks means actively maintaining the obscurity that is nothing more than corporate humility.

This desire for anonymity is grounded also in a historical lesson: the great monastic centers did not begin by seeking out worldly glory or recognition; they did not want to become great. Rather, they sought out authentic holiness. Their rejection of the world was not done out of misanthropy but rather out of their sole desire to seek out holiness here on earth. And it was this holiness that brought them fame, not vice versa. Many modern monasteries seem to reverse this relationship.²⁰¹⁴

Fr. Seraphim Rose wrote about another pitfall for monasteries in America:

Unfortunately, the awareness of Orthodox monasticism and its ABC's remains largely, even now [in 1975], an outward matter. There is still more *talk* of "elders," "hesychasm," and "prelest" [delusion] than fruitful monastic struggles themselves. Indeed, it is all too possible to accept all the outward marks of the purest and most exalted monastic tradition: absolute obedience to an elder, daily confession of thoughts, long church services or individual rule of Jesus Prayer and prostrations, frequent reception of Holy Communion, reading with understanding of the basic texts of spiritual life, and in doing all this to feel a deep *psychological* peace and ease—and at the same time to remain *spiritually* immature. It is possible to cover over the untreated passions within one by means of a façade or technique of "correct" spirituality, without having true love for Christ and one's brother. The rationalism and coldness of heart of modern men in general make this perhaps the most insidious of the temptations of the monastic aspirant today. Orthodox monastic *forms*, true enough, are being planted in the West; but what about the heart of monasticism and Orthodox Christianity: repentance, humility, love for Christ our God and unquenchable thirst for His Kingdom?

In all humility let us admit the poverty of our Christianity [in America], the coldness of our love for God, the emptiness of our spiritual pretensions; and let us use this confession as the *beginning* of our monastic path, which is a path of correction. Let us, the monks of the last times, realistically aware of our failings and of the pitfalls before us, not lose courage at the sight of them, but let us all the more strenuously offer to God our humble entreaty that he might forgive our sins and heal our wounded souls.²⁰¹⁵

When an organization is successful, its power naturally increases. This principle applies to monasteries as well. As power increases, however, so does the temptation for corruption. Lord Acton famously quipped: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."²⁰¹⁶ Recent studies have shown, however, that it would be more accurate to say that power does not corrupt but rather heightens pre-existing ethical tendencies.²⁰¹⁷ This finding

²⁰¹⁴ *Beauty for Ashes*, 173–74.

²⁰¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁰¹⁶ John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, *Historical Essays & Studies* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1907), 504.

²⁰¹⁷ Vid. DeCelles, K. A., D. S. DeRue, J. D. Margolis, and T. L. Ceranic. "Does power corrupt or enable? When and why power facilitates self-interested behavior." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97, no. 3 (May 2012): 681–89.

is in line with Abraham Lincoln's maxim: "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."²⁰¹⁸ Thus, in a monastery as long as the abbot maintains impeccable ethics, his power will not result in some form of corruption.

17) Legalities

Elder Aimilianos stated in the *Regulations of the Holy Cenobium of the Annunciation*: "A nun whose life is spiritual and whose ardent soul adheres firmly to God shall not have recourse to civil courts, even if she is unjustly treated, suffers or is brought to death itself, but shall live only in God, trusting in Him"²⁰¹⁹ To implement this principle, in some monasteries every novice is required to sign a "release agreement" that expresses his understanding that he will receive no monetary compensation for his work and cannot sue the monastery. Signing this kind of document was a prerequisite for joining some monasteries in the old days. For example, *The Rule of the Master* dictates:

If the brother chooses to give himself along with his possessions to the monastery and does not wish to sell them, in case he should ever want to leave, subverted and backed by the devil, and make trouble for the monastery by demanding his things, let him first with his own hand draw up a pledge of stability, adding an inventory of his goods. Then let him offer every thing with his soul as a gift to God and to the oratory of the monastery, with religious persons—bishop, priest, and deacon, and the clergy of that area—signing as witnesses. In the document itself let him make this declaration, that should he ever want to quit the monastery he will depart from the monastery without his goods and from God without forgiveness of his sins.... Furthermore, whatever he at any time acquired or made or contributed while in the monastery may absolutely not be given back to him when he leaves.²⁰²⁰

When a person wishes to join a monastery, he should read and sign the monastery's typikon. The *Rule of Macarius* states: "If someone from the world should wish to be converted in the monastery, let the rule be read to him when he enters, and let every practice of the monastery be made clear to him. And if he should accept all things suitably, let him thus be fittingly received by the brothers in the cell."²⁰²¹

Likewise, St. Benedict described in more detail how the monastery's rule is to be repeatedly read to a postulant:

If he [i.e., the postulant] promiseth to remain steadfast, let this Rule be read to him in order after the lapse of two months, and let it be said to him: "Behold the law under which thou desirest to combat. If thou canst keep it, enter; if, however, thou canst not, depart freely." ... And after the lapse of six months let the Rule be read over to him,

²⁰¹⁸ Abraham Lincoln, *Quotations of Abraham Lincoln* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2004), 30.

²⁰¹⁹ Elder Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, 173.

²⁰²⁰ Eberle, *The Rule of the Master*, 255, 266.

²⁰²¹ Franklin, *Early Monastic Rules*, 49.

that he may know for what purpose he entereth. And if he still remaineth firm, let the same Rule be read to him again after four months. And if, after having weighed the matter with himself he promiseth to keep everything, and to do everything that is commanded him, then let him be received into the community, knowing that he is now placed under the law of the Rule, and that from that day forward it is no longer permitted to him to wrest his neck from under the yoke of the Rule, which after so long a deliberation he was at liberty either to refuse or to accept. Let him who is received promise in the oratory, in the presence of all, before God and His saints, stability, the conversion of morals, and obedience, in order that, if he should ever do otherwise, he may know that he will be condemned by God “Whom he mocketh.” Let him make a written statement of his promise in the name of the saints whose relics are there, and of the Abbot there present. Let him write this document with his own hand ... and with his own hand place it on the altar.²⁰²²

St. Benedict was continuing the tradition of Galician monasticism, which was known for its “pactualism.” As explained by one historian: “The pactum is the name given to a document attached to the end of the Common Rule that constitutes a contract between the novitiate and the abbot, highlighting precisely the expectations of both.”²⁰²³ Even before this, in the 4th century Abba Shenoute the Great required new monks to sign a written covenant containing a commitment not to defile the body in any manner, steal, bear false witness, or commit any act of concealed deceit.²⁰²⁴

Contemporary monastic typika continue this tradition. For example, the charter that St. Nectarios of Aegina wrote for his monastery required candidates wishing to join it to sign its rules.²⁰²⁵ Elder Aimilianos wrote that throughout history, “an effort was made [by the monastery] to have the typikon signed by the brotherhood, the Patriarch, the Emperor, and the competent judicial authorities, as well as by the author, in order to ensure and confirm its validity. It thus became the foundation charter of the monastery, respected by all, a guide for the everyday life of the monks, the living voice of God among them.”²⁰²⁶

Several saints wanted their monastic rules to be read frequently by their disciples. For example, St. Benedict wrote: “We desire that this Rule be read quite often in the community, that none of the brethren may excuse himself of ignorance.”²⁰²⁷ St. Savas of Serbia wrote: “Read these rules at the beginning of every month in the refectory to be reminded of these

²⁰²² *Rule of St. Benedict*, Chapter LVIII.

²⁰²³ Neil Allies, “The Monastic Rules of Visigothic Iberia: A Study of their Text and Language,” 79. etheses.bham.ac.uk/787/1/Allies10PhD.pdf

²⁰²⁴ Vid. Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, 21.

²⁰²⁵ Vid. *The Charter of the Holy Monastery in Aegina of The Holy Trinity*, Article 8.

²⁰²⁶ Elder Aimilianos, “On the Preparation of an Internal Regulation for the Holy Monasteries of the Church of Greece,” *The Authentic Seal*, 70.

²⁰²⁷ *Rule of St. Benedict*, Chapter LXVI. St. Athanasios of Athos included this exhortation of St. Benedict nearly verbatim in his own typikon (vid. Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 228).

commandments and for the benefit of your souls.”²⁰²⁸ St. Athanasios I, the Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote that his monastic rule should be read every month.²⁰²⁹ Similarly, the eleventh-century typikon of the Monastery of Evergetis says: “I instruct you to read the present typikon at the beginning of each month during your meal-times, to remind you of your instructions and for the benefit of your souls.”²⁰³⁰ The typikon of the Monastery of Machairas quoted this injunction verbatim, but reduced the frequency to three times a year.²⁰³¹ Abba Shenoute the Great ordered: “All the issues, ordinances, and words that we have recorded in all the epistles shall be read four times per year.”²⁰³² Blessed Augustine wrote in his monastic rule: “That you may see yourselves in this little book, as in a mirror, have it read to you once a week so as to neglect no point through forgetfulness.”²⁰³³ *The Rule of Paul and Stephen* states: “The Rules of the Fathers also are read constantly for our sake so that by attuning our inner ear to their holy appeals we may grasp the most delightful love of discipline and so that with the help of the Lord we may follow in everything the example of their lives.”²⁰³⁴

Following in their footsteps, we, too, would benefit by reading our typikon from time to time. This will help us to remain focused on what our monastic goal is, to bear in mind how we intend to reach it by God’s grace, and most importantly²⁰³⁵ to remind us *why* we are choosing to strive in this manner for the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁰²⁸ *Charter of Hilandar Monastery*, Article 43.

²⁰²⁹ Vid. Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1500.

²⁰³⁰ *Ibid.*, 498.

²⁰³¹ *Ibid.*, 1165.

²⁰³² Layton, *The Canons of our Fathers: Monastic Rules of Shenoute*, 195.

²⁰³³ Bavel, *The Rule of Saint Augustine*, ch. 7. Reading his rule every week was not very time-consuming, considering that his rule had only 3,000 words.

²⁰³⁴ Barry Hagan, “The Rule of Paul and Stephen,” ch. 41

²⁰³⁵ In order to remain connected to his existential purpose in life, St. Arsenios continually asked himself: “Arsenius, why did you leave the world?” (Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 18) Being aware of one’s purpose in life is so crucial that Viktor Frankl emphasized: “Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose.” Along the same lines, Leo Tolstoy observed: “Without knowing what I am and why I am here, life is impossible,” and Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote: “The secret of man’s being is not only to live but to have something to live for.... Neither man or nation can exist without a sublime idea.”



Chapter Seven: *Monastic Schema*



THE ORIGINAL MEANING of the Greek word *schema* is “shape” or “form.” By extension, it also meant “fashion” (i.e., “way of life”) and “fashion of dress”²⁰³⁶ or “clothing.”²⁰³⁷ Thus, the term “monastic schema” refers to all the clothes worn by a monk (his “habit”). After the 7th century,²⁰³⁸ the word *schema* could also mean a specific item of monastic garb, described below on page 416 in section 9).

1) Origins

The origin of the monastic garments (i.e., the monastic “schema”) is unknown. From after the 9th century,²⁰³⁹ icons of St. Pachomios the Great (who lived in the 3rd century) often depict an angel wearing the great schema and telling him: “With this schema, everyone shall be saved, O Pachomios.” Such icons led to the popular opinion (or perhaps popular opinion led to such icons)²⁰⁴⁰ that the angel who gave St. Pachomios a monastic rule was also the first to indicate what garments monks should wear. The problem with this

²⁰³⁶ Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1745.

²⁰³⁷ G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1359.

²⁰³⁸ Ζουκόβα, *Γέννηση και Έξελιξη της Ακολουθίας του Μοναχικού Σχήματος*, 297.

²⁰³⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

²⁰⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 297.

opinion is that prior to this, St. Anthony had already given the schema (i.e., monastic garments) to St. Macarius of Egypt,²⁰⁴¹ and St. Pachomios himself had already received the schema from Abba Palamon.²⁰⁴²

Another common misunderstanding with this is that the particular monastic garment known today as the schema was supposedly given to St. Pachomios by the angel. The problem with this notion is that the original accounts of that angelic encounter say nothing of the sort. The part of this encounter recorded in the *Lausiac History* contains only the following instructions from the angel regarding monastic clothing:

“At night let them [i.e., the monks] wear linen tunics and be belted. Let each of them have a tanned goat-skin without which they may not eat. When they go to Communion on Saturday and Sunday, let them loosen their belts, lay aside their goat skins and go in with the hood only.” He [i.e., St. Pachomios] prescribed for them hoods without nap, as for children, and he ordered a sign in the form of a cross to be put on them in purple.²⁰⁴³

Commenting on this and other ancient texts, Evgenia Zhoukova wrote:

These texts clearly show that in the clothing shown to Pachomios by the angel, there was no garment that would be called the schema. Therefore, we must surmise that when we speak of the revelation to Pachomios of the monastic schema, we should understand that the angel revealed to Pachomios primarily the rules of life for the monks of the cenobium as well as the entire monastic outfit, which did not include the *analavos* (known today as the polystavrion) and certainly did not mean the modern “schema” in the sense of a particular garment or the form of the garments of a present-day great-schema monk.²⁰⁴⁴

St. Symeon of Thessalonica taught that the schema (not as a particular garment but as a way of life) is from Christ Himself:

The first one to write about the angelic and divine monastic schema was the holy Dionysios [the Areopagite], and the Savior Himself handed it down, and this is what His disciples kept. It was not merely from Saints Pachomios and Paul of Thebes and Anthony that this began to be given as a rule (as some say), but it was from the Savior Himself and given to the Apostles. For they lived monastically in terms of chastity and food and garments and poverty and prayers. It increased with those who came after them, and with the holy Fathers it shone forth.²⁰⁴⁵

²⁰⁴¹ Vid. Tim Vivian, *Saint Macarius, the Spiritbearer: Coptic Texts Relating to Saint Macarius the Great* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 168.

²⁰⁴² “After the old man [Abba Palamon] had tried him [St. Pachomios] for three full months and had seen his courage and his firm determination, he took a monk’s habit with the belt and he placed it before the altar, and they spent the whole night praying over them. Then he clothed him with it at daybreak, and they celebrated the morning prayer together with joy” (Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, 32).

²⁰⁴³ Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, 126.

²⁰⁴⁴ Ζουκόβα, *Γέννηση και Έξέλιξη τῆς Ἀκολουθίας τοῦ Μοναχικοῦ Σχήματος*, 302.

²⁰⁴⁵ PG 155:912CD.

Elaborating on this, Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos observed:

When one carefully reads the Acts of the Apostles as well as the epistles of the Apostles that were sent to the Christians of the first churches, one will notice that the first Christians, who received the Holy Spirit and were members of the Church, were living as monastics do today with an intense spiritual life. The exhortations of the Apostles for thorough repentance, unceasing prayer, keeping the commandments of Christ, expecting the Second Coming of Christ, seeking the heavenly lifestyle, etc., show that the monastic life is actually the Christian life in its fullness.²⁰⁴⁶

Echoing this sentiment, Fr. Theodoros Zeses wrote:

Christ was born of the All-Pure, Ever-Virgin Theotokos in a manner which involved no carnal relations, thus specially honoring the life of virginity. In fact, the Theotokos herself is specially venerated by the monastics, for they see her as a model when it comes to the renunciation of the world, obedience, and purity. At the early age of three the Panagia was dedicated to the temple and there she lived, obedient to the temple priests, and entirely cut off from the world.²⁰⁴⁷

The Church has viewed the Prophet Elias and St. John the Baptist as prototypes of monastic life because they lived alone in the wilderness. This is why the service of the great schema mentions them: “Grant unto him ... to preserve unblemished the Schema ... following in the footsteps of the great Prophet Elijah [Elias], and of the holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John.”²⁰⁴⁸ St. Symeon of Thessalonica called the two of them “the leaders of anchoretic life”²⁰⁴⁹ and also said: “The Baptist was the first after Elias to prefigure the schema.”²⁰⁵⁰ This also explains why St. John the Baptist referred to the monastic schema as “my schema” in a vision in the following incident related by St. John Moschus:

When a monk who had fallen to temptation was brought before him [i.e., Patriarch John of Jerusalem in 583], he publicly stripped him of his angelic habit [schema], which he put on a pig, and let the pig loose in the streets of the city. That night St. John the Baptist appeared to him: “Man, why have you so treated my habit? I will make suit against you in the dreadful Day of Judgment.”²⁰⁵¹

St. Germanos of Constantinople (in the early 8th century) also attributed the schema to St. John the Baptist: “The monastic schema is in imitation of the desert-dweller John the Baptist whose garment was from camel hairs and had a leather belt around his waist.”²⁰⁵²

²⁰⁴⁶ Ἱεροθέου, *Ὁ Ὀρθόδοξος Μοναχισμός*, 175; Hierotheos, *Orthodox Monasticism*, 163.

²⁰⁴⁷ Zisis, *Following the Holy Fathers*, 34.

²⁰⁴⁸ *The Great Book of Needs*, vol. 1, 376.

²⁰⁴⁹ Συμεῶν Θεσσαλονίκης, *Διάλογος*, κεφ. ΣΟΔ', PG 155:501A.

²⁰⁵⁰ PG 155:197D. Similarly, St. Gregory Palamas said: “Nor was he just the Forerunner of Christ, but also of His Church and particularly, brethren, of our monastic way of life” (Veniamin, *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, vol. 2, 218).

²⁰⁵¹ Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 149.

²⁰⁵² PG 98:396B.

sky? Now there is no more hope for salvation.” Then they violently ripped out his soul and departed.

If this is how things are, what shall we do who hope to show repentance at our final breath? So the baptism of repentance is truly a second baptism that renews the first, as we have said, but it requires many tears.²³¹⁰

12) The Grace of the Schema

Regarding the grace one receives along with the schema, Elder Ephraim taught:

When people are tonsured, grace visits some of them greatly, while others less. This, however, does not foretell the monk’s future spiritual life. Some do not feel the grace of the angelic schema at all, and yet they make much progress thereafter, whereas the opposite happens with others. Regardless, the goal of monasticism is purity of heart, from which perfect love is attained. This is what should preoccupy us and what we should pay attention to: whether or not we have patience and bravery in our battles with the devil, pure love, a tongue free of criticism and backbiting, etc. A monk has two joys: one when he becomes a monk and one when he approaches death. What is the life of a monk but a constant martyrdom? This is why death is joyful, because he realizes that he will escape the torments and battles of the tempter.²³¹¹

Elder Ephraim also taught that the grace of the schema strengthens monastics in their struggle for chastity: “Strengthened by the angelic schema’s grace, a nun [or a monk] courageously struggles against the rough waves of the flesh while ceaselessly calling upon Jesus until He comes and rebukes the sea: ‘Peace, be still’ (Mk. 4:39).”²³¹²

The grace that accompanies the great schema is also evident from the following incident in the life of Sts. John and Symeon the Fool for Christ:

Nikon bade the newly-tonsured monk to come forward, so that Symeon and John might see him. When this took place, a vision was granted to those who were accounted pure and unpolluted. The all-good God vouchsafed Symeon and John the following sight. They beheld the newly-tonsured monk approach, at which point they both kneeled at the feet of Abba Nikon. They felt enjoined to say to him, “If we are about to receive such honor and glory, do thou garb us this very evening. For we fear lest during the night we, the miserable ones, should expire from some demonic illusion; and thereby, we would be deprived of such a precious crown and the splendid escort which accompanies this new monk.”

The hegumen, hearing this description, understood that the two young men were beholding a vision. Nikon then dismissed the newly-tonsured man to return to his cell. The youths of Christ were saddened exceedingly and said as much to the abbot: “Happy should we be were we to be vouchsafed such honor, that we might wear upon

²³¹⁰ PG 158:941C–952A (*Επιστολή 25*).

²³¹¹ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 122. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 84.

²³¹² Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικαὶ Νουθεσίαι*, 107. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 73.

our brows such a splendid crown, and be escorted by a multitude of monastics bearing lamps in their hands and rejoicing.” By these words, the hegumen was assured that the young men had seen a vision....

[After they received the holy schema]²³¹³ their countenances possessed such light and their heads were donned with precious crowns, even as the aforementioned newly-tonsured monk at that monastery, that Symeon and John could see each other’s faces that night as though it were day....

The great Symeon, afterward, related to Hierodeacon John about that early period of his life, saying that “Our souls experienced such joy that we had no desire to take either food or drink for the reverence we felt.”²³¹⁴

Evidently, this special grace lasts only seven days, for this instructive narrative continues:

As it happened, two days later Symeon and John caught sight of the monk who had received the Schema just days before they had. They observed that he was engaged in some obediences. He was dressed in other garb and there was no longer a crown about his brow. Indeed, he was no longer escorted by monks bearing lights as they had seen only a few days earlier. Symeon made a remark to John, saying, “Believe me, brother, after we fulfil our seven days, we, too, shall possess no longer either such grace or such majesty. Therefore, if thou wilt hear me, be ready to follow me. Let us go to a solitary and calm place, where we can labor for our souls. Indeed, brother most beloved, even as we have renounced all that is in the world, let us also forsake every earthly provision and care that we might meditate solely on heavenly things. When we had received this holy Schema, I want you to know that I beheld strange and wondrous things. When the slave of God, Abba Nikon, garbed us, I was sensing a fire which was consuming my inward parts. Moreover, I now find that my soul no longer seeks either to behold men or to speak to anyone anymore.”²³¹⁵

Then St. Symeon and John decided to sneak out of the monastery at night in order to become ascetics:

The pure bridegrooms of the Master Christ were just then coming toward the gate in order to leave. Nikon caught sight of them, but he also observed that others [i.e., angels]—some bearing lamps and some holding a scepter in one hand—were advancing with them....

Symeon and John were about to make a prostration before Abba Nikon when he forbade them, saying that on account of the Angelic Schema which had been bestowed upon them, it was not permitted that week to make prostrations.... [After expressing their deep gratitude to Abba Nikon and] entreating him to keep them in remembrance, the venerable Nikon wondered at the former simpletons made wise so quickly after their tonsure.²³¹⁶

²³¹³ This phrase is missing from this English translation but is found in PG 93:1688B.

²³¹⁴ *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church: July* (Buena Vista: Holy Apostles Convent, 2003), 872–73.

²³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 873.

²³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 874–75 and PG 93:1692B.

Another description of receiving much grace along with the great schema is found in the life of St. Akakios of Kafsokalyvia:

On the very night [St. Akakios] received the holy schema, he was counted worthy of seeing a divine vision. He saw in his sleep—or rather in a waking state—that he was holding a lit candle with a brilliant light that shone and illumined the whole place there. (This, I think [writes the author of his life], represented his future virtuous way of life, which would shine and illumine not just Mount Athos by the grace given to him by God but also—even though it is bold to say—the entire world of the Orthodox Church.) When this holy man saw this miraculous sign, he correctly reasoned that in this manner the holy virtues of Christ (and especially “uplifting humility”) must illumine a monk.²³¹⁷

Gerondissa Makrina also experienced tremendous grace when receiving the great schema:

The tonsuring [of Gerondissa Makrina] took place during the service of Compline. Gerondissa beheld a light as if the sun were rising from the Holy Altar of the church, illuminating everything as if it were daytime. She was in a state of *theoria* and she beheld Christ crucified and His immaculate blood flowing from His wounds into her heart. For forty days her mind was full of light and joy, and she shed endless tears. Her radiant spiritual state affected all those around her. Because of this spiritual transformation, Gerondissa desired to go up to a high mountaintop—as she would later say many times—and proclaim the grandeur of God, crying out for all people to become monastics in order to glorify God. Throughout the first days after her tonsure, whenever she saw the icon of the Last Judgment outside her cell, she would go into *theoria*, as if she were in the flames of hell. This transformation from the grace of the Great and Angelic Schema lasted for some time. For many days, she did not want to taste any food, and for an entire year, she was not occupied by any earthly thoughts.²³¹⁸

Furthermore, Gerondissa Makrina taught: “Those of us with the Great Schema have two angels: the guardian angel of our soul and the angel of the Schema.”²³¹⁹ She spoke from personal experience, for after receiving the great schema she had been counted worthy of seeing both of her angels on several occasions. For example, she once told her nuns:

When I was in the hospital for my surgery, I saw my guardian angel and the angel of my Schema guarding me. They came hand in hand and were looking at me. They gave me joy, life, and gladness. They enriched my soul with their glance, as if they were telling me, “We are here, don’t worry; we won’t abandon you.” Oh, how much joy I had when they were close to me! How I felt their presence! This is why we should not embitter our guardian angel and the angel of our Schema, but we should respect them. They are always close to us, next to us. What a joyous truth!²³²⁰

²³¹⁷ Παταπίου Κασσοκαλυβίτου, *Άγιος Ακάκιος ό Κασσοκαλυβίτης*, Έρημοπολίτες 7 (Άγιον Όρος: 2001), 62–67.

²³¹⁸ Panagia Odigitria Monastery, *Words of the Heart: Gerondissa Makrina Vassopoulou*, (Goldendale: St. John the Forerunner Greek Orthodox Monastery, 2018), 60–61.

²³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 376.

²³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 382–83.

One of the nuns of Gerondissa Makrina was counted worthy of both seeing and even touching the angel she was given at her tonsure. As Gerondissa Makrina related:

When her own tonsure came, that same sister saw her angel embracing her with her two huge wings wrapped around her, holding her tightly. At that moment, she felt a great transformation in her soul and an abundance of grace. She felt such majesty! She told me, “I touched the wings, Gerondissa! They were like a peacock’s; that’s what they felt like in my hands. He had large brown wings, with green on the inside and a little red. That’s what they looked like. The angel standing over me was very tall!”²³²¹

13) The Rank of Monastics

St. Dionysius the Areopagite wrote the following about the grace and rank that God bestows on monastics:

But of all the initiates [i.e., those who are not clergymen] the most exalted order is the sacred rank of the monks which has been purified of all stain and possesses full power and complete holiness in its own activities. To the extent that is permissible, it has entered upon sacred contemplative activity and has achieved intellectual contemplation and communion. This order is entrusted to the perfecting power of those men of God, the hierarchs, whose enlightening activities and hierarchal traditions have introduced it, according to capacity, to the holy operations of the sacred sacraments it has beheld. Thanks to their sacred understanding it has been uplifted into the most complete perfection proportionate to this order. This is why our blessed leaders considered such men to be worthy of several sacred designations; some gave them the name of “therapeutae,” or servants, and sometimes “monks,” because of the purity of their duty and service to God and because their lives, far from being scattered, are monopolized by their unifying and sacred recollection which excludes all distraction and enables them to achieve a singular mode of life conforming to God and open to the perfection of God’s love. Hence the sacred ordinance has bestowed a perfecting grace on them and has deemed them worthy of a sanctifying invocation which is not the business of the hierarch (he only confers clerical ordination) but of the devout priests who sacredly performed this secondary rite of the hierarchy.²³²²

This special rank given to monastics is evident also in the following incident from the life of St. Alypios:

Among these holy women dwelled the mother of St. Alypios. She practiced the same rule as the others, but she could not be persuaded to receive the monastic schema, even though her virtue was certainly remarkable, as we said in another place. She constantly refused to obey the many persistent entreaties of her son, maintaining that in the monastery the servant is the same as the nun. However, it happened that a divine dream brought her into immediate obedience to her son’s entreaty, so that she now began to beg him fervently in this regard. It seemed to her, in this revealing dream, that she was hearing certain holy women chanting in melodious psalmody. She was so delighted by this chanting, that she wanted to enter the room where this wonderful

²³²¹ Ibid., 240.

²³²² Luibhéid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 244–45.

choir was singing and to be united, herself, with the chanting women. But when she tried to enter, a guard prevented her, saying: “She who is not wearing the same schema as the servants of God may not communicate with them.”²³²³

Nevertheless, despite the importance of receiving the schema, St. Ephraim the Syrian reminds us:

It is not the tonsure and the clothing that make the monk, but the longing for heavenly things and a life in accordance with the will of God; the true monk is recognized by the latter. In the same way, the worldly man is not known by his hairstyle and clothing, but by his evil manner of life and his greed for worldly and material luxuries; for it is by these that the soul is made sinful. If you have renounced the world, be attentive to your spiritual labor, that you might acquire the pearl that you were seeking. For many have renounced the world and withdrawn from it; yet others have set aside military rank and have scorned their riches. But since in the end they were seduced by their own wills, they fell; for there is no worse sin than for one to be taken captive by his own will and to bypass what he judges to be correct.²³²⁴

In the same spirit, Elder Ephraim said:

Therefore, since we have put on the angelic schema, aren't we also obliged to live in an angelic manner? How can you be considered to be living an angelic life when I see you talking back, complaining, displaying self-will, enmity, and, worst of all, disobedience? By doing so, aren't you doing the opposite of what you have been counseled to do by my lowliness? Won't you receive a greater condemnation by doing the opposite, according to the saying in scripture that “he who knows and does not do shall be beaten with many blows” (Lk. 12:47)? In other words, he will be strictly chastised with many terrible blows and punishments.²³²⁵

St. John (Alexeev) of Valaam related the following incident revealing that it is more important to be a monk inwardly than outwardly: “In Kiev this happened: a schema-monk and a novice had been buried at the same time. When their graves were opened, the novice was wearing the habit and the schema-monk was wearing the novice's dress. There's a schema-monk for you! Poor fellow, you wore a schema and it served not for your salvation but for your condemnation.”²³²⁶

St. Eustathios of Thessalonica reproached monks who thought that the grace they will receive along with the schema is so powerful that they can afford to live negligently until then:

These [lazy] monks believe that even though they have never done anything good, they will automatically be able to do so as soon as they have received the great tonsure.

²³²³ Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, Book I, 262.

²³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 268.

²³²⁵ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Πατρικὰ Νουθεσία*, 302. See also Elder Ephraim, *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*, 241–42.

²³²⁶ Father John, *Christ is in Our Midst: Letters from a Russian Monk* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 87 (Letter #76).

This approach is foolish because it resembles in an evil way the saying: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”²³²⁷ In other words, “Let’s sin without restraint, since tomorrow by receiving the schema that brings us close to God we will die to the corruptible and corrupting life and world, and we will stand before God no longer as sinners but as His angels.”²³²⁸

St. Symeon of Thessalonica taught that a monk who has received the schema has become heavenly: “Thus, a monk is no longer earthly and of this world but above this world and heavenly, and his ‘citizenship is truly in the heavens,’ together with Paul (vid. Phil. 3:20), and this is how he promises to live. Therefore, every monk should know that he no longer belongs to this present life but has been mortified towards this life and is an incorruptible and heavenly man.”²³²⁹

St. Sophrony of Essex also spoke of the heavenly nature of monasticism:

The idea that the world must be renounced has led the majority of people to regard the monastic state as something sombre and uncomfortable. But those who have chosen monasticism see it differently. St. Theodore the Studite, for instance, in his enthusiasm for the life of a monk, called it “the third grace.” The first grace was the law of Moses; the second, “the grace for grace”²³³⁰ which we have all received of the fulness of Christ; and now the third, the monastic life, understood as celestial life, as the descent to earth of the angelic world, as the attainment and realization in history of what by its very essence lies beyond the confines of history.²³³¹

St. Theodore the Studite viewed monks who have been “perfected in the divine mystagogy” (i.e., tonsured) as “surpassing many [laymen] in terms of knowledge and rank.”²³³² Elaborating on this, St. Symeon of Thessalonica compared the priesthood with monasticism:

Which is greater: the priesthood or the monastic schema? In terms of order, the priesthood is much greater than the monastic schema, for the works of the priesthood are the works of God, and without the priesthood no one would be a Christian, nor would anyone have sanctification or communion with God. Yet the monastic order is greater than a priest in the world (as Dionysios says) not in terms of the priesthood but in terms of his life. Therefore, a monk who is also a priest is superior to a priest in the world. A simple monk, however, is not superior to a priest in the world, as we have said. For the priesthood is the work of God, but a simple monk is superior in terms of his life. Through the priesthood, a priest always blesses and sanctifies a monk who is superior to him in terms of his life. This is why Anthony [the Great] bent down and bowed his head not only to bishops but to every clergyman. Therefore, let every priest

²³²⁷ Is. 22:13.

²³²⁸ PG 135:877B.

²³²⁹ PG 155:913C–D.

²³³⁰ Jn. 1:16.

²³³¹ Sakharov, *Truth and Life*, 67.

²³³² Vid. *Προκοπίω μονάζοντι*, PG 99:1437D.

(as one having great worth) live a holy life and struggle to live like a monk; in some instances, let him even hasten to become a monk.²³³³

St. John Chrysostom also viewed priests as superior to monks:

Great is the conflict which recluses undergo, and much their toil. But if any one compare their exertions with those which the right exercise of the priesthood involves, he will find the difference as great as the distance between a king and a commoner.... If any one were to give me my choice whether I would rather gain distinction in the oversight of the Church, or in the life of the recluse, I would vote a thousand times over for accepting the former.²³³⁴

St. Symeon of Thessalonica also wrote: “The schema is in the likeness of angels and of Jesus Christ Himself, Who prayed to His Father, ‘Not my will but Thine be done’ (Lk. 22:42). This is why Dionysios [the Areopagite] said that this schema is superior in purity even to the life of bishops in the world.”²³³⁵ Even though St. Symeon apparently misunderstood what Dionysius the Areopagite was saying,²³³⁶ this perhaps explains why St. Symeon (who was both a monk and an archbishop) preferred to sign his name as “Monk Symeon” rather than “Archbishop Symeon.”

With the same understanding, St. Nectarios of Aegina (who was also a bishop) wrote:

The rank [of a bishop] is great indeed, but only in and of itself. Due to its inherent value, this rank truly honors the one who holds it, but it in no way alters the relations of those counted worthy of this rank towards his brothers, the brothers of the Lord; these relations remain always the same. This is why there is no difference and therefore no inequality between them.... The rank honors the one who has it but does not distinguish him from among the brothers of the Lord. Among the brothers of the Lord, the ones who imitate Christ are distinguished regardless of rank, since they bear the original image and the grace of the Holy Spirit.... He who has been perfected in virtue is superior to him who is not yet perfected, and he who has not at all become virtuous is very inferior to him who lives virtuously. Someone who is negligent and lazy—even if he happens to be a bishop—is miles behind someone who is diligent and vigilant—even if he happens to be some lowly and insignificant monk.... So please tell me now who is superior in virtue: he who lives in comfort and abundance or a hermit lacking even the smallest consolation; he who is worldly or he who is dedicated to God? ... Thus, it is virtue and virtue alone that matters, and virtue depends on one’s way of

²³³³ PG 155:881C–884A.

²³³⁴ *Chrysostom: On the Priesthood, Ascetic Treatises, Select Homilies and Letters, Homilies on the Statutes*, 77–78.

²³³⁵ PG 155:489C.

²³³⁶ Dionysius the Areopagite did write: “Of all the *initiates* [emphasis added] the most exalted order is the sacred rank of the monks,” but on the previous page he stated: “These, therefore, are the clerical orders.... Something must now be said of the three orders of initiates who are subordinate to them [i.e., subordinate to the clerical orders, which include all bishops and priests]” (Luibhéid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 244, 243).

life... Behold what my conviction is, beloved brother, because of which I consider the ascetic superior to the bishop, and which I confess in all sincerity.²³³⁷

On the other hand, St. Eustathios of Thessalonica (who likewise was both a monk and a bishop) presented a different comparison of how bishops and monks differ in rank:

[Great-schema monks] are obliged to acknowledge seniority only to one holy rank—the lofty and holy rank of bishops. Great-schema monks are superior to all the rest in both form and figure. For of all the human ranks on earth (which of course are inferior to those in heaven), the first and foremost for man’s salvation are they who are symbolic of the first and great Bishop of our salvation [i.e., Christ]. Since they [i.e., bishops] bring straight down from God every good thing, they do nothing but lead every person to Him, as is their duty. The light that these bishops emit is inferior to the light of God Himself. There are three sources of light: first, the light of God which is incomparably brighter than the sun; then, the light of the angels which resembles the sun and is the light that the bishop emits; and then follows the light which is like moonlight (in a sense) which the great-schema monks emit. After this come all the other godly stars around the earth [i.e., other spiritual people] who illumine with light and give warmth to lowly people with their vivifying energy, in the same way rich earth is made fruitful. Such monks (and those who are like them) are offered to God as the first fruits of this spiritual crop, but bishops are superior to them. They are similar to each other since they both belong to a sacred rank, but the bishops are superior due to the loftiness of being a bishop, which is a “royal priesthood.”²³³⁸ And since it is superior, from this do monks (who are clearly inferior) receive their blessings, even though they might be displeased to hear me saying so. This is something I have deduced from my own personal experience. But this behavior of theirs is completely senseless, since they are unable to justify their displeasure if someone were to ask them for an explanation.

All liturgical sanctifications—for example, in holy baptism and in all the other services done in the lives of those who have been baptized, as well as all the priestly ranks and the service of tonsure by which monks are dedicated to God—are performed spiritually and symbolically by the Holy Spirit but visibly by the bishop or by priests whom the bishops have appointed to perform such holy services. So then, considering that the bishops themselves sanctify monks in the Mystery of tonsure, how can a monk dare to object and say that he is not subject to the authority of the bishop who is superior to him, to whom he is clearly inferior? These ignorant monks raise their head and try to become autonomous not only from the bishop who in the beginning blessed and dedicated them but also from anyone else they might meet later. They think that they are autocephalous, whereas in reality they are just necks without heads, and out of their arrogance they end up being something molded that answers back to their molders.²³³⁹ They do not understand that their difference from the rank of bishop is that they are merely fathers, whereas a bishop is the father of fathers. Nor do they comprehend that although they are shepherds and sometimes also abbots, the archshepherd is the bishop, since the position he has been given is superior to that of the abbots, especially when the bishop is an archbishop of many. Furthermore, they do not

²³³⁷ Ματθαϊάκη, *Ὁ Ὁσίου Νεκτάριος Κεφαλᾶς, «Ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς Μοναχόν»*, 260.

²³³⁸ 1 Pet. 2:9.

²³³⁹ Cf. Rom 9:20, “Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?”

realize that, if they want to and exert themselves systematically in their hard monastic duties, they can ascend to the rank of bishop. And this, of course, does not mean that they will fall from some lofty position into a precipice, but they will ascend to a much higher place, as if from earth to Mt. Olympus.²³⁴⁰ . . .

You are certainly not unaware that God is rightly called the Bishop [*ἀρχιερέυς*]²³⁴¹ of our salvation, and that Scripture calls Him the Bishop [*ἐπίσκοπος*]²³⁴² Who oversees His chosen, but nowhere is He called an elder [*καλόγερος*] or a monk [*μοναχός*] of any kind.²³⁴³

The council held in the Temple of Holy Wisdom in 879 explained why a monk is inferior to a bishop: “If any bishop or anyone else with a prelatical office is desirous of descending to monastic life and of replenishing the region of penitence and of penance, let him no longer cherish any claim to prelatical dignity. For the monks’ conditions of subordination represent the relationship of pupilship, and not of teachership or of presidency; nor do they undertake to pastor others, but are to be content with being pastored.”²³⁴⁴

14) When to Receive the Schema

In the Byzantine era, a person would receive the schema after three years of trial. For example, the First-and-Second Council in Constantinople decreed in 861:

No one shall lay claim to the monastic habit [i.e., the schema] until, after the expiration of the term of three years allowed them to prove their worthiness, they turn out to be adequate and fit to take up such a mode of life in earnest . . . unless . . . some grave disease has overtaken the person . . . or unless, there should be anywhere a man so reverent as to lead a monastic life even in a worldly habit—for in the case of such a man even a six months’ period of trial is sufficient for a thorough test.²³⁴⁵

Commenting on this canon, St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain expressed the opinion: “It may be inferred, too, from this Canon that anyone that fails to become a monk by the end of three years while living in a monastery will thereafter if he stays there be dwelling with the brethren in the monastery illegally and unlawfully, and ought either to become a monk or to depart.”²³⁴⁶ Although Elder Ephraim agreed that after a certain time period a

²³⁴⁰ PG 135:733B–735A.

²³⁴¹ Ever since at least the second century (vid. 1 Clem. 40:5), the word *ἀρχιερέυς* (which was used a dozen times in Hebrews in reference to Christ the “High Priest”) has been used to refer to bishops.

²³⁴² 1 Pet. 2:25. The literal meaning of *ἐπίσκοπος* is “overseer.”

²³⁴³ PG 135:841A.

²³⁴⁴ Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 478 (Canon 2).

²³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 460 (Canon V).

²³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 462.

novice should either become a monk or depart, his experience with novices in America showed him that three years is often not a long enough trial period.

Notwithstanding this minimum trial period of three years, “when death is imminent the holy habit will be granted without delay to those who are leaving this world,”²³⁴⁷ according to the 13th-century typikon of Nikephoros Blemmydes and several others, including Canon XXV of St. Nicephoros the Confessor (9th century),²³⁴⁸ Patriarch Theodore Balsamon (12th century), and St. Symeon of Thessalonica (14th century),²³⁴⁹

In contemporary practice there are varying traditions regarding when a person should receive the great schema. Monasteries in the Russian tradition typically wait until a monk is on his deathbed. But in some places on the Holy Mountain, after a person has been a novice for 5–10 years he is immediately given the great schema without first becoming a rasophore or small-schema monk. Elder Ephraim had a more moderate approach and typically waited 20–30 years before giving the great schema to rasophores. His reasoning was that since a tremendous amount of grace is given with the great schema, it should not be given to someone who might lose that grace through inattentiveness. In the case of monks living negligently, he would wait until their deathbed before giving them the great schema.

St. Ephraim the Syrian also believed that one should patiently wait to receive the schema at the proper time. He wrote:

Brother, be not impatient to receive the angelic schema; for the Enemy implants in some people the unreasonable desire to demand the monastic schema when the time is not yet ripe. But as for you, my beloved, as one striving to please God, be patient and hear what the Apostle says: “If thou mayest be made free, use slavery rather.”²³⁵⁰ Cast your gaze over the past generations and see that it was through forbearance and patience that all the saints received promises from God, and goad yourself daily to be a fellow-heir with them in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Have you considered that the Patriarch Jacob worked as a slave in Mesopotamia for fourteen years next to Laban the Syrian, enduring the heat of the day and the frost of the night, for the sake of Rachel? Likewise, did not the beloved Joseph remain for several years as a slave in a foreign country? In this regard Scripture says: “Joseph was seventeen years old, feeding the sheep with his brethren.”²³⁵¹ Later on it says: “Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh.”²³⁵² Moses, the servant of the Lord, remained as a refugee in the land of Madiam for forty years. The Hebrews entered into the Promised Land after a journey of forty years. Prior to all of this, think how many years it was before Abraham received what had been promised to him by God. In

²³⁴⁷ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 1203.

²³⁴⁸ Vid. Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 967.

²³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 343.

²³⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 7:21.

²³⁵¹ Gen. 37:1.

²³⁵² Gen. 41:46.

general, all the saints gained the Divine promises through ungrudging waiting. Therefore, you, too, should wait patiently on the Lord with humility, and He will exalt you in the proper time, “and He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday” (Ps. 36:6).²³⁵³

St. Symeon of Thessalonica emphasized how important it is for monks to receive the great schema:

Just as he who has not been baptized is not a Christian, so, too, he who has not been perfected by receiving the schema will not be considered a monk.... He who has not attained to becoming a monk should become one at the end of his life. For the gift is tremendous! The seal is royal! It is a second baptism! It purges sins! It gives gifts and graces! It arms and marks him! It delivers him from enemies! It presents him to the King and makes him his friend!²³⁵⁴

St. Sophrony of Essex taught: “No one ought to ask for the priesthood, whereas one ought to ask for the monastic schema, because monasticism is the search for repentance.”²³⁵⁵ Likewise, the *Ascetical Discourse* attributed to St. Basil states: “An ascetic should not desire to become a clergyman or the superior of brethren. For this illness is diabolical, and it is the transgression of loving authority, which is characteristic of the devil’s supreme cunning.”²³⁵⁶

St. Eustathios of Thessalonica compared progress in monasticism with progress climbing a mountain and said that a monk is ready to receive the great schema after reaching a certain level:

... [A small-schema monk] wearing black has not yet completely attained greatness, nor has he ascended to the loftiest point of perfection, but he has just recently stopped being a lowly pedestrian and has come to the mountain to climb it as his strength permits. Now that he has left behind the level plain and the smog engulfing it, he has passed into a clearer atmosphere with refreshing air. Moreover, he has a different view of the earth and of things on earth, and he ponders on those things that had previously ruined his true human form. And he is afraid lest he fall down from this height and suffer something worse.

When he has felt this genuine fear, he will spread his wings early in the morning with vigilance and prayers that God hears. He will close his eyes and every other sense as a person who no longer wants to be a man of the world at all but a man transcending the heavens. And he will keep himself steady to stand on the pinnacle of virtue, and will leave behind the stagnant air and the darkness engulfing it and the various tempests in order to reach the cloudless place where the sun always shines. And he will certainly achieve such a goal of illumination and will approach God after coming to this lofty place from where the Lord Himself has a panoramic view of all the sons of men. That

²³⁵³ Παύλου Μοναχοῦ, *Εὐεργετινός*, Τόμος Α΄, ἔκδοσις ἑβδόμη (Ἀθῆναι: 2001), 446. See also Chrysostomos, *The Evergetinos*, Book I, 264.

²³⁵⁴ PG 155:673B.

²³⁵⁵ Hierotheos, “*I Know a Man in Christ*,” 385.

²³⁵⁶ Μ. Βασιλείου, *Ἀσκητικαὶ Διατάξεις* 9, PG 31:1369D.

is, he will in a sense bend down his head along with God and will be able to see people who need his help and he, too, will do whatever he desires [as God also does]. Then, having risen above the small schema (it is not possible to describe how much so), he has reached the great schema, glorying in a bright and great face, beholding the face of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Who is one of the superbriiliant Trinity. He also sees the other two Persons [of the Trinity] with his spirit, which makes up for this lack with the grandeur appropriate to the unity of God. In this manner he is true to the great schema he has received, which could have been called the greatest schema [μέγιστον σχῆμα, i.e., the greatest “form” of being], if the holy Fathers—who did well—hadn’t chosen to give this title to the One and Only Bearer of the greatest form of being [i.e., God]. In comparison to this eternal form of being, the other forms of being are like shadows.

So the life of the great-schema monk has these three stages as we have said. He is the refuge of pious Christians when they want to hide from the enemies [i.e., the demons] who are attacking them from above. Blessed is he who truly has this form (σχῆμα) and has been divinely transformed and has taken the form of God and has henceforth acquired this greatness as a natural trait of his. Furthermore, he perfects those who are inferior to the great schema [i.e., small-schema and rasophore monks], and thus the great-schema monk holds a primary position because of his philosophy. He is able to make up for their deficiencies with a divine and discursive method by which the knowledge of virtue is reached. Simultaneously he guides them to imitate those in heaven, as we shall elaborate hereafter. Thus, such a monk who completed these three stages is blessed, since he has ascended to the rank of the great schema. He has become as light as a feather and has ascended to the third heaven.²³⁵⁷ ...

A great-schema monk should be proud [in a good sense] that he has been made erudite in spiritual matters by both doing and teaching them, not as a mental exercise. By obeying the Holy Spirit, he helps the inferior monastic ranks attain perfection and please the only wise God.²³⁵⁸ ...

It would be proper to mention first the leaders of the group of monastics, who are perfect and make others perfect. This is the right order, since they are like gods (according to the scriptural reference) and ought to help all the others in every small matter. These are the ones who have the great and angelic schema, who because of it are indeed great like angels, in accordance with the provisions of the rules and also according to the vows they gave during the sacramental rite. For they have turned their backs to the world, primarily by flying away from it with their spiritual wings to God Himself. Now they have the responsibility (if they want it) to look down from these divine heights and help others.²³⁵⁹ ...

The monastic order is not just any order but a truly divine order. It is a sacred army, a brigade of God, chosen by the Lord, the glorious ones of heaven who have withdrawn from every worldly glorious thing—which would be sinful for them. They are soldiers against the devil, the rebellious apostate. They imitate the angels, which is why they are the protectors not only of people’s souls but also of their bodies, which they keep healthy, releasing them from sins that often disintegrate the harmonious elements of our nature. They are vessels of virtue, as long as they keep themselves suitable and

²³⁵⁷ PG 135:740C–741C.

²³⁵⁸ PG 135:737B.

²³⁵⁹ PG 135:733A–B.

open to it. They are containers of divine myrrh, when they have nothing filthy in themselves. They are imprints of the Apostles, as long as they do not fail to learn things about God. They are gardens of salvation, inaccessible to the serpents' whisperings, by which the devil tries to speak to those who open their ears to him. This magnificent order (which the episcopal order surpasses) boasts that its leaders are those who have the truly great schema, who must neither fail to be great literally nor be unworthy of this compound title [i.e., of being a "great-schema" monk, which means having a great form].²³⁶⁰ ...

I remind great-schema monks that they have been taught to yearn after the form [σχημα] of angels so that they may play the role of an angel. Therefore, the reverence shown to them should not be viewed as being excessive, since they are superior even to angels, as we are taught by the sacred ascetical writings, which say that if they want to, they can cover the small distance that separates them from the angels according to the psalm²³⁶¹ and even surpass them. So bear this in mind, you monk who do not live in the world, who are a saint at least by intention.²³⁶² ...

A true great-schema monk (as well as all true Christians) should always be ready to serve a friend in all ways and help him with whatever he needs.²³⁶³ ...

It is through them [i.e., great-schema monks] that the world is saved, for they are always devoted to God alone and are closer to Him than the angels. They do not turn to the world except to remember us in prayer.²³⁶⁴

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain objected to the practice of intentionally waiting until old age to receive the great schema:

Those who receive the Angelic Schema at a young age and humbly struggle with *philotimo* greatly move God. If the Angelic Schema has externally become a bit dusty (with the passing of years), I still think it is cleaner than the Schema of monks who were intentionally tonsured in their old age, that they might live a little slothfully. They gloat over their brand-new Schema at the hour of death (fresh from the tailor) and give their vows on their deathbed with a half-gone voice, promising to keep virginity, poverty, and obedience. Where? In the grave? Let us not set our mind to rest with these kinds of illusions.²³⁶⁵

As for the time of year for becoming a monk, St. Theodore the Studite wrote in the 8th century: "It should be known that on the Tuesday of Renovation [Easter Week] we grant the great habit to those brothers who have been designated to receive it."²³⁶⁶ The life of St. Symeon the Fool for Christ mentions that in the 6th century someone received the schema

²³⁶⁰ PG 135:736B–D.

²³⁶¹ "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, with glory and honour hast Thou crowned him" (Ps. 8:6).

²³⁶² PG 135:764BC.

²³⁶³ PG 135:772B.

²³⁶⁴ PG 135:793D.

²³⁶⁵ Elder Paisios, *Epistles*, 195.

²³⁶⁶ Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 101.

on the day of the Holy Cross, although it was also given on other days.²³⁶⁷ The 11th-century *Strategios Euchologion*²³⁶⁸ describes the service of tonsure along with the prayers of the Washing of the Feet, which implies that monks were tonsured during Vespers of Holy Wednesday. St. Symeon of Thessalonica taught in the 15th century: “Though any time may be considered fitting for one to become a monk, yet the period of the forty days of Lent is more fitting than any other because it is a time of mournful repentance.”²³⁶⁹ Elder Ephraim agreed that any time of year is fitting to receive the great schema, but he had a slight preference for tonsuring on feast days. In contrast, St. Sophrony of Essex taught: “Monastic professions are not festive services, so they ought to take place in a contrite atmosphere of repentance and prayer. The monastic life is a cross and spiritual burial. A bright and festive atmosphere removes the monk from the essence of the monastic life.”²³⁷⁰

15) When to Wear the Schema

In the early days of monasticism, “the Egyptian fathers had the custom of keeping the cloak and cowl in which they took the holy habit until their death, only wearing them on Sundays for the Holy Communion and taking them off immediately afterwards.”²³⁷¹ Similarly, in Athonite tradition, great-schema monks wear their schema only when they receive communion. When they are not wearing the full version of the great schema on top of their cassock, they always wear a small version of it under their cassock hanging from their neck on their chest. This is because St. Symeon of Thessalonica taught that a monk “should always be wearing all the symbols of the schema”²³⁷² since it helps to effect “an unforgettable remembrance of God and union with Him and boldness and courage towards Him.”²³⁷³

St. Paisios of the Holy Mountain cautioned monks not to display their schema vain-gloriously:

Some monks, for example, make broad and long great schemas reaching down to their feet, with red crosses, roses, red branches and many letters.... And they open their cassock to reveal the schema, like the Pharisees who “make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,”²³⁷⁴ to show that they pray a lot! But in the

²³⁶⁷ Vid. *Saint Symeon of Emesa, The Fool for Christ’s Sake*, 56; PG 93:1685CD.

²³⁶⁸ Vid. J. Duncan, *Coislin 213. Euchologe de la Grande Eglise. Dissertatio ad Lauream* (Rome: 1983).

²³⁶⁹ Reply #25, as paraphrased by St. Nicodemos in Agapius and Nicodemus, *The Rudder*, 343.

²³⁷⁰ Hierotheos, “*I Know a Man in Christ*,” 305.

²³⁷¹ Vid. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 241.

²³⁷² PG 155:916C.

²³⁷³ Αγίου Συμεών Θεσσαλονίκης, *Έργα Θεολογικά*, 176.

²³⁷⁴ Mt. 23:5.

past one could barely see the schema under the cassock of a monk as he walked. In fact, many wore a small schema underneath to hide it altogether.²³⁷⁵

St. Symeon of Thessalonica gave the following details of how a monk should be buried:

After [the corpse] is wiped in the shape of the cross, they dress him with the garments of the schema, and they sew him up in his mantle, which is like his tomb. They make crosses on the top for the sake of Christ for Whom he was crucified. And an icon of Him Whom he loved is placed on top of him.²³⁷⁶ After the priest says the prayer, they lift him up and take him to the holy temple with candles.²³⁷⁷

St. Symeon explained the reason why monks are buried with the garments of the schema:

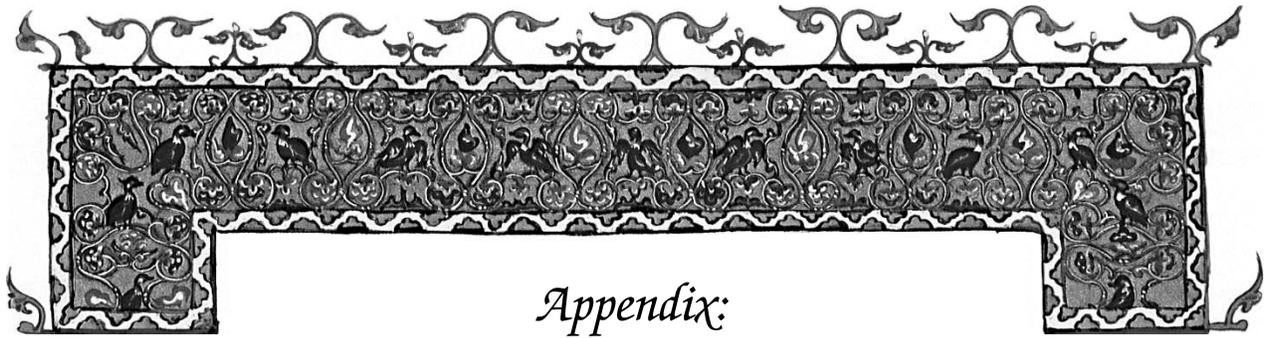
[It is] not because these [garments] will be raised along with them, but because they are symbolic of divine things and because he who wore them lived with their power. But even if he did not live in this manner, he did come and submit himself in obedience. Therefore, since each person will be in his own rank [in heaven], both the monk and the priest are dressed in this life [at their burial] with the things belonging to their schema and order, and they are offered to God with these things along with whatever else there is in the schema or in the priesthood. And since this present life is a time for work whereas the future life is for a reward, each person shows in this life that in whatever rank he was found here he will also be enrolled there. This is why one must be buried with the schema appropriate to one's rank, so that one does not think that one casts it off in death.²³⁷⁸

²³⁷⁵ Elder Paisios, *Spiritual Awakening*, 365. Interestingly, though, whenever the holy elder of St. Paisios, Papa Tikhon, was asked to be photographed, he would first don his schema for the photo. Clearly, there are both passionate and dispassionate reasons why a monk would want to be seen wearing his schema.

²³⁷⁶ In contemporary Athonite practice, the icon placed on the monk's chest is an icon of the Resurrection, with the top of the icon close to the monk's chin. The icon is removed from his chest after the funeral service before he is buried.

²³⁷⁷ PG 155:676C–D.

²³⁷⁸ PG 155:916C–D.



Appendix:
The Benefit of Heterodox Writings
According to the Holy Fathers

IN THIS BOOK we have included some insights of wise men who were not Orthodox. Since, however, the heterodox lack the fulness of grace of Orthodox Christians, it may seem inappropriate to derive benefit from heterodox sources. To address such concerns, the first half of this appendix will demonstrate that this approach is in fact justified because the greatest Church Fathers throughout the centuries have unanimously declared that Christians should take advantage of whatever wisdom is to be found in the writings of the heterodox. The second half of this appendix will attempt to explain how the grace of God can work through those outside the Church.

+ + +

In the 2nd century, St. Justin the Philosopher and Martyr taught that God can be discovered through the writings of Hellenic philosophers, and he attributed their wisdom to a “seed” of God the Word. He wrote:

I confess that I both boast and with all my strength strive to be found a Christian; not because the teachings of Plato are different from those of Christ, but because they are not in all respects similar, as neither are those of the others, Stoics, and poets, and historians. For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatik divine Logos, seeing what was related to it... Whatever things were rightly said among all men are the property of us Christians.²³⁷⁹

A contemporary of his, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, agreed: “The Word of God has never ceased to be present in the race of man.”²³⁸⁰ Another contemporary of his, St. Athenagoras of Athens, believed that the Hellenic poets and philosophers were moved to religious knowledge by the “breath of God” within them.²³⁸¹ Similarly, Blessed Augustine taught: “What

²³⁷⁹ Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, II, 13; PG 6:465B.

²³⁸⁰ *Adversus Haereses*, III, 16, 1 (as quoted in Jean Daniélou, *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*, trans. Felix Faber [London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1957], 4).

²³⁸¹ PG 6:904B (*Πρεσβεία* 7).

is now called the Christian religion existed even among the ancients and was not lacking from the beginning of the human race until ‘Christ came in the flesh’ (cf. 1 Jn. 4:2).²³⁸²

St. Justin also said: “Christ, Whom Socrates knew in part (for He is the Word everywhere present), swayed not only philosophers and lettered men but even workmen and ignorant folk, to such effect that they scorned public opinion, fear and death; for the Word is the power (*δύναμις*) of the Father and not a product of human reason.”²³⁸³ Commenting on this passage, Fr. Jean Daniélou wrote: “The last phrase is to be noted. Justin definitely means by his words a supernatural action of grace (*δύναμις*) and not a simple exercise of reason.”²³⁸⁴

In the late 2nd (or perhaps early 3rd) century, Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* expounded extensively on “the importance and uses of Greek [i.e., pagan] philosophy for the Christian.”²³⁸⁵ He wrote:

For clearly, as I think, he [i.e., Peter] showed that the one God was known by the Greeks in pagan fashion, to the Jews in Jewish fashion, and to us [Christians] in a new and spiritual way.²³⁸⁶ ...

It is He who also gave philosophy to the Greeks by means of the inferior angels.... He is Saviour; not [the Saviour] of some, and of others not. But in proportion to the adaptation possessed by each, He has dispensed His beneficence both to Greeks and Barbarians.²³⁸⁷ ...

The Greek preparatory culture, therefore, with philosophy itself, is shown to have come down from God to men.²³⁸⁸ ...

[Pagan] philosophy does not ruin life ... although some have calumniated it, though it be the clear image of truth, a divine gift to the Greeks; nor does it drag us away from the faith, as if we were bewitched by some delusive art, but rather, so to speak, by the use of an ampler circuit, obtains a common exercise demonstrative of the faith. Further, the juxtaposition of doctrines, by comparison, saves the truth, from which follows knowledge.²³⁸⁹ ...

Before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety.²³⁹⁰ ...

²³⁸² *St. Augustine: The Retractions*, The Fathers of the Church (Book 60), trans. Sister M. Inez Bogan (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 52 (Retractiones, book 1, chapter 12).

²³⁸³ Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, II, 10, 4–5 (as translated in Daniélou, *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*, Jean Daniélou, 19–20); PG 6:461AB.

²³⁸⁴ Daniélou, *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*, Jean Daniélou, 20.

²³⁸⁵ *The Early Christian Fathers*, Frank Leslie Cross (London: B. Duckworth, 1960), 121.

²³⁸⁶ *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, 489 (*Stromata*, Book 6, Chapter 5; PG 9:261AB).

²³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 522 (*Stromata*, Book 7, Chapter 2; PG 9:409B).

²³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 308 (*Stromata*, Book 1, Chapter 7; PG 8:732B).

²³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 303–04 (*Stromata*, Book 1, Chapter 2; PG 8:709B).

²³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 305 (*Stromata*, Book 1, Chapter 5; PG 8:717C).

Since, therefore, truth is one . . . so the sects both of barbarian and Hellenic philosophy have done with truth, and each vaunts as the whole truth the portion which has fallen to its lot. But all, in my opinion, are illuminated by the dawn of Light. . . . So, then, the barbarian and Hellenic philosophy has torn off a fragment of eternal truth not from the mythology of Dionysus, but from the theology of the ever-living Word. And he who brings again together the separate fragments, and makes them one, will without peril, be assured, contemplate the perfect Word, the truth.²³⁹¹

Thus, Clement demonstrates that the wisdom in barbarian and Hellenic philosophy are fragments of truth acquired by the grace of God, and therefore we can (as he said above) “without peril bring together the separate fragments.”

This gathering of fragments of truth from the heterodox is what St. Basil the Great in the 4th century recommended:

For just as bees know how to extract honey from flowers, which to men are agreeable only for their fragrance and color, even so here also those who look for something more than pleasure and enjoyment in such writings may derive profit for their souls. Now, then, altogether after the manner of bees must we use these writings, for the bees do not visit all the flowers without discrimination, nor indeed do they seek to carry away entire those upon which they light, but rather, having taken so much as is adapted to their needs, they let the rest go. So we, if wise, shall take from heathen books whatever befits us and is allied to the truth, and shall pass over the rest. And just as in culling roses we avoid the thorns, from such writings as these we will gather everything useful, and guard against the noxious. So, from the very beginning, we must examine each of their teachings, to harmonize it with our ultimate purpose, according to the Doric proverb, “testing each stone by the measuring-line.”²³⁹²

Nevertheless, St. Basil also wrote with regret: “Much time had I spent in vanity, and had wasted nearly all my youth in the vain labour which I underwent in acquiring the [pagan] wisdom made foolish by God.”²³⁹³ Elsewhere, St. Basil added that people “should apply discernment to the studies they make, seeking out useful studies and rejecting what is unintelligent or harmful.”²³⁹⁴ These quotes show that St. Basil thinks that when we read heterodox books, we must be careful not only to avoid the “thorns” but also to avoid spending an inordinate amount of time reading them.

In the same century, St. Gregory the Theologian expressed his stance toward pagan Greek culture in the apothegm: “Avoid the thorns, pluck the roses.”²³⁹⁵ He wrote:

²³⁹¹ Ibid., 313 (*Stromata*, Book 1, Chapter 13; PG 8:753C–756B).

²³⁹² St. Basil the Great, *Address to young men on the right use of Greek literature*, as quoted in Frederick Morgan Padelford, *Essays on the Study and Use of Poetry by Plutarch and Basil the Great*, Yale Studies in English 15 (1902): 105 (PG 31:569C).

²³⁹³ *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, 263 (Letter 223).

²³⁹⁴ Homily XII on Proverbs 1:6 (PG 31:397BC) as quoted by St. Gregory Palamas in Amis, *The Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts: Book 1*, 39 (Triad 1.1.8).

²³⁹⁵ Vid. Frederick Norris, “Of Thorns and Roses,” *Church History* 53 (Dec., 1984), 455–64.

External culture [i.e., the culture of the heathen] which many Christians by an error of judgment scorn as treacherous and dangerous and as turning away from God... we select from them what is useful both for life and enjoyment and we avoid what is dangerous... Even from certain reptiles we have at times compounded salutary medicines. So also from the pagans we have received principles of inquiry and speculation, while we have rejected whatever leads to demons, and error, and the abyss of perdition. And from such material we have drawn profit for piety, by learning to distinguish from the worse, and from its weakness we have made our own doctrine strong.²³⁹⁶

Also in the 4th century, St. Gregory of Nyssa interpreted anagogically Moses's instruction to the Israelites in Exodus 11:2 to take the wealth of Egypt with them as follows:

The loftier meaning [of Moses's instruction]... commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves. Our guide in virtue commands someone who "borrows" from wealthy Egyptians to receive such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.²³⁹⁷ ...

There are certain things derived from profane education which should not be rejected when we propose to give birth to virtue. Indeed moral and natural philosophy may become at certain times a comrade, friend, and companion of life to the higher way, provided that the offspring of this union introduce nothing of a foreign defilement.²³⁹⁸

The attitude of St. John Chrysostom (in the 4th century) towards pagan philosophers was in general unenthusiastic.²³⁹⁹ He did acknowledge, however, that some of their writings are instructive: "Read, if you will, both our own books and those without [i.e., both Christian and heathen books]: for they also abound in such examples. If you despise ours, and this from pride; if you admire the works of [pagan] philosophers, go even to them. They will instruct thee."²⁴⁰⁰ Elsewhere he said: "I do not say this to prevent your teaching him these things [of pagan philosophy], but to prevent your attending to them exclusively."²⁴⁰¹

In the 5th century, Blessed Augustine (who was by no means complacent towards paganism) taught that the pagan philosophers were saved: "From the beginning of the

²³⁹⁶ *Funeral Orations by S Gregory Nazianzen and S Ambrose*, Fathers of the Church 22, trans. Leo P. McCauley (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 35–36 (PG 36:508B).

²³⁹⁷ *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), §115, 81 (PG 44:360B).

²³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62–63 (PG 44:336D–337A).

²³⁹⁹ Vid. Θεοδωρούδη, *Θεία και Ανθρωπίνη Σοφία κατά την Πατερικήν Παράδοσιν της Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, 75–78.

²⁴⁰⁰ *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 379 (Homily 1 on Second Thessalonians).

²⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 155 (Homily 21 on Ephesians 6:1–3).

human race, there were people who believed in Jesus Christ, knew him and lived a good and devout life according to his commandments. No matter when or where they lived, they without doubt were saved by him.”²⁴⁰² St. Anastasios of Antioch and St. Nectarios of Aegina also believed that the pagan philosophers were saved, for the latter wrote:

Jesus said: “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mt. 9:13). These words of Jesus clearly show that the righteous [before Christ] had a part in the salvation of the human race that would come through Jesus Christ. Since those who were under the law had a part in salvation, why would the Gentiles—who have the law written in their hearts and keep it—be excluded from salvation? Is God a respecter of persons? Or is He the God only of Jews? Nonsense! God is a just God and the Father of every nation and race of man. So if He promised salvation to those under the law if they keep the law, He will also save the uncircumcised who kept the law written in their hearts.

St. Anastasios the Patriarch of Antioch assured us that the salvation of the righteous Gentiles was revealed to him by revelation. He mentioned that the wise Plato appeared to an Orthodox monk while awake who was reviling him for some of his errors. Plato informed him about his salvation in Jesus Christ, and he admonished him to stop reviling him and sinning in doing so. Even if this testimony were not taken into consideration—although it is trustworthy since it comes from a trustworthy source—the belief regarding the salvation of the Gentiles is based on sound reasoning and is true by itself.²⁴⁰³

Moreover, it may be inferred that the Athonite fathers since at least the 13th century also concurred with this positive stance toward pagan philosophers, considering that at Vatopaidi and Iveron Monasteries there are frescoes of them holding statements akin to those contained in Christian teaching. But to indicate that these pagans did not reach the same levels of illumination and theosis as the Christian saints did, the pagan philosophers are accordingly depicted without halos.²⁴⁰⁴

In the 5th century, St. Nilus of Ancyra (and/or an anonymous contemporary of his)²⁴⁰⁵ found the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus (a pagan Greek philosopher) so beneficial that he presented it as a Christian treatise by replacing the word “gods” with “God” in it²⁴⁰⁶ and by removing sections inapplicable for Christians.²⁴⁰⁷ Ever since then, it has been embraced as a spiritually edifying text by Christians, and it was even included in the Patristic series

²⁴⁰² Saint Augustine, *Letters*, vol. 2 (83–130), *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 18, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 155–56 (Epistle 102).

²⁴⁰³ Ὁ Ἅγιος Νεκτάριος, ὁ κορυφαῖος καὶ λαοφιλῆς τῶν καιρῶν μας, 243–44.

²⁴⁰⁴ Vid. Constantine Cavarnos, *Anchored in God*, second edition (Boston: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1975), 68–70.

²⁴⁰⁵ Regarding the person responsible for the Christian revision of this document, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enchiridion_of_Epictetus

²⁴⁰⁶ For example, compare Chapter 31:1 of the *Enchiridion* with PG 79:1301B.

²⁴⁰⁷ For example, Chapter 32 of the *Enchiridion* regarding divination is absent from PG 79:1301D.

“Φιλοκαλία τῶν Νηπτικῶν καὶ Ἀσκητικῶν” published in Greece in 1972.²⁴⁰⁸ This shows that the content of some heterodox writings does not conflict with Orthodoxy and can even be helpful to the Orthodox.

In fact, the content of some heterodox writings can be so close to Orthodox texts that even excellent theologians can fail to distinguish between the two, as is evident from the following amusing incident with Metropolitan Anthony Bloom and the renowned theologian Vladimir Lossky:

At one time, Lossky’s opinion was that the Eastern [non-Christian] religions had no proper knowledge or experience of God. Andrei [Metropolitan Anthony’s name as a layman] did not dare to argue openly with such a distinguished person, about a somewhat controversial topic. “But what courage couldn’t achieve, cunning could,” he later said, and he decided to make his point in a way that his friend could not fail to respond to.

Andrei slipped home and wrote out eight quotations from the Upanishads [a collection of ancient texts containing central religious concepts of Hinduism]. He took them back to Lossky with an apparently innocent query. “Could you help me? I have some sayings of the Fathers here and I can’t remember who said what. Can you identify them for me, please?”

Lossky went through the list and without hesitation wrote beside each quotation the relevant name: St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great and so on. When the theologian had attributed them all, Andrei dropped his bombshell. “It’s the Upanishads.”

“From then on,” he said, “Lossky began to look much more sympathetically at other faiths and came to find in them truths he had never before been able to acknowledge.”²⁴⁰⁹

In the 6th century, a monk asked St. John the Prophet: “Should we not, then, read even the works of Evagrius?” (Note that Evagrius the Solitary was considered a heretic because he had espoused some *theoretical* speculations of Origen that were later condemned at the Second Ecumenical Council. The *practical* teachings of Evagrius, however, were held in high regard, which is why several of his apothegms appear in the *Vitae Patrum*, and St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain included some writings of Evagrius in the *Philokalia*.) St. John the Prophet replied: “Do not accept such doctrines from his works; but go ahead and read, if you like, those works that are beneficial for the soul, according to the parable about the net in the Gospel. For it has been written: ‘They placed the good into baskets, but threw out the bad.’²⁴¹⁰ You, too, should do the same.”²⁴¹¹ Thus we see that St. John had the

²⁴⁰⁸ Νείλου τοῦ Μοναχοῦ, *Ἄπαντα τὰ Ἔργα*, ΕΠΕ, Φιλοκαλία 11Γ, 172 ἐπ.

²⁴⁰⁹ Gillian Crow, *This Holy Man: Impressions of Metropolitan Anthony* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 84–85.

²⁴¹⁰ Mt. 13:48.

²⁴¹¹ Chryssavgis, *Barsanuphius and John, Letters*, vol. 2, 183 (letter 602).

same approach towards *Christian* heretics that St. Basil the Great and others had towards *pagan* heretics: “Avoid the thorns, pluck the roses.”

St. John the Damascene in the 8th century had the same mindset. For he wrote in the preface to his *Fount of Knowledge*:

First of all I shall set forth the best contributions of the philosophers of the Greeks, because whatever there is of good has been given to men from above by God, since ‘every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.’²⁴¹² ... In imitation of the method of the bee, I shall make my composition from those things which are conformable with the truth and from our enemies themselves gather the fruit of salvation. But all that is worthless and falsely labeled as knowledge I shall reject.²⁴¹³

Also in the 8th century, St. Theodore the Studite studied pagan philosophy and (in the words of his biographer) “did not hold on to its mythology but kept what is edifying, while perceiving and detecting what is superfluous.”²⁴¹⁴ Furthermore, “St. Theodore, emphasizing that the faith forms the most secure foundation, encouraged the faithful to gather from [pagan] philosophy whatever agrees with the faith and to censure those who are against it.”²⁴¹⁵ Similarly, St. Photios the Great in the 9th century, having mastered all secular learning,²⁴¹⁶ taught that it acquires value and becomes useful only when it “guides the mind towards piety.”²⁴¹⁷

In the 12th century, St. Eustathios of Thessalonica wrote: “I would prefer that monks make anthologies also of secular writings, opinions, and sayings. The most holy Fathers in the old days selected these things ... and pleased God by working in this manner. I myself would love to have such monks here. But instead, the monks here scorn non-Christian books as well as Christian books.... I hope they acquire some prudence and stop behaving foolishly like this.”²⁴¹⁸ Although this stance of St. Eustathios may appear at first glance to be the same as the heretical stance that Barlaam the Calabrian would take in the 14th century (since he also urged monks to occupy themselves with worldly learning),²⁴¹⁹ there is a

²⁴¹² Jas. 1:17.

²⁴¹³ *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, The Fathers of the Church, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 5, [PG 94:524C].

²⁴¹⁴ PG 99:117CD.

²⁴¹⁵ Θεοδώρουδης, *Θεία και Ανθρωπίνη Σοφία κατά την Πατερικήν Παράδοσιν της Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, 97.

²⁴¹⁶ Vid. PG 105:509.

²⁴¹⁷ PG 102:597C.

²⁴¹⁸ For the entire quotation of St. Eustathios and its context, see the paragraphs referenced in footnote #955 on page 180.

²⁴¹⁹ Barlaam believed “that monks also should pursue secular wisdom, and that if they do not possess this wisdom, it is impossible for them to avoid ignorance and false opinion, even if they have achieved the highest level of impassibility; and that one cannot acquire perfection and sanctity without seeking knowledge from

fundamental difference: St. Eustathios made a clear distinction between human and divine wisdom and their corresponding benefits (as did other Church Fathers),²⁴²⁰ whereas “Barlaam, being influenced by the unifying methodology of scholastic theology, equated the objects, method, and accomplishments of human and divine wisdom,”²⁴²¹ which resulted in his overemphasizing the value of human wisdom.

St. Gregory Palamas in the 14th century made a distinction similar to that of St. Eustathios and “differentiated between philosophy and theology, human reason and [divine] revelation, the created and the uncreated, and he taught that the two kinds of wisdom (human and divine) are clearly distinct and that the purpose of each of them determines its value.”²⁴²² St. Gregory criticized Barlaam’s overemphasis of human wisdom and his attribution of soteriological value to pagan philosophy. Nevertheless, St. Gregory added:

Is there then anything of use to us in this philosophy? Certainly. For just as there is much therapeutic value even in substances obtained from the flesh of serpents, and the doctors consider there is no better and more useful medicine than that derived from this source, so there is something of benefit to be had even from the profane philosophers—but somewhat as in a mixture of honey and hemlock. So it is most needful that those who wish to separate out the honey from the mixture should beware that they do not take the deadly residue by mistake.²⁴²³ ...

Studying them [i.e., the various branches of human knowledge] is a good thing, but only to the measure that through it they develop sharpness of vision in the eye of the psyche [i.e., in the nous].²⁴²⁴

Nevertheless, St. Gregory described how difficult it is to extract benefit from pagan philosophy:

In the case of secular wisdom, you must first kill the serpent, in other words, overcome the pride that arises from this philosophy. How difficult that is! “The arrogance of philosophy has nothing in common with humility,” as the saying goes. Having overcome it, then, you must separate and cast away the head and tail, for these things are evil in the highest degree. By the head, I mean manifestly wrong opinions concerning things intelligible and divine and primordial; and by the tail, the fabulous stories concerning created things. As to what lies in between the head and tail, that is, discourses on nature, you must separate out useless ideas by means of the faculties of examination and inspection possessed by the soul, just as pharmacists purify the flesh of serpents with fire and water. Even if you do all this, and make good use of what has been properly set aside, how much trouble and circumspection will be required for the

all quarters, above all from Greek culture” (*Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. John Meyendorff [New York: Paulist Press, 1983], 25, [1:1:4]).

²⁴²⁰ Vid. Θεοδορούδη, *Ὁ μοναχισμὸς κατὰ τὸν Εὐστάθιον Θεσσαλονίκης*, 69.

²⁴²¹ Θεοδορούδη, *Θεία καὶ Ἀνθρωπίνη Σοφία κατὰ τὴν Πατερικὴν Παράδοσιν τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας*, 146.

²⁴²² *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁴²³ Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, 28.

²⁴²⁴ Amis, *The Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts: Book 1*, 37 (Triad 1.1.6).

task! Nonetheless, if you put to good use that part of the profane wisdom which has been well excised, no harm can result, for it will naturally have become an instrument for good.²⁴²⁵

St. Gregory himself, of course, had this discernment to extract the good from the harmful, which is why in his homilies he could quote non-Orthodox philosophers such as Pythagoras.²⁴²⁶

In the late 18th century St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain warned *others* to avoid the writings of the heterodox,²⁴²⁷ but he himself quoted them in his books, and occasionally he even translated and published large portions of what they had written, such as Lorenzo Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*, Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* with Giovanni Pietro Pinamonti's Italian commentary, and Paolo Segneri's *Il Confessore Istruito* and *Il Penitence Istruito*.²⁴²⁸ Perhaps St. Nicodemos was so critical of the heterodox because he was simply trying to protect his audience—the largely uneducated Greek people under the Turkish yoke—who would not have had the discernment to separate “the honey from the hemlock.” We would also say that anyone today who has not thoroughly acquired a patristic mindset is likely to consume some “hemlock” unwittingly if he tries to find the “honey” of the heterodox.

St. Athanasios Parios in the early 19th century sharply criticized heterodox teachings from Western Europe. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that using the beneficial insights of the heterodox “is something that the divine and foremost holy Fathers cultivated very much throughout their lives. They, too, selected whatever good they found in others and passed it on to benefit the public”²⁴²⁹ This is why, according to Protopresbyter Theodoros Zeses:

[Saint] Athanasios did not forbid the use of other [non-Orthodox] books. He himself used them and taught them to his students, just as the Fathers also did. He correctly believed that worldly wisdom does not lead to perfection and sanctity and the acquisition of the good things of the Kingdom of God, and that their usefulness is limited to life here on earth. Nevertheless, it is useful even in theology, as he wrote in *Epitome*.²⁴³⁰

²⁴²⁵ Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, 29.

²⁴²⁶ Vid. Veniamin, *Saint Gregory Palamas: The Homilies*, 371, n. 724.

²⁴²⁷ For example, St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote: “Be careful not to read the books of heretics. Avoid the books of atheists like fire. Do not even accept to take them into your hands” (Chamberas, *Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain: A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, 190).

²⁴²⁸ According to Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, the *Exomologetarion* written by St. Nicodemos is “mostly a direct translation” of those two books by Paolo Segneri (Vid. Dimitri Conomos, Graham Speake “St. Nikodimos and the Philokalia,” in *Mount Athos, the Sacred Bridge: The Spirituality of the Holy Mountain* [Oxford: Bern, 2010], 91).

²⁴²⁹ As quoted in Ζήσης, *Μοναχισμός: Μορφές και Θέματα*, 196.

²⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

Fr. Constantine Cavarnos added that St. Athanasios Parios

emphasizes the inferiority of “external” or “human philosophy” compared with the “internal philosophy” or “philosophy from God.” Throughout the book he is concerned with making his compatriots understand these two things: (a) The great importance of preserving in Greece the true order of the two philosophies, placing “Divine” philosophy above “human philosophy,” Christianity above secular systems of knowledge. (b) The real danger involved in sending their sons to Europe for higher education, because in Europe this hierarchal order has been inverted....

[But] he was not altogether closed to Western European thought. This is clearly testified to by the fact that he translated the book of the Italian philosopher Antonio Genovesi, *Elements of Metaphysics*, and used it as a handbook in his course on metaphysics.²⁴³¹

In the late 19th century, St. Nectarios of Aegina wrote dozens of books and articles in which he frequently included inspiring quotes of non-Christians. Specifically, Fr. Constantine Cavarnos observed:

Of the ancient Greek philosophers, the one from whom our Saint [Nectarios] draws most often is Plato. Next come, in order, Plutarch, Socrates, Aristotle, Epictetos, Pythagoras, and some others. Of other ancient Greek writers, the most frequently quoted are Xenophon, Isocrates, Euripides, Menander, Homer, Aesop, Demosthenes, Herodotos, Sophocles, Theognis, and Thucydides.²⁴³²

Furthermore, when St. Nectarios published the second edition of the book *Sketch Concerning Religious Tolerance* by Eugenios Voulgaris, he “contributed eighteen pages of notes taken from a [non-Orthodox] French work which Voulgaris used as a basis for his treatment of the subject. He selected some of the notes contained in the French work, translated them and appended them in order to help the readers understand in a more precise manner certain parts of Voulgaris’ work.”²⁴³³

St. Nikolai Velimirovich (1880–1956) expressed in poetry the benefit his own soul had gained from heterodox prophets:

All the prophets have from the beginning cried out to my soul, imploring her to make herself a virgin and prepare herself to receive the Divine Son into her immaculate womb....

The wise man of China admonishes my soul to be peaceful and still, and to wait for Tao to act within her. Glory be the memory of Lao-tse, the teacher and prophet of his people!

The wise man of India teaches my soul not to be afraid of suffering, but through arduous and relentless drilling in purification and prayer to elevate herself to the One

²⁴³¹ Cavarnos, *Saint Athanasios Parios*, 67–69.

²⁴³² Cavarnos, *St. Nectarios of Aegina*, 37. St. Nectarios also published a book in 1896 entitled *Epic and Elegiac Maxims of Minor Greek Poets*, consisting entirely of spiritually edifying sayings of non-Christians (*Ibid.*, 39).

²⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

on high, who will come out to greet her and manifest to her His face and His power. Glorious be the memory of Krishna, the teacher and prophet of his people!

The royal son of India teaches my soul to empty herself completely of every seed and crop of the world, to abandon all the serpentine allurements of frail and shadowy matter, and then—in vacuity, tranquillity, purity, and bliss—to await nirvana. Blessed be the memory of Buddha, the royal son and inexorable teacher of his people!

The thunderous man of Persia tells my soul that there is nothing in the world except light and darkness, and that the soul must break free from the darkness as the day does from the night. For the sons of light are conceived from the light, and the sons of darkness are conceived from darkness. Glorious be the memory of Zoroaster, the great prophet of his people.

The prophet of Israel cries out to my soul: Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a son, whose name will be—the God-man. Glorious be the memory of Isaiah, the clairvoyant prophet of my soul!

O heavenly Lord, open the hearing of my soul, lest she become deaf to the counsels of Your messenger.

Do not slay the prophets sent to you, my soul, for their graves contain not them, but those who slew them.²⁴³⁴

Furthermore, St. Nikolai Velimirovich believed that God was using Mahatma Gandhi (a Hindu) to teach the Christian world lessons in fasting, prayer, and silence. St. Nikolai wrote:

A warning from God—that is surely the meaning of the leader of the great Indian nation.... Gandhi's political method is very simple and obvious—he does not require anything except the man who cries out and the God who hearkens. Against weapons, ammunition and army, Gandhi places fasting; against skill, wiliness and violence—prayer; and against political quarrel—silence. Fasting, prayer and silence! Providence has chosen Gandhi, an unbaptized man, to serve as a warning to the baptized....

Providence sometimes uses such warnings for the good of the people. The Gospel also tells us that Providence sometimes uses such warnings for the good of the people.... I am alluding to the Roman captain from Capernaum (Mt. ch. 8). On the one hand, you see the elders of Israel who, as chosen monotheists of the time, boasted of their faith, meanwhile rejecting Christ, and on the other hand and you see the despised Roman pagan who came to Christ with great faith and humility, and asked Him to heal his servant. And when Jesus heard it, He was astonished and said to those who followed Him, "Truly I say to you, not even in Israel have I found faith like this." The Christian world is the new, baptized Israel. Listen! Is Christ not telling the same words today to the consciences of the Christian elders by pointing to today's captain of India?²⁴³⁵

In the 20th century, St. John Maximovitch also had the same openness to non-Orthodox sources, according to Fr. Seraphim Rose, who wrote:

²⁴³⁴ Nikolaj Velimirović, *Prayers by the Lake*, A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality, vol. 5, trans. Archimandrite Todor Mika and Stevan Scott (Grayslake: The Free Serbian Orthodox Diocese of the United States of America and Canada, 1989), 86–87.

²⁴³⁵ Saint Nikolai Velimirovich, *Missionary Letters of Saint Nikolai Velimirovich, Part 1*, A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality, vol. 6 (Grayslake: New Gracanica Monastery, 2008), 171–73.

In 1640 or so, a [Roman Catholic] man in France named Ardenon wrote a book called *On Frequent Communion*.... At about the same time in Spain, someone named Miguel De Molinos also wrote about frequent Communion. It is very likely, although we cannot prove it right now, that St. Macarius [of Corinth] read one or both of these books, and that he even translated whole chapters from them for his own book. We do not need to get upset that he may have been taking a Western spiritual practice, however, if we realize that St. Macarius was adapting from the West something which can be important for us in our corrupted state; therefore there is nothing wrong with it at all. In fact, this is what we may call a true theological wisdom: when one is not afraid of something foreign just because it is foreign. One can take something foreign, having a higher wisdom which the Church gives, and adapt for one's own what is useful and throw out what is not useful. This kind of theological wisdom is precisely what we find in Archbishop [Saint] John [Maximovitch]. He was in the full tradition of Orthodoxy, and in the full tradition of those who adapted from wherever they could find sources for spiritual profit.²⁴³⁶ ...

A person who has prudence and discernment can read these [heterodox] texts and find out where they are right or they are wrong and use them properly.... Today we are in a situation where everyone who is Orthodox is totally immersed in this Western world, this Western understanding; and therefore we had better know how to take wisdom from it, what to accept and what to reject.²⁴³⁷

The spiritual forefathers of our monastic community continued this Patristic understanding of how edifying the wisdom of the heterodox can be. For example, St. Joseph the Hesychast in a pastoral epistle of his cited an edifying incident from the life of Philip of Macedonia and remarked that “the truth of things made the pagans wise.”²⁴³⁸ Elder Ephraim believed that also contemporary heterodox writings can be beneficial. One day (in 2009) one of his monks told me that he had read a non-Christian book²⁴³⁹ about ethical behavior and benefitted greatly from the author's insights. This puzzled him, and he asked Elder Ephraim: “How is it possible to derive such great benefit from an author who is not even Christian?” Elder Ephraim replied: “Of course we can benefit from the writings of the heterodox. I, too, read some books of theirs.”

Elder Ephraim not only read some heterodox books but he even referred to them in his homilies. For example, in his homily “Enthusiasm and Fanaticism: Two Completely Opposite Concepts,” he cited the opinion of an Anglican regarding Islam. Even more boldly, several times Elder Ephraim has mentioned in his homilies the story of how Napoleon Bonaparte convinced someone of God's existence by using a teleological argument (i.e., an “argument from design”). It is such a strong argument that Elder Ephraim even managed

²⁴³⁶ *The Orthodox Word*, no. 175–6 (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994), 155.

²⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 152, 155–56.

²⁴³⁸ Γέροντος Ἰωσήφ, *Ἐκφρασις Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας*, 298. See also Elder Joseph, *Monastic Wisdom*, 256.

²⁴³⁹ The book was *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* by Stephen R. Covey who was a Mormon theologian. Covey does not touch on theological matters in this book of his.

to convert someone to Orthodoxy with the help of this insight, despite the fact that Napoleon was not even Christian. What he said was the following:

Napoleon was a pious man of faith, but he had a general who did not believe in God. The emperor knew him well and made many attempts to convince his general, but he objected and refused to believe. One day the emperor invited him to lunch but had previously placed a ball on the dinner table. The emperor said to him: "I believe this ball on its own appeared here out of thin air."

"Your Highness, you must be joking. Do you think I'm a fool to believe this?"

"Yes, you are a fool," Napoleon replied. "If you believe this insignificant ball was made by someone, how can you not believe that the entire universe which operates with such precision was not created by God?"²⁴⁴⁰

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The reason why it is possible to benefit from the insights of the heterodox is because, according to the holy Fathers, their wisdom can be attributed to the grace of the Holy Spirit acting on them externally. In particular, St. John Chrysostom said:

If He "lighteth every man that cometh into the world,"²⁴⁴¹ how is it that so many continue unenlightened? For not all have known the majesty of Christ. How then doth He "light every man"? He lighteth all as far as in Him lies. But if some, willfully closing the eyes of their mind, would not receive the rays of that Light, their darkness arises not from the nature of the Light, but from their own wickedness, who willfully deprive themselves of the gift. For the grace is shed forth upon all, turning itself back neither from Jew, nor Greek, nor Barbarian, nor Scythian, nor free, nor bond, nor male, nor female, nor old, nor young, but admitting all alike, and inviting with an equal regard.²⁴⁴²

St. Athanasios the Great spoke of the same thing: "The Saviour is working mightily among men, every day He is invisibly persuading numbers of people all over the world, both within and beyond the Greek-speaking world, to accept His faith and be obedient to His teaching."²⁴⁴³

St. Maximos the Confessor also taught that the grace of the Holy Spirit works in all people:

The Holy Spirit is not absent from any created being, especially not from those which in any way participate in intelligence. For being God and God's Spirit, He embraces in unity the spiritual knowledge of all created things, providentially permeating all things with His power, and vivifying their inner essences in accordance with their nature. In this way He makes men aware of things done sinfully against the law

²⁴⁴⁰ Vid. Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ, *Ἡ Τέχνη τῆς Σωτηρίας*, Τόμος Γ', ὁμιλία κθ' (ἀνέκδοτο).

²⁴⁴¹ Jn. 1:9.

²⁴⁴² *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Volume XIV, trans. Philip Schaff, Homily VIII: John 1:9 (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 29; PG 59:65.

²⁴⁴³ *St. Athanasius, On the Incarnation*, trans. A Religious of C.S.M.V. (New York: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 1993), 61.

of nature, and renders them capable of choosing principles which are true and in conformity with nature. Thus we find many barbarians and nomadic peoples turning to a virtuous way of life and setting aside the savage laws which they had kept among themselves from time immemorial.²⁴⁴⁴

Likewise, St. John Cassian stated: “The grace of Christ then is at hand every day, which, while it ‘willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,’ calleth all without any exception, saying: ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you (Mt. 11:28).’”²⁴⁴⁵

St. Diadochos of Photiki made a distinction between how grace works on those who are baptized (i.e., Christians) and on those who have not been baptized (i.e., people outside the Church): “Before holy baptism, grace encourages the soul towards good things from the outside, while Satan lurks in its depths, trying to block all the ways of the nous from approaching the divine. But from the moment that we are reborn [through baptism], the demon is outside, and grace is within.”²⁴⁴⁶

St. Seraphim of Sarov elaborated further on this external action of grace. Commenting on the Scripture that “the Spirit of God was not yet in the world” (Jn. 7:39), he said:

That does not mean that the Spirit of God was not in the world at all, but His presence was not so apparent as in Adam or in us Orthodox Christians. It was manifested only externally.... The grace of the Holy Spirit acting externally was also reflected in all the Old Testament prophets and Saints of Israel.... Though not with the same power as in the people of God, nevertheless, the presence of the Spirit of God also acted in the pagans who did not know the true God, because even among them God found for Himself chosen people.... Though the pagan philosophers also wandered in the darkness of ignorance of God, yet they sought the truth which is beloved by God, and on account of this God-pleasing seeking, they could partake of the Spirit of God, for it is said that the nations who do not know God practice by nature the demands of the law and do what is pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 2:14).²⁴⁴⁷

St. Sophrony of Essex concurred: “Many people have received grace, and not only those in the Church but outside the Church, too, for ‘God is no respecter of persons’ (Acts 10:34).”²⁴⁴⁸

²⁴⁴⁴ Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, «Ἐκατοντὰς τρίτη, κεφάλαια διάφορα θεολογικά τε καὶ οἰκονομικά καὶ περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ κακίας» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπιτικῶν*, τόμος β΄ (1991), 103–04 (κεφ. οβ΄); see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 180 (ch. 72).

²⁴⁴⁵ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume XI, trans. Edgar C. S. Gibson, 2nd sermon (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), 425.

²⁴⁴⁶ Διαδόχου Φωτικῆς, «Λόγος Ἀσκητικὸς» ἐν *Φιλοκαλία*, τόμος α΄ (1893), 155, κεφ. ος΄; see also Palmer, Sherrard, Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 279 (St. Diadochos of Photiki 76).

²⁴⁴⁷ *A Conversation of St. Seraphim of Sarov with N. A. Motovilov* (Blanco: New Sarov Press), 12–13.

²⁴⁴⁸ Sakharov, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, 127.

St. Gregory the Theologian held that the character of some people outside the Church can be more Christian than that of many inside the Church. In the funeral oration for his father's death he stated:

Even before he was of our fold, he was ours. His character made him one of us. For, as many of our own are not with us, whose life alienates them from the common body, so, many of those without are on our side, whose character [τρόπος] anticipates their faith, and need only the name of that which indeed they possess. My father was one of these, an alien shoot, but inclined by his life towards us.²⁴⁴⁹

There are several instances of holy people who were not part of Abraham's covenant with God in the Old Testament, or were outside the Church in the New Testament, who were nevertheless enlightened by the grace of God. For example, St. Justin the Philosopher and Martyr pointed out that Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Lot, and Melchizedek were amongst those "who did not observe the Sabbath, yet nevertheless were pleasing to God."²⁴⁵⁰ Commenting on this, Fr. Jean Daniélou wrote that St. Justin "is thus a witness to the fact that, in the natural order, certain men were able to know the true God and to serve Him."²⁴⁵¹ And St. Gregory the Dialogist wrote apropos of Job: "It is not without cause that the life of a just pagan is set before us as a model side by side with the life of the Israelites. Our Saviour, coming for the redemption of Jews and Gentiles, willed also to be foretold by the voice of Jews and Gentiles."²⁴⁵²

Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus wrote about the Queen of the South: "That is where that wonderful woman was queen, whose eagerness Christ the Master lauded in the holy gospels (vid. Mt. 12:42)... I remember the teaching of the Apostle who praised those that were justified without the law: 'When the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law, these not having the law are a law unto themselves' (Rom. 2:14)."²⁴⁵³ St. Isidore of Seville added: "Not only is she blessed with the reward of heavenly resurrection, but she is declared worthy, by the voice of the Judge Himself, of the apostolic power to judge the adulterous Jews."²⁴⁵⁴

An example from the New Testament of a Christian being benefitted by a non-Christian after the coming of Christ is found in chapter ten of Acts. It tells of Cornelius the Italian, who because of his piety, almsgiving, and prayers was counted worthy to speak with an angel, even though he was not Christian or even Jewish. The Holy Spirit then used

²⁴⁴⁹ *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, 256* (Oration 18:6).

²⁴⁵⁰ PG 6:517A.

²⁴⁵¹ Daniélou, *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*, 112.

²⁴⁵² *Moral. super Job*. Proem; Sources Chrétiennes, 128 (as translated in Daniélou, *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament*, 4).

²⁴⁵³ *Quaest Reg.* III, 10, 33; PG 80:697C–700A.

²⁴⁵⁴ *Quaest Reg.* III, 5; PL 83:417.

him to teach the chief Apostle Peter something he had not yet understood. Upon learning this lesson, St. Peter declared: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”²⁴⁵⁵

Another noteworthy observation from the New Testament is that the Apostle Paul quoted pagan writers several times as a means of strengthening his points by demonstrating that his message contains universal truths, as St. Basil pointed out: “The Apostle [Paul] often was not above using even pagan utterances which were congruent with his special purpose.”²⁴⁵⁶ Thus, in Acts 17:28 St. Paul quoted Arstus of Tarsus²⁴⁵⁷ and Cleanthes of Asses:²⁴⁵⁸ “‘In Him we live and move and exist,’ as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’” In First Corinthians 15:33, St. Paul quoted Menander: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Furthermore, in Titus 1:12–13 St. Paul quoted Epimenides and even called him a prophet: “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true.” Most surprising of all is that, according to St. Paul in Acts 26:14, *Jesus Himself* quoted a heathen proverb to him: “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”²⁴⁵⁹

Several biblical scholars²⁴⁶⁰ believe that St. Paul wrote the following words to the Phillipians (heirs of Hellenistic culture) as a way to suggest that they continue implementing the ideals of Hellenistic virtue: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,

²⁴⁵⁵ Acts 10:34–35.

²⁴⁵⁶ Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, vol. 9, 58.

²⁴⁵⁷ In *Phaenomena*, 1.

²⁴⁵⁸ Vid. *Fabricii Biblioth.* Gr. 1. 3. c. 18. 453.

²⁴⁵⁹ Acts 26:14. According to a biblical scholar: “There is no Jewish use of this proverbial expression; it is entirely classical, and is of frequent occurrence in the Greek and Latin Poets” (John William Donaldson, *Christian Orthodoxy Reconciled with the Conclusions of Modern Biblical Learning; a Theological Essay with Critical and Controversial Supplements* [London: 1857], 293).

²⁴⁶⁰ For example, one contemporary biblical scholar wrote: “The list of virtues in verse 8 is not uniquely Christian nor even Jewish in character. Rather, the list ‘espouses the highest ideals of Hellenistic virtue’ (White 1990: 221). The appropriation of Hellenistic virtues by Paul has troubled some (e.g., Martin 1976: 157–58), but Paul makes no attempt to ‘Christianize’ them. Instead he accepts what was considered ethically commendable in Hellenistic culture and tells Christians to reflect on this as a norm for their own behavior” (*Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, James D. G. Dunn, ed. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003], 1401). The 19th-century *Pulpit Commentary* observed: “This word [‘virtue’ in Phil. 4:8], so very common in the Greek moralists, occurs nowhere else in St. Paul. Nor does any other of the New Testament writers use it except St. Peter (1 Peter 2:9 (in the Greek); 2 Peter 1:3, 5). Bishop Lightfoot says, ‘The strangeness of the word, combined with the change of expression, εἶς τις, will suggest another explanation: “Whatever value may reside in your old heathen conception of virtue, whatever consideration is due to the praise of men;” as if the apostle were anxious not to omit any possible ground of appeal’” (Henry Donald Maurice Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* [New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1895], vol. 20).

whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”²⁴⁶¹ Likewise, St. Paul’s advice to the Thessalonians: “Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good,”²⁴⁶² was understood by St. John the Damascene to mean: “Let us examine also the words of non-Christian wise men [τῶν ἕξω σοφῶν], that we may find something in them worth carrying away and reap some fruit that will be of profit to our soul.”²⁴⁶³

Regarding this issue of the presence of God’s grace among the heterodox, St. Sophrony of Essex wrote: “Only the one and only [Orthodox] Church can possess the fullness of grace. All the other [heterodox] churches have grace due to their faith in Christ, although not the fullness of grace.”²⁴⁶⁴ A contemporary Orthodox author explained this in more detail:

In any attempt to elucidate an Orthodox position on dogmatic issues, it is also important to consult the texts of the Divine Services. A brief look at some frequently used prayers will help to illustrate the concept of the Holy Spirit’s general ministry. The first example introduces the Trisagion and is recited at almost every Orthodox service: “O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things, the Treasury of good things and Giver of life.” Here one can see an affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s general ministry towards all of creation in which He fills all things with the energies of God in His rôle as the Divine Agent of Him by Whom “all things consist.”²⁴⁶⁵ The second example is the prayer which concludes the First Hour. Based on Saint John 1:9, it is a good example of the Orthodox understanding of the Economy of God towards His creation: “O Christ the True Light, Who enlightenest and sanctifiest every man that cometh into the world: Let the light of Thy countenance be signed upon us, that in it we may see the Unapproachable Light.” ...

There are innumerable examples of [non-Orthodox] believers who clearly appear to have had a deep relationship with Christ, as attested by their words and deeds.²⁴⁶⁶ Some famous ones readily come to mind: C. S. Lewis—a Christian apologist whose thinking was close to Orthodoxy in many ways—is a “hero” to innumerable Christians

²⁴⁶¹ Phil. 4:8.

²⁴⁶² 1 Thes. 5:21.

²⁴⁶³ PG 94:532A. See also Chase, *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, 9.

²⁴⁶⁴ Σωφρονίου, *Αγώνας Θεογνωσίας*, 161–62 (Επιστολή 11).

²⁴⁶⁵ Col. 1:17.

²⁴⁶⁶ The author of this book added the following footnote: “Caution is required here, however. Occasionally one will find misguided Orthodox Christians who have adopted as their own one or more ‘saints’ of Roman Catholicism (post-Great Schism), Francis of Assisi being the most common. Although we do not wish to cast judgment upon Francis, to uphold such a person as a model is a grave error, as the following studies clearly bear out: *Unseen Light* (Blanco: New Sarov Press, 1999, forthcoming); Father George Macris, ‘A Comparison of the Mysticism of Francis of Assisi with that of St. Seraphim of Sarov,’ *Synaxis*, vol. 2, 39–56; ‘Francis of Assisi,’ *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XII, No. 2, 41–42. The divergence of Roman Catholic spirituality from that of Orthodoxy will become readily apparent after reading these.”

of every variety. His writings have been instrumental in leading many to faith in Christ. Then there is Mother Theresa, who is revered by thousands as a model of Christian charity. One also recalls William Law, who wrote the challenging Anglican classic on the spiritual life, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. And we cannot forget Cardinal John Henry Newman, whose love for God in his intellectual biography, *Apologia pro vita sua*, is most evident. Of course, Orthodox Christians would readily disagree with many things these people wrote and did. Nevertheless—recognizing in them true feeling, piety, and love for God—, we can rightly thank God for their lives and work, not presuming to know how He will judge them. In such people it is obvious that God has found hearts that are open to Him. But Orthodox Christians should also say that this openness is in reality the reception of the *external* influence of God’s Grace (Divine Energies) upon their lives, which is not the same thing as the *internal* working of ecclesial Grace given only through Baptism.²⁴⁶⁷

Based on all the foregoing, it follows that not only the pagan philosophers who lived *before* Christ were enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, but even non-Christians who lived *after* the *economía* of Christ in the flesh “could partake of the Spirit of God on account of their God-pleasing seeking,” as St. Seraphim of Sarov said.²⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, since the grace of God has been at work even in non-Christians who “sought the truth which is beloved by God,”²⁴⁶⁹ it makes sense that the holy Fathers would be able to appreciate the “spermatic divine Logos” present in some heterodox writings and would encourage others to benefit from them as well.

It is interesting to note that prior to the 18th century, the only non-Orthodox authors quoted by the saints of the Church were the Hellenic philosophers. After the 18th century, however, the saints began to quote contemporary non-Orthodox wise men as well (as cited above on pages 457–461). One explanation for this phenomenon would be to claim that these recent saints were an aberration from the norm and departed from the stance of the holy Fathers. However, this explanation has two problems: 1) it assumes that a number of saints was making a mistake, and 2) it implies that the grace of God ceased to act in the non-Orthodox after Hellenistic times, which is an implication that contradicts the patristic understanding of grace explained above on pages 461–463. Perhaps a more accurate explanation for this phenomenon can be found through an understanding of the historical context. Until the Byzantine Empire fell in the 15th century, it was the epitome of civilization and culture in the world. As such, it had very little to learn from its less civilized neighbors. But after a few centuries of suppression under the Ottoman yoke, and after Western Europe had emerged from its Dark Ages, the Orthodox Christians in the former Byzantine Empire were no longer at the forefront of worldly civilization and education. As

²⁴⁶⁷ Patrick Barnes, *The Non-Orthodox: The Orthodox Teaching on Christians Outside of the Church* (Salisbury: Regina Orthodox Press, 1999), Chapter II.

²⁴⁶⁸ *A Conversation of St. Seraphim of Sarov with N. A. Motovilov*, 13.

²⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

a result, they could thenceforth benefit from some aspects of “human philosophy” (as St. Athanasios Parios called it) of heterodox Western Europe.

In his book *Orthodox Monasticism*, Professor Christos Krikonis observed that Orthodox monasteries have traditionally appreciated the value of books written by non-Christians as well as books regarding non-spiritual matters:

The contribution of monks is also typical in all the higher cultural values, such as the development of literacy and science. This contribution of theirs instills awe and admiration for the open-mindedness with which the monks preserved in their libraries the works of the ancient Greeks and of other authors, which they display with pride. Thus, among the thousands of old monastery manuscripts (which are vital for the preservation and study of the texts’ history) are found entire or partial works that the ancient writers have bequeathed on us (such as: Aesop, Aeschylus, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Galen, Demosthenes, Epictetus, Euripides, Herodotus, Hesiod, Thucydides, Hippocrates, Isocrates, Josephus, Lucian, Homer, Horace, Pindar, Solon, Sophocles, Philo, and innumerable others).

Among the thousands of manuscripts and printed books that are kept in the monastery libraries, all branches of knowledge and everything known to man are found: grammar, syntax, rhetoric, logic, metaphysics, psychology, geography, botany, medicine, physics, mathematics, meteorology, physiology.²⁴⁷⁰

Some people, however, might reason that heterodox writings are superfluous, considering that there have been countless saints throughout the history of the Church who have attained holiness without ever being exposed to such writings. Their reasoning appears to be supported by St. Irenaeus of Lyons who said: “Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life (Rev. 22:17). For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers.”²⁴⁷¹ St. Irenaeus, however, was speaking of *theological* truth, not scientific and ethical truths.

Although we can agree that heterodox writings are superfluous in the sense that it would be blasphemous to assert that the teachings of Jesus Christ were deficient, nevertheless, it is clear from what the holy Fathers demonstrated in word and deed that we Orthodox Christians should “beautify the faith with the riches of reason of those outside the Church,”²⁴⁷² as St. Gregory of Nyssa put it. And, according to St. Basil the Great, doing so is not merely optional, but “we *must* use these writings.”²⁴⁷³ St. Gregory the Theologian

²⁴⁷⁰ Ἱεροθέου, *Ὁ Ὀρθόδοξος Μοναχισμός: Φορέας πνευματικότητας, κοινωνικῆς προσφορᾶς καὶ παράγων πολιτισμοῦ ἢ ἄρνηση ζωῆς;*, Χριστοῦ Θ. Κρικῶνη (Ἀθήνα: Ἀποστολική Διακονία, 2010), 40.

²⁴⁷¹ *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Adversus Haereses, III, vol. 1, (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 4.*

²⁴⁷² For the entire quotation of St. Gregory of Nyssa, see footnote #2397 on page 452.

²⁴⁷³ For the entire quotation of St. Basil the Great, see footnote #2392 on page 451.

even lamented that “many Christians by an error of judgment scorn [heterodox writings] as treacherous and dangerous and as turning away from God,”²⁴⁷⁴ just as St. Eustathios of Thessalonica lamented the “foolish behavior” of monks who “scorn non-Christian books.”²⁴⁷⁵

St. Gregory of Nyssa enumerated some of the fields of knowledge that we ought to borrow from the heterodox: “moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful.”²⁴⁷⁶ This is why we have included in this book insightful examples of moral and natural philosophy from the heterodox as well as some of their scientific findings. But we have avoided referring to the dogmas, theology, and ontology of the heterodox because they are incompatible with Orthodoxy.

It is important to make this distinction between the harmful *theological* teachings of the heterodox and their beneficial *moral* and *scientific* teachings. Failing to do so would result in “throwing out the baby with the bathwater,” or to put it more patristically, “throwing out the roses with the thorns.” Making this distinction enables us to see why some of the holy Fathers would approve of reading heterodox writings while others would prohibit this. The prohibitions were always in regards to books that specifically contain heresies—i.e., the *theological* teachings of the heterodox. The following passage of St. Paisius Velichkovsky in the 18th century is a good example of such a prohibition:

Can a true Christian have and read books forbidden by the Church which are being secretly reprinted in a sacrilegious manner by schismatics and being distributed by them among the people, or should this be not done? My answer is that the Divine Church forbids reading heretical books and holding discussions with heretics. In a book on the profession of the Orthodox faith, there is a question asking what is the fifth commandment of the Church. The answer is that those who are unlearned in the Holy Scriptures and other necessary fields should not read heretical books or listen to the harmful teachings of heretics, or even speak and have dealings with them, as the psalm-singer prophet says: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners” (Ps. 1:1). Elsewhere the Holy Scripture says: “As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him” (Titus 3:10). Watch carefully and note that the Divine Church does not command everyone not to read heretical books and not to hold discussions with heretics, but only those who are unlearned in the Holy Scriptures and the various fields of learning. It is very easy for the latter, as they read heretical books and get acquainted with their teachings, or carelessly enter into conversations with heretics, to succumb to their ungodly and perverted sophistry. In the eyes of ignorant people, heretical teaching often appears to be truthful, while actually being unquestionably false. Just as Satan, being darkness, becomes transformed into a radiant angel, so do heretical teachings, being darkness and totally alienated from the light of God’s Truth,

²⁴⁷⁴ For the entire quotation of St. Gregory the Theologian, see footnote #2396 on page 452.

²⁴⁷⁵ For the entire quotation of St. Eustathios of Thessalonica, see footnote #955 on page 180.

²⁴⁷⁶ For the entire quotation of St. Gregory of Nyssa, see footnote #2397 on page 452.

often appear to people who are unlearned in the Holy Scriptures and various fields to be somewhat similar to the truth. This is why the Church forbids those who are unlearned in the Holy Scriptures and the other fields to read heretical books, and to have discussions with heretics, so that they will not, due to their unsophistication, be harmed by their teachings. Those who have studied the Holy Scriptures and the other fields are exempt from this commandment. Such are the Holy Fathers, the pastors, and the teachers of the Church. Not only were they instructed to perfection in the Holy Scriptures by the grace of God, but they also mastered the other fields of knowledge, surpassing in worldly wisdom not only their instructors, but also all the ancient philosophers. These God-bearing Fathers of ours saw how various heretics, proud of their worldly wisdom, would turn the Divine Scriptures into a weapon of their philosophy, interpreting them in an erroneous and perverted sense through philosophical proofs and bringing constant strife into the Church of Christ through their teachings. Thus the Fathers would read their false heretical teachings, and subordinating their philosophies to the Divine Scriptures in every respect, would perceive the heretics' errors clearer than the sun, and through the invincible double weapon, i.e., theology and philosophical proof, would rend asunder all their heretical stratagems as a spider web and would defend God's Church by the word of truth from all heretical attacks. For philosophy, too, if used correctly, as the Holy and Apostolic Church teaches us, corresponds to God's truth to such an extent that it cannot be surpassed by any heretical verbal stratagems. If used contrary to the true sense of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Church, as is done by the heretics, it becomes opposed to God's truth, and since it upholds lies it gets vanquished by truthful evidence. Thus, one who starts reading schismatic books must lack neither theological knowledge nor worldly learning. For the one who does not have the appropriate knowledge, it is better to obey God and the Church commandment which says: "Do not read heretical books and do not take part in discussions with heretics."²⁴⁷⁷

Panayiotis Nellas, a contemporary theologian, called for discernment in dealing with such matters:

The task of contemporary Orthodox theology does not consist in theologians identifying themselves with scientific research or political action, with the idea of corroborating these things, nor does it consist in trying to overthrow the achievements of these things on the basis of a supposedly evangelical or patristic teaching. The Gospel teaches that the struggle of the faithful is "not against flesh and blood"²⁴⁷⁸—that struggle within the framework created by science, politics, and the other dimensions of the "garments of skin," because such a framework is not of its own nature evil—but it is a struggle "against principalities, against powers, against world rulers of this present darkness,"²⁴⁷⁹ against the devil and sin. Orthodox theology ought to practice a discernment of spirits. Its aim should be to liberate whatever good exists among the fruits of scientific research, technological development, etc., from lawless autonomy, which is slavery to corruption and the devil, the ultimate sin, and to assign to this good element an ordered place within its own catholic truth, because that is where it belongs

²⁴⁷⁷ Chetverikov, *Starets Paisii Velichkovskii*, 253–55.

²⁴⁷⁸ Eph. 6:12.

²⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

by virtue of its own nature; for [according to St. Justin]²⁴⁸⁰ “whatever is called good by all men belongs to us Christians.”²⁴⁸¹

+ + +

Today we live in an age of syncretism, nihilism, globalization, and general confusion. Thus, the average Orthodox Christian nowadays has been exposed to various unorthodox teachings and is usually trying to fit Orthodoxy into an already made, but quite distorted, framework. For example, he has been taught that “there are many paths up the mountain,” that there is a “transcendental unity of all religions,” that “what matters is that one does good works, not what one believes,” and many other such heretical ideas. Therefore, we want to make it perfectly clear that despite our inclusion of select quotes from the heterodox, we believe that “no man cometh unto the Father but by Me [Jesus].”²⁴⁸² We certainly do not endorse all or even many teachings of the heterodox authors quoted, nor do we disregard the Patristic warnings regarding the harm that can ensue from indiscriminately reading the writings of heretics. Therefore we urge all Orthodox Christians to flee from the *spiritual, theological, and dogmatic* writings of the heterodox “as from fire,” but to learn only from their *ethical and scientific* insights, as we did in this book. Furthermore, we believe that it is crucial to keep all such ethical and scientific approaches in their proper place, that is, subordinate to Orthodox spiritual life, which is why they occupy only a small part of this book. We have completely avoided any dogmatic opinions of the heterodox, since we believe that the Church is indeed “the pillar and ground of the truth.”²⁴⁸³

The End

Glory be to God for all things.

²⁴⁸⁰ For the entire quotation of St. Justin, see footnote #2379 on page 449.

²⁴⁸¹ Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987), 102–03.

²⁴⁸² Jn. 14:6.

²⁴⁸³ 1 Tim. 3:15.



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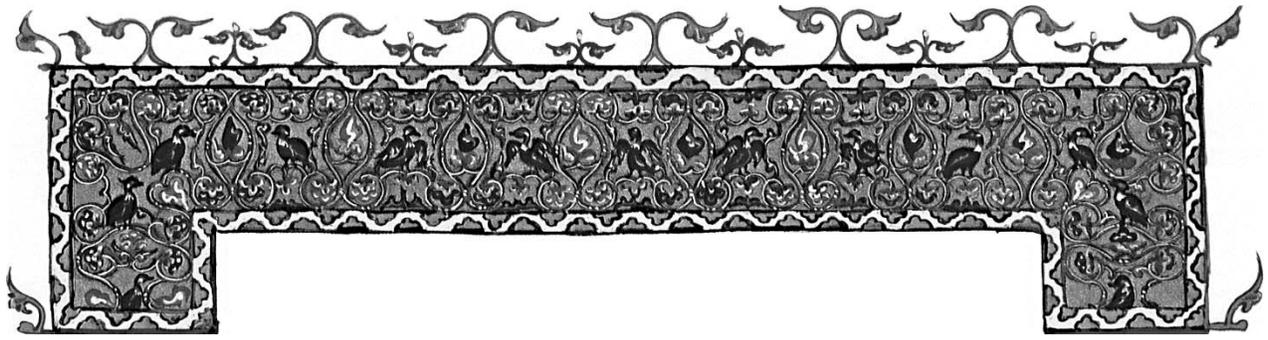
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WHAT IS AUTHENTIC ORTHODOX MONASTICISM? Why do the saints call it the light of the world and the boast of the Church? What does it take to become a monk? What is the inner life of a true monk? What is his purpose, and how can he measure his progress? This book answers these questions by letting the holy Fathers speak for themselves.

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