

Chapter 10: Orthodox Monasticism

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him... And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”¹

The previous chapter demonstrated that no good evidence exists that the Eastern Orthodox veneration of icons has any connection to the beginnings of Christianity. Such lack of evidence undermines the Orthodox argument for justifying its teachings on icons. In fact, only in the early fourth century did the unbiblical issue of icons arise in the Eastern Orthodox (and Roman Catholic) Church. In a similar vein, the Orthodox practices of monasticism, an organized and special form of celibacy, also arose. Further study will reveal that Orthodox monasticism is an inauthentic form of Christianity not justified by the Bible. Furthermore, monasticism contradicts the model for family life established by God in the beginning of human history.

The beginning of this chapter will introduce readers to how Eastern Orthodoxy explains the phenomenon of monasticism, its meaning, and its impact on Christianity. The chapter will contrast Orthodoxy’s teachings on monasticism with the Holy Scriptures, which will illuminate the reader’s perspective on monasticism, particularly the effect that monasticism leaves upon those who are seduced by this method of unbiblical expression of religious fervor.

Origins and Organization of the Monastic Movement

The first forms of monasticism arose originally in Egyptian Christianity in the third and fourth centuries A.D. This ascetic movement spread relatively rapidly to Syria and Palestine. Without doubt, the Egyptian “desert fathers” laid the foundations of the monastic movement. Monasticism in Orthodoxy is revered and looked upon highly as a sublime way of life. An excerpt from an Orthodox Church journal demonstrates this reverence:

“Monasticism in the Church of God was and has remained through the centuries (from the very beginning of Christianity until today) **the most mature and best fruit of the Christian life.** Monks have achieved **the highest summits of Christian perfection.** Monasticism for the Church throughout the centuries has been of invaluable importance. The number and quality of monks has dictated the strength of the church and the sanctity of the nation... A Church without monasticism would be as barren and unfruitful as weeds on the side of the road.

¹ Genesis 2:18, 21-4.

The monks were the best guardians and zealots not only of the greatness and purity of the Christian life, but also the most courageous fighters for the purity and integrity of the Orthodox faith. The blood of monks in most cases sealed and delivered every victory by the Eastern Orthodox faith over damnable heresies. Today monasticism has lost none of its significance for the Orthodox Church or its reputation in the church of God.”²

There are at least two main theories about the origin of monasticism. Eastern Orthodoxy rejects both of these theories and claims that the monastic movement is rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and His apostles. Indeed, one theory suggests that monasticism in the Christian Church came under the influence of Eastern religions that at their core fostered various forms of asceticism, e.g. religious asceticism. The second theory is that the monastic life (i.e., the withdrawal into solitude) appeared as an expression of resistance to the closer relationship between church and state during and after the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. This closer relationship resulted in the mass conversion of pagans into the Church and the consequential decline of Christian morality.

“[Eastern Orthodoxy believes] that monastic life as a system formed spontaneously in the Church, bone of her bones and flesh of her flesh. Monastic life appears officially in the fourth century, **though its roots extend from the apostolic era.** The Christian life as described in the sacred writings of the New Testament is the first ascetic type, both in terms of organization and methods. ‘*Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*’ (Mt. 5:48); ‘*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*’ (Mt. 10:37); ‘*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*’ (Mt. 16:24). **The Apostles themselves fulfilled the monastic vows in their own lives,** albeit the official vows were formulated much later. This also includes John, the holy Herald of the Lord, and the Virgin Mary, which has been and remains the supreme example of obedience and virginity that the world has ever known... Also, during the time of the Apostles, there lived young ladies devoted to God, though they lived at home with their parents, who shared in **the beginnings of monastic life.** (See 1 Corinthians 7:36-8.)”³

There is no evidence in the Bible that neither the apostles nor the Virgin Mary supposedly fulfilled monastic vows, and thus laid the foundations for the later monastic movement. We examined the issue of Mary in the previous chapter “Blessed Mary or the Queen of Heaven?” A little later we will examine the verses used above by the Eastern Church to defend the existence of monasticism under its auspices. Before addressing in further detail the background and the emergence of Christian asceticism, it would be appropriate to define more precisely the term “monk”. Ernst Benz explains this concept:

² *Holy Prince Lazarus, Journal of the Rashko-Prizren Diocese*, no. 2, (1993), 181. Author’s emphasis.

³ *Ibid.*, 182. Author’s emphasis.

“The primary definition of the word monk - monachos – does not mean ‘hermit, loner’ as is generally believed. Rather, its primary definition is ‘unique’. When we consider the oldest symbol for Syrian monks - ihidaya - even clearer, it also connotes the ideas of 'unique' and 'perfect'. Therefore, the Christian community recognized the monk originally as 'perfect', one who seeks to fulfill the Gospel commandment: ‘*Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*’ (Mt. 5:48). The Syrian word also means 'only begotten', 'Only One'. The Messianic title of Christ as the only Son (John 1:14) is transferred to the perfect Christian, a monk. He is the image of Jesus Christ and because of these exemplary similarities to Him, the monk will be elevated to the rank of the only begotten Son of God.”⁴

The Emergence of the Monastic Movement

The typical explanation for the emergence of monasticism is that some devout Christians chose to move away from their homes and communities where they lived out of a desire to live godly lives. These “separated ones” first lived nearby their villages, not in the desert as monasticism later developed.⁵

According to Milan Vukomanović, “The concept of ‘anachoresis’ meant separation from society. It originated from early Christian times and is connected with efforts to avoid huge levies and taxes. Entire groups of people often abandoned their homes to settle in Tebaida and Upper Egypt. Such “escapes” often occurred particularly in times of great persecution, such as, for example, the one under Decius, around 250 A.D.”⁶

The early church father Jerome testifies that Paul of Thebes was the first hermit who retreated to the desert because of persecution against Christians by the Roman emperor Decius. Dionysius of Alexandria, a writer whose works became a source for the church historian Eusebius, also argued that many Christians fled into the wilderness from Roman persecutors.⁷ The implication is that these believers did not flee to the desert and live there out of a voluntary decision to deepen their spirituality. Such an implication contradicts the allegation by Eastern Orthodoxy that the early Christians assumed the monastic life in imitation of the most holy apostles and Mother of God. Rather, these Christians on the run were forced by circumstance to live in the desert.

In defending the early origins of monasticism, the same Orthodox author presumes that the first Christian ascetics emerged at the beginning of the second century during the persecution of Egyptian Jews by the Emperor Trajan. Among those who were persecuted were Christians. This is what he says:

⁴ Ernst Benz, *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church*, 83.

⁵ See *Holy Prince Lazarus*, 182.

⁶ *Early Christianity since Jesus Christ*, 260.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

“Even persecution by the Roman emperors contributed to the development and progress of the monastic life, as many Christians **fled into the desert** in order to avoid unprecedented torture and the risk of denial of their faith. Since these waves of persecution often lasted a long time, these Christians were forced to live in the wilderness for a long time. Thus, many adapted to this way of life. Even after the end of persecution, they did not return to their former communities. Instead, they remained in the desert.”⁸

The first known ascetic hermit was Paul of Thebes (Paul the First Hermit) who lived in Upper Egypt. However, the first “desert father” and the father of monasticism was Anthony the Great (251-357 A.D.).⁹ According to Eusebius Popovic, Anthony lived in the wilderness from 286 to 311. Afterwards he left the wilderness and came to Alexandria where he stood amongst those who fought for the faith during the time of Diocletian’s persecution of the Christians. After Anthony encouraged many people, yet he did not receive a martyr’s crown, he returned to the desert and a crowd followed him who wanted to imitate his lifestyle. These followers of Anthony lived separately from each other and settled in two colonies. One colony was located near the river Nile in the Fayyum and the other at Tivaidus on the banks of the Red Sea. Pakhomius, one of Anthony’s disciples, later became the founder, or “father”, of a different vision for the monastic life. Monks would live together in the monastery:

“These ascetics lived under strict discipline by practicing work, prayer and self-control in all aspects of life. **Anthony became the father of monasticism** and established the monastic colonies, though its monks still lived separately and independently, and were to be ruled jointly by their spiritual guide. Pakhomius, one of his disciples, in either 330 or 340 A.D. founded a separate monastic settlement on the island of Tabenissi on the Nile River in Egypt. At first, monks lived in one place but with total solitude in the monastic community, that is, a home for individual monks. Then his settlement assumed the name of monastery (home of solitude, house of monks) and later cloister (enclosed house). **Thus, Pakhomius, who died in 348 A.D., became the father of communal monks living in a monastery**, even before Anthony had died.”¹⁰

Forms of Monastic Living¹¹

- (1) **Anachoresis** is defined as the harshness of life as viewed through the wilderness vision of monastic life. Anchorites were people who leave their homes and settle in a deserted place. Such persons are also called **hermits** or **ascetics**. During Anthony’s time, according to tradition, in the Egyptian wilderness lived nearly 5,000 hermits who lived austere lives the best they could before God and their own conscience. Occasionally, the hermit would visit known spiritual elders to receive spiritual advice.

⁸ *Holy Prince Lazar*, 183. Author’s emphasis.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 479-80. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹ The main points for this section come from *Holy Prince Lazar*, No. 2, 1993, 182-5.

- (2) Another form of monastic practice is found in the “lavra” (Greek for “path”, also called *laura*).¹² The lavra was one of the original forms of organization for Byzantine monks. The Venerable Hilarion, a student of St. Anthony, adapted the concept of anachoresis to monks in Palestine, where they formed the first monastic colonies called lavra. In Judea, the lavra were first established around 330 A.D. by St. Chariton in the Desert of Paran. The distinguishing characteristic of the Lavra is that individual monks live in the wilderness more or less independently of one another. Unlike the traditional monastery, the monks in lavra are surrounded by one common wall, even though they live distant from one another, and they share a common temple in which to worship. In contrast, monastic communities share all their possessions and live together. Monks in the lavra live independent of one another. Later on, lavra were also referred to as “monasteries”, due to the fact that a large number of monks live in them, even though the monks live not as a community but in anachoresis.
- (3) The third form of the organization of monastic life is communal or “coenobitic”. Its founder was Saint Pachomius in the fourth century. A distinguishing characteristic of this way of life is the unity and common property ownership of all inhabitants of the monastery. The communal system eventually developed to become the most advanced form of monastic life.
- (4) The fourth form of the monastic life is called “idiorhythmic”:

“The residents of idiorhythmic monasteries observed communal living, prayer, and observation of the great holidays and holy weeks. However, they would work only in small groups by washing clothes and cooking. Consequently, this led to a collapse in discipline. Great abuses occurred in this regard. Until recently, a large number of Athos monasteries, including the Serbian monastery Hilandar, were organized under this system. However, the idiorhythmic system caused the decline of monasticism in terms of numbers and quality.”¹³

“The observation is made that the weakening of monastic life and discipline led to the creation of a new (yet actually also decadent) monastic system: idiorhythmism (Russian “special living”). In reality, this system was not the response to the decline of monasticism, but rather a symptom of its decline.”¹⁴

After having examined the various forms of monastic living, we will move on to an even more interesting topic: the impact of various pagan concepts on monasticism as practiced in various “Christian” religions. We will also consider the meaning of various texts from the New Testament that Orthodox proponents of monasticism use to support their positions.

¹² Translator’s note: see <http://www.biblewalks.com/info/ByzantineMonks.html> .

¹³ *Holy Price Lazar*, 185.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Author’s emphasis.

The Influence of Pagan Thinking on the Origin and Development of Monasticism

Regardless of whether or not Christians practiced the monastic life in the wilderness as a consequence of fleeing cruel persecution and saving their lives, a critical question remains. Did religious and philosophical doctrines outside of Biblical Christianity shape today's Orthodox monasticism? Historians and scholars researching the issue give an affirmative answer. As we saw in the previous chapter, the theory that justified the painting of divine frescoes on Orthodox temples derived from "Christians before Christ" – namely the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and others. Greek philosophy in large part became the "Old Testament" for Orthodox theology. Consequently, we should not be surprised at all to recognize the influence of pagan Greek philosophy on Orthodox monasticism. Church historian Ernst Benz elaborates:

"Already at an early age, the practice of ascetics living outside the community emerged. They settled outside urban communities and moved to a secluded place in an enclosed area. Only the label of "monk" could incorporate this emphasis on physical separation. **The lifestyle of these monks bears the stamp of** past later Judaic and **Hellenistic models** of religious community. Similar groups of monks copied the **Pythagoreans** and later Judaic communities the **Essenes.**"¹⁵

According to researchers, such as the German Walter Bauer in the first half of the twentieth century, the development of monasticism was influenced by teachings described in various apocryphal, Gnostic Gospels, as well as other Gnostic works written by Egyptians, such as the Basilidian and Valentinian works.¹⁶ Orthodox author Vukomanović concedes that, if we were to reject these documents as heretical (which church teachers indeed have rejected for centuries) "then the objective judge **must admit** that the history of early Christianity in Egypt developed under the dominant influence of **Gnosticism.**"¹⁷

It is noteworthy that the church father Origen tells us that people in Egypt in the second century widely read and used the apocryphal (Gnostic) Gospel of Thomas. Consequently, concludes Vukomanovic, "the fact that the Gospel Thomas was so readily accepted in the specific religious and ideological framework of the time explains why Egyptian Christians welcomed these Gnostic works."¹⁸ The author, who is an expert on the apocryphal gospels, states that the Gospel of Thomas emphasized "Jesus's" command to asceticism and the hermit life (which, of course, is nowhere to be found in any of the canonical Gospels):

"The very myth of revival being transmitted through the ritual of baptism as well as celibacy became dominant characteristics of **asceticism**. Abstaining from intercourse, the glorification of '**solitude**', and a general negative attitude towards

¹⁵ Benz, *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church*, 83-4. Author's emphasis.

¹⁶ See Vukmanovic, *Early Christianity from Jesus to Christ*, 255.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

procreation represented the most distinctive features of the **ascetic's attitude** toward life and the world.”¹⁹

“Asceticism was a dominant theme in the Gospel of Thomas... For example, we have seen **that the character of Jesus portrayed in Thomas commanded** his disciples literally and symbolically to ‘fast in relation to this world’ (verse 27) and to live **a life of celibacy, solitude, and the renunciation of wealth and private property**. These distinctive characteristics of ascetic and monastic attitudes toward life lead us to believe that the Thomasine community in Egypt²⁰ could have represented some kind of ‘proto-monasticism’ as an ideological position that was peculiar to the Christian preachers in Egypt even before St. Anthony.”²¹

Based on years of research on this subject, Vukomanović finally concludes:

“Christian asceticism in Egypt represents the result of a gradual and natural process in which a large role was played not only by the ideology of Philo of Alexandria, **a Jewish Platonist**, but also the experience of many nameless (e.g., non-Christian) **philosophical and ascetic communities** that lived in the vicinity of Alexandria and transferred their teachings to other cultural centers along the banks of the Nile.”²²

On the other hand, according to Benz, monasticism as a movement suddenly began to strengthen in the fourth century. The reason was not “the weariness of life in the world and the decadence of the late ancient world,” but rather the popularity of many ideas of asceticism and asceticism in isolation.²³ According to Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, after the end of Roman persecution and the “conversion” of Emperor Constantine, some Christians felt obligated to prove their dedication in order to compensate for the lack of opportunities for martyrdom under persecution that no longer existed. Namely, in the past, one's loyalty to Christ was proven by submitting to degrees of physical suffering inflicted by persecutors:

“By the fourth century, the days of testing one's loyalty to Christ by submitting to physical suffering imposed by the pagan authorities were finished. **Christians now searched for some other form of holiness and perfection**. They found it in asceticism. The Christian ascetic, like the martyrs, proved his heroic fidelity to Christ by the acceptance of pain, rejection of the comfort of family life and struggle with the full commitment to a spiritual life. **Following the end of the period of persecution, asceticism became the highest goal**. Asceticism made sense as a powerful solution for the main problem of religion: how to bridge the gap between the human and the divine. By participation both in this world

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 203. Author's emphasis.

²⁰ The author refers to believers who have adhered to the teachings based upon the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

²² *Ibid.* Author's emphasis.

²³ Benz, 84.

(through the physical body) and in the Kingdom of God (under the direction of celibate purity), the ascetic provided the missing link.”²⁴

As for the development of monasticism in the West, the most influential Church Fathers included St. Jerome, the historian Rufus, St. Ambrose of Milan, Martin of Tours, St. John Cassian, and St. Augustine.²⁵ In the case of Augustine, it can be reliably established that his asceticism originated and was formed **under the strong influence of neoplatonistic philosophy**. In fact, Augustine first became acquainted with it through Manicheanism, which pointed out the evil nature of matter and body:

“Manicheanism considered everything physical to be sinful, and the worst sin in their view culminated in sexual intercourse. Thus began the story of Augustine’s struggles resolved only after more than a decade when he became a priest in the celibate orders not of a Manichaean sect, but of the Catholic Church.”²⁶

After his conversion to Christianity, which occurred due to the fervent prayer of his mother Monica, Augustine abandoned a life full of physical pleasures and reached for the fulfillment of a higher goal - a spiritual union with God. This saint derived this concept of spiritual union with the divine not through any teaching of the Holy Scriptures, which teach the concept of spiritual rebirth in God through the Holy Spirit, but rather with the help of non-Christian philosophical ideas:

“This philosophy [Platonism] was adopted by a number of Christian intellectuals who considered the Greek-speaking world as the most sophisticated culture of its time. Augustine and many of his contemporaries **greatly respected the work of Plotinus (205-70), a Neoplatonist** who in his later years served as court philosopher for the Roman Emperor Gallienus. **Plotinus fervently taught that one should retreat from the world and adopt an ascetic way of life... The teaching which [Augustine] finally adopted was a mixture of Platonism and Christianity...** Along with mysticism, Augustine adopted an ascetic lifestyle as recommended by Neoplatonism and later firmly established in monasticism... Although he acknowledged the virtues of married life, Augustine advocated there was definite advantage in living a celibate life. One can clearly see **the spirit of Plotinus** in this teaching. **Plotinus’ influence was also evident in Augustine’s interpretation of the Bible...** Ascetic Christians have not only rejected the remnants of pagan culture, but they also viewed the material world in general with suspicion. They believed that the world served as a domain, if not the creation, of the devil. **This dualistic approach that emphasized the value of the spiritual over the physical reflects similar thinking in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism.**”²⁷

²⁴ Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (Yale Univ. Press: New Haven, 2001), 77-8. Author’s emphasis.

²⁵ See *Holy Prince Lazar*, no. 2, 1993, 185.

²⁶ *Heaven: A History*, 79.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-3. Author’s emphasis.

So the previous text explains that the philosophy of asceticism, e.g. monasticism, is actually based on the neglect and rejection of the physical world and material and the apprehension of the spiritual world, but not in accordance with New Testament theology. Rather, it is based on the theory that Orthodox theological thought serves as a kind of “Old Testament”. Ernst Benz confirms this statement:

“From within Orthodox monasticism has emerged the most important spiritual force for Eastern Orthodox piety and spirituality - the mystic. The mystic is developed on the model of a radical ascetic. The Old Church traditions of asceticism, **in which both evangelical and Neoplatonistic spiritual traditions intertwine with each other**, are practiced by Orthodox monks **to this day almost unchanged**. Original Christian asceticism was strongly influenced by the expectation of the sudden and impending end of the world and the coming kingdom of God, against which the power of this present and transient world struggled. **Later in history, monastic asceticism** placed much less emphasis on waiting for the coming of Christ and much more **on Neoplatonic dualism**.”²⁸

We have demonstrated through various historical arguments that the roots of asceticism and monasticism in the later part of Christian history are not based on the Holy Scriptures. Rather, monasticism is based on Greek philosophical thought. The next section will provide an overview of the biblical texts abused by Orthodox theologians to defend monasticism, as well as the true meaning of the texts.

What Do the Holy Scriptures Say about Monasticism?

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Orthodoxy attempts to portray itself as the Church of Christ and attempts to defend its teaching by citing biblical texts. As is the case with many other doctrines and practices that were introduced well after the Bible was written, Eastern Orthodox theologians appeal to the words of Christ and the Apostles to defend the foundation for monasticism. As a reminder, let the reader reflect on a citation from the text of the journal *Holy Prince Lazar*. This reminds us how Orthodoxy explains the emergence of the monastic movement:

“**The Apostles themselves fulfilled monastic vows in their own lives, although they only articulated these vows much later on.** This was likewise the case with St. John, the forerunner of the Lord, and the Virgin Mary, who was and is the highest example of obedience and chastity that the world has ever known. Also, even during the time of the holy apostles, there were women, though they lived at home with their parents, devoted themselves to God and thus formed the beginnings of monastic life. (See I Corinthians 7: 36-38)... The monastic life is called the heavenly life here on earth. The meaning and source of life stems from the Holy Eucharist, which is the symbol of the future Kingdom of Heaven. **Thus, monasticism as a philosophy of life is as old as Christianity** (as we saw earlier in the examples of the blessed Apostles).”²⁹

²⁸ Benz, 93. Author’s emphasis.

²⁹ *Holy Prince Lazar*, no. 2, 1993, 182-6. Author’s emphasis.

An earlier chapter described how the most blessed Virgin Mary in the Bible is totally different from the persona that Orthodoxy portrays and venerates. In a similar vein, the Bible says things completely different about the apostles versus what Eastern Orthodoxy teaches, particularly in its claims that they fulfilled monastic vows (such as celibacy, absolute obedience (submission), hegemony or submission to the abbots, and poverty).³⁰ Earlier research suggested that many of the apostles were unmarried, but some did have a wife. One Scripture, Matthew 8:14-15, tells us that the apostle Peter had a mother-in-law, which meant that he was married. The apostle Paul confirms this fact in 1 Corinthians 9:5:

“Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?”

So, the other apostles, including Jesus’s half-brothers by His mother, were married. Moreover, their wives accompanied the apostles on their missionary journeys, as Paul explains.

Orthodox teachers distort verses such as Matthew 10:37 and 16:24 out of context in order to justify the origin of asceticism and hermetic living.³¹ (The best evidence in this regard is that neither Jesus nor His disciples applied them to a monastic context in the first century.) In fact, these verses discuss the cost of discipleship to Christ in a world where we live. It is certain that the man who wants to be a true follower of the Lord cannot and must not accept the numerous opinions of unbelieving sinners, even as he is to love them. Unbelievers hold to a worldview completely different from that which God commands in His Word. Many believers will have to answer their unbelieving parents and relatives by reading the Bible and submitting themselves to God’s will. It becomes obvious how the believer is to withstand opposition [even from his or her own family] because his or her love for God must be stronger. In fact, what stands out as the hidden truth for every family who does not believe God is that even a Christian believer in a household can be a blessing to all of his or her family members (no matter how they behave toward the believer because of their spiritual blindness). Precisely because God wants to save the entire family with the gift of eternal life, thus the believer who lives as part of this household will be under constant pressure to renounce his or her faith. Yet, the believer must persevere in faith by praying to God for the family and living a positive Christian testimony. In no way did the Lord Jesus intend these statements to command isolation, or (God forbid) that believers abandon their families to become disciples of monasteries (which are mere monks and nuns). Instead, Jesus wants believers to contend for the salvation of the souls of those who have not yet believed, and to disciple new believers, even closest relatives.

On the other hand, the process of “denying oneself and taking up one’s cross daily” is a daily struggle with the believer’s old sinful nature opposing the knowledge of God and His presence (Romans 7:5-6, Galatians 5:16-17; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Also, the term “taking up the cross” means to take upon oneself the scorn of suffering (which genuinely

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 186-7.

³¹ Refer to the citation of this chapter from the same source.

follows the example of Jesus Christ) hurled by unbelievers and false believers under the influence of the Evil One. These words of Christ do not refer at all to isolation from society by removing oneself to the desert and monasteries. Rather, this verse refers to submission even with the difficulty of living with other people in the world who surround and oppose Christ. The apostle John records Jesus's words to emphasize the fact that his disciples are chosen from the sinful secular environment yet must continue to live in the midst of these people in order to possess Christ and eternal salvation:

*“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. **Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.**”*³²

*“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*³³

*“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated **them because they are not of the world**, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. **They are not of the world**, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As **You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.**”*³⁴

There is at least one text that can be misinterpreted by those advocating asceticism and indulgence in celibacy for God and the Kingdom of Heaven. This text is found in Luke 18:28-30.

“Then Peter said, ‘See, we have left all and followed You.’ So He said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.’”

Without a doubt, the first disciples of Jesus Christ had to leave their homes, women and children, families, and employment behind in order to follow Him. There was no other way if they really wanted to spend time with their Teacher. However, after the Lord ascended into heaven, this level of sacrifice became unnecessary. After the descent of the Holy Spirit on the first Christians, believers could continue to live in their current contexts while at the same time remaining very serious Christians. This was made possible because Christ, as He had promised,³⁵ now dwelled in their hearts.

Even the apostles recognized this reality as we read earlier in 1 Corinthians 9:5, a passage written more than twenty years after Jesus uttered the words in Luke 18. The apostles returned to their families and allowed their wives to join them in their missionary travels.

³² John 15:18-9. Author's emphasis.

³³ John 16:33.

³⁴ John 17:14-18. Author's emphasis.

³⁵ See John 14:16-17, 23, Romans 8:9, 11.

(These were the same apostles who had temporarily left their wives at home during Jesus's earthly ministry.) This fact becomes takes on even greater emphasis when we consider that Paul authored 1 Corinthians 9:5. He and his coworker Barnabas had never considered themselves as monks (even though they were unmarried and would have satisfied the monastic vows of modern Eastern Orthodoxy. Yet, we see that Paul asserts that the apostles have the freedom to marry as well as to have their wives accompany them on mission trips.

In contrast, as we shall see in more detail later, Orthodox monks are prohibited to be married to even to consider the possibility. Monks are commanded to abstain from such thoughts and vigorously fight against them, because they took vows of celibacy in order to enter the monastic order.

Furthermore, the Bible makes no mention whatsoever of "virgins devoted to God" living celibate lives in their parents' homes as examples of the "origins" of monastic life. In fact, Paul uses the entire seventh chapter in his first epistle to the Corinthians in order to emphasize the truth that humans were created as sexual beings, having a strong natural sex drive bestowed on them by God. Paul, as a single man, thought it would be a lot easier for single people to serve God full-time than those who are married because marriage entails many activities that would prevent them from praying more, traveling, and preaching the gospel. Such activities like household chores, caring for the family, and raising children would demand effort and take time (1 Corinthians 7:29-35). In his belief that the temporal world system would soon pass away and the kingdom of God would appear (verse 31), the apostle Paul recommended to those who were able to remain single should do so. Yet, Paul also stressed that if believers chose to marry, they did not violate God's will (verses 36-38). However, as we shall see in the following chapters, the Orthodox misinterpret the text from 1 Corinthians 7. Indeed, the Orthodox are totally opposed to Paul's teachings that God inspired and commanded in this chapter.

The Consequences of Fulfilling Strict Monastic Vows

The Scriptures teach that God created the first marriage. Since He created man as a sexual being, God brought the woman, who was created from Adam's own body, to him in order to foster intimate, sexual relationship. God also created all other creatures as males and females in order for them to procreate offspring. It is well known that the sexual urge of animals drives them to procreate. Although man is considered part of the animal world, yet some experts believe that man's sexual instinct as the strongest of all natural instincts (even stronger than the instinct for self-preservation). This is why the Lord said:

*"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."*³⁶

The apostle Paul affirmed that marital union involves intimacy between a man and a woman without restrictions, in order that one of the spouses might not have fallen into temptation to commit adultery:

³⁶ Gen. 2:18.

*“Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. **Do not deprive one another** except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and **come together again** so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”*³⁷

God makes it clear through Scripture that marriage became valid once marital vows were made (in the presence of the local community, national, or religious establishment), and not from the moment of sexual relations. Namely, the Bible says: “They shall be one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24) Many people get married in their old age, as do disabled people (with physical or mental handicaps). These two groups of people might never enter into sexual relations. However, their marriage is as valid before God as it is for younger and healthy, sexually active persons. Every marriage is valid and extremely important before God. God’s commandment states: “*Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*” When the Pharisees, who believed that divorce was permissible in all kinds of situations, asked Jesus what a man unhappy with his wife should do, Jesus gave a very clear answer:

*“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and **be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh**’? **So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.**”*³⁸

According to the Lord's words, marriage as a divine institution is inseparable, because the spouses become one being, “one body”. Divorce is possible only in the event of adultery by the other spouse (Matthew 5:31-32) - although even then, the Bible does not command divorce (1 Cor. 7:11). However, in opposition of these biblical principles, the history of the Eastern Orthodox Church under the influence of monastic philosophy and an unbiblical “gospel” shows many instances of married men who abandoned their wives and children forever and went into the desert and monasteries. The examples are too numerous to list. Let us cite a few from the Prologue of Okhrid written by Bishop Nikolai:

“THE VENERABLE THEOPHANES THE CONFESSOR... He possessed great wealth and splendor. But all of this lost its worth for Theophanes when the Lord Christ began to reign in his soul. He resisted his own marriage and, when he was compelled to marry, succeeded in counseling his bride to live together in chastity, as brother and sister. As soon as his parents died, **his wife entered a convent and he, a monastery.**” (March 12)

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:2-5. Author’s emphasis.

³⁸ Matthew 19:3-6. Author’s emphasis.

“SAINT ALEXIS, THE MAN OF GOD... He had an only son, Alexis, who, when he had reached the age of maturity, was compelled to marry. But on that same night, **he left not only his wife** but the home of his father as well. Alexis boarded a boat and arrived at the city of Edessa in Mesopotamia... Alexis clothed himself in the dress of a beggar and, as such, lived in the city for seventeen years, continually praying to God in the vestibule of the Church of the Holy Mother of God.” (March 17)

“THE VENERABLE ZACHARIAS... Zacharias was the son of Carion the Egyptian. Zacharias **left his wife and children** and became a monk.” (March 24)

“SAINT NICETAS THE CONFESSOR... Nicetas was born in Bithynia in the city of Caesarea. His father, Filaret, **after the death of his spouse**, was tonsured a monk while **Nicetas remained with his paternal grandmother.**” (April 3)

“VENERABLE NICETAS, THE STYLITE... Nicetas **left his home, wife**, property and entered a monastery near Pereyaslavl, where he lived an ascetical life of difficult mortifications until his death.” (May 24)

“THE VENERABLE KARION AND ZACHARIAS... Karion and Zacharias were father and son, and both were great Egyptian ascetics. Karion **left his wife and two children** and set off to become a monk.” (December 5)³⁹

Contrary to expectations, the Orthodox Church actually does not condemn behavior that violates the teachings of Christ and the apostles, particularly with regard to violating “the holy sacrament of marriage”. In fact, just the opposite occurs. Orthodoxy praises such vile actions. Fathers without any conscience and breaking their marriage vows are called “saints” and venerated as such. It begs the question: would any Orthodox Christian who abandons his left wife and children and went to the monastery be commended as righteous and declared a saint? At the very least, he should have left some alimony for the abandoned wife and orphans – but how could he earn alimony? The monastery imposes a rule that monks cannot earn salary! So his wife is left with nothing but mourning over the treacherous husband on whom she relied, who violated her trust in the presence of many witnesses, and broke his word to God.⁴⁰

Examples of Sexual Impropriety

The Gospel clearly teaches that man was created in order to be united with his wife in order to praise and worship the Creator. According to this very same Gospel, God calls

³⁹ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> . Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁰ We can even ask what happens to these poor abandoned women with their fatherless kids, whose husbands later become venerable saints because of their “lives sacrificed to God”? Probably some of them with their children are robbed by thieves, die by starvation, and suffer damage from all kinds of diseases. Such misfortune can happen all because the husband and father abandoned his family. He abandoned his responsibilities as a provider and defender, appointed by God to be the head of his family.

some Christians to live a celibate life in order to serve Him and to build His kingdom. The apostle Paul urged those who lacked strong sexual desire to abstain from marriage in order that they might serve the Lord like he did:

*“For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am... But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband.”*⁴¹

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Apostle Paul did not call Christians to live a monastic life such as what we see today. It is also certain that Paul did not intend to say that the other apostles were “split” (divided into levels half secular and half spiritual). Paul did not say that those apostles who were not married were the “most devoted” to God because they had not entered into marriage. What the apostle wanted to make it clear to his readers from his perspective as an unmarried man is that he considered it a more blessed condition to stay single and serve the Lord “full time” without having to spend time on things that will soon come to an end anyway.⁴² In the words of 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, the apostle tells believers to think more about heavenly things (prayer, bringing people to the true knowledge of God). Paul views these heavenly matters to be of much greater value than the daily responsibilities of marriage. However, by no means does Paul negate the high value of marriage in God’s eyes.

This premise, not the misinterpretations used to rationalize monasticism, is very clear also in the interpretation of Christ's teachings starting in Matthew 19:9-12:

*“‘And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.’ His disciples said to Him, ‘If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.’ But He said to them, ‘**All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given:** For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. **He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.**’”*⁴³

These verses show that there are three types of eunuchs (people upon whom God calls to a single, unmarried life):

⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 32-4.

⁴² We should not forget that Paul wrote this text, as he himself pointed out, because of his firm belief that the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His Messianic Kingdom would occur soon. See verse 31, as well as 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

⁴³ Author’s emphasis.

1) Those “born thus from their mother’s womb”.

These words of Christ pertain to people who are born with certain physical disabilities (of which at that time there were many) or severe mental illnesses that make them unable to marry a person of the opposite sex.

2) Those “eunuchs made by men”.

These people are certainly people who were certainly more well-known during the time of Christ than in our own day. Such eunuchs worked at the imperial court for the government in the Jewish setting. They often served as servants or guards of the ruler’s harem. Acts chapter 8 refers to one such eunuch. Eunuchs were people who had an operation to remove their male sex glands (testicles) in order to suppress the hormone known as testosterone. By removing the testicles, it was expected that the sexual drive as well as the prevention of sperm would be suppressed.

3) Those “who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake”.

These words refer to those men (and women), Christians, who decided to renounce any hopes to marry in order to more effectively minister to the Lord. They did this even in spite of being in a daily struggle with their natural sexual impulses, which the single life forbid them to satisfy. The apostle Paul was certainly one example:

*“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”*⁴⁴

*“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”*⁴⁵

*“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.”*⁴⁶

*“Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, **having no necessity, but has power over his own will**, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.”*⁴⁷

The apostle’s declarations refer to disciples of the Lord who live in society and rub shoulders with other people in towns and villages, not to those who have retreated to the seclusion of some desert or monastery. It is clear, too, that Paul fought on a daily basis with his old sinful nature which craved to overcome him. However, although Paul lived among people and constantly faced sexual temptation as a healthy, single man, by the power of the Holy Spirit who lived in him, he succeeded in not giving in to the “lusts of the flesh.”

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:27. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁵ Galatians 5:27. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁶ 2 Corinthians 10:3.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 7:37. Author’s emphasis.

However, when we study the lives of various saints renowned in Eastern Orthodoxy, we find many examples of people who faced similar carnal instincts and desires, even though they had departed from human society and went into solitude. The fiercest trials emanated from the manifestation of sexual lusts in the monk, that is, his struggle with completely natural feelings that we find in mature people. Orthodox monks considered this struggle against human nature as a war against “demonic temptation in the desert”⁴⁸, as they believed that evil spirits dwelled in the desert (probably based on Matthew 12:43)⁴⁹. The Prologue of Okhrid tells us of such people and events:

“THE VENERABLE MARTINIAN... The glorious and most wonderful life of Martinian is worthwhile to read in its entirety... At age eighteen, Martinian retreated to a mountain in Cappadocia called ‘The Place of the Ark’ where he lived for twenty-five years in fasting, vigils, prayer and **struggling with many temptations**. When a woman came to tempt him and, he perceiving that **he will succumb to sin with her, Martinian leaped into the fire** barefooted and remained in the fire until the pain brought tears to his eyes and subdued any lust within himself. When another temptation erupted, Martinian fled to an isolated rock in the sea and there he lived. During a shipwreck a young woman swam to this rock. **Martinian jumped into the sea to avoid any further temptation**, but a dolphin rescued him on its back and by God's Providence brought him ashore.” (February 13)

“THE VENERABLE BENEDICT... He retreated to a monastery where he was tonsured by the monk Romanus after which he withdrew to a steep mountain where he remained in a cave for more than three years in a great struggle over his soul... Once, **when an unclean and raging passion of the flesh seized him, he removed all his clothes and rolled around naked in the thorns** until he repelled every thought of a woman.” (March 14)

“SAINT JAMES THE FASTER... He lived in the sixth century. He was so perfected in pleasing God that James cured the most gravely ill through his prayers. But the enemy of mankind lured him into great temptations. At one time, an immoral woman was sent to him by some scoffers. She misrepresented herself to James, pretending to be crying yet all the while luring him into sin. **Seeing that he was going to yield to sin, James placed his left hand into the fire and held it there for some time until it was scorched...** On another occasion, James did not flee from his temptation, but rather he succumbs to a maiden, who was

⁴⁸ See Benz, *Spirit and Life of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, 84.

⁴⁹ “So we find some people who by nature, handicap, or sheer necessity felt compelled not to marry, and thus they had no children nor any living fruit. They die in isolation alone. But it is a different matter when they invent a law, and a most terrible one at that: a holy Christian law, founded and enforced against God’s intentions, will, and blessing, against the nature given by God, against all reason and intellect, that forces depopulation, murder, and the perishing of the human race, which consequently ends up in insane thoughts and works.” Thus commented one of the great Serbian sages, Dositej Obradovic, on the meaning of monastic philosophy and showed the way into which it leads people and nations that are seduced by monasticism. *Collected Works*, (Prosveta: Belgrade, 1961), 609.

brought as a lunatic by her parents to be cured of her insanity. He, indeed, healed her and after that, **sinned with her**.⁵⁰ Then in order to conceal his sin **he killed her and threw her into a river**. As is common, the steps from adultery to murder are not too distant. James lived for ten years after that as a penitent in an open grave.” (March 4)⁵¹

Let us compare these accounts to the description by the famous historian Will Durant in his book *The History of Civilization*:

“The records of hermits abound **with sexual visions and dreams**. The monks in the cells could be heard sobbing while they fought with their phantasmagoric trials and **erotic thoughts**. They believed that the air around them was full of demons attacking them. It seemed that the monks felt hot while living in the midst of all the coolest conditions in the city. **There were not infrequent cases where anchorites [monks] went insane**. Rufus tells a story about a young monk in whose cell entered a beautiful woman. He bowed before her charms. Then, the woman disappeared, as he thought, into thin air. The monk in a frenzy hurried to the nearest village, **jumped into a furnace in a public bathroom, and burned himself with its fire**. In another case, a young woman asked a monk to receive her in his cell under the pretext that a wild beast was chasing her. The monk agreed to let her in, but at that moment when **he accidentally touched her, flames of desire were aroused**. **Even his strict monastic discipline failed to extinguish it**. He tried to grab her, but she disappeared from his arms and disappeared. A choir of demons rejoiced and made fun of his humiliation. Rufus said that this monk could no longer submit to monastic life, and he could not conduct himself like St. Paphnucius who converted the woman Thais. That monk was unable to dispel the vision of beauty from his mind. He left the monastic cell, immersed himself in urban life, and followed that vision all the way to Hell.”⁵²

These excerpts reveal that Eastern Orthodoxy honors and praises these monks. Yet, these monks, like laypeople, and perhaps to an even greater extent, tend to have erotic dreams and fantasies. Some monks went to the extreme of even raping and killing women who sought help from these “spiritual elders and ascetics”. Other monks ended up committing suicide. Alas, all the difficulties on these monks arose from the unbiblical system of salvation imposed by Eastern Orthodoxy. The apostle Paul offers a Biblical remedy:

“But if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion ... But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his

⁵⁰ Dositelj Obradovic commented on an event similar to what we just read in *The Prologue*: “In the middle of the church of God, an elder monk told someone he fornicated. Brothers, for God’s sake, don’t we want to be holy? That is what the man confessed, as if he were proud, even to the extent of boasting before the whole church about it. Shame on that elder!” *Selected Writings*, 119.

⁵¹ See <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi> . Author’s emphasis.

⁵² Wil Durant, *The History of Civilization: The Good Faith, Volume 4*, 81-2. Author’s emphasis.

*virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.”*⁵³

However, the Eastern Orthodox Church considers what later church authorities wrote and taught to be much more important than what the apostles of Christ taught in accordance with the teachings of their Lord.

Commenting on monastic life and rules, Dositej Obradovic wrote that in his life he met many monks and learned of many of their deepest longings and aspirations:

“I grew up with monks of many ethnicities and languages (though I am no longer a monk, when I lived that way, I used to wear the black frock in which they walked). Thank the Lord God, **I never was acquainted with any old, unfeeling monk of any nationality or tongue who never had any desire to have sex with a woman and would have died to have had it.** In those ancient impassible North African deserts (as the Lives of the Saints tell us), the desert dwellers describe it as such: they imagined mirages of the spirits of women (which were probably attractive), and how their dreams became reality. **What else could they expect given the immutable will of God the Creator** and the unchangeable and ever-present law of nature that makes it **impossible for a man to live without woman** – similar to a fish without water or an animal that cannot live and breathe without air?”⁵⁴

When he was young, Obradovic had a strong desire to become a monk and live “in celibacy”.⁵⁵ He would have preferred to have been torn to pieces by a savage lion or bear than to embrace a beautiful Serbian daughter. However, as he got older, Obradovic admitted that his earlier thoughts were “utter apostasy stemming from reading false teachings in books that he had no business reading and confusing him with how to think about marriage and family.” In the end, Obradovic affirmed the biblical truth that “it is not good for man to be alone.” He articulated this conclusion well:

“The first grace that God showed to the first man His creation was when He gave him a wife, with the first blessing of ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ How would He (God forbid!) have wanted to show man the greatest show of wrath? God would have taken his wife away, even as He had given her to him before. When God was about to punish Adam, He could have said: ‘Do not be fruitful or multiply, may your generation die out and disappear from the earth.’ What an absurd notion, even I myself could see perfectly what an absurd doctrine [celibacy] is: no matter what you call it, it is a futile teaching.”⁵⁶

Dositej Obradovic, from his youth as a monk, and then to the end of his life, saw marriage as God’s great blessing. On the other hand, he viewed the monastic way of life

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 7:9, 36. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁴ Dositej Obradovic, *Collected Works*, (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1961) 609-10. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁵ See Obradovic, 78.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 660.

as unbiblical, something set up against God's intentions and will as well as man's common sense. One major influence on Obradovic's thinking was the famous Orthodox bishop Georgi Popovic, whom Obradovic describes as one who repeatedly condemned contemporary monasticism in his time, even though he was himself a monk. Here are some of his words:

“You will know a tree by its fruits,’ says the holy Gospel. ‘The tree that bears no fruit will be cut and thrown into the fire.’ But the **people out of their naïve thinking** believe that if the monks disappear, then so would religion and the law. What do they say? Pray to God for us. Oh my brothers, hardly anyone wants to pray or intercede before God! From your labors, others (monks) are eating and sleeping. They are not working. What do you expect from those people who are useless and have no demands... The Archimandrite Bezdinski asks: ‘So in your manner of speaking, you would desire to purge all the monasteries?’ The Bishop answers: ‘In my manner of speaking? Oh my brother, they should have been purged eons ago. You do not need to wait for me to give the word... Don't you now realize that even the monks themselves should have been purged a long time ago?’ The Archimandrite replied, ‘Lord, you are right! God's truth emanates from your lips. Would that all the bishops agree! **I myself would have been married!**’”⁵⁷

The evidence from the lives of these “saints”, including the admission of the Archimandrite that if he were so daring that he would have been married, demonstrate the troubles they bring to themselves in attempting to live under the bondage of unbiblical rules arising from religion that contradicts true Christianity. Yet, an even greater danger presents itself as more likely when some of the monks fall into sexual perversion, even to the point of committing homosexuality and pedophilia. What is even worse, this preposterous unbiblical system can also lead monks to the extreme that the presence of female animals becomes a source of sexual temptation! For this reason, only animals of the same sex were allowed to be kept in monasteries for monks to live on. Ralph Woodrow speculates that this ban of keeping animals of the opposite sex in monasteries originates from the ninth century and stemmed from the widespread immorality extant in monasteries.⁵⁸ Roman Catholic Cardinal Peter d'Ailly said that no one dared to describe

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 97-9. Author's emphasis.

⁵⁸ Woodrow, 120.

the immorality in nunneries⁵⁹, and women who became nuns simply found another way to become a public prostitute.⁶⁰

Such a ban on entry of all that is feminine in men's monasteries is enforced on Mount Athos in Greece and in many other monasteries, including the Serbian monastery in Chilandar. Here is one media report on Mount Athos that describes the standards of living for local monks:

“Since the establishment of the ‘monastic republic’ in 1054 on Mount Athos, the **presence of women has been prohibited**, even though all 20 of the monasteries are dedicated to the Virgin Mary – Theotokos. Moreover, on the peninsula, monks striving toward high moral principles and tendencies to the near-perfect ideal of spiritual living **also ban female animals**. No cows, goats, and sheep! **All that is ‘feminine’ is considered a possible temptation** for monks pledged to celibacy.”⁶¹

It is obvious, of course, that the writer of this newspaper report was biased and wanted to declare this prohibition as very spiritual. However, any logical person has to wonder what kind of spirituality Athos monks have when even the animals become a source of temptation in their presence?! It is understandable that one could expect them to be tempted (God forbid!) if there were some women nearby. However, what does it say about the men who decided to become monks when they could be tempted by female animals (cows, goats, sheep, etc.)?!?! Otherwise, there would be no reason for the monasteries to prohibit having animals of the opposite sex! These examples verify the truth of what the apostles taught and to that which people such as Obradovic and Bishop Georgi were concerned about. George. After all, it is known that some people who live a

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* See also Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 3, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1888) 629-631. Though he was specifically addressing monasteries in the Western (Roman Catholic) Church, it is critical to note that the Eastern Orthodox and Western Churches were united as one church until the Great Schism of 1054. So before that year, one must view monasticism in both the East and the West as one and the same. In other words, we can only talk about monasteries in the overall “ecumenical” church. Protodeacon Lyubomir Rankovic says this about the Church until 1054: “Apart from minor frictions, the church lived in graceful peace. **The Eastern [Orthodox] and Western [Roman Catholic] Churches were one.** Together they participated in the Ecumenical Councils, assembled the sacred dogmas and canons, and lived together in mutual fraternal love.” See *The Life of the Serbian Church*, (Valjevo, Serbia: Voice of the Church, 1989) 132. Author’s emphasis.

⁶⁰ The journal *Woman* (Sarajevo and Banya Luka, Bosnia: Healthy Family, 2005, Volume 13, Number 2), a magazine for family health, has an extensive article entitled “The World’s Oldest Profession: Prostitution”. Early in the Middle Ages, many prostitutes were taken forcibly to the monasteries: “Empress Theodora, who herself was a prostitute before her marriage to Emperor Justinian (6th century), thought she would do a good deed by forcing them [e.g. the prostitutes] to work in the monasteries. However, as they shipped the prostitutes across the Bosphorus Straits, some of the women managed to escape, but many of them who attempted to flee ended up dying or being executed.”

⁶¹ *The Weekly Telegraph*, February 5, 2003, 11. Author’s emphasis. [Translator’s note: see http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:YUtMg7uR_iYJ:www.sacredland.org/mount-athos/+ninth+century+ban+female+animals+in+monasteries&cd=10&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&source=www.google.com accessed on March 19, 2011.]

long time in prison (and monasteries are a kind of prison)⁶² with natural heterosexual tendencies can resort to homosexual temptations or even bestiality to indulge their sexual drives.

The Lord God in His Word reveals that He considers such sins the most abominable in His eyes:

*“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion.”*⁶³

*“If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them.”*⁶⁴

*“‘Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”*⁶⁵

We need to take seriously the words of the Lord, who commanded that the pervert who fornicated with cattle must be destroyed, and connect them with the fact that the Lord Christ in Matthew 5:27-28 stated that the man committed adultery simply by desiring a woman who was not his wife, even though he had not slept with her. These commands would have implicated many monks who should have been put to death (or “purged” in the words of the Bishop Georgi) because of their perverse lusts for female animals.

Women in Men’s Monasteries

The monastic vow of celibacy demands a ruthless fight against the natural sex drive that God ordained for human beings. Based on the passages just cited, one might think that no woman would ever dare to step into a men’s monastery. Judging by the sexually obsessed “saints” described in the Prologue of Okhrid, the arrival of women in men’s monasteries resulted either in monks killing themselves or else raping and then murdering the wandering woman. However, the Lives of the Saints informs us that throughout history, more women stayed in men’s monasteries for a long time by disguising themselves as men! Here are some examples:

“THE VENERABLE APOLLINARIA... Apollinaria, who did not wish to marry because in her heart she was betrothed to Christ, withdrew into the Egyptian wilderness. In men's attire and under the masculine name of Dorotheus, Apollinaria entered a

⁶² See Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, vol. 1, 480, for his analysis of the word “cloister” (prison, prison for monks). [Translator’s note: for a brief, Catholic history of monasteries as prisons, see: http://www.traditioninaction.org/Questions/F036_ConventPrisons.html , accessed on March 20, 2011.

⁶³ Leviticus 18:22-3.

⁶⁴ Leviticus 20:15-6. Author’s emphasis.

⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 27:21. Author’s emphasis.

monastery for men, where she lived an ascetical life, uplifting her spirit continuously toward God and burning with love toward her Creator... Only when Apollinaria died was her secret revealed that she was not a man, but a woman... She died in the year 470 A.D.” (January 5) ⁶⁶

“**THE VENERABLE MARY...** Mary was a woman with a man's courage. After the death of her mother, her father desired to become a monk. Mary would not be separated from him, so they decided to go together to a men's monastery - Mary with short hair and in man's raiment as a youth. Her father died, and Mary became a monk and received the name Marius... Immediately after her death it was discovered that the `Monk Marius' was a woman... St. Mary entered into rest and went to eternal joy in 508.” (February 12) ⁶⁷

“**THE VENERABLE MOTHER ANASTASIA...** Anastasia was a patrician and lady of the imperial palace of Emperor Justinian. After she was widowed and when she perceived that Empress Theodora could not tolerate her, she immediately slipped out of Constantinople and turned up in the wilderness of Egypt. The renowned spiritual father Abba Daniel tonsured her a nun and **presented her as the monk Anastasius the eunuch according to her wishes so that, as a woman under the guise of a man, she could easily be saved and hidden from the pursuit of the emperor.** Anastasia then closed herself off in a narrow cell where she spent twenty-eight years and died there in the year 563 A.D. Before her death, the Elder Daniel saw her face glow like the sun.” (March 10) ⁶⁸

One common theme in these narratives is the necessity for these women to disguise themselves falsely as men in order to enter the monastic brotherhood. Even if we were to assume that people entered monasteries in order to pursue a closer relationship with God, the clear fact remains that these women (and others) committed a deliberate violation of God's commandments, specifically the ninth commandment that reads:

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” ⁶⁹

This command has a much broader meaning than many realize. The command is not only a prohibition against telling lies. This commandment also forbids “false witness”, whether in the form of clear misrepresentation (as in the cases of these women) or something else. After all, the sin of false non-verbal representation is committed by Apollinaria alone. Mary and Anastasia had collaborators in their sins of falsely posing as men. Mary’s helper was her father. Anastasia had collaboration in her sin from none other than the “renowned spiritual father” Abba Daniel, who before his brethren presented her as a eunuch.

⁶⁶ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.htm>

⁶⁷ <http://www.serbianorthodoxchurch.net/cgi-bin/saints.cgi?view=274672579385>

⁶⁸ <http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog.cgi>

⁶⁹ Exodus 20:16.

Another interesting fact is that Anastasia entered the male monastery under a man's name **“so that, as a woman under the guise of a man, she could easily be saved.”** If one were truly “saved” (and apparently the context leads to this conclusion) by God leading unto eternal life, this action seems strange when the New Testament makes no connection between a person's sex and salvation. The Holy Scriptures clearly teach that both men and women exist on an equal level in the sight of God through faith in Jesus Christ the Savior and rebirth by the Holy Spirit.⁷⁰

Note the fact that the Venerable Anastasia became a monk in the Egyptian desert, and recall the discussion at the beginning of the chapter that addressed Egyptian asceticism as having arisen “under the dominant influence of Gnosticism” (per Vukomanovic and other authors). Then the question of how gender relates to salvation reveals a more specific answer. Here is a short text from the apocryphal Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, which, according to many researchers, decisively influenced the philosophy of Egyptian desert asceticism:

“Simon Peter said to him, ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall **lead her in order to make her male**, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For **every woman who will make herself male** will enter the kingdom of heaven.’”⁷¹

According to the Gnostic writings, Jesus makes women into men so that could enter the heavenly paradise. It seems quite possible that one of the Gnostic teachings remained until the sixth century and managed to influence Anastasia in her quest to gain eternal life.

Earlier in the chapter, there was a reference by Protodeacon Ljubomir Rankovic stating that before the Great Schism between the East and West in the year 1054 year, both the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Churches lived in “unity” and “grace”. In light of this unity prior to 1054, it is noteworthy to study the example of another woman from the ancient times when the Church was unified. Specifically, in the ninth century, there was a woman who disguised herself as a man (similar to the examples in the Prologue of Okhrud) and ascended to the papacy, the Holy See of Rome! Although some believe that this narrative is not true, several historical documents confirm its truth. The first piece of evidence that a woman became the chief Roman Bishop comes from the ninth century Anastasius Bibliothecarius, chief Librarian of the Roman Church and personal advisor to Pope Leo IV. A Catholic historian, Bartolomeo Platina, who lived in the fifteenth century, described the events surrounding the ascendancy of the female pope:

“Joanna, of English extraction, was born at Mentz [Mainz] and is said to have arrived at Popedom by evil arts; **for disguising herself like a man**, whereas she was a woman... coming to Rome, she met with few that could equal, much less go beyond her, even in the knowledge of the Scriptures; and by her learned and

⁷⁰ See John 1:12, 3:16, Romans 10:9-13, and Galatians 3:26-8.

⁷¹ See <http://gospelofthomas.webs.com/logia101114.htm>, accessed on March 20, 2011. Logia 114. Author's emphasis.

ingenious readings and disputations, she acquired so great respect and authority that upon the death of Leo (as Martin says), by common consent she was chosen Pope in his room. As she was going to the Lateran Church, between the Colossean Theatre (so called from Nero's Colossus) and St. Clement's, her travail came upon her, and **she died upon the place, having sat two years, one month, and four days, and was buried there without any pomp.**"⁷²

Martin Scotus, a monk in the Abbey of St. Martin in Cologne (died 1086) wrote this:

"AD 854, Lotharii 14, Joanna, a woman, succeeded Leo, and reigned two years, five months, and four days."⁷³

Stephen of Bourbon (died 1261) in his book *The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (De Septem Donis Spiritu Sancti) mentions details similar to others of his predecessors and contemporaries. The details of the life of Pope Joan vary by different sources. Some medieval documents call her Agnes or Gilberta. Some sources believed she was the wife of Pope Leo IV who, after his death took over the papal duties. However, the most interesting version is *The Chronicle of the Popes and Emperors* (*Chronicon pontificum et imperatum*) written by the 13th century writer Martin von Troppau. He recorded information on the life and death of the female Pope similar to the information already quoted by Bartolomeo Platina, who lived two centuries earlier. At the place where Pope Joan was buried, a large stone slab with a classic label was erected. Later, it was destroyed on the orders of Pope Pius V (1566-1572) in order to avoid further scandals. After the demise of the female Pope, future candidates for the highest place in the Western church were to have their gender verified by a third party.⁷⁴

Since the emergence of the Protestant Reformation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has done everything possible to deny the existence of the female pope, who became a symbol of corruption and immorality. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* considers this story as a fairy tale. It claims that after the death of Leo IV (847-855), a certain John of Mainz, an Englishman who was "apparently" female, sat on the throne for two years, seven months, and four days.⁷⁵ Also, this encyclopedia asserts that this Pope was considered an historical personage whom no one doubted during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Siena Cathedral had her bust, which was later, at the bidding of Pope Clement VIII (1592-1595) transformed into the bust of Pope Zacharias. During the Middle Ages, one of the streets in Rome leading to the church of St. Peter had a statue of a female Pope. During his visit to Rome, Martin Luther saw the statue and was amazed that the Pope allowed it to exist. Forty years after Luther's death, Pope Sixtus V ordered the statue to be removed.⁷⁶

⁷² See <http://library.telkamp.eu/popejoan/> It is interesting to note that there

⁷³ See <http://www.slemen.com/pope.html>

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ See <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08407a.htm>

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* See also <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~pardos/PopeJoan3.html>

The previous examples illustrate the concept of monasticism among members of the traditional churches of the East and the West. The clear implication is that these groups did not rely on the Bible as the Word of God. We will examine more of this evidence in the next section.

Celibate Bishops (Pastors)

According to the teaching of Scripture, the pastor or minister (also called the overseer) in the churches was a person who not only pleased God but also was responsible in his position. The essence of ministry of the Lord's disciples in the early Church was reflected in the spiritual care and concern for the entire life and work of the first century Christian community, including both individuals and the church as a whole. The apostle Paul says this regarding the role of church elders:

*“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to shepherd the church of God** which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”*⁷⁷

The apostle Peter exhorts the elders in the first century churches:

*“The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd the flock of God** which is among you, **servicing as overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but **being examples to the flock**; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”*⁷⁸

Peter was the same apostle who received this very exhortation from the Lord Himself after His glorious resurrection. In fact, Christ gave this in response to Peter's answer of His question: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He answered Peter three times with these words:

*“Feed My lambs... Tend My sheep... Feed My sheep.”*⁷⁹

What is absolutely certain is that not every Christian is qualified to lead a local Christian church. According to the teachings of the Holy Scripture, Christ has endowed His believers with different spiritual gifts, which are used by the Lord in the building of Christ's body - the Church:

*“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...”*⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Acts 20:28-31. Author's emphasis.

⁷⁸ 1 Peter 5:1-4. Author's emphasis.

⁷⁹ John 21:15-7.

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*⁸¹

Therefore, the pastor must be chosen by God and qualified to carry out the great responsibilities of this office. Paul explains that the qualifications of a potential pastor that should already be evident in his Christian life:

*“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but **be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition**, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth.”*⁸²

However, two special texts related to pastoral ministry in the church are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. We can clearly see the difference between early Christian apostolic teachings and religious practices that are found in the Orthodox Church today.

*“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of an elder, he desires a good work. **An elder** then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”*⁸³

*“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— if a man is blameless, **the husband of one wife**, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For **an elder** must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”*⁸⁴

Amongst other virtues as defined by the God-inspired teaching of the apostle Paul, the elder (“bishop”) must also be married (“the husband of one wife”). The reason for demanding this qualification is beyond just giving a man a trial to see if he is capable of being the shepherd of God's flock, but indeed, the apostle Paul expects the elder to have

⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:27-8.

⁸¹ Ephesians 4:11-13.

⁸² 2 Timothy 2:24-5. Author's emphasis.

⁸³ 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁴ Titus 1:5-9. Author's emphasis.

proven his ability in managing a congregation similar to that of his own family. Furthermore, an elder is to be married because of the nature of his ministry, which often involves contact with many believers and unbelieving people (including women of all types, including married, divorced, and widows, per 1 Corinthians 7:2-5). We have already clearly recognized that celibacy among men in the monasteries can lead to various sexual perversions and temptations that are difficult to resist. The apostle Paul went so far as to encourage marriage for the majority “*because of [the risk of] sexual immorality.*”⁸⁵ Overseers in the Church must be married by the clear teaching of God’s most excellent Word. Even the Orthodox bishop Georgi Popovic acknowledged Paul’s teaching on the qualifications for ministry regarding the need for them to marry:

“From the time of the apostles until more than three hundred years later, bishops were lay ministers and had wives. We see that by the first Nicene Council, the church father St. Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus, lived openly in marriage and raised sons and daughters. Such was also the case with brother Basil the Great, St Spiridon, and many others. Paul the apostle publicly teaches that **bishops, elders, and deacons must be married.** He drives the point home by saying: ‘*if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?*’ Beyond doubt, the first pastors and bishops were married men. Bishop does not mean anything other than an overseer supervisor, and there was no such position as an archbishop that ruled over bishops. But then when the monks began to multiply and receive eminence as high priests, **little by little they introduced the custom that a bishop must be a monk, against the public teaching of the Apostles, whose doctrine, justice, and common sense made clear that a monk could never be a monk.** A monk is destined to live in the desert, not in the cities and among men and women. Such a man formed of flesh and blood as God created him, **if he does not marry, will find himself in great turmoil.**”⁸⁶

Who could have given a better answer to the question about his views on qualifications for a Bishop than from a monk among people living in such an environment, a celibate Bishop? Georgi Popovic was exactly that person. He said that anyone who lived in his circumstances and trying to serve in the real world suffers “turmoil” (which means great misery, that is, trouble because of his celibacy). Moreover, the position represented by the archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the eighteenth century is entirely consistent with the Bible. This position is identical to the teaching that Christians faithful to God and His Word have always maintained. A bishop cannot be a monk. This practice (along with many others in Eastern Orthodoxy) was introduced a few hundred years after Christ and the apostles who taught about it quite differently.

The fact that during the first centuries of Christianity, bishops were married men, and that only later were rules for monastic hierarchies formed, is confirmed by the Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic. Here is how he describes the changes to the qualifications for the office of bishop:

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:2.

⁸⁶ Obradovic, 84-5. Author’s emphasis.

“As monks acquired more power within the church, positions of the highest ecclesiastical prestige **gradually** fell into the hands of highly respected monks. Clergy who were married were gradually **suppressed** by these monks. As a result of the monks’ suppression, others became more reluctant to assume positions as elders and deacons... However, monks also assumed seats of power at the Church Councils. Soon, the seats of episcopal power in the Eastern Church were occupied almost exclusively by the monks. Initially, it was common for bishops to marry. **Yet, by the fifth century, it was a rarity to find a bishop who was married.** In the year 410, Synesius of Cyrene was nominated as bishop of Ptolemais. At first, he hesitated to accept the position because he was married and did not want to part with his wife.⁸⁷ He still accepted the position and kept his wife. **With this exception, history makes no further reference to bishops living in marriage...** Finally, during the reign of Justinian I (527-565), bishops were **expressly prohibited** from being married. Indeed, the majority of bishops in the Eastern Church were monks.”⁸⁸

This account by Popovic explains that until the sixth century, some bishops in the Eastern Church were married, although married bishops became increasingly rare even in the fifth century. In contrast, the churches in Britain, Ireland, and Scotland had married church leaders until the seventh century due to their isolation from the rest of Europe and the end of Roman rule over these islands. As for the rest of the continent, the possibility of marriage was revoked much earlier, not only for bishops, but also for elders and deacons:

“On the other hand, the Western Church at the Council of Elvira (Eliberis) in 306 **prohibited** bishops, elders, and deacons **from being married.** Marriage was also banned for monks toward the end of the fourth century (in the year 385). The Roman Pope Siricius (384-398) **reaffirmed the prohibition** on marriage in line with the Council of Elvira. Pope Leo I (440-461) **extended the ban on marriage** to subdeacons in 450. Thus celibacy became mandatory throughout the Western Church.”⁸⁹

It is obvious that in the Ecumenical Church, first in the West, then in the East, bishops **were prohibited** to marry without any basis from the Bible.⁹⁰ (The Western Church also banned other members of the clergy from marriage.) In contrast, the apostles predicted that a time would come in the future (relative to when they lived) when false doctrine within the Church would emerge and prohibit marriage:

⁸⁷ The example of the bishop Synesius is praiseworthy due to his respect for the sacred and inviolable covenant of marriage in accordance with Christ’s teachings, as opposed to many other examples of dissolution of marriages made by the “saints” who abandoned women and children for the wilderness monasteries in the delusion that God required them to do such sin.

⁸⁸ Popovic, vol, 1, 490-1. Author’s emphasis.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁰ According to the Bible, bishops (overseers), deacons (ministers), and elders (pastors) should be married (and qualify for their positions based upon their ability to manage their marriages and families). See 1 Timothy 3:12 and Titus 1:5-6.

*“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to **deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons**, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, **forbidding to marry...**”*⁹¹

The Holy Spirit through the Scriptures teaches that some people within the Church will depart from the faith into apostasy. This apostasy stems from their adoption of “doctrines of demons” under the influence of “deceiving spirits”. We have already seen that Greek pagan philosophy has wielded a dominating influence over monastic life and its belief in the spiritual superiority of celibacy.

Thus, we see the very situation about which the apostles by inspiration of the Holy Spirit were warning us. Clearly, Neoplatonism and Gnosticism do not conform to God’s teaching. On the contrary, such philosophies have nothing in common with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, they belong to “doctrines of demons”. The prohibition of marriage for church ministers, the very people whom the Lord has commanded to marry and have families, bears the fingerprints of no one other than the enemy of the Church of Christ, in other words, Satan.

The Greatest Totalitarian System in the World

“Everyone knows that any disobedience and opposition to the supreme authority will subject that person to prosecution by the Ecclesiastical Court with the potential penalty of expulsion from the ministry, defrocking, and excommunication from the Church! Such is written in the canons written of the Orthodox Canon, **‘the greatest totalitarian system of its kind in the world’**, as experts describe it.”⁹²

The conclusion of the excerpt just cited is logical when one performs an impartial and objective study of the Orthodox Canon and those of the Church Fathers. These canons form ecclesiastical law that affects many aspects of the life of believers in the Eastern Church. This article from the newspaper in the Serbian town of Vranje refers to the expulsion of Deacon V.S. from the ministry and the Church by the Bishop of Vranje. The deacon had given support to children who accused Bishop Pakhomius of sexual harassment and violations. Not only did this priest suffer, but several other priests and nuns likewise had been under severe attack from Bishop Pakhomius who took revenge upon those who opposed him. According to the rules of the Serbian Orthodox Church (and other Orthodox churches), the bishop of a diocese has the ultimate authority in all religious matters in the territory under his charge. Not even the Patriarch himself could ever make an unannounced visit to a diocese or parish without the authorization of the bishop.⁹³ Even though Bishop Pakhomius is under legal indictment for pedophilia and

⁹¹ 1 Timothy 4:1-3. Author’s emphasis.

⁹² *Newspaper of Vranje*, November 9, 2003 issue, 24. Author’s emphasis.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

homosexual assault on teenage boys, no one has been able to expel the Bishop from his position.

Yet another example demonstrates that the Orthodox Canons are truly among the most undemocratic and totalitarian rules that exist in the world. This specific example relates to the vows of monks and novices who violate the rule of absolute obedience to their elders. Perhaps they “fell into sin” with a woman in violation of their vow to celibacy. This rule also applies to those who leave the monastery in order to start a family. They realized that they could no longer restrain themselves sexually and did not want to become either homosexuals or alcoholics (like others of their fellow monks in their environment). An earlier section of this chapter described the monastic vows to celibacy, obedience, and poverty. By submitting to these vows, the novice voluntarily says farewell to everything that binds him to this world. The introduction of the monastic order is confirmed and sealed by monastic vows (tonsure) and giving the novitiate a new name:

“Besides receiving a new name, the vows of the novice are confirmed with a haircut. They cut the hair in the shape of a cross. Although monastic vows are not counted among the Seven Sacraments, the Holy Fathers (such as Theodore of Studion) regarded the sacrament as closest to Holy Baptism. Just like Baptism, **monastic vows are eternal.**”⁹⁴

The canons state that once a person enters the monastery, he forfeits the right to return to civil society and secular life. He needs to live in quietude, fasting, and prayer, and cannot even participate in secular nor ecclesiastical affairs, except by special permission from the bishop.⁹⁵ The Church Fathers invoked anathema (a curse) on any monk who decided to leave the monastery and devote himself to a different way of life:

“We have decreed in regard to those who have once been enrolled in the Clergy or who have become Monks shall not join the army nor obtain any secular position of dignity. Let those be **anathematized** who dare to do this and Jail to repent, so as to return to that which they had previously chosen on God’s account.”⁹⁶

According to the law of the Emperor Justinian (6th century), who with strict civil decrees supported and protected the Byzantine church, a monk who left the monastery to enter a secular trade would be immediately and under compulsion returned to the monastery, which meant that his secular life was over:

“In equal measure, the Church and State have issued decrees supported by the rulings expressed in the canons. Although today, in a time of separation of church and state, church laws are not binding, the Justinian Code will be enforced. **It**

⁹⁴ *Holy Prince Lazar*, 6th Year. No. 2, 1998. Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* (See Canon 4 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council: <http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0835/P18.HTM>)

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* (See Canon 7 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council: <http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0835/P1B.HTM>)

testifies to the truth of church canons, which state, ‘The monk who left his monastery and crosses over into secular life, even if by chance he earned some kind of civil or military honor, shall be deprived of it under the authority of the presiding bishop. The presiding bishop and the district judges shall return him immediately to the monastery. (Nov. CXXIII c. 42)’⁹⁷

As for those people who became monks and then realized the impossibility of such a lifestyle, they sought to start a family and return to living the pattern that God has created for human beings. They could never hope to find any sympathy from their superiors in the faith. In such situations, the Canons demand very severe measures, which not only threaten but in fact trample upon the dignity of man whom God created in His image. Such a person fleeing the monastery has a curse cast upon him and imprisoned under duress in the monastery to die with no chance of winning salvation and eternal life. Here is one rule to which the Church Fathers subscribed when the “covenant of celibacy” would be violated:

“If the monk leaves the holy order in order to eat meat and take a wife, once he is found, such a monk should be subjected to **anathema**, and **forced** once again to don the friar's robe and **confined to a monastery.**’ (Canon 35 of Nicephorus the Confessor) This rule applies to monks who abandon the holy monastic order and by eating meat and having relations with a woman, thus transgress against the rules of the monastic order. The sentence for such betrayal is anathema. Such a rule conforms to Canon 7 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, which excommunicated monks who depart monastic life in order to live in the secular world. This canon on anathema requires that the accused monk who does not voluntarily return will be forcibly taken back, prosecuted (under the Justinian Code), and confined in a monastery. Why do they imprison this man if he is already excommunicated? **The anathematized man is already excommunicated from the Church for all eternity**, and as he is **accursed**, thus he is also an enemy of everyone (see John Chrysostom, Homily 16, in Epist. Ad Romanos). Such a person can no longer be a monk, but **he is forced to don a monk's robe** in order to demonstrate that he has fallen under the reproach of **anathema** for violating the vows to which he swore.”⁹⁸

Just like St. Nicephorus the Confessor, St. Basil the Great prescribes a severe law for such transgression. Here is how the saint used the Scriptures in this case:

“Holy Scripture says: ‘If a man sins against God, who should pray for him?’ For he who devotes himself to God and then turns away to a totally different life has become a worldly person, for he himself stole and took away a sacrifice to God. It is only just no longer to open the gate of fraternity to such a traitor, even if he comes to take refuge under the roof in common travels.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 36. Author's emphasis.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

According to the teachings of the church fathers, if a former monk marries a wife, then the Orthodox Church does not recognize the relationship as an official marriage but rather as sexual immorality:

“Any monk who takes a woman is in adultery, even if the state grants them the status of civil marriage.”¹⁰⁰

“The monastic life in itself is already understood to conform to celibacy, whether or not the man made a vow to celibacy (in ancient times, such a vow was not required). The attempt by the saint-monk to marry is considered a betrayal to his vow to the ascetic life. His relationship with a woman alone is not considered to be real marriage, but rather **a bond of sexual immorality, which should be dissolved at any cost.**”¹⁰¹

Not even the most autocratic and destructive sects and cults have such rules as harsh and extreme as those that apply to monks, nuns, and even novices who have not yet entered the monastery after receiving tonsure. (Even if, for some reason, a person happened to adorn a monk’s habit, he would be forced to obey these rules until he made the official vows to monasticism.)¹⁰²

We see this in the examples of annual defections from pseudo “Christian” cults by their former members. Probably the most famous example in Serbia is the young man Vuk Andrejevic from Belgrade, a former member of the Unification Church of Sun Yung Moon. After dogged persuasion, his parents finally convinced him of the error of this organization. At first, it was not easy for Vuk’s parents to convince him that he made a mistake, and he resisted the idea to leave the cult. However, once he finally decided to leave the organization, Moon’s church simply did not have enough power to keep Vuk in its membership. This young man returned with his parents returned to Serbia and completely severed ties with the Moonies. Thank God that there is no totalitarian cult in the countries of the civilized world that can invoke the power of the state to impose its harsh rules on its members. Thus, it is possible for members deceived by these cults to be rescued from the "claws" of these monstrous sects.

However, in the Middle Ages, a “synergy” between the church and civil government existed in which the laws of the church became the laws of the state. Many radical theologians and members of the Serbian Orthodox Church aspire for Serbia in the

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 41. Author’s emphasis. It might be noteworthy to observe that according to the teaching of the “church fathers” (as opposed to the teaching of the Bible), any civil marriage that is not confirmed in the church by an Orthodox priest is viewed as sexually immoral. Orthodoxy’s reasoning is that such a marriage was made without God’s blessing and thus would be invalid in the eyes of God. (The Orthodox Church considers civil marriage as sexual immorality, with the implication that the majority of the Serbian population today lives in sexual immorality. (This statement pertains particularly to couples who entered marriage with civil ceremonies in lieu of church weddings during the times of Communism.) I personally heard a lecture to this effect from Justin Stefanovic, Orthodox Bishop of the Diocese of Timochka in the middle of the 1990’s.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 42.

twenty-first century to re-establish this same relationship between the medieval church and state, that is, for the Justinian Code once again to become reality.

In any event, with or without the Justinian Code, the parents of sons and daughters now living in the monasteries of Serbia must realize that will never be able to depend upon their children to whom they gave birth and invested all their lives. Even if one of these young people in the monastery changed his or her mind, resigned from the monastery, and got married to the delight of his or her parents, he or she would face a worse fate than that of Vuk Andrejevic, as we saw from the canon of the holy fathers. This person would be anathematized and cursed forever with no hope of eternal salvation by the Orthodox Church. Furthermore, such a person would be arrested and confined in the monastery prison, where that person would curse the day he was born and according to the apostate doctrine which deceived him to ever enter the monastic order in the first place.

How Orthodoxy Justifies These Harsh Rules

“The will and vows of a man are sealed before the Church. In the Church of God, the holy sacrament of monastic vows is brought to light and sanctify him permanently as a monk in body and soul. This man is bound to the church forever. Indeed, many canons of the Church justify this **according to the rule: ‘What God has joined together let not man separate.’** (Matthew 19:6)”¹⁰³

The passage above explains that a man who took monastic vows and then wishes to leave can be confined to the monastery against his will. This passage justifies such teaching on the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ from Matthew 19:6. Let us examine the whole context of this teaching in order to gain a more accurate understanding:

*“The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.’”*¹⁰⁴

So we must pose the question right away: what does Christ’s teaching have to do with keeping a monk in the monastery against his will? In contrast to the rationalization used by Orthodoxy that monastic vows as “forever”, a perpetual bond to the monastery and its rules, Christ’s teaching actually refers to a topic having nothing to do with the monastic life of celibacy – the sanctity of marriage.

Other texts in Scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 7, clearly teach this principle. Any marriage between a man and a woman that conforms to the laws of contemporary society

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 40. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 19:3-6. Author’s emphasis.

(even if not confirmed by a religious organization) is valid before God and should not be separated by third parties.

It is also clear from our previous studies that the relationship of monks to the monastery is based on manmade rules (with notable demonic influence). Not only does God have no respect for monasticism (because He never established it), but He also finds monasticism opposed to His will as recorded in the Scriptures. In fact, God considers it a sin to force the termination of a marriage between a man and a woman. The apostle Paul taught that *“if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*¹⁰⁵

Clearly, the verse of Matthew 19:6 is torn out of context and its true meaning by Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy has no basis in proving what cannot be proved based on the Scriptures, namely that God imposes some eternal bond on monks to the monastery. On the contrary, the patristic law that “marriage should be dissolved at any cost” is one that is completely opposed to God's Word and His will.

The end of this chapter will discuss one of the numerous examples of the negative impact of monastic philosophy on members of Serbian and other Eastern Orthodox peoples. This example might make readers in such environments think twice before pining for some future utopia constructed on monastic orders and saving them from such crazy ideas.

As we saw earlier, monastic vows include not only the renunciation of marriage and wealth, but also literally abandoning their families and relatives as well as any loyalty to the country where they lived.¹⁰⁶ Of course, the biggest problem is the fact that the Orthodox Church believes that such extreme and negative behavior of monks is praiseworthy. Worse still, the majority of the Serbian people is ignorant of the nature of monasticism and what it implies. Furthermore, most Serbs support without thinking what the Orthodox Church teaches, no matter how it conflicts with fundamental moral norms that apply in a civilized human society. Yet, at the same time, while fighting Satanists and other destructive cults¹⁰⁷ that perform physical and psychological alienation of individuals from their families through brainwashing, the identical situation occurs within the Eastern Orthodox Churches. I ask each of you, dear reader, to carefully read the description of the following events:

“And so, in this story, like fresh coffee and a lean lunch, there are many things strange and unusual to hear. Many monks of Athos have parents who are still living. One time, a monk’s father came to visit his son. He went to visit him in the Daphne district near the lake. **His father had not seen his son in twenty five**

¹⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:9.

¹⁰⁶ “In order to develop himself and gain virtue, the monk breaks ties with the material world and modern life in order to be different in everything: his home, his clothing, his health (hence the according to Save, the behavior (hence the word “inok” means “different”). By escaping into the wilderness, **he rejects his homeland, his relatives, and his property.**” *Holy Prince Lazar*, No. 2. 1993, 186. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ Eastern Orthodoxy unjustifiably includes among the cults many evangelical-Protestant churches in the same category. (See details in Chapter 13 on “The Church that Persecutes”.)

years. This means that the man who is a monk today had not been home since he was a boy, when he had a girlfriend with a blue shirt and the village had flourished.

Just as any normal father would, his father traveled to see his son. And instead of a boy, he met a monk with an overgrown graying beard and eyes. His son's eyes were familiar, yet they were duller and they looked different than what his father remembered.

The father **turned white** when his son the monk spoke to him:

‘Father!’

‘Are you my son?!’

‘Yes, I am your son!’

The old man **lost it. He became sick and started to vomit.**

The monk stepped away, waited, and then returned. Again his father asked him:

‘Is it really you, my son?’

When the monk once again said he was really his son, the old man's countenance darkened as **if he had just been struck by lightning.** And all the way as he was riding on his mule up the mountain, the old man shouted **many incoherent and incomprehensible statements.**

He stayed a month with his son in the monastery. At night, they discussed the hopes his father had for his son's life. His father hoped for his son in his youth to shine among the stars.

However, the aged monk told him that **he considered himself now to be a dead man. His son aspired to wind up in the mausoleum where they inter the skulls of dead monks.** (Monks' corpses are buried underground and then transferred to the mausoleum after three years.)

When his father left his son at the monastery, he constantly yelled:

‘I am afraid! I am afraid! I am afraid!’

His son answered back repeatedly:

‘**Consider me as a dead man! Do not write to me anymore!**’”

The wounds received by the old man were so horrible that they could never heal!”
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This text is particularly striking in that every monk who adheres to the austerity of monastic vows probably has the same relationship toward his family as the monk on Mount Athos. The true story just cited, about which the Orthodox take great pride, describes a poor father who is stricken with mental pain when he saw his son the monk. Descriptions of his state include “the old man lost it”, “he became sick”, “he began to vomit”, and “as if he had been struck by lightning”. What else could these descriptions mean other than the deep mental agony that he experienced? Like any parent, he believed that his son in his time would have his own happy marriage, and grandchildren would have been sitting in the lap of their grandfather. Instead, contrary to the will of the parents, this immature young man disobeyed his parents by going to the monastery.

Unfortunately, his father sees his son in the condition of a loved one on his deathbed. And, what big words did the “spiritual monk” of Athos say when he met his father? Did he utter any words of regret because of the evident pain and disappointment that he had seen on the face of his father? Not at all! What words could this “saint” concoct after not having seen his father for 25 years, even in spite of seeing his father’s love and broken heart? “Consider me dead, and write me no more!” The father’s frantic yelling made the situation worse as he left the monastery.

The son’s alienation from his family is yet another proof of the extremes that monastic rules that are unbiblical and inhumane can drive a person. Indeed, monastic rules contradict the clear teaching of Scripture regarding the relationship of Christians to their parents. Specifically, God’s fifth commandment in the Ten Commandments states:

*“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”*¹⁰⁹

The Apostle Paul in the New Testament affirms that true Christians must respect, love, and take care of parents always, especially in their old age:

*“But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.”*¹¹⁰

*“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ “The Travels of the Sinful Elephteria”, Word of Love, (Belgrade, 1971), cited in *Eight Centuries of Athos, Special Supplement*, 15 January 1998, 28. The writer of the article “The Days and Nights of Athos” is Slobodan Markovic. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ Exodus 20:12.

¹¹⁰ 1 Timothy 5:4. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹¹ 1 Timothy 5:8. Author’s emphasis.

However, it is obvious that our nameless monk of Mount Athos considered his duty to dig up corpses from their graves and write on dead skulls of much greater importance than family and caring for his father. After all, this “holy duty” calls him to explain to his father the importance of working in the mausoleum by collecting the skulls of monks and printing their names. Such activity has no foundation on any teaching of the Bible. This practice is something the monks could only have adopted from a pagan cult. (Indeed, this practice did originate from pagan religion.)

Professor Dr. Veselin Ilich in his book *Religion and Culture* explains the fact that the cult of the skull was preserved from ancient times, when people believed that the preservation of a skull of a dead person preserves the very presence of the dead person’s soul to live in society:

“**Mount Athos is stuffed with centuries full of the skulls of monks.** It is certain that one of the ‘hidden’ and forgotten reasons for this practices lies in the meta-religious layers of social consciousness in which the **cult of the skull** first formed and later succeeded by the cult of the ancestors.”¹¹²

I am sure that every rational, civilized person will agree with me that the example mentioned earlier is insane.

When the young Dimitri Obradovic, later renamed Dositej, went to the monastery for the first time, he was accompanied by a fellow named Niko. Several days after their arrival, at the gates of the monastery gates appeared Niko’s mother, all crimson and very angry. As her son joined the monks without her consent, she was determined to use all means necessary to return her son home. Here is how Dositej later described this somewhat comical, but actually very serious and righteous behavior by the boy's mother:

“Before I start to recount our lives at Hopovo, let me tell the story about Niko.

He was very hard-working in cleaning the church, candles, and everything else in the church. His elder was pleased with his conduct. But one month later, there came his mother along with my older brother Ilya. As they entered the courtyard of the monastery, they defied and cursed the monks. **She cried aloud that if they do not give her the child, she would burn down everything: the monastery, the church, with all the monks.** If monks wanted to have children, let them get some women pregnant, even to raise them. Then one Dionysius, a Croat from Garevice, an eloquent man and rather calm, came down to see who was making all the noise. He found himself in a shouting match where even he could not get in but a peep. Such was the Amazonian woman who contended with Dionysius. When she raised her voice so loud, she woke up the entire monastery and even those living on the surrounding mountains. ‘**Give back my child now!**’ shouted a thunderous voice at Dionysius, ‘**for if you keep him, I will yank out your beard and dig out your eyes! I’ll make sure you will never be able to make a**

¹¹² Ilich, 188. Author’s emphasis.

woman pregnant!' He did not know how to answer. Quickly, he returned her son to her and dressed him up in civilian garb without any dark spots."¹¹³

Because she knew the implications of life in the Serbian monasteries,¹¹⁴ and at the same time being aware that her son would lose all hope if he were to have remained in the monastery, this mother acted appropriately. Every other parent in a similar situation ought to do the same thing if their Serbian child (even an adult) who decides to break the parental love in favor of monasticism and who makes vows that require him to be "dead" to his loved ones" (and giving his life to deal with the practices of the monastery, including digging up graves, etc.). Biblically speaking, as the monastic way of life has always meant a pure waste of time for the man who became a monk as well as a disaster for the family from whom the monk departed, the wise Bishop George Popovic recommended a very good medicine against repeating such a mistake:

"By Christ the Saviour, and **shame on the whole Serbian people! Repentance and shame on the Serbian name!** At least let him deny this fair name, let him call himself something else and not bring shame to his race."¹¹⁵

"What can we do? Here it is: Worldly priests in monasteries cannot be forced out, so by no means should we allow any young people to become monks. **Few who have been in the monastery for less than twenty years** realize what is required of a monk."¹¹⁶

My sincere hope is for every reader of this chapter to consider all the facts and arguments I have given and make a proper evaluation of monasticism in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

My personal conclusion is that the philosophy of monastic living utterly contradicts the Bible, as do many other doctrines taught by Eastern Orthodoxy. These doctrines include those we have already studied and which we will further analyze later in this book.

¹¹³ Dositej Obradovic, *Selected Works*, 121. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁴ According to the abbot of Hopovo himself, Theodore Milutinovic, as described by young Dositej, the life of a monk boiled down to drinking alcoholic beverages (wine and brandy) and not the spiritual enlightenment of the people: "**Our whole life** consists of the vats of Rakije [Serbian alcoholic beverage], the drums, barrels and rings, **all our doctrine** consists of our knowledge of how old is the wine and brandy." Dositej Obradovic, *Selected Works*, 131-132. Author's emphasis.

Milka Stankovic in his book says: "Dositej realized very quickly that the same illiterate 'brothers' were comprised of ignorant, selfish, simple, and lazy, intransigent drunks and one plotter who preached and led a very different, hypocritical, and convoluted life that sank to the lowest of morals ranging from theft to fraud and bribery." Stankovic, *Prometheus from the Balkans*, (Kekec, 1989) 34.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 96-7. Author's emphasis.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103. Author's emphasis.