

On Monasticism.

Today there is no Orthodox Church without monasteries. Monasticism is the heart and soul of the Church. It is one of the pillars and foundations in the healthy life of the Orthodox Church because monasteries were and remain a powerful and stable force, which constantly renews the energy and potential of the Church and people, through their activity as well as through prayer.



Orthodox nuns



Monks receive a blessing

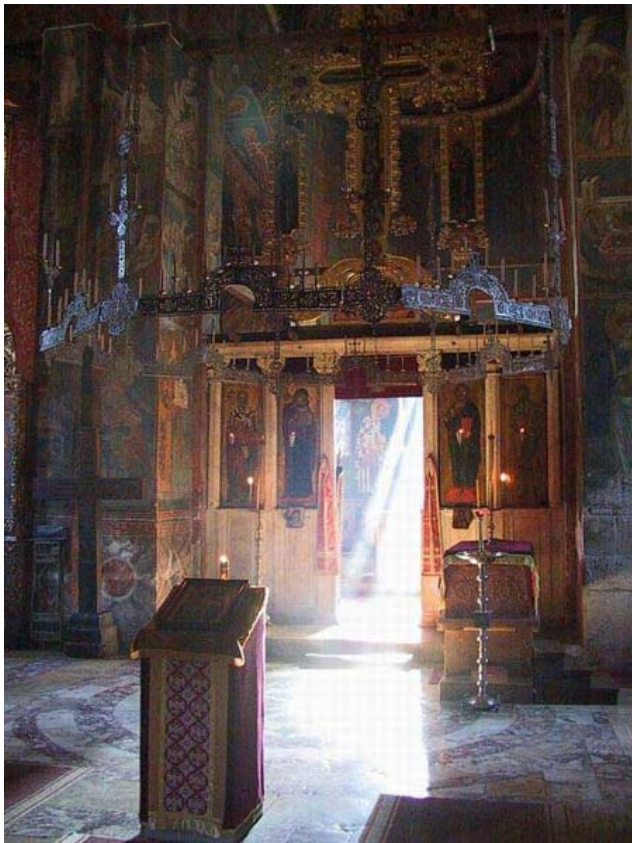
- [What is the importance of monasticism for the Church as a whole, for society and for a person?](#)

[1. Monasteries are oases of spirituality.](#)

You can always come to a monastery to restore your spiritual and moral strength. If overwhelmed by the problems of modern life, you can find in the monastery a spiritual retreat, where you can gain new strength in order to face the challenges of life and continue your journey of Theosis-Union with God. What then, will you find in a monastery? You will find spiritual retreat in a positive surrounding among people who show God's love to all. You can



St. Antony Monastery in the Arizona Desert



Monastic Church in Visoki Decani Monastery

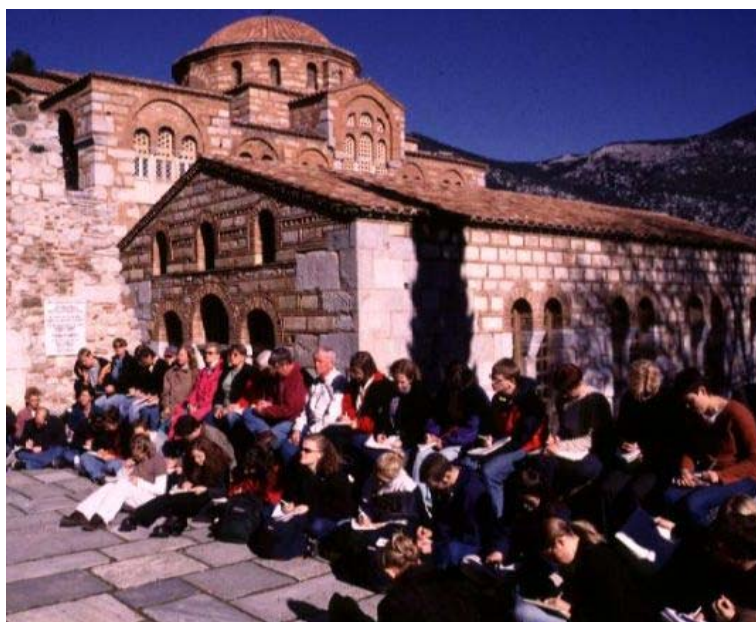
truly pray in peace and have time with God where nobody and nothing will disturb you. The prayerful spirit of monastics will assist your spiritual renewal. In a monastery you will find a peaceful place for meditation and prayer and a church where you are surrounded by holy icons, the images of people who are already saints and celebrate with God, showing us by their example the way to achieve theosis. The gentle glow from icon lamps in the serenity of the evening lighting the faces of Christ the Lover of Mankind and His Mother the Most Pure Virgin Mary. The aroma of incense reminds us of the sweetness and beauty of Heaven. The cycle of services poetically translates the wonderful theology of our Eastern Orthodox Christian Church.

In a monastery you experience that which is better to experience once, rather than hear a hundred times: prayer and divine services which fully unite one with God. A person feels no desire for the service to end as quickly as possible or that one is taking part in a boring service

which is too long. Having at least once experienced this state of prayer, a person will never forget it. A person desires and is able to rekindle anew in his soul the wonderful condition of feeling God's immediate presence. In the monastery you have time to be with God and with yourself in order to be able to reflect on problems and free yourself from them.

2. Working with youth. We see so few young people in our Churches and this is a worry for the future of the Church. It is then a task for monastics to work with and animate the youth. Usually monastics are in charge of the Christian education of children. Nuns/monks must help teach children and youth so that they acquire an understanding of God, of Christian principles, and are encouraged to become good Christians who love and respect themselves, their parents and the world they live in.

An urgent task for monastics in the Church is to be the people who make the life in our Church interesting for youth and children by introducing activities which would be both exciting and educational for them. In our Churches we need people who will work with the youth through conducting regular meetings or sessions, recreational events, worship services and performances with the youth, who will devote their time to youth.



Monasteries are the centers of pilgrimage. They are an important source of spiritual development for youth. They offer the young people an opportunity to enter into a prayerful life, to renew and encourage the development of their young souls.

If we do not see the youth in our churches, a question that can be asked is whether there is anybody to attract them to our churches. Monastics can help do this.

3. Not only the young people are in need of knowledge about God. The Church's condition today is such that [we all need to study God's Teachings](#). Why? – In order to understand why we need God, how He can help us in the complicated situations of our life and in order to see the purpose of God's commandments and the Divine Services and how they help us to be able to use the power of the Holy Spirit in our life.

This knowledge and understanding can be provided by monastics.

4. We see that our Church is experiencing a lack of [church workers](#). There are people, in our churches, who want to sincerely devote their lives to working for the Church and live a monastic life. They leave because they find monasteries in other jurisdictions to do this. Therefore it is very important that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada provide a venue for these most sincere and devoted Christians – through the establishment of monasteries in our Church.

5. [So](#). If a Church's life is not so good as it could be, we have to do what is necessary, in order to change the situation for the better, by renewing in it the things which formerly kept the Ukrainian Orthodox Church strong. One of these things are monasteries: the real energy and power of Christianity.

- [What is the role, of monastics in the Church?](#)

1. Monasticism provides the Church with [good personnel](#), good clergy who are devoted to Church, who in the name of the Church seek to place themselves before God's face by means of prayer and good works. Monastics seek to live sincerely for God, not to seek their own interests or satisfy their own ego. During their lives in the monastery, often with many challenges and temptations, monastics strive to achieve these things. Indifference to the self is a central goal for a monastic.

2. [Charitable activity](#) is obligatory for monks as prescribed by the Orthodox Monastic Rule. Almsgiving means spiritual and material support. Monasteries distribute the donations of money, foods, clothes they receive from benefactors to those who are in need: orphans, widows, less fortunate and the infirm. Traditionally monastics take care of orphans. Today many of the monastic communities in Ukraine raise these poor children. Likewise, many Orthodox monasteries care for the elderly. Ministering to the sick and infirm is part of monastic activity.

3. The contribution of monasticism to [education and science](#) is enormous both historically as well as in the current times. Metropolitan Ilarion (Ohienko) remarks: "Being the Church of high education, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church had brought education to its faithful very early by founding schools ...and monasteries were the only ones to maintain all the schools ..."¹ Main European nations are owing the development of the language, education and sciences to monastic communities. Educated Ukrainian monastics founded and led schools, primary and universities, they wrote books: secular, scientific and ecclesiastical.

4. As well, culture, [arts, artistic handicrafts](#) flourished in the monasteries. The monasteries developed icon writing, gilding, carving, sewing, embroidery and other arts.

5. Monasteries in every time and at every continent remain to be the [centers of the national](#)



Nun iconographer

spiritual culture. This was seen especially during the most difficult periods of Ukrainian history, as for example in first half of the 20-th century.



Ladder of Divine Ascent

- What is a Monk, a Nun?

Definition. According to St. Basil the Great, a monastic is defined as a good Christian. St. John Climacus, the eminent Orthodox theologian, in his "Ladder of Divine Ascent", writes: "Monasticism is an angelic order and state achieved in an earthly and soiled body. A monk is one who follows only the commands of God, always and everywhere... A monk is one who keeps his body in chastity, his mouth pure and his mind illuminated"²

Aim of monasticism is the same as for all of mankind. The ultimate aim is theosis. Metropolitan Ilarion (Ohienko) explains this perfectly in his book "Theosis of Man – the aim of human life". A Christian must be most closely connected with God, and this is the purpose of his life and his future. Theosis for man is real; it is the transfiguration of the soul under the influence of divine power; in reality it is our uniting with the Divine, it is a gradual spiritualization of a spiritual being, and at the highest level it involves a complete and real spiritual unity of the soul with God³.

Another aim of monasticism is to strengthen and build the Church, which is Christ's Body on earth. It is the duty of every Christian to care about his "home church", that is his family. The monk's family is the Church, and his duty is to care for the Church with all his strength: by prayer, through the work of his hands and his intellect.

Monastic Rules. When people join a monastic community, i. e. a monastery, they embraces three basic rules to service to God and Church: chastity, non-acquisitiveness, obedience. Metropolitan Ilarion (Ohienko) expresses very well the rule of **chastity**: "It is easier for a unmarried person to save oneself and others because family binds a man with numerous cares of life. The spiritual value of chastity is explained clearly by Apostle Paul: 'An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife'



Monastic tonsure

(1 Cor. 7:32-33). Chastity purifies the mind from evil thoughts and makes man equal to the angels."⁴ The rule of **non-acquisitiveness** means not to gather goods for himself, not to look for the vanities of this world, and not to seek for money. "As waves never leave the sea, so anger and cares never leave the money-loving man"⁵, says St. John Climacus. Accepting this discipline allows a monk freedom to sincerely work for God and the Church. The third rule, **obedience** to the monastic community and the Church, is intended to kill pride and selfishness in a person. "No greater love for God and Men can be shown by a person than to deny himself and be prepared to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Obedience means to willingly submit to God through the spiritual father/mother.



Nuns of St. Paisius Orthodox Monastery singing

Prayer. Monasticism is considered to be a pillar and foundation of the Church because the first task of a monastic is to pray. St. Silouan of Athos, speaking about monastic prayer, states: "A monk prays for the whole world... Lay people pray less, however, a monk prays always. Due to the monks, prayer never stops, and it is useful for the whole world because the world is maintained by prayer..."⁶.

St. Theodore the Studite in his Rule of monastic life divides the 24-hour day into three equal parts: 8 hours for common prayer, 8 hours for common work and 8 hours for personal time.

Prayer is not perfect without fasting (Mt 17:21). Both have one aim which is attain the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is seen in His gifts, such as love, hope, faith, gift of knowledge and others (1 Cor. 12).

Work is very important for monastics. Metropolitan Ilarion (Ohienko) says: "Work, especially physical, brings to the spirit victory over the body... A monk works with prayer and joy, because work is the foundation of every life"⁷.



Prayer in a monastery on Mt. Athos

The Day in a Monastery.



Announcing: it is time for worship

Most of Orthodox monasteries follow the cenobitic rule of monastic life: a community of monastics holding all things in common, following a daily schedule of prayer and work in obedience to their spiritual father/mother. The monks'/nuns' daily program begins early in the morning with personal prayer time followed by the cycle of morning prayers and the Divine Liturgy. After breakfast the monastics begin their work day, attending to prayer and their tasks till evening. Tasks may include among others: groundskeeping, gardening, iconography, charitable work with children, seniors and the sick, teaching, sewing, embroidery, woodworking, publishing, food preparation, and offering hospitality. The day ends with evening Vespers followed by supper, Compline. At the end of the day every monk has his own personal prayer rule. That is the time when in silence a person can be alone with God, and enjoy the sweet fruits of peace and sweetness of union with God through the Jesus Prayer. The exact hours when the daily schedule begins and ends vary. A

typical daily routine is as follows:

5:30 AM - Midnight Service, Matins, First, Third, Sixth Hours and Divine Liturgy

9:00 AM – Breakfast and Tasks

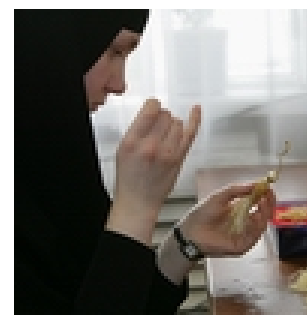
Noon – Lunch

6:00 PM - Ninth Hour, Vespers and Supper

8:30 PM - Small Compline, personal Prayer time

In the monasteries with the "cenobitic" (which means "common way") of monastic life, everyone follows the same daily schedule, under the direction of the Abbot/Abbess.

Meals are eaten together; work, rest periods, and services are conducted together according to the monastery's schedule. Every monastery is a Holy Monastery of Our Lord Jesus Christ; that is, a place of prayer and redemption for those people leading a monastic life, and for pious pilgrims.



Nun preparing a bishop's mitre



Holy Fathers of the Lavra Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv

- [Historical background of monasticism.](#)

Christianity was persecuted during the first centuries, and often Christians fled from these persecutions and were able to find shelter in large deserts, where they could live undetected, and worship God in peace. An example for this is the life of St. Paul of Thebes. In time, such a mode of living seemed fit for those who desired to strive to live perfectly the biblical commandments and counsels. This inspired St. Anthony the Great in the 3rd century to found the hermitic style of monasticism in the Egyptian deserts. According to this style, monks lived mostly in individual isolation. And around 318, Saint Pachomius in Egypt began to organize his many followers in what was to become the first Christian monastery, in which monks lived together. This is another style of monasticism, called cenobitic. The Egyptian monks of the first centuries were abundantly graced with spiritual gifts: hope, faith, prayer, prophecy, healing, languages, and

theology. These gifts of Holy Spirit are a normative state of any Christian (1 Cor. 12). The monastics cultivated them to a higher degree.

When Christianity became legal, another monastic center appeared in Constantinople. One of its greatest achievements was the cenobitic Rule written by St. Theodore the Studite for his monastery the Studion. This Rule remains as an unsurpassed example of monastic organization and is in use by all Orthodox monastic communities today.

In 1062 in Constantinople, this rule was carefully copied by St. Ephraim, a monk of the Lavra Monastery of the Caves in Kyiv and brought to Ukraine. From the Lavra of the Caves these rules spread to other monastic communities in Ukraine and in other Slavic lands.



Venerable Princess Anna Vsevolodivna of Kyiv, Abbess of St. Andrew Monastery and founder of the first Ukrainian school for girls in Kyiv, XI
 Feast day on 3/16 November.
 Iconographer Vera Lazarowich-Senchuk.
 Photo by Carlyle Hoffman

In 10th century due to historical events, particularly the barbaric conquests, another great center of monastic civilization arose and flourished on the Athos peninsula in Greece. Today, Mt. Athos or the Holy Mountain continues to be an active and strong centre of Orthodox monasticism. There one can find those who strive to live the same type of Christianity with all its characteristics as Apostle Paul describes in his Epistles.

Monastery played always a great role in the Orthodox Church. Almost all the Fathers of the Church, Theologians who compiled the Holy Doctrine of the Church, were monks.

The most of Saints of the Orthodox Church Calendar are monastics. Nowadays, as it had always been, the Church elects her Bishops only from monastic Clergy.

Today there is no Orthodox Church without monastics. Whole our homeland Ukraine is covered with the monasteries where children of our people devotedly serve God. There is multitude of monasteries across the Europe. Here, in North America every Orthodox Church has them.

- *Lord said: "If you want to be perfect... come, follow me."(Matthew 19:21). Monasticism is a perfect way to serve God and to achieve theosis.*

St. John Climacus teaches: "In this world when a king summons us to obedience, we leave everything aside and answer the call at once without delays or hanging back or excuses. We had better be careful then not to refuse, through laziness or inertia, the call to the heavenly life in the service of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the God of gods. Let us not find ourselves unable to defend ourselves at the great tribunal of judgment. Someone

caught up in the affairs of the world can make progress if he is determined. But it is not easy. Those bearing chains can still walk. But they often stumble and are thereby injured. The man who is unmarried and only bound by the affairs of the world is like a person with only his hands tied. Thus whenever he wishes, he can without trouble make haste toward the monastic life. But the married man is like someone chained hand and foot"⁸.

In the life of St. Andrew of Constantinople, who revealed to us the Intercession of The Most Holy Theotokos (Pokrova) at the beginning of the 10th century, we can find an example worthy of our attention which further explains to us God's calling to monasticism. "Once during prayer St. Andrew found himself in spirit, in the royal palaces of Heaven. The King of Heaven called him and said: 'Do you wish to serve me? If so, I will make you one of the nobles of my palace'. St. Andrew replied: 'Does



Called by Christ

anyone exist who would not wish your



favor, Master? As for me, I deeply desire this'. Christ said: 'If you wish it, taste of my Kingdom'. The King said: 'Narrow is the road that leads to life. That road lies between the sweet and the bitter. The bitter is labor, struggle and sweat; but the sweet and delicious is refreshment, rest and rejoicing, given by the All-Merciful Father to those who endure sufferings and witness for My sake. The bitter alternates with the sweet'. The King gave Andrew something that was very fragrant and said: 'Take, Eat'. Andrew took and ate, and experienced a wonderful aroma, brightness and divine sweetness. Andrew fell at the King's feet and begged: 'Have mercy on me, Kindest Master, accept me to serve you, because I understand very well, that serving you is very pleasant'. The King answered: 'Believe me, of all my treasures, this is the least and most insignificant! Now you will go back to earth... And if you serve me sincerely and with self-denial the rest of your life, then all I have will be yours!'"⁹

In the same way the Lord calls those who are able to follow a life of monasticism. This call can be expressed in diverse forms but its meaning remains always the same. The call to monasticism is a great blessing and great opportunity which is not a calling for all people.

[The monastic life offers one many advantages:](#)

1) **An opportunity to learn to love God** and to know Him as much as we can.

2) **A way of life organized, dedicated to serving God.**

3) The best opportunity to fulfill one's aspirations **to live out God's commandments as completely as possible.**

4) The best opportunity for a person who is conscious of his sinful past life and who wishes to "go now and leave the life of sin" (John 8:11), **to cleanse his sins.**

5) The finest path of life for those who hope in the reward of **the Heavenly Kingdom.**

6) The possibility for inner personal growth by **having a true elder-teacher** who will assist one towards unity with God, through prayer and its fruits.

7) An opportunity to fulfill a desire **to assist those who need help** in many ways. One can feed the hungry, give drink to those who are thirsty, clothe the naked, and give shelter to those who have no place to lay their heads; visit those, who have fallen ill and have no one to assist them even with their smallest needs; visit the imprisoned who need to be supported (Mt. 25:31-46). We can help poor children through their desperate troubles; light a ray of hope and faith for those, who can not find their way out of difficult circumstances; teach those who wish to learn about Christ and His teaching; to be one who represents Christ and His Mission on earth so that everyone knows they can find help and support in you.

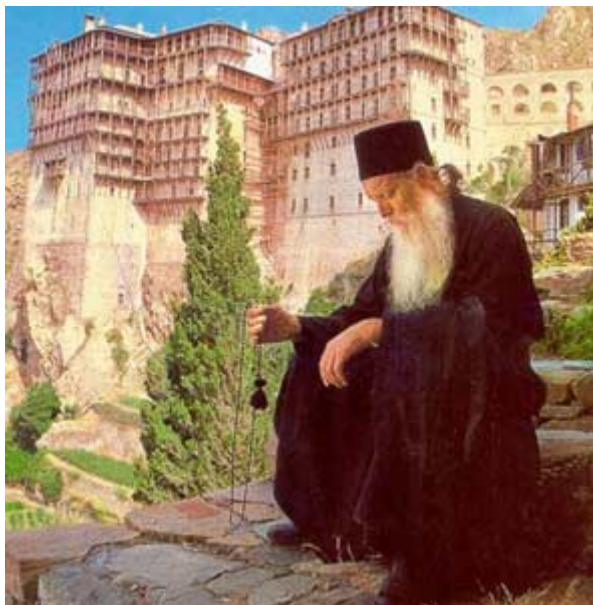
8) **Peace for the soul**, every human being of whatever religion or world view is



Elder Paisios the New, Athonite

born with a sense of conscience which accuses or approves. We can have peace in our soul if our conscience through prayer, good deeds and understanding, acquires peace with God and people.

St. Siluan of Athos thus describes the rewards a monastic receives from God:



Peace for the soul

"**First**, a quiet conscience. **Second**, peace from the Lord for soul and body. **Third**, he loves God, and, contemplating Him, reflects that the Lord loves us. **Fourth**, because of his love for God he loves his neighbor too, as himself. **Fifth**, the soul finds rest in God and contemplates the greatness and compassion of God. **Sixth**, he walks the earth and works with his hands, but his mind is attached to God and in contemplation of Him forgets the earth, for the love of God draws the soul to love the Beloved. **Seventh**, in the thoughts of his soul he feels the grace of God. **Eighth**, he is aware of grace in his heart. **Ninth**, he feels the grace of God in his body, too.

Tenth, because of his love of God, the Kingdom of Heaven is revealed to him, and through the Holy Spirit he knows what our Lord is like"¹⁰.

Monasticism is a perfect way to serve God and to achieve theosis. The Lord says: "If you want to be perfect... come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21), "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life, will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38).

¹ Іван Огієнко (Митрополит Іларіон). Українське Монашество.- Київ: Наша культура і наука, 2002.- р 31-33.

² Saint John Climacus. The Ladder of Divine Ascent. - Boston, Massachusetts: Holy Transfiguration Monastery.- 1991, p. 4.

³ Митрополит Іларіон. Обоження людини – ціль людського життя: Богословська студія.- Вінніпег.- 1954, р.5, 57.

⁴ Іван Огієнко (Митрополит Іларіон). Українське Монашество.- Київ: Наша культура і наука, 2002.- р. 52.

⁵ Saint John Climacus. The Ladder of Divine Ascent.- Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery.- 1991, p. 133.

⁶ Старець Силуан. Життя і поучення.- Мінськ: Православна община.- 1991, с. 366-367.

⁷ Іван Огієнко (Митрополит Іларіон). Українське Монашество.- Київ: Наша культура і наука, 2002.- р. 52.

⁸ Saint John Climacus. The Ladder of Divine Ascent.- Jordanville, Holy Trinity Monastery, 1963.- р. 7.

⁹ Αναγνωστοπουλος Κ. Στεφανος. Εμπειριες κατα την Θεια Λειτουργια.- Πειρεας, 2003.- σ. 277-279.

¹⁰ St. Siluan the Athonite. Archimandrite Sofrony.-New-York: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1999.- p. 501.