

(I warn all of you in advance that this is going to be quite a long posting, but the topic is a very serious one and cannot be discussed superficially or in just a few words. FN)

Is There Such a Thing As “Monastic Divorce”?

No; the concept is totally foreign to the whole ethos of the Orthodox Church.

On Aug. 23, Theophan quoted one of my messages and then posed a question.

I had written:

>We likewise know the fathers who have left. In fact, no one knows  
>them better than we do, and no one loves them more than we do, and  
>no one grieves over them more than we do. But we love them for  
eternity,  
>and not for this vain world only; therefore we pray that they repent  
>and return to the monastic discipline which they had embraced and  
>wherein alone is found salvation for them. May God grant that it come  
>to pass before the end. Amen.  
> Fr. Nicholas HTM

Theophan asked:

>Dear Fr Nicholas,  
>Are you saying that once a person has taken monastic vows, if they  
>leave the monastic state, there is no way at all that they  
>may be saved? Is this the teaching of the Church?  
>After all, we do not say that all Divorcees will be damned.  
>Theophan

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Our good God is all powerful and totally free to act in any way He sees fit. No laws or necessity can ever constrain Him in any way whatsoever. He can save a man by any means He so wishes. But for us mortals He has laid down ordinances, and a way and path to salvation; and we disobey those ordinances or take another path at our own peril. We must do as He has commanded us. If He deigns to save us in spite of ourselves, then that is His great lovingkindness, but we must do our part.

The whole history of the Church — the Old Testament legislation, the New Testament dispensation, the Lives of the Saints — declare to us constantly that our God is a jealous and zealous God, One Who does not

relinquish that which has been consecrated and dedicated unto Him. Recall the punishment meted out to Ananias and Sapphira for attempting to deceive the Apostles (Acts 5: 1-11). And how many times in the lives of the saints do we read of the woes a person has brought upon himself for failing to fulfill a pledge or complete a pilgrimage to a saint's shrine? If such be the case with material things, then how much more so concerning a living temple dedicated to God in the tonsure service.

Some people seek to draw an analogy with divorce. Ah, but there is one enormous difference here. In mortal marriage the two partners are both finite, fallen, sinful, human beings. Thus, if the marriage collapses, both parties can be considered to be at fault to a greater or lesser degree. But in monasticism, where the other party is our infinite, immortal, and perfect God, only the sinful monastic is at fault if the relationship "fails". And thus, in monasticism, the solution is not to "terminate the relationship" — for how can one go away from God and yet live? — but rather, to repent, to return to the Father, and to continue to struggle with one's passions. To abandon monasticism and unite oneself to a mortal spouse would be tantamount to committing adultery against God. It's telling the King of kings that you wish to be excused from His banquet, because you have more pressing business to tend to. But what does King David cry out to us?

Psalm 84: 10 "For better is one day in Thy courts than thousands elsewhere. I have chosen rather to be an outcast in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of sinners."

And is it truly possible to grow "weary" of God? If so, then why should one even seek to reach the Kingdom of God at all?

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Psalm 21: 25 "From Thee is my praise; in the great Church will I confess Thee; my vows will I pay before them that fear Thee."

Ps. 49: 15 "Sacrifice unto God a sacrifice of praise, and pay unto the Most High thy vows."

Ps. 60: 8 "So will I chant unto Thy name unto the ages, that I may pay my vows from day to day."

Ps. 65: 13 "I will go into Thy house with a whole-burnt offering, to Thee will I pay the vows which my lips pronounced, and which my mouth had spoken in mine affliction."

Ps: 75: 10 "Make your vows and pay them to the Lord our God."

Ps: 115: 3-9 “What shall I render unto the Lord for all that He hath rendered unto me? I will take the cup of salvation , and I will call upon the name of the Lord. My vows unto the Lord will I pay in the presence of all His people... in the courts of the house of the Lord, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.”

Ecclesiastes 5: 2-7

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. **\*\*Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.\*\*** Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.

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Before proceeding further, we would like to dispel two widely held misconceptions about the monastic calling.

1) Monasticism is **\*not\*** a rank or office bestowed upon someone by the Church; rather, it is a personal covenant made by an individual directly with God. The Church witnesses to this pledge and blesses it.

2) It therefore follows that the Church **\*cannot\*** revoke someone’s monastic commitment — neither as a form of punishment, nor at the request of the monk himself. For serious transgressions a hieromonk can be deposed from the priesthood; released from his monastic vows he cannot be. Just as one cannot “unbaptize” an Orthodox Christian, so too, one cannot “laicize” a monk. On that Dread Day an apostate will not be judged as a heathen, nor will a renegade monk be judged as a layman.

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(See Robinson, below. FN):

In the early days of monasticism there was but one grade of monks, one, tonsure, and one habit. Explicit vows are not of the essence of Orthodox monasticism. The primitive monk, before the formal institution of monasticism by Saint Anthony the Great, was one who had turned his

back upon the world, and had entered upon the narrow way of the ascetical life, but without formal vows, or tonsure, or habit. His profession was merely a tacit profession of his intention to lead the ascetical life; but in his own conscience the tacit profession was intended to mean for himself that, for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake, he had put his hand to the plough, and was morally bound to persevere to the end of his life. And so for centuries after the institution of monasticism, and even in coenobitic monasteries, formal vows were unknown. Saint Pachomius the Great's monks took no formal vows, and Saint Basil the Great did not contemplate the formal taking of vows by his monks, though they were to regard themselves as under a strict moral obligation to persevere in the monastic calling. Palladius in the Prologue of the Lausiaca History (c. 420) even deprecated vows as subjecting the free will to the binding obligation of an oath. The mere adopting of a coarse dress and entering into the wilderness for the purpose of practicing asceticism, or the taking of the habit of monks by permission of the hegumen of a coenobium, constituted a moral obligation to continue in the monastic life to the end, according to general custom; and public opinion regarded it as a tacit profession of life-long asceticism.

The Lives of the Saints furnish us with many such examples: St. Anthony the Great, St. Paul the Simple, St. Mary of Egypt, St. John the Russian, etc. When St. Paul came to live with St. Anthony, he stayed with him some time, and then one day St. Anthony simply announced to him: "Now you are a monk and must live apart on your own." No service, no tonsure, no vows.

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The following study in English of Orthodox monasticism contains much valuable information:

“MONASTICISM IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES”

Being An Introduction To The Study Of Modern Hellenic And Slavonic Monachism And The Orthodox Profession Rites, Together With A Greek Dissertation On The Monastic Habit, Done Into English, With Notes,

By N. F. Robinson  
London, England; Milwaukee USA 1916

Reprinted 1964  
American Review of Eastern Orthodoxy, New York USA

“A Dissertation On The Monastic Habit”

By Saint Nicodemus Hagiorites

(Nicodemus the Hagiorite, or Monk of the Holy Mountain of Athos, was born in 1789 A.D., and died in 1809 A. D. His description of the Monastic Habit, of which the following is a translation, is to be found in his "Exomologetarion", edited and published by N.. Michalopoulos in Athens in 1900, from the latest Venice edition, Part II, pp. 156-168.)

In this dissertation by St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, the Saint makes four major points:

- 1) As Baptism is one and single so also is the Schema of monks; the Great Schema is the only true Schema.
- 2) The Little Schema is a betrothal and a preface of the Great Schema; and it was devised by certain later Fathers on account of the infirmity (or even indifference) of men.
- 3) All who have renounced the world and entered upon the monastic life are bound, necessarily, either sooner or later, to receive without fail the great and perfect Schema.
- 4) As many as come to be Rassophores are no longer able to lay aside the Rasson, and to marry.

[Excerpts from the Saint's dissertation:]

"Concerning The Schema Of Monks And Their Garments"  
(pp. 129-136)

The Schema of Monks is from above; and at first it was one and single, viz., the Great Schema. And as many as became Monks after the Canonical probation, became at once Megaloschemoi by one act, and not by two or three. Therefore St. Theodore of Studium, a standard authority on such matters, gives the following direction to the Hegumen in his Testament, which says: "Thou shalt not give to anyone that which they call a Little Schema, viz., that of the Stavrophore; and afterwards, the great Schema. For the Schema is one, like as also is Baptism; just as also the Holy Fathers employed it." But if certain persons urge that the prayer that is found printed along with the Catecheses of this St. Theodore, which contains the statement that the composer of the prayer received the Little Schema, and afterwards the Great Schema, and if they maintain that this prayer was a composition of this same St. Theodore, then we say in reply that this contention of theirs is erroneous; for the prayer is not St. Theodore's, but the work of a certain Theodosius; and this is evident from the prayer itself, which

was compiled from divers sources. Besides, that great luminary of Thessalonica, Gregory of Palamas, also, in a letter to the Monk Paul Asanes, says: "This is the great monastic Schema; but of a Little Schema for Monks the Fathers knew nothing. Certain persons, however, in subsequent times appear to have divided the Schema into two. Nevertheless, since they give the same questions and answers, and the same promises, for the Little Schema as for the Great, they reestablish it again as one Schema."

In agreement with these authorities the holy Simeon of Thessalonica, also, says that

\*\*\*"as Baptism is one and single so also is the Schema of Monks\*\*"; for the Little Schema is a betrothal and a preface of the Great Schema; and it was devised by certain later Fathers on account of the infirmity (or even indifference) of men". And the Euchologion also, and Balsamon as well, speak of the Little Schema of the Stavrophores as a betrothal of the Great Schema. And Job, surnamed the Sinner (in his treatise on the Sacraments, in the Syntagma of Chrysanthus of Jerusalem) mentions also a third Schema, when he says: "The monastic Schema advances from the less to the more perfect; from that of the Microschemos and Rassophore, so-called, to the Holy Schema of the Tonsure; and from this again to the Great Angelical Schema, as it is called." And note here, that this author alone calls the Schema of the Rassophore a Little Schema; for all others speak of the Schema of the Stavrophore as a Little Schema. And similarly, also, the Euchologion divides into three the Offices of the Schema; viz., into the Office of the Rassophore, the Office of the Microschemos, and the Office of the Megaloschemos.

\*\*\*It follows, then, from what has been said, that as many as come to be Rassophores are no longer able to lay aside the Rasson, and to marry? \*\*Of course not! For how shall they dare to do this at a time when they have shorn the hairs of their head? For this signifies that they have put out of the head every worldly thought, and have consecrated their life to God. How! when they have put on with a blessing the monastic Rasson, and a Kamilavkion, and have changed their name; and when two prayers have been said over them by the Priest in which the Priest thanks God because He has rescued them from the worldly life and has called them to the solemn profession of Monks; and in which he entreats God to receive them under His saving yoke?\*\*\* And if he who has only pledged himself by word to become a Monk, without putting on the Rasson with prayer, may not break his promise, as we have said in the Instruction to the Confessor, Chap. ix., with how much less excuse can he break it who has put on the Rasson with prayer? It is indeed on this account that \*\*Balsamon says that he who wear the Rasson has no longer the option of being a layman\*\*, but should be compelled to carry out his original intention; namely, to become a

perfect Monk. But if he be not willing, he will have to be punished, as the Laws enjoin.

And again the Microschemoi, or Stavrophores — they, too, have fallen into a strait betwixt two. For, on the one hand, they are compelled to maintain the strictness of behaviour that is fitting in the Megaloschemoi, inasmuch as they have made to God the very same promises that are made by the Megaloschemoi, as St. Gregory has stated above; and they have been clothed also with the very same monastic garments (except a few); and they have been deemed worthy also of the same prayers (all but three). Therefore it is unbecoming in them to make lame excuses, saying that, forsooth, they are not Megaloschemoi; and that therefore they are under no obligation to maintain the strict behaviour of Monks. This is a deceit of the devil.

And then again, on the other hand, the Microschemoi are under the obligation of hastening to receive the great Schema, the full and perfect one; that is to say, to become Megaloschemoi, and not to fail in this and put off the time, for fear lest death should overtake them, and they should be found in the presence of God imperfect — that is to say, not perfect Monks. Therefore as the betrothal, when compared with the marriage, is imperfect; so also the Little Schema of the Stavrophores, being only like a betrothal in comparison with the Great Schema, is likewise imperfect; and consequently they who wear it are imperfect Monks. And for this reason the holy Simeon of Thessalonica directs, that "they who are too imperfect for the Schema should be made perfect, lest they die imperfect, without the perfect perfecting of the Schema; ... and that as he who is not baptized is not a Christian, so also he who is not made ready for the Schema — that is to say, he who has not become a Megaloschemos — is not a Monk".

What then? What ignorance is this? Are the Stavrophores to be required to maintain the same behaviour and perform the same works as the Megaloschemoi, in virtue of the same promises which they made to God, and afterwards not to become Megaloschemoi? Are they to endure the pains only, and to fall short of the reward? Are they to grow old in the monastic life, while they themselves are not altogether Monks? Are they to contend in the same arena, in the same conflict, and afterwards not to be accounted worthy to receive the same crown? And can there be found a greater misfortune? Or can there be found anything more ridiculous? Is anybody to behold one who has spent twenty, or even thirty, years in the Schema of the Stavrophore afterwards come to receive the Great Schema and to be asked, "Why hast thou come, Brother?" and to answer, "I am desirous of the life of asceticism, Reverend Father." Is such an one to be told that he is to be unclothed as though he were a secular? Is he to be questioned like a secular, and

to answer like a secular?

But diverse answers are given by the Monks of the present day called Stavrophores, when anyone asks them why they do not become Megaloschemoi. Some reply, that the Great Schema is a "dreadful" and an "Angelical" thing. And others, that they are waiting until their old age to become Megaloschemoi. Others still, finding one pretext or another for their negligence, abandon the idea — and these form the majority — and never receive the Great Schema. And so, because of these irrational motives, out of the many thousands of Monks that are to be found in the world only a certain small proportion are Megaloschemoi when they come to die. And these few received the Great Schema, either because they had grown quite old, or because their life was endangered by a deadly illness, or from some other compelling circumstance. But hardly ever have they received it when they were in sound health, and young, and of their entire free-will, quite apart from some compelling circumstance. And all the rest when they come to die are still Stavrophores; that is to say, imperfect Monks, only betrothed to Christ, but not yet wedded to Him. And, indeed, in this respect they bear a strong resemblance to those early Christians, who finding lame pretexts like these kept putting off the time, and remained unbaptized. Consequently very many of them died while still catechumens and unbaptized. That is the reason why St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian (of Nazianzus), St. Gregory of Nyssa, and the rest of the holy Fathers made use of such strong exhortatory language about Baptism; by means of which they incited persons not to defer the time of Baptism, but to be baptized while they were still young and in good health, that they might be enabled to exercise the gift of grace which they would receive in Baptism.

Such exhortatory words would one need to use to-day also, to incite the Monks of the present age to the receiving of the second Baptism, that is to say, the great and perfect Schema. Nevertheless we, omitting a lengthy discourse, speak only these few encouraging words to them.

“All who have renounced the world and entered upon the monastic life are bound, necessarily, either sooner or later, to receive without fail the great and perfect Schema\*\*; for if they receive it not, they are no Monks, as it has been shewn above, since the Schema is one, just like Baptism. And this true ideal of the monastic life is typified, and constituted, and fulfilled by means of the Great Schema. And, moreover, \*\*the Great Schema is the only true Schema” as has already been demonstrated. Therefore a far juster, sounder and better view of the matter will make Monks, after a longer or shorter term of probation, become Megaloschemoi by a single act, instead of first becoming Microschemoi — as, indeed, the more judicious are wont to do. One,

therefore, they prove the Schema of Monks to be, in a very practical way, by the one and only act itself — one and monastic, as the Tradition of the holy Fathers inculcates. And there is this further consideration, that they who receive the great Schema when they are young and in vigorous health have it in their power to exercise the special gift which they then received; and consequently to multiply greatly, and to increase, their Lord's talent — that spiritual power which the divine Schema, after the manner of a sacrament, has conferred upon their souls — in the conflicts they are to wage against devils in gaining the victory over their passions, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit which they will receive.

But if anyone should contend that Athanasius of Mount Athos, and Dunale the Confessor, and others received first the Little Schema and afterwards the Great Schema, on different occasions; then we reply, the exceptional cases did not become a law of the Church according to Gregory the Theologian (Sermon on the Epiphany); and what contravenes the Canons has no weight as a pattern. For those who, on becoming Megaloschemoi at some subsequent period, reiterate the questions and answers, and the prayers, and the articles of apparel belonging to the Schema, appear to be reiterating also the one Schema of Monks — a thing which is almost as much out of place as it would be if someone should reiterate the one Holy Baptism.

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Robinson continues his discussion of monasticism in the Orthodox Church:

The Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451, decreed (Can. xvi) that Monks should not contract marriage; and that if they did so, they were to be excommunicated.

In accordance with traditional custom no dispensation from the Monastic Vows is ever given in the Greek Church, though a Monk may have his beard cut off, be deprived of his Habit, and be dismissed from his Monastery, on account of immorality. *But expulsion from a Monastery is not a dispensation from the Monastic Vows.*

The Russian Church, in the past century [1800s], has departed from the custom of never granting a dispensation, though this change has not met with the general approval of Orthodox canonists. The general canonical practice held good in Russia until the year 1823, that no Monk should be allowed to leave his Monastery and marry. In that year the Superior of a Monastery in the Eparchy of Ekaterinoslav, the Archimandrite Joasaph Lebidinsky, applied to the Holy Synod of Russia for permission

to retire from the Monastic estate. After long consultation in the Synod and in the Council of State his petition was granted. A precedent was thus established in the Russian Church by this test case.

Dr. Nikodemus Milasch, late Bishop of Zara, in Dalmatia, who records the case in his Russian work on the Canon Law of the Eastern Church, was so dissatisfied with the decision that he sought from the best Orthodox canonists an expression of their opinion as to whether a dispensation from the Monastic Vows is in accordance with the fundamental teaching of the Eastern Church on the question. From the answers he received it was evident to him that those whom he had consulted did not feel that they could justify the practice.

In the rare instances in the Russian Church in which a dispensation has been granted it has carried with it not merely a permission to marry, but also an absolute degradation from Ecclesiastical orders, in the case of a Hieromonk, that is, a Monk in orders. The Monk receiving the dispensation is laicized, and returns to the dress and life of a layman.

[Please note that in the above case, Archimandrite Joasaph was **not** a monk of the Great Schema. And anyway, a single incident in 1823 does **not** serve as a precedent for the Church, despite what Robinson may think. Such an aberration cannot annul or overturn so many centuries of the Church's holy tradition and practices. FN]

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Some Russian monasteries have the custom to give a novice a simple blessing to wear the rasson and cowl. But in such cases his hair is not tonsured and his name is not changed, thus he remains a novice.

We do not have this practice at Holy Transfiguration Monastery: here a Rassophore is one who has been tonsured and has been given a new name, i.e., he is a monk for life.

A Rassophore monk makes no public vows, but then, the very fact that a person presents himself before the holy altar and allows himself to be tonsured is, in itself, a promise before God and all the faithful that he will remain in the monastic estate. God has no need of words; He sees the heart of a man and his volition. Any type of solemn tonsure service is rather in order to impress upon the new monk and upon the faithful the seriousness of the step he has taken.

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Here are the texts of the two prayers read over a Rassophore monk, as

mentioned by St. Nicodemus in his “Dissertation”, above:

>From the Tonsure Service for a Rassophore Monk:

Then the following Two Prayers:

Deacon: Let us pray to the Lord.

Choir: Lord, have mercy.

We give Thee thanks, O Lord our God, Who according to Thy great mercy \*\*hast delivered Thy servant (handmaid) N., out of the vain life of the world, and hast called him (her) to this sacred vocation\*\*. Vouchsafe that he (she) live worthily in this angelic estate, and preserve him (her) from the snares of the devil, and keep his (her) soul and body pure \*\*even unto death,\*\* and deem him (her) worthy to become a holy temple of Thine. Keep him (her) ever mindful of Thee and grant him (her) the humility of Thy commandments, and love and meekness; by the intercessions of our most holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, and of all Thy Saints. Amen.

Deacon: Let us pray to the Lord.

Choir: Lord, have mercy.

Unto Thy saving yoke, O Master, receive Thy servant (handmaid), N., and deem him (her) worthy to be numbered in the flock of Thine elect; clothe him (her) with the garment of sanctification; with sobriety gird his (her) loins; show him (her) forth as a champion in all manner of temperance; vouchsafe that in him (her) and in us there may abide a full measure of Thy spiritual gifts; by the intercessions of our most holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, and of all Thy Saints. Amen.

Then he cuts his (her) hair cross-wise, saying:

In the Name of the Father. [Choir]: Amen.

And of the Son. [Choir]: Amen.

And of the Holy Spirit. [Choir]: Amen.

And he clothes him (her) with the tunic and the kalymmavchion, adding nothing.

And then the Dismissal.

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Unless one has been present at a tonsure service, or read the text, one has no idea of the very solemn, even terrifying, vows that a monk of the Great Schema has made.

PLEASE read these excerpts from the service attentively.

>From the Order of the Great and Angelic Schema:

(The garments of the person who is to receive the holy Schema are brought overnight into the holy Sanctuary, and are laid in the thalassidion of the Holy Table.)

(In the Liturgy, when the Entrance with the Gospel takes place, he that is about to receive the holy Schema puts off the covering from his head and the shoes from his feet, and making three prostrations, he stands upright.)

Then we chant the following.

Thy fatherly arms do Thou open to me quickly, for like the prodigal have I wasted my whole life. O Saviour, have regard to the unfailing wealth of Thy compassions, \* and do not disdain a heart now impoverished. For, to Thee, O Lord, do I cry out in compunction: O Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee.

The Priest:

Question: Why hast thou come hither, Brother (Sister), falling down before the holy Altar and this holy Assembly?

Answer: I am desirous of the life of asceticism, Reverend Father.

Question: Dost thou desire to be deemed worthy of the Angelic Schema and to be ranked in the choir of the Monastics?

Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.

The Priest:

Truly a good and blessed work hast thou chosen; but only if thou dost also accomplish it. For good works are obtained by labour, and achieved with pain.

Question: Of thine own willing mind comest thou unto the Lord?

Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.

Question: Not by any necessity or constraint?

Answer: No, Reverend Father.

Question: Dost thou renounce the world, and the things that are in the world, according to the commandment of the Lord?

Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.

Question: Wilt thou abide in the Monastery and in the ascetic life **until thy last breath**?

Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.

Question: Wilt thou unto death observe obedience to the Superior and to all the Brotherhood (Sisterhood) in Christ?

Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.

Question: Wilt thou endure all the affliction and poverty belonging to the monastic life, for the sake of the Kingdom of the Heavens?

Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.

Question: Wilt thou keep thyself in virginity, sobriety and piety?

Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.

Then the Priest gives the Instruction:

*Behold, Child, what manner of promises thou art giving to Christ the Master; for Angels are present invisibly inscribing this thy profession, for which also thou art to be held accountable at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [!]*

I am explaining, therefore, unto thee this most perfect life, wherein, by similitude, the Lord's manner of life is exemplified, testifying what things thou oughtest to embrace, and what things it is necessary to avoid. For the renunciation is nought else, as concerning him that uttereth it, than a promise of a cross and of a death. Know, then, that from the present day thou art crucified and art dead to the world by reason of the entire renunciation; for thou art renouncing parents, brethren, wife, children, near kindred, companionships, friends, occupations, the hubub of the world, cares, possessions, belongings, and empty and vain pleasures and glory; and thou art abjuring, not only the aforementioned things, but even thine own life also, according to the voice of the Lord, which saith: Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. If, therefore, thou hast truly chosen to follow Him, and if thou dost ardently desire to be called, not falsely, His disciple, be prepared from this present time — not for repose, nor for freedom from care, nor for pleasures, nor for any other of the pleasing and delightful things upon earth — but for spiritual struggles, for continence of the flesh, for cleansing of the soul, for complete poverty, for commendable mourning, for all the sorrowful and painful things of the joy-giving life in God; for thou hast to hunger, and to thirst, and to be naked, and to suffer reproach and ridicule, to be both insulted and persecuted, and to become a prey to many other sorrowful things, whereby the life in God is distinguished. And when thou hast suffered all these things, Rejoice, it is said, for great is thy reward in the Heavens. With joy, then, rejoice, and exult with exultation; for today the Lord God hath chosen thee and set thee apart from the life in the world; and He hath placed thee as before His face, in the estate of the Monastic order, in the army of the angel-like life, in the loftiness of the imitation of

the heavenly citizenship; to adore Him after the manner of the Angels, to serve Him wholly, to think on those things that are above, and to seek after them. For our conversation, according to the Apostle, is in the Heavens. Oh, how great is this new calling! Oh, how great is the gift of this mystery!

“A second Baptism art thou receiving today,” Brother (Sister), in the abundance of the gifts of God, the Friend of man; and thou art cleansed from thy sins, and art becoming a son (daughter) of light; and Christ our God Himself rejoiceth together with His holy Angels over thy repentance, sacrificing for thee the fatted calf. Therefore, walk worthily of thy calling, rid thyself of the attachment to vanities, hate the desire that draweth thee to things below, turn thy whole desire towards the things of Heaven; “in no wise turn back to the things behind, lest thou become a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife, or like a dog returning to his own vomit, and the word of the Lord be fulfilled in thee: No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

“For thou art in no small danger, seeing thou hast promised to observe all the aforementioned things, of thinking lightly hereafter of thy promise;\*\* and either of going back again to thy former life, or of separating thyself from the Father and Brethren (Mother and Sisters) who are thy fellow ascetics; or else, remaining, of spending thy days disorderly.”

“For thou shalt have accounts to render heavier than before, at the dread and unerring tribunal of Christ, in proportion as thou art now rejoicing in greater grace. And better would it be, according to the saying, not to vow, than to vow and not to pay.”

And again, think not that during the preceding time of thy sojourn here thou hast sufficiently fought against the invisible forces of the enemy; but know that the rather from this time forward greater struggles yet will come upon thee in the conflict against him. But he will in no wise prevail against thee, if he find thee hedged about both by a strong faith in, and a love for, Him that leadeth thee; and also by uprightness for all obedience and humility. For this cause, put far away from thee unwillingness to listen, gainsaying, pride, strife, jealousy, envy, anger, clamour, blasphemy, stealthy eating, boldness, particular friendships, talkativeness, quarrelling, grumbling, slander, private acquisition of some miserable thing, and all other kinds of wickedness, by reason whereof the wrath of God cometh on them that do such things, and the corrupter of souls beginneth to take root in them. But rather, instead of these procure for thyself the things that are becoming to Saints: brotherly love, quietness, gentleness, reverence,

meditation on the divine sayings, reading, keeping the heart from unclean thoughts, working according to the ability, abstinence, endurance until death, for which cause thou didst first make thy covenant with thy Father, and afterwards didst make a declaration of the secrets of thy heart, in the manner that the Holy Scriptures relate; for, They were baptized, they say, confessing their sins.

*Question: Dost thou thus acknowledge all these things, in the hope of the power of God; and dost thou agree to hold fast to these promises unto the end of thy life, by the grace of Christ?*

*Answer: Yes, God helping me, Reverend Father.*

Then the Priest says the following Prayer:

Therefore, may the all-compassionate and greatly-merciful God, Who openeth up the bowels of His untraceable goodness unto every one that cometh unto Him with longing and fervent love; Who saith: A woman shall forget the fruit of her womb, before ever I shall forget thee; Who knoweth thy desire, and to thy good purpose doth lend His own strength for the fulfilment of His commandments; may He receive, embrace, and shield thee, and become unto thee a strong rampart against the face of the enemy, a rock of endurance, a source of consolation, a bestower of perseverance, a provider of courage, and a fellow combatant in valour; present with thee when thou liest down, and when thou risest up, sweetening and gladdening thy heart with the consolation of His Holy Spirit, and deeming thee worthy of the lot of our holy and righteous Fathers Anthony, Euthymius, Sabbas, and those with them; [but in the case of Nuns: of the holy first-martyr Thecla, Eupraxia, Olympias, and those with them]; with whom thou also shalt inherit the Kingdom of the Heavens, in Christ Jesus our Lord; to Whom be glory, and power, and sovereignty, and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Choir: Amen.

The Priest makes the sign of the Cross thrice upon the head of the person to whom the Instruction has been given; and after the signing, he turns towards the East and says:

Let us pray to the Lord.

O Eternal Being, Almighty Master, Most High King of glory, Who with Thy living and enhyposstatic Word, and with the Spirit of truth Who proceedeth from Thee, rulest over all creation, both visible and invisible; O God, Who sittest upon the Cherubim, and Who art unceasingly praised by the thrice-holy cry of the Seraphim, and before Whom stand thousand thousands, and ten-thousands times ten-thousands of holy Angels and hosts of Archangels: Thou art the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; Who art entreated by the holy Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, and by all Thy heavenly Church of the first-born in Jerusalem; look down with a merciful eye upon the

humility of thy servant (handmaid) N., who hath agreed and professed before many witnesses. Unite to the gift of adoption and Thy Kingdom given to him (her) by his forebears by means of holy Baptism, this monastic and Angel-like profession unshakeable, founded upon the sharp and spiritual rock of faith in Thee. Strengthen him (her) in the power of Thy might, and clothe him (her) with the full-armour of Thy Holy Spirit; for his (her) struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the authorities, against the rulers of the world of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness. Gird his (her) loins with the power of truth, and clothe him (her) with the breastplate of righteousness and exultation, and put shoes on his (her) feet in preparation of the Gospel of peace. Instruct him (her) to take up the shield of faith, wherewith he (she) shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one; and to receive the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is Thy word, helping him (her) in the groanings of his (her) heart which cannot be uttered. Make him (her) to be numbered with Thine elect, that he (she) may become a vessel of Thy choosing, a son (daughter) and inheritor of Thy Kingdom, a son (daughter) of light and of the day, of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption. Make him (her) a harmonious instrument, a delightful psaltery of the Holy Spirit; so that henceforth, having progressively put off the old man, corrupted by the seductive deceit of the multiform serpent, he (she) may be clothed with the new Adam, which after God is created in holiness and righteousness. Strengthen him (her) to bear at all times in his (her) body the marks and the Cross of Jesus by which the world is crucified unto him (her), and he (she) unto the world. Form in him (her) the practising of true virtue, and not the pleasing of men or self-pleasing, in patience reverence, and in reverence brotherly love and obedience. Grant unto him (her), whether keeping vigil, working, lying down, or rising up, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, after the manner of Angels, to behold Thee as in a mirror with a pure heart, and to worship Thee, the only living and true God, to his (her) ineffable joy. For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the dominion; and to Thee are due all glory, honour, and worship, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Choir: Amen.

Another Prayer. Let us pray to the Lord.

O holy Lord of hosts, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, bless Thy servant (handmaid), N., whom Thou hast called to Thy spiritual bride-chamber, and make him (her) worthy to be Thy holy servant (handmaid). Grant unto him (her) wisdom, and pour out upon him (her) the grace and understanding of Thy guiding Spirit; strengthen him (her) for the conflict against the spiritual enemy; by Thy mighty power put down the uprisings of the flesh; grant unto him (her) to be pleasing to

Thee in unceasing praise and glorification, in fitting hymns, in acceptable prayers, in right resolution, in a lowly heart, in the conduct of life, and in the exercise of meekness and truthfulness. Vouchsafe that he (she) please Thee in meekness, in love, in perfectness, in understanding, in courage; and to offer unto Thee hymns and glorifications and prayers for an odour of sweet fragrance. Perfect his (her) life in holiness and righteousness; so that, having a continuous and pure union with Thee, he (she) may be accounted worthy of Thy heavenly Kingdom; by the grace and compassions and love for man of Thine only-begotten Son, with Whom Thou art blessed, together with Thine all-holy, and good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.  
Choir: Amen.

Then the Priest, extending his hand towards the holy Gospel, says:  
*Lo, Christ is here present invisibly. See that no one is compelling thee to come to this Schema. See that thou art desiring of set purpose the betrothal of the great and Angelic Schema.*  
*Answer: Yes, Reverend Father, of set purpose. [!]*

And after the assurance has been given, the Priest says to him (her):  
Take the scissors and give them to me. (Thrice)  
[This demonstrates his free will and desire to be tonsured. FN]

And when he (she) has given the scissors to the Abbot (Abbess), the Priest says to him (her):  
*Lo, from the hand of Christ thou receivest them.*  
*And see to Whom thou approachest, to Whom Thou dost promise, and whom thou dost renounce. [!]*

And the Priest, taking the scissors from the hand of the Abbot (Abbess), says:  
Blessed is God, Who willeth that all men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth, Who is blessed to the ages of ages.

Then he cutteth his (her) hair crosswise, saying thus:  
Our Brother (Sister), N., is tonsured in the hair of his (her) head, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Let us say for him (her) the Lord, have mercy.  
And the Lord, have mercy is sung by the Brethren (Sisters), thrice.

Then the Priest clothes him (her) with the Himation [zostikon], saying:  
Our Brother (Sister), N., is clothed with the tunic of righteousness and gladness, of the great and Angelic Schema, in the Name of the Father. . . etc.  
Let us say, etc.

Then the Pallion [schema], saying:

Our Brother (Sister), N., receiveth the pallion of the great and Angelic Schema, for a robe of incorruption and modesty, in the Name of the Father. . . etc.

Let us say, etc.

Then the Analavos [polystavrion], saying:

Our Brother (Sister), N., receiveth the analavos, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, taking up his (her) cross upon his (her) shoulders, and following Christ the Master.

Let us say, etc.

Then the Cowl [Koukoulion], saying:

Our Brother (Sister), N., is clothed with the cowl of guilelessness, for a helmet of the hope of salvation, in the Name of the Father. . . etc.

Let us say, etc.

Then the Girdle [belt], saying:

Our Brother (Sister), N., is girded about his (her) loins with the power of truth, in the Name of the Father. . . etc.

Let us say, etc.

Then the Sandals, saying:

Our Brother (Sister), N., is shod with the sandals in preparation for the Gospel of peace, in the Name of the Father. . . etc.

Let us say, etc.

(Here is given the Rasson or Mantia or both.)

Our Brother (Sister), N., hath received the great and Angelic Schema, in the Name of the Father. . . etc.

Let us say, etc.

While he (she) is being clothed, the following troparia are chanted.

Fourth Tone

Put on the tunic of salvation, gird yourselves with the girdle of chastity, receive the sign of the Cross, arm your noetic feet with the weapons of abstinence, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

My soul shall rejoice in the Lord; for He hath put on me the garment of salvation, and with the tunic of gladness hath He clothed me. He hath put upon me a crown as upon a bridegroom, and as a bride hath He adorned me with an ornament.

But the Prayers which the Priest says are these:

Let us pray to the Lord.

O Lord our God, Who art faithful in Thy promises, and immutable in Thy gifts of grace, ineffable in Thy love for man; Who hast called Thy

creature with a holy calling, and hast led Thy servant (handmaid), N., into Thy spiritual way of life: Grant unto him (her) a becoming course of life, a conduct virtuous and irreproachable; so that, abiding in holiness, he (she) may preserve spotless the Schema which by Thy power he (she) hath put on: the tunic, being covered with righteousness; and with the girdle, bearing about in himself (herself) the mortification of the body and chastity; and with the cowl, putting on the helmet of salvation; and with the analavos, being adorned with the Cross and with faith; and with the cloak, being shielded with a garment of incorruption; and with the sandals, that he (she) may walk in the way of peace and salvation, so as to become terrible to the adversaries, unassailable to the enemies, a stranger to all voluptuousness and shameful desire; trained in obedience, practising abstinence, conforming to the rule of asceticism, so that in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs he (she) may acclaim Thine all-honoured and majestic Name; following in the footsteps of the great Prophet Elias, and of Saint John the Forerunner and Baptist; that he (she), having attained the measure of perfection, may finish the course, may keep the Faith, and put on the incorruption of the Angels, and be numbered with Thy holy flock and obtain a position at Thy right hand, and hear the blessed voice: Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; whereof do Thou, O God, deem us also worthy to become the heirs by Thy goodness. For a God of mercy, compassions, and love for man art Thou, and to Thee do we send up glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Priest: Peace be unto all.

Choir: And to thy spirit.

Deacon: Let us bow our heads unto the Lord.

Choir: To Thee, O Lord.

O Lord our God, lead Thy servant (handmaid), N., into Thy spiritual court, and number him (her) together with Thy rational flock. Cleanse his (her) mind from carnal desires and the vain deceit of this life; and grant unto him (her) to unceasingly keep in remembrance the good things that are laid up for them that love Thee and crucify themselves to this life for the sake of Thy Kingdom.

For Thou art the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and to Thee do we send up glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Deacon: For our Brother (Sister), N., and for his protection and help from God, let us pray to the Lord.

For his (her) accomplishing without blame, condemnation, or hindrance the purpose of the monastic Schema, let us pray to the Lord.

For his deliverance from every worldly desire and attachment to kindred

according to the flesh, let us pray to the Lord.

For the remission of his (her) sins, and for the forgiveness of his (her) transgressions, and that he (she) may be exalted above the thoughts of this world, let us pray to the Lord.

For his (her) living this life in all piety, reverence and modesty, let us pray to the Lord.

For his (her) putting off of the old man, and putting on of the new man which is created after God, let us pray to the Lord.

For his (her) deliverance and ours from all tribulation, wrath, danger and necessity, let us pray to the Lord.

Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Thy grace.

Choir: Amen.

Instead of the Trisagion:

All ye that in Christ have been baptized, Christ have ye put on.

Alleluia.

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How any monastic who has voluntarily presented himself for tonsure, given these awesome vows, and heard these fearful admonitions, can later claim that he did not understand what he was doing, or that he has simply changed his mind, is beyond us! We shudder for those who dare to say such things, and for the hierarchs who thought so lightly of (supposedly) releasing these monks from their life-long vows to God and allowing them to marry.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Hebrews 10: 31.

This world passes away in the twinkling of an eye, and our lives come to their end. Each of us will have to answer for the promises we made at baptism, and at our tonsure. And what good will it do a monk then to say that he was “well adjusted and happily married” in this fleeting life?!

Having read all of the above, perhaps now you will understand what I wrote earlier:

“We likewise know the fathers who have left. In fact, no one knows them better than we do, and no one loves them more than we do, and no one grieves over them more than we do. But we love them for eternity, and not for this vain world only; therefore we pray that they repent and return to the monastic discipline which they had embraced and wherein alone is found salvation for them. May God grant that it come to pass before the end. Amen”

Fr. Nicholas  
HTM

PS: See St. John Chrysostom: An Exhortation to Theodore After His Fall

Letter 1:

[http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-09/npnf1-09-13.htm#P603\\_328590](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-09/npnf1-09-13.htm#P603_328590)

Letter 2:

[http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-09/npnf1-09-14.htm#P715\\_434935](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF1-09/npnf1-09-14.htm#P715_434935)

(Sometimes these links go right through; sometimes the search engine can't find the server. Keep trying. FN)