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**"DOAMNE MILUEȘTE": THE LIFE OF A CONTEMPORARY
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MONASTERY**

by

David George Subu

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Comparative Religion

Western Michigan University
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"DOAMNE MILUEȘTE": THE LIFE OF A CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MONASTERY

David George Subu, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1997

The Holy Dormition Monastery demonstrates the Orthodox Christian appeal to the tradition and authority of the Church Fathers, Mothers, and the ultimate source of power, the Holy Trinity, which is enacted on the several complimentary and interactive levels of monastic history, spatial and architectural arrangements, personal relationships and community structure, and liturgical or ritual activity cycles. This appeal to authority and power is achieved most notably through a complex system of ritual acts that are typically "embedded" into the many facets of the monastic life which simultaneously orients the monastic participant towards the correct, "Orthodox" relationships with those sources of authority on the interactive levels mentioned above. The primary Orthodox relationship is based on the model of "Spiritual Fatherhood," which indicates not only a hierarchical preference, but also one that suggests the intimacy of parenthood and familial relationships. Lastly, the yearly Feast-Day pilgrimage to the monastery provides a powerful example of this system and the interaction of its many levels in one single public event.

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David George Subu

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Thesis

This thesis begins as a pilgrimage. The project began in 1993 on a visit to the Holy Dormition Monastery, a community of twelve Orthodox Christian nuns. Located in Rives Junction, Michigan, the monastery was founded in 1988 by three nuns who had emigrated from Romania. My first journey there took place during the yearly "feast-day pilgrimage" celebrating the day of the Dormition, or "falling asleep" of the Mother of God on August 15. Upon arriving and witnessing the events of the feast-day, I found the incredible richness and complexity of the Orthodox Church stunning. As a comparative religionist, I immediately sensed that there was a sophisticated religious system at work, one that I could only superficially glimpse on that first encounter. It quickly became clear that the unraveling of the mystery before me was no simple task, and would occupy my attention for at least the next few years. This thesis is primarily the answer to a series of questions that arose in my desire to make sense of the religious system of Orthodox Christian monasticism. The title, "Doamne Miluește" is the Romanian equivalent of "Lord Have Mercy", and reflects the combination of awe and exasperation I experienced in writing, as well

as summarizing one of the key spiritual teachings of Orthodox Christian Monasticism

Though Christian monasticism is a noteworthy topic in the discipline of Comparative Religion, few, if any, studies exist of Eastern Orthodox Christian monasticism, which this study will henceforth label as "Orthodox" monasticism. This study aspires to bring to light the field of Orthodox monasticism for academic study. The strong continuity of this religious tradition allows the contemporary reader a chance to glimpse Christianity in a form typically unavailable to Westerners. Orthodox Christians in America often describe their religion as the "best kept secret in America"; perhaps this study can uncover some of that secret.

In one sense, this thesis answers questions such as how? when? where? who? and why? quite literally. However, these questions are not simply for the sake of journalistic accuracy, even though empirical accuracy is an aim of this work. Each component question and its answer leads to a clue to a greater whole: the religious system. The religious system of Orthodox monasticism involves elements interacting with each other predictably in meaningful relationships which form identifiable patterns. This thesis discusses and details five areas of pattern, namely, (1) history of the monastery and its relationship to Orthodox monasticism, (2) organization of community and "sacred" spaces, (3) the person of the monastic and the roles she plays in the community, (4) the cycle of ritual activity in the monastery, and (5) the dynamics of Orthodox monasticism in terms of yearly aspects, focusing especially on

the feast-day pilgrimage as a defining moment of the religious system.

The primary focus of this thesis has therefore been the Holy Dormition Monastery itself. Fieldwork has been the most important tool in gathering data, and all reading has been in a sense, supplemental. The role of text in this study has been to elucidate the finer points and explain the obscurities observed in the field.

Overview of the Fieldwork

Research at the Holy Dormition Monastery began in the summer of 1995 and continued through and into the fall of 1996. There were two periods of intensive data-gathering during this 15-month period. These correspond to the two different methods used in the research. Participant-observation was the primary method conducted throughout the time of research and practiced most industriously and meaningfully during the feast-day pilgrimage of August 1995. Over four days, I gathered two main types of data: details of the site and its layout, including diagrams, and details of the ritual activity of the monastery including the special rites connected with the pilgrimage. I also returned to observe these events again in August 1996, providing confirmation as well as variations on the information. Additional observation occurred throughout the year as needed, particularly during the week of Christmas, 1995 and both the Paschal services of 1995 and 1996. Many short trips to observe the weekly services added to the body of research data.

The second period of intensive fieldwork centered on the interviewing of eight of the twelve nuns of the monastery. All of the interviews were conducted in 1996.

Five interviews took place in July with another three in October. Because of the pilgrimage and the activity surrounding it, the interviews waited until everyone's schedules were more open. The interviews ran approximately 50 to 90 minutes with an average of 75 minutes. The interviews discussed the lives of the nuns and their transition into the monastic life, and provided anecdotal material on monastery activities. All data was taken anonymously and confidentially, and the only references to nuns or priests that have been used are those publicly available in sources such as the monastery's own publications and those of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America. Interview scripts along with protocols and approvals from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Western Michigan University are included in the appendices.

Interview data provided a number of different types of insights. These ranged from very empirical types of data to the very existential. This thesis as a result attempts to balance the empirical and the existential in a fair manner. Such a balancing act is often a precarious position for a scholar to maintain. Nuns are theologians in a classical sense, they are "those who pray". Their testimonies are heavily inspired by the theological language of Orthodoxy. In my attempts to elucidate the anthropological mysteries of the monastery, I have on occasion drawn upon the mysteries of the faith to provide insight. I hope the usefulness of these moments will purchase the necessary indulgences from my fellow scholars. Specifically, existential and theological data was heavily used in the chapters on the nun as a special role in the religious system (Chapter IV) and in the chapters on ritual

and pilgrimage (Chapters V-VI). In these cases I felt that the ideas of the nuns themselves, about themselves and what they do, provided an essential conceptual framework for describing the religious system. It is, in fact, with some regret that I have backed away from using more of the spirituality of the nuns in presenting this research in order not to confuse the predominantly empirical approach.

In this type of research there are also many instances of the use of key informants. That is, the nuns themselves answered many questions about monasticism and questions specific to the Holy Dormition Monastery outside of a formal interview process. Most of these questions concerned clarifying details of ritual practice in the Holy Dormition as compared to other Orthodox monasteries throughout the world, especially those presented in textual sources. The acquisition of key informant data was an essential aspect of participation with this community and could not occur without the development of rapport between observer and subject, which was in many ways challenging. The monastic community has its own cultural norms and etiquette, in seemingly endless layers of appropriateness. This point became clear to me on Holy Saturday of April 1997. Father Roman, the spiritual father of the community, remembered that when I first came to the monastery I wore a big, black cowboy hat in the church-- a point of etiquette I did not fully realize I had broken until he told me some three or four years after the fact! Luckily, in the monastery environment the overwhelming hospitality exhibited by the nuns ameliorates these issues of cultural etiquette. More often than not, this hospitality included food-- very much in the Romanian spirit. Most important,

however, was the genuine warmth and patience that the nuns exhibited toward me during my research. I can only hope that my big hat was the most intrusive presence of research that they had to suffer. A variety of scowls, giggles, and quizzical looks from the nuns has suggested to me that it was not the only noticeable feature of my presence among them.

Overview of the Literature

In a study such as this, there is no key text to analyze. Nonetheless, there were many texts that provided key information for piecing together the puzzles with which I found myself confronted. Defining what types of sources were useful suggests the methodological considerations taken in this research. Primary sources ranged from very contemporary works written by members of monastic communities, including the spiritual father of the Holy Dormition monastery himself, to the earliest works on monasticism such as Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*. On occasion, I have presented these historically distant sources as part of the continuity of Orthodox Christianity. If I have made any untoward assumptions I must apologize and state that I would not have done so had not these very ancient works not appeared so prominently in the contemporary scene. In the monastery, John Climacus and Athanasius the great are still quite popular and part of both the oral and textual traditions among the nuns.

Primary sources also included liturgical service books, some of which were unpublished, photocopied manuals put together by the nuns out of a number of

different manuals in their own library. To the liturgical purist this may seem outrageous, but to the anthropologist such pieces are invaluable. Where the actual translations in use at the monastery were unavailable, recommended and approved alternatives were used. Secondary sources also ranged a wide gamut. Since academic studies of the Orthodox Church are few and far between, some of the most important methodological influences on this thesis derive from studies of radically different cultural areas. These include Japanese and African traditions, and theoretical areas, such as cognitive science.

In terms of primary sources, two were essential: Mother Cassiana's *Come, Follow Me*, a record of her year-long stay in the Monastery of Varatec, Romania, and Father Roman Braga's *Exploring the Inner Universe*, which includes a detailed interview with him and provides substantial historical and spiritual insight into Orthodox monasticism. Articles from the yearly almanac of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, *Calendarul Solia*, were also very important. Besides these very current primary sources, several translations of sources from the patristic period and later Byzantine period provided background, but became less a part of the actual thesis as time went on. Only where they serve to elucidate an aspect of the contemporary situation were they directly cited. Among the most useful sources were *The Monastic Discourses* of Theoleptos of Philadelphia, translated by Frank Sinkewicz and *A Woman's Quest for Spiritual Guidance: The correspondences of Princess Irene-Eulogia Koumnenos*, translated by Angela Hero. Since many early primary sources neglect the world of women monastics, there was little use in

focusing closely upon these texts.

Liturgical texts for this study were perhaps the most important type of primary source. For the service of Matins and Vespers, *Byzantine Daily Worship*, a volume approved for use by both Eastern Orthodox and Byzantine Catholics, was drawn upon. The Holy Dormition also owns a copy of this book, though it is not necessarily used as the primary translation for the daily cycle. Especially important in piecing together the rubrics of the services was the *Festal Menaion* translated by Mother Mary and Bishop Kallistos Ware. Lastly, Father Papadeas' Greek-English manual on Holy Week and Pascha was very useful, for Holy Week and a comparison of Unction services. Scripture, including Psalms, were taken from the *Orthodox Study Bible* (New Kings James Version), unless otherwise noted.

Secondary sources fell into three different types: historical, anthropological/sociological, and theoretical/methodological. Important historical texts were Bishop Seraphim's *Romania: Its Hesychast Tradition and Culture*, Rosemary Morris' *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1148*, Gerald Bobango's *Religion and Politics: The Life and Times of Bishop Valerian Trifa*, Bishop Kallistos Ware's *The Orthodox Church*, J.M. Hussey's *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, and in particular Brenda Meehan-Waters' *Holy Women of Russia*. The history of Orthodox Monasticism is more expansive than one initially may imagine, but these works served as important primers into the field. Anthropological texts, including sociological and archeological works, were more influential while less frequent. Laurie Kain Hart's *Time, Religion, and Social Experience in Rural Greece* was

initially a major inspiration as an ethnography of an Orthodox community. However, since pursuing this work, I have found Hart's treatment of Orthodox liturgy unsatisfying and incomplete. Her treatment of monasticism was not the central issue of her study, and reflects an "outsider's" view of monasticism more in tune with the rural folk in whom she is most interested. Yizar Hirschfeld's *Byzantine Monasteries in the Judean Desert* was a very useful archeological work that provided good modeling of the layout and structure of the various forms of monastic communities in Orthodoxy. George Hillery's *The Monastery: a Study in Community, Freedom, and Love* was very influential, though it deals with the distantly related Trappist monasteries of the U.S. Though we depart from each other in focus and theory, I found Hillery's discussion of fieldwork and the interviewing process very important and useful, which brings us to the methodological/theoretical works.

Perhaps the most important methodological influence on this work is the *Religious Traditions of the World* series edited by H. Byron Earhart. I became acquainted with these texts while teaching an introductory course in Comparative Religion. By using the threefold approach of history, structure, and dynamics to present incredibly vast religious systems, traditions such as Islam, Christianity, or African Religions can be introduced sensibly and tangibly. The "Religion 100" approach, as I have come to call it, used in a very tightly focused manner, is in fact the core structure of this thesis: history of the monastery, structure of the community, and dynamics of the pilgrimage. From within this series I am also particularly indebted to E. Thomas Lawson's *Religious Traditions of Africa* for the notions of

religious system as well as special roles, special places, and special powers that will also be found to dominate the arrangement of this study.

On the theoretical level, this study dips into several areas and thinkers. Much of this reflects theoretical biases that I have developed over the course of my graduate studies. In particular, the major theoretical influences on this work include, Lawson, especially his later work with Robert MacCauley *Rethinking Religion*, also Claude Levi-Strauss *Structural Anthropology*. Other theorists that require note here also include Clifford Geertz, H. Byron Earhart (see also acknowledgements), Peter Brown, and of course, the great Romanian father of contemporary comparative studies of religion, Mircea Eliade.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II dives into the history of the Holy Dormition Monastery. First, the immediate history of the monastery is considered, with a focus on its founding and first ten years of development. Next, the history of Orthodox Monasticism is considered, in order to provide a brief but necessary foundation for further study. With the background of Byzantium and the Desert Fathers in mind, the development of Romanian monasticism, especially the women's monasticism of Varatec, the mother monastery of the Holy Dormition monastery is addressed. Important issues of this section highlight the differences between women's monasticism, Moldavian and Romanian monasticism, and Orthodox monasticism as a whole. This chapter as a whole also develops the notion of spiritual fatherhood that will play a subsequent

role in the thesis.

Chapter III serves as an introduction to the physical space and arrangement of the monastery grounds. Particular attention is paid to the way in which religious space is arranged and how the entire monastery is itself designed to reflect religious and spiritual themes and relationships. This chapter also discusses the plan for the development of the space. A few maps and figures will provide tools for the visualization of this monastery. This chapter in effect, creates a setting, a stage, in which the actors and the actions can then be described.

Chapter IV is the most lengthy chapter, as it deals with the most complex aspect of the monastery: the nuns themselves. First, we consider the vows that define the nun in canonical and theological terms. Besides the theological importance of vows and monastic rules, there is a direct correlation to behavior which is observable. Vows and rules are about practice, and the practice of monasticism is the empirical foundation of this research. We then turn to the demographics of the monastery, the family backgrounds of the nuns, and the personal experiences that led them to joining a monastic community. These personal experiences help to illustrate the types of relationships that the monastics have developed with the Church and the lifestyle and serve to reinforce the practical and ritual relationships that make up the bulk of monastery life. Then we look at the various ranks in the monastic hierarchy, the rites by which these are attained, and the many roles and responsibilities associated with the lifestyle.

Chapter IV also considers the external aspects of the nuns' world, their

relationship with the priests, monks, and pilgrims as a part of the extended community. Then attention is paid to their habit, the special monastic dress or uniform, and to other material items used by the nuns in the practice of their spirituality.

Chapter V explores this practice of spirituality in terms of the most accessible: the public services performed by the nuns and their priests for the spiritual benefit of not only themselves but the entire world. This chapter seeks to provide for the reader unfamiliar with Orthodox liturgical activity a framework or "grammar" with which to understand the various types of rituals of Orthodoxy. Here I make several theoretical claims and a number of interpretive endeavors intended to assist the visitor to the monastery or student of religion.

The ritual system described in Chapter V provides a basis for the subsequent ritual analyses in Chapter VI, which looks closely at the feast day pilgrimage. Before making this pilgrimage, however, Chapter VI takes into consideration the season of Lent and the Paschal cycle. There are two reasons for this. First, Lent is an ascetic season, considered by the vast majority of monastics to be the most significant time of the year for their own lifestyle. Secondly, the services associated with Holy Week provide the model for the services held during the Dormition pilgrimage. To appreciate the latter, one must have a grasp on the former.

Chapter VI also brings together the many aspects of the monastic life that compose the preliminary chapters. The pilgrimage provides an instance of the whole of the people, places, powers, and actions of the religious system working together

in a grand unison that defines the monastery to the outside world, in the form of the pilgrims. The pilgrims in turn spread the monastery's religious system into the rest of the church while influencing the small community of nuns simultaneously in a symbiosis. It is in this environment that the final theoretical claims made are tested and confirmed.

Chapter VII provides a brief conclusion, in which the importance of anthropological and sociological studies of religious communities is reevaluated and reaffirmed. The appendix which follows contains the research protocols, interview scripts, informed consent letters and other materials associated with the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF THE DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN MONASTERY

Rives Junction

While the Holy Dormition monastery was founded only in 1987, it has incredibly deep roots that go back to the beginnings of Christianity. First, then, we shall consider the immediate historical background of the founding of the monastery and its first ten years of existence. Next, a brief history of Orthodox Christian monasticism will be provided to give the historical context for this whole study. Lastly, we may treat the specific history of Romanian monasticism, the tradition out of which the Holy Dormition Monastery was born.

The story of the Holy Dormition Monastery itself begins in 1978 when two nuns from Varatec, Romania made their way to the United States to join a community of nuns at the Holy Transfiguration monastery in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania. Mother Alexandra, formerly Princess Ileana of Romania founded the Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration in 1968. She foresaw a need for monasticism among the Orthodox in America. In Romania, parish life was deeply tied to the many local monasteries. The Holy Transfiguration monastery was also founded during controversy over the use of language in Romanian-American parishes. It seemed clear

to a growing number of Orthodox Christians then that to survive and thrive in America, the Orthodox Churches would have to conduct services at least partially in English. Second and third generations of Romanian-Americans were already losing their fluency in the ancestral tongue. There had already been a split among the Romanian Orthodox in America between those who were loyal to the Romanian Patriarchate and those who were loyal to the new American episcopate. Meanwhile, Romania was still a Communist country with limited religious freedoms. The concerns of the bishops at this time were primarily political rather than spiritual; Mother Alexandra moved to provide a spiritual haven for the Orthodox in America.

That was the situation into which the Varatec nuns entered upon arriving in America. In 1981 the two were joined by another former companion from Varatec, a tonsured nun. All three had in some form seen the repression of monasticism in the "Old Country" under communism, and this was a very strong reason for them to leave. These three would establish the Holy Dormition Monastery on a foundation of tradition from Moldavian monasticism, but the impetus to form the Holy Dormition was not simply to import or recreate a glorious past that they had left behind. They hoped to spread the spirituality of Orthodox Christianity into America. It was their desire to pursue missionary work through monastic community that remains the central principle or motivation for the development of the Rives Junction site.

The three nuns left Ellwood City in 1987. They wintered in Terre Haute, Indiana, where they briefly resurrected a defunct Romanian Orthodox Church in

town. They were served by a local parish priest, but had no spiritual father of their own. Although this was a transitory time, they did not go unnoticed as they sought for a more permanent place to establish their new community. The nuns received offers of help and donations from local townsfolk in their mission. What was surprising for the nuns at first was the willingness of Americans to give and help, a situation that was not so in Communist Romania. "Everybody helps you!" remarked one of the nuns concerning the charity of the American people.

In 1988, a small farmhouse, pole barn, and exactly 47.8 adjoining acres were purchased in Rives Junction, Michigan. This small rural town is set in sleepy Southern Michigan, about five miles north of Jackson, Michigan, known for an aeronautical museum and state penitentiary located there. Rives Junction is a typical American hamlet with one main gas station, and a tiny post office adjoined to a larger fire station, located next to the railroad that gives the Junction its name. Occasionally one of the main street residences proudly flies the confederate flag. Farming and hunting make up an important part of the local economy. In many ways, Rives Junction is similar to the small town of Varatec, Romania.

The location in Rives Junction for an Orthodox convent is not necessarily an odd one. Geographically, Rives Junction is within an hour or two of most of Michigan's major cities: Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor, and of course, Jackson. It is also within a three to five hour drive of Chicago and Cleveland. Orthodox Christianity in America has particularly thrived in centers such as these where immigrant communities established "colonies" which eventually led

to settled communities with their own churches (Galitzi, 1968). Perhaps what is most important, just east of Jackson in Grass Lake, another small rural Michigan town, is the *Vatra Romaneasca*, or "Romanian Hearth," usually known simply as the Vatra. The Vatra is also a converted farm property that now serves as the headquarters of the Romanian-American Orthodox Church in America (R.O.C.A.), currently headed by Bishop Nathaniel Popp. Also in Detroit, the Archdiocese headquarters of the Romanian Patriarchate is headed by Archbishop Victorin. The location at Rives Junction is well suited for a Romanian monastery, with the two highest priests of the Romanian Orthodox in the United States in close proximity¹.

With the aid of needed donations and the proceeds of nine months of their own labor in sewing vestments, altar cloths, and the like, the nuns were able to purchase the property. Donations included a few substantial amounts from supportive parishes. In a sense, the financial incorporation of the nun's work may be considered the official beginning of the Holy Dormition monastery-- it is not the place but the people that make a place a monastery. From 1988 to 1993 the tiny community slowly but steadily began to establish itself. The tale of these years is a tale of many consecutive small miracles, as people often came forward to help without solicitation. The pole barn was first expanded to hold the church, named in honor of one of the church's great feast-days, the Dormition of the Mother of God, known in the Roman

¹ You may have observed the presence of two bishops in close proximity. The reasons for this is that the Romanian Orthodox in America are split into two churches or ecclesiastical jurisdiction, as a result of church politics in the twentieth century. For a thorough if not impartial treatment of this situation, see Bobango, 1981.

Catholic church as the Assumption (August 15). The Dormition is perhaps the third most holy feast in Orthodoxy, following Pascha and the Nativity of Christ. The Dormition is also the patronal feast of the main church in Varatec's monastery as well. An iconostasis was provided for the new monastery church from Sts. Peter and Paul, now in Dearborn Heights. The farmhouse was renovated to house most of the nuns as a cloister. Also a guesthouse and an open air pavilion was built to accommodate the growing numbers of visitors to the monastery. The pavilion began its public career as a Chapel for the 1993 Dormition pilgrimage. A more thorough description of the grounds especially in terms of their religious significance follows in chapter three.

The budding monastery also received a priest-monk, Fr. Roman Braga who not only has had a wide ranging career that included serving Bishop Valerian Trifa at the Vatra but is also the younger brother of Mother Benedicta, the first Abbess of the monastery. Fr. Roman was joined by Fr. Felix Dubneac, himself an accomplished author and iconographer, and a long time acquaintance², shortly after that. In 1994, the monastery was able to purchase the residence next door for use by the priests. Their home is now known as the St. Nicholas house.

Steadily the monastery attracted more women to be members of the community. A few nuns came from Romania and joined them. Three of the nuns

² Both priest-monks were members of the Burning-Bush movement in Romania, an intellectual and theological movement that was persecuted under communism. Both monks and many others within the movement served prison time. see Braga, 1996.

came to live with them in their first experience as nuns. In this period they also attracted an American-born nun from Holy Transfiguration as well. In the spring of 1992, Mother Gabriella, one of the original three from Varatec, took over the administration of the monastery. The former abbess, Mother Benedicta, was then able to retire and take on a stricter rule of prayer. By 1993 the community had grown to ten nuns. Since then some new nuns have come and some have left. At the beginning of 1997 there were eleven sisters.

The Holy Dormition monastery has achieved the type of relationship with the laity that is exhibited in Romania. A growing number of lay people from diverse ethnic backgrounds continually support the monastery in many ways: repairs, construction, donations of food, catering, and supplies, and more. A core group known as "the Friends of the Monastery" has been active in spreading awareness of the monastery throughout the country.

The steady growth of the monastery and the increasing interest in its well-being exhibited by not only Romanian Orthodox but by all ethnicities of the faith led the nuns to embark on a development plan. There is no set time for the monastery's completion, because the nuns know that they must build only as they have the funds. The net result will produce a structure that should last a "thousand years" like the monasteries of old. The model of the development follows the pattern of the Moldavian fortress monasteries such as Varatec, the mother monastery of Rives Junction.

The building project was only a plan in 1993. At that time the sisters began

to ask publicly for funding from the Orthodox community, unveiling their intentions at the large feast-day pilgrimage of the Dormition. Building began in 1996, and an expansion of the pole barn church and kitchen is already underway. Work has been intermittent due to funds, weather, and availability of the material resources that are needed to make a built-to-last monastery. When this is finished, the guesthouse and cloister will be expanded, forming a ring of buildings. Saving the best for last, the intention is that they will build the new church in the center in Old World style.

The Holy Dormition Monastery of Rives Junction, MI. is not however, an entirely new phenomenon. More accurately, it is a transplant of a style of religious community from not only Moldavia but the rest of the Orthodox Christian world. There is no doubt that its textures will become thoroughly Americanized over time. The core principles that unite, guide, and sustain the monastery are nonetheless principles that find their source not in the innovations of the American Orthodox but in the traditions of the ancient church and her fathers and mothers. There remains always a continuity to the past in the monastery. The monastery is a place of living tradition. Perhaps this is some of its appeal to those pilgrims who visit, who then find themselves transported back in time to the ancient church or perhaps simply, to simpler times.

Monasticism as a religious tradition has its own mythology of origins, embodied in its history, its sayings of the Desert Fathers, in the everyday reminders that such a place gives of its roots. As the Holy Dormition monastery moves forward in time, its community will continuously look backwards in order to insure that the

integrity of the tradition is maintained, that the way set down in centuries past is preserved. This is not unusual to the nuns in Rives Junction, nor to any Orthodox Christian monastics. Throughout the history of Orthodox monasticism there has been a concern with preserving and maintaining the living tradition of the early ascetics.

Rives Junction has its model in the monasticism in Moldavia, which in turn has its roots in the monasticism of the Byzantines, Mount Athos, and inevitably the Desert Fathers. Examining this transmission can provide insight to the principles that undergird the Holy Dormition today. While the history of Orthodox monasticism is quite long, there is a distinct pattern to its development.

The Origins of Orthodox Christian Monasticism

There are some important basics to Orthodox Monasticism that provide a good foundation for any subsequent discussion of the subject. Theologically, monasticism has its roots in the community of the apostles themselves, as well as the prophets of the Old Testament who lived an ascetic lifestyle in the deserts. According to Orthodox tradition, monasticism began at the end of the third century in the Egyptian deserts south of Alexandria. Chitty points to three crucial figures in the early movement: Athanasius, Anthony, and Pachomius (Chitty, 1966, pp. 1-16). Each provides a crucial element in the tapestry. Anthony is the first great hermit and set the standard for *eremitic* or hermit-oriented monasticism, through the hagiography written by Athanasius, himself a monastic and powerful theologian-bishop. Pachomius is recognized as the founder of the *cenobitic*, or community-oriented monasticism,

whose story is told most fully in the *Lausaic History* of Palladius, another monk. Because of the successes and charisma of these three early founders, the monastic lifestyle grew in popularity and prominence, laying the groundwork for monasticism in East and West.

In the West, John Cassian from Roman Dobrugea, located in modern Romania, was crucial in transmitting desert monasticism to Italy and France, and provided a basis for St. Benedict (Chadwick, 1968). In the East, St. Basil of Caesarea, another eminent bishop-theologian, established monasticism in Cappadocia (in Asia Minor) based on Egyptian and Palestinian models. St. Basil's "Rule," which is really a set of informal guidelines for ascetic communities, became the basis for subsequent Eastern Monasticism. It is better to speak of the "Rule of the Fathers," however, as St. Basil is just one among many early fathers that shaped Orthodox Monasticism³.

The two models of Egyptian monasticism, eremitic and cenobitic, were elaborated by the later desert monasticism of Palestine and Judea, the Sinai, and Syria. Figures of note include Chariton, who founded monasteries in the Holy land, and later St. Sabbas whose communities would have a long lasting influence on Orthodox worship (see Chapter V). Palestinian communities added their own models for monastic community, especially the *lavriote* style, based on the *lavra* (market,

³ Morris, 1995, pg. 15 and 53: "these monastic founders emphasised adherence to the 'law of the fathers', by which they, too, understood the monastic constitutions of St. Basil."

alley), an arrangement of hermitages or small monastic homes centered around a church and cenobium, the monastic community center. Lavriote monasticism blended the two Egyptian forms and expanded and elaborated upon them (Hirschfeld, 1992, pp. 10-12).

Following the desert models, Orthodox monasticism developed organically in the Byzantine world. Unlike its Western counterparts, no distinct separate orders have developed in the Christian East. Instead, traditions based on the ethnic heritage and language have developed which stylistically differentiate monastic communities (i.e., Greek, Romanian, Russian, Slavic). However, there is no other inherent or official division between them in Orthodoxy.

The developments of the patristic period define monasticism and even Orthodoxy in every way, including artistically, architecturally, liturgically, and musically. Following the patristic period and the age of the Ecumenical Councils, the history of monasticism is one of renewals rather than innovations. While the Byzantine period of Orthodox monasticism is incredibly complex and colorful (see Hussey, 1986; Morris, 1995; Ware 1993; Schmemmann, 1963) it is not the central topic of this thesis. There are several aspects of Byzantine monasticism that require mention as foundations for Romanian monasticism, however.

Theodore of Studites was an influential theologian and monastic whose community would come to dominate and shape Orthodox Monasticism. His community in Constantinople, known as the *Studion*, wielded power and influence in the empire. One significant aspect is his development and definition of the roles

concerned with the spiritual guidance of the monks and each day, as spiritual father to the community, heard the private revelation of each member's thoughts, concerns, and confessions. Beneath him was a deputy, originally known as the deuteron, but by the tenth century was most often referred to as the oikonomos, whose task was to oversee the property and temporal organization of the monastery. (Morris, 1995, p. 16).

In this way, Theodore began giving a standard practical form to a movement that already had a standard theological canon. However, Byzantine monasticism was not rigidly structured either. As Morris (1995, p. 33) explains, "The most important characteristic of Byzantine monasticism by the end of the ninth century was, in fact, its very *lack* of clearly defined forms." Byzantine monasticism not only combined but contained the early forms of desert monasticism: eremitic, cenobitic, and lavriote.

The Byzantine combination achieved its most lasting and deepest expression in the communities of Mt. Athos, known among Orthodox as the Holy Mountain. At first the Holy Mountain was inhabited by anchorites, that is, hermits in the eremitic style. In 958 St. Athanasios with the help of the emperor began establishing the Great Lavra, which introduced cenobitism to the mountain (Morris, 1995, pp. 45-47). What evolved was a symbiosis of styles, where young and inexperienced monastics could live in community in a cenobium or in a small skete, the house of an elder teacher and guide with a few students, characteristic of the lavriote style. Then the most experienced ascetics could also retire to the eremitic life as well.

What is most crucial to see is that the great monastic thinkers of the church established a tradition of appeal to the authority of the early Church fathers, many and most of whom were these early desert monastics. With these basics in mind, it is now

possible to return to the specifics of the origins of the Holy Dormition Monastery, which is modelled after the monastery of Varatec in Moldavia, Romania.

Varatec and Moldavian Monasticism

The Varatec monastery and its nearby and equal-sized sister monastery of Agapia may be the largest Orthodox Christian convents in the world. In 1984, when Mother Cassiana visited the monastery, she estimated that 350 nuns were living in the community (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 8). Since the 1989 revolution this number has undoubtedly increased. Varatec itself, however, is far from ancient. It was founded in 1784 during the early years of a resurgence in monastic spirituality not only in Romania but in Russia as well (Meehan-Waters, 1993, p. 2).

The history of Varatec was told to Mother Cassiana during her stay, and she attempts to quote the anonymous nuns in her version of Varatec's story:

There are a number of things that distinguish Varatec. First of all, it was not founded or built by any leader or prince, as the majority of the monasteries, especially in Moldavia, were. Strangely enough, it is the fact that Varatec has no specific historic importance that sets it apart from others.

Varatec was founded by nuns, specifically one Mother Olimpiada, from a monastery called Topolita located near the town of Tirgu Neamt. Mother Olimpiada was the daughter of a priest and had grown up reading and singing in church. In the 1700's, however, the responses to the services in nun's monasteries were given by male cantors. St. Paisie Velichkovski, living at Neamt Monastery, was Mother Olimpiada's spiritual father. After a great deal of consultation, he gave her the blessing to seek a suitable place for the founding of a new monastery, one in which the nuns themselves would read and sing all the responses to the services. He called a priest-monk named Iosif to assist Mother Olimpiada in this search, and together they found the present day site of Varatec.

Within a matter of only two years, the entire monastic community from Topolita moved to Varatec, leaving the church at Topolita to be used as a parish church by the villagers who attended services there Thus the traditions found at Varatec today of reading and singing in church, along with daily hard work, can be traced back to the earliest days of its history.(Mother Cassiana, 1991, pp. 23-24).

This short history contains several very important points. The first point is the significance of Varatec's variation in practice and the importance of women's initiative; the second is the importance of spiritual fatherhood, and the third the role of St. Paisie or Paisius Velichovsky.

The role of women's initiative in the founding of Varatec is not necessarily exceptional. During this period a large number of women in the Orthodox world were turning to the monastic life. The desire to forego the use of male cantors reflects the desire for an intensified religious lifestyle, one in which women could have the maximum amount of participation. Meehan suggests:

The women we are studying sought environments conducive to holiness and helped create and shape those environments. They craved both the solitude central to a contemplative life and a community of like-minded women to share the richness of liturgy, sacrament, and prayer. Together they fasted, together they broke bread. In the privacy of their cells they followed their personal prayer routines, mortifications, and study of holiness. The disciplines they practiced helped them transcend bleak, spiritually dry periods in their lives; those same disciplines brought them moments of great joy and inner peace. (Meehan-Waters, 1993, p. 6).

In the case of Varatec, the success of women's initiative in this direction can be seen in the rapid growth of the community and the replacement of the old system. The presence of female cantors was not necessarily an innovation, either. Women had had

access for centuries to such positions in the Church, including even a female diakonate (Cloke, 1995, pp. 205-210). As the monastery of Varatec grew, the nuns themselves were obliged to engage in the labor of new construction and tending of fields. For monastics, work is second only to the primary vocation of prayer, and Varatec provides for its nuns plenty of opportunity for physically demanding yet spiritually uplifting labor. This is the rule across Eastern European monasticism, which, is described by Meehan-Waters:

In addition to spiritual development, women's monastic communities offered women an opportunity to develop their leadership abilities and to exercise considerable responsibility. Women managed and worked large agricultural properties. They ran schools, almshouses, and orphanages and supervised the feeding, housing, and religious life of the community . . . These monastic communities further empowered women by teaching many of them to read. Reading was important for the liturgy, the observance of canonical hours, the recitation of the psalter, the absorption of edificatory readings (particularly for the early church fathers and lives of the saints), and the work of running the community and orphanage. (Meehan-Waters, 1993, pp. 13-14).

Varatec also empowered its nuns with literacy, a tradition that would survive into the twentieth century, by which time it was customary for nuns to attend universities and seminaries for study along with male counterparts. In this sense, Varatec has had a lasting "historic importance" on Moldavian monasticism.

While the role of women's initiative is important in the history of women's monastic communities, it is always coupled with the role of spiritual fathers, those guides who as a part of the established hierarchy not only spiritually aided the nuns but also ecclesiastically legitimated their institutions. Within Orthodoxy there has long been a balance between "innovation" and "tradition." The spiritual fatherhood of Iosif

also known as Joseph the ascetic (Joanta, 1992, pp. 171-172) to Olimpiada is a sign not only of this balance, but also of its mutual interdependence. Rather than being seen as another male intrusion, the spiritual father of the Varatec community became a continual source of inspiration. Even today in Varatec he is treated like a saint and given veneration through an icon in the Dormition Church (Mother Cassiana, 1991, pp. 23-24). Throughout the centuries, women monastics have been close to their spiritual fathers as well as mothers. A particularly insightful example has been preserved in the correspondences between the Byzantine abbess Mother Eulogia and her spiritual father the venerable Theoleptos of Philadelphia (Hero, 1986; Hero 1992; Sinkewicz, 1992).

The dependence on spiritual fathers may seem to contemporary feminists as counter-productive to the empowerment of the women in the community. Meehan-Waters (1993, p. 151), in contrast to that view, explains:

It is difficult for many feminists to believe that patriarchal religious traditions can ever empower women. And it is difficult for modern readers, in general, to accept that tradition can be a path of creativity and a source of liberation. Yet the experience of the women . . . argues that the established disciplines of monastic tradition--routines of prayer, meditation, contemplative silence, fasting, and mortification-- can be powerful tools for breaking through human mire and suffering to a transcendent freedom. Because holiness goes beyond false attachments and splintered selves to the inner core of being, it allows both women and men to be fully whole and powerful, radiating a life force and fresh energy stunning to its observers.

Spiritual fatherhood, perhaps a bastion of patriarchy, is best understood in its monastic context as part of a larger, positive whole. It is inseparable from the nun's enterprise. With this in mind, the significance of Mother Olimpiada's own spiritual father

becomes clearer.

St. Paisius Velichovsky was a very important figure in the renaissance of Orthodox monasticism in the 18th century. Born in the Ukraine in 1722, he would go on to study in Kiev, live on Mt. Athos, and establish many monasteries in Moldavia and Russia. He was an important precursor to and influence on the compilation and publication of the Greek *Philocalia* of Macarius and Nicodemus. His own work in Moldavia and the rest of Romania led to the *Romanian Philocalia*, which predates the Greek version by fifteen years. The collection and resurrection of the writings of the Church fathers was one way in which Paisius renewed Orthodox Monasticism. At that time many works were transferred to Moldavia from Mount Athos in Greece that was under the Turkish "yoke." Moldavia offered a more open environment and in some eyes, a second Athos. Paisius Velichovsky also led a hesychast movement involving the repetition of the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner") which became a widespread practice in Russian monasticism. Though not all of his reforms became rooted in Moldavian monasticism, St. Paisius' life illustrates the importance of spiritual fatherhood and the impact it had on monasteries such as Varatec⁴.

Varatec, for all of its historic insignificance, is a poignant and significant example of the historic period in which it was founded. It has remained to this day

⁴ Fr. Roman Braga suggests that St. Paisie's use of the Jesus Prayer, while suitable for Russian monasticism, was too alien for it to survive wholeheartedly in Romanian monasticism. (Braga, 1996). For another, perhaps more charitable perspective, see also Joanta, 1992, pp. 100, 128-157, 161-163.

a powerful force in the monastic revival that started in the eighteenth century and is again undergoing revival in post-communist Romania. Varatec and its offspring also have deep roots, which can be seen through three different and distinct periods of Orthodoxy. The first period, the flourishing of Moldavian monasticism, illustrates further dynamics in the historical process. The second period, the rise of Byzantine and Athonite monasticism, provides the deeper roots to the Moldavian period. And the Byzantine period finds its roots in the Patristic period of the Cappadocian and Desert fathers. These three periods provide a foundation for the living tradition of the Holy Dormition Monastery.

Origins of Moldavian Monasticism

Bishop Seraphim, in his attempt to trace the continuity of Romanian monasticism to Roman times, admits that there is much less evidence for a survival in Moldavia or Wallachia than in Dobrugea and Transylvania, both of which for historical reasons had more opportunities for the maintenance of monasteries. Transylvanian history is deeply intertwined with that of the Hungarians, and as a mountainous region, was less accessible to attack than Moldavia and Wallachia. Dobrugea, known as Scythia Minor in ancient times, was always more tied to the power of the Roman and later Byzantine empires. In fact, Dobrugea is the home place of John Cassian, the fourth century monastic who brought desert monasticism to Italy and France, far from his homeland (Chadwick, 1968, p. 36; Joanta, 1992, pp. 14-15).

The flowering of Moldavian monasticism has stronger roots in the medieval

period, when the majority of the monasteries there were built. At least forty-four monasteries were built or founded by Stephen the Great (1457-1504), including the famous Voronet. The architecture of the period mixed Byzantine and Slavic styles, and involved some innovations of its own such as the painting of the outer walls of the churches of a few monumental monasteries. The arrangement of these monasteries was most often on the fortress model, serving not only as a spiritual metaphor but a political necessity at a time of continual warfare with the encroaching Ottoman empire.

The Romanian principalities were already becoming a destination for Orthodox leaders long before Stephen the Great. *Hesychasm*, the mystical theology of the church, only achieved final victory as official "Orthodoxy" in Byzantium in the 14th century, through the works of the great theologian Gregory Palamas. Hesychasm was not long in coming to Romanian lands. The man generally accredited with the reorganization of Romanian monasticism is St. Nicodemus of Tismana (Joanta, 1992, pp. 44-48). "Reorganization" may not be the best term, however, as Nicodemus founded far more monasteries than he reformed, and such endeavors are understood as renewing the original Christian monasticism. While he did most of his work in Transylvanian lands, his disciples worked in Moldavia and were responsible for the founding of Neamț monastery, later the home of St. Paisius, and Moldovița, a monastery now occupied by nuns. St. Nicodemus himself received his hesychast orientation from Mt. Athos and was influenced by St. Gregory the Sinaite, who himself stayed in Bulgaria just south of Wallachia. By the 15th century, patristic

writings were becoming more available to Romanian monastics, as Byzantines sought refuge from the invading Turks (Joanta, 1992, pp. 32-35).

There are some important conclusions that can be made about Romanian monasticism at this point.

1. Moldavian monasticism as it is understood today has its roots in the formation of that state in the 14th century by figures such as Stephen the Great.

2. The theological orientation of Moldavian monasticism is directly tied to the spread of hesychast doctrine in that period.

3. The form of monasticism in Romania is primarily Byzantine, with little visible connection to the ancient Daco-Roman form.

4. It is more reasonable to say that Romanian monasticism, while imported structurally, ideologically, and textually from Byzantium was necessarily and rapidly "Romanianized" due to the historical context of its introduction and development.

Whenever one enters an Orthodox Christian monastery, one is nevertheless walking into the desert, historically as well as metaphorically. Over the centuries, the history of the monastery develops in such a manner that it embeds and encapsulates what has come before. The Tradition is revived, rediscovered, and renewed with each century in development. Being in accordance with this long line of transmission is as essential for Orthodoxy as Apostolic succession is for the Church as a whole. This ties the community back to the source of its power, its life, and its authority.

Today at the Holy Dormition monastery the ages of history overlap and intertwine with each with a surprising ease. In providing guidance, a nun might draw

on the insights of a Romanian spiritual father such as Father Cleopa just as easily as St. Anthony. The art, architecture, customs, and rituals of the Orthodox monastery have their roots in this long history. With this in mind we can now look at the monastery in terms of space, time, and community and see how the tradition is lived.

CHAPTER III

THE MANY SPACES OF SACRED: MONASTERY LAYOUT

As discussed in Chapter II, Orthodox Christian monasteries may follow a number of different styles or patterns. *Eremitic* involves the solitary life of monastics either as hermits or in conclaves of locally attached hermitages. The *Lavra* style of monastery, such as that of St. Sabbas, where the monks live separated in a string of cells but gather together for liturgical worship is also quite common. *Cenobitic* monasticism is, on the other hand, communal, with the monastics living and working together in a household or *cenobium*. *Idiorhythmic* monasticism involves a blending of the first two, where novices live in a cenobium and then later graduate to exterior cells, sometimes living with and under their spiritual mothers or fathers. The Holy Dormition monastery is a cenobitic form of monastery, as it is small and the nuns for the most part share all the same facilities. The physical layout for this specific community is given in Figure 1. In the future, this may change, should the monastery grow large enough, it will likely develop into an idiorhythmic form, similar to Varatec in Moldavia.

The Development of the Land at Rives Junction

When three nuns left the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Ellwood City,

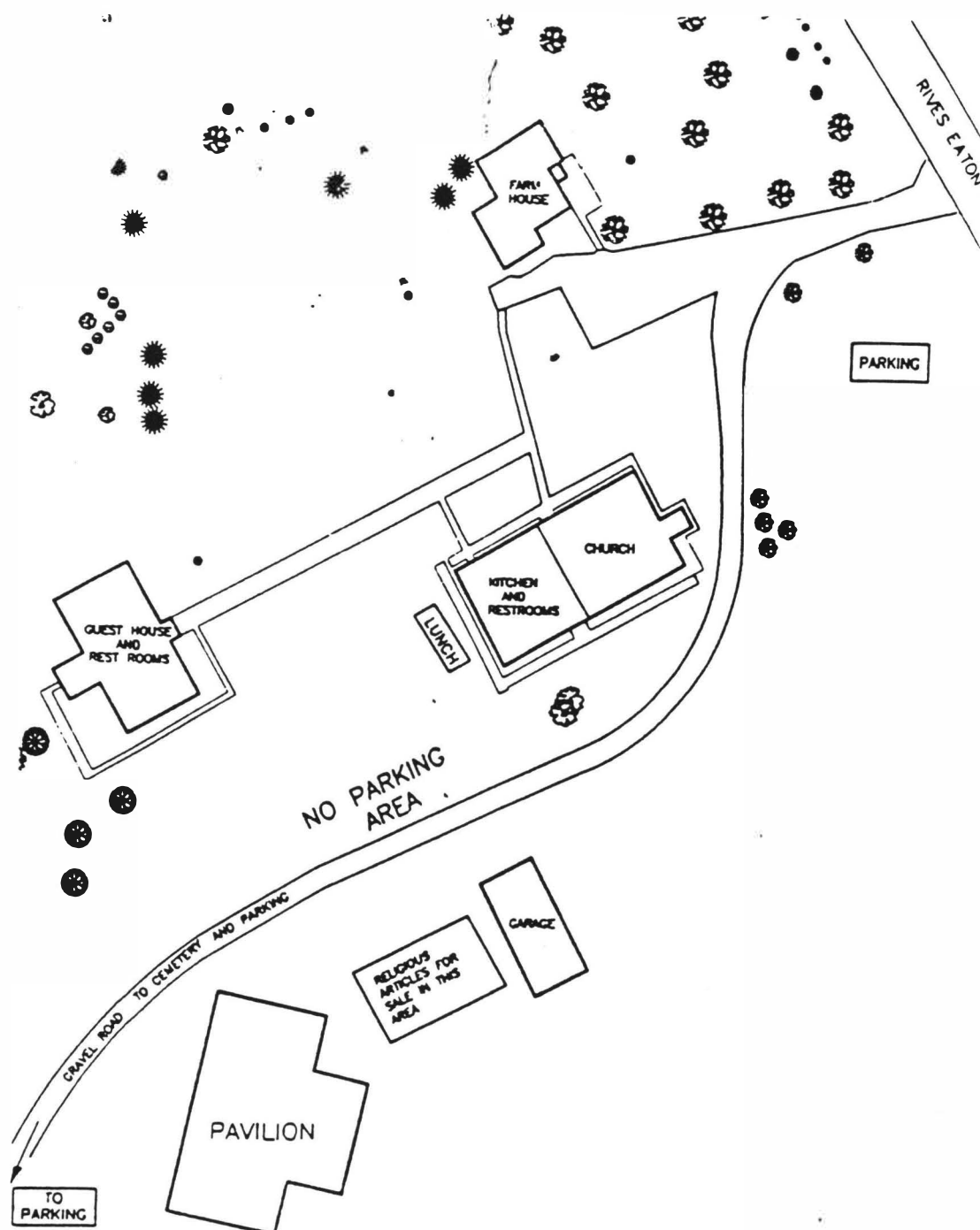


Figure 1. A Map of the Holy Dormition Monastery.

Source: Holy Dormition Monastery, (1994).

Pennsylvania, their home for nearly ten years in America, they did not first come to the sleepy hamlet of Rives Junction, Michigan. First they spent the better part of a year in Terre Haute, Indiana, living in the remains of a shut-down church. From Terre Haute they looked for a suitable site for their new monastery. By 1987, they had chosen the Rives Junction site, then just an old farm house and a pole barn. Within the next few years the community grew to ten nuns, most of whom lived packed into the two story farm house cloister. One of the first projects was the renovation and expansion of the pole barn. Now that barn is heated and is divided into a chapel, a kitchen, dining hall, and office connected to the abbess' quarters. This has been adequate for most days, but at busy times and feast days the building becomes quite crowded.

The Main Building: Church, Trapeza, and Office

The Church is, not surprisingly, considered the most important space in the monastery. It takes up the eastern half of the building and includes a small narthex, a nave, sanctuary, and vestibule, like any standard church¹. The capacity of the nave is no more than fifty people, but at special times such as Pascha services the crowds flood out into the narthex. The church is entered through a sliding glass door, upon which appears the schedule of services and the requests of the nuns that visitors obey

¹ The "Church" at this time should be considered a chapel, technically, as it is not a separate structure. However, the terms church and chapel will be used interchangeably here as the chapel serves as the primary setting for religious ritual.

a certain level of decorum in dress, speech, and music. In the narthex are a small selection of items on sale from the monastery, including books, icons, prayer ropes, and beeswax votive candles. There is also a guest book for visitors and a stock of the monastery's newsletter. A Holy Water dispenser can be found in the narthex, and it follows the same design basically as that of a hot water or coffee dispenser, but engraved solemnly with a cross and the words, "Holy Water." There is also a place for the storage of the large epitaphion, an embroidered cloth icon, here of the Dormition and used on the feast day. Dominating the narthex however, next to the door to the church nave proper, is the large framed icon of the Dormition. It is customary for visitors to venerate this icon by crossing themselves and kissing it before entering the church.

The nave is where the most of the ritual action takes place for the monastics besides those who enter the sanctuary. The room has been furnished with four rows of tall-backed black upholstered chairs. The walls of the room are painted in sky blue and there are few windows, so the room tends to be very dark, receiving most of its light from the candles within. The carpet before the sanctuary is covered with rugs in the deep red style of the old country. Icons of many different subjects and styles line the walls. Unlike most churches, however, the icons are of a variety of styles and media, including traditional painted wood, wall murals, framed paintings, and painted glass, the last of which is a particularly Romanian tradition in iconography.

Visually dominating the chapel is the *iconostasis* or "icon-wall", the screen of icons which separates the nave from the sanctuary. The iconostasis itself barely

fits into the room and is wooden. Formerly it was the iconostasis of Sts. Peter and Paul Romanian Orthodox Church of Dearborn Heights, Michigan. However, some new icons have been painted over the old, especially the icon of the Dormition. In every orthodox church the iconostasis will portray the patron saint or feast of the church in one of its main places. There are three doors into the sanctuary from the nave. The main double doors, or "royal" doors, are used only by the priest and are kept curtained and shut most of the time. Whenever these doors are opened they signify a hierophany into this world and the lights are turned up, while the attendants stand at reverent attention. The north door is traditionally decorated with the icon of Archangel Michael, and is used in processions such as the Entrances and Litia. Archangel Gabriel traditionally decorates the southern door, through which the altar-server most often passes, venerating Gabriel as she opens the door. Two icon-stands (Greek, sing.: analogion) with important patron saints of the church have been placed before the iconostasis. On the south are the Dormition icon and usually the icon of that particular day or week. On the north side are a Virgin and Child, Christ the Lifegiver, and an icon of St. Andrew (Andrei). The Apostle Andrew is held as the first apostle to the Romanians, and thus has a special place in most Romanian churches. (The importance of icons in worship is discussed at the end of Chapter IV.)

In the north corner of the nave, the holy relics are enshrined. The reliquary is a small wooden box with a windowed lid that reveals a number of small, labeled, artifacts within. Among the relics of the Dormition church is a piece of the true cross that was given to the monastery from a monastery on the Holy Mountain of Athos.

After every service the icons kept before the iconstasis are venerated, and often pilgrims will approach the relics as well, bowing and crossing themselves three times before and after approaching these special items.

The narthex is entered on the north side of the church; the choir area is to the south, near the back door which adjoins to the kitchen. During services, the nuns are always found along the south wall, unless serving in another capacity. A couple of the eldest nuns will sit on the chairs as well. Along the south wall are a few short, small benches used by the nuns during the few brief moments they are not required to stand or genuflect. Most of the time they are gathered near the readers' bookstand where the many hymnals and service books are kept. And there are many texts:

The weekly cycle consists of hymnographic material (found in the text called the Oktoechos), which is varied in cycles of eight weeks throughout the year . . . the yearly cycle includes the fixed feast, fasts, and commemorations of the saints which are conceived as a twelve-month cycle beginning in September (these texts are found in the Menaion). This yearly assemblage includes the Lenten cycle (for the three pre-Lenten weeks, the six weeks of lent, and Passion Week) presented in the Lenten Triodion, and the Liturgy of the Easter Cycle (Easter, Easter Week, the period between Easter and Pentecost) presented in the Pentekostarion. (Hart, 1992, p. 96).

The Orthodox services are primarily chanted and sung, without instrumentation in a dizzying array of Byzantine tones. All of this information must be available to the nuns at a moment's notice, thus, it is found in the reader's bookstand in several languages.

The abbess stands or kneels on the other side of the reader than the nuns. In sitting near the bishop's throne, she takes his role in proxy as leader of the

community. It is typical before a liturgy that one by one the nuns will come up and approach her for a blessing, then turn and bow to the rest of the community for their blessing and forgiveness. For visitors, it is a moving sight of great love and great humility.

Connecting the rear of the narthex and the sanctuary is the priest's room of preparations, the vestry. The vestry has become the place for the sacrament of confession for the monastery. Unlike the Roman church, which has special alcoves developed for this ritual, the orthodox service is performed next to a priest before an icon of Christ. The two are not physically separated, since absolution requires the penitent to kneel under the stole of the priest's vestment. On the outside of the vestry door is an illustration in black print of devils tempting Christians to sin and hell and subsequent salvation through the sacrament of confession.

Attached to the church is perhaps the second most utilized space in the monastery, the kitchen and dining hall. Most of the communal meals are taken in these rooms. When there are large numbers of guests and especially in the warmer months, the meals are set on a long table in the dining hall that runs along the northern half of the building and opens to the narthex through a glass door. In the winter the hall is often too cold and the community has less guests, so they gather in the kitchen. The kitchen is used more for cold dishes, drinks, and coffee. Most of the actual cooking is done in the kitchen of the cloister. This is partly because cooking in the kitchen tends to heat up the building too much in the warmer months.

In the kitchen the presence of religion is still clear. Above the dinner table are

two significant icons: The Last Supper and St. Euphrosynos the cook. St. Euphrosynos was a monk who cooked the meals for the community so diligently that he was unable to attend the services. Even though some of the other monks criticized him for missing services, his sense of duty and obedience was rewarded with sainthood. One of Holy Dormition's nuns has become the equivalent of "head cook". She can often be seen at meal times bringing large trays, pots, and broilers of warm food from the cloister across the yard to the dining hall or *trapeza*.

On the western end of the building the office and room of the abbess are found. The office serves as a library and a place to take calls and calculate bills and the like. Very often the sisters move into and out of the doorway there with questions for the abbess. Also in the office are further items for sale (also displayed in the narthex). Beyond the office is the cell of the abbess herself which is considered to be very private and "enclosed."

Lodging: The Cloister, St. Nicholas House, and the Guest House

The cloister at Rives Junction is a typical mid-American farmhouse. Within its walls bedrooms have been turned into single and double cells for about eight nuns. The abbess and the former abbess live in other buildings. Cramped but cozy is the feel of these places. I have only myself seen into the kitchen which is entered through the main door on the side. Beyond it is a small living room. The only men ever allowed into the cloister are priests and only on very specific occasions such on the

day of Theophany, when Holy Water is prepared and used to bless all the buildings of the monastery. On one occasion I witnessed, a young married priest was elated to have the privilege of entering the cloister and blessing the rooms. This was a rare privilege, as at most every other time only the priest-monk of the community performs this ritual of blessing.

Beyond the Cloister on the outside of the main monastery grounds is the St. Nicholas House, the home of the two priest-monks. Each has his own room that includes a personal altar-like arrangement of icons and religious items. Since one of the priests is an accomplished iconographer, his work can be found in the house. In the main living room is a large wall mural of the Dormition which also depicts the monastery in its ideal form, the bishops and priests, and the nuns themselves, all in attendance at the Dormition. These home icons are not just for show; they have all been properly blessed as instruments of prayer. This house was once the home of a neighbor and was bought to accommodate the needed priests for the community.

The house is arranged in a manner indicative of its residents and their purposes here. Little space is set aside for comfort or entertainment. A desk and bookshelves dominate the main living area and serve as an office. The downstairs is similarly converted for official use. The priests do have a television, which is aptly tucked out of the way on the top shelf of a closet. During the cold winter months, the priests also maintain a small enclosed porch as something of a greenhouse.

A two-story guest house was built to accommodate the growing numbers of visitors to the community featuring eight rooms and two full baths upstairs, a sewing

room, a cell or personal room for the former abbess, laundry, icon studio, and offices downstairs. Guests and Pilgrims are a very important part of the day-to-day community, and it is rare to have an empty guest house. Monastics are admonished to treat each guest as if he or she were "Christ himself," and to take hospitality as a religious duty.

The furnishings are simple and spartan, and each room has two beds for times of need, although usually only a married couple shares a room. Above each bed as well is an icon, to watch over the sleeping guest. Potted plants add life to the main hallway, and the entrance or foyer sports a small sitting room with photo albums showing the growth and expansion of the monastery. Pictures of the Romanian-American Bishops, the Varatec Monastery, and Icons adorn the walls.

Downstairs, the guest house serves as more of a work area for the monastery. In the offices, the monastery's newsletter, *The Burning Bush* (Romanian, *Rugul Aprins*), is published on a seasonal basis. It is published bilingually in English and Romanian. This periodical serves to quench the thirst of those who wish to learn from the monks and nuns or about the monks and nuns. But that is not the only way the facility is used to quench thirst. For some time now the best drinking water has come from the guest house. It has been common to see both guests and nuns bringing large water bottles in and out of the basement there. The difference is due to the deeper well drilled for the guest house: the water lacks a certain sulfur smell and taste that the kitchens have. Currently, there a new water system is being developed behind the guest house, next to the gardens.

The sewing room is spacious, but dominated by a large table upon which one almost always finds long lengths of very fine embroidered fabrics used in vestments making or altar covers. One may learn a lot about the significance of these items by spending time here. For instance, the colors used all have meanings related to the time of the year. Reds are used for Christmas, purple for Lent, white for Pascha, greens for Pentecost. A good part of monastery income also comes from the nun's production of vestments and the like for parishes across the country. The abbess and one of the younger nuns currently oversee these time-consuming projects.

As of 1996, the icon studio was not used much. For several years, a nun trained as an iconographer was in residence at the monastery. The space is much cleaner and more like an exhibition area when not in such use. However, the monastery still endeavors to put on a week-long Icon painting workshop at least once a year for lay people interested in learning the art. The space itself is small, an eight- foot square room. Numerous icons and examples of the art are to be found within the room, including several unfinished pieces that allow the viewer to get a glimpse of the process midway to completion.

From the studio one may walk out the back door to the gardens kept by the nuns. Here they grow a good amount of their own produce, including tomatoes, peppers, squashes, etc. There is also the beginning of an orchard and what might become a fine arboretum of evergreens. From the gardens one may also look out into the back yard of some of the nuns' Rives Junction neighbors. These folk have adapted well to the perhaps strikingly foreign presence of the monastery and have

been known to volunteer some help on projects throughout the year.

The Pavillion and Outlying Grounds

On the southern edge of the central grounds is the large pavilion. This open air, wooden construct was only built in the early 1990's and serves a large, temporary church for special events in the summer season. The most important use of the pavilion is for accommodating the vast numbers of pilgrims and clergy who visit during the Monastery's Feast Day Pilgrimage on August 15. In 1996 the pavilion was used not only for the day services on August 15 but also for the vigil the night before. It is also cleared afterwards and is used as a feast hall. The pavilion is about 60 feet by 60 feet square, with an additional 10 feet by 40 feet extension on the each side for more seating. The altar area is thus easily defined by a single concrete step upwards, and it is also enclosed fully on the sides and back. The ceiling is perhaps some 25 feet above the floor, with a few windows to let in sunlight. When full, the pavilion easily holds four hundred or more people. At the pilgrimage in the last few years, this number has consistently been exceeded.

During most of the year the pavilion is a place to store chairs, tables, and construction supplies out of the elements. When services are to be conducted, it is thoroughly swept, cleaned, and decorated as with icons, flowers, and sometimes a very large pennant-like icon of Christ Pantocrator which hangs along the back wall. The altar is a simple table covered by the proper cloths and invested with the proper ritual to make a consecrated church. One of the most alluring aspects of the pavilion

church and one of the clearly recognized attractions to pilgrims is that there is no iconostasis, or icon screen, between the nave and the sanctuary. Thus on the feast day the people are able to observe a complete hierarchical divine liturgy, that is, liturgy with attendance by bishops, priests, deacons, and sub-deacons, with no visual obstructions but the persons ahead of them. This allows the people to see the many steps to the preparation of the gifts that are usually hidden from view.

Beyond a line of trees and down a hill from the pavilion are the wide-open lawns of the cemetery. In the center of the cemetery is a large Romanian style wooden cross shrine. Around it are the beginnings of what will become a large Orthodox Christian grave yard. Already a dozen or more individuals have found their final resting place here. One of the elder mothers is in charge of keeping the grounds here. Most of the graves involve a headstone or wooden marker in the shape of a cross. These come with a small enclosed alcove set in them for candles to be burnt, and are maintained by a nun assigned to the task. Around the base of the grave and in most cases stretching to the end of the whole grave is an elaborate flower and succulents garden. Burial here offers more advantages than assured grave upkeep, since it is a common Orthodox practice to have a priest bless the graves, at least once a year, usually just after Pascha. Also, Orthodox Christians participate in a large number of memorial services known as *parastasis* and *panakhida* at set intervals of time after burial. They are also remembered in the petitions and litanies during services on a regular basis within the monastery church.

Lastly, the monastery grounds stretch into the woods beyond the cemetery as

well. A number of footpaths are cut through the area; benches are located at strategic sites for peaceful retreat walks. One of the nuns told me that her favorite place in the monastery (besides the church of course) was the forest. There she would take walks and enjoy the natural beauty. She was also trained as a biologist as well. When the nuns first came to the forest, it was darkened by the canopy of evergreens. Neighbors from Rives Junction were kind enough to brighten the trails with flowers they planted along the way. And on some occasions the nuns have allowed hunting on their back property. The woods extend several acres to the south to an adjacent corn field and to the west to the railroad tracks from which Rives Junction derives its name.

The Building Project

Already the information given above is becoming increasingly obsolete. Starting in 1996, the monastery began construction on the next phase of its development. Currently the trapeza is being lengthened and improved to facilitate the treatment of the numerous guests that come for special events. After that the community will begin on an expanded cloister and guest house with improved facilities for pilgrims and visiting clergy. The new cloister will contain a private chapel for the use of the nuns only. These three buildings-- cloister, trapeza, and guest house-- will form a courtyard wall in the center of which will be built a new church in an old Moldavian style. This means it will be not only grand, tall, and picturesque, but also spacious inside and probably without the cumbersome pews that are found in America but not in the old country.

The design follows the Moldavian pattern in other ways as well. To insure durability, the monastics have had to search long and hard to find contractors willing and capable of designing structures that should last a thousand years. For the most part today's American constructions tend to be flimsy and temporary compared to a medieval fortress-style monastery. The monastery must be just as physically adamant as it is spiritually. Its design and construction must reflect the values of its inhabitants. This also requires rare building materials and greater expense. Thus, the nuns, who receive no money other than what donations come in and income from religious items, are forced to build slowly, as they accumulate the money. They have no set contract for the construction. So, the current phase which is the trapeza, has been on and off throughout the year. It will be several years before the church is seen. Until then they have faith and build what they can, in the spirit of the medieval cathedrals which took decades to complete.

There is also the possibility that the outlying grounds will be further developed. Though there are no current plans, it may be that a few additional areas will be constructed. The acreage may easily support a hermitage in the woods. There may also be some additional shrines built, in the *Troița* style, or perhaps in gazebo form. Gazebos overlooking a well or pool of water are especially useful for the blessing of waters on feast days. There is a spring-fed pond in the woods that may be cleaned and developed for this purpose.

The Garden of the Virgin

The monastery is not merely the collection of buildings described above. As a space, it is meant to be somehow separate from the world, a place where one makes the transition physically along with spiritually into the sacred. The monastery is described by the nuns not only as their home, but as a garden, a desert, a fortress, and a battlefield. These contradictory images emphasize the constant process of the monastic life, which is always in struggle against sin and toward the holy transfiguration of the earth. It is in this sense that the icon of the Holy Dormition monastery which is portrayed in the St. Nicholas house describes the place. It is an ideal portrait of a Moldavian fortress monastery, surmounted by the eternal event of the Dormition of the Mother of God and attended by the nuns and priests of the community and the bishops of the Romanian Orthodox in America.

In every part of the monastery one may see not only the mundane function of the construction but also an underlying theology of monastic life. The surface is important however, for it serves continually to remind those who dwell in and visit the monastery of the eternal values that animate the place. Whenever I asked the nuns about their hopes for this monastery, they never spoke in terms of the building project or the adding of material largess, but in terms of the spiritual growth and of the community.

The monastery grounds are designed in such a manner that they reflect the macrocosm of the Orthodox cosmos. Many layers of history and symbolism are embedded in the walls and halls of the place. Just as the monastery is a microcosm

and a temple of the Holy Spirit, so is each individual nun as well. In the next chapter, we will discuss how the nun as a person internalizes the monastic structures into her lifestyle and the special roles she plays in the monastery herself.

CHAPTER IV

SPECIAL ROLES WITHIN THE MONASTERY

Now that we have looked at the historical and spatial context of the monastery, we may turn to the actors in this drama themselves. The nun (Romanian: *colugarița*) is the primary figure here, but what we have to say about her is generally true of a monk as well, including the priest-monks who serve the community in Rives Junction. In defining and describing what a nun is, one can look at several aspects. These aspects include the theological, the personal, the structural, the behavioral, and the physical. Each of these aspects sheds light on one level of the life of a nun.

First, there is the way that the nuns define themselves. This "insider" definition is theological, philosophical, and Orthodox Christian. Examining the theology of monasticism provides us with a conceptual framework that helps explain the formation of roles within the community. This also provides the definition of a monastic which is in use in the church itself. The central difference that marks a monastic in contrast to the rest of the church are his or her vows: statements of intent that have a direct impact on lifestyle and personal behavior.

Second, nuns are human beings who have diverse personal experiences which shape their lives and help push them toward monasticism as a way of life. Nuns and monks have families which exert powerful formative influences upon them, as they

do to any person. Monastics are also guided by "spiritual fathers", and we shall consider this important role as well. These influences also have a direct impact on lifestyle and personal behavior. Together, the theological and personal approaches provide an internal, existential interpretation of the nun.

All of this background then leads us to describe and define the structural and physical specifics of the special role known as "nun": the monastic hierarchy; the monastic "rites of passage," or tonsuring; the functional "roles" within the community; the habit; and other "tools of the trade" such as prayer aids and icons. These are the observable externals of the monastic lifestyle and root the role of the nun into the religious system. They differ from the existential aspects of monasticism by virtue of their relative inflexibility (Lawson, 1985, pg. 87), providing the empirical standards by which the community can recognize the nuns.

Vows

Monastics themselves have different ways of expressing their own identity. The spiritual father of the community is fond of saying, "Monastics are people who decide to start living in Eternity today," that is, renouncing their own worldly lives and acting to bring forth the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. In this simple phrase is also an assumption of continuity with centuries of Orthodox mystical, or *hesychast*, ideas. The essence of the monastic life in the theology of Orthodoxy is the *transfigured* life, a life transformed by the central, saving power of Jesus Christ.

The monk is one who commits himself to let this transformation be

completely expressed in him. Monastic life is a manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven in this world. The monk is devoted to freeing the world from Satan's grip and to restoring among Christians in the world the eschatological vision that was lost. We are called monks, not so much because of our physical withdrawal from the world, but rather because we should converse with God day and night and should possess nothing of our own on earth but the things of God. (Braga, 1996, p.151).

The vehicle through which the monastic achieves this transformed life is the ascetic lifestyle. The taking of vows is an essential practice and part of becoming a monk or nun. Three central vows are considered necessary for the Orthodox Christian monastic, but they are far from simple: *poverty*, *chastity*, and *obedience*, sometimes referred to as or replaced by *stability* in the Roman Catholic tradition. Each vow has very tangible, observable ramifications on the nun.

These effects illustrate the relationship between the internal and external life of the nun, and how the theological definition impacts on the physical and structural definition of the special role. Poverty begins with the renouncing of worldly riches. The monastics sell or donate all they own and enter the community ideally without possessions. Over time, monastics acquire their own private and personal possessions, usually items such as books on religious topics or icons, incense, etc., but the amount is never great. Most college freshmen probably own more in their small dormitory rooms. The nuns of Rives Junction are clearly not wealthy in material terms. Due to the availability of books in the United States, as compared to Romania, texts on prayer and the monastic life often top the list of personal goods. Should a nun be called to move to another monastery or church, she only takes what she can, which

is usually just some clothes and other small essentials. A monastery may itself become very wealthy, but no monk or nun is considered to own a part of it. Rather, the monastery should be considered "incorporated according to the laws of the state" where the monks hold "a kind of political authority over the territory, and one may consider the abbot a mayor." (Hillery, 1992, p. 68). In the case of the Holy Dormition Monastery, ownership is accorded to the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America under the supervision and direction of Bishop Nathaniel.

Chastity at first seems self-explanatory. The monastic abstains from sexual activity and does not marry. Though priests within the Orthodox Churches may marry before being ordained, those who do not are expected to remain celibate and are considered "priest-monks," or Hieromonks. This is so even if they do not spend most of their life in a monastery. For women of course this is different. While it is increasingly commonplace to find women who live a single life by choice, in times past the idea of a daughter not marrying was quite exceptional. Many of the earliest women martyrs were those who chose the life of the virgin against the wishes of their families and society. As Brenda Meehan-Waters points out,

Although they would have disclaimed any feminist goals, they did in their own way make considerable claims to autonomy by the simple insistence that their own salvation was of paramount importance, more important than the claims of family, marriage, or village. (Meehan-Waters, 1993, p. 15).

Chastity or celibacy in the context of a communal monastery is not just an absence of sexual activity or marriage, however, though this is noteworthy enough. Besides these things, George Hillery points out that the monastics' vow of stability,

that is, to stay in a monastery until the end of their lives, has some similarities to marriage (Hillery, 1992, p.102). However, it is not unusual for Orthodox monastics to change monastery locations in their lifetime, though this requires the permission of the abbot or abbess (Robinson, 1916, p. 14). During the period of this research, for example, two nuns left the Holy Dormition community, one returning to Romania and another founding a skete, a monastic settlement founded under the authority of a sovereign monastery (Ibid.). Meanwhile, another two nuns came from Romania. There are other ways in which monastic life is like married life, as both monks and nuns are considered upon their profession to have become symbolic brides of Christ, and committed to his community, the church that is symbolic of the body of Christ. As Hillery (1992, p. 102) suggests,

It is probably impossible to say whether a monk's emotional attachment is as deep or as intense as that in marriage, because the attachments are so different-- as different as agape and eros can be. But his emotional attachments certainly are more extensive. His celibate commitment permits him greater latitude.

In Orthodoxy, the relationship between marriage and priesthood runs deep. Along with the monastic commitment to an almost nuptial relationship with the Saviour, the sacrament of marriage is itself looked upon as an ordination to a "nuptial priesthood." (Evdokimov, 1995, p. 41).

Obedience is perhaps one of the most profound vows in the eyes of an American audience. In the monastic community there is a head, an abbot or abbess who oversees the temporal and spiritual well-being of the monastery. In becoming a monastic, one must vow to obey whoever is in charge, all of the time, as if that

person is Christ. This is a powerful act of humility and trust, and is often one of the most difficult to follow.

Numerous examples in the correspondence between monastics show that this relationship is essential in maintaining a close-knit community and is difficult at best. For example, in the letters between the Medieval Byzantine Abbess Eulogia and her spiritual father, the very esteemed Theoleptos of Philadelphia, a recurring theme was that of personal conflicts (Hero, 1994, p. 59). For Theoleptos, divisiveness within the cenobitic community was a great danger, the work of the devil. "If one person intentionally separates from the harmonious fellowship of the brothers, the enemy immediately finds a foothold and through one hastens to control the rest" (Sinkewicz, 1992, p. 219), warns the venerable bishop. The solutions for problems of disobedience are simple yet demanding: vigilance in prayer, open confession to the community and the asking of forgiveness, sometimes even in response to exchanging frivolous words during services (Sinkewicz, p. 227). Where necessary, superiors such as the abbess or spiritual father are brought in to help resolve conflicts. On occasion, conflicts are not solved easily, and one solution is to remove the nun from the community. What was true in Theoleptos' day is still true today in Rives Junction¹.

The vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are theologically the ethical

¹ Questions of obedience and stability are perhaps the greatest concerns for the Holy Dormition Monastery. The answer most frequently given in the interview to the question, "What has been particularly challenging for you in the monastic life?" has been maintaining "obedience" and a properly humble heart. The solutions they apply are identical to those given to Abbess Eulogia: vigilance in prayer, confession, and asking for forgiveness.

trinity of the nun's life. The "taking of vows" itself is a ritualized act, however, which will be discussed further below. Living by these ascetic principles, the nun begins a process of ever-increasing orientation and devotion to the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Demographics and Family

The majority of nuns at the Rives Junction site are Romanians by birth. Of the eight monastics that I interviewed, all were born in Romania, and most of them (six) were from Moldavia where monasticism is very strong. As of 1996, all of the ten nuns were ethnically Romanian, and over half were fluent in English. This is not to say that only Romanians are welcome there. There had been one nun who was American by birth who left the monastery to form a *skete*, which is a small monastic settlement under the supervision of a "sovereign" monastery (Robinson, 1916, p. 14). Meanwhile, another American began living as a novice at the monastery in late 1996.

In the Holy Dormition community, the ages of the nuns vary widely. The youngest sisters are in their mid twenties while the oldest are in their eighties, with an even sprinkling in between. The average age of those interviewed is fifty-two but the mean is forty-one. Three of the youngest nuns have never lived in another monastery, having come from Romania directly to join the Holy Dormition community. Others have lived in Varatec or other Romanian monasteries. The priest-monks, who have lived more often outside monasteries than in them, have had well-

travelled careers. Of the subjects interviewed, all but one had sought to enter a monastic life at an early age. The average age of entrance was eighteen years old, with a low of ten years old and a high of thirty-one years old. For professed monastics, the average age of tonsuring was thirty years old. For rasaphore nuns, the average age for becoming a rasaphore was twenty-four. A rasaphore is a beginning monk or nun, which will be discussed more extensively below.

Among Romanian Orthodox monastics, a religious lifestyle seems to run in the family, especially for those from Moldavia (including the territory that would become Soviet Moldova). Of the eight subjects interviewed, only one could not recall any family members being monastics or priests, but, in this case, the family was nonetheless very pious and faithful. All others had either an aunt, a brother, a sister, or widowed mother who became monastics. One subject told me that every family had one monastic somewhere in the past, and this would support George Hillery's claim that "most important, [the monastic's] family was largely responsible for his present religious background" (Hillery, 1992, p. 97). This familial proliferation of monasticism does not mean however that the subjects had an easy time becoming monastics themselves. Of the eight, two had families who initially did not support their decisions for various reasons. One father wanted his daughter to be a doctor or a teacher. However, both situations in time turned out positive as they saw the commitment of their daughters. Another had a mother who was emotionally distraught to see her daughter leave the home for the monastery, but eventually relented. In one case, a nun received a very supportive response to her decision from

her father and was surprised. He told her that life in "the world" was not necessarily an easy thing either, requiring great effort and "lots of work." In the end, the monastic life was probably better.

Often, parents wished to make sure that their children were sincere and committed before embarking on that path. This was especially the case for the two that entered as children at ten to twelve years of age. Only through their own precocious persistence did they convince their parents of their sincere desire to become monastics. There were of course, many good reasons for sending young children to a monastery. There they could receive the beginnings of education. The two subjects who entered at a very young age did so before the second world war, when children's education was quite different in Romania. This persistence was related to me in a story of a saint one nun had read as a child:

The mama was killed and the child was looking and the child said, 'kill me the same, kill me I am Orthodox and I want to be with Mama' . . . the man who was beating her mother saw that the child was beautiful and said, 'give me that child'. And he took her in his arms and said gently 'come with me and I will [take care of you]', and she cried out 'No! Why? !', and struggled and kicked him. He was very ashamed in front of the people and took the child and threw her down the steps and the child died and then was there with Mama. This is when someone is 'clean', when someone is innocent . . . God loves us like this. (Interview, 1996)

For this elder nun, the child's martyrdom was a noble goal attainable for a child through the monastic life.

Most monastics can maintain a relationship with their birth family, especially in Romania where the monasteries are not distant from home. The Holy Dormition

monastery, however, is not typical in this manner. Since the monastery was founded for the express purpose of establishing the monastic way of life in America, the nuns have left their families behind. Only about a third have family in the United States, and most of those relatives are fellow nuns or monks. One of the monastics gave up the opportunity to live with a sibling in a Romanian monastery in order to live with an old friend here in the U.S. It is not uncommon to find monastic families remaining in proximity to each other. This may or may not be intentional, and more often or not it is convenient. Otherwise, the communication kept between nun and family is quite infrequent. They average one or two phone calls or letters per year. This infrequency is primarily a matter of physical distance. All of the nuns have had very good relations with their families after entering the monastic life. Though the world is renounced by a nun, family ties are not in practice completely abandoned. Hillery (1992, p. 101) suggests that the monastery itself does not become a new family, even though the family is a model. However, the Rives Junction community often *feels* very much like a family, and some of the nuns do say that this is their family now. Family relationships, especially parent-child, are the core metaphor of the relationships between the divine and the human and are expressed extensively throughout the monastery.

Personal Experiences

Besides having supportive families and monastic relatives, many of the subjects interviewed had powerful experiences with monasteries that motivated them

to choose this direction in life. The interviews shed light on a variety of aspects of the monastic life. In looking at how these individuals came to enter monasticism, one can see how the religious system of orthodox monasticism interfaces with the laity on many levels and in many ways. Each story illustrates the integration of the nun or monk as special role with the rest of the community. At the same time, each story brings to life the very personal and transformative side of monasticism.

The experiences the monastics of Rives Junction shared in the interviews included many strong childhood memories of monasteries in Romania. Occasionally, the children were inspired by the beauty of the monasteries they visited. One nun walked five or six miles with her family to a nearby monastery on feast days and remembered clearly the awe inspired just by the massive entry gate and the angelic sound of the choirs. Another remembered her aunt, who was a nun but died outside of the monastery during the communist persecutions that evicted many nuns from their convents in the late 1950's. She described her aunt as "saintly, beautiful, and peaceful"-- attributes that came to be mentally linked for her with life as a nun. Others had dreams of their own as children. One wanted to be a saint, while another wanted to sing and perform as a deacon in church (a role limited to men), and another wished to sing in the choir with age mates.

While most of the monastics interviewed seemed to have developed a longing for the ascetic path early in life, they often had key turning-point experiences that cemented their resolve in entering the monastery. For one it was as simple as hearing Mark 2:14, "Come, follow me," at a serendipitous moment of decision. It is this

same passage which first moved the young St. Anthony, according to Athanasius. One nun related that when she had graduated from high school she was waiting at a bus stop where she ran into an old family friend, who happened to be a nun. When the nun asked her about her plans, she said that she hadn't made any solid plans yet. The nun suggested that she consider the monastery. At first the young woman laughed, but immediately regretted her response when she saw the nun was serious. When she said she would consider it, the nun looked at her seriously and said, "I don't know how long the door will be open." In those days, it was very difficult to become a monastic because the Communists were not very keen on seeing young potential workers "corrupted" by religion. Nonetheless, the nun was a recognizable and socially active part of the Orthodox community. Before the summer was over, the young woman had packed her things and arrived at the monastery, weeks before they expected her.

Another amazing story has been told in Father Roman Braga's *Exploring the Inner Universe* (1996). The book includes Father Roman's account of his imprisonment during the Communist period in Romania. Accused in 1948 of aiding a member of the anti-communist Legionnaire's Movement, he was sentenced to prison for five years. Part of this sentence was fulfilled at the Romanian version of Gulag, Pitești, and the rest by working on the Danube-Black Sea canal which involved heavy labor and the loss of more than ten thousand lives (Braga, 1996, pp. 37-38). In prison, religious activity was strictly forbidden and even the physical motions of prayer could merit a beating. Among the few religious intellectuals,

theologians, priests, monks, and other imprisoned Orthodox Christians, a form of underground religion or catacomb Christianity developed. They were even able to perform the Eucharist using tonic water slipped from the pharmacy and bread pieces from the rare coffee breaks and meals. In this place of innumerable hardships the young Braga spent his first year in solitary confinement. As Father Roman now recalls,

What I do know is that we will never reach the same spiritual level of life as in Communist imprisonment. There was no pencil, no paper, no T.V., nothing; especially in solitary confinement, you could not even look through a window. There was no exterior horizon, nothing but the four walls of your cell. You had to go somewhere; you had to find an inner perspective, because otherwise you would truly go crazy. I'm ashamed to say that I was forced to find myself in prison. (Braga, 1996, p. 40).

This development of a spiritual life led him to continuously delve deep into the self, in contemplation. There he began to feel a sense of the presence of God within him. The life of hesychasm, or inner silence, was born within him, but he was not yet a monastic. Prison served for him as the desolation of the desert served the early ascetics. The ultimate transition came for Father Braga in the next half of his imprisonment, when he worked in the labor camps:

When I was at the Danube-Black Sea Canal I met a great monk. He contributed much to my conversion to the monastic life. God worked through him, so to say. In that labor camp, I had a dream. I do not know how to interpret this dream, which anyway I consider a revelation in my life. One day they beat me very cruelly because I did not complete my required work . . . That night I was very depressed. We slept on long boards packed together like sardines; if one man turned around, the whole row had to turn. I did not eat anything; I was not hungry, although I was weak. I had a strange dream; I do not know how to interpret it. My mother was calling me

at the entrance of St. Nicholas Church at Condrita Monastery. It was Pascha night; the bells were ringing. She said, "How good that you are here, because God told me that you have to save the princess Laodicea." I was trying to think what princess this was, because in the same dream I was looking through a book about the Church of Laodicea. "Where is the princess?" "She is in the church," my mother said. "The Soviets are coming to kill her." "And what shall I do with her?" "Go and hide yourself in the woods. You know the places." The princess was a little girl. I took her by the hand and started running. The Communists invaded the monastery through all three gates and were chasing us. Many times I fell down, I felt tired, and this child raised me high in the air and said, "You are not saving me; I am saving you." And immediately it was quiet and no one was chasing us. And the princess said to me, "Look around you. Nothing is real. The world is full of symbols. The only real things in this world are God, myself, and you." ... I woke up. My friends were not sleeping. They said, "We saw you very agitated and we are sure you had a dream." And I told them the dream. The lawyer, who was not a religious man, said, "I think you will become a priest" . . .

When I was released from prison, I saw one of my friends, a doctor, a professor of medicine. He had under his arm many books. He said, "What can I offer you?" And I said, "Nothing. I want to become a monk." He took a volume and offered it to me. It was *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Beaudelaire. I opened it to a sonnet, and I read it right then and there: "The only reality in this world is God and you; everything that you see around you is just a symbol." (Braga, 1996, pp. 42-47).

Shortly thereafter, Braga was tonsured a monk and also ordained a deacon, serving the Metropolia of Iasi for five years until he was again arrested with many other theological and spiritual leaders for "corrupting the children" with religion. But his experiences in the prison and labor camps kept him dedicated to his monastic vows, even through the years when the Communist government closed most of the monasteries and evicted the monks and nuns. Many monastics, seeing no other options, gave up their vows and returned to the world, sometimes marrying and having children as well. These were very trying times for Orthodoxy in Eastern

Europe. Now, these trials have created a new generation of martyrs and confessors, those who have suffered for their faith, who have brought their heritage to the United States through the Holy Dormition Monastery.

Through their personal experiences, monastics are propelled to renounce the world and enter the ascetic life. Some may have startling and prophetic experiences, others come quietly with little fanfare. These bits of life histories can be seen as "contemporary expressions of the . . . religious heritage" (Earhart, 1989, pg. 10) of Orthodox Christian monasticism. They show the activity of the religious system on a very personal, experiential level. Monastics are not generated by accident, but by involvement with the religious system. In every case, there is a serious decision that involves not only the self but the family as well. In Orthodoxy, these decisions are helped and guided by figures in the community who have been prepared to do so: spiritual fathers.

Spiritual Fatherhood

The personal experiences of the individual are always tied to that essential institution of monastic community: spiritual fatherhood. The guidance provided by spiritual fatherhood is just as important *before* the monastery as it is once entered. The nuns of the Holy Dormition Monastery were asked about their spiritual fathers and guides in the interview phase of research. For some, this spiritual father was the local parish priest or a local monk sought out by the whole family for guidance. Others were charismatic leaders who had their own following of "disciples." One nun

described her spiritual father as a "Santa Claus" figure who called her "little one" and told her that indeed the monastic life would be good for her. This older priest was in fact considered the spiritual father for the whole city, unofficially, since he was so well loved by the populace. Sometimes the spiritual father that moved them was known only briefly. One nun told of a monk in a relative's monastery that urged her to a life of repentance since "the end of the world is coming." In most cases, these figures are connected to the would be monastic through the family and the home parish.

Another spiritual father might be a simple monk in prison, guiding from the heart where no books are available. Father Roman described his own spiritual father in prison, Father Evghenie Hulea, as follows:

He was not a theologian, He was not an intellectual. I was impressed by him as a monk, not by his theoretical knowledge . . . What impressed me more was his spirit of forgiveness. This man was tortured very much, even there in our presence. Because he was a monk, they did not lose any opportunity to make fun of him, and their cruelty was inventive. All the guards mocked him, all the officers, and once, after they had dragged him in the mud he was completely filthy like a pig, he only smiled and said, "God bless you, my sons." To him all of them were his sons-- those tyrants, those criminals, all those torturers were his spiritual sons. He was always serene and calm; I never saw him troubled. He suffered everything with resignation, without any thought of revenge. We were bad; we talked about them like monsters, but he always said, "Leave him in peace. Let us say some prayers." And he started a Psalm . . . (Braga, 1996, pp. 44-47).

Father Evghenie would survive the prison camps to go on and live a peaceful life as a recluse. And in time, Father Roman Braga would attain his peaceful life as spiritual father of the Holy Dormition Monastery. Father Evgenie, Father Roman, and

spiritual fathers like them possess a notable charisma rooted in their kindly, fatherly compassion. In the monastic environment, this spiritual family replaces the monastic's birth family in a very real way. This is not coincidental but cultivated, for early desert fathers that discuss spiritual fatherhood see in it a great responsibility in the guidance of the spiritual son or daughter (John Climacus, 1982; Turner, 1990).

Of course, spiritual guidance from living sources is always coupled for the monastic with guidance from those who have gone before. The saints of the church also provide insight when needed. Though not always the immediate source of inspiration to enter the monastic life, the sayings of the holy fathers quickly become a continuing source of support once that step is taken. The *Philokalia* and the *Paterikon* are important resources for the nuns of the Holy Dormition. The Holy Fathers themselves exhort the monastic to the virtues of spiritual fatherhood. For example, from John Climacus:

A ship which has a good navigator comes safely to port, God willing. A soul with a good shepherd climbs easily heavenward, even if it has earlier done much wrong.

A man, no matter how prudent, may easily go astray on a road if he has no guide. The man who takes the road of monastic life under his own direction may easily be lost, even if he has all the wisdom of the world (Climacus, 1982, p. 259).

Once a nun has entered the monastery, the role of spiritual father in the broadest sense of guide, teacher, mentor in the spiritual life is also taken by a spiritual mother. "The role of the priest is more that of the sacramental confessor, His instruction to the nuns in confession is inevitably to be obedient to the spiritual mother" (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 29). Therefore, one of the most important roles of the elder

monastic is as spiritual guide and teacher to the novice. With the guidance of the spiritual father of the community, a priest-monk sometimes known as a *duhovny* or *starets*, and the guidance of an elder nun as spiritual mother, the nun's life is constantly kept directed on a spiritual path. Mother Cassiana describes this relationship:

This relationship which exists between elder nun and novice hearkens back to the earliest days of monasticism when the fathers dwelt in the desert. Then, one desiring to lead the monastic life would seek out a monk living alone and he would ask that monk to instruct him in the monastic way. They would live, pray, and work within their humble dwelling, the younger brother being obedient in all ways to his elder. Though the community life later developed, Orthodox monasticism has always allowed for this ancient way to continue, often in conjunction with a communal setting . . . (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 46).

In Varatec, the idiorhythmic style in which an elder nun and a small number of novices live together, keeping a small household, recreates this ancient desert tradition. Since the Holy Dormition monastery is so small, this guidance occurs around the cenobitic form. At certain times of the day one may see an elder and her spiritual child consulting in a quiet corner of the church or monastery grounds.

The significance of spiritual parenthood cannot be overstated. The relationships that develop often determine the success and happiness of a nun's life in the community. In consideration of personal background, one last factor seemed to stand out among the subjects interviewed, relating to this issue of spiritual fatherhood and its importance. Half of the interviewed monastics had a parent who

died early in their life.² In one case, the subject said that after her mother had died, the Mother of God became a new mother. The monastic life can provide not only a spiritual father or mother, but a very literal sense of parenting for the monastic as well³.

Roles, Rites and Responsibilities

Within the monastic community can be found several levels of commitment and authority. Based on seniority and completion of prerequisites, a hierarchy of respect and obedience is established. Orthodox make no distinction between nuns and monks with regards to the rites of tonsuring and the wearing of habits, which will be described below (Robinson, 1916, pp. 7-8). It is through these rites and habits, among other things, that Orthodox monastics may distinguish their rank and station in a community.

A fledgling monastic is known as a *novice*, or *neophyte*, and has not actually taken any permanent vows or been tonsured as a nun. Before being recognized as an

² One of the traditions in Romanian families is that the youngest child, especially a daughter, is expected to take care of the parents. Monastic life can be in direct competition with this tradition, and, in one case, the nun was only able to enter the monastery after the death of a parent.

³ In this I disagree with George Hillery's supposition that the monastery is not a family because of the absence of parent-child relationships and husband wife relationships. The parent-child relationship is clearly an important part of life in the Holy Dormition. The husband wife role is present symbolically in the nuns relationship to Christ. It is not an exact match to the secular family, but it is a "spiritual" family nonetheless. See Hillery, 1992, pp. 98-101.

actual novice, however, the would-be nun lives with the community on a trial basis and can be identified by her incomplete habit. She will wear typical black clothing such as dresses, sweaters, long sleeved garments, and a black veil over the head. When she commits to the role of novice, she is not tonsured in any way but is given a *scufia*, a stiff, circular skull cap, which is blessed by a priest. At this stage, they are known as "sisters" but never as "mothers." Novices are usually assigned to an elder mother who oversees their spiritual maturation (see above).

Between the stage of novice and mother is the role of the *rasaphore*. As Mother Cassiana (1991, p.27) explains,

This middle stage in the monastic life is the one which many of the nuns refer to as 'half nun'. A novice or beginner in the monastery has made no official commitment and is still free to leave the monastery and return to lay life without any ecclesiastical penance. Once that novice has shown that she is indeed sincere in her desire to serve God as a nun, the abbess decides to advance her to the rank of rasaphore.

The term rasaphore is from the Greek "one who wears the rason," the long-sleeved outer garment, the *rasa*, which monks and nuns wear. This stage in the monastic life is marked by a *tonsuring*, or cutting of the hair. Once a sister is tonsured a rasaphore, she is expected to have taken on the "career" of monastic life permanently. The tonsuring itself for a rasaphore is a deceptively simple affair. I was able to observe a double rasaphore tonsuring on August 15 of 1996, the day of the Dormition of the Mother of God and the patronal feast-day of the monastery. Just before the beginning of the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, the visiting Metropolitan performed a blessing over the heads of two novices. N.F. Robinson provides a

translation of the typical prayer of the rasaphore rite:

We give thee thanks, O Lord our God, who according to thy great mercy hast delivered they [handmaiden] N., out of the vain life of the world, and hast called [her] to this high vocation. Enable [her] to live worthily in this Angelic estate; and protect [her] from the snares of the devil, and keep [her] pure in soul and body even unto death; and make [her] worthy to become an holy temple of thine. Keep [her] ever mindful of thee; and grant [her] the lowliness of thy commanments, and love, and meekness . . .

Unto thy saving yoke, O Lord, receive they [handmaiden], N., and make [her] worthy to be numbered in the flock of thine elect; clothe [her] with the robe of sanctification; with sobriety gird [her] loins; of all manner of temperence make [her] a champion; grant that in [her] and in us may abide a full measure of thy spiritual gifts; through the intercessions of our most holy Lady, the Theotokos and ever-Virgin Mary, and of all the Saints. Amen. (Robinson, 1916, pp. 72-73).

Both novices then had their typical head covering removed and their hair was loose and long. Tonsuring literally requires the cutting of hair. In this case, four locks of hair were taken, cut in a cruciform manner; the women were anointed, and older nuns came and provided them with a habit which signified their new and advanced stage. It was with tender care that the elders refitted the new rasaphores, right there in the front of the sanctuary, who then returned to the choir area to sing in the liturgy. Later I learned that the decision to tonsure was and is usually made by the spiritual mother, the abbess, and spiritual father of the community who decided or discerned when the two younger novices were ready for advancement. Had they been unwilling to receive the tonsuring, they would have had to present a reason for not proceeding, and neither novice seemed willing to hesitate and, in essence, disobey. Both new rasaphores reported that the tonsuring was a very special experience for

them. It certainly was a very special day for the community and the laity attending, as the community gained two new rasaphores.

A fully tonsured and professed nun is addressed as "Mother" or in Romanian, "Maica." The abbess is taken from the ranks of the mothers, but is not necessarily the one with the most seniority. Nuns who have reached a stage of great experience, age, and wisdom, may further deepen their monastic regimen by following what is known as the *great schema*, a path of increased devotion and discipline. Nuns who remain on the regular path are sometimes said to follow the *little schema*. This distinction is primarily found in Slavic and Romanian monasteries (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 32). The little schema nun follows "the modern representation of the Cenobitic ideals of St. Pachomius, St. Basil, and St. Theodore Studites" (Robinson, 1916, p. 27), while the great schema nun lives according to the stricter, eremitic ideals of St. Anthony. In either case, the tonsuring of a fully professed nun is a far more elaborate ceremony than the tonsuring of a rasaphore.

A tonsuring service is held during a Vigil service in the evening. The novice begins the service as usual, but is brought before the icons to venerate them and then is placed before the central icon of Christ, to the right of the royal, or central, doors. There her habit is removed until she only wears a white, baptismal gown. As one nun describes the process:

Just after the beginning of Matins, the novice is taken to the Vestibule. Her spiritual mother then covers the novice with her Mantia (long pleated cape), and the novice enters the church walking on her knees. She does a prostration (full bow to the ground) at the entrance to the church and in the middle of the church.

During the entrance, the choir sings a special Tropar, asking Christ to "open His Fatherly arms" to the novice who is like the Prodigal Son returning home. At this time, all of the people hold lighted candles . . . having arrived at the altar, the novice lies face down on the floor, with arms outstretched, in the form of a cross, still under the mother's mantia. This represents being crucified for Christ. The novice remains in this position until the bishop (or priest-monk) helps her to her feet.

The bishop then questions her intentions and whether she is coming of her own free will. He asks if she will remain in poverty, chastity, and obedience the rest of her life, and she answers, "Yes, God helping me." The bishop instructs her concerning the seriousness of the promise.

The bishop then lays his hand on her head and asks God to strengthen her in the desired life. A pair of scissors lay on the Gospel book, and three times the bishop instructs the novice to take them and give them to him. She does so and kisses his hand each time. This is a test of the novice's obedience and also gives her a chance to change her mind.

The novice is then tonsured. Her hair is cut cross-wise as a "sign of her renunciation of the world and all that is of the world, renouncing her self will and all desires of the flesh, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen."

At this point she becomes a nun. She receives a second name as a sign of a second baptism and of becoming a new person. The nun is then clothed in each piece of the monastic habit, with a special prayer and blessing by the bishop (Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America [ROCA], 1996, pp. 148-150).

Besides the interpretations provided by the anonymous narrator, this ritual demonstrates many important aspects of Orthodox monasticism. The ritual presents a true *imitatio Christi* pageant. The novice must first undergo a trial by the bishop involving three temptations of rejecting the monastic life, when she is asked to give him the scissors, the cross-like tool used to signify the worldly death of the nun. She must undergo the crucifixion, and is brought through into resurrection in the new life as a nun. As in baptism, she is given a new name as an indication of this new life.

Occasionally a new name is given to a rasaphore, in which case a new name is still given upon profession. Thus the service is also called a "second baptism." Nuns recognize each other thereafter in seniority, not by age of birth, but by age of tonsuring. Thus, an elderly nun who is a widow and has only recently professed has less seniority than a middle-aged nun who has been tonsured since her twenties. It should be noted that such matters of seniority are rarely significant in the day-to-day life of the monastery and are simply recognitions of experience. Considering the ever-present struggle to maintain humility, it would seem very out of sorts to find a nun at the Holy Dormition "pulling rank" on any other member of the community⁴.

The role of abbess does not require any special tonsuring or garment wearing beyond that of any other mother. Of course, she must have a blessing by a bishop to lead the monastery. However, the duty and responsibility of the abbess make clear her station to others. The role of abbess may or may not be a life-long position. The current abbess of the Holy Dormition received her post when the first abbess, now a great schema nun, retired from the position. An abbess may of course be moved from a position as well, either to lead another community, take on another task for the church, or for lack of ability.

Within the community there are many positions based on function and talent, and these positions may be rotated. At Holy Dormition there are so few nuns as to

⁴ St. John Climacus (1982) in the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* provides numerous examples of high-ranked monks undergoing tests of humility including even defrocking and return to novice status. Some end up preferring the role for the sake of the humility it teaches them.

make this flexibility quite limited. The first and foremost is of course the Abbess. Many monasteries also have a Mother Economa who is similar to the medieval chamberlain, managing the household and economic affairs of the community. Both these roles are held by individuals.

A very visible role is that of the Ecclesiarch and the Great Ecclesiarch. They are given a special blessing to enter the holy altar area and must follow a standard of reverence and respect for the holy (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 51). The ecclesiarch is generally responsible for the maintenance of the altar area and helps the clergy in the celebration of the services. The ecclesiarch can be seen moving into and out of the sanctuary during services, lighting and extinguishing candles, setting up reading stands, preparing offerings of bread, wine, holy water, incense, and the like. The most senior ecclesiarch is a tonsured mother and is known as the Great Ecclesiarch. There is also usually a vestmentara, a nun in charge of the vestments. The Great Ecclesiarch and the vestmentara together oversee the maintenance of the church (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 31).

Nuns are also assigned roles as singers, and there is usually an experienced nun who instructs the rest as a choir director. The *tipicara* (from the romanian *tipic*, or rule of prayer) is a nun who has the "responsibility to correct anyone reading or singing who makes a mistake and also to assure that the prescribed order for each service is followed" (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 51). Other roles are based on talent, such as seamstress, iconographer, cook, bead worker, groundskeeper, and cemetery keeper. Each nun at Holy Dormition is known for her own individual special task.

The stage of rasaphore does have its benefits and responsibilities. Besides the heightened commitment to the monastic path, the rasaphore now may take on greater liturgical responsibilities. She may become an epistle reader in the church, although on major feast days this role is usually filled by the abbess herself. A rasaphore generally participates equally in the choir of the monastery with the other sisters. She may also become an *ecclesiarch*. A rasaphore may also learn the rhythms and technique of playing the *symandron* (Romanian: *toaca*), a wooden board struck rapidly with a hammer as a call to prayer. The Toaca became especially important in the years of the Ottoman empire, according to one of the mothers, when bells were prohibited from ringing in Christian churches, but the practice itself goes back at least to the sixth-century (Hirschfeld, p. 19). The board may be handheld or suspended from two ropes and is about five feet long. The beat begins slowly but increases in speed and complexity, achieving a musical climax that is highlighted by bells when preceding a divine liturgy. At the Holy Dormition, there is one nun skilled in the rhythmic pounding of the toaca, and she has passed this skill on to one of the new rasaphores.

Lastly, a Romanian Orthodox nun in America is often called to return to the world as a speaker, educator, or representative of the church. Many nuns, especially those talented at public speaking, will find themselves constantly travelling to Orthodox gatherings. During the Orthodoxy Exhibit at the Chicago Field Museum nuns from Rives Junction visited twice, once to give a recital of Byzantine music. Over the course of my research at the Holy Dormition it has been the rule rather than

the exception for at least one of the mothers to be gone, attending conferences, retreats, and even special events such as choir concerts. It was also common to find the youngest sisters out on "field trips" with the abbess to events organized by Orthodox Parishes in the state. Unlike the life of a hermit, the rare Orthodox nun is in high demand and with the Holy Dormition Monastery taking on the role of a mission as well as monastery, these nuns will expect to lead a rigorous public life as well as spiritual one.

The life of the nun is both strictly regimented and surprisingly open to variation. So many areas of work and positions are available in the monastery that there is great room for personal exploration and creativity. Each position, such as abbess, ecclesiarch, and cook serve as variations to the category of "nun" as special role in the religious system. Before looking at the other "stuff" of the nun's world, i.e., the habit and other ceremonial and liturgical items, we need to comment on the special roles other than nun that are a part of the nun's world.

Priests, Monks, and Laity

There are also special "supporting" roles that exist and are necessary for a monastery to function. Since women in the Orthodox Church have not been ordained as full priests, they may not serve the liturgy and the sacraments. Thus it is necessary for there to be an attending priest for the nuns. At Holy Dormition there are two priests who are also monks, known as priest-monks. Both are experienced and accomplished priest-monks and hold the rank of Archimandrite. Since Bishops are

drawn from the experienced monks of the church, archimandrite also holds the connotation of Monsignor, in that an archimandrite is a candidate for Bishop. In the earliest days of monasticism, "archimandrite" signified the leader of a monastic community. Hieromonk is a common and lesser rank for other priest monks. The head priest-monk of the community has authority on par with the abess, and is usually referred to as the spiritual father of the community. The spiritual father is a keeper of wisdom, an advisor, confessor, and pastoral minister. The priest-monks themselves do not live in the monastery cloister but in a home adjoining the community.

Other priests are a common sight at the monastery, which maintains many personal links with parishes around the country. On special occasions it is not uncommon to find visiting priests serving the altar, including bishops and archbishops. The limited number of monasteries in the United States creates a much different type of contact with the church hierarchy than is perhaps possible in the old country. For example, it is very common to find Orthodox priests of several different ecclesiastical jurisdictions serving at the same liturgy. This often provides an alternative to the sometimes fractional and factional parish arrangements in the rest of the country. The monastery even draws a share of protestant ministers who come for dialogue or just curiosity.

Lastly the laity itself can play a special role in the community. Any lay person who enters the grounds of the monastery becomes in some sense a pilgrim and retreatant, though such terms most often are used in the specific context of designated

pilgrimage or retreat times. There are some laypeople however who play a more intimate role in the life of the community by spending a good portion of their time in service to the nuns' needs. A special group has arisen around the Holy Dormition monastery known as the "Friends of the Monastery." They have among their aims the raising of funds for the upgrading of the monastery facilities. Some of these friends come from as far as Cleveland and Minnesota to spend weeks at a time helping out the sisters. They also include members of not only Romanian but also American, Greek, Russian, and even Ethiopian churches. They include women and men and many potential candidates for the monastic life. A few of these women spend long periods of time in retreat at the monastery and participate as fully as possible in the nuns' way of life and may go as far as becoming unofficial novices. Some lay visitors may be invited to take on the challenge of reading psalms during the vespers or matins services, especially in English since many of the nuns read most comfortably in Romanian. This especially seems a sign of deeper welcome into the community, to share the religious ritual duties with the sisters.

Even though the monastery is the home of monastics, it is still very much tied to the rest of the church community. This is not unusual for Orthodox monasticism, where the notions of retreat and unity do not struggle with each other so much. Every person involved in the monastery plays a special role in its life and way.

The Monastic Habit

The first and most obvious difference in the appearance of nuns to others is

their distinctive garb. The monastic habit, sometimes called the "angelic habit," is what first separates the nun from "worldly" society. Each piece of the habit has some significance to the monastic way of life. Monastics may trace the wearing of a distinctive outfit to Saint Anthony or even St. John the Forerunner (or Baptist) (Mother Cassiana, 1991, p. 101). The habit is received through the stages of a nun's development. Upon becoming a novice, the sister receives a *rasa* and a *scufia*. Upon becoming a rasaphore she receives a *camilauca*, a veil worn in church. The *mantia* is the last piece gained at profession.

Underneath the habit is a *Paramandias*, an embroidery with symbols of the faith such as the cross and spear (R.O.C.A., 1996, p. 150). It is worn on the back and is symbolic of a yoke, through which the passions are bridled and the nun is reminded of taking upon her the burden of monastic life just as Jesus took up the Cross. The color black, and occasionally dark blue-blacks and grays, are used in the rest of the dress to symbolize the further mortification of the flesh. On top of the basic black dress the nun also wears a *rasa*, a black shirt or vest. In church the pleated cape or *Mantia* is also worn, which tends to billow out behind them when they walk in such a manner that it evokes a strong sense of presence. These two items are symbolic of spiritual armor and signs of salvation (R.O.C.A., 1996, p. 150).

On the head is worn the *skufia* (*skufitza*) a skull cap under which the hair is kept. From the *skufia* a veil runs along the sides of the face, for the most concealing all of the head except the nun's face. When the *mantia* is worn, it drapes down from

the top of the skufia as well. Also, unlike Roman Catholic nuns, the entire habit is black. The habit also includes a simple belt and shoes, which also have symbolic meanings of support and humility.

Prayer Aids

From the arm of many a nun can be seen draping a prayer rope. These ropes are the Orthodox version of rosaries. They are knotted and sometimes beaded in the shape of an ankh-like cross (the top arm is looped). These are used in the recitation of prayers much like rosaries. The nuns themselves design and produce their own prayer ropes, as well as ropes of different sizes for sale to guests. There is even a video available now giving instructions on how to make them.

Besides the habit, the nun owns few personal possessions. One nun confessed to me that she does own too many books, which are probably the most typical possession of a nun. Besides Bibles, there are large numbers of writings in Orthodoxy by or about the Saints. Especially important to monastics are the lives and letters of past monastics. Through this interface with historical situations, monastics seek to solve their own challenges and win their own battles against sin today. I have often heard the nuns discussing works with visitors who wish to learn more about monasticism, which has been very enlightening. However, it seems that every book that is recommended is considered an essential for understanding the monastic life--a situation that is not always favorable for the scholar with limited access and funds!

Candles and incenses are used by monastics as well. Primarily in church,

these items also may be used in the cell as part of a personal routine or rule of prayer. In the church a sand tray is available near the relics for the burning of small candles and large seven-day vigil candles are always lit above the icon stands in the front of the nave. Candles are used in at least two clear ways in the Orthodox church. Liturgically they are carried and presented as representatives of the light of Christ. For example, candles are held at the side of the priest reading the gospels and are carried before the gospel book in the "little entrance." Both actions intentionally connect physical light to the metaphysical Word. But candles, when used in private prayer or bought and placed in the church by guests are clearly offerings. These may be lit for certain purposes, such as the health or well-being of self or family. This type of candle use has largely been the province of lay piety, and the nuns do not seem to participate in much more than the maintenance of this votive-offering tradition through the tending of the ecclesiarch.

Icons

Icons are the most notable of Orthodox Christian ritual tools. In the monastery, they are omnipresent. In history they were the target of one of the church's greatest controversies, the Iconoclasm. In everyday life, the icons are an important part of personal piety. As a result, the topic of icons and iconography includes a large range of materials. Rather than examine this tangent in full, this section draws on the experience and insight of the nuns of the Holy Dormition, as they have represented this subject in their own ideas about and behaviors around

icons. Much of the historical and theological information presented here is the product of informal discussion with one key informant who was trained and blessed as an iconographer. The rest is the result of interviews and observations.

Icons are most often flat paintings, usually on wood and sometimes embellished with precious metals, which depict religious figures such as saints, Jesus Christ, The Virgin Mary, and special events in their lives such as The Resurrection or The Nativity. On the most superficial level, icons are pedagogical, especially in the case of the larger wall murals in the chapel. Many icons are actually much smaller, and portable pieces are kept in the home. Some icons are even kept and worn as amulets.

The Byzantine style of iconography is not simply a form of early Christian art that has failed to evolve into the Realism of the Renaissance. It specifically mirrors theological notions of transfiguration of the flesh to a heavenly, ideal, form. In this way it is a development along the lines of Hellenism but is intentionally Christian. While there is a great deal of variety in iconography, certain set standards, primarily ideological, must be followed. These allow icons to be identifiable across cultures and ages. Therefore, Orthodox iconographers describe their art as "writing" icons rather than painting them.

All icons play an important ritual role in Orthodoxy, however. While they clearly are understood as merely depictions of heavenly figures, these depictions are considered to be efficacious conduits or "windows" to those heavenly powers. Thus, when one venerates an icon of a saint one is actually considered to be interacting on

some level, mystically, with the saint. The Icons serves as two-way gate for the venerated and the venerator. This plays out not only through the mechanical gestures of bowing and kissing the icons, but through directing prayer *through* the icon as well. In the home, the icon's presence serves not only as a spiritual reminder but may in fact have a tutelary, amuletic role.

The nuns of the Holy Dormition certainly do have personal prayer relationships with saints of the church. One nun was fond of standing in a spot in the church directly under the icon of the saint from which her monastic name was derived. Others make sure to go out of their way to venerate icons in the church with which they have a developed relationship.

The power of the icon is most clearly revealed when one considers them from the perspective of the iconographer. To begin the painting of an icon, the potential iconographer should have the proper spiritual training and a proper blessing by a priest to be an iconographer. While not necessarily a distinct vocation, many famous iconographers have been able to work full time in this area. One iconographer was able to tell me that during work on a piece, she would pray to the subject of the icon for the proper inspiration. Through this, a spiritual relationship between subject and artist was formed. This relationship was considered by her to be necessary to making the work acceptable for spiritual use. Not surprisingly, the finishing of the face and eyes was what she considered would truly bring the icon to life. Part of the profound impact of the icon as art form that she suggested is this living presence which is experienced by Orthodox Christians as they meet the gaze of the painted eyes. Once

an icon is painted, it must then be finally "activated" by a blessing or consecration of sorts by being passed over the chalice during the liturgy, being blessed with holy water, or remaining in the sanctuary for forty days. By bringing the icon as close as possible to the ultimate source of the religion's power, the Incarnate God in the Eucharist, the icon can be considered fully "charged" and functional for ritual use.

Throughout the monastery the many items and objects of religious ritual can be found bringing a depth of exterior detail to what is really an interior mode of prayerful life. If one is to consider these items as storehouses of power and heavenly presence, then the monastery can be considered "holy" solely on its reservoirs of these batteries. But what makes these items so powerful is their repeated use and integration into the active lives of the community. Each item adds some character to the place, some connection to personal experiences, some attention to the Orthodox longing for salvation.

The Nun as Sacred Person

Nuns and monks have been described as angels, spiritual warriors, mystics, hesychasts, mortifiers of the flesh, repositories of holiness, keepers of prayers and vigilance, and a great many more things. They are also human beings with personal experiences and family situations like anyone else. They do not act alone but with the guidance of their fellow monastics, their spiritual fathers and mothers, and the Holy Spirit which acts through them. They are members of a clearly defined community with a practical division of labor. They are bearers of specially blessed clothes and

items, and they act upon these blessings through their vows and practices of prayer. Nuns are many things to many people, especially to each other. There is a rich body of monastic theology which defines them within their tradition. There is also a rich amount of detail to their lives which enriches and interacts with the theology of the nun. In terms of the religious system, the nun represents a well-defined, highly-structured special role to which a variety of people can dedicate themselves. As a recognizable category in the world of Orthodox Christianity, the nun stands out as a type of "sacred person", even though they themselves would deny any inherent sacred quality to themselves on this account.

We have seen where nuns come from historically, where they live in the monastery, and who they and others understand them to be. Now that all this context is taken care of, what exactly do nuns do that is so religious? In the next chapter, we will look at the rule of prayer that the community follows and the way in which time is transformed into the unfolding of mythic cycles. Not only the cycles of time are important, but the actual mechanics of the Orthodox liturgical rituals can tell us a great deal about how the monastery works to orient its monastics to a holy and spiritual life.

CHAPTER V

TIME, RELIGION AND RITUAL IN THE MONASTERY

The relationships at which we have so far looked involve "spiritual parenthood" in many different ways. Now it is possible to see how "spiritual parenthood" is not just arranged and constructed but how it is lived through the prayer life of the community on a regular and cyclical basis. The first boundaries in this analysis must be the definition of prayer life.

As we have seen, the religious system of Orthodox Christianity is accessed and engaged through the arrangement of space, the use and presence of icons, the institution of the nun as a sacred person. These levels then orient the participant toward the *practice* of Orthodox Christianity in its liturgical or ceremonial forms. These forms are public and present the most obvious interface between the monastery and its visitors. The ceremonial life of the monastery is a significant portion of the "prayer" life of the nuns available to observation. Therefore, this chapter will attempt to illustrate the religious system in action on the religious ritual level. The continual orientation toward spiritual concerns can also be highly personal and private, and is the subject of a great deal of the conversation between the nuns and their spiritual

mentors¹.

Public, liturgical worship involves an established routine of services carried out in the monastery chapel by the nuns and the priest-monks of the community. The routine is based on an intricate system of organization that has developed over centuries from the earliest days of Christianity. The most important way the "rite" of the Holy Dormition monastery maintains routine and organization is through time-based cycles. Bishop Ware, in his introduction to the *Festal Menaion*, says that there are five cycles of time in Orthodox worship. These range from the life cycle of the Orthodox Christian to the daily cycle of prayer, with a weekly cycle and two separate and distinct yearly cycles in between (the movable Paschal cycle and the fixed Incarnation cycle). The monastic life cycle, as a subcategory of "Orthodox Christian life," is what concerned us in the preceding chapter on special roles, and is ritually marked by the monastic "rites of passage": tonsuring. This chapter deals more

¹ On the level of personal, private prayer, however, it is very difficult to "observe" this orientation or even elicit clean and concise reports from the nuns concerning it. It would also be fair to say that disclosing the details of such private experiences would not only be bad manners, but also subject to temptations such as pride in the nuns' own accomplishments.

Perhaps, then, research should be directed towards the exterior forms of personal prayer. While Orthodoxy does promote worship "with the whole body", through gestures of prayer such as making the sign of the cross or the use of a beaded prayer rope, kissing icons, etc., such activity does not shed much light by itself. On the individual level, each nun maintains her own rule of prayer, usually kept within the privacy of her own cell and carried out before and after rest and sleep. These prayers consist of established forms and recitations as well as spontaneous prayer and simple moments of "talking to God". This of course is highly personal and private, and not open to "observation". It is part of the cloister, the "enclosure" away from the world of such anthropological affairs.

specifically with the daily, weekly, and yearly cycles of religious activity in which the nuns of the Holy Dormition participate.

The Typikon

Orthodox worship seems very complicated. The monastery provides an environment in which the typical Orthodox parishioner and priest can encounter the full complexity of Orthodox worship, and then some. For the comparative religionist, this complexity offers a testing field for innumerable theories on the nature of religious ritual. An initial observation is that Orthodox Christian rituals are heavily prescribed, with guidelines given in the *Festal Menaion*, the *Pentekostarion*, the *Octoechoes*, the *Lenten Triodion*, and other church service books. Because some parts of the rituals are fixed and some are variable, the worshiper may have to switch from one text to another to combine the correct elements for that specific ritual. It is quite impressive how the nuns themselves gracefully move from part to part and text to text without interruption of the flow. This is cultivated, of course, and the reading of services is one of the primary duties that the novice must master². The nun must attain proficiency in this ritual system akin to a proficiency with language.

² Since the monastery conducts services in both English and Romanian, the nuns who have come from Romania first learn the English of the service books through memorization. According to the report of one nun, this in fact precedes linguistic *understanding* of the material. Apparently, the Romanian novices spend portions of the work day engaged in memorizing passages and prayers such as the Lord's Prayer from small handwritten sheets they carry with them. However, the nuns do get exposed to the native version enough to quickly learn and equate the two.

The arrangement of readings, hymns, prayers, canticles, canons and the myriad elements of Orthodox worship (many of which have elaborate and highly technical Greek and Slavic names) is to be found in a *Typikon* (Romanian: *Tipic*). A typikon, equivalent of a Latin *ordo*, "contains the rules and rubrics governing every aspect of the Church services and their celebration throughout the year" (Ware, 1964, p. 541). In practice, these rules concern not the regular everyday services, which are already available in other service books, but guidelines to the many irregularities that arise due to the presence or absence of some or all types of clergy or due to the intersection of the five cycles.³ The standard typikon of Orthodox Christianity has undergone many transformations and embellishments throughout its history. In its present form, the "standard" order for the daily cycle of services, which begins with the evening⁴, is Vespers, Compline, Midnight office, Matins, First Hour, Third Hour, Sixth Hour, Ninth Hour (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 39)⁵. Most of these will

³ The classic example of this is when the feast of the Annunciation (March 25), occurs during Holy Week, which is part of the movable Paschal cycle. What happens when a feast falls upon a fast? Or what if the Annunciation falls on Palm Sunday? etc.

⁴ The theological reasoning for this is found in Genesis 1. The world begins in darkness, before the light, and the days are described as "evening and morning".

⁵ Interestingly, though the Midnight office or Nocturnes is mentioned in the *Festal Menaion*, nowhere is a "common" or what I call a "ritual script" given for this office, which is found in the West in a form similar to the hours. According to Raya (1969, p. 150), it is omitted because it is "seldom used". It also is not performed to my knowledge at Rives Junction, its place supplanted by Matins/First Hour, which lasts until midnight. Please note as well that the title "Hour" does not reflect the length of the service but its place in the time of day.

be familiar to the student of Western monasticism, as they have a common origin (see Chapter II). The Divine Liturgy, the eucharistic service of the Orthodox Church, is not considered part of a daily cycle, but an 'eschatological' event that is mythically beyond the cycles of time (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 40). However, the Liturgy is placed at a specific time of the day, after the Sixth Hour and generally, the Liturgy is a daily occurrence in cathedrals and large monasteries. When there is no Liturgy, the service of the *Typika*, similar to the Latin "Dry Mass" may be added.

An abridged version of the typikon for parish use of the Romanian Orthodox in America is published yearly in calendar yearbooks-- such as *Calendarul Crestin* or *Calendarul Solia* (ROCA, 1995, 1995). In Rives Junction, the first "typikon" one encounters is the schedule of services found on the sliding glass door into the church.

It reads bilingually and presents the following schedule:

Daily:

7:00 a.m.: Akathist, 3rd and 6th hrs. , Typika (Divine Liturgy replaces Typika on Wednesdays)
 5:00 p.m.: 9th hr., Vespers, Compline
 10:00 p.m.: Matins, 1st hr.

Saturday:

8:00 a.m.: Akathist, 3rd and 6th hrs., Divine Liturgy
 6:00 p.m.: Vigil

Sunday:

9:00 a.m.: Akathist, 3rd and 6th hrs., Divine Liturgy
 5:00 p.m.: 9th hr., Vespers, Compline
 10:00 p.m.: Matins, 1st hr.

In this case, there are some differences between the "standard" format and the Rives Junction practice. First, the morning service begins with an *Akathist* hymn, which is

an elaborate poem containing several stanzas oriented toward praise. The nuns will read a different *Akathist* or portion thereof every day, with weekdays to the Virgin Mary and Sunday reserved for Jesus Christ. Some nuns also use the akathist hymns as part of their personal rule of prayer. The reading of this poetry is also carried out in many Romanian and Slavic parishes, whereas Greeks perform the Matins (Gr. Orthros) before morning Liturgy. The most important difference is found mainly in the timing of services. The reason which suggests itself at first, is that this is an adaptation to the American daily cycle of activity that places work from nine to five. However, the reason for this arrangement is far more complicated. The Rives Junction format is only one in a series of developments in the typikon over the centuries.

The earliest typikons were far from unified. In the Egyptian desert, for example, there was remarkable variation from monastery to monastery. When John Cassian brought desert monasticism to France and Italy, he adapted the ordo to fit better the new environment. So too was the early ordo adapted into the rest of the Christian world. While St. Basil is given much credit for the organization of monastic community, the person generally accredited with the liturgical typikon is St. Sabas of the 5th to 6th century Judean desert (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 541). The body that St. Sabas represented, the Church of Jerusalem, is responsible for much of the earliest liturgical developments. It was there that the local Jewish worship evolved into new Christianized forms as the sect became its own religion. Vespers is one example of Judaic forms developing into separate and distinct Christian versions

(Uspensky, 1985).

Though most Orthodox churches today follow a version considered the Typikon of St. Sabas, it has become clear that it has been embellished over the centuries. The Typikon received material brought from St. Catherine's on Mt. Sinai in the 7th century, then revised by St. John of Damascus in the 8th century, and in the following three centuries the Byzantine monks of the Studion in Constantinople and those of Mt. Athos added their own adjustments. In fact, this final typikon has been described by the abess of the Holy Dormition as the "Athonite" typikon. Bishop Ware says that "the typikon as we now have it represents essentially a crystallization in liturgical practice which occurred between the ninth and tenth centuries" (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 541). Ware also states that it is a synthesis between the "cathedral" rite and the "monastic" rite but it should also be said that the monastic rite over time has come out in a dominant position (Uspenskii, 1985, p. 69; Grisbooke, 1978). As Bishop Ware (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 541) adds, "Monasteries and parishes since then have both followed the same typikon, although in most parishes there are inevitably numerous omissions and abbreviations."

The Holy Dormition monastery has an abbreviated form available of the Typikon of St. Sabbas, though what the monastery considers its "Typikon" is something quite different. However, one of the most notable aspects of the Typikon of the Holy Dormition monastery is that it is a mixture of written and oral tradition. When I asked them about their Typikon, I discovered that while they have some things written down here and there, they have no compact "brochure" version that

one can look up. Their Typikon is a tradition which has been passed down from the generations of Varatec. The combination of services into two-hour units performed three times a day has also been an established tradition in the Orthodox monasteries, which clearly is an alteration from the earliest schedules, but this is not arbitrary. There are rules for the arrangement of such things derived from common sense and the oral traditions⁶.

The timing of the service is the main difference of the Holy Dormition from earlier monasteries. This practice was imported with the three nuns from Varatec, where this type of combination has been the norm for the last fifty years or so. Varatec, like the rest of the Romanian monasteries, came under the strict and unsympathetic supervision of the Communist Department of Religious Affairs. Under the suppression, the Matins service, usually performed at midnight was moved to 6:30 p.m. by the Romanian Holy Synod in 1953, which published a new set of communist approved *Rules for Monasteries*. Apparently, the state initially considered the activity spurious. According to Archimandrite Roman Braga, "the new atheistic regime did not like the mystical atmosphere which the sounding of bells in the middle of the night radiated . . . " (Braga, 1996, p. 147). In most other Orthodox monasteries, the "Athonite" Typikon (used on Mt. Athos) is what is used, and

⁶ For example, the placement of Ninth Hour, Vespers, and Compline together makes sense. Ninth hour is the last service of the liturgical day, and precedes the setting of the sun. Vespers relates to the setting of the sun and the lighting of lamps, so the two fit back to back. Compline then follows as an after dinner and before rest service. In Athonite monasteries, Vespers and Compline are separated by a communal supper.

apparently, some Romanian monasteries are returning to that model as well. For now, the earlier schedule works well for the sisters in Rives Junction. They also do not serve the Liturgy everyday, which was the case in Varatec. They are a small community, with only a handful of nuns to read the various parts of the services, and only two elderly priest-monks capable of serving. The schedule also suits the "audience" of the American laity. Essentially, the Rives Junction Typikon is energy efficient.

The Variety of the Services

As stated above, the typikon of the Orthodox Church, at least as it is realized in the services of the Holy Dormition monastery, is very lengthy and complex. The number of services itself is quite daunting. The daily cycle is complemented by weekly and yearly cycles that interact and interweave like an ever-shifting tapestry. This insures that no single day is the same as the last, though the difference will seem minute, even non-existent, to the untrained ear and eye. After visiting the monastery from month to month over a period of three years, it became clear, however, that no two days were alike. At first, this was exciting, as it promised an interesting variety. It delivered not only that but also a befuddling variety. In order to save the reader the confusion I underwent to figure this out⁷, this chapter provides

⁷ Like an intrepid anthropologist, I endeavored to discover the cultural rubrics at work by participant observation, that is to say, the hard way. Only much later did it become clear to me that things like typikons existed which the nuns followed and which I could as well. This made things easier, but, luckily, I still found gainful

a description of the religious ritual system that is at the heart of the monastery typikon. First, the basic variation in all Orthodox daily services is due to three main factors: *tones*, *psalms*, and *saints/ feasts/ fasts*.

Tones are elaborate byzantine music, divided into eight tones, each of which has a different mood and effect on the listener. Their use is based on a weekly cycle described in, appropriately, the *Octoechoes*. The arrangement of the tones dictates the very sound and rhythm of the services and creates an auditory variety that is distinguishable across the weekly cycle and the seasonal cycles. Since Orthodox worship is entirely sung *a capella*, these tones are an essential part of the proper execution of ritual⁸.

Psalms are another essential part of the services. While the psalms do not play an important part in the divine liturgy, the service with which most Orthodox laity are familiar, they are to be found in every other Orthodox daily service, and most other services besides. The entire Book of Psalms is chanted over the course of a week at the monastery, usually in units of multiple psalms, known as *kathismata* coupled with chanted responses or *antiphons* which serve to punctuate and highlight the reading (Uspenskii, 1985, pp. 28-30). The arrangement of the kathismata over the week depends on the season of the church year. These variable psalms are also

employment in trying to discover the underlying rules of the rite, which are not laid out in an obvious manner for nincompoops like myself.

⁸ The theological significance and historical development of the eight tones is well beyond the scope of this thesis. Musical masochists are advised to start with the *Octoechoes* for a treatment of this subject.

supplemented by fixed psalms that designated the specific service. The hours (1st, 3rd, 6th, and 9th) are primarily devoted to the reading of fixed psalms, usually appropriate to the hour's position in the day. For example, 1st hour, which is a morning service, begins with Psalm 5:

Give ear, O Lord, to my words, heed thou my sigh, attend to the cry of my prayer, my King and my God! To thee, O Lord, do I pray; in the morning hear my voice; in the morning I set before thee my prayers and I wait. (Raya, 1969)

These Psalms are part of a set cycle of the office of the hours. Similarly, Vespers and Matins also have set psalms read that are significant to their time of day. However, it is during Vespers and Matins that the cyclical reading of psalms in units known as Kathismata is performed. The Psalter, or Book of Psalms is divided into twenty sections, which are then read during the week, starting on Saturday's Vespers with Psalms 1 to 8, the First Kathisma. The vast number of psalms allows each day of the week to have its own distinctive flavor.

Lastly, variety is assured by the yearly cycle of saint's days, feast days, and fast days. During the season of Lent, the *Lenten Triodion* is the service book that provides the guidelines for this important period. More often, however, there are smaller variations that occur due to the saint's days and feast days. The whole year of major feast days is regulated in the text of the *Festal Menaion* and many of the special hymns for saint's days are to be found in supplemental works such as the *Synaxarion*. If tones and psalms make up two-thirds of the Orthodox variations, it is the festal hymns, known as *troparia* (sing.: troparion), which make up the rest. When

not reading from a scriptural sources or offering petitional prayers, the nuns are singing the many hymns available to them. The hymns themselves can be further arranged into subcategories: a troparion of the saint of the day, a hymn or hymns for the current major feast period, a kontakion of the day, and others. All of these are in action during a typical service ⁹.

The monastery is the place where the full round of Orthodox services are performed. While the Hours are unified in form and function, Vespers and Matins each present special aspects of Orthodoxy not usually encountered in the abbreviated parish typikons. They both shed light on aspects of the religious system important to the monastic life as well. Both contain their own unique structures and both are combined to create the lengthy vigil service. Therefore, each of these services will receive greater detail in the next section before the variations in the yearly cycle are discussed. We will look at these services first in their most simple forms as practiced at Holy Dormition as daily services and then combined in their more complex forms at the Vigil, held on Saturdays and on great feast days.

⁹ For example, Nativity hymns are sung in periods anterior and posterior to the actual day itself, and the whole feast period is ritually demarcated by when the singing of these hymns are begun and ended. This gets quite interesting when more than one period is in action. Take a day between August 6 and August 15. August 6 is the Transfiguration, August 15 is the Dormition. Sometime between the two the daily services will include troparia for both feasts, plus a troparia for the saint of the day and perhaps another if there is a vigil for an important saint on the next day. This can add up to four, five, even six separate hymns that must be sung on multiple occasions during the day. Since the Holy Dormition provided bilingual services, these hymns can be heard in both English and Romanian. It is a credit to the sisters that they not only learn them all but sing them with care and affection.

Vespers: The Old Testament Tradition

The tradition of lamp-lighting is an ancient one, and has its roots in Jewish worship. As a result, the Orthodox office of Vespers is where the Old Testament tradition of the Church is remembered and relived. For Orthodox Christians, the Old Testament portrays the anticipation in Israel of the coming Messiah, realized in Jesus Christ. Vespers is also the evening office, and themes related to the onset of night are an important part of its prayer imagery. There is also a symbolic connection between the Old Testament tradition and the image of the night which is not coincidental. Just as the Old Testament anticipates the New Testament, so does the night anticipate the day. This central symbolism is the core of the Vespers service, not just semantically but structurally.

First some prefatory remarks about Vespers and Orthodox ritual structures are useful. A primary concern is understanding the role of clergy in the rituals. Except for the Divine Liturgy and other sacraments, a priest is unnecessary for the successful completion of a whole office such as Vespers. A Priest or Deacon is required however for certain types of acts within that office that must be omitted if the clergy is absent. Certain prayers are only read by clergy and are left out otherwise. Litanies ("Let us pray to the Lord . . . ") are the most obvious example, since they require at least a Deacon to initiate. Then there are prayers which are spoken by priests in the sanctuary and are perhaps not even heard by the nuns. Bishops also have their own special prayers when present. Therefore there is a great deal of variability in just

how a specific ritual will be carried out. At the Holy Dormition monastery the two services of Vespers and Matins offer a chance to compare the two situations of clergy-led and clergy-less services. Vespers is almost always attended by the priest-monks and Matins is almost always the province of nuns alone.

There is a beginning, a middle, and an end to a ritual in any religion; the same pattern is true for Orthodox Christianity in general and Vespers in particular. The beginning of Vespers establishes the service and takes care of the weekly psalm reading; the middle or center of Vespers is concerned with the core of the rite: the "lamp-lighting" prayers of ancient synagogue worship; the conclusion closes the service by recognizing and celebrating the specific day and its importance. Thus the weekly, daily, and yearly cycles are all involved in this one rite. The factors of psalms, tones, and saints/feasts are also present.

The beginning of Vespers is typical of Orthodox services. The priest gives a blessing, and certain common prayers are read: "Glory to you our God, glory to You!...", the Trisagion ("Thrice-Holy") Hymn, the Lord's prayer, and "Come let us worship our God . . . " Then a nun reads the "Psalm of introduction," Psalm 103/104, the "Song of Creation" which recounts the Genesis story in poetic form and celebrates the Creation:

Bless the Lord, O my soul!
 You are very great, O Lord my God!
 Clothed in pomp and brilliance,
 arrayed with light as with a cloak.

Stretching out the sky as a tent-cloth,
 covering your lofty halls with water.

You make the clouds your conveyance,
You surge on the wings of the wind.

You make spirits your messengers
and flaming fires your attendants.
You settle the earth on its firm foundation:
it shall stand unmoved from age to age.

The abyss covers it like a garment;
waters stand over the mountains . . .

You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows the time of its setting.
You establish darkness and it is night
wherein the forest creatures prowl around.

Young lions roar for their prey
and call out to God for their meat.
As the sun rises, they will come together
lay themselves down in their dens.

Man will go out to his labor
and work until eventide.
How great are your works, O Lord!
In wisdom You have wrought them all:
the earth is filled with your creatures . . . (Raya, 1969, pp. 39-41).

The beginning of the day begins with a praise of the Creation, which is the first subject of the Old Testament. During the reading of this lengthy psalm, the priest is quietly praying before the icon of the Lord and the holy doors, offering a series of seven petitional prayers known as "lamp-lighting prayers." At the end of the psalm he intones the "Litany of Peace." This litany is followed by the reading from the psalter of the day, the *kathisma*. The *kathisma* is divided into *stases*, typically of two or three psalms. Each stasis is punctuated at its ending with a series of invocations beginning with "Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The reading is

part of the weekly cycle of psalms that begins on Saturday and goes through the whole Book of Psalms. This is also the ending of the introductory phase of Vespers.

This series of petitions and intonations function as a proper invocation of the Holy Trinity so that the service as a whole may begin. One can note that all litanies and psalms end with a direct invocation of the Trinity: "Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," or a priest's "For unto you are due all glory, honor, and worship, to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages amen." Whenever these are intoned all participants make the sign of the cross over themselves as well. These small utterances and actions are quite important to understanding the "grammar" of Orthodox liturgical worship. Each proper invoking of the Trinity acts as a seal on whatever prayer is offered or action is taken. Each invocation can be understood as connecting the prayer to the ultimate source of power or "superhuman agency" behind Orthodox Christianity. Therefore such invocations will always be found at the start of and throughout Orthodox services as key points of "punctuation." With this pattern established, the remainder of the rite may follow.

The center of Vespers begins with the "lamp-lighting Psalms," also known as "Lord, I have cried" since this is the first line of the first psalm. Four psalms, 140, 141, 129, and 116, are read together and share a theme which has been described by one of the monastics as "the plaintive cry in the wilderness," and also, the situation of the Old Testament, pre-messiah world. Part of the enactment of this time is found in the coupling of the psalm with action. Verse 2 of Psalm 140: "Let my prayer rise like incense before You and the lifting of my hands like an evening

sacrifice. Hear Me, O Lord" is read as the priest begins a censuring of the whole chapel, including the narthex, while the psalms are finished (Raya, 1969, p. 43).

The lamp-lighting psalms are followed by hymns, the Theotokion (hymn to the Mother of God) and the Hymn of the Evening, the musical centerpiece of Vespers:

O joyful light of the holy glory of the immortal Father, heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ: now that we are come to the setting of the sun and behold the evening light, we sing in praise to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is meet at all times to praise Thee in hymns with happy voice, O Son of God who grantest life: therefore the world gives Thee glory (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 83).

This hymn is sung quite vibrantly by the nuns and especially the priests. It is followed by a Prokimenon, or verse from Psalms sung in one of the eight tones dependant on the day of the week. The Prokimenon is traditionally followed by a reading of scripture. Vespers calls for readings from the Old Testament, testifying to its synagogue roots. Vespers is the only place in the cycle of Orthodox services read from the Old Testament in this way (not counting the psalms, of course). The reader is often the abbess herself, who stands before the open holy doors and begins with the call and response Prokimenon with the priest. During the week, daily vespers keeps the Prokimenon, though omits the actual reading.

The evening prayers are completed through a series again of petitional prayers, beginning with a litany known as the Ecumenic Prayer, because it prays for all the members of the church from Bishops down to those "who bring offerings." Then follows another evening prayer, "Vouchsafe, O Lord." This prayer is followed

by a litany which begins, "Let us complete our evening prayer to the Lord . . . "

This sequence of prayers and songs culminates in the following prayer which is spoken from memory in a very humble, reverent voice by the priest:

O Lord our God, who bowed the heavens and came down for the salvation of the human race, look down upon your servants and on your inheritance: for your servants have bowed down their heads and bent their necks to You, the Judge both awesome and loving. They do not await the help that is from man, but look for your mercy and are ready to receive your salvation. Guard them at all times, this evening and tonight, against all enemies, against the devil's assaults, against vain thoughts and evil dreams. May the might of your kingdom be blessed and exalted, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever and ever. Amen (Raya, 1969, p. 53).

Thus, the evening prayers have been fully enacted. The celebration of the Hymn of Evening and the hope of the final prayers stand in stark contrast to the darkness of the first part of the prayers, "Lord, I have cried." The theological message is clear: the Old Testament Law is fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ. The symbolic message is one of transformation, from darkness to light, from sorrow to joy.

Following the lamp-lighting prayers, Vespers is concluded by a series of songs and prayers that reflect the beginning of the service in reverse. First is the Aposticha, which are stanzas and verses from the Psalms proper to the day. Then follows the Song of Simeon, which aptly summarizes the meaning of Vespers:

Now you shall dismiss your servant, O Lord, according to your word in peace: because my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to the revelation of the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel (Raya, 1969, p. 54).

Then follow, just as in the beginning portion, the Trisagion and Lord's Prayer.

Hymns conclude the part for the choir of nuns as they sing what is known as the

Apolytikion, which means simply, "dismissal hymn," and is the troparion to the saint of the day or feast (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 545). This would be where the priest gives the dismissal, but since at Holy Dormition the office of small compline immediately follows, that has to wait. Otherwise, the conclusion mirrors the introduction, ending with the same established prayers.

Matins: Repentance and Praise

Matins at the Holy Dormition appeals to some pilgrims and nuns as one of the most profound and meditative services which the monastery has to offer. Beginning at 10 p.m., it is usually a private affair, with very few attending visitors. Not even all of the sisters are typically present. The oldest nuns participate on an infrequent basis, and much of the performance is accomplished by the novices and rasaphores. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of this service, of all the services at Rives Junction, is that it is almost always performed without clergy, as opposed to Vespers, where the role of the priest is very visible. By this time, the elder priest-monks are at home for the evening, especially in the cold winter nights. This makes the service essentially the province of the nuns, and thus has a distinct flavor from the other services.

Matins is a quiet service. Not only because of the small crowd but also because it is late at night, when in the words of one nun, all of Nature is quiet. This lends a very introspective mood to the service. The late hour demands an intensity that comes from the effort required of such late night offices. In larger monasteries,

and in the West, the matins might even be celebrated later into the night, during the pre-dawn hours.

Typical of Orthodox services, Matins has an introductory phase involving petitional prayers, priest's blessings, and introductory hymns and prayers, such as the Trisagion and Lord's Prayer. When no priest officiates, certain prayers, such as litanies, are highly abbreviated or omitted. The solution to their absence is presented and performed in the formula, "Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ save us and have mercy on us." This signals to the participants that at this point in the ritual a priest would be leading the prayer. This invocation properly acknowledges the correct chain of command and the ultimate source of power in Christian rites, Jesus Christ.

Part of the monastic routine at the beginning of services includes obligatory prostrations or *metania*. At Matins these are done upon entrance to the church. Individually, the nuns approach the place of the abbess, whether she is present or not, and bow prostrate three times to the abbess or to the icon of the Virgin with Child. Upon arising, they also give a bow to their fellow nuns, which is returned. One mother explained that in doing these prostrations and bowing to each other, they are asking for blessings from each other to engage in prayer. The relationship between the nuns that is reinforced through this behavior is at the heart of the monastic community: mutual supplication, mutual guidance, mutual blessings. Prostrations also follow at the end of the service, but these are to God alone. During Lent, prostrations are also done at every Trisagion or Alleluia in the service. Prostrations and deep

bowing are just one way in which bodily posture is put into religious action.

Once the introductory phase is accomplished, the body of the ritual itself can be engaged. Like Vespers, the office of Matins is composed primarily of three distinct sections, a beginning, a middle, and an end. These three sections also involve the three factors which determine variability in all Orthodox services: the psalms, the tones, and the saints. The first section of Matins is given to Psalm reading, in two parts: the six introductory psalms of Matins and the variable kathisma according to the day of the week. The second section, the canon, is dependent on the tones of the *Octoechoes* and during Lent, the *Triodion*. The canon also depends on the saint of the day, drawing on the *Menaion*. Whereas in Vespers the evening prayers form the distinctive core of the ritual, in Matins this role belongs to the canon. The third and concluding section is the singing of the hymns, including the troparion of the day. This section also mirrors the introduction and is followed by the final dismissal of the service, also like Vespers. Each section is briefly described below.

Matins, coupled with the First Hour, are primarily services of the dawn in origin, but at the Holy Dormition they are services of the night. The times are both appropriate, reflecting the themes of the service as introduced in the "six psalms" are 3/3, 37/38, 62/3, 87/88, 102/103, 142/143 (septuagint/masoretic numbering, respectively). These psalms are a fixed set of readings for the matins service which are concerned with repentance, spiritual warfare, and struggle for the light of not only the coming morning, but of Christ. During the reading of these psalms it is traditional to remain silent and standing at attention (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 558).

For the monastic, the night is a time of increased struggle against the enemy. For one of the nuns, the image of darkness and dark deeds lent significance to the Matins service as a time for renewed vigor in the struggle against sin. She felt that at night more than ever did the world need the prayers of the nuns, since it is at night that some of the foulest sins and "dark deeds" are committed. The first psalm of the six reflects this tide of "darkness" and the ensuing spiritual struggle:

Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!
 Many are they who rise up against me
 Many are they who say of me,
 "There is no help for him in his God" . . .

But You, O Lord, are a shield for me,
 My glory and the One who lifts up my head . . .

Arise, O Lord;
 Save me, O my God!
 For you have struck all my enemies to the cheekbone;
 You have broken the teeth of the wicked . . .
 (*Orthodox Study Bible*, 1993).

In this psalm, the problem is introduced, and the image of warfare is powerfully present. This Old Testament image of God is very much a part of spiritual warfare. Since the time of St. Anthony the monastic struggle has been understood against not only the self but also the enemy, which is Satan. Monastics also consider Satan to be particularly focused on attacking them, as they have taken up their "shield" and are engaged in the fight directly. The reading of psalms then becomes part of the prayer arsenal of the nun, and the image of God displayed is as an angry, warrior God. This is a development of the Old Testament tradition that follows the image developed in Vespers.

His anger extends not only to the enemy but to the sinner, however. This is to remind the monastic that humanity cannot defeat the enemy alone, but always requires the ultimate power of God. Thus, the next psalm, 37, is a psalm of repentance to the angry God:

O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath;
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!
For Your arrows pierce me deeply,
And Your hand presses me down.

There is no soundness in my flesh
Because of Your anger,
Nor any health in my bones
Because of my sin.
For my iniquities have gone over my head;
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.
My wounds are foul and festering
Because of my foolishness . . .

Do not forsake me, O Lord;
O my God, be not far from me!
Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation! (*Orthodox Study Bible*, 1993, pg. 666).

Repentance, for the ascetic, is a necessary prerequisite for the spiritual struggle and beginning of the day's labors. It establishes in the participant a properly humble and abased attitude toward God the Father, and establishes the need for salvation.

By now a pattern may be discerned of psalms paired in terms of repentance and praise, praise and repentance. The last of the six psalms is also so arranged.

Psalm 62 praises God in the late night and early morning,

O God, You are my God;
Early will I seek You . . .

When I remember You on my bed,

I meditate on You in the night watches.
 Because you have been my help,
 Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice
 (*Orthodox Study Bible*, 1993, pg.683).

thus establishing the time of the day of the service through psalmody. Psalm 87 looks back to the darkness of night and of Hades in repentance:

O Lord, God of my salvation,
 I have cried out before you day and night . . .
 For my soul is full of troubles
 and my life draws near to the grave . . .

Lord, I have called daily upon you,
 I have stretched out my hands to You.
 Will You work wonders for the dead?
 Shall the dead arise and praise You?
 (*Orthodox Study Bible*, 1993. pg. 707).

By this point the pattern is well established. Psalm 102, "Bless the Lord O my soul" is a psalm of praises, and Psalm 142 is one of repentance, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, Give ear to my supplications!". This sequence is also read by the novices, establishing in them the proper relationship of praise and repentance as well. Lastly, this interplay of praise and repentance is also the main overall pattern throughout the Matins service. One way in which the pattern unites the whole service is that these first psalms do in fact seem to focus more on repentance than praise. In the Lauds, later in the service, praises come to dominate repentance, and thus a balance is made and a transformation following the pattern is achieved.

The second psalm related portion of Matins is the reading of the Psalter, which is set in the same basic structure as that of Vespers. Three readings from the book psalms, set into groups of psalms known as kathismata, are punctuated by

"sessional hymns". The effect is seen in how this enacted. While the psalms are read, the rest of the nuns listen attentively and meditatively, *receiving* and meditating on the information. For the sessional hymn, they rise and *return* with hymns praising God. This section ends on regular days with a set reading of Psalm 50, the "psalm of repentance" which is read by a penitent during the sacrament of confession and is read in anticipation of the Eucharist. This Psalm was originally part of Lauds, and divides contemporary Matins in its ancient halves. During a Vigil, the matins will include a reading from the Gospel before Psalm 50.

During Matins and Vespers and over the course of the week, the whole of the Book of Psalms will be read in these types of readings. Because several of the psalms are also used in other parts of the services, the actual achievement exceeds the Book of Psalms. Most of this reading is done by the youngest sisters, the novices and the rasaphores, though each mother has her turn as well.

The second main section of matins is known as the Canon. A canon is a set of scriptural canticles accompanied by hymns (troparia) either read or sung. In practice at the Holy Dormition and most other Orthodox monasteries, the canon is abbreviated and the canticles are replaced by troparia read and sessional hymns, most often to the Theotokos (Virgin Mary). The one scriptural hymn that is always kept is the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Lent provides its own variations of this rule. During Lent the scriptural portions are read and known as the Great Canons. There is also a canon which reflects the saint of the day or feast period. Also, canticles to the Mother of God are a fixed part of the canon and are derived from the Theotokion,

and correspond to the Octoechoes. When clergy are present these pairings are divided by small litanies of petitional prayers. This occurs at a Matins during a Vigil, but not usually the everyday service. The structure of the Canon is also very important in two other important services of the monastery, namely the Vigil, where the full canon is read, and the Office of Holy Anointing or Unction, where a canon-like structure is used. The final structure of the canon would therefore resemble (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 76)¹⁰:

The Canon:

1. Canticles One and Three
Small Litany
Sessional Hymn
2. Canticles Four, Five, and Six
Small Litany
Kontakion (hymn of the day)
3. Canticles Seven, Eight, and Nine
Small Litany
Exapostilarion (concluding hymn of the canon)

There are also set rules for the reading of multiple canons. As often occurs at the Holy Dormition, a canon for the Mother of God is read at the same time a canon for the saint of the day is read. On Sundays, a canon for the resurrection would be added as well. What occurs is that all of the first canticles of the various canons are read together, then the third, and so on. Each is punctuated by a "short invocation such

¹⁰ Where is the second canticle? "In present practice there is no second canticle in the canon, save only on various days in Lent: thus the canon, which theoretically contains nine canticles, has in reality only eight." (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 547).

as *Glory to thee, O God, Glory to thee or Most Holy Theotokos, save us*" (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 547), or in the case of a saint, *St. (name) pray for us*, at which time the sign of the cross is made. In this way, the cycle of saint's days is actualized in the Matins service, just as the cycle of Psalms is also so actualized above. The "punctuations" are similar to those described in the Vespers service as well.

Canons are a well-liked portion of the sisters' service cycle. They are so varied and rich in detail, providing for many an exposure to a broad range of saints in a manner that is prayerful as well as informative. They are also very complicated, since the singing follows the tones of the week. Some of the sisters wish they had more time to teach and learn the intricate methods of singing that are involved in canons and the like.

After the Canon, Lauds are read, which are a series of morning psalms that all contain the word "praise" (psalms 148/149, 149/150, 150/151). According to Bishop Ware, the use of Lauds at matins and the use of "*Lord, I Have Cried*" as evening prayers at Vespers is "of the utmost antiquity, and has its roots in the worship of the Jewish synagogue" (*Festal Menaion*, 1969, p. 554). The Lauds conclude the reading portions of the matins service. And just like each small reading is paired with a song, so is the whole of the service's readings now paired with a set of hymns. This is the third main section of the service, and includes central prayers and hymns of Orthodoxy. The troparia of the day are sung along with a doxology, literally a hymn of "glory", and the Theotokion, a hymn to the Virgin Mary. These hymns give an upbeat end to the quiet and meditative service, once again adding

praise to repentance. Then the brief service of first hour ends the night's services-- at Holy Dormition, the conclusion of the matins is not a conclusion of the service. Where the priest would normally give the dismissal, one of the sisters (usually the most senior) gives the brief prayer "through the prayers of our holy fathers . . . " and then the nuns begin the office of the first hour, which adds about twenty more minutes and follows the standard form. This office is completed in relative darkness, and finally the candles hanging before the iconostasis are lowered and snuffed, the lights go on, and the sisters complete the evening with a veneration of the church's icons and relics. By now it is just before Midnight, and the sisters will return to their cells to complete their own personal rule of prayer and rest until the morning service at 7 a.m..

In the Matins service, the themes of repentance and praise can be seen paired with each other in a systematic manner. The relationship between the nuns and the object of worship, God, is reflected in their actions throughout the ritual as well as the content of their actions or utterances. Through ritual, the relationship between the ascetic and her God is structurally defined, ritually realized, and theologically reinvigorated. The structure of the ritual and the actions within may not be clearly intentional or conscious on the part of the participants, but there is a clear pattern of action to which the participants seem to conform implicitly and intuitively. The basic paired relationship can be seen on the explicit level as the two major themes of the Matins service: Praise and Repentance. We can diagram how these two themes are enacted throughout the ritual (see Figure 2). The diagram is not absolute:

Intended Action:	Praise	Repentance
(Theology)		
Ritual action #1:		
Verbal:	Singing Hymns	Reading Psalms
Ritual Action #2:		
Posture:	Standing	Bowing Prostrating
Ritual Action Recipient:	God the Father	Human Penitent
Ritual Contents:	Psalms of Praise	Psalms of Repentance
	Day, Morning	Night
	Light	Darkness
	New Testament	Old Testament

Figure 2. A Structural Analysis of Orthodox Christian Religious Ritual System: Matins and Vespers.

For example, in the six psalms there is an interplay between the two themes even though the action structure described below would suggest that only one theme is being enacted. The function of the six psalms is as an introductory synopsis of the Matins anyway, and the diagram holds more clearly for the reading from the Psalter which includes hymns. Now the question remains to be asked how this structural analysis (Levi-Strauss, 1979) assists the main thesis of this work. The two main themes of praise and repentance find their meaning in actions with objects or

recipients. Both involve humans acting toward God like children to their father, in this case the heavenly Father. The difference is that praise is giving to God while repentance is given with the hope of receiving mercy, help, aid, forgiveness, healing, as presented in the psalms. The psalms, as holy scripture, also represent the power of God acting through the Word, and they are read not so that God may repent but that his wayward child are helped in doing so. So to speak, psalms are read for and to sinners, hymns are sung for and to God. This pattern of action has an effect on the participants: it establishes the relationship between Spiritual Parent and Child, God and Humanity.

The Vigil

The third evening service which is performed on a weekly basis at the monastery is the Vigil. A Vigil is in itself only a combination of the services we have described, namely, Vespers, Matins, and 1st hour, with a few of its own distinct additions that have roots in antiquity. Originally, a vigil might be conducted over the course of the night, starting at midnight and running with breaks until dawn. Now, the services are performed without break and are begun in the evening at 6:00. The whole service runs about three and a half hours long, which in most parishes, is usually only seen on Holy Thursday evening. The purpose of the vigil is preparation for a holy liturgy on a feast day. At the monastery, every saturday night a vigil is performed in anticipation of sunday's divine liturgy. Considering that the liturgical day begins with nightfall, the vigil is technically the beginning of sunday in this case.

The vigil is also performed for important feast days of the church, such as the Nativity, or the Transfiguration, or the Dormition which we will look at in great detail in the next chapter. A vigil is also usually performed for saint's days of great monastic saints, such as St. Anthony of Egypt.

There are two additional actions that are usually found only in a vigil service, though they may be found also in any Great Vespers service, these are the Lity and the Blessing of Bread (Greek: *Artoklasia*). These two additions are found together and not performed separately, and are located in the third and final section of Vespers. The lity developed in the Church of Jerusalem around the Epsicopal Vespers held at the Holy Sepulchre, at which point a light would be brought from the sanctuary to represent the light of the resurrection, the light which is the anticipatory theme of the vespers service. The procession with the light is meant to go all the way into the narthex of the church, boldly proclaiming the resurrection. This grand entrance is accompanied by stichera or hymns that reflect the importance of the feast day. The items to be blessed in the artoklasia are brought forth as well at this time, and at the end of vespers the blessing will occur. The lity and artoklasia transform the end of vespers, making it richer and more celebratory than ever. The bread, dipped in wine, is then distributed toward the end of the vigil, offering a light reward for the dedication required in standing for the better part of three hours. Indeed, a vigil lives to its name in its demand for endurance and dedication in worship and attentiveness. The vigil teaches vigilance, along with the vesperal lessons of hope and faith and the matins lessons of praise and repentance.

The offices of Vespers, Matins, and the Vigil serve to maintain, strengthen, activate, and access the same fundamental relationships established on the other levels of monastic life: historically, spatially, personally, and theologically, in their own distinctive ways. Vespers richly enacts the relationship between Christ and the Old Testament, between Light and Darkness, and God and Humanity. Matins further develops these themes in terms of Praise and Repentance. The Vigil combines them and adds its own power to renew and reinvigorate the participants.

A point of further interest is that these rituals are composed of contents and arranged in structures of action (Lawson and MacCauley, 1990), which are related to each other on many levels as well. While the psalms and prayers themselves display the verbal contents of the ritual, the structures of action reflect and enhance these contents. The actions suit the words, the structure of the ritual suits the meanings of the contents, and the ritual system has holistic meaning. Thus, the contention that the religious ritual system is like a language becomes clearer. It is a rule-driven system, having its own "grammar", and a semantics that develops out of the arrangements of its parts.

How would a monastic respond to this idea? If it is fair to say that the religious ritual system is like a language, and that the system is reflected throughout the monastery on several very levels, then the monastery itself as a whole can be seen as a linguistic utterance, a conversation, perhaps. And who is doing the speaking? The mothers would say to you without hesitation, God.

In the next chapter, two aspects of the yearly cycle will be taken up that in

their own ways actualize and transform the religious system described above. The first is Lent, the season of fasting and repentance, which as an ascetic season is very significant to monastics. The other is the Dormition of the Mother of God, the death and the resurrection of the Virgin Mary which symbolizes not only the patron feast day of the monastery but the very promise of the nun's life: death to the world and resurrection in Christ.

CHAPTER VI

DYNAMICS OF THE YEARLY CYCLE: LENT AND THE DORMITION

So far, we have looked at the complementary cycles of weekly worship and the life cycle of the nun. What remains is the yearly cycle of feast days and fast days that commemorate the events of the life of Christ, his mother, his disciples, and his saints. These events not only give remarkable life to the sacred stories of the religion but to its rituals as well, as the events remembered in the liturgical year become reenacted and relived by the participants of the Orthodox Community. There are distinctly Orthodox traditions associated with the holidays, many of them monastic traditions as well. In Orthodoxy, the monastic celebration of the yearly cycle informs and interacts with the rest of the church giving depth and detail. This chapter explores the relationship between the nuns, the church, and the yearly cycle in terms of Lent, Holy Week, Pascha and the summer feast day of the Dormition of the Mother of God.

Lent, Holy Week, Pascha

Several factors make the Paschal cycle of Orthodoxy distinct from other forms of Christianity. Not least is the tradition of using the ancient Julian calendar for determining the date of Pascha (Easter) instead of the Western, Gregorian calendar.

Throughout the cycle there are several traditions that have evolved in the Christian East that are not to be found in the West, and vice versa. Three main religious practices can be described that show the uniqueness of Orthodox Lent: The fast, the Sundays of Lent, and the Liturgies of the Presanctified Gifts. This is not only true of the Holy Dormition monastery, but of all the Orthodox Church, so we will be brief.

In the popular understanding of the Christian West, the Lenten fast has become a time of a single, symbolic sacrifice, where one asks "What did you give up for Lent?" As Bishop Kallistos Ware states, "In Western Christendom over the past five hundred years, the physical requirements of fasting have been steadily reduced, until by now they are little more than symbolic." (Ware, 1994, p. 15). Though it is difficult, the Orthodox Church pushes its members to carry out a serious fast and live for forty days the ascetic life, engaging in the spiritual struggle that the monastics do. In terms of diet, Orthodox Christians are to abstain, if health allows, from all animal products including dairy, eggs, most baked goods, and fish. Rich foods such as wine and olive oil are also prohibited during the week, and some Orthodox extend these historically Mediterranean foods to include all alcohols or oils including fried foods. Some limit themselves to only raw vegetable foods as well. While this may seem harsh to some, the fast is carried out not in a prescriptive, legalistic tone, but directed toward spiritual discipline and purification from temptations. For a time, the Orthodox are asked to live as if in the desert. They also relive the baptismal fast of the ancient catechumens who went through a forty-day

period of fasting and training in preparation of the baptism just before Pascha (Yarnold, 1978, p. 99).

The Fast is directed toward more than just food, however. It is also a fast or abstinence from other sinful preoccupations: lusts, angry words, gossip, and vanities. It is a time for Orthodox to make a deep moral inventory of themselves, and they are asked to undergo confession as well during this season. The early desert fathers also exhorted their students to recognize the connection between gluttony and sloth and anger and the many vices that afflict humanity. For the monastics, this season of fasting is a key part of their own spiritual growth. Many begin the Great Lent on "Clean Monday" with a week without food at all, or perhaps some fruits or nuts after sunset. One nun told me that in Romania Great Lent is a time of the strictest fasting, and many go without a meal all week until Sunday. Father Roman speaks of the relationship between the monastery, the villagers, and asceticism in his own childhood in Moldavia:

I saw in my family and in the people of our village an asceticism; asceticism does not only belong to monks . . . During the fasting periods we ate what the monks ate. We knew from the monks that they did not cook during the first week of Great Lent. We children tried to eat only bread and fruit, and we were very healthy; nobody got sick (Braga, 1996, p. 21).

At the Holy Dormition monastery the first week of Great Lent is kept with the greatest strictness. It is the only time of the year when the monastery is closed to visitors as well. Most of the nuns I interviewed felt that the paschal cycle was the most important time of the year for them. Some described Lent as a time of

preparation for when the bridegroom, Christ, presents himself, drawing on the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) which is also dramatically portrayed in the Bridegroom services of Holy Week. Others resonated with the early desert fathers, for Lent was a time to emulate and imitate the forty days of Jesus in the desert. Not only do the nuns have more time away from the outside world, they also pursue time away from each other to look within themselves and focus on the mystical aspects of hesychasm, "inner silence" which is at the heart of Orthodox spirituality. It is the mystical aspect of Lent which is most important for the nuns, not their own fortitude in fasting or attending church. The outer disciplines are for them and their forebears a means to attain the inner stillness that comes with being in the right relationship with God. It should be noted, however, that the fast is not carried out with a goal of a mystical gnosis of some sort. Though fasting orients the mind toward repentance, which requires a certain level of self-awareness, it is repentance and not "gnosis" that is the proper human position in the relationship between God and humanity in the Orthodox framework.

Meanwhile, the church services are also directed toward the most mystical event of the Christian story, the Resurrection. Services themselves grow more complicated and musically sophisticated leading to a "joyful and triumphant" climax (Interview, 1996). During Lent, the Sundays commemorate key events or figures in the history of Orthodoxy and contain gospel readings that reflect the importance and proper understanding of fasting and repentance. One Sunday of particular significance to the nuns is the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt, an early saint who began her life as

a prostitute. She followed the crowds into Jerusalem on their way to the Holy Sepulcher but found herself unable to pass through the gate. Stricken with a sense of shame at her own sinfulness she retired from the world into the Judean desert. She lived there as a hermit for many years until, old and withered, she was discovered by a priest who could hear her confession and bring her communion. As an early female anchorite, she is a model for nuns especially. During the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the defeat of Iconoclasm is celebrated, and this conflict generated numerous female and monastic saints and martyrs as well. Each Sunday of Lent serves as a prelude to the ultimate martyrdom and sacrifice of Christ, itself a necessary prelude to his resurrection. Most Sundays also reflect on the correct attitude toward fasting and repentance as well.

The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified gifts is another distinctly Orthodox tradition. During Lent, the ancient tendency toward frequent feast days and liturgies is suspended to make fasting possible. The only feast day that is fully recognized when it falls during Lent is the Annunciation, and then with special rubrics. The Pre-Sanctified Liturgy was established by the Church to provide an opportunity for communion during the week when typical liturgies are suspended (Uspenskii, 1985).

A Presanctified Liturgy is a vespers service that culminates with an abbreviated divine liturgy. The abbreviation comes in the fact that there is no sanctification of the holy gifts-- this is done on the preceding Sunday, when two or three hosts are prepared. During Lent there is a Presanctified Liturgy on Wednesdays and Fridays, which in most monasteries are performed in the morning, even though

they are part of an evening service. This shift is not the only example of services occurring at different times from their normally scheduled ones during Lent. Holy Week itself includes several vespers and matins services that occur earlier in the day than usual. Whatever the earliest reasons were for this development, they are usually followed out of tradition.

Great Lent ends with Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday, both of which serve as minor feasts that herald the final leg of the Lenten journey in Holy Week. Orthodox Holy Week begins with a series of evening Matins services known as the Bridegroom (Greek: Nymphios) service, in which key parables and events leading up to the betrayal of Christ by Judas are enacted. On the evening of Holy Tuesday, the Bridegroom features the famous Hymn of Kassiane the nun, which is sung from the perspective of the sinful woman who came and anointed Christ with expensive oil. These services are marked by the profound ironies and paradoxes of the story, and include some of the most amazing liturgical poetry Orthodoxy has to offer. On Holy Wednesday, a service of holy anointing is provided, and this is also something that occurs at the Holy Dormition monastery at the feast day pilgrimage of August, to be described below. On Holy Thursday, the last supper, which is considered the institution of the Eucharist by Christ, is reenacted. A special reserve host is prepared and kept for the next year as an emergency source of communion. On Holy Thursday evening, the passion is enacted with a very emotional procession in which the priest carries an Orthodox crucifix through the church and plants it before the altar.

On Holy or Good Friday the death of Christ is remembered with the

preparation of his tomb. The entombed Christ appears in the form of an epitaphion, or embroidered icon of Christ lying in state. The epitaphion itself lies in a bier that is bedecked with flowers. Death is surrounded by life. In the evening follow the Lamentations and a procession around the church, in which all the community by passing under the epitaphion symbolically pass into death with Christ. This service also highlights the role of the myrrh-bearing women who came to anoint the body of Christ and lament for him. This role in most parishes is now taken by young girls of the community, but in the monastery it is the nuns who assume this important ritual role. One of the nuns spoke of the difference between the Lamentations for her before and after entering the monastic life. At first, she had experienced the Lamentations on a more intellectual level, but now she focuses on the spiritual meaning of the rite. She finds herself truly weeping now, just as the myrrh-bearers did long ago.

On Holy Saturday the Resurrection is prepared for, and culminates with a midnight service that lasts until three in the morning. One of the nuns has particularly powerful memories of her first Pascha with the nuns at the Holy Dormition. At that time there were only four or five of them living there and they were not well known in the wider Orthodox community. They were able to have a very small, personal Pascha service. After the liturgy they prepared the meal of the feast and ate around 4-5 in the morning. By 6:30 she was finished cleaning up and was able to come outside to hear all of the birds singing. "Everything was alive!" she exclaimed, finding the meaning of the Resurrection echoed back to her in nature.

For the nuns of the Holy Dormition monastery, Pascha and the complex cycle of activity that accompanies it are of extreme spiritual significance. Pascha is the feast of feasts. Lent, Holy Week and Pascha provide an vast amount of material for the student of Orthodox Christianity, more so than that to which we may do justice here. These rites are also the central pageant of Orthodox Christianity, and may be found performed outside the monastery in most local parishes. One of the most fascinating aspects of these services is that they provide the dramatic models for subsequent Orthodox services. In August, the monastery celebrates its patronal feast-day, the Dormition of the Mother of God on the fifteenth. The services held there are unusual if not unique to the monastery, at least in this country, and are based in form and structure on the paschal structure we have been looking at. In some senses, the feast-day pilgrimage provides a second or little Easter for the Orthodox, as they celebrate the death or "falling asleep" and resurrection of the Virgin Mary.

The Holy Dormition

According to Orthodox tradition, when the Virgin Mary had grown old and the apostles spread out around the world, the apostles were called back by angels to the Virgin who lay on her death bed in Gethsemane (Dunlop, 1981). All but Thomas were able to return to be with her as she died, or "fell asleep." Thomas, arriving late, however, was witness to her resurrection on the third day when Christ himself, in something of a role reversal that is depicted on the icon of the Dormition, came and lifted her into heaven directly. Ironically, this rebirth of the Virgin is more

important in the cycle of feast-days in her honor than her birth to Joachim and Anna, celebrated in early September. Not only does this event contain a great deal of the Orthodox belief of the importance of the Virgin, it also demonstrates the promise of the bodily resurrection for humanity that came through Christ's own resurrection. Therefore, it is rightly the third most important feast within Orthodoxy after Resurrection at Pascha and the Nativity at Christmas. Not surprisingly, it is one of the most significant holidays for the nuns as well.

Theologically, then, the Dormition is an important holiday. But since the monastery was founded and dedicated to this special event in the history of the church, it is equally important as the patron feast-day (Romanian: *Hram*), which is in a sense a birthday for the monastery. It is traditional in Romania for the faithful to visit monasteries on their patronal feast-days. The main church in Varatec's monastery is also the Holy Dormition, and the event draws many pilgrims who wish to share in the special services and to reaffirm their own spirituality. Perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of these feast-day pilgrimages for the scholar of religions is that they are an instance of a meeting ground between the religion of the "high church" and that of the "folk"-- an occurrence that is quite common to Orthodox Christianity. The whole village itself participates in the feast, and here in America, a large community of people from across the country make pilgrimage and help the sisters prepare for the feast. As one of two Romanian monasteries in the U.S., the Holy Dormition has become the center of a broad base of supporters and faithful pilgrims. At the same time, these pilgrimages usually involve a great number of

clergy, and serve as a meeting place for bishops, priests, and the like across ecclesiastical and ethnic boundaries. The ability of the monastery pilgrimage to break down the political walls of parish life with spiritual offerings is crucial to the health of the community.

The season of the Dormition dominates the whole month of August, since the feast is preceded by a two-week fast similar to Lent and Advent and has a week of post-feast commemorations as well. There are three ritual events that mark the feast-day pilgrimage and provide unique opportunities for the pilgrims who attend. The first is the Vigil with Lamentations, which mirrors the services of Good Friday; the second is the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, a grand service held outdoors with the presence of a bishop and numerous clergy; and third is the office of mystical unction, in which the community is invited to partake of the sacrament of holy anointing for the healing of soul and body, thus partaking in the healing of the Virgin's Dormition.

The Vigil of the Dormition is conducted on the eve of the feast, and usually involves the presence of a bishop. In the United States, the proliferation of overlapping jurisdictions based on ethnicity or autocephaly, accompanied by the scarcity of monasteries, has allowed for greater interaction with bishops outside the local episcopacy, which enriches the pilgrimage and insures that each year will have its own character. In earlier years, the vigil could be held in the small chapel in the main building, but recently the number of pilgrims has made this impractical at best and uncomfortable at worst-- a room full of standing, singing people holding lit candles at the height of summer can be exhausting for the faint of heart. With the

construction of the pavilion, a temporary chapel is furnished which opens the ceremony up in many ways -- generating its own challenges of candle-snuffing breezes and distracting insectoid pilgrims. In either case, the Vigil of the Dormition is one of the most intricate and beautiful services of the Orthodox church.

Like any vigil, the Dormition vigil combines the offices of vespers and matins, adding a lity (procession with light) and artoclasia (blessing of bread). The model for this service however is the Great Friday service of Holy Week which entails a special set of lamentations and a final procession with an epitaphion, tapestry-like icon of Christ lying in state. The Dormition requires its own special epitaphion of the Virgin in her lying in state or "falling asleep."

The Vigil begins with the call to prayer: a ringing of bells and loud beating of the symandron or toaca. The bishop and attending clergy proceed to the church, being led by the toaca-playing nun and attendant sub-deacons and ecclesiarchs who carry ceremonial items such as fans and crosses on high poles. The bishop is followed by the rest of the clergy, then the nuns, then the lay people. In this day of tourism, the solemn procession is stalked by faithful pilgrims armed with cameras and videocams. Topsy, the dog of the monastery, is heard barking at all the excitement, especially at the children who have stopped playing with him and will now go to the church with everyone else. When they arrive at the church they find it like the apostles did the garden of Gethsemane: the epitaphion is lying in a wooden bier bedecked with bright flowers which evoke an image of life. The priests and deacons (half a dozen of them is a good start) come and surround the Virgin's epitaphion just

as the apostles surrounded her-- interestingly, the bishop, a living icon as it were of Christ, does not come forward, but waits at the entrance.

Vespers begins as usual, with the psalm of introduction and "Lord I have cried," the lamp-lighting psalms and prayers. During a vigil, readings of the Old Testament are included in the vespers, and this night's selections are particularly appropriate. Orthodox Christians see the Old Testament in terms of its anticipation of Christ, and in this instance, the references are cryptically oriented to his mother the Virgin. There are three readings: Genesis 28:10-17, Ezekiel 43:27-44:4, and Proverbs 9:1-11. It is interesting to note the similarity here to Lent, during which readings from Genesis, the Prophets (primarily Isaiah), and Proverbs are read on weekdays. The reading from Genesis is on "Jacob's ladder," described as the very "gate of heaven" and the "house of God," both taken as prophecies of the Virgin Mary. The second reading can also be seen as symbolic of the Virgin: "The Lord said to me, 'This gate will be kept shut. No one will open it or go through it, since the Lord the God of Israel has been through it. And so it must be kept shut.'" Again the gate through which Christ has entered the world is through his mother, it is she who is considered the "Temple of the Lord" filled with glory. Lastly proverbs speaks of Wisdom as having "built herself a house," another reference to Mary as Temple. The Old Testament themes of vespers are directed in this instance toward the Virgin Mary, who in Orthodoxy receives reverence and honor almost on a par with Christ.

The Lity is carried out with the singing of sticheras which introduce the theme of the evening directly, while still maintaining much of the Old Testament flavor:

"The spotless Bride, the Mother of Him with whom the Father was well pleased, she who was foreordained by God to be the dwelling place of His union without confusion, delivers today her blameless soul to her Creator and her God." These hymns speak of her also as the "lamp of the Light which no man can approach" and the "Ark of God."

The Lity also provides another interesting ritual action. After the entrance with the light that follows "Lord I have cried" the bishop has remained out of the sanctuary, before the epitaphion, near the middle of the church. He has his staff, but none of his full vestments. At the Lity, he is fully vested, then comes forward to perform the blessing of the bread, and only then fully returns into the sanctuary. This is the point at which the bishop makes his official entrance into the church to serve. This also marks the end of the vespers portion of the vigil.

Matins is the longest part of the service, and contains many defining aspects of the Dormition Vigil. After the six psalms traditional to Matins, a special reading of the psalter is performed. In the place of the typical reading of kathismata, the lamentations of the dormition are performed. They are designed to correspond line by line with the verses of psalm 117/118, which begins "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord." This exceptionally long psalm is itself divided into three stases or sections for reading during the 17th kathisma performed on saturday night matins/vigil. Adding a sung or chanted verse to each line of the psalm makes for an incredibly lengthy service; in practice, therefore, there are abbreviations. Typically, only half of each stasis might be read, and then only the

lamentations themselves are fully sung or chanted. In the bilingual services of the Holy Dormition this means that a priest might chant one verse of lamentation in English and the nuns would sing back the next line in Romanian. The pilgrims are encouraged to participate as much as possible as well. Photocopy copies of the lamentations verses are made available, and everyone holds a small beeswax candle, just as is the case on Good Friday and the Vigil of the Resurrection.

The Lamentations are a wonderful example of Orthodox theology and poetry, which in many cases are indistinguishable from each other. The themes they represent and the styles used in presenting them carry the underlying ideas and meanings just as the other services do on many levels. The first theme of the lamentations are of course the lament for the dead Virgin. Here is a sample of the lamentations, recorded at the 1995 Vigil:

Thou, o Christ, life itself, were laid within the tomb and now so, the
Mother of Life: a strange sight both to angels and men . . .

How is it that you, the life of all the faithful, died O Mary? How does
the tomb contain your body which once contained him who is
uncontained by all? ...

Gabriel was sent from God again and brings the glad tidings of your
departure, O most heavenly, uncorrupt and pure one . . .

How did you who surpassed the laws of nature submit to the laws of
nature, O sovereign lady, and like us taste death? ...

As we look on you o Virgin, the Mother of God, we think that we
shall see God forever; How shall we now bear this separation?

In this passage, one of the dominant themes is the bitter irony of the Virgin's death, and human wonder at how such sad things can come to pass. But this is not the only

way in which the lamentations bring the wonder of Orthodox Christians to the fore.

There is also meant to be great hope and great joy in this event. For example, from the first stasis:

Even in death, O most pure one, your all holy countenance appears as
paradise and breathes forth grace and life . . .

Clothed and adorned with grace, you now stand before God as Queen
and Mother of God . . .

O Ineffable Joy! O immeasurable honor! Mary reigns in heaven and
on earth with Jesus her son! ...

You, the divine ark of God's covenant with us, have settled in a
wondrous tabernacle-- the House of God.

The themes of the lamentations are many. Sorrow is mixed with joy and wonder. Many verses also testify to the importance of the dormition and the responses of the apostles and the angels, who all come forward to give honor and glory to this amazing event. The poetry of the verses finds its power in the juxtaposition of old assumptions and symbols with Christ and the Virgin Mary. Through the miraculous events of their story, the powers of death, the devil, and sin are reversed and negated. Through their story the many symbols of the Old Testament are redefined and reinvigorated.

The lamentations are not shy in their praise of the Virgin Mary, considered the Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. In Orthodoxy, she is, in fact, considered far more glorious and powerful than the angels themselves. Following the lamentations is a special Gospel reading, a feature of matins during vigils. The reading for the Vigil of the Dormition also reaffirms the glory of the Virgin and is

the scriptural basis for her veneration. This version was taken from the monastery's unpublished service book (Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Monastery, 1995, pp. 21-22):

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior, because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name..." Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home (Luke 1:39-49, 56).

In the service of the Vigil it is the esteemed place of the bishop to read this Gospel, and his reading is accompanied by blessings and praises. At this time, the imagery has now completely moved from the Old Testament to the New, from sorrow over the "Dormition" to rejoicing and expectation of her "Translation" into heaven, which will be fully relived and revealed through the divine liturgy on the following morning. The canons of the Vigil which round out the service are yet another set of incredibly sophisticated hymns to the Virgin which expand the theology of the Church. In eight canticles they summarize in song all of the images of the Holy Virgin: Queen, mother, bride, tabernacle, living ark, plentiful fount, holy mountain, earthly heaven, swift cloud, incorruptible source, temple of life, and others. The

writers of the canticles spare no image from giving glory to Mary, for example, from canticle six of the service:

Your Son, O Virgin, has truly made you dwell in the holy of holies as a bright candlestick, flaming with immaterial fire, as a golden censer burning with divine coal, as the vessel of manna, the rod of Aaron, and the tablet written by God, as a holy ark and table of the bread of life. (Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Monastery, 1995, p. 28)

It is this richness of imagery in poetry and song that makes the Vigil of the Dormition such a profound and unusual display of Orthodox affections. The very physical nature of these images reflects the Orthodox notion of theosis, or deification, of the human being and the cosmos through the saving power of the Incarnation.

At the end of the canons at the end of the matins the epitaphion is lifted from the tomb and led in a procession around the church to the sound of the toaca and the bells and the singing of hymns. At each of the cardinal points the procession stops and the bishop leads a prayer and litany. After three hours of standing or sitting in place the procession is a much longed-for change in activity. The mechanics of the procession are not that different from that of Good Friday-- the faithful near the front sing along with the priests, but the farther back down the line the more disjointed and less audible things become, turning into more of a festive and jocular parade, which is not necessarily a degeneration of the solemnity of the event! When the long bulbous train of people make their way back into the church they must pass under the epitaphion, symbolically, entering death and rebirth with the Virgin herself, participating in the mythic journey of all Orthodox Christians. As they reenter the

church all are singing the troparion of the feast: "In giving birth you preserved your virginity; in falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Birthgiver of God. You were translated to life, O Mother of Life, and by your prayers deliver our souls from death." (Ibid., p. 13) The service ends with the dismissals, and the participants come forward to venerate the epitaphion and receive from the bishop an anointing of oil on the forehead and a piece of the blessed bread.

The Dormition Vigil itself draws a respectable crowd. The guest house is filled with pilgrims from across the country, and afterwards there is a light supper of fasting foods which will be the last meal before the feast which follows the liturgy and Communion. The buzz of excitement is in the air, and many of the pilgrims know each other from the year before and get involved in doing support work in preparation of the big crowds the next day. One almost has to compete to be given a task to help out with; the spirit of giving and helping is so strong. As the evening winds down the trapeza is occupied by a few pilgrims up for coffee and talk. The Pan-Orthodox make-up of the group allows for rich dialogue and cross-cultural fertilization. There are those who have toured the Orthodox world, and can speak of its wonders, and there are those who are just now discovering the world outside their own parishes. There are pious elders of the community, whose eyes shine like old monks and nuns of the old country, and children who add an energy of well-behaved playfulness to the monastery grounds. Conversations drift from world politics to personal stories of grace, to the particulars of Romanian cuisine which are now being happily digested. Perhaps the most commonly discussed issue is the shared experience

of being Orthodox in America, regardless of one's ethnicity. The community begins to recognize its shared heritage across borders of language, race, culture. Out of this community has arisen a group of dedicated lay supporters known as the "Friends of the Holy Dormition Monastery" and their numbers are expanding.

On the day of the dormition the monastery explodes with people. Over the last few years from 300-500 people have come each year and the numbers are growing. Parking stretches over much of the front lawns of the Monastery and the St. Nicholas house. Should the Dormition fall on a weekend, the monastery is sure to be overflowing, but no one will go away without their needs seen to. For 1997, the new trapeza hall should be ready to handle the large load for feasting. The liturgy is held out doors in the pavilion, which is a special experience for many. The pavilion is not equipped with an iconostasis, the wall of icons that divides the sanctuary from the nave. Thus, the laypeople can see the entire liturgy without the veil of doors and curtains. Instead of taking away the "magic" of the sacrament, it simply adds to it. There are also other attractions. Several book sellers routinely come and set up tables with all sorts of Orthodox paraphernalia-- icons, books on Orthodox subjects, prayer ropes, crosses, Romanian, Russian, and Greek arts and crafts, beaded eggs, video tapes of services in the monastery and elsewhere across the world, and more.

The Feast-Day liturgy is known as a "Hierarchical Divine Liturgy" because its chief celebrant is a bishop of the church (and sometimes archbishop or metropolitan to boot). Numerous priests, deacons, and subdeacons are also present, so the entire hierarchy of the clergy is represented. It is not uncommon for there to

be upwards of twenty clergy members serving at this liturgy, an impressive sight to see. With the presence of bishops and deacons, the service has an increased complexity and majesty that keeps many parishioners excited and expectant. This is heightened by a procession of entry similar to that of the vigil where the community is led by the toaca beater and the ringing bells to make their way to the pavilion. Communing itself becomes an adventure, as the throngs of people press forward and navigate through the hastily moved folding chairs toward the sacrament. There is a mysticism that is experienced by Orthodox Christians in such a crowd; the self melts into the unity of the Church which the Orthodox consider the Body of Christ.

After the celebration of the liturgy, the celebration of the feast begins literally; the food is catered and given to the monastery through donation, which is exceptionally fortunate for the sisters. After a blessing, the hundreds line up in the hot noon sun for a chance to feast, and it is quite worth the wait. Tables are set up all over the grounds, sometimes filling the pavilion which had only recently been the dinner hall of a different kind of supper. The gifts and the important sacramental objects have been removed in this case, since feasting in a ritually "functional" church is inappropriate and forbidden. The feast may include Romanian favorites such as stuffed cabbage and sausage and lighter fare such as fruits and salads. Desserts are plentiful, and there are many traditional Romanian pastries. Luckily, gluttony is tempered by the strong ascetic spirit of the place. The nuns seem to wait until the last minute to serve themselves, making sure that everyone else is well taken care of, but the pilgrims respond by making sure they go before them in line. In

Orthodoxy there seem to be endless levels of etiquette possible, and it would be fictitious to say that everyone is sure as how best to proceed when hunger strikes!

The afternoon is still busy, and many people stay for the service of "Mystical Unction" which usually takes place at about 2:00 in the afternoon. This part of the pilgrimage recaptures some of the feel of the medieval pilgrimage, as it is a service of healing and directed prayer, and many come with pictures of loved ones to be blessed and prayed over. Today, unction is perhaps the least familiar of the church's sacraments, but in the days before the belief in the "techno-shamanism" of modern medicine, unction most likely held a strong place in the piety of the people. And perhaps due to the focus on healing of the sick, there is a this-worldly attention that is different from the other rites of Orthodoxy. Pilgrims also are able to walk away from this service with small items that are blessed, including small bags of flour for baking and vials of blessed oil for use at home. One year, tiny buttons of the Dormition Icon were handed out; on another, post-card icons were given instead. In that way, pilgrims take away a little piece of the monastery with them in portable, amuletic form.

Mystical Unction is simple and complex at the same time. A clear goal for the ritual is "healing of soul and body". To achieve this healing properly requires a suitably Orthodox procedure, which makes things more complex by integrating the actions of the ritual into the religious system. There are two main components of the rite or office of Mystical Unction. The first is the sanctification of the oil; the other is the use of prayer and oil in healing. The monastery also provides a special

opportunity because this service was designed to be performed by at least seven priests, and the feast-day pilgrimage is one of those rare opportunities where over seven priests are serving together. The Unction itself is unusual, since it is not performed on any routine basis throughout the year except on Holy Wednesday evening, which reflects the anointing of Christ before his passion by the sinful woman. This image is also used in the prayers preceding the sanctification of the oil at the feast-day pilgrimage. Like baptism and marriage, it is usually done as needed, so this practice is a tradition specific to the Monastery and its typikon.

Following the Orthodox format, the office of Mystical Unction begins with an introduction of litanies, psalms, and the troparion of the day of the Dormition. The rite is conducted in the pavilion, shady refuge from the warm afternoon sun. The altar itself is not in use for this service. Instead, before the congregation, where the epitaphion was laid the night before, is a long table covered with the necessary ritual implements. A three-stemmed candle stick holds the center, representing the light of the trinity. Before the candles lie the service book, the Gospel, and stack of small (4" by 7") prayer lists containing the names of the many for whom the pilgrims are asking the priests and nuns to pray. To either side of the candles are baskets filled with items to be blessed and distributed to the faithful. Small vials of oil have been collected and once blessed will be considered holy oil that can be used for unction at home or given to the ill. There are also small bags of flour which can then be used later for baking, especially prosphora, the small round loaves from which the eucharistic "lamb" is cut. On the remaining surface of the table is a true potpourri

of items, especially photographs of loved ones who will be prayed for in this service. In a sense, the faithful are bringing "relics" of loved ones to be blessed in hopes of transmitting that blessing (through the grace of the Holy Spirit) to the subjects of the photographs or owners of the items presented.

The sanctification of the oil is initiated through a litany during which the following formula is intoned: "That this oil will be blessed by the descent, power, and operation of the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord." (Papadeas, 1996, p. 124). The blessing is then acted upon by the priest who speaks the "Prayer of the Oil," which is followed by a reading of troparia to healing miracles and saints of the church, read in this case by the abbess. In each utterance, a direct invocation is aimed at engaging the power of God through the Trinity or the saints to act on behalf of those gathered. Once blessed, however, it is not as simple as applying it to the faithful and it's done. This is really just the beginning.

A series of healing prayers over the faithful follows. The series is repeated seven times, following a pattern of (1) a litany of supplication, (2) an epistle reading, (3) a priest censes as the choir sings "alleluia," (4) a Gospel reading. During the reading of the gospels, the pilgrims scramble forward to kneel near a priest or the bishop, who covers them with his vestments. Each priest takes a turn reading a gospel, and the bishop moves around each time so that all the pilgrims may receive the blessings through him as well. At the end of the gospel, a solemn prayer is spoken which is directly to the point: healing. One example of these prayers is as follows:

O Master almighty, Holy King, who chastens, yet does not put to death; Who supports those who fall and raises those who are downtrodden, who heals our physical afflictions; we entreat you, Our God, that you bring mercy on this Oil, and to those who are anointed with it in Your name; that it may be effectual unto the healing of soul and body, unto cleansing and deliverance from every infirmity, illness, malady, and every defilement of soul and body. yea, Lord, send down from Heaven Your healing power; touch the body, quench the fever, sooth the pain and banish every hidden ailment. Become the Physician of these, Your servants, raise them up and heal their suffering, grant that they may be given to the Church whole and in restored health, pleasing You and abiding by Your will.

For it is yours to show mercy and to save us our God, and to you we ascribe glory to the father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and to the ages of ages. (Papadeas, 1996, pg. 139).

Following Orthodox ritual "grammar," the prayer is punctuated in the name of the Trinity. There also seems to be the intuitive understanding that not only is the oil itself charged with healing power, but so also is the action of bowing beneath and being touched by the priests' vestments. This is not the only instance of Orthodoxy applying this ritual action; absolution is given by kneeling under the stola while the priest prays. The theological understanding which may or may not be known to the faithful is that by making present the actions of Christ in the gospel through vocalizing the stories, the faithful are able to participate in those actions and thus receive their benefits. All manner of people flock to kneel on the concrete of the Pavilion floor, from the bowed elderly to the wonder-filled children. Those who cannot fit underneath the vestments stretch to reach out and touch the sacred cloth, and failing that, they put their hand on a shoulder of one who is touching it. Perhaps the greatest test of the intuitive action of this rite is when I asked a five-year old if he "felt the healing power" while under the vestments, he replied quite emphatically,

"Uh-huh!"

The rite ends with a blessing by the bishop who then calls the congregation forward to receive an anointing with the now holy oil. The faithful are coached to say "Bless me Holy father, and forgive me a sinner" three times as they approach the unction. The priest or bishop then anoints them in small cross patterns across their forehead, throat, under their eyes and ears and mouth, on their hands and any place they specifically ask for healing, each time saying "for the healing of soul and body." This anointing is a conclusion for many to a two-day experience that can be described as "for the healing of soul and body," a final blessing before the return to the "world" which now seems quite far away after such an intricate and mystical rite.

Still, a few handfuls of people will stay to help with clean up, which is an extensive project. The feast is winding down, soon the monastery will return to its normal pace, but still quite animated with the energy of the Dormition. With each year, the monastery sees its extended family of pilgrims and supporters grow larger, older, and hopefully, deeper in the faith. New friends seem to be made every feast-day, adding to the regular faces of return guests. These folk are the important bridges between the monastery and the world, spreading most often by word of mouth the power they encounter and experience in the nun's environment. Once, rich nobles and emperors could be expected to found and support great monasteries. The Holy Dormition, like its mother monastery Varatec is founded and supported far more humbly. It will be the work of the unsung pilgrims that carry the message of the monastery farther.

This symbiotic relationship is supportive in a number of mutually beneficial directions. It also serves to reinforce the relationships of spiritual parent to child literally as well as between monastery and world, church hierarchy and church laity, and God and humanity. The monastery does this by creating a space and community in which these relationships thrive with vibrancy and dominance over mundane ones, and then putting them directly in action for the Orthodox Christian community. Once a year, this culminates most clearly in the feast-day pilgrimage of the Dormition in which all of the monastery's resources, physically and religiously, are actualized. Besides being an instance of Orthodoxy at its most extravagant, it is a defining moment for the community of nuns. It is a time of totalities, when all they work for is tested and tried out by the world at large. And so far, they have done blessedly well.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The pilgrimage to the Holy Dormition Monastery is a defining moment for the religious system of Orthodox Christian Monasticism. All of the aspects of the system are put into synergetic action. The history of monasticism, with its appeal to the traditions of the desert fathers and the early church, with its heritage from Romania and America, is expressed through the living traditions of the Holy Dormition Monastery. The heritage is expressed first through the place itself, in its architecture, its arrangement, and its art. The monastery becomes functional as a setting for the religious system. The main actors of the system are the nuns themselves, the priest-monks, and the clergy and laity that come to participate through pilgrimage. In serving the pilgrims especially, the nuns illustrate the special role of nun in the Orthodox Christian world. In performing this role, they define the role of spiritual parent for the whole community and model the right relationships for Orthodox Christians between themselves, their Church, and their God. The relationship is most fully expressed through the ritual system of prayer, worship, and the cycles of life and time. The times of Lent, Pascha, and the Dormition become key points of this expression of the religious system, especially since it is at these times that the monastery interacts most intensely with the rest of the Church. In these

moments of emergence, the religious system appears in its fullness. The Orthodox Church claims that it holds the fullness of the Truth, and this is partially because the theological truth-claims of the Church are expressed so intricately on the many levels of the religious system. This is also why the monastics play such an important role in Orthodoxy, for it is they who guard this fullness in their traditions. The monastery provides an environment in which one can encounter the spirituality of Orthodoxy in a number of interconnected and complimentary ways. Spiritual fatherhood and motherhood present themselves in layers of complexity, continually reinforcing the fundamental worldview of Orthodox Christianity. This thesis however, has not had such lofty aims as to proclaim the truth of Orthodoxy, which is best done by a skilled and learned theologian. Rather, there has been the hope that Lawson (1985, p.91) expressed:

Analyzing a particular religious system by taking into account the complex and intricate relationships among the roles occupied by individuals and the kinds and levels of religious power the people believe to be real leads to the discovery of its importance for shaping human life for good or ill.

There should also be no surprise that this thesis finds monasticism as a shaper of human life for good far more than ill, and this is a prejudice based solely on the very positive experiences of fieldwork at the Holy Dormition Monastery of Rives Junction, Michigan. So too, has the prejudice towards "Spiritual Fatherhood" as the defining theme of monasticism. There are certainly many other ways in which Orthodox Christian Monasticism can and should be approached by scholars of religion. Until then, "Through the prayers of our holy Fathers and Mothers, Lord Jesus Christ our

God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen."

Appendix A

**Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Protocols and Approval Form**

Western Michigan University
Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB)
Application Form

I. Basic Information

Project Title: "'Doamne Miluste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery."

Principle Investigator or Advisor:

H. Byron Earhart, PhD.

Department of Comparative Religion

3814 Stonegate, Kalamazoo, Mi. 49004

Office Phone: 387-4395

Co-Principle/ Student Investigator

David G. Subu B.A.

Department of Comparative Religion

1545 Concord Place 2A, Kalamazoo, Mi. 49009

(616) 372-7001

This project is intended to meet the Master's Thesis requirement.

Proposed Project dates: Aug. 1, 1995, to Jan. 1, 1996.

Site of Research Activity: Dormition of the Mother of God

Orthodox Monastery, 3389 Rives Eaton Rd., Rives Junction, Mi

49277. Phone: (517) 569-2873.

Participants:

Total number of participants: variable

The first stage of the research involves participant observation of the Monastic community. Specifically the religious activities of the Monastics will be observed and recorded. The central activities include the Pilgrimage that occurs yearly on the feast day of the Dormition, namely, August 15. The participants therefore include any Monastics involved as well as lay participants who visit the Monastery. These therefore range in all ages, genders, and possible categories. Though children may inevitably be present with parents or guardians, the public behavior being observed for the study is that of the adult members of the religious community only.

This stage is concerned with the collection of anonymous data only.

Level of Review: Exempt

I certify that the information contained in the HSIRB application and all attachments is true and correct. I certify that I have received approval to conduct this research from all persons named as collaborators and from officials of the project sites. If this proposal is approved by the institutional review board, I agree to conduct the research according to the approved protocol. I agree not to implement any changes in the protocol until such changes have been approved by the HSIRB. If, during the course of the research, unanticipated risks or harm to subjects are discovered, I will report them to HSIRB immediately.

advisor signature and date:

student researcher signature and date:

HSIRB Protocol outline:

Project Description: The research project entitled "'Doamne Milueste': the Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery" has the purpose of describing and analyzing in detail the daily events and religious activities of a Monastery, and the lives of its community members. This research is done in pursuit of the completion of the requirements of a Master's Thesis in the Department of Comparative Religion at Western Michigan University, the thesis of the student researcher, David G. Subu.

The research procedure is two-fold. The first part, which is the only part being described in this protocol outline, involves observation of the religious activities of the Monastic community including visiting lay participants. This observation will result in data which will accurately depict the rituals, ceremonies, customs, and religious actions of the participants in general. The data for this is based on observation of public behavior and hence is anonymous in nature. This observation will take place over the time of the research project, and all on the Monastery grounds itself.

The second part of the research, which will deal with interviewing specific members of the community, will take place later and require its own protocol outline. For expediency, this second project will not be undertaken until the first section has been completed.

Benefits of the research: The benefits include the description and explanation of religious activities of Monastics not widely known to scholars or participants in the broader Orthodox Faith. For the research participants it provides them with an opportunity to help construct a useful educational tool that they themselves can use in communicating their purposes for their behavior. The research also allows them to express the personal, human side of the Monastic lifestyle that is often neglected in research on monastics. For the anonymous participants, the research provides something for them, as well as all Orthodox and other interested people, a complete picture of the Monastery which was established to serve them spiritually.

Subject selection:

As the observation of Public behavior is anonymous, no subjects need be directly recruited or selected. The official at the site giving permission to the researcher has the authority at any time to prohibit public observation of Monastic activity.

Risks to Subjects: The possible risks involved in participant observation, which is a non-intrusive form of field work, are minimal in terms of discomfort. All activity observed is public and participant-observation is no inconvenience as it is expected and welcomed by the community.

Protection of Subjects: Protection is insured by the site official prohibiting and allowing observation. In participant observation, the researcher behaves in a manner consistent with any other lay member of the researched community. Mr. Subu is already a member of the Orthodox Church of America and has attended the pilgrimage on two previous occasions as a participant. This method of research affords protection from the discomfort of being observed by not introducing any research elements that might disrupt the activities or distract the other participants.

Confidentiality of Data: No names will be recorded or used in this part of the project. Data obtained from participant-observation will be used to generate an idealized model of religious and cultural practice at the Monastery. Neither direct nor indirect identifying information will be disclosed during or after the project as the result of this research.

Instrumentation:

Data Collection Instruments:

Panasonic Microcassette Recorder RN106D

Microcassettes

Kodak Camera and Film

Informed Consent:

Western Michigan University
 Department of Comparative Religion
 Principle Investigator: Dr. H. Byron Earhart
 Research associate: David Subu

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled " 'Doamne Milueste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery". I understand that the research is intended to study and describe the life of Monastics and the religious life in which they participate. I further understand that this project is David Subu's Master Thesis project.

My consent to participate indicates that my behavior while participating in the activities of the Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Monastery may be observed and recorded. The Observation will take place whenever Mr. Subu is present from Aug. 10 until Aug. 16, 1995. I will not be required to do anything whatsoever for the purposes of this research project. I understand that only my public behavior is that which may be recorded.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. I understand that the only risks anticipated are minor discomforts that may be experienced by having one's behavior observed. I understand that all the usual methods employed during standard participant-observation to minimize discomfort will be employed in this study. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way in which I may benefit from this activity is providing insight into Monastic life that will allow both Orthodox and Non-Orthodox who may not be familiar with Monastic life a deeper understanding and possibly an appreciation of that life.

I understand that all the information collected from me is confidential and anonymous. My name will not be recorded nor appear on any documentation resulting from this research.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Mr. Subu at (616) 372-7001 or Dr. H. Byron Earhart at (616) 387-4395. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research with any concerns that I have. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate as I have indicated above.

participant's signature: _____ date: _____

Site Official's Letter of Permission:

Western Michigan University
 Department of Comparative Religion
 Principle Investigator: H. Byron Earhart
 Research associate: David Subu

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled " 'Doamne Miluceste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery". I understand that the research is intended to study and describe the life of Monastics and the religious life in which they participate. I further understand that this project is David Subu's Master Thesis project.

My consent to participate indicates that I grant permission for Mr. Subu to conduct his research on the grounds of the Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Monastery in accordance with the proposed project protocol. I have read and understand the proposed protocol outline.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. I understand that the only risks anticipated are minor discomforts that may be experienced by having one's behavior observed. I understand that all the usual methods employed during standard participant-observation to minimize discomfort will be employed in this study. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way in which the Monastery may benefit from this activity is providing insight into Monastic life that will allow both Orthodox and Non-Orthodox who may not be familiar with Monastic life a deeper understanding and possibly an appreciation of that life.

I understand that all the information collected from participants is confidential and anonymous. Participants' names will not be recorded nor appear on any documentation resulting from this research.

I understand that I may prohibit research at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Mr. Subu at (616) 372-7001 or Dr. H. Byron Earhart at (616) 387-4395. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research with any concerns that I have. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate as I have indicated above.

Site Official's signature: _____ date: _____

Western Michigan University
Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB)
Application Form

I. Basic Information

Project Title: "'Doamne Milueste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery." Part II: Collection of Life Histories

Principle Investigator or Advisor:
H. Byron Earhart, PhD.
Department of Comparative Religion
3814 Stonegate, Kalamazoo, Mi. 49004
Office Phone: 387-4395

Co-Principle/ Student Investigator
David G. SubuB.A.
Department of Comparative Religion
1545 Concord Place 2A, Kalamazoo, Mi. 49009
(616) 372-7001

This project is intended to meet the Master's Thesis requirement.

Proposed Project dates: June 1, 1996, to Sept. 1, 1996.
Site of Research Activity: Dormition of the Mother of God
Orthodox Monastery, 3389 Rives Eaton Rd., Rives Junction, Mi
49277. Phone: (517) 569-2873.

Participants:

Total number of participants: 12

The participants include the Monastics who live at the Holy Dormition Monastery in Rives Junction, Mi. These range in age from the mid twenties to the elderly, and include ten women and two men. In this part of the research, they are only involved for the length of time that they require to complete a questionnaire and a follow up interview of a one hour and a half length.

Level of Review: Not Exempt

I certify that the information contained in the HSIRB application and all attachments is true and correct. I certify that I have received approval to conduct this research from all persons named as collaborators and from officials of the project sites. If this proposal is approved by the institutional review board, I agree to conduct the research according to the approved protocol. I agree not to implement any changes in the

protocol until such changes have been approved by the HSIRB. If, during the course of the research, unanticipated risks or harm to subjects are discovered, I will report them to HSIRB immediately.

advisor signature: _____ date: _____

student researcher signature: _____ date: _____

HSIRB Protocol outline:

Project Description: The research project entitled "'Doamne Milueste': the Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery" has the purpose of describing and analyzing in detail the daily events and religious activities of a Monastery, and the lives of its community members. This research is done in pursuit of the completion of the requirements of a Master's Thesis in the Department of Comparative Religion at Western Michigan University, the thesis of the student researcher, David G. Subu.

The research procedure is two fold. The first part has been previously carried out and approved by HSIRB. Part I included participant observation of public, anonymous behavior on the monastery grounds and was exempt from review. The second part, here detailed, involves confidential but not anonymous data collection, and therefore is not exempt from review.

The procedure of part II of "'Doamne Milueste': the Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery" involves the distribution of surveys coupled with follow-up interviews (please see attachments). The surveys and interviews are designed to allow for the collection of religious life-histories, a technique which allows the researcher to have a fuller picture of what it means to be a member of the monastic community and to live the monastic life.

Benefits of the research: The benefits include the description and explanation of religious activities of Monastics not widely known to scholars or participants in the broader Orthodox Faith. For the research participants it provides them with an opportunity to help construct a useful educational tool that they themselves can use in communicating their purposes for their behavior. The research also allows them to express the personal, human side of the Monastic lifestyle that is often neglected in research on monastics. For the anonymous participants, the research provides something for them, as well as all Orthodox and other interested people, a complete picture of the Monastery which was established to serve them spiritually.

Subject selection:

All subjects are to be recruited from the Holy Dormition Monastery in Rives Junction MI. They will be recruited through a written recruitment script given to and approved

by the site official (see attachment). The official at the site giving permission to the researcher has the authority at any time to prohibit research activity or observation of Monastic activity.

Risks to Subjects: The possible risks involved in the survey and interview process are minimal in terms of discomfort. The survey and interview questions are in fact typical of the questions asked of the monastics by everyday visitors to their community. Areas of questioning that prove to be uncomfortable will not be pursued.

Protection of Subjects: Protection is first insured by the site official's power prohibiting and allowing observation and interviews. Mr. Subu is already a member of the Orthodox Church of America and has attended the pilgrimage on two previous occasions as a participant, developing a rapport with the members of the community appropriate for this research. All surveys are to be completed in private by the monastics at their leisure within the one month time allotted. All interviews are to take place on the Monastery grounds at times convenient to the nuns' schedules. This method of research affords protection from the possible discomfort of research by not introducing any research elements that might disrupt the activities or distract the other participants. See also Confidentiality of Data below.

Confidentiality of Data: No names will be recorded or used in the final part of the project. Data obtained from surveys and interviews will be used to generate an idealized model of religious and cultural practice at the Monastery. Neither direct nor indirect identifying information will be disclosed during or after the project as the result of this research. Statistical data regarding age and educational background and home background are for the generation of idealized models only. Furthermore, all data collected is confidential. That means that no names will appear on any papers on which recorded data appears. The data forms are to be coded by Mr. Subu who will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code names. Once the data is collected the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for three years in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home.

Instrumentation:

Data Collection Instruments:

Panasonic Microcassette Recorder RN106D

Microcassettes

Pads of Paper and writing instruments

Note pads

Informed Consent:

Western Michigan University
 Department of Comparative Religion
 Principle Investigator: Dr. H. Byron Earhart
 Research associate: David Subu

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled " 'Doamne Milueste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery". I understand that the research is intended to study and describe the life of Monastics and the religious life in which they participate. I further understand that this project is David Subu's Master Thesis project.

My consent to participate indicates that I will be asked to complete a brief survey and then meet with the researcher for a short follow-up interview of about an hour and half length at the Holy Dormition Monastery. The interview is designed to clarify and elaborate upon the answers in the survey. I will also be asked to provide general information about myself such as age, and educational and religious background. Data from all individual surveys and interviews will be employed together in order to generate an idealized profile of a monastic's whole religious life as it exists in an Orthodox monastery and mission.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. I understand that one potential risk of discomfort may arise from the asking of questions concerning my religious life, which can be a very private and personal matter. However, the researcher agrees to not pursue any areas of questioning that I may consider to be overly sensitive. Also, I understand that all the usual methods employed during standard interviewing procedures used to minimize discomfort will be employed in this study. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way in which I may benefit from this activity is providing insight into Monastic life that will allow both Orthodox and Non-Orthodox who may not be familiar with Monastic life a deeper understanding and possibly an appreciation of that life.

I understand that all the information collected from me is confidential. That means that no names will appear on any papers on which recorded data appears. The data forms are to be coded by Mr. Subu who will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code names. Once the data is collected the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for three years in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Mr. Subu at (616) 372-7001 or Dr. H. Byron Earhart at (616) 387-4395. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research with any concerns that I have. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate as I have indicated above.

participant's signature: _____ date: _____

Site Official Permission Form:

Western Michigan University
 Department of Comparative Religion
 Principle Investigator: H. Byron Earhart
 Research associate: David Subu

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled " 'Doamne Milueste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery". I understand that the research is intended to study and describe the life of Monastics and the religious life in which they participate. I further understand that this project is David Subu's Master Thesis project.

My consent to participate indicates that I grant permission for Mr. Subu to conduct his research on the grounds of the Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Monastery in accordance with the proposed project protocol. I have read and understand the proposed protocol outline.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. I understand that the only risks anticipated are minor discomforts that may be experienced by having one's behavior observed. I understand that all the usual methods employed during standard interviews to minimize discomfort will be employed in this study. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way in which the Monastery may benefit from this activity is by providing insight into Monastic life that will allow both Orthodox and Non-Orthodox who may not be familiar with Monastic life a deeper understanding and possibly an appreciation of that life.

I understand that all the information collected from participants is confidential. That means that no names will appear on any papers on which recorded data appears. The data forms are to be coded by Mr. Subu who will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code names. Once the data is collected the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained for three years in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home.

I understand that I may prohibit research at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Mr. Subu at (616) 372-7001 or Dr. H. Byron Earhart at (616) 387-4395. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research with any concerns that I have. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study

and that I agree to participate as I have indicated above.

Site Official's signature: _____ date: _____

Survey Questionnaire

Statistical Data:

1. Age: _____.
2. Sex: ___M___F.
3. Where are you from originally? If from Romania, where in Romania? _____
4. How old were you when you entered a monastery to live? _____
5. Have you taken the monastic profession? _____
How old were you when you were tonsured? _____
6. What monasteries have you lived in before coming to Holy Dormition Monastery and how long did you live in each monastery?

Family Data:

7. What was your family's religious affiliation or activity when you entered the monastery? _____

Was your own religious affiliation or activity different? How so? _____

8. What was your family's reaction to you entering a monastery?
9. What relationship do you have now with the members of your family? Which members?
10. What were some of the reasons you entered the monastery originally?

Religious Life Data:

11. What is your favorite activity in the monastic lifestyle?

12. What is the most challenging or difficult activity for you in the monastic lifestyle?

13. What is your favorite time of the year, liturgically?

14. What is your favorite time of the week and day?

15. What is the most important space for you personally in the monastery?

Conclusion Data:

16. How has your religious life changed since becoming a monastic?

17. Would you suggest to a young person to pursue the monastic life? What reasons and advice would you give to them to help them make their decision?

18. How do you see your life as a monastic growing, changing, and developing?

Recruitment Script:

Western Michigan University
Department of Comparative Religion
Principle Investigator: Dr. H. Byron Earhart
Research associate: David Subu

Dear Sisters, Mothers, and Fathers of the Holy Dormition Monastery,

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled " 'Doamne Milueste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery". This research project is intended to study and describe the religious life of monastics in which they participate. This project is my Master Thesis project at Western Michigan University.

With your consent to participate, I will ask you to complete a brief survey and meet with me for a short follow-up interview at the monastery. The interview is designed to clarify and elaborate upon the questions and answers in the survey. You will be asked to provide general information about yourselves such as age, educational, and religious background. Data from all individual surveys and interviews will be employed together in order to generate a model of a monastic's whole religious life as it exists in an Orthodox monastery and mission. Please understand that all the information collected from you is confidential. That means that no names will appear on any papers on which recorded data appears.

One way in which you and the monastery may benefit from this activity is providing insight into monastic life that will allow both Orthodox and non-Orthodox who may not be familiar with monastic life a deeper understanding and possibly an appreciation of that life. Each of you has a unique and powerful story that can serve as a tool for teaching the world about Orthodoxy. Your individual experiences bring a vitality to learning that no academic textbook can equal.

Approval Letter:

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-3899
616 387-8293

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

To: H. Byron Earhart
David G. Subu

From: Richard A. Wright, Chair
Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Subject: HSIRB Project # 96-05-10

Date: May 18, 1996

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard A. Wright".

This is to inform you that your project entitled "Doamne Milueste': The Life of a Contemporary Orthodox Monastery," has been approved under the exempt category of research. This approval is based upon your proposal as presented to the HSIRB, and you may utilize human subjects only in accord with this approved proposal.

Your project is approved for a period of one year from the above date. If you should revise any procedures relative to human subjects or materials, you must resubmit those changes for review in order to retain approval. Should any untoward incidents or unanticipated adverse reactions occur with the subjects in the process of this study, you must suspend the study and notify me immediately. The HSIRB will then determine whether or not the study may continue.

Please be reminded that all research involving human subjects must be accomplished in full accord with the policies and procedures of Western Michigan University, as well as all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations. Any deviation from those policies, procedures, laws or regulations may cause immediate termination of approval for this project.

Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Project Expiration Date: May 18, 1997

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