

Tonsure of Nuns at the Convent of the Holy Angels

ON the Second Saturday of the Great Fast, March 9, 2008 (Old Style), the commemoration of the Holy Forty Martyrs, and also on the Third Saturday, March 16, 2008 (Old Style), eve of the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod and proxy for His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle (the Convent's spiritual Elder) Tonsured three nuns at the Convent of the Holy Angels to the Great Schema. Mothers Taxiarchia (in the world Adaman-tia Giatrakos, b. 1981) and Theodosia (Theodora Magdalinos, b. 1985), who are daughters according to the flesh of spiritual children of Metropolitan Cyprian, entered the Convent in 2000 and 1999, respectively. Mother Magdalene (Maria Jonsved, b. 1975), a convert to Orthodoxy from Sweden (where she studied social psychology), entered the Convent in 2001, just a year after her Baptism.



• **O**n the Second Saturday of the Fast, His Grace also Tonsured Novice Alina Simion, from Romania (b. 1980, studied philosophy) a Rasophore Nun, giving her the name “Justina.” Sister Justina, a spiritual daughter of His Eminence, Bishop Silvano of Luni, entered the Convent in 2006, with the prospect, God willing, of returning to Italy, following appropriate preparation, to found a Convent under the guidance of Bishop Silvano.

Bishop Cyprian read to the newly-tonsured Sisters a short oration, which had as its central theme: “The Development of a Monastic ‘in knowledge,’” wishing them that “their spiritual union with Christ our Savior become progressively more profound and fervent.”

The Development of a Monastic “in Knowledge”

*Reverend Mother Taxiarchia;
My venerable Mothers and Sisters;
Feast-loving assembly of those keeping vigil:*

CALLING upon the guidance and blessing of our ailing Metropolitan and Divinely-Graced Elder, the illuminating Grace of the Mother of God, and the help of your prayers, I would briefly like to touch on a very important matter, of which we are reminded anew by this evening’s two monastic Tonsures.

Last week, during the *Agrypnia* for the commemoration of the Holy Forty Martyrs (March 9), two new Nuns were tonsured: Mother Taxiarchia and Sister Justina. This evening, Mothers Theodosia and Magdalene celebrated their spiritual weddings.

I do not wish to weary you by speaking about the spiritual grandeur of the Angelic way of life led by monastics and the elements of which it is composed; for I have before me a God-pleasing and promonastic assembly, which, from personal experience, is familiar with our Patristic Tradition.

I wish to turn your attention to a passage in the second prayer, read by the celebrant during the Service for the Great Schema: “*and vouchsafe them to please Thee in knowledge.*”¹

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Now then, just what does “*in knowledge*” mean? Is a monastic perhaps called upon to please God in an “intellectual” way? Monastics have put aside their studies and embraced the **foolishness of the Cross.**² How, then, are they now to proceed “intellectually”? What does rationalistic science have to do with the **Cross-bearing way of life** of monastics?

I cannot conceal from you that this phrase, “in knowledge,” has interested me for several years now. The monastic tonsures these past two weeks, which have been the first in my new lofty ministry, have shed some light on my question.

As a monk addressing nuns—first and foremost—, I humbly re-

mind you that a monk or nun must live out his or her monastic commitment **with awareness**, and live “*with knowledge*,” as the Holy Fathers instruct us.

St. John of the Ladder makes a very telling observation when referring to the **Martyr of Obedience**, St. Akakios, who had a “*merciless Elder*”: “***But his patience was not irrational.***”³ At first sight, his patience seems “irrational,” senseless, but it was not: It had its place and was **rational**; he practiced it “*with knowledge*,” knowing why he was submitting himself and what he sought by means of obedience in patience and martyrdom.

Another renowned **Martyr of Obedience**, Abba Dorotheos of Gaza, is chiefly praised by his biographer for his “***unquestioning obedience in knowledge***”;⁴ that is, his conscientious, unquestioning obedience, with knowledge and prudence.

The entire ascetic tradition exhorts the monastic to put forth efforts “*in knowledge*”; to perform his duties “*in knowledge*”; to struggle against his passions “*in knowledge*”; to uproot his passions “*with knowledge*”; to do good “*with knowledge*”; to fulfill the Will of God “*with knowledge*”; in brief, to build his spiritual edifice “*in knowledge*.”⁵

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By the Grace of God and the aid of the *Theotokos*, our lengthy monastic experience has taught us that, as a rule, a monastic deviates from his purpose and has no success when he does not have knowledge of his identity, does not walk “*in knowledge*” and “*with knowledge*,” and has not become conscious of the line that separates, with perfect clarity, a worldly mentality and ethos from a monastic mentality and ethos.

Our Much-Revered Elder and Guide never ceased expressing his devout desire to behold monks and nuns with such knowledge—with consciousness of why they dedicated themselves to this life, what they are seeking, and how they will attain their visions.

Within this context, I humbly believe that we have already sufficiently addressed the interpretation of the supplication by the celebrant during the Service of the Great Schema: “***to please Thee in knowledge.***”

Abba Zeno once strongly urged a double-minded monk, who was kneeling before him: “**Arise! Have knowledge!**”⁶ Stand up and learn to understand things correctly.

Arise, nun—we might repeat today—and walk “*in knowledge*” and “*with knowledge*”!

Arise, nun! Pray, seek advice, and read, so as to acquire “*knowledge*,” that is, profound awareness of your spiritual identity.

Abba Moses the Libyan urges you, nun: “**Let us acquire knowledge**”⁷: Let us acquire genuine spiritual knowledge, that we might walk, by means of *praxis* and *theoria*, “*in knowledge*” and “*with knowledge*,” pleasing God “*in knowledge*.”

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*My venerable sisters in Christ,
Theodosia and Magdalene, Taxiarchia and Justina:*

Your monastic tonsures were performed by our Much-Graced Elder and Much-Revered Father and Metropolitan, who was, and is, present in our midst.

May his holy blessing, together with the blessing of our Venerable Mother, Abbess Kypriane, strengthen, guide, and protect you, that you might continue to walk “*in knowledge*” towards the unwaning Eighth Day of the Kingdom of God.

You have been vouchsafed to become brides of Christ the Bridegroom; **your mystical union with Him, in the chamber of your hearts, is your supreme and most sacred goal.**

Your progress “*in knowledge*” will secure and arm you against the perilous temptation of **ignorance**, will protect you from pernicious **forgetfulness** (*lethe*), and will deliver you from deadly **lethargy**.

Laxity “*in knowledge*” will lead to a slackening of your deifying union with your One and Only Bridegroom. And it will then not be long before you begin to hobnob with the unclean spirits, through the



operation of the passions; that is, you will commit—God forbid!—*spiritual adultery*.

May the Blameless and Unwedded Bride of Christ, the Immaculate *Theotokos*, preserve you in the purity, chastity, and illumination of the Second Baptism of the Angelic Schema, and may your spiritual union with our Savior become progressively more profound and fervent.

May the blessing of our Divinely-Graced Elder and Father be with you always!

Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi

March 16, 2008 (Old Style)

Holy Martyr Sabinos

1. Second prayer after the Catechesis: “Holy Lord of Hosts...,” *Euchologion to Mega* (The great *Euchologion*) (Athens: Ekdotos Oikos “Aster,” p. 212).

2. Cf. I Corinthians 1:18.

3. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Discourse IV, §111, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LXXXVIII, col. 720B.

4. Abba Dorotheos, *Erga Asketika* (Ascetic works), “Letter Regarding Abba Dorotheos,” §5 (Karea: Ekdoseis “Hetoimasias,” 2000), p. 44.

5. *Ibid.* §§ 37 (col. 17), 59 (col. 10), 194 (col. 5), 110 (col. 6), 111 (col. 11), 155 (col. 3), 158 (col.

6. *To Mega Gerontikon* (The Great *Gerontikon*) Vol. III, ch. X, §39 (Panorama, Thessalonica: Ekdose Hierou Hesychasteriou “To Genesion tes Theotokou,” 1997), p. 56.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. XI, §47, p. 300.