

Project Title

Student name(s), major; Mentor name(s), department

Research Statement

This research is a comparative study of daily life in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and ecumenical monasteries, employing anthropological and historical methods, to explore the role of present day monastic seclusion with respect to biblical mandates, theological traditions, and the influence of modern culture.

Project Goal and Objectives

The goal of this research is to understand the nature of Christian monasticism with regard to monastic seclusion. Objectives are as follows: visit an Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and ecumenical monastery; conduct interviews with members of each cloister; observe liturgy, prayers, and spiritual disciplines; observe interactions and attitudes toward outsiders.

Project Impact

This research is valuable because it examines the present day monastery as it exists alongside modern intrusions, such as technology. The monastic tradition is currently in a sharp decline. Questioning monastic seclusion across Christian traditions, in relatively isolated, closed-door communities as well as in large seeker-sensitive centers, will offer insights to the possible theological orientations the monastery can adopt to continue to meet the challenges of the present day.

Background/Relationship to Previous Research

Christian monasticism is broad and varied, yet a common denominator of monastic life is retreat from the world. Monasticism is in direct opposition to the self-absorbed schedules and routines, economies and priorities, and general attitudes of the secular world. However, if a monastery is to follow the biblical command to be the salt and light of the Earth, a degree of interaction between world and monastery is necessary. The Rule of St. Basil and The Rule of St. Benedict guide Eastern and Western monasticism, respectively. Contemporaries of these early classical Christian texts placed considerably less value on openness to the world than do monastic communities of the present day. However, many of the clauses and statements of these influential documents have taken on new meaning in a modern world. "Be near a town," "welcome the pilgrim," and "pray for the world" present difficulties to monastic communities attempting to cling to historic practices. The modern struggle of world and cloister is expressed in Thomas Merton's *Contemplations in a World of Action*. The monastery of today must find its identity in this balance or it ceases to serve its purpose. Merton notes that the identity dilemma is exacerbated by a decline in monastic vocations and outward criticism concerning seclusion.

Anthropological-theological work in specific monasteries contributed to the articles "Conversations in a Monastery" and "The Convent: Community, Prison, or Task Force?" Though these articles do not treat the question of monastic seclusion, they demonstrate how to conduct fieldwork in the relatively closed environment of the monastery. Monastic research is subject to the approval of an abbot and must abide by the order's traditions. Research should be informed of monastic culture, as contained in texts such as *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, *The Study of Spirituality*, and *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain*.

Project Design

The first stage of research is currently underway through an independent study. Texts studied pertain particularly to monastic theology and practice, monastic immersion, and biographies, including both classical and contemporary sources. I will take a course during Maymester on Eastern mysticism and spirituality with Dr. Cutsinger, my religious studies advisor. The Maymester course will include a visit to the Eastern Orthodox monastery of St. Anthony in Arizona. Dr. Cutsinger will be available in Arizona to

consult should I need any assistance. After the completion of the Maymester course, I will visit the Roman Catholic Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, and the ecumenical monastery of Taizé, France. I can speak French, however, Taizé is a multilingual center prepared to receive large numbers of foreign speakers. While in the field, research will follow patterns highlighted by the two anthropological studies above, will be informed by my studies as a history double major, and will be informed by the immersion experiences in *The Monks of Mount Athos*, *The Genesee Diary*, and *The Cloister Walk*. Methodology will include periods of observation, participation in services and daily activities, group and individual interviews, and periods of silence and contemplation. Arrangements for each visit, including on-site accommodations, have already been approved. Following my fieldwork and under the direction of Dr. Cutsinger, I will place my observations in the context of a theological system, compare the responses of the three monasteries with respect to those systems, and consider what changes, if any, those theologies will allow for in a “modern” monastery. The final stage of the project will be a comparative article on monastic seclusion in specific communities across the Christian tradition.

Project Timeline

January-April:	Independent study of monasticism; background research IRB approval process through USC Office of Research Compliance Develop framework and skills needed for observational fieldwork Develop questions and skills needed for interviews
May 10 - 27:	Maymester course: <i>Eastern Mysticism</i>
May 17 -21:	Eastern Orthodox Monastery of St. Anthony in association with Maymester course: Field work and interviews
May 31-June 3:	Roman Catholic Abbey of Gethsemani: Field work and interviews
July 11-16:	Ecumenical Monastery of Taizé: Field work and interviews
May-August:	Reflection, organization, pre-writing period
August-November:	Writing of article
December:	Submission of article to American Academy of Religion

Anticipated Results

I anticipate that the three monasteries will exhibit reflections of their seclusion practices primarily in their accessibility, order, and doctrine, but secondarily through expressions of faith, namely prayers, disciplines, and worship. Furthermore, I anticipate varying degrees of openness within each monastery. Varying degrees of openness to me and my research will be an observable and active decision on the part of monastic leadership that will contribute directly to the research question. While I anticipate similar facets of monastic life to be reflections of seclusion in all three monasteries, I expect to discover minute differences in practice commonly not associated with the seclusion question. My study of the three monasteries and their expressions of seclusion will culminate in a comparative article. In addition to the presentation of my findings at USC’s Discovery Day, I will submit my article for presentation at the spring 2011 Southeast Regional American Academy of Religion conference in the undergraduate division.

Personal Statement

My academic goals deeply intersect with my chosen vocation of ministry. I am currently exploring seminaries and entering the ordination process. A study of monasticism will expose me to the living tradition of spirituality so often neglected in the academic study of religion. This research will give me the rare opportunity to spend time in Orthodox, Catholic, and ecumenical monasteries and have informed conversations about the practices of the Christian faith. This exposure is both a unique opportunity for an undergraduate religion student and will provide me with tools and experiences that will enrich my future ministry as a professional clergyman. In addition to its academic merit, this research fulfills a deep personal interest in the monastery and the spiritual disciplines.

Magellan Scholar BUDGET FORM

Student's Name: _____

Double-click on table to enter data

Student salary	Hours <small>Enter the estimated number of hours student will work</small>	Rate <small>Enter the hourly wage</small>	Subtotal
Taking classes	0	0	\$0.00
Not taking classes	15	10	\$150.00
Fringe: Student salary * student fringe rate¹			
Taking classes	\$0.00	1.10%	\$0.00
Not taking classes	\$150.00	8.90%	\$13.35
Materials/Supplies	Enter sub-total from below:		\$0.00
Travel	Enter sub-total from below:		\$2,838.00
TOTAL:			\$3,001.35
Amount requested for MGS award:			\$3,000.00

Budget Justification

Student Salary: Indicate estimated number of student work hours per week during academic year and summer and hourly rate.

Over the summer: 5 hours per week for 3 weeks at 10.00 an hour

Materials/Supplies: Indicate items, quantity, and estimated price

Not Applicable – Student will pay for food, donations to monasteries, etc. out of pocket.

Travel: Indicate location, purpose of travel, estimate itemized costs (transportation, lodging, registration, etc).

Travel Expenses			
	Item	Expense	Notes
St. Anthony (Orthodox)	Flight	\$550.00	Arranged through USC Religion Department and approved by OUR office – travel expenses associated with Maymester course
Gethsemani (Catholic)	Gas	\$202.00	Distance: approximately 440 miles Estimate based on USC travel rate of \$0.46/mile
Taizé (ecumenical)	Flight	\$1,700.00	Paris -Charles Degaulle airport, recommended by Taizé for first time visitors
	Car Storage	\$56.00	Storing car at Atlanta airport \$7.00 a day, 8 days
	Bus	\$30.00	Route recommended by Taizé monastery
	Bullet Train	\$300.00	Route recommended by Taizé monastery
	Total	\$2,838.00	