



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 13, 2020

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

The social perception of monastic life between falsity and reality in contemporary world

Lecturer Ph. D. Nina Stănescu

Ovidius University of Constanta, Faculty of Theology, Constanta, Romania

nina.stanescu13@gmail.com

Abstract. Analysis of the misled mundane perceptions of monasteries and monastic life, and finding ways to change this concepts to the appropriate social reality in order to improve relations between the mundane and the monastic population, and also to increase the role of monasteries in moral and spiritual development of adolescents and youth. The key to this problem is communion, meaning together-living, together-working and together-thinking. The great revelation of Christianity was and is that the community comes first, either the big or the small communitiy. Great empires have induced the illusion that the great things, the secrets and the keys to our lives they are somewhere above or outside the small circle of our lives.

Keywords. social perception,the choice of monastic life, increasing role of monasteries moral and spiritual development, the existence of a discrepancy,social reality of monasteries secular society

1.Introduction

Today one speaks, at least as much as in the past, about the role of monasticism in the life of the church. The assertions are so diverse and contradictory that people, if not sufficiently cleared, end up at least bulversated or even negative in the treatment of monasticism as its constituent element. The discussions are being held around an older idea, intensely valued in our communist period, by scientific and dialectical materialistic thinking and has been reaffirmed in recent years, especially in the west, questioning or even denying the necessity of the existence of monasticism as part of the Church. The last forty years have marked a significant revision of the perspective on Christian ascetism and monasticism. In the past, most often, interpretations followed confessional lines. Today, postmodern criticism seeks to understand monasticism that produced by taking it out of the environment that created it-the Christian Church.[¹]

In a society in which the perception of reality is more credible "on television", in the newspapers of the time than the living of our own deeds, the monk struggles "in silence" to keep the "living flame" of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through monasticism, the Church keeps her body vigorous,^[2] lives, grows, and gets perfect in the spirit of the gospel.

"The rationalization of the spiritual has led to the decline of religion and the acceptance of a new morality - a permissive one."^[3] As a result of the new organization on technical and rational principles, the local traditions lose their significance. Society is becoming more insensitive, and sensitivity to peers, interpersonal care is taking up less space in our lives.

Modern societies seem to have fallen prey to diseases without antidote which are characterized by: the subordination of spiritual values to material ones, the fetishization of technical efficiency and immediate success; the exteriorization of life and the alienation of man in the technical universe, the emptying of the human interiority of authentic aspirations and feelings; massification and robotization of man, annulment of the relationship between man and transcendence, loss of meaning in life, dissolution of values and motivations.

"Planning and not revelation, rational order and not inspiration, systematic routine and not charismatic or traditional action - these are the imperatives that are imposed in wider areas of public life." [4] The annulment of transcendence and the subordination of life to immediate ends are attitudes that belong to the very essence of the modern world, to its cult of utilitarian values and secular power.

Benda's vision for this degraded world is bleak. A society that professes an integral realism and can no longer ensure the future of spiritual values is logically moving, says Benda, to an "organized massacre between nations and between classes," to "the most total and complete war the world has ever had" [5]. His irony is all the more cruel when he states: "After this zoological war human species will exterminate itself, and history will smile at the thought that Socrates and Jesus Christ died for this species" [6].

2. Analysis:

The false social perception regarding monasteries and Orthodox monastic life, which I observed especially among young people, has led me to undertake a sociological research on "Monastic life - between reality and contemporary social perception" (unpublished study).

The sociological research **aimed** at analyzing false social perceptions of monasteries and Orthodox monastic life and identifying ways to change them with concepts appropriate to social reality, in order to improve relations between secular and monastic populations and increase the role of monasteries in the moral and spiritual development of adolescents and young people.

In addition to the general objective of this project, this research also insisted on the causes and effects of erroneous social perception on contemporary Orthodox monasticism.

2.1. Project justification:

- The existence of a discrepancy between social reality of the monasteries and its perception by the secular society.
- The need to identify the causes which determine the distorted perceptions of lay people over monasteries and monastic life in general.
- The need to identify ways in which monasteries can contribute to moral and spiritual development of adolescents and youth.

2.2. The Research Goal:

The analysis of false social perceptions of monasteries and monastic life and identification of ways to change their concepts with appropriate social reality, in order to improve relations between secular and monastic population and increasing the role of monasteries in moral and spiritual development of adolescents and youth.

2.3. The Research Objectives

- Identifying the level of knowledge and awareness of the secular population on monastic life.
- Identifying main aspects of social reality in the monasteries.

- Comparative analysis of the social reality of the monastery and its perception by the contemporary secular society.
- Identifying and analyzing the motivation of young people's choice of a monastic life, both in terms of reality and the perception of lay people belonging to the same age group.

2.4. Concepts Operationalization:

- Social Perception is the mental process of knowing, actively involved in current knowledge, which reflects individuals, groups, social events depending on the subject's knowledge relations and interactions with them.
- Perceptions result in producing evaluations and assessments of perceived objects and phenomenon and their representations, ultimately leading to the production of behaviors and relationships to the environment.
- Motivation designates all dynamic factors that determine an individual's behavior or all internal motives of his conduct, whether innate or acquired, aware or unconscious, simple physiological necessities or abstract ideals.

2.5. Research Hypotheses:

- If young people do not have enough information about monasteries and monachism, then, their perception over monastic life is wrong.
- If young people do not know the real reasons why a young man would choose the monastic life, then they have a misperception of many aspects of monachism.
- If the ideals and moral values of youth are different from those of the monks, then the young people have difficulties in properly perceiving the lifestyle of the monks.

2.6. Research Methodology:

Survey by:

- questionnaire for adolescents and youth, in order to gather opinions regarding: how they perceive monastic life, the information they hold about monasteries and monastic life, relations between monasteries and the secular society, the role that monasteries have in the life of adolescents and young people and ways for its development, etc;
- individual interview with monks and nuns.

Research Tools:

- individual interview guide;
- questionnaires for lay persons;

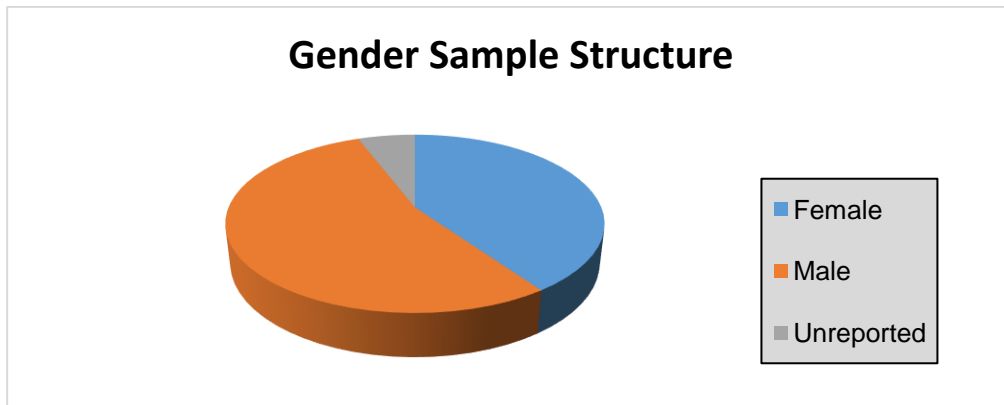
Sampling: probability measure (random). The sample includes adolescents and is not representative.

Targeted Population:

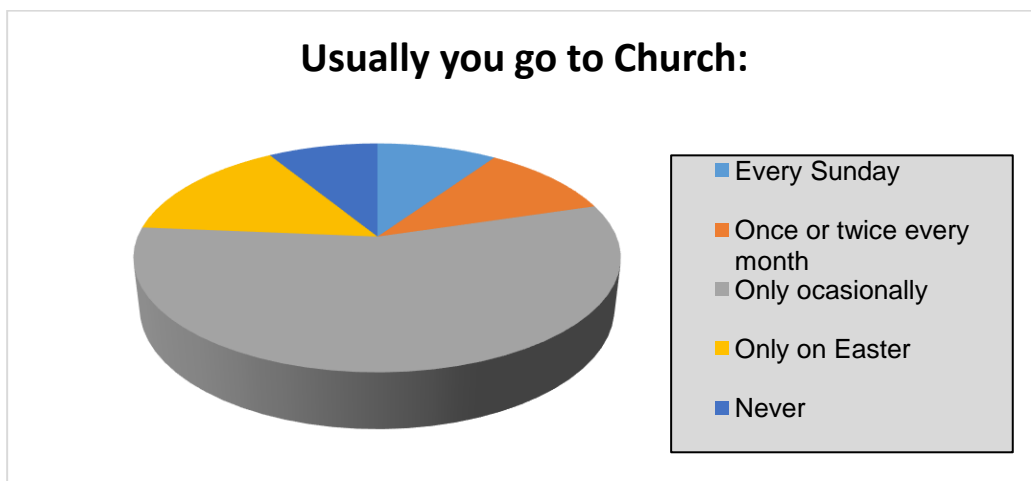
- Romanian adolescents;
- monks and nuns from Romanian monasteries.

2.7. Data and Research Results;^[7]

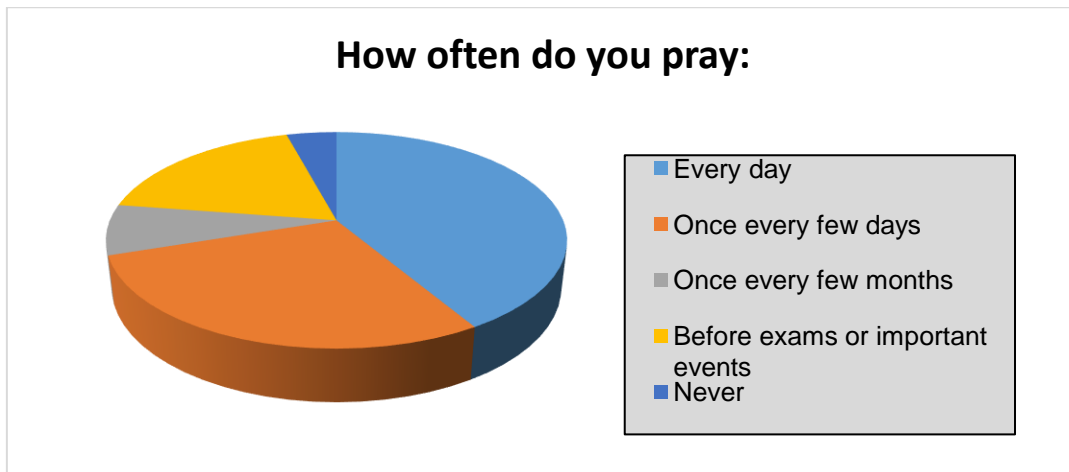
Sample structure by gender is as follows: 40% female, 54% male and 6% haven't reported their gender.



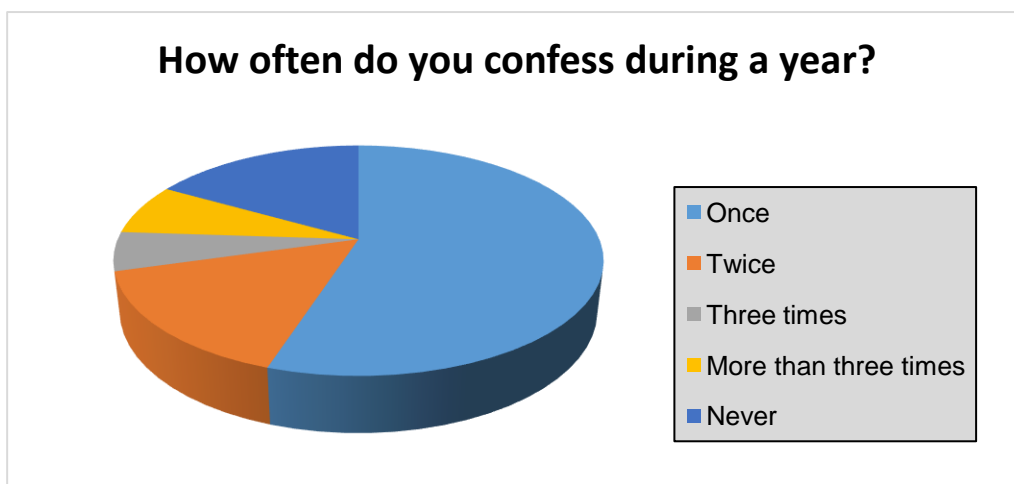
The sample degree of religiosity was determined by questions, using the following indicators: attendance at religious services, private prayers and confession. For question on attendance at religious services, the youth gave the following answers: 9% said they go every week, 11% go 1-2 times per month, the vast majority - 56% - only occasionally go to great feasts, 15 % go only on Easter, and 9% never go to religious services.



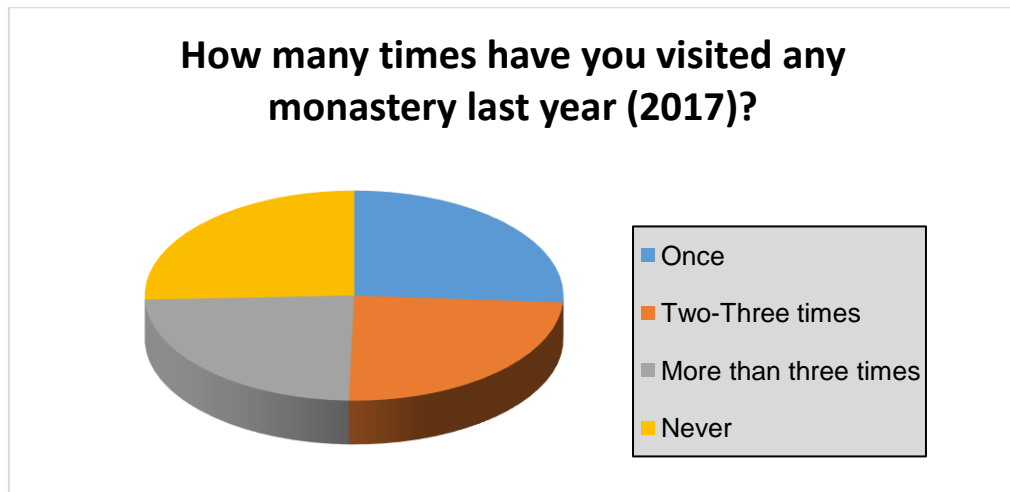
By Question examines the second indicator of religiosity, namely private prayer. Therefore, 41% of respondents said they pray daily, 29% pray only once every few days, 8% pray once every few months, 18% are praying only before exams and other important events and 4% do not pray ever.



The third indicator of religiosity, namely confession is analyzed by question : "How often do you confess during a year?". To this question 55% of respondents said they go to confession once a year, 16% twice a year, 5% three times a year, 7% more than three times a year, and 17% do not confess ever.

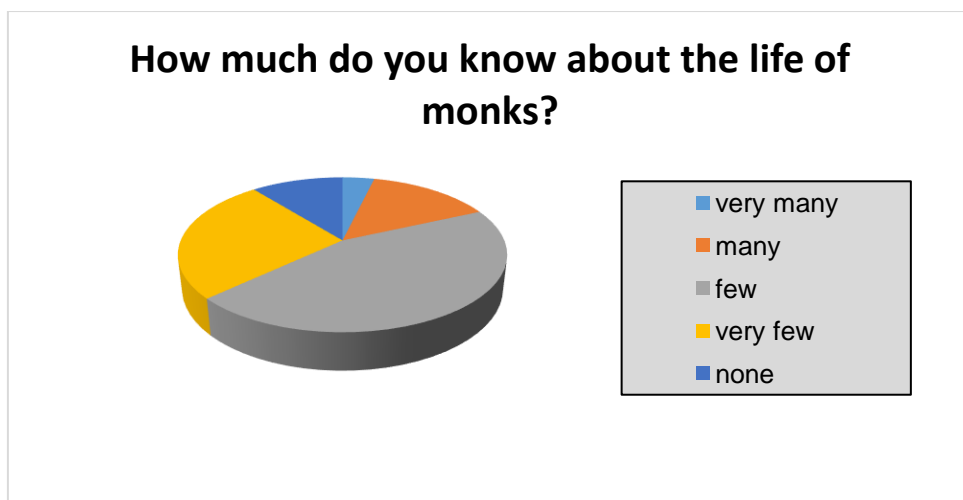


The second thing I wanted to find out about the selected sample was related to the existence or non-existence of a direct contact between young people and monasteries. Therefore, in order to determine whether there was a direct contact between the respondents and monasteries lately, question no. 1 was asked: "How many times have you visited any monastery last year (2017)?" . For this question 25.7% said once, 24% said 2-3 times, 23.6% responded that more than 3 times, and a rate of 25.3% responded that they haven't visited any monastery during the last year (2017). Therefore, it is noted an almost equal distribution of responses between the four variants, which means that the selected sample is quite appropriate for this research as it includes in almost equal proportions persons who had more contact with monasteries, less or no contact at all.

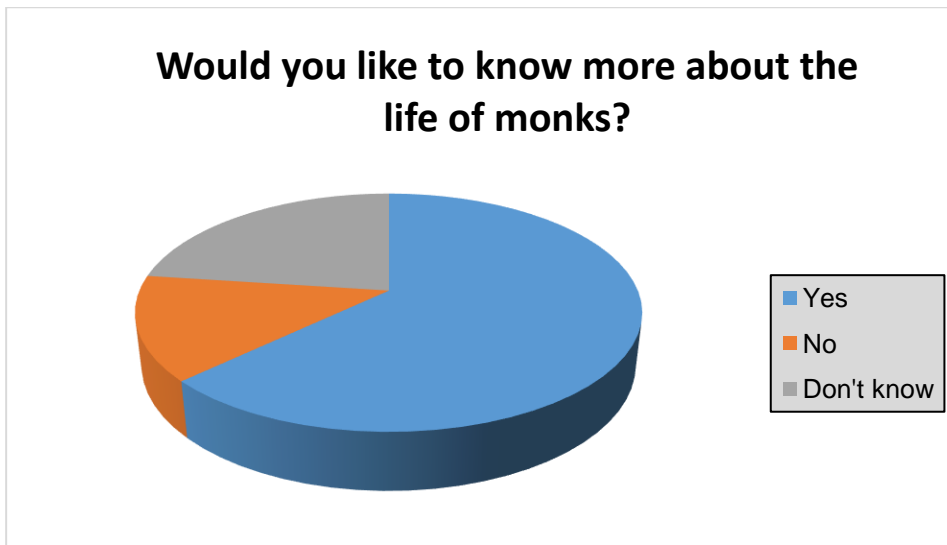


After this sample analysis we went to checking the hypotheses. Therefore, the first research hypothesis was: *"If young people do not have enough information about monasteries and monasticism, then their perception over monastic life is wrong."*

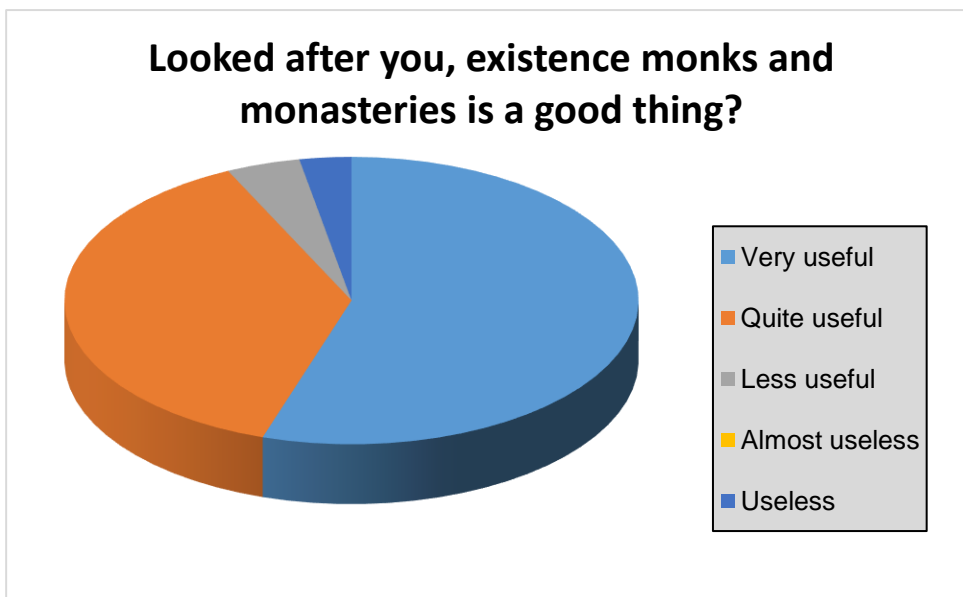
Before checking the actual information respondents have about monasteries and monastic life we resorted to a question of general nature intended to examine how aware are young people of the level of knowledge they own on this topic. Therefore, question: 'How much do you know about the life of monks?' the vast majority - 45% - said they know little. Other responses were: 4% know a lot about the life of monks, 14% know more, 26% know very little, and 11% have no knowledge about the life of monks.



Conversely their availability and willingness to learn more about the monastery is very high. Therefore, question: "Would you like to know more about the life of monks?", was answered "yes" by 63% , 14% answered "no" and 23% answered "I don't know".



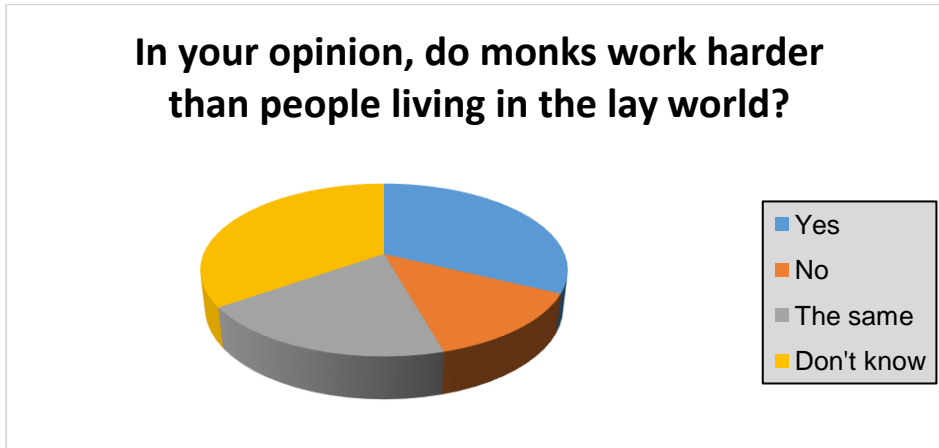
Despite the fact that they know very little about monks, most respondents believe that monks' existence is useful. Therefore, the question: "In your opinion, is the existence of monks and monasteries an useful thing?", 55% considered it "very useful", 38% said it is "quite useful", while 4% said "less useful" and 3% said "useless".



At the question: "In your opinion, do monks work harder than people living in the lay world?", 32% of respondents answered that "they believe monks work harder than people living in the lay world", on the contrary, 13% think that "people who live in the lay world work more than monks" and 20% believe that both categories work as much. However, for this question, a large number of respondents - 35% - felt that they had not enough information to make this comparison and chose the response "I don't know".

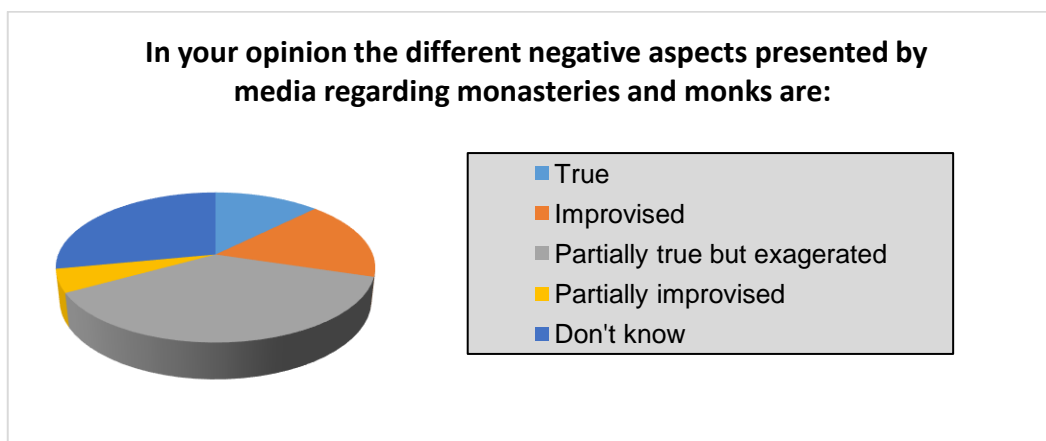
Making a comparison with the information obtained from interviews with monks and nuns from monasteries in Romania, we can say that most said they work 10-12 hours a day,

without having a precise work program established between certain hours, as in the case of the jobs people from the lay world have. The working schedule of a monk is very flexible, varying according to the daily needs of the monastery, in special circumstances being able to go to 24 from 24 hours, a monk must be ready at any time of day or night for any request that occurs.



To see whether or not young people have the capacity to distinguish whether information received via media are true or not, at question which asked the respondents opinion about various negative aspects presented by the media regarding monasteries and monks. 37% of the respondents felt that they are partially true, but exaggerated, 17% felt they are improvised, 13% that they are true, 5% that they are partially improvised and 28% chose the answer "I do not know".

The distribution of responses shows that young people generally have the ability to discern and retrieve from the table information that is provided only what they consider true or even partially true, and correlating the responses to this question with those of the previous question, we can say that the media is not among the main sources of information on monastic life and that it has a rather low influence on social perception of monasteries and monks, the main deformation factor remaining the lack of knowledge.

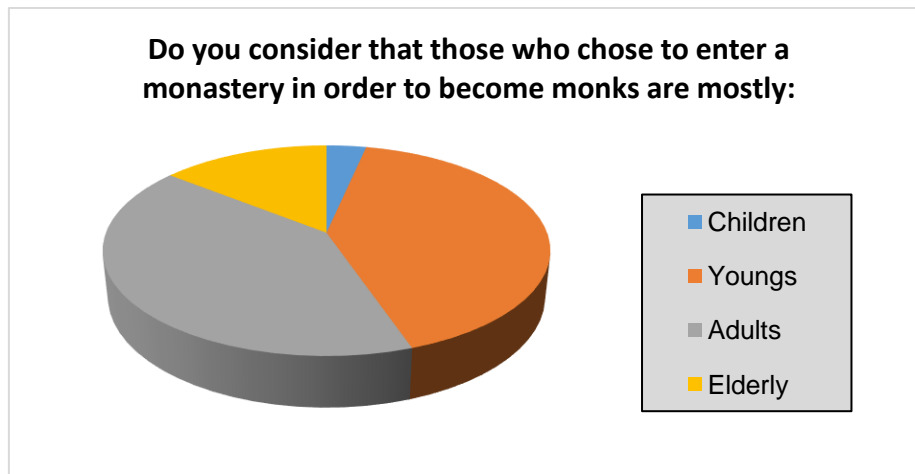


After the comparative analysis of data from questionnaires applied to young people and the interviews with monastic people we can conclude **that hypothesis no. 1 is true**, because "If young people do not have enough information about monasteries and monasticism, then their perception on monastic life is wrong", but at the same time we can add that there is

willingness on the part of young people to find out more about monastic life and to have more contact with monasteries and monks.

Hypothesis no. 2 is as follows: "If young people do not know the real reasons why a young man would choose the monastic life, they have a misconception on many of the aspects of monachism.

To the question by which the young people were interviewed people's opinion about age of entry into the monastery. 41% answered that those who enter the monastery are generally young, the same percentage being obtained for the "adults", 14% thought that the monastery is mostly for the elder, and 4% said that those who enter the monastery are children. From the interviews with monks and nuns and from my own experience I can say that between 2012 - 2017, the overwhelming majority of those who entered the monastery were mainly young people aged between 18 and 22 years. Between 2017 and the current year, the vast majority of those who entered the monastery were adults or elders. These generalizations are valid, of course, with the necessary exceptions.



At the question „**That is why choosing the monastic life by a young man?**”

In order to achieve an overall ranking of responses, we paid 2 points for answers like "mostly true", 1 point for "true in a few cases", and 0 points for "never true". The resulting scores for each of the 15 reasons are as follows, where the reasons were placed in descending order of their score:

1. The desire to serve God - 415 points
2. Searching for holiness - 356 points
3. The monastic calling - 321 points
4. The desire to pray for all people - 309 points
5. Vocation – 284 points
6. The inability to cope with life's difficulties - 231 points
7. A disappointment in love - 216 points
8. Poverty – 210 points
9. The inability of finding a life partner - 173 points
10. The inability of finding a job - 153 points

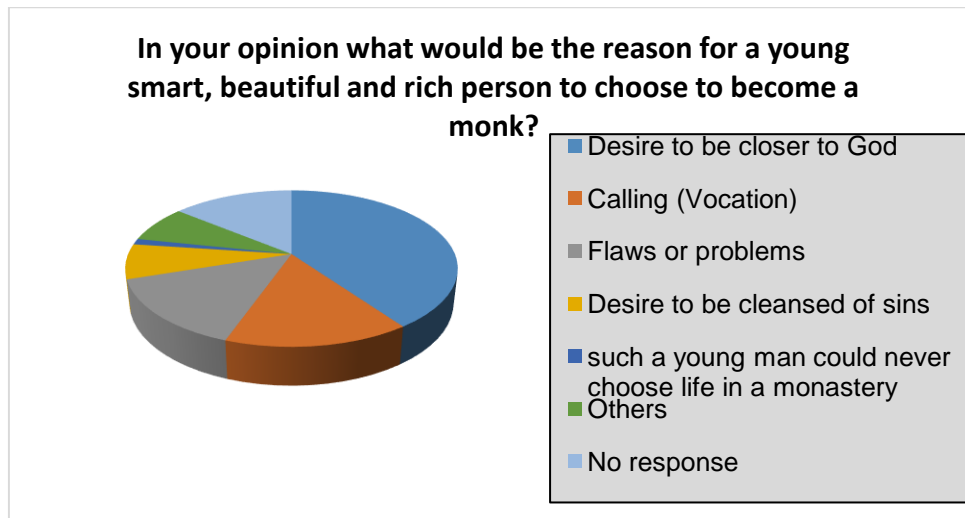
11. The inability to continue their studies - 149 points
12. Unpleasant appearance - 135 points
13. Unwillingness to work - 135 points
14. Running away from responsibilities - 101 points
15. Low intelligence - 99 points

It is interesting to note that the first places in the ranking are the closest reasons to the reality for a young man to choose monachism. However, other versions have quite high scores, which proves in many cases the existence of wrong social perceptions of why a young man should choose the monastery, fact that has an important contribution in forming a wrong social perception over all aspects of monastic life.

From the interviews with monks and nuns and biographies of well-known Orthodox parents we can conclude that the life they lived before entering the monastery was not one with gaps or flaws as some of the respondents stated as reason for entering the monastery and I could not find those in most cases. Monks said the main reason of entering the monastery was the "monastic calling" as commonly known. Hard to define with words, this monastic vocation is explained by the monks as "a blending between love and longing, a tireless thirst to serve God fully and their fellows", "a totally overwhelming need for God."

Psychologically, it can be only compared to the need to update the self that Masslow speaks about. It is also interesting the same author's statement that after every physiological, security, affection, esteem and respect need is satisfied, a new need may appear: the need of improving your self, "if the individual does what suits him individually" because "people should be what they can be"^[8] or as a monk said, the ones called may be called by God. And as the need to update the self can not occur until after the meeting of needs in the lower levels of the hierarchy, it means that the real reason for entering monastic life a man can not be a lack of material things necessary for the existence, or lack of love of others, or the uncertainty of tomorrow, because these are bottom necessities, but I am talking about more than a need, the absolute. The need, not as a simple desire, to become "the man Man", a complete man. And the man who chooses to become a monk is very aware that this can not be achieved except through union with God, so he is fully committed to Him and fully tends to him without being prevented by anything worldly. The need for self-realization merges with the need of God. From Him he receives power to give up all worldly satisfactions to devote to the sole purpose of perfection, and one of the ways, perhaps the most accessible, is monastic life, which offers all the conditions to become all that he can be^[9]. Of course about the reason of entering a monastery there are exceptions to what I said before, but they merely confirm the rule, being totally isolated cases and those generally do not stand too long in monastic life.

To the question by which the young people were interviewed to try and explain the reason why a young man with all the qualities, smart, beautiful and rich, would choose to become a monk.



This way I have tried to remove the main reasons that social prejudices consider as underlying a young person's entering in a monastery, to enable respondents to think about other possible reasons than those they have gained from the society. Being an open question the responses were very varied. For analysis I have classified them in the following categories: 41% thought that the reason is the desire to be closer to God, to serve Him better, 15% thought that the reason was the calling or vocation. Also a percentage of 15% of the young respondents felt that the only possible reason would be certain flaws or problems that the young man who chooses to become a monk might have, listing in this category the lack of some qualities that were not listed in the statement. These people have chosen to go on the prejudices line of the society, but are forced by the statement to exclude the most common, found other problems or defects upon which to justify the young person's decision to enter a monastery.

People who haven't managed to find other defects or problems which would lead the young person to go to the monastery, but have not yet abandoned the social prejudices regarding this issue, gave an answer that denied the very wording of the question, saying that such a young man - smart, beautiful and rich - could never choose life in a monastery - 1% of the responses. A percentage of 7% of the respondents felt that the reason for choosing life in a monastery, for a young man is his desire to be cleansed of sins. Other answers were 8% and 14% were non-answers.

To the question "What are your core values?"

Values are those ideas and beliefs which we keep and which we take as benchmarks throughout life. Write next to each value in the table below a mark from 1 to 10, on how important is the specific value for you. Write "0" for values which have no importance to you.

You can also add other values that represent you in vacant boxes." Without performing a quantitative analysis of the responses to this question, we can see that religious and moral values are not generally noted with grade 10, not being a part of the core values guiding their young lives.

After concluding the answers to all these questions, ***it can be said that hypothesis no. 3 can be verified***, namely ideals and moral values of youth are different from those of monks, which contributes to the fact that young people have difficulties in correctly perceiving the lifestyle of monks. This difference of ideals and moral values, together with the lack of information, are the two main causes for the existence of erroneous social perceptions on monks and monastic life.

Thus, the presence and the role of monasticism and monasteries in the postmodern age is fundamental for the mission of the Church. In Orthodox countries, in the context of the double secularization (the atheist-communist propaganda and the Western materialist non-religious civilization), monasteries are fortresses in the effort to re-Christianize the world and to transform secularized Christianity.:[¹⁰].

What to do?

The monk is in ontological communion with all his fellows at the same time, but the secret life of the monk is a mystery sealed with seven seals. By constantly repeating the prayer of the heart, he invokes Christ for all. The Lord Jesus Himself lives in him and shares with him the gifts that the Spirit pours into His Church. ***To this day, in the face of such a way of life, the world is upset***

The key to the efficient solution lies with us, the social actors of this society: family, school, church, state institutions, private institutions.

References

-
- [¹]Lecturer Maxim Marian Vlad, Ph.D., article „The Process of Integrating the Monastic Phenomenon into the Forms of Institutional Organization of the Church and the Implications of its Recognition as its Third Constituent Element. Ecclesiological-Canonical Consequences 2020, DIALOGO, International Journal (www.dialogo-conf.com/dialogo-journal) DIALOGO, DOI: 10.18638/dialogo 2019.6.1.15.ISSN:2393-1744,vol.6, issue 1,2019, pp.164-173.
- [²]Maxim Marian Vlad, Eucharistic communion and penitential discipline, according to the Church Fathers and Orthodox Canonic Law, 16th International Multidisciplinary Scientific GeoConference SGEM 2016, www.sgem.org, SGEM 2016 Conference Proceedings, Book 5 Vol. 3, 2016, pp. 825-834, ISBN 978-619-7105-67-4 / ISSN 1314-2704, June 28 - July 6, <http://sgem.org/sgemlib/spip.php?article7531>, DOI: 10.5593/SGEM2016/B53/S22.105.
- [³]Bryan Wilson, Religion from a sociological perspective, translated by Dara Mara Străinu, Trei Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p.104.
- [⁴]Idem, p.202
- [⁵]Julien Benda, The betrayal of the scholars, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, pp.169-183.
- [⁶]ibidem
- [⁷]The research carried out in 2018(respectively from the project with theme: MONASTIC LIFE – among reality and social contemporary perception –project realized in 2018,unpublished study), we presented only sequentially obvious questions and answers most eloquent on the subject of study chosen.
- [⁸]A.H. Maslow – „Motivație și personalitate”, Traducere de Andreea Rasuceanu, editura Trei, București, 2007, p. 93.
- [⁹]idem, p. 94.
- [¹⁰]Lecturer Maxim Marian Vlad, Ph.D., article „The Process of Integrating the Monastic Phenomenon into the Forms of Institutional Organization of the Church and the Implications of its Recognition as its Third Constituent Element. Ecclesiological-Canonical Consequences2020, DIALOGO, International Journal (www.dialogo-conf.com/dialogo-journal)DIALOGO,DOI: 10.18638/dialogo 2019.6.1.15.ISSN:2393-1744, vol.6, issue 1,2019, pp.164-173.