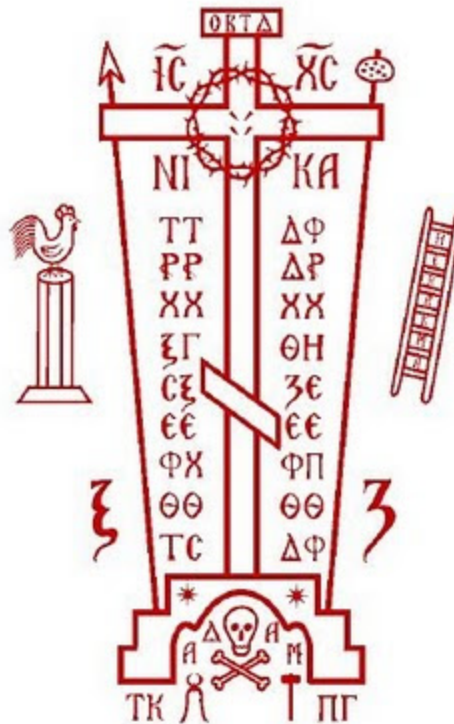


The Analavos of the Great Schema Explained

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The Great Schema in the Orthodox Church requires the traditional monastic vows, plus special spiritual feats. According to Archpriest G. S. Debolsky: "In the understanding of the Church, the Great Schema is nothing less than the supreme vow of the Cross and death; it is the image of complete isolation from the earth, the image of transformation and transfiguration of life, the image of death and the beginning of another, higher, existence."

As a monastic dignity, the Great Schema has been known since the 4th century. According to an ancient legend, this dignity was inaugurated by St. Pachomios the Great. However, as a form of monastic life, the Great Schema goes back to the origin of Christianity. Those who followed Christ's teachings on supreme spiritual perfection by voluntarily taking the vows of chastity, obedience and poverty were called ascetics to distinguish them from other Christians. They led a harsh and secluded hermit's life like St. John the Baptist, or like our Lord Jesus Christ Himself during his forty days in the desert.

According to the Rule of St. Pachomios, the act of acceptance into a monastery had three steps and consisted of (a) "temptation" (trial), (b) clothing, and (c) presentation to the starets for spiritual guidance. Each of the three steps undoubtedly had its own significance. They marked the beginning of the three stages in monasticism which have become deeply

embedded in the life of the Eastern Church: first, the novice (or rasoforos); the second, the monk (known as a monk of the Lesser Schema); and the third, the monk of the Great Schema.

The Church historians Sozomen, Bishop Palladios of Helenopolis and Hieromonk Nicephoros maintain that St. Pachomios was the first to invest monks with the full monastic dignity of the schema.

It should be noted that not all the fathers and ascetics of the Church divided monasticism into the greater and lesser angelic schema. For instance, St. Theodore of Studios did not agree with this division, considering that there should be only one form of monasticism, just as there was one Mystery of Baptism.

However, the custom of dividing monasticism into two became widespread in the practice of the Church. The Lesser Schema thus became a kind of preparatory step to the Great Schema. Cenobitism came to be known as a "betrothal", and seclusion within a monastery as actual "matrimony". In accordance with the Rule the difference between the Lesser and Greater Schema began to be reflected in the habit. Those of the latter had embroidered crosses on their habit, while the former did not(7).

Those who take the Great Schema vows must be like an angel in the flesh; they must attain that degree of spiritual perfection which is possible for man. Constant contemplation of God, life in Him, and silence is their vocation.

The analavos of the Great Schema monks are the signs of perfect monasticism, symbols not only of humble wisdom and gentleness, but also of the Cross, of suffering, of Christ's wounds, of constant dying with Christ.



The **ἀνάλαβος (analavos)** is the distinctive garment of a monk or a nun tonsured into the highest grade of Orthodox monasticism, the Great Schema, and is adorned with the instruments of the Passion of Christ. It takes its name from the Greek αναλαμβάνω (“to take up”), serving as a constant reminder to the one who wears it that he or she must “take up his cross daily” (Luke 9:23). The ornately-plaited Crosses that cover the analavos, the polystavrion (πολυσταύριον, from πολὺς, “many,” and σταυρός, “Cross”) — a name often, though less accurately, also applied to the analavos — reminds the monastic that he or she is “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20).

With regard to each image on the analavos, the **rooster** represents “the cock [that] crowed” (Matthew 26:74; Mark 14:68 Luke 22:60; John 18:27) after Saint Peter had “denied thrice” His Master and Lord (John 13:38).

The **pillar** represents the column to which Pilate bound Christ “when he scourged Him” (Mark 15:15) “by Whose stripes we were healed” (Isaiah 53:5; I Peter 2:24).

The **wreath** garlanding the Cross represents the “crown of thorns” (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2) that “the soldiers platted” (John 19:2) and “put upon the head” (Matthew 27:29) of “God our King of old” (Psalm 73:13), Who freed man from having to contend against “thorns and thistles in the sweat of his brow” (Genesis 3:18-19).

The **upright post** and the **traverse beam** represent the stipes and the patibulum that formed “the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14), upon which “all day long He stretched forth His hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Isaiah 65:2; Romans 10:21).

The **four spikes** at the center of the Cross and the **hammer** beneath its base represent the “nails” (John 20:25) and hammer with which “they pierced” (Psalm 21:16; John 19:37) “His hands and His feet” (Luke 24:40). when they “lifted up from the earth” (John 12:32) Him Who “blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us by nailing it to His Cross” (Colossians 2:14).

The **base** upon which the Cross stands represents “the place, which is called 'Calvary' (Luke 23:33), or 'Golgotha', that is to say, the Place of the Skull” (Matthew 27:33), “where they crucified Him” (John 19:18) Who “wrought salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psalm 73:13).

The **skull and crossbones** represent “the first man Adam” (I Corinthians 15:45), who by tradition “returned unto the ground” (Genesis 3:19) at this very spot, the reason that this place of execution, “full of dead men’s bones” (Matthew 23:27) became the place where “the last Adam was made a quickening spirit” (I Corinthians 15:45).

The **plaque** on top of the Cross represents the titulus, the “title” (John 19:19-20), with “the superscription of His accusation” (Mark 15:26), which “Pilate wrote” (John 19:19) “and set up over His head” (Matthew 27:37); however, instead of “Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews” (John 19:19), which “was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew” (Luke 23:38), the three languages being an allusion to the Three Hypostases “of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), this titulus reads, “The King of Glory” (Psalm 23:7-10), “for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Corinthians 2:8).

The **reed** represents the “hyssop” (John 19:29) upon which was put “a sponge full of vinegar” (Mark 15:36), which was then “put to His mouth” (John 19:29) when in His “thirst they gave Him vinegar to drink” (Psalm 68:21), Him of Whom it was said that “all wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22).

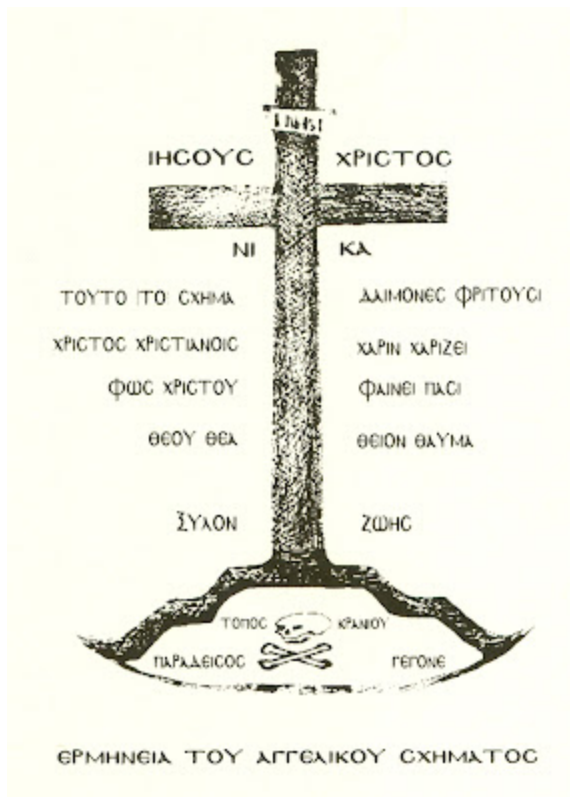
The **lance** represents the “spear [that] pierced His side”; “and forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34) from Him Who “took one of Adam's ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof” (Genesis 2:21) and Who “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Revelation 1:5).

The **plaque** at the bottom of the Cross represents the suppedaneum of Christ, “His footstool” (Psalm 98:5), “the place where His feet have stood” (Psalm 131:7). It is slanted because, according to one tradition, at the moment when “Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the spirit” (Mark 15:37), He allowed a violent death spasm to convulse His legs, dislodging His footrest in such a manner that one end pointed upwards, indicating that the soul of the penitent thief, Saint Dismas, “the one on His right hand” (Mark 15:27) would be “carried up into Heaven” (Luke 24:51), while the other end, pointed downwards, indicated that the soul of

the impenitent thief, Gestas, “the other on His left” (Mark 15:27), would “be thrust down to Hell” (Luke 10:15), showing that all of us, “the evil and the good, the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:45), “are weighed in the balance” (Ecclesiasticus 21:25) of the Cross of Christ.

The **ladder** and the **pincers** beneath the base of the Cross represent the means of deposition by which Saint Joseph of Arimathea, “a rich man” (Matthew 27:57) who “begged for the body of Jesus” (Matthew 27:58; Luke 23:52), “took it down” (Luke 23:53), so that as in body He descended from the Cross, so in soul “He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4:9), “by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison” (I Peter 3:19).

Through these instruments, “the Cross of Christ” (I Corinthians 1:17; Galatians 6:12; Philippians 3:18) became the “Tree of Life” (Genesis 2:9; 3:22, 24; Proverbs 3:18, 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Revelation 2:7; 22:2,14), by which the Lord Jesus reified His words that, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).



The Greek letters that appear on the analavos are abbreviations of phrases that extol the Cross as “the power of God” (I Corinthians 1:18). From top to bottom:

- **ΩΒΤΑ** - Ὁ Βασιλεύς της Δόξης - “The King of Glory”
- **ΙC ΧC ΝΙΚΑ** - Ἰησοῦς Χριστός νικά - “Jesus Christ conquers”
- **ΤΤΔΦ** - Τετιμημένον τρόπαιον δαιμόνων φόβη - “Honored trophy, the dread of demons”

- **ΡΡΔΡ** - Ρητορικοτέρα ρητόρων δακρύων ροή - "A flow of tears more eloquent than orators"
(or, more likely: Ρητορικοτέρα ρημάτων δακρύων ροή)
- **ΧΧΧΧ** - Χριστός Χριστιανοίς Χαρίζει Χάριν - "Christ bestoweth Grace upon Christians"
- **ΞΓΘΗ** - Ξύλου γεύσις θάνατον ηγαγεν - "The tasting of the tree brought about death"
- **ϸΞΖΕ** - Σταυρού Ξύλω ζωήν εύρομεν - "Through the Tree of the Cross have we found life"
- **ΕΕΕΕ** - Ελένης εύρημα εύρηκεν Εδέμ - "The discovery of Helen hath uncovered Eden"
- **ΦΧΦΠ** - Φως Χριστού φαίνοι πάσι - "The light of Christ shines upon all"
- **ΘΘΘΘ** - Θεού Θέα Θεόν Θαύμα - "The vision of God, a Divine wonder"
- **ΤϸΔΦ** - Τύπον Σταυρού δαίμονες φρίπτουσιν - "Demons dread the sign of the Cross"
- **ΑΔΑΜ** - Αδάμ - "Adam"
- **ΤΚΠΓ** - Τόπος Κρανίου Παράδεισος γέγονε - "The Place of the Skull hath become Paradise"
- **ΞΖ** - Ξύλον Ζωής - "Tree of life"

There are other items and abbreviations that may appear on the analavos, but these are sufficient to demonstrate that this holy garment silently proclaims "the preaching of the Cross" (I Corinthians 1:18) through its mystical symbolism, declaring for its wearer, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14).

For more on the Great Schema, see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

For the complete service of the elevation of a monk to the Great Schema, see [here](#).