

# Orthodox Christian Campus Ministries (OCCM)

Official Campus Ministry Organization of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern U.S.



## OCCM Curriculum – Year 2018-2019

### Fall 2018

#### First Month (August-September): Orthodoxy

- Session 1: OCCM Chapter Orientation
- Session 2: What is Orthodoxy? The Orthodox Faith.
  - Uniqueness and truth of Orthodoxy
  - Why Orthodoxy?
  - Ortho-praxy (works, behavior...). Orthodox life = home + school + work + social life.
- Session 3: The Orthodox Life, Sacramental Life
  - What are the sacraments? Meaning for me?
  - Importance and necessity of the sacraments = Participation is a must? Why?
  - Must have an active sacramental life = exams or not. Communion.
- Session 4: Orthodox Spirituality

#### Second Month (September-October): Martyria = Witnessing

- Session 1: Definition and meaning of witnessing. Martyrs as witnesses.
- Session 2: How to witness in this day and age? Are we influential or “being influenced”? One or the other!
- Session 3: The world needs us!
- Session 4: Open discussion regarding Orthodoxy and Witnessing (in the presence of a priest)

#### Third Month (October-November): Faith

- Session 1: True meaning of faith (more than just a belief), biblical examples of faith
- Session 2: Life of Faith – practical approach (home, school, relations)
- Session 3: Faith and Science: Orthodox Perspectives
  - Faith vs. Knowledge
  - More to life than molecules and biology
- Session 4: Faith in the context of a relationship with God
  - God as a Being / a Person who seeks us
  - Talking to Moses as a friend, face to face, talking to Abraham
  - St. Ignatius of Antioch and others who truly loved Christ as a person, died for a person

For questions and guidance, please contact Fr. Daniel Ebrahim at [Fr.Daniel.ebrahim@gmail.com](mailto:Fr.Daniel.ebrahim@gmail.com).

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## Year 1: First Month August- September, Pages 1-60

### **Session 1: Introduction to OCCM**

### **Session 2: pages 1-9**

#### **Introduction to the Orthodox Church**

The visitor to an Orthodox church is usually impressed by the unique features and the external differences between this place of worship and those of the various traditions of Western Christianity. The rich color, distinctive iconography and beauty of the interior of an Orthodox church are in sharp contrast to what one often finds in many Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. When one enters the interior of the Orthodox Church it is like stepping into a whole new world of color and light. The art and design of the church not only create a distinctive atmosphere of worship, but also reflect and embody many of the fundamental beliefs of Orthodoxy.

#### **Beauty and Symbols**

The Orthodox Church believes that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The Creator is present through His handiwork. This means that the material world, being valuable and good (Genesis 1:31), is an important means through which God shows His love for us.

The Orthodox Church affirms these convictions through her extensive use of material creation not only for the embellishment of her places of worship, but also in the Holy Eucharist (Communion), the sacraments and other prayer services. For example, when the bread and wine - "the first fruits of creation" (Romans 11:16) - are offered in the Holy Eucharist, they are also a symbolic offering of all creation to God its Creator. The Holy Eucharist, known as the Divine Liturgy, is the Church's great action and prayer of thanksgiving.

Using the gifts of creation, the interior of an Orthodox church is a place of beauty. Designed to create an atmosphere which is special, the building expresses a sense of joy and an appreciation of God's blessings. Orthodoxy recognizes that beauty is an important dimension of human life. Through iconography and church appointments, the beauty of creation becomes a very important means of praising the Triune God. The divine gifts of the material world are shaped and fashioned by human hands into an expression of beauty which glorifies the Creator. As the pious woman in the Gospel story

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poured her precious oil on the feet of Our Lord (Luke 8:38), Orthodoxy seeks always to offer back to God our gifts of beauty and praise.

## **Sacred Space**

The church interior is both the background and the setting for Orthodox worship. The art and architecture are designed to contribute to the total experience of worship, which involves one's mind, feelings, and senses. The Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments take place in God's midst, and they bear witness to His presence and actions. In the Orthodox tradition there is a very strong feeling that the church is the 'House of God' and the 'place where His glory dwells.' God is present everywhere. And, we can turn to Him in prayer in all places and circumstances. Yet, the interior of the church is designed to enable us to lift our hearts up in song and prayer. For this reason, all Orthodox churches are blessed, consecrated and set aside as sacred space designed for worship. The whole church bears witness to God's dwelling among His people.

Ideally, an Orthodox Church building is relatively small in size to emphasize and enhance the sense of community in worship. The church is generally constructed in the form of a cross and divided into three areas: the narthex, the nave, and the sanctuary. The narthex is the entrance area where the faithful make an offering, receive a candle, and place it before an icon. Here, the faithful offer a personal prayer before entering the nave and joining the congregation.

The nave is the large center area of the church where the faithful gather for worship as members of the community of faith. Although most Orthodox churches in this country have pews, some follow the custom of having an open nave with few seats. On the right-hand side of the nave is often the bishop's chair from which he presides as a living icon of Christ among his people. Even in the bishop's absence, the chair reminds all that the parish is not an isolated entity but is part of a metropolis or diocese which the bishop heads. On the left-hand side of the nave is the pulpit where the Gospel is proclaimed and the sermon is preached. Often the baptismal font is also placed in this area. The choir and the cantors frequently occupy spaces at the far sides of the nave.

The sanctuary is the most sacred part of the church, and the area reserved for clergy and their assistants. The sanctuary contains the Holy Altar and is separated from the nave by the Iconostasion.

## **The Altar**

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The Altar or Holy Table is the heart and focal point of the Orthodox church. As God's people, we gather before the Altar. There, the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine are offered to God the Father as Christ commanded us to do at the Last Supper (Luke 23:20). The Altar, which is usually square in shape, stands away from the wall and is covered with cloths. A tabernacle, with reserved Holy Communion for the sick or dying, is set upon the Altar, together with candles. When the Divine Liturgy is not being celebrated, the Book of Gospels is always placed in the center of the Altar. Behind the Altar is a large cross with the painted figure of the crucified Christ. Often the chair of the bishop is also located behind the Altar.

## Iconostasis

The iconostasis is the panel of icons which separates the sanctuary from the nave. Its origin is in the ancient custom of placing icons on a low wall before the sanctuary. In the course of time, the icons became fixed on a standing wall. In contemporary practice, the iconostasis may be very elaborate and conceal most of the sanctuary. Or, it may be very simple and open in accordance with more ancient custom.

## Icons

An icon is a holy image which is the distinctive art form of the Orthodox Church. An icon may be a painting of wood, on canvas, a mosaic or a fresco. Occupying a very prominent place in Orthodox worship and theology, icons depict Christ Our Lord, Mary the Theotokos, the saints and angels. They may also portray events from the Scriptures or the history of the Church, such as the Birth of Christ, the Resurrection, or Pentecost.

The icon is not simply decorative, inspirational, or educational. Most importantly, it signifies the presence of the person depicted. The icon is like a window linking heaven and earth. When we worship we do so as part of the Church which includes the living and the departed. We never lose contact with those who are with the Lord in glory. This belief is expressed every time one venerates an icon or places a candle before it. Orthodox churches have icons not only on the iconostasis but also on the walls, ceilings, and in arches. Above the sanctuary in the apse, there is very frequently a large icon of Mary, the Theotokos and the Christ Child. The Orthodox Church believes that Mary is the human person closest to God. This very prominent icon recalls her important role in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The icon is also an image of the Church. It reminds us of our responsibility to give birth to Christ's presence in our lives.

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The icon of Christ the Almighty, the Pantocrator, is on the ceiling or in the dome. This icon portrays the Triumphant Christ who reigns as Lord of heaven and earth. Looking downward, it appears as though the whole church and all of creation comes from Him. Looking upward, there is the sense that all things direct us to Christ the Lord. He is the "Alpha and the Omega" (Rev. 22:13), the beginning and the end of all. This is the message of Orthodoxy.

## **Holy Communion**

When you visit, please keep in mind that the Orthodox Church practices closed communion. This is not for triumphalistic reasons, but for very important theological reasons. In doing so we follow the practice of the ancient Church. "Open communion" is a relatively recent innovation and was not the practice of the Church beginning in the New Testament period.

\*\*\* <https://www.goarch.org/introduction-articles>

**Video:** <https://www.goarch.org/-/what-is-orthodox-christianit-1>

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## **True Orthodoxy**

***by Archbishop Averky of Blessed Memory***

Few people today know that the Orthodox Church is nothing less than that Church which has preserved untainted the genuine teachings of Jesus Christ, the very teachings delivered to every subsequent generation of believers. These teachings came down the centuries. from the Holy Apostles, explicated and carefully interpreted by their legitimate successors (their disciples and the holy Fathers), traditioned and conserved unaltered by our Eastern Church which is alone able to prove her right to be called "the Orthodox Church."

The divine Founder of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, said clearly, "I will build my Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her" (St. Matt xvi, 18). To the Church, He sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descended upon the Apostles, the Spirit of Truth (St. John xv, 16f) Who "manifests all things" to Her and guides Her (St. John xvi, 13), protecting Her from error. Indeed, it was to declare this Truth to men that the Lord came into the cosmos, according to His own words (St. John xviii, 31). And Saint Paul confirms this fact in his letter to his pupil, the bishop Timothy, saying that, "the Church of the living God is the ground and pillar of the Truth" (I Tim iii, 15).

Because She is "the ground and pillar of the Truth," "the gates of Hell cannot prevail against Her." It follows, then, that the true Christian Church—palpably unique since Christ established but one Church—has always existed on earth and will exist to the end of time. She has received the promise of Christ, "I will be with you even unto the end of the age." Can there be the slightest doubt that the Lord refers here to the Church? Any honest and sane judgment, any act of good conscience, anyone familiar with the history of the Christian Church, the pure and unaltered moral and theological teachings of the Christian religion, must confess that there was but one true Church founded by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and that She has preserved His Truth holy and unchanged. History reveals, moreover, a traceable link of grace from the holy Apostles to their successors and to the holy Fathers. In contrast to what others have done, the Orthodox Church has never introduced novelties into Her teachings in order to "keep up with the times", to be "progressive", "not to be left at the side of the road," or to accommodate current exigencies and fashions which are always suffused with evil. The Church never conforms to the world. Indeed not, for the Lord has said to his disciples at the Last Supper, "You are not of this world." We must hold to these words if we are to remain faithful to true Christianity—the true Church of Christ has always been, is and will always be a stranger to this world. Separated from it, she is able to transmit the

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divine teachings of the Lord unchanged, because that separation has kept Her unchanged, that is, like the immutable God Himself. That which the learned call "conservatism" is a principal and, perhaps, most characteristic index of the true Church.

Since the *TRUTH* is given to us once and for all, our task is *to assimilate* rather than to discover it. We are commanded to confirm ourselves and others in the Truth and thereby bring everyone to the true Faith, Orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, there have appeared in the very bosom of the Church, even among the hierarchy, opinions expressed by well-known individuals which are detrimental to Her. The desire to "march with the times" makes them fear that they will not be recognized as "cultured", "liberal" and "progressive." These modern apostates to Orthodoxy are "ashamed" to confess that our Orthodox church is precisely *the* Church which was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church to which appertains the great promise that "the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her," and to which He confided the plenum of divine Truth. By their deceit and false humility, by their blasphemy against the Lord, these false shepherds and those with them have been estranged from the true Church. They have given tacit expression to the idea that "the gates of Hell" have "prevailed" against the Church. In other words, these apostates say that our holy Orthodox Church is equally "at fault" for the "division of the churches" and ought now to "repent" her sins and enter into union with other "Christian churches" by means of certain concessions to them, the result being a new, indivisible church of Christ.

This is the ideology of the religious movement which has become so fashionable in our times: "The ecumenical movement" among whose number one may count Orthodox, even our clergy. For a long time, we have heard that they belong to this movement in order "to witness to the peoples of other confessions the truth of holy Orthodoxy," but it is difficult for us to believe that this statement is anything more than "throwing powder in our eyes." Their frequent theological declarations in the international press can lead us to no other conclusion than that they are traitors to the holy Truth.

As a matter of historical fact, the "ecumenical movement"—of which the WCC is the supreme organ—is an organization. of purely Protestant origin. Nearly all the Orthodox Churches have joined, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia being the most notable exception. Even those churches behind the "iron curtain" have joined. For some time the Russian Patriarchate resisted, flattering herself with the

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purity of her Orthodoxy and quite naturally viewing this movement as hostile to Orthodoxy. She has since become a member.

The Russian Synod almost stands alone in her opposition to the "ecumenical movement." How can we explain her isolation from the rest of "global Orthodoxy"? We must understand the situation in terms of the words that "this Must take place" (St. Luke xxi, 9), that is, the "great apostasy" clearly predicted by the Lord (Sol ii, 3-12). "it is permitted by God," as [St.] Ignatius Brianchaninoff said almost a century ago. (Another spiritual father, Theophan the Recluse, announced with grief that the horrendous apostasy would begin within Russia.) [St.] Ignatius wrote: "We are helpless to arrest this apostasy. Impotent hands will have no power against it and nothing more will be required than the attempt to withhold it. The spirit of the age will reveal the apostasy. Study it, if you wish to avoid it, if you wish to escape this age and the temptation of its spirits. One can suppose, too, that the *institution* of the Church which has been tottering for so long will fall *terribly and suddenly*. Indeed, no one is able to stop or prevent it. The present means to sustain the institutional Church are borrowed from the elements of the world, things inimical to the Church, and the consequence will be only to accelerate its fall. Nevertheless, the Lord protects the elect and their limited number will be filled."

The Enemy of humanity makes every effort and uses all means to confound it. Aid comes to him through the total co-operation of all the secret and invisible heterodox, especially those priests and bishops who betray their high calling and oath, the true faith and the true Church.

Repudiation of and preservation from the apostasy which has made such enormous progress demands that we stand apart from the spirit of the age (which bears the seeds of its own destruction). If we expect to withstand the world, it is first necessary to understand it and keep sensitively in mind that in this present age all that which carries the most holy and dear name of Orthodoxy is not in fact Orthodox. Rather, it is often "A fraudulent and usurped Orthodoxy" which we must fear and eschew as if it were fire. Unlike this spurious faith, true Orthodoxy was given and must be received without novelty and nothing must be accepted as a teaching or practice of the Church which is contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the dogma of the Universal Church. True Orthodoxy thinks only to serve god and to save souls and is not preoccupied with the secular and ephemeral welfare of men. True Orthodoxy is *spiritual* and not physical or psychological or earthly. In order to protect ourselves from "the spirit of the age" and preserve our fidelity to the true Orthodoxy, we ought firstly and with all our strength live blamelessly: A total and rigorous commitment to Christ, without deviation from the commandments of

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God or the laws of His holy Church. At the same time, we must have no common prayer or spiritual liaison with the modern apostasy or with anything which "soils" our holy Faith, even those dissidents who call themselves "Orthodox." They will go their way and we will go ours. We must be honorable and tenacious, following the right way, never deviating in order to please men or from fear that we might lose some personal advantage.

The sure path to perdition is *indifference* and the *lack of principles* which is euphemistically called "the larger view." In opposition to this "larger view" we put the "rigor of ideas" which, in modernity, it is fashionable to label "narrow" and "fanatical." To be sure, if one adopts the "modern mentality," one must consider the holy martyrs—whose blood is "the cement of the Church"—and the Church Fathers—who struggled all their lives against heretics—as nothing less than "narrow" and "fanatical." In truth, there is little difference between "the broad way" against which the Lord warned and the modern "larger view." He condemned the "broad way" as the way to "gehenna."

Of course, the idea of "gehenna" holds no fear for those "liberals" and avant-garde theologians. They may smugly "theologize" about it, but in rashly and wantonly discussing "the new ways of Orthodox theology" and acquiring a number of disciples, they give evidence that they no longer believe in the existence of Hell. This new breed of "Orthodox" are really no more than modern "scholastics."

In other words, the way of these "progressivists" is not our way. Their way is deceptive, and it is unfortunate that it is not evident to everyone. The "broader" or "larger view" alienates us from the Lord and His true Church. It is the road away from Orthodoxy. This view is sinister, maliciously invented by the Devil in order to deny us salvation. For us, however, we accept no innovations, but choose the ancient, proven way, the way in which true Christians have chosen to serve God for 2,000 years.

We choose the way of fidelity to the true Faith and not the "modern way." We choose faithfulness to the true Church with all Her canons and dogmas which have been received and confirmed by the local and universal Councils. We choose the holy customs and traditions, the spiritual riches of that faith transmitted complete and entire to us from the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers of the Church, and the Christian heritage of our venerable ancestors. This alone is the faith of the true Orthodox, distinct from the counterfeit "orthodoxy" invented by the Adversary. We receive only the Apostolic Faith, the Faith of the Fathers, the Orthodox Faith.

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From *Orthodox Christian Witness*, wherein it appeared translated from the French in *La Foi Transmise* (Nov. 1968), pp. 19-22.

## **What Does Orthodox Mean? The Doctrine, Worship and Values of the Church**

by *Frederica Mathewes-Green*

The word “orthodox” means “right belief” or “right praise.”

The “Orthodox Church” is also known as the “Eastern Orthodox Church.”

### **Orthodox Doctrine**

In the years after Jesus’ Resurrection, apostles and missionaries traveled throughout the known world spreading the Gospel. Soon five major locations were established as centers for the faith: Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople. In the year 1054 the Roman church broke from this united Church, and five hundred years later Protestant churches began breaking away from Rome. But the original Church has remained united in the Apostolic Faith since the first century. This is Orthodoxy. One of the tasks of the early Church was defining, and defending, orthodox theology against the battering waves of heresies. These heresies often appeared in disputes over the nature of the Trinity, or how Jesus could be both God and Man. Church Councils were called to search the Scriptures and put into words the common faith, forming a bedrock of certainty that could stand for all ages. From this time, the Church has been called “Orthodox,” which means “right belief” or “right praise.” The Nicene Creed (see reverse) originated at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, and is the central Orthodox statement of faith, a preeminent example of the work of the Councils. Built on the foundation of Christ and His Apostles, nothing has been added to our faith, and nothing can be added. It is complete.

### **Orthodox Worship**

Orthodox churches still use forms of worship that were practiced in the first centuries. Our worship is based to a great extent on passages from Scripture. We sing most of the service, joining our voices in simple harmony to ancient melodies.

Our worship is focused on God, not on our own enjoyment, fulfillment, or fellowship. We come into the presence of God with awe, aware of our fallenness and His great mercy. We seek forgiveness and rejoice in the great gift of salvation so freely given. Orthodox worship is filled with repentance, gratitude, and unending praise.

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We try, as best we can, to make our worship beautiful. The example of Scripture shows us that God's design for tabernacle worship (Exodus 25, 26) included gold, silver, precious stones, blue and purple cloth, embroidery, incense, bells, and anointing oil. Likewise, in Saint John's vision of heavenly worship (Revelation 4) there are precious stones, gold, thrones, crowns, white robes, crystal, and incense. From the beginning to the end of Scripture, worship is offered with as much beauty as possible. While a new mission's finances may call for simple appointments, our hearts come to worship seeking to pour out at the feet of Christ all the precious ointment we possess.

A common misconception is that awe-filled, beautiful worship must be rigid, formal, and cold. Orthodox worship shatters that stereotype. The liturgy is not a performance, but an opportunity to come together as a family of faith before our beloved Father. True Orthodox worship is comfortable, warm, and joyful. It could be nothing less in His heavenly presence.

## Orthodox Values

Values that are usually termed "Judeo-Christian" have never left Orthodoxy. We believe that sexual expression is a treasured gift, one to be exercised only within marriage. Persons with homosexual or other extramarital sexual impulses are welcomed as fellow servants of God, receiving loving support as they make an offering to God of their chastity. Marriage is a commitment for life. Divorce is a very grave action, and remarriage after divorce a concession to human weakness, undertaken with repentance. Orthodoxy has stood against abortion since the earliest days of the church. The Didache (circa A.D. 110) states, "Do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant." In the midst of a culture which freely practiced abortion, infanticide, and the exposure of infants, early Christians were a consistent voice against violence, as the Orthodox Church continues to be today.

Caring for the poor and disadvantaged has always been a concern for the Orthodox. The strong sermons of Saint John Chrysostom, written in the fourth century, bear witness to the importance of this Christian responsibility. The Church continues to see its mission in light of the whole person, body and soul.

Orthodox believers are right, left, and center on many issues. But where Scripture and the witness of the early Church guide us, there is no controversy. We uphold and obey God's will.

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### **Coptic Faith:**

<http://www.copticcentre.com/the-coptic-orthodox-church/coptic-faith/>

<https://lacopts.org/orthodoxy/coptic-orthodox-church/introduction-coptic-orthodox-church/>

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## **Session 3: 10-37**

### **Sacraments**

#### **The Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church**

[Print The Sacramental Life of the Orthodox Church](#)

*Rev. Alciviadis C. Calivas, Th.D.*

The life and character of an Orthodox Christian is in large measure shaped, nourished, and enriched by the liturgy or worship of the Church. Replete with biblical readings, imagery, and expressions, the texts of the liturgy set forth in doxological form the Church's authentic and living tradition. In the liturgy, the Orthodox Christian is in constant touch with the fundamental truths of the faith. Worship becomes a theology of fervent prayer, a living sacrifice of praise of a biblical people, a vision of the spiritual world, a betrothal with the Holy Spirit, and foretaste of the things to come.

Paschal in character and essentially eschatological in spirit, Orthodox worship while continuously rehearsing the mighty works of God in history, joyously celebrates the kingdom of God already come and already given to us as the pledge of our salvation through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ.

#### **The Infusion of God's Life**

The powers of the Kingdom already experienced in the Church are manifested through the divine mysteries or sacraments offered in faith. It is through these, as through windows, that the risen Christ enters this dark world to put sin and corruption to death and introduce abiding and immortal life. God's life is infused into the present age and mingled with it, without change or confusion, through the mysteries. God touches, purifies, illumines, sanctifies and deifies human life in his uncreated divine energies through the mysteries. Christ becomes everyone's contemporary in the mysteries. All that He did one and for all for the salvation of the world has now passed over into the mysteries. Thus, the mysteries become the various manifestations of our Lord's saving power, and the means by which Christ is present and works in his Church. "As the Church is the perpetual extension of Christ, so the mysteries are the power by which the Church sanctifies people" (Ch. Androutsos).

#### **A Preparation for the Future Life**

The mysteries prepare the faithful for the future life, but they also make that life real, here and now. We are given the vision and have the foretaste of the things to come through them. They introduce us

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continuously and in various ways to the transforming power of God, which communicates salvation, i.e., the cure of our fallen humanity and "the elimination of the germ of mortality." In them we encounter Christ, in order to be Christ. We enter upon a decisively new reality: in Christ we learn to become fully conscious of what it really means to be human. Encountering God, we also see the power of evil, whose force invades, pervades and distorts the image of God in us. Allied with Christ, we share in his victory over sin and death; the power of divine love overcomes evil in us and makes us a new into children of God and heirs of his Kingdom.

## **The Meaning of the Word "Mystery"**

Each mystery is directly rooted in Christ. Christ himself is the primordial mystery (John 1:1-18), and the very celebrant of all the mysteries. The Orthodox Church uses the Greek word *mysterion*, instead of sacrament, to denote the divinely instituted rites which manifest and communicate sanctifying divine grace. The word *mysterion* essentially means anything hidden or incomprehensible. It has been applied by the Church to the essential beliefs and doctrines of the faith and appears several times in Holy Scripture; its chief meaning is linked to the hidden and secret will of God related to the salvation of the world, now manifest in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word (Logos). "And since the Church is to proclaim that mystery and communicate it to the people, the essential acts by which she is accomplishing this are also called mysteries. Through all these acts we are made participants and beneficiaries of the great mystery of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ" (Rev. Al. Schmemmann).

## **Transmitting Grace by Visible Means**

The holy mysteries are at once inward and outward in character. Redeeming and sanctifying grace is transmitted by visible means. "The theanthropic nature of Christ is extended both to his Church and Her means of grace" (D. Constantelos). This embodiment of spiritual realities in material form is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation and the ultimate redemption of matter. It is consistent with the very nature of the Church as the divine-human institution and the continuing mystery of Christ's presence in history. It also affirms the basic "goodness" of nature and recognizes the psychosomatic nature of humankind.

The material elements, signs and gestures used in each mystery, are living symbols that relate to the realities of our human experiences. Material things are made into vehicles of the Spirit, and are adequate in each case to express deeply and amply the mysterious power of divine grace (e.g., bread

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and wine, the uniquely human food, once blessed and consecrated become the food of immortality, the Body and Blood of Christ).

The mysteries, while physical in their outward expression, are not mere symbolic rites. The outward signs of the mysteries convey grace tangibly not of themselves but by the very present of the Holy Spirit in them. And the grace given is not at all ambiguous or symbolic but real and actual, in order to truly recreate and perfect each person in the image and likeness of God.

Commenting on the real presence of the divine energies in the holy mysteries St. John of Damascus notes the following:

*"But if you inquire as to how this takes place, it is enough for you to know that it is effected by the Holy Spirit. The manner of the change can in no way be understood. But one can put it well thus, that just as in nature, bread, by eating, and wine and water, by drinking, are changed into the body and blood of the eater and drinker, yet not becoming a different body from the former one; so the bread of the Table, as also the wine and water, are supernaturally changed by the invocation and presence of the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ, and are not two, but one and the same."*

## **Divinely Ordered Institutions**

The effect of holy mysteries is not based upon the personal faith and moral character of the clergy, not in their "use," nor in the faith and good will of the recipients, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. For the mysteries derive their power from God and not from men; they are not mere human inventions. They are divinely ordered institutions, by which God in his unsearchable wisdom and ineffable glory and love is transfiguring the world in and through his Spirit-led Church by restoring to all things and all relationships their true meaning, purpose and destiny, and communicating divine life and love to all persons who freely hear and respond to the call of his Son.

## **Human Response**

It is important now to emphasize the human factor as well, since salvation is accomplished by God in cooperation (synergy) with humanity. "The incorporation of man into Christ and his union with God require cooperation of two unequal, but equally necessary forces: divine grace and human will" (Lev Gillet). The holy mysteries are neither magic nor mechanical operations. As the seed gives forth according to the ground into which it was planted, so the full effectiveness of the sacramental life is made manifest to a greater or lesser degree by the spiritual awareness, the faith and the devoutness of

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the participants. Yet no one, unless he has blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, is left without some measure of grace, since the sun rises and shines upon all.

The holy mysteries are continually embracing, taking up and transforming the deepest and most fundamental human experiences. Intensely personal and at the same time intensely communal, the holy mysteries continuously and simultaneously renew the spirit of persons "who have put on the new man, which was created according to God, in righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24); they prepare the saints for the work of the ministry, until all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature manhood, and to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12-13). As each holy mystery has its outward signs, which manifest the work of the Spirit, so each Christian life, sharing in the power of the holy mysteries, itself becomes a sacrament. As God permits and to the extent the will is sensitized, the mind is illumined and the heart is energized and made pure. Those who are Christ's, live and walk in the Spirit and the Spirit bears fruit in them: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-25).

## **The Number of the Mysteries**

In recent centuries, the Orthodox Church has recognized seven mysteries for sacraments: baptism; chrismation; the eucharist; penance; the priesthood; marriage; and the anointing of the sick (Euchelaion).

While the New Testament does not specifically enumerate the holy mysteries, it is clear that the Apostolic Church received people through baptism and chrismation (confirmation); celebrated the eucharist at least weekly on the Lord's day; readmitted penitents through an act of penance; selected and ordained her ministers; sanctified the union of husband and wife; and extended the healing ministry of Christ to those in need of divine succour. It is evident, therefore, that the Church gave special attention to these acts from the beginning, despite the absence of explicit testimony from Scripture, the early Fathers or the Ecumenical Councils.

The mysteries are founded upon the words and actions of the Lord in Scripture and are, in a particular way, a continuation and an extension of his saving ministry. Among them, baptism and the eucharist hold a preeminent position. While emphasizing the importance of the holy mysteries, Orthodox theology is careful not to separate or isolate them from the Church's many other rites of blessing, consecration and passage. "Between the wider and narrower sense of the term 'sacrament' (mystery) there is no

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rigid division: the whole Christian life must be seen as a unity, as a single mystery or one great sacrament, whose different aspects are expressed in a great variety of acts, some performed but once in a man's life, others perhaps daily" (Kallistos Ware).

## **How the Mysteries Become Operative**

The Church, moved by the Holy Spirit, prescribes the manner of the administration of the holy mysteries. The mysteries are operative and effective when two basic conditions are observed. First, the ministers of the mysteries, the bishop and/or priest, must be canonically ordained and in canonical order with the Church. Second, they must be "ordained" to conduct the prescribed rites of the Church, not because they contain "magical" powers in themselves, but because the rites express the faith and the mind of the Church concerning these saving acts.

The rites contain prayers, petitions, Scripture readings, hymns, gestures and liturgical actions. Rooted in the New Testament and shaped by the historical process in the crucible of the living and dynamic community of faith - the Church - the rites embody the vision of the new life, confirm the real presence of divine grace, and communicate salvation and sanctification to the believers prepared to receive these divine gifts.

## **Sacraments Outside the Church**

In principle the Orthodox Church does not see the same fullness in the 'sacraments' performed outside the Church. Yet, she does not consider these actions of other Christians as lacking totally in spiritual power and substance. Here, the Church applies the doctrine of economy and sees these acts in the light of the Lord's words "no man who performs a miracle using my name can speak ill of me" (Mk. 9:38). The 'sacraments' of other Christians are disfigured to the measure that Christ and his teaching have been kept or distorted. These Christians may be considered, in a lesser or greater degree, as peripheral members of the Orthodox Church. The center of the operation of the Holy Spirit is the historical and visible One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

## **Baptism**

Baptism is the initial and essential mystery and an absolute, decisive action for the Christian. The benefits of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection are mediated to the believer through Baptism. Baptism engraves upon and imparts to each person afresh the image of God distorted by the effects of

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sin, an image continuously disfigured by the accumulated wrong-doing and wrong-thinking of Adam's progeny and imitators.

The baptismal font becomes at once a tomb and a womb: "at the self-same moment you die and are bom; the water of salvation is at once your grave and your mother" (St. Cyril of Jerusalem). The triple immersion in and emersion from the baptismal waters is laden with meaning. Baptism is both a death and a new birth. The water destroys one life and it begets another. It drowns the old man and raises up the new. The liturgical act gives expression to two realities: the death of the old man, who in solidarity with Adam, is subject to sin and death, and the birth of the new man, who in his union with Christ, is provided with new members and faculties in preparation for the life to come.

## **The Beginning of a Process of Becoming**

Age is not a conditional factor in baptism. As in Christian antiquity, the Church continues to baptize both adults and infants. As a matter of fact, infant baptism is the norm in most instances. However, such baptisms are not performed in a vacuum, but upon the explicit profession of faith by parents and sponsors and especially the very community itself, gathered to celebrate the mystery, each time reaffirming its faith, pledging itself to provide an environment of continued Christian witness for its members regardless of age and circumstance. Baptism is the process of constant becoming. The conversion of the heart or continual repentance is the daily experience that makes life theocentric and oriented towards God's Kingdom.

Baptism unites the believer not only with Christ but with his people, the Church. One is baptized into the community of faith to share in life, its values, its vision. Baptism, by bringing us into the glorified life of Christ and making us part of his deified humanity, integrates us into the Church, his body, where the business of dying and rising is daily experienced in ascetic discipline in the life of prayer and in the Eucharist.

## **Prebaptismal Rites for Infants**

The Orthodox Church has three rites for infants which are closely linked to baptism. The first rite is for the mother and child on the first day of birth. In this rite the Church expresses her thanksgiving for the safe delivery of the mother and her joy at the appearance of a new life. Blessing the newborn infant the Church anticipates its new and second birth through water and the Spirit (John 3:5). A second rite is conducted on the eighth day after birth, when the new born child receives its name from its parents.

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The child is given a Christian name as a sign of its new identity with the faith community. The third rite is conducted on the fortieth day after birth. The new-born child is to be brought to the Church in imitation of the New Testament event, when Mary, the Theotokos, brought the infant Christ into the Temple to fulfill the requirements of the Law. On this day the mother is blessed and the infant "churches," or is accepted as a peripheral member of the Church, until it is fully incorporated into her life through baptism.

## **The Baptismal Rite**

The baptismal rite of the Orthodox Church consists of three major parts. The present single rite is in fact a coalescence of several separated but interdependent rites, which were performed over the course of several days and weeks when the order of the catechumenate was once in full force. The first part is preparatory in nature. It is usually referred to as the catechesis. It contains the prayer for the making of a catechumen; prayers of exorcism; the renunciation and condemnation of the devil; the acceptance of Christ; the recitation of the Nicene Creed; and the call to baptism.

The second part is the Service of Baptism proper. It focuses almost entirely on the baptismal font. It includes a series of petitions; a prayer of invocation for the consecration of the baptismal waters, so that they may be given the power of spiritual fecundity; and an anointing of the candidate with the "oil of gladness." In the case of the candidate the anointing is both a sign of healing of his fallen nature and of his becoming an athlete for Christ. In the case of the font, the anointing is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the baptismal waters.

When these rites have been completed the candidate is baptized by the officiating bishop or priest with three immersions and emersions using the liturgical formula "the servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father. Amen. And the Son. Amen. And the Holy Spirit. Amen." The three fold immersion becomes the adequate sign of participation in Christ's three day burial and resurrection. The newly illumined Christian is then robed in a white garment, the symbol of regeneration, newness, kingship, and future immortality. The white garment, which is the color of royalty, symbolizes the gifts of baptism and reminds the neophyte of his responsibility to remain whole and be faithful to the baptismal pledge.

At this point the mystery of the holy Chrism (myron) is administered. The neophyte is anointed with the consecrated oils by the celebrant using the liturgical formula "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

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Amen." Chrism is applied to the sense and other parts of the body in the pattern of the Cross, signifying the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit takes the neophyte beyond the restoration of the fallen nature. The continuous presence of the Holy Spirit makes possible the constant, progressive, personal growth of the Christian into the image and likeness of God. He or she is also given a cross to wear.

In the ancient Church baptism was immediately followed by the celebration of the Eucharist. The newly-illuminated Christians, holding lighted candles proceeded from the baptistry with the clergy to the nave of the Church to join the faithful for the Eucharist. Vestiges of this ancient practice form the next sequence of actions in the baptismal rite. A procession around the font, with the singing of "As many as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia" (Gal. 3:27) is followed by the reading of two excerpts from the New Testament: the Epistle to the Romans (6:3-11) explains the meaning of baptism; and the Gospel of Matthew (28:16-20) recalling the command of the Lord to the Church to instruct and baptize. The neophyte then receives Holy Communion.

After a set of petitions called the "Fervent Litany," the neophyte participates in three additional rites. These were originally conducted on the eighth day after baptism; they now form the last part of the baptismal rite. The celebrant washes the neophyte's forehead as an indication that the visible signs of the mysteries (the oils, et. al.) must now become inner realities and the very essence of life. This is emphasized with the laying on of hands upon the candidate and the tonsure. Through the laying on of hands, the neophyte and those concerned for his growth in Christ, are reminded that the Christian is armed with the Holy Spirit to war against all adverse powers. The tonsure, or cutting of the hair, indicates both a sacrificial offering that does not require the mutilation or humiliation of the human body and a sign of servitude and obedience. The new Christian proclaims his willingness and readiness to negate the world with its false values and to serve God with faithful devotion.

## **Chrismation**

The mystery of Chrismation (Confirmation) is anchored in the events of Jesus' baptism and the outpouring of the Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost, yet, in the Lord's declaration "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

There is both an intrinsic unity and a distinction between the mysteries of baptism and chrismation. They are intimately related theologically and liturgically. Chrismation is not so much the second mystery

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as it is the very fulfillment of baptism. While baptism incorporates us into Christ's new risen existence, chrismation makes us partakers of his Spirit, the very source of this new life and of total illumination.

## **The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

Chrismation causes a mysterious new and hidden life to flow in us. It imparts to persons the energies and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Is. 11:23 and Gal. 5:22).

*"To some the Holy Spirit is given that they may be able to benefit others and edify the Church by speaking of the future or by teaching mysteries or by freeing men from disease with a single word. To others, however, He is given in order that they themselves may become more virtuous and shine with godliness or with an abundance of sobriety, love or humility" (St. Nicholas Cabasilas).*

Chrismation is called the seal (sphragis). The neophyte receives the Holy Spirit as the source, the pledge and the seal of unending life. Anointed with the oils of Chrism, we are marked forever as the sheep and soldiers of Christ. We belong to him and to his holy Church. Thus chrismation, once canonically performed, cannot be repeated. Chrismation is also a sacrament of reconciliation. People who come to Orthodoxy out of certain heretical confessions and schismatic churches are received through the mystery of chrismation. The ritual anointing "validates" through "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" a Christian baptism performed in irregular circumstances - i.e., outside the canonical boundaries of the Church" (John Meyendorff).

## **The Holy Chrism**

The chrism that is used for the ritual anointing is a mixture of olive oil, balsam, wine, and some forty aromatic substances, symbolizing the fulness of sacramental grace, the sweetness of the Christian life and manifold and diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit. The chrism is also called the holy Myron. Chrism, prepared and consecrated periodically on Holy Thursday, is the antitype, the visible tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.

By ancient custom the right to prepare and consecrate the chrism belongs to the bishop and its administration to the presbyters. Each autocephalous Orthodox Church has the right to prepare and consecrate chrism. The Patriarchate of Constantinople, as the senior jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church, prepares and distributes the holy myron to other Orthodox jurisdictions.

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## **The Eucharist**

The Eucharist or Divine Liturgy is the central mystery of the Church. It is at once the source and the summit of her life. In it, the Church is continuously changed from a human community into the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and the People of God. The Eucharist, according to St. Nicholas Cabasilas, is the final and greatest of the mysteries "since it is not possible to go beyond it or add anything to it. After the Eucharist there is nowhere further to go. There all must stand, and try to examine the means by which we may preserve the treasure to the end. For in it we obtain God Himself, and God is united with us in the most perfect union."

Every sacred mystery makes its partakers into members of Christ. But the Eucharist effects this most perfectly:

*"By dispensation of His grace, He [Christ] disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh whose substance comes from bread and wine, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, to secure that, by this union with the Immortal, man too may be a sharer in incorruption" (N. Cabasilas).*

## **A Continuous Pentecost**

Each Divine Liturgy is a continuation of the mystery of Pentecost. It is the renewal and the confirmation of the coming of the Holy Spirit who is ever present in the Church. In a prayer of the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, the following is found: "Make us worth to find grace in Your presence so that our sacrifice may be pleasing to You and that Your good and gracious Spirit may abide with us and with the gifts here presented and with all Your people." The worshipping community prays earnestly that it may continue to be Spirit-bearing ("send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here presented") and that the consecrated gifts may become a communion of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Messianic Banquet**

In the present age, between the two comings of Jesus Christ our Lord, the Divine Liturgy is always the Messianic banquet, the meal of the kingdom, the time and place in which the heavenly joins and mingles with the earthly. The Eucharist initiates humankind, nature, and time into the mystery of the uncreated Trinity. The Divine Liturgy is not simply a sacred drama or a mere representation of past events. It constitutes the very presence of God's embracing love, which purifies, enlightens, perfects, and deifies (2 Peter 1:4) all "those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9), i.e., all who through Baptism and Chrismation have been incorporated into the Church and have become Christ-bearers and Spirit-bearers.

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In the Divine Liturgy we do not commemorate one or another isolated event of sacred history. We celebrate, in joy and thanksgiving, the whole mystery of the divine economy from creation to incarnation, especially "the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand of the Father and the second glorious coming." Thus, in experiencing the reigning Christ in the Divine Liturgy, the past, present, and future of the history of salvation are lived as one reality in the mystery of the Kingdom of God.

## Partakers of Divine Nature

The Eucharist "is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father in His graciousness raised from the dead" (St. Ignatios of Antioch). In it we are offered Christ's deified flesh, to which we are joined, in order to partake of divine life without confusion or division. In the Eucharist, Christ acts to make us His own Body: *"The Bread of Life Himself changes him who feeds on Him and transforms and assimilates him into Himself"* (St. Nicholas Cabasilas).

Thus, eternity penetrates our finitude. Men, women and children are invited to share in the trinitarian life of God: *"... by this flesh [of Christ in the Eucharist] our community is raised to heaven; that is where this Bread truly dwells; and we enter into the Holy of Holies by the pure offering of the Body of Christ"* (St. Gregory Palamas).

The life of the Trinity flows and dwells in us through "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:14). We become God-bearers.

## The Local Church

The mystery of the Church as the Body of Christ is fully realized in the Divine Liturgy, for the Eucharist is Christ crucified and risen, in his personal presence. Every local Church, living in full the sacramental life, is the: *"... miracle of the new life in Christ lived in community and is built upon and around the Table of the Lord. Whenever and wherever the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, in the context of doctrinal unity and canonical norms, the local Church possesses the marks of doctrinal unity and canonical norms, the local Church possesses the marks of the true Church of God: unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. These marks cannot belong to any human gathering; they are the eschatological signs given to a community through the Spirit of God"* (John Meyendorff).

The Eucharist unites the members of the Church, both Christ and to one another: "because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread: (1 Cor. 10:17). Sharing in

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the life of Christ and revived by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes an epiphany of divine love. "If union is in truth with Christ and with one another, we are assuredly also united voluntarily with all those who partake with us" (St. John of Damascus).

## **The Term "Divine Liturgy"**

The divine Liturgy is the sacred rite by which the Orthodox Church celebrates the mystery of the Eucharist. This title for the Eucharist is derived from two Greek words, theia and leitourgia. The word theia means "pertaining to God," hence divine. The term leitourgia comes from two words; leitōs (people) and ergon (work), hence "the work of the people" or "a public service, act or function." The word leitourgia was used in Greek antiquity to describe those services and acts which were performed for the benefit and common interest of all, including acts of worship. It was in this latter religious sense that the word found its way into the vocabulary of Scripture and the Church. In the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament the word was applied to the Temple services and the functions of the priests. In the New Testament, where the word appears infrequently, it describes the saving work of Christ (Heb. 8:6) and Christian worship (Acts 13:21). In the Apostolic Fathers and later tradition, the word was applied to worship. By the fourth century, the word leitourgia, together with adjective theia (i.e., Divine Liturgy) had become the technical term for the mystery of the Eucharist. The word Eucharist in turn means thanksgiving. It takes its name from the great prayer of consecration (Anaphora) pronounced by the celebrant of the Divine Liturgy.

## **The Origins of the Divine Liturgy**

The Divine Liturgy is composed of two parts, the first of which is referred to as the Synaxis or Proanaphora (the Liturgy of the Word, or the Liturgy of the Catechumens), and the second as the Eucharist (the offering, the Liturgy of the Mystery (Sacrament) or the Liturgy of the Faithful). The synaxis or Proanaphora, in its basic, classical shape, is a christianized version of the synagogue service. The Eucharist is derived from the words and actions of the Lord at the Last (Mystical) Supper. The connection of the Divine Liturgy to the prayer service of the synagogue and to a Jewish household or fraternal ritual meal must be understood against the backdrop of the nascent Christian community. The Lord and his apostles and the first Christians were Jews. It is clear that the Church will be characterized forever by its Semitic origins. It is equally clear that the Church has close ineradicable connections with Hellenism. The Church was born in Jerusalem, but grew up in the Hellenistic world. Her liturgy, art and theology are radiant with the imperishable traces of this double experience.

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*"It is true that the Christian liturgy, and the Eucharist especially, is one of the most original creations of Christianity. But however original it is, it is not a sort of an ex nihilo creation. To think so is to condemn ourselves to a minimal understanding of it" (Louis Bouyer).*

The Eucharist itself was instituted by Christ at the supper on Holy Thursday to perpetuate the remembrance (anamnesis) of his redemptive work and to establish a continuous intimate communion (koinonia) between himself and those who believe in Him. The actions and words of the Lord concerning the bread and wine formed the basis for the Eucharist, the chief recurrent liturgical rite of the Church. The nucleus of every eucharistic rite consists in four actions: the offering and the placing of bread and wine on the holy Table; the anaphora or great eucharistic prayer, which includes the words of institution and the invocation of the Holy Spirit to change the gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ; the breaking of the consecrated Bread (i.e., the fraction); and the communion of the consecrated elements by the people of God.

At first the Eucharist was celebrated within the context of an evening community meal, referred to as the agape or love feast. By the end of the first or the beginning of the second century the celebration of the Eucharist was separated from the community meal and transposed to the early morning hours.

## **The Development of the Divine Liturgy**

The Divine Liturgy is a complex act of rhythmic movement, sound and spectacle characterized by a deep sense of harmony, beauty, dignity and mystery. It is structured around two solemn entrances, which today are abbreviated forms of earlier more elaborate ceremonies; the great eucharistic prayer (Anaphora); and the distribution of Holy Communion. An elaborate enarxis (opening rites), and a series of dismissal rites (apolytis) embrace the whole action.

The first or "Little Entrance," the entry of the clergy and the people into the Church, once marked the beginning of the Synaxis. The Little Entrance is a solemn procession with the Gospel accompanied with entrance hymns. The second or "Great Entrance" once marked the beginning of the Eucharist. It is a solemn procession with the gifts of the bread and wine that are to be offered and consecrated. The elements used for the offering are prepared by the clergy. The service of preparation (Proskomide) is performed at the Table of Preparation (Prothesis) before the enarxis. It is here, after the preparation of the bread and the cup and the commemoration of the saints, that the celebrant also commemorates the faithful, both living and dead, by name.

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The verbal and non-verbal elements of the Divine Liturgy are fitted together harmoniously, so as to weave a pattern of prayer that addresses and inspires the whole person, body and soul. The principle behind the development of its ceremonial splendor rests upon the notion that our earthly worship ought to reflect the joy and majesty of heavenly worship. On the verbal side of the liturgy, we hear eloquent prayers of praise, thanksgiving, intercession and confession; litanies, petitions, acclamations, greetings and invocations; hymns, chants, psalmody and creedal statements as well as intoned Scriptural lessons and a homily. On the side of the non-verbal, we are involved with solemn processions and an assortment of liturgical gestures. The eyes are filled with the graceful actions of the servers, as well as the sight of the Lord and his saints gazing at us from the icons. The nostrils are filled with the fragrance of incense, and the heart is grasped by the profound silence of the divine presence. People touch each other gently, saying "Christ is in our midst," when called upon to "love one another" before the offering of the gifts. With one voice and heart they also recite the Creed and recommit themselves to the Orthodox faith into which they were baptized. And participating in Holy Communion the faithful "taste and see that the Lord good" (Ps. 33).

The basic outline of the Divine Liturgy is anchored in the New Testament. Ritual and text evolved gradually; the several elements of the liturgy developed unevenly and at different stages. Its structures were expanded, augmented and adorned with chants, prayers and various ceremonials. By the tenth century the eucharistic rites of Constantinople, the chief see of the Orthodox East, has become more or less crystallized. The process of growth, modification, and adaptation has been relatively slow ever since. By virtue of its prestige the rites of Constantinople first influenced and finally replaced all other rites in the Orthodox East. Since the end of the twelfth century, with minor variations that reflect local customs, the Liturgy of Constantinople has become the sole common rite of all Orthodox Churches.

## **The Three Liturgies**

Constantinople was the magnificent crucible in which several liturgical traditions mixed. Out of this synthesis came three liturgies which were distinctly Constantinopolitan. Firmly rooted in God's written word and strongly influenced by the patristic experience, these liturgies take us to the heart of God's glory and philanthropia.

The Liturgy of St. Basil was, until the twelfth century, the chief liturgy of Constantinople. Its anaphora is probably the most eloquent of all Liturgies, east or west. Powerful in its unity of thought, theological depth and rich biblical imagery, it was celebrated every Sunday and great feast day. Now it is used only

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ten times during the year: on the five Sundays of the Great Fast, on the vigils of Pascha, Christmas and Epiphany, on Holy Thursday and on the Feast of St. Basil, January 1.

The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is shorter and less rhetorical than that of St. Basil. It is distinguished for its simplicity and clarity. At first it was probably the weekday liturgy of Constantinople. Gradually it superseded and replaced the Liturgy of St. Basil. The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is now celebrated at every eucharist assembly unless the Liturgy of St. Basil or the Presanctified is to be celebrated.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified is not a full Divine Liturgy in that it does not contain the anaphora. This Liturgy is now used on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast and on the first three days of Holy Week. It is comprised of Vespers, the solemn transfer to the holy Table of the elements of Holy Communion consecrated at the Divine Liturgy the previous Sunday (or Saturday), and the order of the distribution of Holy Communion as in the other liturgies.

According to local custom three other ancient Liturgies are also used by Orthodox Churches on the occasion of the Feast day of the Saints to which their authorship is traditionally attributed. These are the liturgies of St. James (Iakovos), the ancient liturgy of Jerusalem; St. Mark, the ancient liturgy of Alexandria; and St. Gregory the Theologian, an ancient liturgy of Cappadocia and Alexandria.

## **The Celebrants of the Divine Liturgy**

The Divine Liturgy is a corporate action of the whole people of God. The eucharistic assembly presupposes the presence and active participation of clergy and laity, each with their own essential and distinctive ministry, role and function. The chief celebrant of the Eucharist is the bishop or presbyter, without whom there can be no Eucharist. The bishop or priest acts in the name of Christ, who is the one true and unique High Priest.

## **Reception of Holy Communion**

Eucharist belongs to and is shared by those who have been baptized into the Church and who hold a common faith in the bond of love. Thus, only those Orthodox Christians in full communion with the Church may partake of the Holy Gifts. It is expected that every baptized and confirmed Orthodox adult, child and infant be a regular and frequent recipient of the holy communion. It is presupposed that adult

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and children communicants have fasted from the evening meal prior to receiving Holy Communion at the morning Eucharist.

Care must be taken that one approaches the chalice with spiritual understanding: *"Let not everyone come to receive it, but only those who are worth, 'for the holy gifts are for the holy people of God'. Those whom the priest calls holy are not only those who have attained perfection, but also those who are striving for it without having yet obtained it ... that is why Christians, if they have not committed such sins as would cut them off from Christ and bring death, are in no way prevented, when partaking of the holy mysteries, from receiving sanctification ... for no one has holiness of himself; it is not the consequence of human virtue, but comes for all from him and through him"* (St. Nicholas Cabasilas).

## **The Mystery Of Penance**

The mysteries of initiation introduce us to the life-long process of grasping accepting and choosing to follow the values of the Christian life. Christians, born anew in Baptism, are expected to govern their lives by the power of God. They are to undertake the noblest deeds and "holding fast to both faith and virtue. . .formed by both into the blessed likeness of Christ" (St. Nicholas Cabasilas). The Church, however, has never considered Baptism to be an automatic guarantor of continuous salvation. It is only the beginning of the life in Christ. Its full effects are derived when the baptized are disposed to persevere and preserve the treasure to the end. The process of healing and restoring our damaged, wounded and fallen nature is on-going.

God is recognized to be continuously loving, merciful and long-suffering towards his creation. He accepts all repentant sinners tenderly and rejoices greatly in their conversion. There are no limits set to the exercise of his loving-kindness and forgiveness. All sins are forgivable, save one: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Here we are confronted not with the powerlessness of God, but with an unrepentant and callous heart.

Through the mystery of repentance God embraces a repentant lapsed Christian with his love, in order to forgive him and reconcile him to the Church. But, for this to occur, the sinful Christian must first have a sense of his unfaithfulness to God, contrition of heart, and determination to amend. This must be followed by the confession of his sins before the authorized clergy of the Church. Both the interior repentance and the verbal acknowledgment of concrete sins are indispensable conditions for true

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forgiveness and reconciliation. Confession is the opening of one's conscience before God and the witness of the Church.

*"Did you commit sin? Enter the Church and repent for your sin; for here is the physician, not the judge; here one is not investigated, one receives remission of sins" (St. John Chrysostom).*

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## Who Administers Penance?

A bishop or designated confessor-priest administers the mystery of Repentance. Confessions are usually heard in the Church or in some other convenient and suitable place. The penitent and the confessor see each other face to face. The confessor identifies with the sinner and bears with him the consequences of his sin as he prays for him. Just as a perceptive physician seeks to heal wounds, he heals sins: he offers counsel, and may prescribe remedies (penances) that look to the preservation of the spiritual health of the penitent. Such "penances" are not punitive in nature, but remedial. They do not constitute an essential part of the mystery. Penances may include such things as spiritual reading, fasting, increased prayer, prostrations, charitable works, and exclusion from Holy Communion for a specified time.

The confessor pronounces judgement upon the sin and not over the sinner. As a caring spiritual father, he prays for the sinner and manifests to him the mercy and love of God. When the penitent has completed his confession, the confessor beckons him to kneel and, placing his hands upon his head, reads the prayer of absolution, by which the forgiveness of God is pronounced and bestowed. For it is God who is the forgiver and the healer of the penitent, not the human confessor.

Penitence is essentially a healing ministry, since sin is viewed primarily as a disease that needs to be healed, rather than a crime that needs to be punished. And since everyone is susceptible to the wiles of the devil, a regular examination of the conscience deepens self-awareness and quickens the sensitivity of the heart. For this reason, many persons as a matter of course have a father confessor who shares their concerns in the on-going process of spiritual development and growth.

## Priesthood

Jesus Christ is the one, true priest of the Church. Through his perfect self-offering, Christ continues to unite fallen humanity to God and is the unique High Priest and Mediator of the new covenant. Both the royal priesthood of all believers and the ministerial priesthood have their sources in Christ the High Priest.

The priestly ministry of Christ is perpetuated in the Church by the ministerial priesthood, existing in the three essential ministries of bishop, presbyter and deacon. These are set apart by the grace of ordination to serve the Church; to preach, teach and shepherd the people of God; to celebrate the sacred mysteries; to preserve correct doctrine; and to keep the body united in the love of Christ. The

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ministerial priesthood belongs to the very essence and structure of the Church, having been established by the Lord Himself. The gifts and functions once given to the Apostles are transmitted to the ordained ministers through the mystery of the priesthood in the rites of ordination.

## Functions and Duties

The Bishops are the successors to the Apostles, the chief shepherds and administrators of the Church and the guardians and teachers of the true faith. They are the celebrants and ministers of the mystery of the priesthood. While the right to choose the ministers of the Church belongs to all the clergy and the people, the bishop alone has the authority to ordain and appoint ministers and to consecrate churches. As a sign of the collegiality of the episcopacy, three bishops (or at least two with the consent of a third) ordain a bishop. In all other ordinations, one bishop suffices. Since the sixth century bishops have been selected from the celibate clergy. Presbyters (priests) and deacons, however, are permitted to marry but only before ordination. Hence, married men may be ordained, but priests and deacons may not marry. A widower can be elected and ordained a bishop.

Presbyters (priests) share in the functions of the episcopacy. They shepherd and administer local parishes, they teach and celebrate the holy mysteries for the edification of the people of God, and take counsel with the bishop concerning the affairs of the diocese. Most parish priests are married, but it is not unusual for celibate clergy and monastics to serve local churches.

Deacons assist the bishops and presbyters in the execution of their pastoral liturgical and teaching duties. In earlier times, women were also ordained as deaconesses. The order, however, fell into disuse by the twelfth century.

## Minor Orders

Besides the three "major" orders, the priesthood includes several "minor" orders: subdeacons, readers, chanters, and acolytes. The ordination of such minor orders is conducted outside the sanctuary and at any communal worship service, but never within Divine Liturgy. The enthronement of a bishop or the bestowal of honors and the appointment to an office are also conducted outside the framework of the Divine Liturgy.

## Ordination Rites

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The ordination of the major orders is held during the course of the Divine Liturgy. Bishops are ordained before the scripture readings and Anaphora. This is to indicate that a bishop is the primary expounder of the faith and celebrant of the mysteries. A presbyter is ordained immediately after the Great Entrance and before the Anaphora, because he too is a celebrant of the mysteries. A deacon is ordained after the consecration of the Gifts and before Holy Communions, because he assists at the liturgical services and administers Holy Communion.

The consent of the whole Church is a necessary requirement for ordination. At every ordination rite both the candidate and the assembled clergy and laity, and the celebrating bishop are asked to give their assent with the antiphon (Keleuson). After the ordination, the new cleric is clothed with the vestments of his order and installed in his new position amidst the acclamation "he is worthy" (axios) by the assembled faithful.

The primary signs of all ordination rites are the prayers and the laying on of the hands upon the heads of the candidate by the bishop. There is a distinction between the rites of ordination for the major and minor orders. The term cheirotonia (to stretch out the hand) designates the rites of ordination for the major orders, while the term cheirothesia (to place hands) is used to designate an ordination to the minor orders.

## **The Character of the Priesthood**

Those called and ordained to serve the Church are referred to as "clergy" (kleros), because they are chosen and set apart. The character of ordination is indelible. Therefore, ordination is never repeated, even in the case of clergy who have apostatized or have been defrocked, and are received again into the Church.

The male character of the ordained priesthood is a basic tenet of Orthodoxy. The priesthood belongs to Christ and those ordained to perpetuate his priesthood are his icons. The bishop (or priest) is not simply a delegate or a vicar of an absent Christ, but the one through whom Christ renders himself present to his Church.

The clergy do not possess an intrinsic personal holiness because of their ordination. Rather, they strive to acquire it, like all Christians, but with a greater urgency through ascetic effort. The clergy ought to embody the love of Christ and manifest to the community the essentials of the Christian life.

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Conversely, the clergy need to discover in their flock the presence of Christ. In this mutual witness each assists the other to become a living member of the body of Christ.

## **Marriage**

### **A Christian Marriage**

Orthodox theology has always presented Christian marriage as something absolutely unique, and, indeed eternal. In marriage, human love "is being projected into the Kingdom of God" (John Meyendorff), reflecting the intimate union between Christ and the faithful which St. Paul speaks of (Ephes. 5). Married life is a special vocation which requires the grace of the Holy Spirit; and it is this very grace which is conferred in the Marriage Service.

The contemporary Marriage Service of the Orthodox Church is itself divided into two parts: the office of betrothal and the office of crowning. In the first, the rite includes the exchange of rings, demonstrating that both partners enter into marriage of their own volition. At the second, "crowns" placed upon the heads of the partners signify the grace of the Holy Spirit. These crowns are crowns of both joy and martyrdom. Because the couple has been united for eternity, there is joy; but because every marriage involves enormous self-sacrifice on the part of each partner, both also become "martyrs" in their own right.

The complete love each of the partners has for the other, should be the motivating factor in Christian marriage. In such a context, marriage exists not only for the procreation of children, but also that a mutual love may be expressed, sustained and extended to others. While it is not to be denied that God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, children must always be considered a gift from God and not the sole reason for marriage. Certainly, children do contribute to making marriages an authentic image of the Trinity; and St. John Chrysostom spoke of the family as "a little Church".

## **Divorce**

Because marriage implies a decision of free will on the part of both partners, there will always be the possibility of error. When a marriage fails, the Orthodox Church has generally declared that a true marriage had in fact never existed, i.e., the bond did not demonstrate its necessarily eternal character. It would not be totally accurate, however, to say that the Orthodox Church grants divorces, although such a practice has crept into the practice of some local Churches. Divorce is actually a civil matter

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which recognizes the breaking of a legal contract; the Church can merely recognize that an attempt at building up a true marriage has failed.

Without going into an exhaustive analysis of the historical and canonical developments, it should be mentioned that the Orthodox Church today normally allows the laity three attempts at establishing a true marriage. A fourth marriage is positively forbidden. Clergy, however, are permitted to marry only once and this must be prior to ordination. Finally, it remains only to comment upon the penitential character assigned to a marriage rite in which both partners are being married for the second or third time. A special service exists for these situations in which the prayers are more somber and the entire service far more subdued. In this way, the Church reminds both the partners and the entire people of God that one lasting marriage is the Christian norm.

## Unction

*"Is there any sick man among you? Let him send for the elders of the Church and let them pray over him. The prayer offered in faith will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him from his bed, and he will be forgiven any sins he has committed" (James 5:14-15).*

So St. James describes the anointing of the sick, providing the apostolic foundations for the sacrament of unction, or more properly, "the oil of prayer" (euchelaion). In keeping with the biblical injunction, the Orthodox order for the celebration of this sacrament calls for a group of presbyters to be present at it but this requirement is only of secondary importance. Nor is it required that the person receiving the sacrament be mortally ill as some have supposed. Bodily healing as well as the forgiveness of sins are the primary purposes of this sacrament and only in cases of immanent death can it be considered a preparation for it.

Orthodox theology has always stressed the unity of body and soul and this means that there can be no sharp dichotomy between physical and spiritual; the readings and prayers used in the rite of unction certainly do not assume that physical healing is assured framework of repentance. The anointing symbolizes ultimate pardon in the face of sickness and even death, physical results of the spiritual disease of sinfulness. Unction itself has frequently been associated with penance as a single action and in some instances it has even superseded penance. The popular public celebrations of unction on Holy Wednesday in many Orthodox churches

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might be interpreted as a substitute for actual confessions of sins by individuals in preparation for the pascal Eucharist. Needless to say, anointing is meaningless without true contrition.

## Marriage

### The Institution of Marriage

*"God is the author and celebrant of pure marriage. He ordained and instituted it in paradise (Gen. 1:27-28)."*

A Christian marriage is like any other marriage in its external form, structure and organization; it is experienced, however, in a radically different way. Relationships, authority and personal identity are experienced on a wholly other plane: in the context and spirit of the new life in Christ. In a Christian marriage two persons share each other in a unique relationship with the risen and reigning Christ. Christ's death and resurrection constitute the basis for this new and radical relationship between spouses and between parents and children. In loving and being loved, Christians must be willing to enter, daily, into the light of Christ. It is there that they discover that "all great love is crucified love," as Paul Evdokimov once noted. Sacrificial, self-giving love requires our willingness to die daily to the dreadful condition of our fallen nature, to pride, envy, anger, deceit, insensitivity, selfishness and every other kind of sinful desire and self-delusion that distorts, reduces, and destroys the human person. In the immense reality of Christ's love, Christian spouses discover and experience the love of the Holy Trinity. It is this love, wrote Olivier Clement, which precedes, founds and renews our love. The couple's "self-gift" to each other is to love in a divine way. Such love invests the couple's whole being with the redeeming presence of the Incarnate Love. This Incarnate Love, Christ, integrates and enriches their personal and sexual love, enabling them to transcend the closed finitude of their fallenness, and thus allow them to reach ever-new and ever-deeper levels of communion, friendship, maturity, openness and holiness. This Christ-like experience of love reflects and makes credible the reality of God's love for humankind. In this way Christian spouses learn to become servants of redemption.

In marriage every person acquires a new identity: the two become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Thus, marriage is more than the social and religious sanction of a biological fact. It is, according to Christos Yiannaras: *"... the personal relationship of co-inherence. Through a reciprocal relinquishment of the individual will and acceptance of the other's will, the unity of husband and wife comes not to be built on the natural premise of sexual impulse, but on the premise of ecclesial communion, which is self-*

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*transcendence and self-offering. Marriage draws its identity not from the natural relationship, but from the relationship in the realm of the Kingdom."*

Persons who marry in the Lord come to appreciate, in the deepest possible levels of existence, God's commandment to "love thy neighbor as thy self." A husband and wife become intimate lovers, because they are, first of all, neighbor and friend to each other in the most unique and conclusive way. By loving Christ, and through Him each other, they come to know one another's distinct identity, complete one another in a dynamic way, and discover God's image in each other (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18-24). Drawn to each other, and together to Him, Who is the source of all love, their eros is transfigured constantly into unending love, into agape. Consumed by the face of the Lord, Who is mystically present in their lives, they find joy in exploring the hidden and unfathomable depths of the miracle and mystery of their own personhood.

A marriage in the Lord is sustained by the Holy Spirit, Who grants to the spouses the necessary gifts to secure a godly life in peace, truth, harmony and love. This is not to say, however, that a church marriage is free from problems, temptations, tensions, pains and suffering. Rather, it means only that in the obedience of faith are spouses open to the influence and power of the Holy Spirit, who allows the life of the Risen Christ to emerge in them, so that they may be empowered to transcend the weariness, failures and difficulties of daily, ordinary life. Marital bonds are strengthened and renewed by the exercise of godly patience, humility, fortitude, kindness and mutual trust. The bonds are nourished and sanctified by prayer, the sacraments of the Church, and works of genuine piety and charity.

## **Conditions and Characteristics of Marriage**

The essential condition for marriage in the Church is that the partners come to it out of their own free will. The decision to marry in the Lord is a highly personal one. It is to be arrived at prayerfully, in the counsel of one's own heart. The freedom to choose one's own partner is restricted only by those canonical, legal or moral impediments that would distort, damage or frustrate the purpose of marriage. A church marriage is indissoluble. It is understood to be a life long event; a dynamic, unfolding, loving relationship that unites two unique personalities into a single body, without change and confusion. It becomes a covenant relationship between two persons who willingly accept the challenge and opportunity to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephes. 5:21).

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Marriage is established and constituted with appropriate prayers and signs of the Church; since it is God Himself, Who is the creator and the celebrant of marriage. Through her canonically ordained bishops, and/or presbyters, the Church, as the redeemed community, calls upon God to unite and sanctify the spouses and to prosper them in life and faith.

Marriage and family are understood to be patterned after the divine life of the Holy Trinity. With this model in mind, we recognize and uphold the absolute equality of the spouses. However, we are able to recognize differentiation in their nature and also in their relationship to one another. In the words of Thomas Hopko: *"... the mode of being and action of the male in creation is different from the mode of being and action of the female within the same nature of created being. More specifically ... the male and female are not the same and are not interchangeable in the unique forms of their common humanity."*

Spouses relate to each other according to an order established by God; with the man as the head and the woman as the partner. This is a model based on the relationship of Christ and the Church. The man, as head, is called to love, cherish and respect his wife. The wife, as partner, is called to honor and respect her husband (Ephes. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19). A husband and wife complement each other, and, in this very complementarity, are able to recognize and experience their distinctiveness as well as their inherent equality.

A church marriage presupposes a monogamous relationship. Monogamy is implied in the Book of Genesis, upheld by the Prophets, confirmed by Christ, and sustained by the Church. Monogamy is consistent with the Christian ideal of agape. A monogamous relationship, based on the love of God, empowers the spouses with the will to overcome the evil inclinations toward division, envy, conceit, lust, arrogance, deception and manipulation. By preserving personal dignity and seeking to ensure equality, stability and purity in marital relations, monogamy fosters and promotes the aims of Christian marriage.

## **The Purpose of Marriage**

The essential and primary purpose of marriage is to unite two free persons into a communion of love for their mutual companionship, support, enjoyment, and personal fulfillment and completion. Genuine companionship is founded on mutual trust, which in turn is nourished by honesty, commitment, fidelity, tenderness, steadfastness of faith and single mindedness.

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The task of living and growing together in holiness is aided by sexual fulfillment, since sexuality implicates the person whose substance is imprinted on the body. For the Christian, writes Olivier Clement: *"... sexuality must become a dimension of the person, a language of the relation between persons. This unity of the flesh denotes not only the union of the bodies, but the inter wovenness of two lives."*

Sexual fidelity and enjoyment nurture the distinction between, and allow for the development of the maleness of the husband and femaleness of the wife. But, like all human conditions and relations, sexuality, also, has been tinged by ancestral sin. Like all unhallowed things of the fallen world, human sexuality unbalanced can remain opaque, closed and graceless. It can deteriorate into narcissistic, abusive and predatory behavior, or sink into depravity and perversion. It can become an addiction of the worse kind. The other in the sexual relation becomes a body of desire; an object to be possessed, used and abused.

Sexuality needs to be brought into the realm of redemption through marital fidelity, modesty, tenderness, decency and prudence. The sexual experience develops into a means of self-transcendence and becomes a window through which God's love and life shine into marital love and life. The human body becomes a body of communion and an opportunity for personal growth and transparency. The physical relationship is transformed into a union of persons, and more.

"Through the natural relationship of marriage," writes Christos Yiannaras, *"the two are united into one flesh, and through the eucharistic relationship of the mystery of marriage, this one flesh, the shared life of two persons, is made incorruptible and immortal."*

Human sexuality is fundamentally good; a gift from God. It exists to further the growth of mutual companionship in marriage by drawing husband and wife into a loving, caring and intimate communion of body and soul. Most importantly, it allows the spouses to become co-creators with God. Creation of a new life from fleshly love is a special privilege, joy and blessing. Through it, God grants the world a share of His omnipotence. As responsible and loving human beings, a husband and wife share in God's creative power and imitate His self-giving love; His providential concern for creation.

The conception, birth and nurture of children constitute another basic aim and characteristic of marriage. Children are the very crown of the marital union and mysterious presence of God's creative

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love in the lives of two people. However, a childless marriage, due to biological infertility, is no less complete than a marriage with children.

Children are worthy of great love and careful upbringing. St. Paul tells parents to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephes. 6:4). While providing for their physical well-being, parents must also protect their children against sin, provide them with spiritual guidance, and create for them a loving environment in which they can develop into mature, caring human beings. The complex task of raising children requires patience, openness, faith and immeasurable love and understanding. According to Father Alexander Elchaninov, "the most important thing is that children should see their parents leading an intense interior life."

Sexual relations are related to the mutual fulfillment of the spouses and then to child-bearing. The decision, therefore, to suspend fertility through the use of contraceptives is not necessarily in violation of natural law. Regarding this matter, Metropolitan Chrysostomos Zapheris notes the following: *"While the Orthodox Church fully acknowledges the role of procreation in the marital sexual act, it does not share the deterministic understanding of the act ...which ignores love as a dimension of great value in sexual intercourse between husband and wife."*

Creation of new life requires serious, prayerful, honest and sincere reflection. While some forms of contraception are more admissible than others, it is clear that abortion is not an acceptable form of birth control. The decision to regulate the size of one's family is the personal responsibility of the spouses. A serious commitment to the Gospel, however, precludes decisions that are based solely on hedonistic, selfish and prideful reasons. We do well, at this point, to remember the words of a noted Orthodox theologian: *"Since Christ's resurrection a realm of non-death has opened up in the opacity of the world ...Contrary to widespread opinion, my body is not myself. It is my self only when it belongs to Christ, when it takes its place in the stream of life of the communion of saints, in the fountainhead of living water of the Body of Christ."*

## **When a Marriage Fails**

Unfortunately, marriages can fail and cause painful and distressful conditions that lead to separation and divorce. Divorce produces as much anguish as death because it is the withering away of a living relationship into emotional and spiritual deadness; often times after cruel and humiliating experiences.

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The Church admits divorce and remarriage as a concession to human frailty and imperfection. These concessions reflect the Church's pastoral concern for wounded souls and her refusal to abandon divorced persons in their sin, failure, weakness, distress, dilemma and pain. Thus, choice here is between right and wrong marriages in the context of a lifelong union and pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God.

## **The Marriage Rite**

The service of marriage currently in use by the Church consists of two separate, independent and self-contained rites, that have been linked together for many centuries: Engagement which is also called "The Service of the Betrothal"; which is also referred to as "The Service of Crowning."

In the early Church marriages of Christians were accomplished by agreement of the couple with the blessing of the bishop or presbyter, usually given in the context of the Eucharist. By the fourth century, the Rite of Crowning had developed and was performed within the eucharistic celebration. A marriage rite separate from the eucharist began to appear in the ninth century.

The formation of two separate rites, one for betrothal and another for marriage, had begun early. The purpose of the Betrothal Service was to confirm and hallow the pledge of the future marriage. It was customary to conduct it at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. The purpose of the Marriage Service was to consecrate the marital union; it was conducted during the course of the Divine Liturgy. In another stage of its development, the Rite of Crowning was celebrated within the context of a Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts. The practice of drawing these two independent rites into a single liturgical event, separate from the Eucharist, began in the tenth century. It soon became common place, and finally, the norm.

The Service of Betrothal is relatively short. It contains a set of petitions and three prayers. It is characterized by the exchange and the putting on of rings. The rings constitute the sign of the couples' voluntary pledge to enter into marriage and to live together in faith, harmony, truth and love. The Service of Crowning is longer and more complex. Besides petitions, several prayers, and two scripture readings, it contains a number of liturgical actions that include the joining of hands, the partaking of blessed wine from a common cup and a solemn joyous procession. The characteristic ritual, however, is the act of crowning the couple, hence the name of the service. With eloquent words

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and didactic symbolism this service emphasizes the rich blessings, the special joys and the great responsibilities of Christian marriage.

## **A Note on Celibacy**

Celibacy is another way of living the Gospel. A person chooses to remain sexually unengaged in order to better obey the Lord's commandments. Monastics also choose to reject pleasures and relationships of the world, not because these are inherently bad, but because they have a far greater desire, to discover the face of God through asceticism. The monk does not suppress eros. He/she transfigures it by grace. St. John of the Ladder says it in these words: "blessed is he who has a passion for God no less violent than the lover has for his beloved."

The celibate, who is detached from things of the world and accepts virginity for the glory of God, imitates angelic life and manifests the condition of the resurrectional life," when those raised from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage" (Mk 12:25).

## **The Mystery of Holy Unction**

### **The Dogmatic Background**

It has been noted that we are born into a situation, in which pain and sorrow are ever-present realities. Sickness, suffering and death are the terrible proofs that humanity groans under the heavy burden of ancestral sin (Rom. 5:12-14; 8:18-25). In the words of Panagiotis Chrestou, "we bear by birth that nature, which Adam and Eve corrupted." As if the burdens of our fallen, moribund nature were not enough, some choose to exacerbate the dreadfulness of our condition by abusing the soul and body with every manner of excess.

Sickness and the body's eventual death are inescapable indignities which we suffer because of the fall. They are not forms of divine retribution, but the result of our deep alienation from God and our rejection of Him. God allows death, not as a punishment, but to terminate graceless life, so that it may be restored to its fullness in the resurrection.

*"Since, through man, sin came into the world, and through sin death, it pleased God to give us His Son, in order to condemn sin in His flesh, so that those who died in Adam may be brought to life in Him" (Liturgy of St. Basil).*

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Christ "took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matt 8:17; Is 53:4). He overcame the world, by loosening the bonds of death and opening, for all flesh, a path to the resurrection from the dead. By participating in his deified human nature, humanity has access to imperishable life.

## **The Constitution of the Holy Unction**

The Mystery of Holy Unction is established upon the words and actions of our Lord Jesus Christ. It embodies, extends and continues his healing ministry. It is the sign of his transforming presence in a bruised and hurting world, and the emblem of His promise to deliver us from sin and corruption. It is the manifestation of the Kingdom and the sign of what God has in store for the world when it reaches its state of ultimate completion. While the reign of God has not yet come in power, the mighty deeds of Christ disclose and proclaim the mystery of humankind's renewal: "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt 11:5-6). The Mystery of Holy Unction places the sick into this eschatological reality, where suffering, corruption and death are overcome, even in the present time. The healing ministry of the Church is patterned after the healing ministry of Christ; it addresses humanity's need for deliverance. A succinct description of the form and meaning of this ministry, from apostolic times to the present age, is found in the Epistle of James: *"Is any among you sick? Let him call the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and prayers of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins he will be forgiven"* (James 5:14-15).

Holy Unction is a sacrament of faith. It seeks to raise up hope and impart courage and peace to the sick person by alleviating anxieties, frustrations and feelings of alienation that often afflict the sufferer. It communicates spiritual power so that the trials of sickness are borne with fortitude and the temptations that lead to despair are resisted and overcome.

Holy Unction does not serve as a substitute for medical treatment, nor is the priest a replacement for the physician. Medical science is, itself, a gift of God, and a sign of His providential benevolence, wisdom and love. (Sirach 1:1, 38:1-15). In time of illness we are guided by the words of Scripture: *"When you are sick do not be negligent, but pray to the Lord, and He will heal you. Give up your faults and direct your hands aright, and cleanse your heart from all sins ... And give the physician his place, for the Lord created him ... There is a time when success lies in the hands of physicians, for they too will*

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*pray to the Lord that he should grant them success in diagnosis and in healing, for the sake of preserving life" (Sirach 38: 9-10, 12-14).*

The gift of healing is, first of all, a restoration of interior justice and holiness; an entrance into the peace of God. While "healing is certainly a much-desired effect... it is not an indispensable condition for the existence of the sacrament," notes Elie Melia. Holy Unction allows the sick person to share in Christ's victory over sin and death by "conforming him or her in some degree to the body of the risen Lord and by disposing the whole person - body, soul and spirit - for eternal life." The essential purpose of Holy Unction is to raise up the sick into the realm of God's Kingdom.

The Lord has commanded us to share one another's burdens, to visit the sick, and to care for the hungry and the poor. The sacrament of Holy Unction is the strong reminder to the Church community that care for the afflicted, those suffering from illness, injustice, exploitation, oppression, hunger, poverty and abuse, is a communal concern and duty. The Church has a special responsibility to minister to the ills of humanity.

## **Holy Unction as a Sacrament**

The Church's sacrament of healing has several names. It is known as Euchelaion or Prayer Oil; Holy Oil; Eptapapadon (from a custom requiring seven priests to celebrate it); and Holy Unction (from Latin, meaning anointing).

The outward sign or element of the sacrament is (olive) oil. It is an appropriate symbol for the sacrament, since its use as a therapeutic agent is known from antiquity.

As is the case in all the sacraments, Holy Unction is celebrated by a canonically ordained bishop or presbyter.

The service developed over a long period of time. It contains the following basic elements: a modified Orthros; a prayer for the consecration of the oil; a set of seven Readings and priestly prayers; and a prayer for the anointing of the sick person.

The sacrament is used for the sick and may be celebrated at any time, in the Church, home or hospital. In earlier times the sacrament was celebrated in the context of the Divine Liturgy.

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The Church celebrates the sacrament, with special solemnity, on Holy Wednesday for the whole community. The Church confers the sacrament upon all the faithful, whether they are physically ill or not, because we do not draw a sharp distinction between bodily and spiritual illness.

It may be that the use of Holy Unction in the middle of Holy Week is a vestige of the ancient practice of the reconciliation of penitents before Pascha. In any case, the solemn celebration serves to remind the faithful of Christ's power to forgive and liberate the conscience from the blight of personal and collective sin and to emphasize the glorious expectation of Pascha; the resurrection, redemption and sanctification of all life.

\*\*\*<https://www.goarch.org/-/the-sacramental-life-of-the-orthodox-church>

## Sacraments

[http://www.saintmina-holmdel.org/phocadownload/Servants/2012-2014/Part1/The\\_Sacraments\\_\(24Nov12\).pdf](http://www.saintmina-holmdel.org/phocadownload/Servants/2012-2014/Part1/The_Sacraments_(24Nov12).pdf)

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## **Session 4: Orthodox Spirituality, pages 38-59**

### **An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality**

*By George C. Papademetriou \* this is a reviewed and edited version by Fr. Daniel*

#### **Introduction**

The sources of Orthodox spirituality are the Holy Scriptures, sacred Tradition, the dogmatic definitions of the Ecumenical Synods, and the spiritual teachings of the Greek Orthodox Fathers. Orthodox spirituality is mainly expressed through prayer, daily Christian living, and worship, which ultimately lead to union with the divine uncreated Light.

#### **Man and His Purpose as Creature of God**

Before we enter into a discussion of the spirituality of the Orthodox Church, let us see what is man's purpose as a creature of God. Man is created in the image and likeness of God. The human destiny is not to achieve mystical union with the essence of God, but rather to attain moral and spiritual perfection by participation in the divine uncreated energies. Man, according to the Orthodox Fathers, was not created perfect from the beginning. Rather he was created with the potential to achieve perfection through grace. This, of course, was not realized because of the fall. In the fullness of time, God sent our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to become man, and through his suffering and resurrection from the dead, restored man to his original state of grace and enabled him to attain perfection. Christ says: "Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect." The ultimate purpose of man, therefore, is to become perfect in God, through love. That is, to attain perfect, selfless love of God and one's fellow human beings.

#### **The Christian Commitment**

The life of moral perfection, according to our Bible and the Fathers of the Church, is a call to a life in Christ, that is, a Christ-like life. Consequently, the spirituality of the Orthodox Christian is portrayed as a life in Christ, a life of commitment to the Lord, and a complete submission to his will. One lives only to do everything for Christ's sake, as Christ wants it and as Christ would do it.

The Christian commitment to Christ must be made by an inner, free act and is not compelled by any external force, not even by God. "Man is free and able to enter into relations with both kingdoms - the kingdoms of light and that of darkness." These kingdoms, the spiritual and the satanic, are hidden, not in the mind, but much deeper in the soul - "under the mind, beneath the surface of the thoughts," as

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Saint Makarios asserts. This fourth-century saint already had the notion of "heart," which is strikingly close to the modern psychological concept of the subconscious.

## **Moral Perfection Is Life in Christ**

Orthodox spirituality is described throughout the centuries as life in Christ, striving for moral and spiritual perfection. The mystical union in Orthodox spirituality is not the "devout life" that some sects claim but the communion of the person with God. In sectarian teachings, the "devout life" is a sentimental and emotional relation to "divinity." The Orthodox Church rejects this concept in favor of one, which envisions the meeting of man with the divine Person in a mystical way. Orthodox spirituality is union with Christ, with God. A spiritual person is one who purifies himself of all worldly and moral defects in order to be united with the love of Christ. The mystical experience takes place in this world, yet the cause, God, is from beyond the material world. Orthodox spirituality, as well as the whole thought of the Church, is based on the revelation found in the Old and New Testaments. Studying the Patristic interpretation of the Christian truths can see this. In the mystical vision of the divine energies of the advanced Christian, he experiences the divine presence within himself, as vision of the uncreated light and of the energies of God. It is especially through the sacrament of the holy Eucharist that we experience mystical union with our Lord.

## **Philosophy and Divine Knowledge**

The important Orthodox doctrine of the incarnation, that is, the divine Logos who became flesh, rendered philosophy and metaphysics irrelevant to our deeper knowledge of the divine truth. Christianity offers access to divine grace for the salvation of mankind through the resurrection of Christ. We cannot speculate about the Logos after the coming of Christ, who is the divine Logos in the flesh, and who sent the Holy Spirit to the world and "teaches us all things." The mystical experience spoken of by the classical Greeks is abstract and conceptual. That is, in ancient Greek philosophic contemplation, the soul or spirit goes outside the body to be liberated. Philosophy plays only a linguistic role in Orthodoxy, lending the use of its terminology after the terms have been transformed and purified of their secular meanings, "Christianized" philosophy and culture, as Father Georges Florovsky used to say. A master of spirituality, a monk of Mount Athos, describes this point in the following manner: "Many of the Greeks tried to philosophize, but only the monks found and learned the true philosophy." The Logos became flesh and revealed to humanity the divine revelation. He is the Truth and through him we can attain knowledge of the divine will. The metaphysical patterns of the philosophic speculation of the Christian revelation distort the divine mission of the incarnate Logos.

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## Three Ways Upwards

The Fathers of our holy Church suggest three ways to make progress in the spiritual life and attain spiritual perfection:

The way of catharsis or purification

The way of illumination, and

The way of perfection by total union with God.

These ways can bring the Christian who cooperates with divine grace to perfection. Synergy of the individual effort with the help of the grace of God brings us to our ultimate destiny of perfection. Our Lord's death and resurrection achieve for us our end in attaining the presence of the Holy Spirit within us.

The Philokalia speaks of "the increasing knowledge of God decreases knowledge of all else. In other words, the more a man knows God; he knows less of other matters. Not only this, but he begins to realize more and more clearly that neither does he know God." This point is of fundamental importance to Orthodoxy that declares the total mystery and unknowability of the divine essence.

The purpose of man is to achieve moral perfection through the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. In the teachings of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, the Holy Spirit leads the individual through the steps outlined above in order to attain union with the Spirit of Truth.

## Monasteries Are Spiritual Centers of Orthodox Spirituality

The spirituality of the Orthodox Church is best exemplified in its spiritual centers, the monasteries. The monk is a "martyr" or "witness" to Christ, the Son of the living God... the monastic model eloquently portrays the spirituality of the Orthodox Church. [The author] Dostoyevsky distinguishes between worldly freedom and the spiritual person. He says that the worldly or secular people "maintain that the world is getting more and more united, more and more bound together in brotherly community, as it overcomes distance and sets thoughts flying through the air." But in reality, the opposite is true, as is evident in international conflicts and wars. This famous Orthodox novelist expressed eloquently the Orthodox view that in spiritual subjugation, that is, in absolute obedience to Christ, one finds limitless freedom. This is especially exemplified in monasteries where spirituality is nurtured.

## Illumination

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God's act is pure light, and when the Lord appears to us, he always appears as Light. In Holy Scripture we read: "In Your Light we shall see light." Only in the state of illumination does divine grace makes possible the contemplation of the divine light. The hidden truths of Holy Scripture are not revealed to everyone, since illumination comes through the special divine gift of revelation. For this reason, in the early Church, the holy Bible was read only in the Church and only by a charismatic person. In the Orthodox Church, we have never experienced "bibliolatry" or "worship of the Book," as in some sects. The Church holds fast to the unadulterated spirit of the Bible as it was delivered to the Saints, and through them, to us.

## **Spiritual Warfare**

We are saved by Christ and in Christ. Yet we are still subject to temptation and to sin. Therefore, it is important to mention the fact that to acquire spirituality or moral perfection, we must wage war against the "enemy," that is, sin and the devil. Saint Makarios said: "I have not yet seen a perfect Christian man, one completely free (from the devil and sin)." And "although one is at rest in grace and enters into mysteries and revelations and into the sweetness of grace, still sin is yet present within." Consequently, as long as we live, we must be ready to fight against the dark powers of the devil. And "Satan is never quiet from warring. As long as ever a man lives in this world and wears the flesh, he has to war." The holy Bible is the most necessary means of spiritual warfare against the devil; it is also the chief means of acquiring knowledge of the divine will.

## **The Role of the Sacraments**

We must further emphasize the role and purpose of the holy sacraments in attaining spirituality. In the sacraments, we receive divine grace, and in the case of the holy Eucharist, Christ himself, who aids us in waging war successfully against the satanic powers. As Fr. Sergius Bulgakov says: "The heart of Orthodoxy lies in its rites." All the Orthodox rites and sacraments are meant to combat the powers of evil. The sacramental life of the Church is the chief means toward the attainment of spirituality and of ultimate salvation.

## **The Eucharist as Expression of Spirituality**

The question is asked: Is it possible without the holy Eucharist to reach the spiritual state of perfection? The answer is no, because Christ says: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you." Frequent participation in the most Blessed Sacrament of the holy Eucharist is the preeminent means for our salvation and spiritual perfection. Jesus said: "for my flesh is

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meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." Thus, Christ's statement makes clear that the "body and blood" of our Lord is necessary for our spiritual perfection. The Eucharist, therefore, is not received merely as an act of obedience to the command of God or of the Church; it is especially an antidote to sin and death. It is a necessary prerequisite for our perfection in our life in Christ. An important interpretation by Saint John Chrysostom makes this clear.

Paul does not say participation, but communion, because he wishes to express a closer union. For, in receiving Holy Communion, we not only participate in Christ, we unite in him. In fact, as this body is united with Christ, so by bread we are united with Christ. But why do I speak of Communion? Paul says that we are identical with this body. For what is this bread? That is, the body of Christ. And what do we become by receiving this bread? The body of Christ: not many bodies, but only one.

The holy Eucharist serves as the bond of unity in love. The holy Eucharist unites us to Christ and to one another. This is the makeup of the mystical body of Christ: the Church. This concept of the Church as the mystical body of Christ is very dear to our Orthodox tradition because it expresses the reality of Christ in the world and the unity of the Church, which is real only when Christ is the central figure. The Orthodox Church rejects the misconception, of sectarian origin, that Christianity is only a system of morals. It strongly emphasizes the fact that mystical union with Christ is a reality in his Church. The whole life of Saint Paul was "a perpetual system of morals in action." Only because of his personal commitment to Christ and his mystical encounter with the divine Lord, did Saint Paul attain spiritual perfection.

## **Father John of Kronstadt on Teaching Young People the Spiritual Way**

In this brief exposition of the vast topic of Orthodox spirituality an introduction was provided only as a beginning to your own investigation of the great truths of our faith. For some this may be regarded as a spiritual discourse not profitable to the ordinary layman. I am convinced, however, that all Orthodox Christians must acquire knowledge of the Orthodox tradition of spirituality, especially those who teach young people as well as the parents. Father John of Kronstadt addressed the teaching priests, the Christian teachers, and leaders in the following penetrating words:

Do not neglect to uproot from the hearts of children the tares of sins, impure, evil and blasphemous thoughts, sinful habits, inclinations and passions; the enemy and sinful flesh do not spare even children; the seeds of all sins are to be found in the children, too; show them all the danger of sin on the

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path of life; do not hide sin from them lest through ignorance and want of comprehension, they should be confirmed in sinful habits and attachments, which grow stronger and stronger and bring forth corresponding fruits when children grow up.

These words set forth the mission and goal of the Christian priest, teacher and leader.

## **Conclusion**

In concluding this presentation, the following suggestions can be made to those responsible for the development of spirituality in the Church:

In order to transmit Orthodox spirituality to young people, the teacher first must learn it through personal experience and through study of the spiritual writings of Orthodox authors.

Each Christian must acquire Orthodox spirituality in his or her own life by living the sacramental life of the Church and by participating frequently in holy Confession and holy Communion.

Responsible Christians ought to communicate to young people the great spiritual riches of Christianity and the importance of adhering to the Orthodox tradition of spirituality.

All of us, priests, Church School teachers, leaders, faithful Christians - young and old, and especially parents, have a responsibility to emphasize to young people the importance of their personal commitment to Christ and of their sacramental communion with Him. You need to continue your spiritual reading for your spiritual growth. Contact any Orthodox bookstore for a catalogue

\*<https://www.goarch.org/-/an-introduction-to-orthodox-spirituality>

## **God in your prayers and Spiritual Life, by HH Pope Shenouda**

Lots of people, in their spiritual life, fight on their own, without letting God in with them to ask Him strength and assistance, forgetting the Lord's saying: "for without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Those people, they don't ask God to be with them in whatever they do. On the contrary each one of them depends only on his own thinking or on someone else's, not putting in mind God's work in him or for him!! At the same time Jesus says: "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (Jn. 16:24).

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And many people when they intend to live in holiness or even intend to grow in the life of holiness they take many vows and give many promises as if they, with their own power, can actually do what they had promised to! They don't even ask for God's help when it comes to fulfilling those vows or promises. With confidence and feeling of the deceitful strength they think they can fulfill their vows. The branch of a vine can never grow or bear fruit unless the vine's juice passes and reaches it otherwise it dies, as God says: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit" (Jn. 15:5). So, do you rely on your own self, in all the details of your life, or do seek the Lord and depend on Him?

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If you want to live correctly, you should continually seek God's assistance and grace in every work you do constantly and all the time, ask Him to grant you wisdom, strength and blessing... This is very much clear in our ritual prayers whether from the Agpeya, most of the Psalms or in the Liturgy Prayer...it is beautiful that song which says "hold my hands and lead me according to Your own will..." Do you rely on our Lord in your daily life, is He the One who holds your hand and take the lead? Or do you lead yourself according to your own will?!

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Let's take an example on the life of purity and repentance, the life of holiness: We say to the Lord in the Divine Liturgy "Purify our souls, our bodies, and our spirits". We also add to it in the Fraction "our hearts, our eyes, our understanding, our thoughts and our consciences."

We are not making promise to be pure, we are actually asking the Lord to grant us this purity. We pray in the Absolution of the 3rd hr Prayer saying "send forth upon us the grace of Your Holy Spirit, and purify us from all defilement of body and spirit. Change us into a spiritual manner of life, that we may walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh"; all of these are supplications in our prayers and not vows that we take...and at the end of the 12th Hour Prayer we say "Graciously accord, O Lord, to keep us this night without sin..."

In Psalm 50 which we repeat it in every prayer we say "You shall sprinkle me with Your hyssop, and I shall be purified: You shall wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow", "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin"...all of that is God's work in us, without god we cannot on our own become pure...He is the One who washes us from our sin, purify and cleanses us...

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So beautiful is that supplication in the Book of Jeremiah "Restore me, and I will return" (Jer. 31:18). And here God's work in our repentance is clearly perceived. Mar Isaac the bishop of Nineveh says "Drawn away by the Devil, he who thinks that there is any other access into repentance except by praying"...

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Therefore, ask the Lord to grant you repentance according to His true promise in the Book of Ezekiel the Prophet who says: “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...” (Ezek. 36: 25-27).

Doesn't this remind us with the prayer of David the Prophet in Psalm 50 “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit in my inward parts” ... And he also says in the big Psalm “Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness” So pray brethren and say “Lord make me resent sin” “make me love you” “strengthen the bars of my gates” “deliver me from offences” “save me from my own sinful attributes and from my persistent trespasses” ... “conduct my footsteps” ... Isn't that what God taught us to say in the Lord's Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”?

In your prayer, you always need to ask for help. We cry out to the Lord in our prayers and say” O God, be mindful to my help; make haste, O Lord, to help me” (Ps. 69), and we repeat this Psalm in the prayer of the 1st hour, the 6th hour and the Midnight Prayer. Monks also pray this Psalm in the Veil Prayer. As we seek help from God; so we tell Him “For we have no helper in our hardships and tribulations but You.” You've got to fight, not only using your own will but you should ask God for help saying with the chanter in the Psalm “My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.” (Ps. 25:15).

You seek help from God because the Bible tells you: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding ... Do not be wise in your own eyes.” (Prov. 3:5,7). Besides, don't depend only on your spiritual desires. Those desires are never fulfilled without God's assistance...for as long as you have spiritual desires, Satan also will still have the desire to obstruct your path if it were not for God's help which keeps him off...

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How deep and beautiful is what we say in the Absolution of the 1st hour Prayer: “Grant us to please You this present day” ... Here, we are not promising God or taking any vows to do what pleases Him; rather we are asking Him to grant us the help that we need to be able to please Him...its only a grace granted to us from His side.

We also say to the Lord “Guard us from every bad thing, from every sin, and from every adversative power”, that guarding or protection is one of the means by which God offers us His help through His

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strength which help saving us. We also say in the Psalm “My strength and my praise is the Lord, and He has become unto me a salvation.” (Ps. 117). And in seeking help we pray: “Give me strength to do the good;” “Make my way straight before You;” “Ease our paths;” “Save me from my enemies.”

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In seeking help, we also ask God to surround us with His angels and protect us. In the absolution of 12th hour prayer we say: “Send us an angel of peace to protect us from every evil, and every affliction, and every temptation of the enemy.” Lots of people ask for the angel of peace to be with them in their travels, so who asks as well that the angel of peace might also guard him from every evil and from and every temptation of the enemy?!

We also seek the angels’ protection and ask for it, at the conclusion of every hour in the Agpeya we pray “Surround us by Your holy angels, that, by their camp, we may be guarded and guided, and attain the unity of faith, and the knowledge of Your imperceptible and infinite glory...”

How nice it is that we can have relation with the angels in our prayers... In our prayer too, the Church teaches us to ask God for knowledge and guidance. We don’t claim that we know everything, we ask God to give us that knowledge in everything...His disciples said to Him “teach us to pray.” (Lk. 11:1). Who at that time didn’t know how to pray?! It is a lesson in seeking knowledge in everything even in praying...and so, the result was that God taught them the Lord’s Prayer. In our prayers we say “Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness” and we say “Guide us to fulfill Your commandments;” “Enlighten our minds, our hearts and our understandings, O Master of all” ...”Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.” We ask the Lord to teach us to pray, to give us the word which we say in the service, as the chanter says in the psalm “O Lord, You shall open my lips; and my mouth shall declare Your praise”.

Paul the Apostle says “praying for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph 6:19). The chanter also prays in the psalm that God may grant him understanding to His commandments saying in the big psalm “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” ... And so, no one should say “I know. I understand. I studied ...” Everyone should ask God for knowledge, for guidance of the Holy Spirit to all the truth. Even if we do know the good, we should still ask God to guide us in the way of truth, to give us the correct vision of the spiritual understanding and in the spiritual path.

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The chanter says in the psalm: "Teach me Your statutes, Your commandments, Your judgments... Teach me O Lord to do Your will... Don't you sometimes stand at crossroads and become confused in acknowledging God's will in your life or in a certain situation. So ask Him then to unveil this for you.

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Another thing you should ask for, that God might hear your prayer, accepts and answers it. As the chanter says in the psalm "Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications" "Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech." He also says "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice".

Not every prayer is acceptable in front of the Lord. Lets pray then that God might accept our prayers, and that our prayers are according to His own will and that He might answer them... We say in the psalm "Consider and hear me, O Lord my God.

Reprinted from El Keraza Magazine, issue Friday 17th June 2005 – 10th Paona 1721 AM

## **The Life of Repentance and Pure Heart**

*"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).*

We all wish for many things but not everything we wish for we get. Why? Some reasons may be due to lack of our resources, our weak ability to follow up our plan, the worldly desires in our hearts.

As Christians we wish for hearts of purity but we do not want to put the effort to acquire it. Our life is full of excuses, due to our life's demands, our lifestyle, and others' expectations.

We care more about how others will perceive us or say about us than our relationship with God. The people around us look to a religious person as he is out of his mind, weak, too boring, etc.... Therefore, many people, especially the youth, do not want to be associated with that look. Thus, they separate themselves from the church or they limit their worship to where they meet with the group of worshipers. Loving God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength does not mean that we walk in the world weak and boring. Our God asks that we guard our hearts from the act of sin. And you can show the love of God by your smile, the way you conduct yourself with honesty and integrity and being willing to help others.

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A pure heart is so precious to God, and the more you acquire it the more you love to be with God and follow His plan for you.

## **Now the question is how do we develop a pure heart?**

There are steps to develop a pure heart but most of all you have to have the will, the determination, and the perseverance.

1) *Repentance*: is the only way to cleanse your heart from the act of sin after you have been baptized. In the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-31, we see how careless the son was and how he wasted all his inheritance on worldly sins but when he came back to his senses he said, "*How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'*" (Luke 15:17-19).

- Return to God
- Heart of zeal
- Spiritual awakening
- Cleansing the heart of sin

Here the repentance brought back the person to God and freed him from sin and Satan's control over him, through repentance God will work in us and give us a clean heart.

*"Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'*" (John 8:34-36).

Repenting will move your heart to a better place and the Holy Spirit will work in you to guide you to the next step which is refusing the act of sin and going towards abiding with God, unless the repentance was not from the heart but due to no ability to sin because the environment, being shy, too busy, scared to being caught, etc.

How we can reach that level of repentance?

- Sit with yourself and search your heart
- Do not find excuses and justification

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- Do not postpone your repentance
- Stay away from the things that cause you to sin
- Confess and partake of Holy Communion regularly
- Pray and fill your heart with God's words
- Ask God to grant you power to overcome

Also, repentance will teach you to have a merciful heart toward others and pray and help them to overcome.

2) *The purity of the heart*: it is a life process and does not end until the Lord grants us the complete freedom of sin in heaven. So how can we reach the purity of the heart? It is the work of us and God, the more you work on abstaining from gossiping, cleanse your mind from thinking worse of others, or thinking about situations that has no benefit in your spiritual maturity the more God will help you and grant you the fruit of the spirit that help you to overcome.

## **Why God does not help us to gain the fruit of the spirit without us going through this?**

The heart needs so many adjustments to be able to have the simplest attitude, full of humility, childlike, and transformed into Christ's likeness; otherwise the heart will end up full of pride from all the blessing that God will give to us through our journey. *"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the spirit by the works of the law, or the hearing of faith. Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"* (Galatians 3:1-3).

Many people who started their lives with God fell in many temptations due to their pride and instead of starting over and thanking God for this grace and mercy, they kept sinning and left their cross.

Remember that Satan started his life as a shining angel and was full of purity and end up what he is now.

## **How to obtain the purity of the heart when we are living in this world?**

God wants us to live in the world have a family, education, get married, have children, and a career. But He also wants us, as we feed our body, give Him all His needs. Therefore, we should have time to

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spend with God every day on a regular basis and give ourselves time to examine ourselves and pray for God to give us help to overcome temptation and work in us.

Therefore, God's grace will surpass our expectation if we are willing to give time and effort and love for Him and others. May the Lord open our hearts to realize how desperate we are for His love and mercy.

*Written by Nagwa Abdou*

## **Spiritual Warfare**

*by H.G. Bishop Yousef*

### **Introduction**

Two worlds are in coexistence, the natural world and the spiritual world. The natural world is the physical one in which we live and which is visible to the eye, tangible to the hand, and audible to the ear. The spiritual world is as real as the natural, physical world but is not accessible to our human senses. We as human beings possess two types of nature: the physical and the spiritual. St. Paul confirms the existence of these two bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:40, the natural who understands only what pertains to the natural world and the spiritual man who understands what pertains to the Spiritual world. *"There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another"* (1 Corinthians 15:40).

### **Two Spiritual Kingdoms**

Just as there are two worlds so are there two kingdoms.

1. The first kingdom is Satan's kingdom occupied by the demons and all earthly minded people abiding in sin and rebelling against God. It is ruled by a debased system controlled and dominated in darkness by Satan. In Matthew 4:9 Satan professed his possession of the world *"All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."* Our Lord Jesus Christ in His last prayer (John 17) prayed to the Father *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one"* (John 17:15).
2. The second kingdom is God's kingdom heavenly in nature, ruled by God Himself and occupied by the angels, the heavenly hosts, the righteous, the departed saints waiting in the Paradise of Joy and the righteous on earth who strive to reach this kingdom by living a holy life according to the scripture being part of Christ's body the body of the church. That is what Christ meant by saying, *"the kingdom of God is within you"* (Luke 17:21).

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While still here on this earth, we are potential residents of either one of these two spiritual kingdoms based on our choices and how we conduct our moral life.

## God's Kingdom

Only believers in the Savior Jesus Christ, who are baptized and continue to live under the rule of God, led and directed by the Holy Spirit are residents of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God dwells in them. It also resides communally in the church, "the One Holy Catholic (universal) and Apostolic Orthodox Church" (Holy Creed). In the second coming of Jesus the Kingdom of God will be manifested and revealed.

## The Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual discernment is the tool to understanding what pertains to the spirit and the spiritual warfare. "*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Those who are spiritually blind or not in touch with their spirit cannot understand the nature of the spiritual warfare. The story in the Old testament (2 Kings 6) is the best illustration of the existence of the two worlds and what goes on in either of the two. During the fierce battle that was taking place in the city where Elijah lived, victory seemed farfetched to Elisha's servant, Gehazi, and he fell in despair. Elijah the prophet and man of God could see through his spiritual eyes what was going on in the metaphysical world and knew that victory was theirs. In order to restore his servant's confidence, he prayed to God to open the servant's eye to what was going on in the supernatural realms. Miraculously, the servant was connected and could see with his physical eyes multitudes of angels surrounding the city. This experience of having the physical eyes opened onto the supernatural world is neither the norm nor an everyday experience. However, we need to acquire spiritual discernment which is, by definition, the ability to connect with and understand what is spiritual.

## The Nature of the Spiritual Warfare

This is an invisible unnatural incessant war between the two spiritual kingdoms, between God and Satan, with Satan being the attacker and offender striving to capture God's children as captives in his kingdom. St. Paul likens this war to wrestling (Ephesians 6:12) in which residents of the Kingdom of God are a constant target under attack. But they enter this war already sure of victory because they abide in Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. "*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). This war is of three types:

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1. *Social battle*: between us and the world we live in. All the pain, sufferings, hardships, tribulations, afflictions, diseases, attacks of all sorts, and poverty are weapons used by Satan against us. Christ never promised us an easy life void of tribulations. On the contrary he promised us "*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33).
2. *Personal battle*: between the flesh and the spirit. Satan utilizes the flesh and all it desires to strike a war against the spirit.
3. *Supernatural battle*: between us and Satan with all his spiritual powers. St. Peter described this war well saying, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Peter 5:8).

The Gospel of the good shepherd (John 10:10) defines who Satan is: a thief, a murderer and a destroyer. Christ, the good Shepherd came "*that we may have life and have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10).

## **How and When the Battle Started**

The battle started in heaven with an angel named Lucifer, the beautiful and mighty (Isaiah 14:12-17) who rebelled against God's supremacy and eventually fell from his post and became Satan (short for Sataniel meaning opponent). A group of angels joined Satan in the rebellion. In Revelation 12:9, Archangel Michael and some angels fought the dragon. The name 'Michael' 'Mi-Ka-Eel' literally means "who is similar to God". Satan's tool is deceit and he "turns the world astray" stealing, destroying and killing; and as it is prayed in the liturgy, "we fell by the deception of the serpent". That is why we are repeatedly warned in the Holy Bible to take heed of Satan's tricks and deceit.

## **The Consequences of the Battle**

God knew that Satan would use his power of trickery to deceive Adam and Eve, so He warned them. But Satan overpowered them with his lies forgetting that God originally created them in His likeness and image and that the whole economy of the incarnation and salvation was to restore them back to His original likeness. In following Satan, Adam and Eve transferred themselves from the kingdom of God to that of Satan and drove themselves out of the garden by their own free will. The whole human race was in Adam's loins and inherited the condemnation inherent in the disobedience (Romans 5:12) and for five thousand years tried in vain to liberate themselves. But God's love and mercy followed

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them in the plan of Salvation "*He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel*" (Genesis 3:15). The offspring is Christ, the woman being the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the fullness of time God became Man to set us free from the captivity and transferred us to the kingdom of His Son's love (Colossians 1:13-14). God did not send His Son to the world to condemn us but to set us free (1 John 3). Christ bound Satan setting boundaries to him. However, like in an aftermath Satan.

## **The Consequences of Salvation**

Christ's dying on the cross granted us forgiveness, liberation and propitiation but did not take away our freedom of choice. In baptism actual exorcism takes place and we are spiritually born again into the kingdom of God. But that is not the end of the battle with Satan. Satan still wants to be the supreme ruler and still seeks to apply his deceitful techniques on us enticing people to temporary lust and sinful behavior. His rebellion will continue till the second coming of Christ when he will be thrown into the lake of fire and the Kingdom of God will be manifested ushering in the commencement of Eternal Life.

Christ's Redemptive act on the cross provided the potential to liberation but did not eliminate Satan's evil from the world allowing both to exist till the judgment day. But there is no fellowship between light and darkness. He who is with Christ cannot be with Satan at the same time, "*He who is not with me is against me*" (Matthew 12:30). This truth is revealed in the parable of the tares and the Good Seed which will be allowed to grow to be separated later on (Matthew 13:38).

## **How to Win the Battle**

Forewarned is forearmed. St. Paul warns us to be knowledgeable about Satan's tricks so that he may not take advantage of us through his maneuvers and tactics. If people understand that fights are prompted by Satan, they will stop attacking each other and will ally to unite in prayer and submission to God against a common enemy. "*lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices*" (2 Corinthians 2:11). Continuing in fights is a sign of carnality, "*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).

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## Conclusion

There are two spiritual kingdoms one belonging to Christ and the other to Satan. Christ's kingdom is one of peace, unity, love and friendship. Satan's kingdom is one of turmoil, fights, hatred and dissensions which are manifest outwardly in the physical, financial, relational, emotional, spiritual, and mental battles. Satan will not cease to attack us in order to take us captives. Therefore, we should be aware and fortified with the spiritual weaponry. The world may try to fix the evil in it through education, laws, improved environment but to no avail because the visible evil is the result of the invisible evil underlying the spiritual warfare and cannot be corrected by natural means. The question that is to be asked: To which kingdom do we belong? One cannot be a resident in both kingdoms.

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE COPTIC HOROLOGION (AGPEYA)

*By HH Pope Shenouda III*

The prayers in the “Agpeya” are the seven prayers recited at fixed different hours of the day. Each hour includes a general introduction, Psalms, intercessions, a few biblical passages, a closing prayer, and a general prayer to conclude all the prayers included at a specific time of the day.

### Why do we use the Agpeya for prayer?

We use the Agpeya when we pray due to the spirituality and idealism of its contents, as well as for several other reasons, namely:

It helps us to be in the presence of God.

A person may stand to pray and say only a few words after which the matter is over... he doesn't find much to say. On the other hand, the worshipper using the Agpeya finds adequately nourishing matter for prayer. This enables him to stand before God for a quarter of an hour of more in His presence... and for even longer than that. That is why it is possible to say that:

It teaches us how to pray.

We need to learn how to pray. Remember how the Lord's disciples asked Him: “Teach us, Lord how to pray” (Luke 11:1). By the assistance of the Agpeya we learn what to say in our prayers and what is the appropriate way to speak to God. Besides, our tongues and hearts become trained in conversing with Him.

A person who prays without the assistance of the Agpeya, will probably utter a few intercession and then close his prayer. Using the Agpeya, however, would make him realized that there are various

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types of prayers, such as those for intercession, for thanksgiving, for modesty and a broken spirit, for confession, and for repentance. Besides, there are prayers for glorification and praise, for expressing love, and for meditating upon the beautiful divine characteristics of the Holy One.

For example, when you recite the prayer: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth, Heaven and Earth are full of you honor and glory” ... you are not asking/interceding for anything. Neither is this a prayer for thanksgiving or repentance, but you are here glorifying God. Besides, you are meditating upon His holiness and greatness. When you say, at the end of your prayers of every hour: “Christ our good Lord, the long suffering, exceedingly merciful, and extremely compassionate, who loves the righteous and is merciful to the sinners...”, you are, in this instance, meditating upon God’s beautiful characteristics. It teaches us how to praise and glorify God.

It teaches us to glorify and meditate upon His beautiful traits... consequently, many of the Psalms contain the expression: “Praise the Lord” ... “Praise, O servants of the Lord” ... “Sing to the Lord a new song” ... “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God. For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful” ... “Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!”

So what is the implication and meaning of all this praise? How can it be achieved? We learn that from the prayers included in the Agpeya.

It contains detailed prayers and supplications that help us.

Who of us remembers to pray, on his own, for the remission of sins: “those committed intentionally and unintentionally, in knowledge and in ignorance, in secret or openly?” All these, however, are included when we sue the Agpeya to assist us in our prayers.

Who of us, upon offering thanks in his personal prayers, remembers to offer thanks such as those included in the Agpeya which teaches us to say: “for He has sheltered us, helped us, preserved us, received us, defended us, had compassion upon us and brought us to this hour?!”

Who of us remember to mention all the details that the Agpeya helps us to say by including in its contents in the concluding prayer for every hour: “Sanctify our souls, cleanse our bodies, straighten our thoughts, purify our intentions, heal our sicknesses, forgive our sins, deliver us from every destructive grief, distress, and heartache, surround us by Your holy angels, that, guided and guarded within their camp, we may attain the unity of faith...”

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Who of us asks, in his personal prayers, that he may be surrounded by holy angels to protect and guide him? ... When we are assisted by the Agpeya, we remember all these details besides our intercessions for our basic needs...

The topic bearing on the details mentioned in the Book of Hours or Agpeya is a very long one and is loaded with illustrations. To summarize that briefly, we could say that the Agpeya teaches us to pray and to examine everything carefully. Such scrutiny allows us to involve God in the details of our whole lives since we leave nothing out in our dialogue with Him....

God desires that we pray from the Agpeya.

We often pray and receive no answer as our prayers are not in accordance with God's will. That is why we say in our Lord's prayer: "Thy will be done..."

All the prayers included in the Agpeya are in accordance with God's will as most of them are Psalms which David wrote through the Spirit (Matthew 22:43), and which are a part of the Holy Bible.

Therefore, when we use the Psalms for prayer, we are actually using god's words to converse with him since they have been inspired by the Spirit and uttered through David's lips. In this way, we guarantee that our prayers comply with God's will.

The other prayers in the Agpeya have been set by the holy fathers, and they comply with the spirit of the Holy Bible.

It reminds us of important events throughout the day.

Probably we would not have remembered these on a daily basis had we not had recourse to the Agpeya.

- For instance, in the prayers of the "first hour" or "Prime," we commemorate the eternity of God and His incarnation. Moreover, we admit that he is the True Light and we pray that he shines in us and enlightens our being.
- In the prayers of the "third hour" or "Terce," we commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, and pray that It may work within us.
- In the "sixth hour" or "Sext," we commemorate the Lord's crucifixion and all the emotions associated with this event...
- At the "ninth hour" or "None," we commemorate confession of the thief at the Lord's right hand, and the Lord's death on our behalf.
- At the "eleventh hour" or "Vespers," we remember those who came to the Lord at the end of the day: at the eleventh hour.

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- In the “twelfth hour” or “Compline,” we remember death, the transient world, and the final judgment; and how we should get ready of that day.
- At midnight, we mention the Lord’s second coming and what that involves in the way of vigilance, repentance and tears...

Who of us can remember all these occasions or enjoys all their spiritual implications unless he uses the Agpeya to assist him?

There is no doubt that through the Agpeya, we can remember all these holy events. Moreover, they could become an integral and unforgettable part of our feelings and beliefs.

They could have a strong impact upon our souls so hat a change would appear in our daily lives and dealings.

It helps us focus our minds on the Lord.

No more than three hours pass, between one prayer and another, before we are ready to start praying again. In this way, we are enables to lift up our hearts towards God all through the day and night. Our thoughts do not stop, neither do our hearts and souls cease from turning to God.

Thus we are able to carry out God’s commandments: “That men always ought to pray and not lost heart” (Luke 18:1) and to: “Pray without ceasing (1 Thes 5:17).

It is easy to observe these commandments by studying the Agpeya prayers and repeating them without referring to the book. we can do so throughout the day, by lifting our hearts in silence, and without drawing anybody’s attention, even for a few moments... we observe time in the presence of the Lord which fulfills an ultimate need within us.

Then the brain despises sinful or trivial thoughts since it is constantly preoccupied and engaged by the words of the prayers he has learned by heart... and which, consequently, are in his mind even when it is not prayer time. These shild the worshipper against many evils, besides being a source of meditation when we consider the positive aspects of the mind.

It helps to teach us about Dogma, or the Faith of the Church.

For example, in the prayers of the first hour (Prime) there is a passsage taken from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. in it, he says: “I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life of worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace...” (Eph 4:1-3). This is a spiritual plan to follow throughout the day.

At the same time, the prayers include a Psalm which also offers spiritual advice to support us throughout our busy day: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands

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in the path of sinners. Nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is the laws of the Lord, and in the law he meditates day and night.” The worshipper carries in his mind this Psalm which inspires him throughout his day...

He next finds Psalm 14: “Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend...” This is another doctrine which the worshipper needs to repeat in his prayers and to remind himself of as he deals with others.

In the prayer of the third hour (Terce), the worshipper receives another doctrine in Psalm twenty three, which says: “Who may ascend into the holy hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? The who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully... In the prayers of the sixth hour (Sext), he hears the blessings and part of the sermon on the mountain and concludes the Psalms with the expression: “Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord.”

In the prayers of the ninth Hour (None), there is another doctrinal sermon on “mercy and justice,” which says: “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart I will set nothing wicked before my eyes... A perverse heart shall depart from me... Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy...” (Ps. 100). Even if the worshipper does not face such a situation, the Psalm at least underlines the correct attitude.

In the prayers of the eleventh hour (Vespers), there are many doctrinal sermons. To mention a few, we can quote the following: “This is the gates of the Lord through which the righteous shall enter,” (Ps. 117); “I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord,” (Ps. 121); “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it (Ps. 126).

In the prayers of the twelfth hour (Compline), too, there is a lesson on humility, (Ps. 130), in the words: “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Nor do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me.” There are, also, lessons about church work and ministry which David, the prophet, expresses in his words: “Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, Until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob” (Ps. 131). There is another lesson on prayer: “Behold, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, lift up your hands in sanctuary, and bless the Lord” (Ps. 133).

In the prayers of midnight, we receive a long sermon in Psalm 119 about our relationship with God’s Word, His commandments, and testimony. For example, “How sweet are Your Words to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” and “Your Word is a lamp to my and light to my path...”

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It helps us meditate and concentrate on the Word of God.

This is true as each hour includes a passage of the Bible. Thus a worshipper who uses the Agpeya find that he has studied ten of its passages to recite during different hours, besides the supplications of the three midnight watches, as well as the numerous verses contained in the Psalms.

Consequently, a worshipper who constantly has access to the Agpeya during his prayer tie, gets to know so many Biblical passages which assist him in his daikly life and have a profound influence over his feelings and demeanor.

It preserves the unity of the Church.

Thus the same prayers are recited by all the children of the Church, all over the world: in Egypt, Sudan, Jerusalem, in the East and in the West. They are the same prayers as those offered in America, Canada, Australia and Africa. Everybody prays with one spirit and one mid. Consequently, the feeling of participation and holy fellowship pervades. The same applies to the prayers offered during the different holy mysteries: communion, marriage, etc... The same liturgies, benedictions, and sanctifications are offered everywhere.

13) Offering the same prayers unifies the hearts and feelings as well.

In fact, this helps to create a spiritual unity too. This is achieved through the use of the same expressions in prayers, sermons, and spiritual doctrines which occur in the Agpeya. It is also attained through the participation in the meditations and emotions inspired by the wording of the prayers in their consequent effect of the feelings of the whole congregation.

In all these ways, we form on church: not only due to shared dogmas and rituals but due to shared spiritual features as well.

This cannot be realized, ever, if we confine ourselves to individual worship where everyone follows his own whims and thought...

It helps us attain the pure prayer handed down to us by the Holy Fathers.

In so doing, we preserve the holy traditions and ensure the unity of the Church through all the ages and generations, besides the unity of the Church in our own generations; and which is based on shared dogmas, rituals, and spiritual matters. We shall elaborate upon these points in future articles.

It instills the Christian faith in our hearts.

Every time we pray, we also recite the Creed of Faith which inculcates its teaching within our soul.

Through it, we also gain spiritual feelings. In the prayer "Holy, Holy, Holy" we further commemorate the Holy Trinity.

In the "Prime," we commemorate the eternity of the Son, His divinity, and incarnation. We remember that he si the Only Son enfolded in God's embrace.

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In the “Sext” and “None,” we commemorate His crucifixion and death.

In the prayers of midnight, we pray for His second coming.

In the “Terce,” we commemorate the Holy spirit.

In more than one prayer, we commemorate the eternally virgin mother, Mary.

The Agpeya, moreover, carries an exhaustive repertoire of the holy names and features of God.

Finally, through prayer assisted by the Agpeya we gain communion with the holy angels.

It regulates our prayer time.

It reminds us to observe the hours and encourages us to pray. Thus, we feel guilty when prayer time passes by without due observation. Probably, we would neglect prayer or observing it regularly, if we were left to our own estimation and freedom.

It contains the whole spectrum of human emotions.

They are prayers that express love, faith, respectful homage, consolation, joy and rejoicing. Each of these require a further elaboration.

The Agpeya and the Faith

The Holy Church does not differentiate between prayer and faith. Since we believe in God, we speak with Him in our prayers. This belief is revealed as we pray and use the Agpeya which included multiple ways whereby we confess our faith. Consequently, the worshipper who is assisted by the Agpeya constantly deepens his faith in God through prayers.

1) The Agpeya leads us to recite the Creed of Faith as part of our prayers:

By reciting the Creed of Faith we announce the Person to whom we are praying... thus ensuring that our prayers arise from sound faith. This procedure is observed in all our liturgies and not only in “the Prayers of the Hours.” Thus it is recited every time incense is raised, as well as during the observation of each of the seven divine mysteries. In this way the principles of the faith are engendered with the spirit of the worshipper. The Creed of faith is, moreover, recited by our children in Sunday school for the same purpose.

2) The same procedure is observed in the prayers of the first hour (prime):

We read a chapter from the Epistle to the Ephesians, where we say: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5).

3) In the Prayer of Thanksgiving, we mention the facts of our faith:

Thus, at the start we say: “... the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.” We also repeat this expression at the end of our prayer. Moreover, we mention that “glory, honour, dominion and worship” are due to “You” (the Father) with Him (the Son) and “with the Holy Spirit, the life giving and consubstantial”

4) We announce our belief in the Holy Trinity in several prayers:

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Thus in the prayer “Holy, Holy, Holy” we say: “O Holy Trinity have mercy upon us .” At the beginning of our prayers, we always say: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, one God. Amen.”

We then pray to every One of the holy Trinity separately: to the Father the Pantocrator in the sixth and ninth hour, as well as in other parts; and to the Holy Spirit in the prayers of the third hour.

5) When we are assisted in our prayers by the Agpeya, we express our belief and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ:

We confirm that He was born of the Virgin, was crucified on our behalf, arose from the dead and ascended into the heavens. he is the Holy Mighty One ... the Immortal [the Trisagion]: thus we commemorate His eternal presence, divinity and incarnation. In the gospel of the first hour we glorify Him as the Creator of the universe. We confirm that He has carried the sins of the world, and that He is the True Light , the Savior, and the Holy Word (Logos). We also indicate His priesthood “ according to the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110). We remind ourselves of His second coming in the night prayers.

6) The Agpeya helps us to express our beliefs in the Holy Virgin:

Hence we always state that she is “the ever Virgin Theotokos, the mother of Christ ... the intercessor”; “... the honoured mother of the Light,” to whom “from sunrise to sunset the faithful offer her praises.” She is the “second heaven” who is “full of grace”; “the true vine bearing Christ, the fruit that gives life”; and the most able intercessor.

7) Prayer assisted by the Agpeya stresses our fellowship with the angels:

We join them in offering praise to God, and we commemorate their song announcing the birth of Christ. Moreover, we pray that we might be “guided and guarded within their camp.”

8) The Agpeya is abundant with our beliefs concerning intercession:

There is, however, specific stress on the intercession of the holy Virgin Mary and the angels.

The facts of our faith as illustrated in the Agpeya or the Book of Hours deserve elaborate research.

However, we cannot deal with them all in the present article.

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## Second Month September- October

### **Second Month (September-October): Martyria = Witnessing**

Session 1: Definition and meaning of witnessing, martyrs as witnesses

Session 2: How to witness in this time and age? Are we influential or "being influenced" ? one or the other!

Session 3: The World needs us!

Session 4: Open discussion regarding Orthodoxy and witnessing (preferably in the presence of a priest)

### **Session 1: Definition and meaning of witnessing, martyrs as witnesses, pg 60-65**

## **MARTYRDOM: DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

By Olivier L. Clement

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**Martyrdom** means **witness**. But to bear witness to Christ to the point of death is to become **one who has risen again**. Christian martyrdom is a **mystical experience**, the first attested in the history of the Church. It is recorded right at the beginning by the example of Saint Stephen (Stefanos) the '**protomartyr**' (**first martyr**) in the book of Acts of the Apostles thus: (Stephen), full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God; and he said, "**Behold, I see the heavens opened. And the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God**" ...Then they cast him out of the city and they stoned him; And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, **do not hold this sin against them.**" And when he said this, fell asleep, (Acts 7:55-60). Vision of glory ... prayer for the executioners...when history comes full circle and another witness is put to death, this very death '**opens the heavens**' and allows **the energies of love to make their entry into the world.**

**Martyrdom** was the first form of sanctity to be venerated in the Church. And when there were no longer any martyrs in blood, martyrs in asceticism, monks, came instead. It was the monks who coined the saying that expresses the meaning of martyrdom: '**give your blood and receive the Spirit.**' The martyrdom returned.

**A martyr can be**, at first sight, any man or woman at all. But when they are crushed by the suffering they are identified with the Crucified Christ and the power of the resurrection takes hold of them. In very direct accounts, composed at the time without embellishments, at the beginning of the 3rd century, we see a young Christian woman in prison lamenting the birth of her child (if a pregnant woman was arrested she was not sent to execution till after the birth). The jailer jeers at her. But Felicity gently

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explains to him that in the moment of her martyrdom another will suffer in her. Her friends Perpetua, in fact, feels nothing when she is exposed to the wild bulls. She is momentarily spared before coming out of the 'ecstasy of the Spirit' as if awakening from a deep sleep. And the martyrs, before meeting death together, give one another the kiss of peace, as during the Eucharistic liturgy. For the authentic Christian, Christian, death does not exist. He casts himself into the Risen Christ. In him, **death is a celebration of life.**

Felicity was eight months pregnant when she was arrested...Her labor pains came upon her...She was suffering a great deal and groaning. One of the jailers said to her, "If you are already crying out like this, what will you do when you are thrown to the wild beasts?..."Felicity answered him, 'Then there will be another within me who will suffer for me because it is on His account that I am suffering...'

Perpetua was tossed in the air first [by a furious bull]. She fell on her back. As soon as she could sit up...she pinned back her hair which had come loose. A martyr cannot die with disheveled hair, lest she seem to be in mourning on the day of her glory. Then she got up and noticed Felicity who seemed to have collapsed. She went to her, gave her hand and helped her to her feet. When they saw both of them standing up, the cruelty of the crowd was subdued. The martyrs were taken out through the gate of the living...

"...The people demanded that the wounded be brought back into the arena so that they could enjoy the spectacle of the sword piercing the living bodies...The martyrs...came to the place that the crowd wanted. They gave one another the kiss of peace to consummate their martyrdom, in accordance with the rite of faith. All of them remained motionless to receive the fatal blow. (Martyrdom of Felicity and Perpetua, in the year 203 AD, at Carthage (Knopf-Kruger, p. 35-44).

The **blood of the martyrs is identified with that of Golgotha**, and so with that of the Eucharist, which imparts the inebriation of eternity. The **martyr becomes Eucharist, becomes Christ**. And that is why **the holy relics of the martyrs, regarded as fragments of the glorified cosmos, of the 'world to come', are enshrined in the altars on which the Eucharist is celebrated.**

O blessed martyrs, **human grapes** of God's vineyard, your wine inebriates the Church...When saints made themselves ready **for the banquet of suffering** they drank the draught pressed out on Golgotha and thus they penetrated into the mysteries of God's house. And so we sing, "Praise be to Christ Who inebriates the martyrs with the blood from His side.' (Rabalas of Edessa Hymn to the Martyrs [Bickell II, p. 262).

In the following passage from the letter written by Saint Ignatius of Antioch to the Christians of Rome—the bishop of Antioch was being led to the capital of the Empire for solemn execution, at the beginning

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of the 2nd century-almost all the aspects of this 'death-and-resurrection' are brought together. The martyr crushed by the teeth of wild beasts, like grains of wheat in the mill, becomes eucharistic matter; he shares fully in Christ's divinizing flesh; he reproduces, in a quasi-liturgical sense, the Passion of the Crucified, in order to put on the Glorified, and to feel his victorious power. Victor, the conqueror, was the name given to every martyr. In Christ, the Spirit is, for Saint Ignatius, a stream **of living water that leads to the Father**. Here the body of death is no longer dissolved by asceticism and spiritual experience, but all at once by human violence, They Martyr hastens **the coming to birth of the glorious body**.

"I am writing to all the Christians to tell all of them that I am gladly going to die for God...Let me be the food of beasts thanks to which I shall be able to find God. I am God's wheat and I am being grounded by the teeth of wild beasts in order to become Christ's pure bread...by suffering I shall be a freeman of Jesus Christ and I shall be born again in Him, free...let no being, visible or invisible, prevent me out of jealousy from finding Christ. Let fire and cross, wild animals, torture, dislocation of my bones, mutilation of my limbs, the grinding to pieces of my whole body, the worst assaults of the devil fall on me, provided only that I find Jesus Christ...My new birth is close at hand. Forgive me, brethren, do not hinder me from living. Let me come into the pure Light. When I reach that point I shall be a man. Allow me to reproduce the Passion of my God. May anyone who has God in him understand what I desire and take pity on me, knowing what it is that straitens me...My earthly desires have been crucified. There is no longer in me any fire to love material objects, only **living water that murmurs within me**, 'Come to see the Father'...It is the bread of God that I desire, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ...and for drink, I desire His Blood, **which is imperishable love**. (Ignatius of Antioch To the Romans, 4-7 [SC 10, p. 130-7].

\* <http://saintandrewgoc.org/home/2018/3/21/martyrdom-death-and-resurrection>

## Called to be Witnesses (literally : Martyrs!)

BY [FR. TEDIN](#) [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)

*"... for you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard." (Ananias' words to St. Paul, Acts 22:15)*

The first Christians understood that they were given a task to be witnesses (martyrs) to what they learned from and about Jesus Christ. They went into the world with the message they had been given – the Gospel. They proclaimed the Good News and through their lives witnessed to what they believed to be the truth about Christ, about the world, about all humans, about sin and death, and about God's plan of salvation. They carried the Gospel into all the world based on their faith in Christ with no way to know what would unfold in history as Christianity spread to new people.

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Martyrdom originally meant to bear witness to Christ. As history moved along the opposition to the Gospel and the Christians increased. After several centuries, martyrdom came to mean being put to death for the very things one believed about Christ and for bearing witness to the Good News. Even later in history as the Roman Empire dropped its opposition to Christianity and embraced the Church as bearers of the truth of God, the martyrs became a legendary class of heroes who by the drops of their blood had sown the seeds of Christendom in the world.

William Bixler in an article entitled, "How the Early Church Viewed Martyrs" ([CHRISTIAN HISTORY](#), Issue 27, Vol IX, No 3) writes about the evolving and emerging idea of martyrdom in early Christianity:

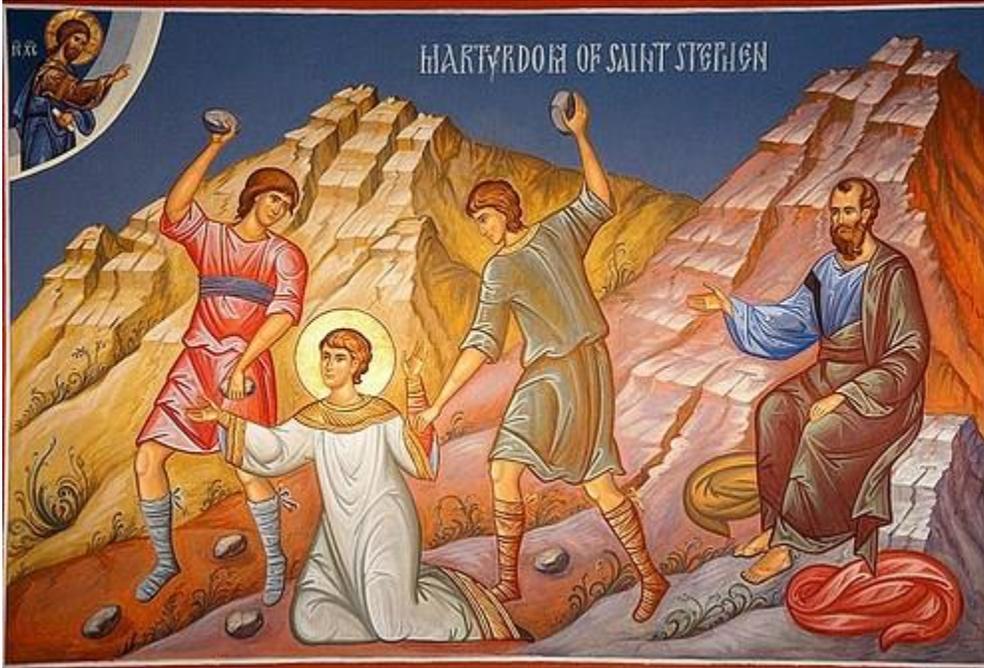
*"The ideal of martyrdom did not originate with the Christian church; it was inspired by the passive resistance of pious Jews during the Maccabean revolt (173-164 B.C.) . . . .*

*The Maccabean period also, however, gave stories of avenging rebels such as Judas Maccabeus. What prompted Christians to emulate the passive resisters such as Eleazar, rather than armed revolutionaries like Judas Maccabeus?*

*To answer this question one need look no further than to Jesus himself. The church understood martyrdom as an imitation of Christ. The Lord was the exemplar of nonviolence at his own trial and execution, declaring that his servants would not fight because his kingdom was not of this world. Jesus' words burned themselves deeply into the collective psyche of the Ante-Nicene church: 'If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also (Luke 6:29); do not resist an evil person (Matt 5:39); blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness (Matt 5:10); if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also (John 15:20).' . . .*

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*The martyr's nonviolent response to trial and torture was never equated with passivity or resignation. For the early church, the act of martyrdom was a spiritual battle of epic proportion against the powers of hell itself. . . .*

*For early Christians, such a battle was not waged alone. The*

*church, as G. W. Lampe notes, understood the believer's suffering and death as a concrete and literal realization of death and burial with Christ, enacted figuratively in every convert's baptism (Rom 6:3)."*



The earliest Christian self-understanding is that the very goal and purpose of the Church is to *witness* to Christ (martyria), to be His martyrs. Orthodoxy is in America not to colonize or to crusade or to conquer. We are here to witness to the fullness of the faith. We have something to which we can witness to the world – Christ. And we do this witness through the liturgy and spiritual life of Orthodoxy. .... We witness to beauty and truth, the mind in the heart, the cosmic dimension of the incarnation and the triumph of Christ over death and sin. We are to return to that earlier church model of being witnesses (martyrs). Witness is what Orthodox Christians do in the Mideast who live in countries dominated by Islam. Victory for us is found in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in our own overcoming our fears in this world to witness to the Kingdom which is to come.

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Jesus rejected all of the power of this world – conquering, crusading and colonizing – when Satan tempted him (Luke 4:1-13). His power is the power of love. We are His witnesses in America – to that power to love, to forgive sins, and to overcome death by resurrection.

## **Also Witnessing means:**

Witnessing by our actions ... our language ... our principles ... not cussing when everyone else does  
Not cheating when everyone else does  
Not conforming to the society.... Etc.

## **Session 2: How to witness in this time and age? Are we influential or “being influenced”? one or the other! Pg65-68**

### **WITNESSING TO CHRIST IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

**\*<https://lacopts.org/story/witnessing-to-christ-in-contemporary-society/>**

As we stand at the door of the new millennium, adhering to the Scriptures, the Apostolic Tradition, the Church's dogmas, and the patristic teachings, all may seem unreal and even “primitive” or archaic. The Orthodox Church has a reputation for incessantly clinging to Tradition, and that She has no message to bring to contemporary society. But as Orthodox Christians, how do we deal with such claims? How do we deal with a society, which can be described at best, as indifferent to God and religion, and at worst as antagonistic? How do we witness to Christ, knowing that Orthodoxy is a minority in a culturally heterogeneous society, which opposes organized religion? How do we make Orthodoxy relevant in our lives?

In our complex society, it may be difficult to give simple answers. But, by the grace of God, we will make an attempt.

All the Church Fathers teach that man was created in the image and likeness of God, and this image is never lost. All of man's efforts, whether consciously or unconsciously, is towards making this image clear. As Christians, we believe that this can be attained by the grace of God. However, because of sin, this image is distorted or buried so deep that it is no longer apparent. Yet, it is never lost. God created Adam from the earth's matter, dust. At the same time, Adam was made in God's image and was made alive by God's breath, His Holy Spirit. Therefore, he has kinship to God. It is a fallacy that Christian life can be separated into sacred and secular. The first being limited to Sunday mornings and a few moments of daily prayer, and the latter ruling all aspects of our life. Each person is called to be in continuous growth towards his full potential, the image of God. This requires that we witness to Christ throughout life and even unto death. This is where the correlation between “witness” and “martyr”

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comes in. Christianity was originally called “The Way” (Acts 9:2), and Christ Himself said, “I am the way.” (John 14:6) Therefore, following Christ is a way of life, which penetrates every aspect of our life down to how we dress, how we talk, what we eat (the fasts), etc. What life is all about is knowing how to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. This is our basic guide to witnessing to God. The problem arises when we want to accept God on our own terms. We want God to make life easy for us.

Something pervasive in our society is the negative connotations given to words such as “doctrine”, “dogma”, “The Truth”, “Tradition”, etc. Some believe there are no “objective truths” in religion, and it is all relative and we should not tell people what the “Truth” is. In our society, there is cultural and religious pluralism. People have a plethora of data in everything, and they can decide what they want and don’t want. This relativistic and self-centered attitude has, in fact, infected the perception of religion in many churches. People want to come to God on their own terms, and they end up making-up their own idea of what God should be. The end result is they create their own “god” and their own values, which may be different from the basic understanding of true Christianity. The consequence is secularization of religion.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe that God is the ultimate “Truth”, and this Truth was revealed to us through our Lord Jesus Christ and is inspired in us by the Holy Spirit. We follow the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit do what He did. We also believe that the teachings of the Church can not be given as a personal opinion, i.e. we can not “pick and choose” what we like and discard of what we don’t like. I must conform myself to the ultimate Truth, and do the will of God. Tradition is regarded as the voice of the Holy Spirit in the Holy Church, which needs to be heard in every generation, so that we can remain faithful to the Bible and make Christianity relevant to our lives. People associate stagnancy and complacency with tradition, because there is lack of change. But in Orthodoxy, we do not accept a time-bound view of Tradition. As the Body of Christ, the Church shares the mind of Christ, and the Church is alive by the Holy Spirit, Who is dynamic.

Christianity in Western society moves fast causing polarization and fragmentation, which are accepted as the norm. Contemporary Christianity focuses on approaching the Gospel from the human point of view rather than from God’s vision. On the other hand, as Orthodox Christians, we recognize that there are certain truths, which are central to the Gospel message and way of life. We are not afraid to remain faithful to them despite ridicule and even persecution. As Christians, we are called to live in purity in an impure world (2 Pet. 2:19). This is how we witness to our Lord.

From a Christian view, there is depth to life, which is often lacking in our society. As Orthodox Christians, we can say that man’s hunger for depth ultimately springs from the image of God in us,

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which has been obscured and distorted by so much secularization. There is a cry in the human heart, which tells us that there is another life in us, which we are not living. It is the life according to the Spirit. There is more to our life than the surface life of safety, comfort, status, and power. This deeper purpose is communion with God. When we distort the image of God within us, we lose our true self, and thus become unhappy. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is set apart, yet not taken out of the world (John 17:15). God leaves the Church in the midst of the world to witness to His goodness, love, and grace. This is our responsibility in this life, sustained by the grace of God.

The central paradox of Christianity is that in holding on to the earthly and temporal, we lose the heavenly and eternal. As the Fathers teach us, in sacrificing everything, we gain unimaginable riches. Like the martyrs and saints, in dying to the passions and lusts of the world, we live in our Lord forever. This is how we witness to our Lord.

Only when we realize that absolutely nothing exceeds the value of finding true life, i.e. the salvation of one's soul, do we understand the meaning of life. By spiritual discipline, we can live a fruitful and righteous life, obeying the Truth. Being Christian goes beyond just belief in Christ. It requires changing kingdoms from that of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. We have to recover the mind of the Fathers, which is the mind of the Church. As the Church of Christ, our actions and lives must witness and confess to the Kingdom of God present here on earth. The key to a Christian life in a materialistic society is the virtue of dispassion, which includes constant refraining from treating physical things as ends in themselves, and maintaining a certain detachment from them. The problem lies in seeing our work as a way of personal gain and luxury and not as a way to serve others. We manifest our love for God in our worship and our love for our fellow man by self-sacrificing service. Thus the Christian seeks to do good work for the glory of God, and this is how we witness to our Lord. Does all this mean we are better than others? Of course, not! We may be worse than others because we often do not apply what we are taught. In fact, we may be in greater trouble, because to whom much is given, much is asked from. On the Last Judgment, we will have to answer to what we have been given in this life, and we have been given an enormous treasure in our Church and our faith. The process of Christian growth requires commitment of our free will to walk in holiness and righteousness. St. Paul said it best when he wrote, "That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Phil. 2:15) This is how we witness to our Lord.

May our Lord, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the prayers of the saints fill us with every virtue and every fruit of the Spirit so we can witness to the Kingdom of God on earth and in the end may be members of this Kingdom for eternity.

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## **Session 3: The World needs us!**

*The Lord said to his disciples, "You are the light of world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called lease in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."*

### **Discuss**

- What does it mean to be a "light"?
- Ask how we get this light? (*Given to us by God*)
- How can we strengthen it? (*going to church, receiving communion, reading the bible, praying, doing good works*)
- Does it ever go out? Completely? (*It may dim if we stray from Christ's path, but never completely goes out.*)
- How to be make it burn brighter? (*renewing our faith: communion, church, prayer, good works, etc*) *To summarize, being a "light of the world" means working our hardest to live like Jesus Christ did because he is the best example of a "light of the world"*
- How do we share our lights with others?
- How can we let our light shine in our families, at school, with friends, with neighbors, at church, etc?
- Discuss the question, "How can you let your light shine in your family, at school, with your friends, with your neighbors, and at church?"
- Restate the Beatitudes in your own words. Give examples of how to live each Beatitude in your everyday life.
- Create a chart using each Beatitude as a guide for personal salvation and for a method of self-examination before the sacrament of confession.
- Read an account of the lives of St. Herman and Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Moscow [Resources and details of her life are in the accompanying unit.] Compare the life of St. Herman to the life of St. Elizabeth and discuss the examples each sets for the world.

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- Read North Star – St. Herman of Alaska by Dorrie Papademetriou to the younger classes in church school and discuss with the children the life of St. Herman of Alaska as someone whose light shines on the world.

**“let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven”**

Since ancient times, the Russian people have a saying ‘Words edify, but examples convince’, that is, while words in one way or another edify a person, a good example seen through real-life actions is what inspires people to do the same, and woe to the person whose deeds fail to live up to his words. In today’s Gospel reading, we heard the words of our Savior which were directed primarily to His disciples, and through them to all of us sinners, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:16), that is, let your good deeds on earth shine before men, so that seeing them, people would glorify your Father in heaven.

These Gospel words remind us of what the heathens said about Christians in the first centuries of Christianity. In the beginning, the Jews, malicious enemies of Christians, tried to distort the Christian dogmas by using all kinds of slander. For example, they said that Christians get together for the sacrament of the Eucharist and slay infants in order to drink their blood. However, in the end, all these slanders were brought to naught, and, as contemporary historians asserted, crowds of heathens converted to Christianity. “Look at the kind of life these Christians lead!” said the heathens with great respect and amazement over what they saw. The Christians’ real-life examples convinced them to accept Christianity and imitate their way of life.

Looking at us today, however, do many people convert to our faith, to our Orthodox Christianity? In the Far East, Orthodox people lived among the pagan Chinese, and here they are surrounded by the heterodox. What can those people learn from us? That is the question! Holy Scripture not only says that our light should shine before the heathen, but there are yet more fearsome words. The Apostle Paul wrote sternly to his brethren, “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom. 2:24). How can this be? It is a known fact that when a Christian missionary once arrived in a pagan land and started to preach about Christ, people listened to him attentively and respectfully. But then, they said, “Tell us, were those people who first came to us from your country also Christians?” Not knowing what this was leading to, the missionary replied, “Yes, they were also Christians”. They said, “Then go away from us! Your Christians behaved in such an abominable way that none of us want to be Christians!” This was what happened.

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And this was not an isolated incident. Instead of being a good example, Christians today are quite the opposite. They blend into their surroundings, living like everyone else, and our Orthodox Russian people are doing this all the time. They are no different from the heterodox surrounding them. By looking at us, no one could imagine how lofty and wonderful our faith really is.

How incredibly marvelous God is, in promising us eternal life, to reign with Christ for eternity, to eternally sing songs in joy and triumph in the never-waning day of the Lord's Kingdom! How great and wonderful are His vows! Yet, by looking at us, can anyone imagine that we live with this expectation? Instead, we are totally committed to this life which has sucked us in. Therefore, every time you hear these words 'let your light shine before men that they may see your good works' remind yourself that these words were directed towards us, and that the Lord in due time, at the Dread Judgment, will seek requital if we did not set a proper example to others by how we lived our lives. May the Lord through His grace set us on the right path so that looking at us, other people may truly appreciate the greatness of the Orthodox faith and accept it as their faith also. Amen.

St. Metropolitan Philaret of New York, Sermons, Vol. II, pp. 216-217

\* <http://stvladimirs.ca/let-light-shine-men-may-see-good-works/>

**Session 4: Open discussion regarding Orthodoxy and witnessing (preferably in the presence of a priest) – Prepare Questions for discussion, relevant topics**