Spring 2015

In Communion

journal of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship
of the Protection of the Mother of God

Fr. Thomas Hopko † Fr. Stephen Muse
Michael Gorman † Jim Forest † Nancy Forest
Frederica Mathewes-Green † Fr. John Garvey † Fr. John Jones
Archbishop Makarios of Kenya † Pieter Dykhorst

The End of Evil and the Good Man

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." (The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations," variously attributed; listed as the most popular quotation of modern times.)

THE WORLD IS beset by war, natural calamity, famine, disease, and every evil. What can be done, we ask? How shall we rid the world of evil? These questions are driven by the moral imperative embodied in the lead quote that we must not allow evil to go unopposed. Humanity today is taken with its own genius and independence. Convinced of our own transcendent goodness and good will, we strive to perfect the human condition by human right, law, genius, and might.

Is this correct? Self-proclaimed good men and their followers kill each other over competing "goods" all over the world with no apparent victory over evil in sight! As Christians, we need to redefine our questions or find better answers. Who do Christ and the scripture say are the good men, and what is the thing they must do?

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity [evil] shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Jesus Christ, Matthew 24:6-14).

"…not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you are unto this called, that you should inherit a blessing. For 'He that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.' And who is he that will harm you, if you be followers of that which is good? But if you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you. 'And be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.' But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good behavior in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing than for evil doing. For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:9-19).

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web site: www.incommunion.org

OPF International Address:
Orthodox Peace Fellowship, Kanisstraat 5, 1811 GJ Alkmaar, The Netherlands
tel: (+31.72) 515-4180, e-mail: incommunion@gmail.com,

OPF North America Address:
Orthodox Peace Fellowship, PO Box 76609, Washington DC, 20013
Alexander Patico, Secretary, e-mail: OPFnorthamerica@gmail.com

OPF UK Address:
Orthodox Peace Fellowship, c/o Seraphim Honeywell, treasurer,
"Birchenhoe" / Crowfield, Brackley NN13 5TW / England UK

***In Communion* Address:**
Pieter Dykhorst, PO Box 76609, Washington DC, 20013
e-mail: editorincommunion@gmail.com (specify if "to the editor" for publication)

Letter

from the editor

Dear reader,

This issue represents an effort to introduce ourselves to those who are not already familiar with us. As a result of our efforts, you may be holding in your hands the first issue of *In Communion* you've ever picked up. Perhaps a friend who subscribes handed it to you or you came across it in church. Maybe you saw it lying somewhere and picked it up because you've heard of us and you're curious to find out for yourself who we are and what we do. If we are new to you, you may want to start by reading "The Orthodox Peace Fellowship: a Fellowship of Orthodox Christian Peacemakers" on page seven, a short narrative that describes who we are.

As you read this issue of *In Communion,* you will discover exactly the sort of content we've always published, all of which is archived on our website where anyone may go to freely read. You may be surprised that we are conspicuously apolitical even though many of the topics we care about are those that perennially fill the public square with noisy debate. Yet, we do have members from all over the political map. No one must sign a political statement to join! But because the Gospel does not lend itself to any particular politics no matter how much we sometimes want it to, we seek to shape our attitudes and behaviors by looking to the words and example of our Lord, the Apostles, Church Fathers, Saints, and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church. We bring our faith to our individual political activities, not the other way around, recognizing as we individually grow in salvation that disagreements are bound to occur. What matters is fidelity to our calling to be peacemakers: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Nevertheless, we take certain stands that to some resemble standard political rhetoric (as examples: we are consistently pro-peace, which some misinterpret as appeasing anti-warism; others take our consistent pro-life stand as fundamentalist intolerance). I welcome you to read what you are holding, visit our website, and join our conversation, or start your own about what it means to be a Christian peacemaker in an increasingly violent world. You may decide to join us and contribute to helping us enlarge the conversation; but if not, feel free to make full use of the resources you find on our website. If you like what you see, please spread the word.

—Pieter Dykhorst

An example of Christian peacemaking may be found in Orthodoxy's response to living under Islamic rule as depicted in the icon on the following page by Onufri, the 16th century Albanian iconographer. The icon looks in on the time of Ottoman rule. Orthodoxy's call was not to arms, to its own reductionist and entrenched propositions, or to a conflation of cultural ideals with an Orthodox flavor but to drink from the well of living, life-giving water in the public square.


ΠΗΓΗ

From Herod to ISIS through Christ:

No Record of Retribution!

Having beheld the strange and ineffable humility of the Incarnate God the Word, O Divinely-blessed Baptist, when He bowed His Divine Head to thee and received a servile baptism, thou thyself wast wholly filled with great humility. Entreat therefore this Divinely-loved virtue for us also, who are possessed by pride, that we may cry to Him from a humble heart: Alleluia!

Wholly filled with the gifts of Grace, in finishing the course of earthly life, John the Divinely-chosen, thou didst teach all to please God well through fulfillment of the Law and repentance. Therefore, we sing out thankful praises to thee, the great teacher of truth:

Rejoice, planter of the law and statues of the Lord!
Rejoice, exposer of Herod's lawlessness!
Rejoice, zealot for his correction!
Rejoice, thou who didst suffer imprisonment and
bonds for the sake of righteousness!
Rejoice, thou who wast beheaded for the truth!
Rejoice, for thy body was given an honorable burial by thy disciples!
Rejoice, for by God's providence thy head was preserved incorrupt!
Rejoice, for it has granted consolation, sanctification, and healing to Christians!
Rejoice, for the faithful piously bow down also before thy right hand
which baptized the Lord!
Rejoice, for many miracles are thereby accomplished even to the present day!
Rejoice, for by thee the faithful are delivered from the dishonor of passions!
Rejoice, for by thee the sinful are moved to repentance!
Rejoice, great John, Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist of the Lord!

O great and most glorious John, Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord! Receive from us now this supplication offered to thee, and by thy prayers, which are pleasing to God, deliver us from evil of all kind, and rescue us from eternal torment, and make us heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven, that throughout the ages we may chant unto God: Alleluia!

O Baptist of Christ, Holy Forerunner, last of the prophets, first of the martyrs, instructor of fasters and desert-dwellers, teacher of purity and close friend of Christ! I pray thee; I run to thee. Do not reject me from thy protection, but lift me up who am fallen in many sins; renew my soul by repentance, as by a second Baptism. Purify me, corrupted by sins, and compel me to enter therein where no corruption can enter: into the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

("The Akathist to St. John the Baptist," Kontakion VIII, Ikos VIII, Kontakion XIII, Prayer to St. John the Baptist.)

Fr. John Parker of South Carolina recently wrote an article titled "An Orthodox Response to Beheading by Muslims" exploring the Church's historical response to the martyrdom of its children and what it should be today.

The essay asks rhetorically "is violence—individual or large-scale—a possible Orthodox response?" To shape his answer, Fr. John looks at the examples of martyrs beginning with the first of the New Testament, St. John the Baptist, and the first of the new Church, St. Stephen. With each saint listed, Fr. John points to the historical record and it's stunning silent testimony that "there was no record of retribution."

Retribution for the murder of John or Stephen would be unthinkable! Imagine if Jesus had prayed for help to save or avenge John the Baptist—the entire Gospel would have turned upside down in a moment. We try so hard to find any justification in the Gospel for violence but there is none. Jesus never appealed to the authorities, raised a mob, or led a protest. He committed no act of violence—even when he cleared the temple, there is no record he harmed anyone. When he had the chance and justification at Gethsemane, he didn't even encourage Peter's zeal. What we could have done with different words! "Well done, Peter. Those who live by the sword understand the world. Today you defended me, but the time is coming when you must defend yourself. Wait until you gain strength. Today we will be passive because we are weak—one sword is simply not enough."

One of the more remarkable aspects of the response of Jesus and his followers to the violence done to John the Baptist, Jesus himself, and the young Church is that their actions ran sharply counter to what might be expected. In fact, Rome saw its violence against them as preemptive—the authorities sensed rebellion everywhere. Palestine of Jesus' day was swirling with political and revolutionary intrigue—the Jews desperately needed a political, military Messiah, and had Jesus wanted to inaugurate his kingdom with violence, he could have: The twelve legions of angels Jesus had standing by in the Garden were probably more than enough. The space of calm into which Jesus was born was brief and rippling with unrest, but waiting for a champion. And Jesus ignored it, did nothing to encourage rebellion, and gave an example exactly the opposite of what any sane person would have advised.

Instead, when Jesus heard of John's murder, he retreated by himself, but when he saw people following him, he got back to the work of ministering mercy to them. After the murder of St. Stephen the Proto-martyr—who prayed that his killers be forgiven even as the stones began to rain down on him—"was there an apostolic uprising?" as Fr. John teasingly asks in his essay. Instead, through responses of prayer, love, and forgiveness, the Church swelled with the numbers of its enemies its love prompted to conversion! Stephen pointed the way as he was dying by praying in the manner of his Savior on the cross: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

As Christians scattered throughout the region in response to growing

persecution, they left us no record of raising bands of fighters to return to Jerusalem "to kill our enemies there before they come kill us here." Instead, they continued to preach to hostile reception wherever they went, often with the same murderous response. The historical record is instead replete with evidence like that from the trial of St. Cyprian of Carthage:

> At the trial, St Cyprian calmly and firmly refused to offer sacrifice to idols and was sentenced to beheading with a sword. Hearing the sentence, St Cyprian said, "Thanks be to God!" All the people cried out with one voice, "Let us also be beheaded with him!" Coming to the place of execution, the saint again gave his blessing to all and arranged to give twenty-five gold coins to the executioner. He then tied a handkerchief over his eyes, and gave his hands to be bound to the presbyter and archdeacon standing near him and lowered his head. Christians put their cloths and napkins in front of him so as to collect the martyr's blood.

We must try to imagine—we can't know—the human suffering these murders caused, the grief and fear experienced by the Christian community, or their struggle with hatred and desire for revenge, though millions of our brothers and sisters in Christ are living it today, many of whom are giving the same testimony the Holy Spirit has handed down through the Church from the time of the first martyr.

Fr. John wrote before the twenty-one Egyptian Copts were killed on a beach in Libya in February, 2015, but surely their witness may be added to his list. One mother who lost her son that day and couldn't be blamed were she to demand angry justice said instead when she was asked if she had a message for her son's murderers: "I thank you [ISIS], may the Lord touch your hearts and light a way for you so you don't end up in a bad place—light a way for you so you don't end up in hell." Another mother whose son was also taken said she'd invite his murderer into her home "and ask God to open his eyes because he was the reason her son entered the kingdom of heaven."

This makes no sense to the worldly minded because it is not of this world. It is the response of those who are in the world and know they are not of it. In "The Akathist to St. John the Baptist" we find joy, salvation, and consolation in contemplating not just the fact of his sacrifice, but in its purpose and Christ's ultimate victory at the end of all things. *IC*

The Orthodox Peace Fellowship:

A Fellowship of Orthodox. Christian. Peacemakers.

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

Let us call brothers even those who hate us and forgive all by the Resurrection (Easter verses, Orthodox Liturgy).

The Orthodox Peace Fellowship of the Protection of the Mother of God is an association of Orthodox Christian believers seeking to practice the Christian peacemaking vocation in every area of life, to bear witness to the peace of Christ by applying the principles of the Gospel to situations of division and conflict at every level of human relationship, and to promote prayer and worship, acts of mercy and service, and love for all human beings and for all of creation. We are not a political association and support no political parties, agendas, or candidates, and we promote no ideology other than that we should "repent and believe, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Were we to attempt to formulate an ideology, we could not improve on the beatitudes from the sermon on the mount.

From the earliest days of the Church, followers of Jesus have sought to live out their Christian faith in its fullness, working to build communities of worship, providing for those lacking the necessities of life, loving not only neighbors but enemies, seeking conversion of adversaries rather than victory over them, and practicing repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation as normal virtues of sacramental life.

This has never been easy. Each generation has had to confront the problem of evil and combat its structures and also has had to suffer the tension that exists between membership in the Church and citizenship in a political entity, be that an empire or a nation-state.

Often the teachings of Jesus have been dismissed, even by believers, as too idealistic. Yet every generation, even in the era of Hitler and Stalin, has been blessed with heroic witnesses to membership in "an army that sheds no blood," as Clement of Alexandria described the Church.

Among the principles that guide us:

- Aware that each person is made in the image and likeness of God, we seek recovery of a sense of familial connection which, while respecting national identity, transcends every tribal, ethnic, and national boundary. This is the oneness the Church mirrors when it is gathered before the Holy Table.
- We use our vocation and whatever special gifts and resources God has given us,

especially our participation in eucharistic community, as we strive to undertake constructive action on behalf of those who are endangered, from the child in the womb to the aged awaiting death, in every circumstance of life and across all boundaries.

- We aspire to eliminate violence as a means of conflict resolution, and we promote resolution of conflicts by mediation, negotiation, and other forms of nonviolent action.
- We pray that, while no one can be certain that he or she will always find a nonviolent response to every crisis that may arise, God will show us in each situation ways of resistance to evil that will not require killing opponents.
- We offer support to those whose conscience leads them to refuse participation in war and who struggle against evil in non-military ways. We believe conscientious objection to participation in war is consistent with the Gospels and Holy Tradition.
- We respect those who disagree with us and may choose to serve in their country's armed forces. We do not promote the naive notion that a nation may be pacifist as a national defense strategy and acknowledge that in our fallen world people often feel compelled to choose collective violence in response to evil. Nevertheless, we find no basis for a Just War theology in Orthodox tradition and, consistent with the earliest teaching of the Church, consider all war sin. Rather than seek to justify war, we are encouraged to exhaust all efforts to seek peace. We believe more wars would be prevented by focusing on doing peace well before war rather than waiting for war to arrive to argue how to do it well.
- We encourage the compassionate treatment of prisoners and their rehabilitation, with special attention to restitution by wrong-doers to victims of their crimes. We reject the execution of criminals as incompatible with the teachings of Christ.
- We commit ourselves to pray for all, especially fellow believers, who suffer around the world from all forms of violence, evil, oppression, and injustice that they may be delivered from evil, healed from their wounds, and enabled to find renewed ways to live in peace and safety.
- We further commit ourselves to prayer for enemies and endeavor to communicate

God's love for them, recognizing our own violence and praying that, through Christ's saving death on the Cross, we will be reconciled with God and with each other.

Thus we strive to avoid bitterness in dealing with controversy, seeking conversion both of ourselves and our adversary. Aware that we are in need of conversion not only in the way we relate to other people but to the world God has put into our care, we try to change our lives in order to live as priests of God's world, asking continuously for the Holy Spirit to descend and transfigure the earth. We seek to cooperate with efforts to protect and preserve the environment which do not involve violence, coercive methods of population control, the promotion of particular political agendas, or violations of the sanctity of human life.

Our work includes:

Theological research: Much needs to be done within the Church to better understand ways in which Orthodox Christians should respond to division, conflict, injustice, war, and the relationship of the believer to the state. We encourage research on peace in the Bible, peace in the Liturgy, examples of ways Orthodox people and churches have responded to war from ancient to modern times, and the collection of relevant quotations and stories from the Fathers and the saints. One significant result of this effort is the book, *For the Peace from Above: an Orthodox Resource book on War, Peace, and Nationalism,* edited by Hildo Bos and Jim Forest and published by Syndesmos, the international association of Orthodox youth. The full text of this reference book is also on the OPF web site.

Publication: Our quarterly journal, *In Communion,* not only provides its readers with helpful essays and news but serves as a forum for dialogue. The main articles from past issues of *In Communion* plus many other resources are made available via our web site: www.incommunion.org. OPF members are also invited to take part in the OPF List, a news and discussion forum.

Practical assistance in conflict areas: As one of our members, a priest in the Republic of Georgia, points out: "Activity of the OPF is of particular importance in those Orthodox countries going through war and the horror of national conflict. The

OPF can help Orthodox people to practice peace and tolerance and to show that war and national conflict are satanic traps."

Structure: The Orthodox Peace Fellowship has members in North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Its international secretariat is in The Netherlands. Decisions are made by the OPF secretaries and officers in consultation with each other, with counsel from members and the Fellowship's Board of Advisors. Our largest branch at present is in North America. There are occasional meetings and conferences in the United States and Canada as well as in Europe. We encourage the formation of local and national chapters.

A description of our vocation:

We are faithful sons and daughters of the Church, not the Church's rescue committee. Fr. John Meyendorff once said to a member of a schismatic Orthodox group, "We do not save the Church. The Church saves us." Our modest task is not to invent anything or announce a new theology or reorganize the Church but simply to reopen forgotten or neglected Church teachings regarding day-to-day life in a world in which enmity is always a problem, in which millions suffer from hunger, thirst, and homelessness, and in which war is rarely not occurring somewhere on our small planet.

The Church has preserved the Liturgy down through the centuries. It has preserved the Bible and the Creed. It has preserved the writings of the Church Fathers and the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. It has developed and maintained a calendar of sacred time. But it has been somewhat less attentive to calling us to account for the teaching it has preserved. Over the centuries, when state and faith were in conflict, we have more often been obedient citizens than obedient Christians.

We believe in a hierarchy of identities. We are not first people of a certain country, then Orthodox Christians. It is the other way around. We are first Orthodox Christians, then people of a particular state, national, or tribal affiliation. We renounce none of these identities nor do we ignore any of their obligations, but when the requirements of one identity clash with another, we are required to know which comes first.

We try to remind ourselves and our neighbors that there is no such thing as a good or holy war—that it defames God and the Gospel to use adjectives associated with sanctity and heaven in that most hellish of all activities, the organized killing of human beings and the destruction of the environment upon which all life depends. Every possible effort must be made to avoid war, but not by cowardly avoidance or failure to recognize evil for what it is and to resist it. Chamberlain was not a peacemaker. Those who fail to see and resist evil are its accomplices. Yet we believe that prayer and fasting are also weapons of struggle, that there is such a thing as spiritual combat, and that what we seek is not the killing of evil people—such a task would require a holocaust that would destroy the human race—but their

conversion, which is also our conversion, for the line dividing good from evil runs not between people or classes but, as Solzhenitsyn reminds us, right through each and every human heart.

We are people attempting, with God's help, to love our enemies as Christ commands his followers to do. This is not a sentimental undertaking but a soul-saving quest to be liberated from enmity. In the seventh century, St. Maximus the Confessor put it in these words: "'But I say to you,' the Lord says, 'love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you.' Why did he command these things? So that he might free you from hatred, sadness, anger, and grudges, and might grant you the greatest possession of all, perfect love, which is impossible to possess except by the one who loves all equally in imitation of God."

Our concern about the sanctity of human life is not limited to war. We seek to protect the lives of the unborn—not by denouncing women who feel they have no other choice, but to help them bring their children safely into this world and to do whatever is in our power to make the world more welcoming. With the same motives, we do not regard euthanasia as an acceptable solution for those whose illnesses seem to be incurable or who are severely handicapped. We do whatever we can in support of hospices for the dying, including effective pain relief for those who are suffering. At the same time we oppose taking extraordinary measures to prolong life when in the natural order a person is beyond hope of recovery.

Our view of peace is not borrowed from secular ideologies or political

It is only through ascetic struggle that a Christian can be liberated from fear and enmity. "O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages, Amen." —Prayer of St. Ephrem

movements. It is not based on the life of Gandhi or Martin Luther King or any of the heroes of nonviolence, even though we greatly admire such people and learn from them. It comes from the Gospel. We understand peace both through the words of Jesus and through his actions. We experience peace in the Liturgy and the eucharistic mystery and try to bring it with us when we return to ordinary life. Day by day we discover peace as the mystery of healing—within ourselves and between each other—the healing that comes from forgiveness, repentance, and love.

Peacemaking is not an idea or principle. It is how we live. It is Christ's life in us. It is less a refusal to do terrible things to others than doing those things which communicate the love and mercy of God.

We have heard it many times, but let us never stop remembering what Jesus teaches us about the Last Judgement: What we do to the least person we do to him. May God preserve us from harming the least person. May God give us the love which empowers us to be merciful to the least person.

Peacemakers are not rare. We find them everywhere: the parent sorting out a dispute within his or her family, the parish council member finding a solution to a conflict that might tear a parish to shreds, the priest hearing confessions who helps a penitent experience God's mercy, the missionary who helps awaken faith in another and points the way to baptism, the volunteer who lives a life of hospitality in a neighborhood others avoid, the driver who responds to dangerous actions on the highway with a prayer rather than a gesture of hatred. We could spend the rest of our lives noting acts of peacemaking.

Our fellowship exists to give witness that peacemaking is something absolutely ordinary. It is an integral part of everyday life. It has to do with how we pray, for whom we pray, how we listen, how we speak, what we do with our anger and frustration, our willingness to forgive, and our attempts to serve as a bridge between those who hate each other.

May God give us strength to persevere in being instruments of the divine mercy.

Must I be a pacifist to join the Orthodox Peace Fellowship?

No. Pacifism is not a Christian ideology. The term was coined in the late 19th century as a political philosophy and has since been used to describe a wide variety of philosophical and political attitudes toward various forms of violence at different levels of relationship from personal to international. The Gospel of Jesus Christ predates and excludes all political ideologies even while many are influenced by Christian teaching. Pacifism as is generally understood is a Western idea formed in a Christian civilizational milieu and often bears marks of Christian virtue but does not capture or fully reflect the ethos of the Gospel peacemaking vocation. But in its most simple definition, "the belief that all conflict should be resolved peacefully," pacifism is a great idea! The OPF does not reject the idea but does not endorse pacifism in any form. Some OPF members are pacifists; some are not. Instead, we simply look to Christ and our Orthodox faith and tradition for guidance in becoming

"The Capture of Christ," by Fra. Angelico, c.1440

fully Christian peacemakers.

The aspiration to eliminate violence as a means of conflict resolution is something all sane people have in common, yet few would say that they would never use violent methods to protect the innocent. All we can do is attempt to find ways of responding to injustice that are consistent with the Gospel. Clearly nonviolent methods are to be preferred to violent.

Peacemaking is not something optional for Christians. A major element of Christ's teaching is his call to become peacemakers. They are among the blessed and are witnesses to the Kingdom of God. To be a peacemaker, Christ says, is to be a child of God. In the years of Christ's life described in the Gospel, one of the most notable aspects is that he killed no one but healed many. He is not a warrior king. Caesar rides a horse while Christ enters Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. Even when he clears the Temple of people who have made a place of worship into a place of commerce, he does so using nothing more than a whip of cords, not a weapon that can cause injuries; the only life endangered by his action was his own. His final instruction to Peter before his crucifixion is, "Put away your sword, for whoever lives by the sword will die by the sword." Saying that, he healed the wound Peter had inflicted on one of the men arresting him.

In the chapters prior to the story of Jesus and his disciples in the garden, Matthew records Jesus describing in several narratives what life on earth would be like, what the Kingdom of God is like, about the end and his return, and the final judgement. Then after the Last Supper came the Garden, where Peter, thinking he had finally put all the pieces together, drew his sword. After telling him to put it away, Jesus said a remarkable thing that is frequently left out in telling this story but

when taken in full context, frames Jesus words about living and dying by the sword. Jesus asked Peter "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

When we consider the choice Jesus faced in the garden, we see it was not either swallow hard or chicken out, but was rather a choice between implementing God's way of salvation or…what would the other choice have been? The alternative had to include slaughtering his enemies! The plan Satan offered Jesus in the desert involved glory, bounty, and bloodshed; surely the world's template for victory remained an option for Jesus here. Indeed, it seems we too face the legitimate option of violence in dealing with our enemies. Jesus seems to have said not that we have no right to choose, but rather "How will scripture be fulfilled if you do it your way?"

And then, on the cross, far from calling down his Father's vengeance on those who participated in his execution, Jesus appeals for mercy: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." Again and again, throughout his earthly life Christ gives his followers a witness of making peace and restoring communion through forgiveness, love, mercy, and sacrifice.

THERE IS QUITE a lot on the Orthodox Peace Fellowship web site that helps clarify what Christian peacemaking involves and its implications in one's own life. Visit us at www.incommunion.org for resources that include past essays from the journal, membership options, and new postings.

Becoming a member:

The Orthodox Peace Fellowship links Orthodox Christians from different traditions and is not under the sponsorship of any jurisdiction. Membership is open to those who embrace the principles of the OPF and that the OPF is rooted in the Orthodox Church and Tradition. Those who wish to receive our journal but not to become members may specify so when they pay the annual donation amount. The annual donation for members and donors is $35, 35 euros, or 25 pounds sterling. Anyone may donate to receive *In Communion.*

Living in Communion:

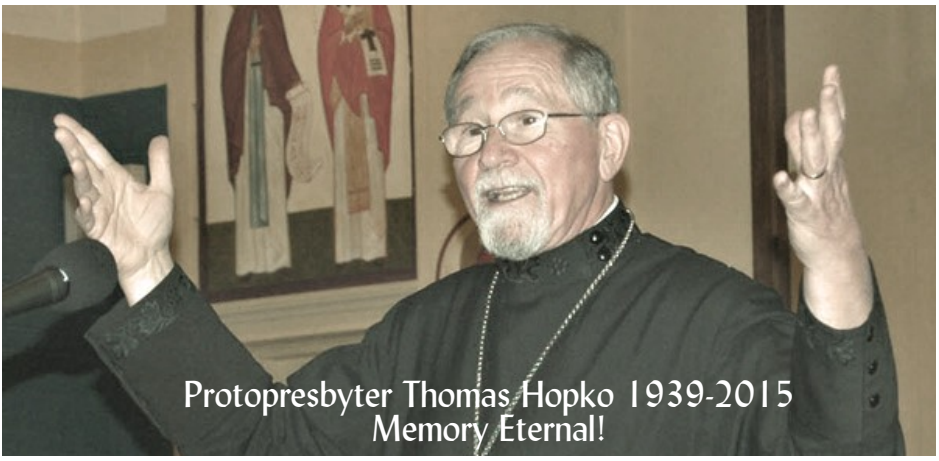
Interview with Father Thomas Hopko

IC: Father Thomas, many people recognize there is a value in forgiving and being forgiven but see it only on the human level without a theological dimension. Would you say forgiveness is a divine act?

Fr. T: If a person is inspired by the spirit of God, he or she can forgive, certainly. People can forgive. But I'm not sure you can say that in general there is the feeling that forgiveness is of value. I have met people who would say, "I don't care. I can go on and live my life; it really doesn't matter to me. If I'm not bothering you and you aren't bothering me, why be reconciled?" This is plain indifference.

Another reason why people don't value forgiveness is that they consider it to be collusion with evil. They feel that if a person has done something really terrible, he or she should be reminded of it until death and, moreover, that the evil should be avenged. And of course, most of us feel that any offense committed against us is irreparable. Nothing that the other person does can ever cancel it. If you kill my child, for example, there is nothing you can do in reparation, and for me to forgive would simply be to condone the evil. So I'm not sure that most people value forgiveness.

When you look at it from the point of view of justice, there is no reason for forgiveness. Only if God exists and we realize that there is either a world with evil or no world at all can we understand that we are going to have to undergo the trial of evil. But if that is not there, I don't know why anyone would forgive. Or want to. But I do think that people who are not believers in God, by the fact they are made in God's image, can have the sense that reconciliation is better than allowing the evil to go on. By definition, forgiveness is breaking the chain of evil, beginning with recognizing that evil really has been done. People tend to think forgiveness means something bad was not really done, that a person didn't understand the consequences, or whatever. If that were the case, there would be no need for



forgiveness; it could be seen simply as a mistake. Forgiveness has to admit, and rage over, and weep over a real evil, and only then say, "We are going to live in communion one with another. We are going to carry on." Never forgetting—you can't, at any rate—but carrying on in a spirit of love without letting the evil poison the future relationship. Certainly that is what happens theologically. The striking thing in the Gospel is that God refuses to let evil destroy the relationship. Even if we kill him, he will say, "Forgive them."

IC: Implied in what you say is that relationship is the highest aim, and that an obstacle to relationship is what calls the need for forgiveness.

FR. T: I prefer the word communion to relationship. The Orthodox approach is that we are made in the image and likeness of God, and that God is a Trinity of persons in absolute identity of being and of life in perfect communion. Therefore, communion is the given. Anything that breaks that communion destroys the very roots of our existence. That's why forgiveness is essential if there is going to be human life in the image of God. We are all sinners, living with other sinners, and so seventy times seven times a day we must re-establish communion—and want to do so. The desire is the main thing, and the feeling that it is of value.

The obsession with relationship—the individual in search of relationships—in the modern world shows an ontological crack in our being. There is no such thing as an individual. He was created, probably, in a Western European university. We don't recognize our essential communion. I don't look at you and say, "You are my life."

Modern interpretations of the commandment in the Torah reflect this individualistic attitude. The first commandment is that you love God with all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength, and the second is that you love your neighbor as yourself. The only way you can prove you love God is by loving your neighbor, and the only way you can love your neighbor in this world is by endless forgiveness. So, "love your neighbor as yourself." However, in certain modern editions of the Bible, I have seen this translated as, "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." But that's not what it says.

I recall a televised discussion program in which we were asked what was most important in Christianity. Part of what I said was that the only way we can find ourselves is to deny ourselves. That's Christ's teaching. If you cling to yourself, you lose yourself. The unwillingness to forgive is the ultimate act of not wanting to let yourself go. You want to defend yourself, assert yourself, protect yourself. There is a consistent line through the Gospel—if you want to be the first you must will to be the last. The other fellow, who taught the psychology of religion at a Protestant seminary, said, "What you are saying is the source of the neuroses of Western society. What we need is healthy self-love and healthy self-esteem." Then he quoted that line, "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." He insisted that you must love yourself first and have a sense of dignity. If one has that, forgiveness is either out of the question or an act of condescension toward the poor sinner. It is

The man who knows the delight of the love of God—when the soul, warmed by grace, loves both God and her brother—knows in part that "the kingdom of God is within us." Blessed is the soul that loves her brother,

for our brother is our life.

Blessed is the soul that loves her brother. The Spirit of the Lord lives manifest within her, giving peace and gladness.

—St. Silouan the Athonite

no longer an identification with the other as a sinner, too. I said that of course if we are made in the image of God it's quite self-affirming, and self-hatred is an evil. But my main point is that there is no self there to be defended except the one that comes into existence by the act of love and self-emptying. It's only by loving the other that my self actually emerges. Forgiveness is at the heart of that.

As we were leaving a venerable old rabbi with a shining face called us over. "That line, you know, comes from the Torah, from Leviticus," he said, "and it cannot possibly be translated 'love your neighbor as you love yourself.' It says, 'You shall love your neighbor as being your own self.'" Your neighbor is your true self. You have no self in yourself.

After this I started reading the Church Fathers in this light, and that's what they all say—"Your brother is your life." I have no self in myself except the one that is fulfilled by loving the other. The Trinitarian character of God is a metaphysical absolute here, so to speak. God's own self is another—His Son. The same thing happens on the human level. So the minute I don't feel deeply that my real self is the other, then I'll have no reason to forgive anyone. But if that is my reality, and my only real self is the other, and my own identity and fulfillment emerges only in the act of loving the other, that gives substance to the idea that we are potentially God-like beings. Now, if you add to that that we are all to some degree faulty and weak and so on, that act of love will always be an act of forgiveness. That's how I find and fulfill myself as a human being made in God's image. Otherwise, I cannot. So the act of forgiveness is the very act by which our humanity is constituted. Deny that, and we kill ourselves. It's a metaphysical suicide.

IC: You are making a distinction here between the individual and the person.

Fr. T: The individual is the person that refuses to love. When a person refuses to identify in being and value with "the least," even with "the enemy," then the person becomes an individual, a self enclosed being trying to have proper relationships—usually on his or her own terms. But again, we would say that the person only comes into existence by going out of oneself into communion with the other. So my task is not to decide whether or not I will be in relationship with you but to realize that I am in communion with you: my life is yours, and your life is mine. Without this, there is no way that we are going to be able to carry on.

IC: Forgiveness is not an achievement, an act, so much as the development of an understanding of reality?

Fr. T: It is a decision in the sense that you have to will it. You have to choose life. A person can choose death by not forgiving. So there is a sense in which you can destroy yourself by not saying yes to the reality that actually exists. That's the choice: yes or no to what truly exists. Forgiveness is the great yes. So there is a choice. In the Greek patristic tradition, the more a person is a person, the more we realize and will our communion with others in the act of love, the less we choose. So the freer we are, the less choice we have.

That's almost opposite to the post-Enlightenment, secular Western thought. We tend to think the freer we are, the more choice we have. For example, if you would sin against me and I want to love with the love of God, then I do not have a choice whether or not I should forgive you, I only have a choice whether or not I will. And I must, if I want to be alive. If I were truly holy, I wouldn't even choose—it would be a spontaneous act.

As an individual, if someone insults me or offends me or betrays me, it is impossible to forgive them, lacking this understanding of the reality of our interconnectedness. So this understanding is needed because one suffers from not being able to forgive.

I think that in our culture the willingness to admit there is real evil is difficult for us—it is such a violent and awesome position towards life. Of course, people in tremendous pain—rape victims, incest victims, etc.—have to forgive if they are going to go on living. But the main forgiving that needs doing in everybody's life, the central act of forgiveness and one that indicates spiritual maturity in every case without exception, is the forgiveness of the parents. We tend either to blame parents or idealize them—both of which cripple life. In order to forgive them, one must first admit the offense, and that may mean enduring incredible pain. Rage and sadness have to be faced in order to forgive. The reason that we can't forgive is because we don't want to face the pain and rage, to admit what really happened.

So people try to live without facing all this. Or when that becomes impossible, it can mean trying to lose oneself in a cult or other form of collective. You sell your soul so that you don't have to choose anymore. This wish to escape is what fueled a great deal of what happened in the 1960s and since. People wanted to lose

themselves; they couldn't handle the individual freedoms, because they weren't on a deep enough level. So there was a flight. I think even the feminist movement is a response to this. In *The Flight from Woman*, Karl Stern shows that in Western culture there has been an almost pathological flight from the feminine, from woman, which means a flight from communion, a flight from the other. The individualistic, radical, fallen, male values became the values for the culture as a whole, and that's the cause of the Western neuroses.

The burden of freedom is cruel—"how cruel is the love of God." But that's what we are called for. The individualistic or the collectivistic solutions will not work. We are persons made for free and voluntary communion—in love, in truth, and in reality—with other persons. This means that in the way we experience life, mercy, and forgiveness are at the heart of it, beginning in one's own family. That's where it's so, so painful.

My feeling, being a radical Orthodox Christian, is that God is not removed from the world but rather enters into the world and gets nailed to a cross. Unless we accept Christ crucified, which is a scandal to those who want God to be some kind of power figure and total foolishness to those who want it all to fall into place intellectually within their own terms, there's no Gospel. But if Christ crucified is at the heart of the matter, then evil is real and forgiveness is real and freedom is real, and there's no other way to deify life but through an act of mercy.

IC: There are some who feel that to understand all is to forgive all. If we could see the entire chain of causality, there would be no reason to forgive, because we would understand.

Fr. T: I wouldn't agree. Actually, when you see things clearly, you can see that certainly we are victimized. There's a woman I'm thinking of who must forgive her father and her uncle for raping her over a period of years when she was a child. Once she begins to see things, she can admit that her father was also a victim, that in many

ways he was conditioned—that's what the Bible means when it says sins visited to the fourth generation. There is such a thing as a tradition of evil. That's why I like to use the expression that forgiveness is breaking the chain of evil. But everyone is given that possibility to break that chain. As long as I'm understanding, justifying, or explaining, I become just one more link in the chain of evil.

IC: Could you explain what you mean by evil?

Fr. T: In Orthodox theology, we speak about evil, or sin, as either voluntary or involuntary, conscious or unconscious. We would not define sin as the cold-blooded, freely sovereign and intellectual act whereby I perpetrate some evil—destroy someone's life, for example. It's much more complicated. One of the points of the Adam story is that we are not born in Paradise. It is anything but Paradise. A child of a hysterical, drug-addicted parent is going to be born drug addicted as well. There is a tendency toward evil in us, biologically, psychologically, genetically. Father Alexander Schmemann used to say that the spiritual life consists in how you deal with what you have been dealt. We've all been dealt something. Our theological claim is that where you have a good measure of faith, and love, and forgiveness, you can restore human nature. You can pass on a more healthy, integrated, peaceful, joyful humanity to your progeny. You can be a presence of forgiveness and mercy, but you can also be a presence of the opposite. In order to be a presence of mercy, you must admit tragedy; you can't just explain it away in terms of genetics, or economics.

There is a freedom: what you do with what you have. It's not a sovereign freedom as though I were just emerging as a pure, pristine angel. No. But the point is if you could see the causes and influences, you would come to the conclusion that there is a great deal of victimization, but at the same time, there are opportunities for people to break the chain of evil, to forgive and not to allow it to go on. Sartre says you make a choice every second. A choice about what? A choice about what you are going to do about where you are. At the very heart of that choice is always going to be an act of forgiveness.

In *The Pillar of Fire,* Karl Stern writes that what the modern person cannot accept is forgiveness and grace. We would rather take our punishment, as it were. God says, "No, I forgive you whether you like it or not." That's the only fire of hell—this loving forgiveness of God. That's why Jesus says there is only one unforgivable sin—the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. And what is that? It is the unwillingness to be forgiven and to forgive. The proud cannot accept grace.

IC: Much is being written about the need to forgive oneself. Does that make sense in Christian terms?

Fr. T: Of course. Forgiving oneself means accepting forgiveness from God—and from other people. Evagrios of Pontus, a fourth-century writer, said that there are in us many selves, really, but at base there are two: the real self, which is the Christ-self, and a legion of other selves, which are the Adamic selves. What happens when we hear the word of grace is that we are split down the middle. We don't want grace

because of the pain we have to face, the fears and so on. But one of the things that happens—one of the lies of the Devil, so to speak—is the conviction that we are not worth it. It isn't for us. We are too bad, worthless. Then there comes a point, as Evagrios said, when the Christ-self needs to be convinced that "yes, I exist, and I am acceptable," and so to have pity and mercy on those other selves.

IC: Do you see a difference between evil or sinful acts and a larger attitude that chooses darkness rather than light? Evil is not outside of us, isn't that so?

Fr. T: For many people evil resides in someone else. But I think your distinction is very good, because our understanding of the Christian view is that we will sin until we die. Even baptism is for the forgiveness of sins "all the days of our life." Baptism puts us in the context of forgiveness and mercy, which then allows what is called the invisible warfare, the unseen struggle, to go on. You are going to be sinful—that's why Jesus says "seventy-times-seven." It is inherent in the human life. Sin is to be expected, but the loving of the darkness is not.

IC: In the Christian view, we are reconciled, we are forgiven. Paul Tillich, in a sermon on the parable of the sinful woman and the Pharisee, points out that repentance comes after being forgiven. It is not a payment in order to be forgiven.

Fr. T: It's both. However, it's important from our perspective what the woman in the parable then does. She does not live happily ever after but enters into a life of tremendous struggle.

Chrysostom says you are baptized in order to struggle. Take Mary of Egypt, the classic example of the forgiven harlot: she went into the desert and wept the rest of her life, not to win God by her tears or to earn forgiveness, and not to make reparation, but out of the love of God for being liberated and for the sense of what sin really is and the desire not to fall into it again. One problem in both the liberal and the fundamentalist forms of Christianity is the absence of an ongoing ascetic dimension. If you don't have to pay for your sins because Jesus has, this can open the door to a life of profligacy. The more liberal line is: this is the way I am, this is the way God made me. God loves me, God forgives me, and so there's nothing for me to do but carry on with my life.

IC: What do you mean by the ascetic dimension?

Fr. T: It is making nothing an end in itself except God, that is, ordering the natural passions to their proper end, which is God himself and love itself. The passions are part of our nature but must be directed in the service of love, meaning the good of the other, the affirmation of the other. This nature must affirm the truth, the reality of things the way they are. The metaphysical base is a communion of love and being and truth for which we have been created. To say yes to that is the deified life. But to say yes to that, in the fallen world, means that you must, as Saint Paul says, crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. You must kill the ego. The "old Adam" has to die, and he always dies kicking and screaming. The multiplicity of these false selves must be exposed, and that is not easy. The evil of other people has to be named and

"…the ascetic dimension…is making nothing an end in itself except God, that is, ordering the natural passions to their proper end, which is God himself…."

forgiven, which is also not easy.

In the short stories of Flannery O'Connor, you find that the moment of grace is usually a violent moment. To see things clearly, to realize, as O'Connor says, that "even the virtues will be burnt up," very often requires an incredibly violent act. We often need to be shaken into that realization. It seems to me that that's the meaning in the scriptures of trials and sufferings and afflictions and so on—to have people realize what and who they are, really. That's the ascetic dimension, because the minute a person says, "I will work to show mercy," every devil in hell will work to try to stop him.

IC: You spoke of the division in us between the Christ-self and the legion of other selves—two natures at war within us. Is it that one nature has ultimately to be transformed? You also spoke about a person who is free and yet has no choice—this is a totally transformed being, isn't it?

Fr. T: We would say there's a human nature that when it is truly itself is full of the grace of God and in communion with God and is, therefore, deified and becomes one with the divine nature. On the other hand, there is the human nature that is broken, fragmented, estranged from its real foundation and in need of salvation. The transforming power of grace is there. But in a sense, it takes all of time to be deified. There are no miracles on this level. The degree of suffering that has to take place is very great.

IC: It's an incarnated struggle on this level.

Fr. T: Yes, and I believe it can't be done alone. You need a community.

IC: Our culture places great emphasis on improving oneself. There is a difference between that and being made whole, being brought to your true nature.

Fr. T: The saints speak about spiritual hedonism, where you want peace and joy but you don't want reality. That's why Saint Paul says that you can give your body to be burned but if you have not love, you are nothing.

You find people who love religion, love the Jesus Prayer, spend their whole life

searching for pure prayer, yet they miss the mark. I once met someone who met a monk at Mount Athos who was in a very bad state, very dark, very bitter, very angry. When asked what was the matter, he said, "Look at me; I've been here thirty-eight years, and have not yet attained pure prayer." This fellow was saying how sad he thought this was. Another man present said, "It's a sad story all right, but the sadness consists in the fact that after thirty-eight years in a monastery he's still interested in pure prayer." You can make pure prayer an idol, too. Those are the worst forms of idolatry.

A person must be helped to want joy, to see that it is possible. And then what is difficult is that all of these other things have to be acknowledged for what they really are, together with all the pain that has to be experienced.

The other day a woman said to me, "It's not enough for me to say I have to forgive my father. I can't do that until I experience the rage and the sadness and the anger over how my childhood was. And that's what I have been afraid to do." Just because you know with your head that someone has offended you, that you ought to forgive them—that's not forgiveness. But how do you achieve the actual reconciliation where you are really at peace with the other? One must experience in full the pain of the actual harm that was done. That's the hardest part of forgiveness. That's the block for most people. It has to be gone through again and again, and layer after layer has to come up.

When forgiveness is needed, one of the hardest things is to face the fact that the way I handled being harmed wasn't always the best, that I have a certain responsibility for allowing myself to have been harmed. One does have to admit, very often, that there were choices for one as well. There's always some form of symbiosis at work. That's why Chrysostom could write that the world is filled with evil but no one can harm him who does not harm himself.

The great example for Christians would be their Christ-like martyrs who have not allowed themselves to be touched by that evil, what Evagrios calls "allowing the devil to rejoice two times." You are sinned against, and the devil rejoices. You react with vengeance or without forgiveness, and the devil rejoices two times. Never give the second joy.

So forgiveness is not just the healing of the other, it is the healing of yourself, too. If you don't forgive, you allow yourself to be poisoned. That's why Jesus says, "Do not resist the evildoer." The minute that you resist or react in kind, you become part of the evil yourself. That's the radical teaching of the Cross.

Ultimately it comes to this. We are forgiven whether we like it or not. If we accept it, then we, too, become forgivers, and it's called Paradise. But if we don't accept it, it is hell. When you reject the forgiveness, you destroy yourself. You refuse communion. *IC*

Father Thomas Hopko, the author of many books and essays, was a member of the advisory board of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship. He fell asleep in the Lord on March 19, 2015 at the age of 76.

The Beatitudes:

A selection of Patristic Comments

SEEING THE CROWDS, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

St. Hilary of Arles: The Lord taught by way of example that the glory of human ambition must be left behind when he said, "The Lord your God shall you adore and him only shall you serve." And when he announced through the prophets that he would choose a people humble and in awe of his words, he introduced the perfect Beatitude as humility of spirit. Therefore he defines those who are inspired as people aware that they are in possession of the heavenly kingdom. Nothing belongs to anyone as being properly one's own, but all have the same things by the gift of a single parent. They have been given the first things needed to come into life and have been supplied with the means to use them.

St. Jerome: Do not imagine that poverty is bred by necessity. For he added "in spirit" so you would understand blessedness to be humility and not poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," who on account of the Holy Spirit are poor by willing freely to be so.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

St. John Chrysostom: The sorrow [of those who mourn] is of a special kind. Jesus did not designate them simply as sad but as intensely grieving. Therefore he did not say "they that sorrow" but "they that mourn." This Beatitude is designed to draw believers toward a Christian disposition. Those who grieve for someone else—their child or wife or any other lost relation, have no fondness for gain or pleasure during the period of their sorrow. They do not aim at glory. They are not provoked by insults nor led captive by envy nor beset by any other passion. Their grief alone occupies the whole of their attention.

St. Chromatius: The blessed of whom [Jesus] speaks are not those bereaving the death of a spouse or the loss of cherished servants. Rather, he is speaking of those blessed persons who do not cease to mourn over the iniquity of the world or the offenses of sinners with a pious, duty-bound sentiment. To those who mourn righteously, therefore, they will receive, and not undeservedly, the consolation of eternal rejoicing promised by the Lord.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

St. Chromatius: The meek are those who are gentle, humble and unassuming, simple in faith, and patient in the face of every affront. Imbued with the precepts of the gospel, they imitate the meekness of the Lord, who says, "Learn from me, for I

Ipitaphios Icon from the Stavronikita monastery on Mt. Athos. It is a fresco named *Epitaphios Threnos*, Lamentations by the Tomb.

am meek and humble of heart."

St. John Chrysostom: What kind of earth is referred to here? Some say a figurative earth, but this is not what he is talking about. For nowhere in Scripture do we find any mention of an earth that is merely figurative. But what can this Beatitude mean? Jesus holds out a prize perceptible to the senses, even as Paul also does. For even when Moses had said, "Honor your father and your mother," he added, "For so shall you live long upon the earth." And Jesus himself says again to the thief, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." Today! In this way he does not speak only of future blessings but also of present ones.

St. Augustine: "Inherit the earth"…means the land promised in the psalm: "You are my hope, my portion in the land of the living." It signifies the solidity and stability of a perpetual inheritance. The soul because of its good disposition is at rest as though in its own place, like a body on the earth, and is fed with its own food there, like a body from the earth. This is the peaceful life of the saints. The meek are those who submit to wickedness and do not resist evil but overcome evil with good. Let the haughty therefore quarrel and contend for earthly and temporal things. But "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land." This is the land from which they cannot be expelled.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Origen of Alexandria: If I must utilize a bold explanation indeed, I think that perhaps it was through the word that is measured by virtue and justice that the Lord

presents himself to the desire of the hearers. He was born as wisdom from God for us, and as justice and sanctification and redemption. He is "the bread that comes down from heaven" and "living water," for which the great David himself thirsted. He said in one of his psalms, "My soul has thirsted for you, even for the living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?" "I shall behold your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied in beholding your glory." This then, in my estimation, is the true virtue, the good unmingled with any lesser good, that is, God, the virtue that covers the heavens.

St. John Chrysostom: Note how drastically he expresses it. For Jesus does not say, "Blessed are those who cling to righteousness," but "Blessed are those who hunger

and thirst after righteousness" not in a superficial way but pursuing it with their entire desire. By contrast, the most characteristic feature of covetousness is a strong desire with which we are not so hungry for food and drink as for more and more things. Jesus urged us to transfer this desire to a new object, freedom from covetousness…. Those who extort are those who lose all, while one who is in love with righteousness possesses all other goods in safety." If those who do not covet enjoy such great abundance, how much more will they be ready to offer to others what they have.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

St. Chromatius: By a great number of witnesses indeed, just as many in the Old Testament as the New, we are called by the Lord to show compassion. But as a shortcut to faith we deem enough and more than enough what the Lord himself in the passage at hand expresses with his own voice, saying, "Blessed are the compassionate, for God will have compassion for them." The Lord of compassion says that the compassionate are blessed. No one can obtain God's compassion unless that one is also compassionate. In another passage Jesus said, "Be compassionate, just as your Father who is in the heavens is compassionate."

St. John Chrysostom: Jesus speaks here not only of those who show mercy by giving worldly goods but also of those who demonstrate mercy in their actions. There are many ways to show mercy. The commandment is broad in its implications. What reward can people expect if they obey the commandment? "They obtain mercy." The reward at first glance appears to be an equal reimbursement, but actually the reward from God is much greater than human acts of goodness. For whereas we ourselves are showing mercy as human beings, we are obtaining mercy from the God of all. Human mercy and God's mercy are not the same thing. As wide as the interval is between corrupted and perfect goodness, so far is human mercy distinguished from divine mercy.

St. Augustine: You may overflow with temporal things but remain in need of eternal life. You hear the voice of a beggar, but before God you are yourself a beggar. Someone is begging from you, while you yourself are begging. As you treat your beggar, so will God treat his. You who are empty are being filled. Out of your fullness fill an empty person in need, so that your own emptiness may be again filled by the fullness of God.

Anonymous: The kind of compassion referred to here is not simply giving alms to the poor or orphan or widow. This kind of compassion is often found even among those who hardly know God. But that person is truly compassionate who shows compassion even to his own enemy and treats the enemy well. For it is written, "Love your enemies, and treat well those who hate you."

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

St. John Chrysostom: In the same vein Paul wrote, "Pursue peace with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." He is here speaking of such sight as it is possible for one to have. For there are many who show mercy, who

refuse to rob others and who are not covetous but who still may remain entangled in sins like fornication and licentiousness. Jesus adds these words to indicate that the former virtues do not suffice in and of themselves. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, bore witness concerning the Macedonians, who were rich not only in almsgiving but also in the rest of the virtues. For having spoken of the generous spirit they demonstrated toward their own possessions, Paul says, "They gave themselves to the Lord and to us."

St. Augustine: To behold God is the end and purpose of all our loving activity…. Whatever we do, whatever good deeds we perform, whatever we strive to accomplish, whatever we laudably yearn for, whatever we blamelessly desire, we shall no longer be seeking any of those things when we reach the vision of God. Indeed, what would one search for when one has God before one's eyes? Or what would satisfy one who would not be satisfied with God? Yes, we wish to see God. Who does not have this desire? We strive to see God. We are on fire with the desire of seeing God.

But pay attention to the saying, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." Provide yourself with this means of seeing God. Let me speak concretely: Why would you, while your eyes are bleary, desire to see a sunrise? Let the eyes be sound, and that light will be full of joy. If your eyes are blind, that light itself will be a torment. Unless your heart is pure, you will not be permitted to see what cannot be seen unless the heart be pure.

Persecution of Christians in Russia by Bolsheviks

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

St. Chromatius: The peacemakers are those who, standing apart from the stumbling block of disagreement and discord, guard the affection of fraternal love and the peace of the church under the unity of the universal faith. And the Lord in the Gospel particularly urges his disciples to guard this peace, saying, "I give you my peace; I leave you my peace."

Anonymous: Peace is the only begotten God, of whom the apostle says, "For he himself is our peace." So people who cherish peace are children of peace. But some may be thought to be peacemakers who make peace with their enemies but remain heedless of evils within. They are never reconciled in heart with their own internal enemies, yet they are willing to make peace with others. They are parodies of peace rather than lovers of peace. For that peace is blessed which is set in the heart, not that which is set in words. Do you want to know who is truly a peacemaker? Hear the prophet, who says, "Keep your tongue from evil, and let your lips not speak deceit. Do not let your tongue utter an evil expression."

St. John Chrysostom: Here he not only responds that they [who follow Jesus] should not feud and become hateful to one another, but he is also looking for something more, that we bring together others who are feuding. And again he promises a spiritual reward. What kind of reward is it? "That they themselves shall be called children of God." For in fact this was the crucial work of the Only Begotten: to bring together things divided and to reconcile the alienated.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

St. Chromatius: The martyrs above all are the epitome of those who for the righteousness of faith and the name of Christ endure persecution in this world. To them a great hope is promised, namely, the possession of the kingdom of heaven. The apostles were chief examples of this blessedness, and with them all the just people who for the sake of righteousness were afflicted with various persecutions. Due to their faith they have come into the heavenly realms.

St. John Chrysostom: Don't be discouraged if you don't hear the kingdom of heaven granted with every single Beatitude. For even if Jesus names the rewards differently, he still puts all of them in the kingdom of heaven. For in fact he says, "Those who mourn will be comforted, and those who show mercy will receive mercy, and those pure in heart will see God, and the peacemakers will be called sons of God." In all these things the blessed One does nothing but hint at the kingdom of heaven. For people who enjoy these things will certainly reach the kingdom of heaven. So do not suppose that the reward of the kingdom of heaven belongs only to the poor in spirit. It also belongs to those who hunger for justice, and to the meek and to all these blessed others without exception. For he set his blessing upon all these things to keep you from expecting something belonging to this material world. For if one wore a prize or garland for things that are to be dissolved together with the present life, things that flit away faster than a shadow, would that one be blessed? *IC*

Dia-Logos with the Cosmos

by Stephen Muse, Ph.D.

> *What is man that Thou art mindful of him or the son of man that Thou visiteth him? (Psalm 8:4)*
>
> *Eternity knows no duration of time but contains in itself the full compass of the centuries. Eternity without space includes in itself all the expanses of the created world.* —*Archimandrite Sophrony*

ASTRONOMERS RECENTLY DISCOVERED a planet six hundred light years away from earth with seventy degree temperatures in just the right position from its sun to support life as we know it. A mere six hundred light years is of microscopic proportions in comparison to the estimated size of the known universe, the whole of which may already be infinite. Beyond that we don't even know if ours is the only universe there is.

A light year is one of those concepts we use as if we know something, yet are totally unable to comprehend what we are saying in any meaningful way that connects with our experience. There are so many such imponderables in our lives that to go about thinking we are in control of anything or that we understand how the universe all fits together is a sure sign of madness.

I was watching an ant careen back and forth over a stone in our walkway. It was moving fast—perhaps fifteen times the distance of its own body in a second. If a six foot man moved fifteen times the length of his own body in one second he would be able to keep up with cars on the highway at speeds over sixty miles per hour.

"Now wait just a darn minute!" you say. "If that were the case, you could hardly even see the ant moving." Relativity is all about scale and proportion. The ant only looks slow to us because we are giants on a scale logarithmically beyond the world of the ant. It's not unlike how jets appear as tiny stars blinking in the night sky, barely seeming to move.

Some physicists have recently confirmed that neutrinos, part of the sub-atomic world that comprises the substance of the known universe, have been clocked moving faster than Einstein's now proverbial speed of light. Think about it, these little wave-particle dualities are flying around in our bodies at speeds we can't comprehend let alone notice.

Relatively speaking, there is as much distance between the electrons circling the nucleus of an atomic particle as there are between the planets circling the sun. These "clouds of energy" are what constitute the solid molecules that comprise the cells of our bodies. With that much space between the clouds of energy and wave particles racing through our bodies, we shouldn't even be able to see ourselves. Come to think of it, maybe part of us could make that trip to that new planet discovered only six hundred light years away after all, if only we knew how to switch

back and forth from mass to energy like those electrons.

Appearing to stroll about at three miles per hour while spinning round and round, upside-down and right-side-up in a circle at one thousand miles per hour fastened only by gravity to the 24,000 mile circumference of the earth, which is itself orbiting the sun at close to 67,000 miles per hour, in a universe expanding outward at 180,000 miles per hour in our sector alone, is a trick few of us would attempt if we realized what we were doing!

The intricate, complex balance of all these gyrations is miraculous beyond comprehension. Considering that ants are moving at sixty-plus miles per hour under my feet while neutrinos pulverize and X-ray the vast emptiness of my body alternately as both particles and light waves while everything in the universe races toward infinity, I have concerns about how it is I am able to hold it all together from day-to-day.

Most of us are accustomed to operating as the center of our individual universes. We don't even break a sweat while managing the many spatio-temporal acrobatics of the greater cosmic dance, blissfully unconcerned how strangely empty and isolated we are. Popular religion often masks our awareness of this stunning reality that might otherwise bring us to our knees in awe. If I "believe in Jesus" (on the same scale as believing in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny), I may conclude that this entitles me to an insurance policy for the afterlife while I continue to live however I want without regard for obeying a larger plan than my own self-satisfaction and individual preservation.

When truly troubled by my inability to live by conscience, I can calm myself by holding forth with something like "substitutionary atonement!" That's Seminarian-speak for "Jesus took the heat so I don't have to. God loves everybody. Nuff said?" Such casuistry serves as an excuse to go on unawares, doing whatever I wish without any consistent daily attempts to discover the degree to which self-love rules me instead of a God-centered frame of reference. The real situation is more that we are each flung into life without a choice, and then just as we seem to be gaining a foothold, we are yanked out at a moment not of our own choosing and dispossessed of all we have tried to possess in between.


Fresco of Christ creating the sun, moon, and stars in St. Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Chapel in Greenlawn Shrine Church, New York

In the publicly shared kingdom of "consensus reality" where reason and materialism are touted as king and queen, it is actually impulsivity driven by pleasure and pain of bodily appetites and the

emotionality of likes and dislikes rooted in self-love that hold power. We eat and sleep, marry sometimes and procreate, and invent and accumulate things, all the while taking for granted that the world is pretty much the way we see it and want it to be; and whatever isn't, is too far away or blessedly unknown to be relevant to our daily lives. But why would the Creator of the universe go to the trouble of placing such tiny, insignificant creatures on such an insignificant planet on the outskirts of the galaxy in a cosmos so gigantic that we'd be afraid we were lost if we weren't so dazzled by all the toys we have to play with in the meantime? If we live for eighty, ninety, or even a hundred years, it is still less than a nanosecond in cosmic time in comparison to the universe's fourteen billion years of existence. Are our ordinary daily lives all we really need to be concerned with?

For five thousand years or more, the prophets of Israel, Zoroaster, the sages of the Upanishads, the Buddha, Jalal'udin Rumi, and of course Jesus have borne witness to a world that cannot be seen or comprehended by the narrow-minded "man-made" complacency we live 99.9 % or our lives believing in and conforming too. They all tell us that human life is not merely eating and drinking, marrying, and working. And they say that these cannot be what they are intended to be without recognition of the invisible world in our midst.

When the cosmopolitan, sophisticated, wealthy, and well-educated Nicodemus approached Jesus by night with the opening salvo of "Rabbi we know you are a teacher come from God because of...," he was presuming to comprehend the mystery of God on earth according to what he already knew, based on lifelong study, reason, and the sense impressions that govern the narrow band of academic and common-sense knowing that constitutes everyday life. Jesus challenged his presumption immediately: "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born from above." That is, unless they have encountered the Holy Spirit who noetically awakens us to the presence of an uncreated world permeating and giving rise to this one, where God, who is sovereign and source of all life, communicates with the human heart.

The greatest tragedy of our lives is that we reduce our Messenger from beyond the known universe and his prophets to fit within our paltry socially-constructed and democratically agreed upon understandings of the world as we already are familiar with it, rather than seek to encounter the One who alone can lead us out of our present darkness into a love and meaning beyond our wildest comprehension.

Apart from this set of magnitudes, Jesus all too easily morphs into insipid cultural shibboleths, redirecting us back to the comfortable and well worn paths of a civil religion acceptable in the public square. The sharp edges of Truth and the authenticity of dialogue with the Absolute God incarnated as a human being, are removed in order to seem inclusive and avoid offense. Christian faith is reduced to the magic of Disney-belief in a slot-machine deity who passes out tickets to paradise based on legalistic or sentimental adherence to religious slogans repeated by rote without heart, repentance, or obedience.

Or God serves merely as a convenient shape-shifting metaphor for fundamentalist intolerance or touchy-feely "luv" and a political correctness that reaches no higher than the natural emotional bonds of family and species that include those we

like, are related to by blood, or with whom we share business transactions, while excluding others who challenge the accumulated power and privilege afforded by being in the world me-first. We are "monomeists" pretending to be monotheists.

In order to do all this without being disturbed by conscience, we console ourselves with what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap Grace." But the Message and the Messenger are far greater than this sort of theological flat-earth perspective. When asked by someone "if only a few would be saved," Jesus responded by pointing to a difficult truth:

> "Strive to enter through the narrow way, because many I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last" (Luke 13:24-30).

This narrow way begins with metanoia—repentance—which is the discovery that as we are, we are not in our right minds. We are not in our right minds because our minds belong in our hearts where grace can affect us beyond mere words and the illusions of comprehension that console us, where it can change our lives. It will take a lifetime of struggle to respond to the Divine Life.

People who have lost their worldly minds from having personally encountered the Messenger and the Message, begin to travel in a different universe, one Jesus called the Kingdom of God. Worldliness is no longer their primary frame of reference. One who considers the reality of an uncreated God who is entirely separate from human consciousness, in whose image we are made yet who is closer to us than our breath, awakens to and gains interest in and response-ability to someone greater than ourselves, someone who loves the whole of creation's riot of diversity expressing the joy and solidarity of the Creator with beings of all colors, shapes, and sizes. One who is seized by this kind of wonder and humility begins a new vocation!

There is a Buddhist saying to the effect that it is rarer to be born a human being than for a turtle swimming in the great ocean, surfacing once every five hundred years, to surface with its neck in a single ring floating on the surface of the water. Perhaps so. I suspect this is true. What a responsibility! Unlike Descartes, I do not take for granted that "I am" simply because I appear to think or move or breathe or make money, write a book, run a company, complete a university degree, have a baby, or do any other number of things that appear to be mine in the small localized scheme of things. The fact is we can be more certain of the existence of God than of our own. How then to be responsive to the purpose of God for human life on earth and for my life in particular? What am I here for? What is the aim of my life?

These kinds of questions begin to irritate (or depress) a lot of people if they have

to consider them for longer than a brief moment. As entertainment they suffice. Like the ancient Athenians observed by the Apostle Paul two thousand years ago, everybody likes the latest news for its entertainment value, but as a real moral problem to be considered over a lifetime with the seriousness that Einstein considered unified field theory or Jesus pondered over Jerusalem, it is another matter. To consider the reality of God beyond and separate from my own consciousness starts to open up those uncomfortable questions of obedience and response-ability again.

Sustain these questions long enough and they begin to reveal a hidden world that cannot be known apart from repentance, ascetical struggle, prayer, worship, and the humility that comes from being dethroned from the center of the universe. Thankfully, what disturbs our paltry "self-esteem" is also what opens the door to the Great Mystery where the journey begins. It is a path that can only be walked by those who have discovered they are paralyzed by complacency and surfeit, can only be seen by those who have discovered they are blind to the uncreated world, can only be heard by those who are deaf to counterfeit worldly ways, can only be begun by those willing to leave behind attachment to what is past at the first hint of invitation from the One to whom the path leads in the present moment.

Once having crossed this threshold, when the forces of resistance question me, as to who it is that is putting me up to all this—creating these questions and disturbing the status quo, revealing to me that I am in the world but not of it, I shall be very careful with my reply and, like Moses, when I refer to "I AM WHO I AM," at least I will know that it is not me that I'm talking about. *IC*

"The transfiguration, then, symbolizes the life to come and thus the goal of ascetic pursuit. It reminds the believer that the vision of God unfolds amidst the splendor of holiness while also pointing toward the way in which the final movement to ecstatic wonder is always grace-filled and joy-laden. It is the sudden burst of divine light as when Helios peaks over the horizon casting his rays on all creation so that the world glows in the golden haze of dawn, translucent and transformed." —Dale Coulter, *The Taboric Light*

Rachel's Lament:
In Communion on Abortion

The Orthodox Peace Fellowship is pro-life but not exactly in the way the term is typically used. Pro-life movements are normally associated with particular political agendas that differ across countries where they are active, but within our fellowship we simply self-identify as children of the Orthodox Church who seek to have our worldviews shaped therein. We recognize the inherent impotence of political ideology in transforming lives and would rather bring our Orthodoxy to our political activities than the other way around. The life of the unborn was cherished by Christians long before modern political realities came into being and will be long after they, as they inevitably will, fade into the past.

In 2000, *In Communion* published a special issue dedicated to the topic of abortion that was introduced by a letter written by Jim and Nancy Forest:

> Jaroslav Pelikan, distinguished Christian scholar and longtime professor at Yale University, also a member of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship advisory board, speaks of abortion as "the great human rights issue of our time." Sadly, many do not see it that way. Even in some parts of the Christian community, traditional opposition to abortion has slowly been transformed to toleration or even abortion advocacy.
>
> No less surprising, those active in peace organizations—people who might be found protesting at military bases or at prisons where executions are about to occur—are rarely found engaging in efforts to make abortions less common. (On the other hand, it must be noted that many who campaign for the right to life of the unborn child often seem much less disturbed by war and executions.)
>
> For the vast majority of feminist groups, endorsement of abortion has been a litmus test. Anyone troubled by abortion, who speaks of an "unborn child" in the womb rather than using Latin terms with a dehumanizing effect—embryo or fetus—is someone to be denounced. At all costs, the unborn must not be recognized as human beings with as much claim on social respect and protection as their parents. (Yet how readily an unborn child is recognized and celebrated as human by those who look forward to any child's birth.)

In this issue, we follow with a few paragraphs from Michael Gorman's excellent essay surveying the early Church Fathers' view of abortion, which itself succinctly states our pro-life attitude. Next we offer an excerpt from an article by Frederica Mathewes-Green. The section finishes with an article by Nancy Forest.

Michael Gorman

The earliest specific written references to abortion in Christian literature are those in the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas.* The *Didache* combines a code of

Christian morality with a manual of church life and order, while the *Epistle of Barnabas* is a more theological tract on Christian life and thought. While both of these probably date from the early second century, they most likely drew on Christian sources which had their origins in the late first century.

Both these writings also contain a section based on a Jewish oral and written tradition known as the "Two Ways." This tradition contrasts the two ways of Life or Light and Death or Darkness. Athanasius notes that it was used extensively in the early church, either as a separate document or as part of the *Didache* , especially for the training of catechumens and new converts.

The *Didache* maintains that there is a great difference between these two ways. In an exposition of the second great commandment ("Love your neighbor as yourself") as part of the Way of Life, the author makes a list of "thou shalt not" statements obviously modeled on, and in part quoting, the *Decalogue of the Septuagint.* Literally, it declares: "Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion."

Similarly, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, in its practical section on the Way of Light, repeats the same words in a list of "thou shalt (not)" statements including, just before the abortion prohibition, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor more than thy own life." The fetus is seen, not as a part of its mother, but as a neighbor. Abortion is rejected as contrary to other-centered neighbor love.

Frederica Mathewes-Green

A woman with an unplanned pregnancy faces more than "inconvenience"; many adversities, financial and social, at school, at work, and at home confront her. Our mistake was in looking at these problems and deciding that the fault lay with the woman, that she should be the one to change. We focused on her swelling belly, not the pressures that made her so desperate. We advised her, "Go have this operation and you'll fit right in."

What a choice we made for her. She climbs onto a clinic table and endures a violation deeper than rape—the nurse's hand is wet with her tears—then is grateful to pay for it, grateful to be adapted to the social machine that rejected her when pregnant. And the machine grinds on, rejecting her pregnant sisters.

It is a cruel joke to call this a woman's "choice." We may choose to sacrifice our life and career plans, or choose to undergo humiliating invasive surgery and sacrifice our offspring. How fortunate we are—we have a choice! Perhaps it's time to amend the slogan: "Abortion: a woman's right to capitulate."

If we refused to choose, if we insisted on keeping both our lives and our bodies intact, what changes would our communities have to make? What would make abortion unnecessary? Flexible school situations, more flex-time, part-time, and home-commute jobs, attractive adoption opportunities, safe family planning choices, support in handling sex responsibly—this is a partial list. Yet these changes will never come as long as we're lying down on abortion tables 1,600,000 times a year to ensure the status quo. We've adapted to this surgical substitute, to the point that Justice Blackmun could write in his Webster dissent, "Millions of women have ordered their lives around" abortion. That we have willingly ordered our lives around a denigrating surgical procedure—accepted it as the price we must pay to keep our life plans intact—is an ominous sign.

For over a hundred years feminists warned us that abortion is a form of oppression and violence against women and their children. They called it "child-murder" (Susan B. Anthony), "degrading to women" (Elizabeth Cady Stanton), "most barbaric" (Margaret Sanger), and a "disowning [of] feminine values" (Simone de Beauvoir). How have we lost this wisdom?

Abortion has become the accepted way of dealing with unplanned pregnancies, and women who make another choice are viewed as odd, backward, and selfish. Across the nation, three thousand crisis pregnancy centers struggle, unfunded and unrecognized, to help these women with housing, clothing, medical care, and job training before and after pregnancy. These volunteers must battle the assumption that "they're supposed to abort"—especially poor women who hear often enough that their children are unwanted. Pro-choice rhetoric conjures a dreadful day when women could be forced to have abortions; that day is nearly here.

More insidiously, abortion advocacy has been poisonous to some of the deeper

values of feminism. For example, the need to discredit the fetus has led to the use of terms that would be disastrous if applied to women. "It's so small," "It's unwanted," "It might be disabled," "It might be abused." Too often women are small, unwanted, disabled, or abused. Do we really want to say that these factors erase personhood?

A parallel disparaging of pregnancy itself also has an unhealthy ring. Harping on the discomforts of pregnancy treats women as weak and incompetent; yet we are uniquely equipped for this role, and strong enough to do much harder things than this. Every woman need not bear a child, but every woman should feel proud kinship in the earthy, elemental beauty of birth. To hold it in contempt is to reject our distinctive power, "our bodies, ourselves."

Nancy Forest-Flier

In a recent letter, a friend explained his reluctant acceptance of abortion with the statement: "I also believe that the human race is overrunning the planet and destroying our Mother the Earth." While recognizing abortion as a moral problem, he saw it as the lesser of two evils. The cost of saving the planet is to reduce the human population. This is a widely accepted notion, and there are many who have succeeded in making us believe that over-population is the problem and that birth control and abortion are the answers.

Population control is often an attempt by Western, wealthy nations to impose their values on poor, usually non-white nations, and these countries are not happy about it. At a 1998 Population Consultation of the UN NGO Committee on Population and Development in New York, the ambassador from the Dominican Republic, Julia Alvarez, shocked the audience with a speech in which she sharply criticized groups such as Zero Population Growth and Planned Parenthood for trying to reduce fertility in countries that don't want it (and thinking that it's for their own good, etc.). She accused the West of targeting poor and darker-skinned countries, such as her own. "It used to be," she pointed out, "that older women could depend on their adult children to care for them in old age. In 1960, for example, a Jamaican woman had an average of six children; by 1990 she was likely to have fewer than three. Now typically she has two. Who will supply the support system for this mother when she is old?"

Even more amazing was the speech by Dr. James McCarthy, Head of the Center for Population at Columbia University, who called himself a "recovering demographer" and told the audience that "population doesn't matter."

In her book *Sex and Destiny*, feminist Germaine Greer comments, "we [should] abandon the rhetoric of crisis for we are the crisis. Let us stop worrying about a world crammed with people…stop counting the babies born every minute…use our imagination to understand how poverty is created and maintained…so that we lose our phobia about the poor. Rather than being afraid of the powerless, let us be

afraid of the powerful—the rich, sterile nations who have no stake in the future. More 'unwanted' children are born to us, the rich, than to them, the poor."

Although there are clearly some over-populated places in the world, this does not mean that the world is over-populated. There are many, many factors involved. Someone told me recently that the entire population of the world, if it agreed to live at the same density as New York City, could fit into the state of Texas. Not a very savory prospect, but interesting.

Justifying abortion by the population-control argument boils down to saying that we should encourage the use of abortion as birth control. But there are already countries that use abortion as birth control—Russia and other former East bloc countries—and the women there are in despair. Some women have several abortions in their lifetime because the birth control possibilities are so limited, and they are urgently demanding better conditions so that they don't have to resort to abortion just to limit births. So this argument just doesn't hold water. Not only do the poor countries not want population control, not only is the whole over-population argument questionable, but individual women who are forced to control births through abortion are crying for help.

I would be surprised if any woman ever had an abortion for the sake of the planet or because of her concern for over-population. Among the women I have known who had abortions, none of them, at that terrible point in their lives, cared a hoot about over-population. Women have abortions because they feel cornered, abandoned, hopeless, scared, manipulated. At least my friends all felt this way and, after the abortion, mourned deeply. They may still be mourning. Frederica Mathewes-Green, in her book *Real Choices*, explains the psychological after-effects of abortion: if they had it to do over again, most women admit that they would choose not to abort.

My personal feeling is that abortion is just as much a feminist issue as it is a pro-life issue. I think women have been sold a very shoddy bill of goods. Radical feminist leaders have played right into the hands of Hugh Hefner types: abortion is a wonderful solution for both of them. Women are expected to make the "right" choice as soon as a problem pregnancy comes along (at least the playboy philosophy hopes they will).

The other argument one hears is that abortion is a more merciful solution for the children of the poor than growing up in destitution. My friend asked: "Isn't poverty and isolation a slow, cruel death as opposed to an operation that deals with the new life before it can actually think and breathe?"

Not necessarily. That's implying that poor people should consider abortion when they get pregnant, because it's sure better than raising children in poverty and isolation. But there are lots and lots of poor women who curse their poverty, and then on top of it all they feel driven to the abortion clinic when they get pregnant, just because society has few other options.


The Visitation

With all our collective intelligence, with all our social science, with all our money, society in the West should be able to come up with a better solution for dealing with problem pregnancies (not medical problems) than abortion. Abortion leaves far, far too many psychological scars. But it's the cheap way out. What abortion does is pressure the most vulnerable—scared pregnant women—into "getting rid of the problem" so that society doesn't have to deal with it.

My friend wrote: "I shudder to think of our making common cause with the so-called 'Christian' right who are militantly against abortion but endorse war, sexism, and capital punishment." But must we be inconsistent simply because others are inconsistent? Just because the far-right seems to have co-opted the pro-life argument doesn't mean that nobody else can endorse it. This calls for a little bit of courage. I urged my friend not to let the agenda of the far right limit his agenda. If you think abortion is wrong, oppose it bravely!

Here in the Netherlands we have the lowest abortion rate in the entire Western world. And, says the Minister of Health, "we're proud of it." Proud to have a low abortion rate? That must mean that lowering the abortion rate, or trying to, is a thing worth doing. What I'm saying is, let's try to lower the abortion rate everywhere. Let's not abandon women to their own private darkness where they have to make these impossible decisions alone (and then face a society that shrugs its shoulders).

William Styron's book *Sophie's Choice* is about such an impossible choice. On one level it's about the Holocaust, but on another level it's about the pressure to decide which of your children you will allow to live and which you will abandon to the hand of violence. Sophie could not live with her choice and finally took her own life.

One can find women who are no more troubled about an abortion they had than they are troubled about a missed bus, but for every woman who is blasé about having abortions you will find many more who wish they hadn't had to do violence to their unborn children and to their consciences. I'm not insisting that the laws be changed (although it would be good if it did eventually happen), or that all women be forced to go through with their pregnancy no matter what (even if their health is at risk), or that we abandon women to back-street butchers. I'm saying, let's work from the other side. Let's try to create a society in which abortion is unthinkable. A society that forces the weak and frightened to shoulder the burden of a social problem should be ashamed of itself.

How do we do it? That's a good question. My hope is that peace organizations will at last begin to explore rather than ignore the problem, to start some dialogues, to try to cut through the rhetoric and terrible division and to address a problem that everybody can rally around. *IC*

You Cannot Serve Two Ideas:

When Ideology and Theology Meet

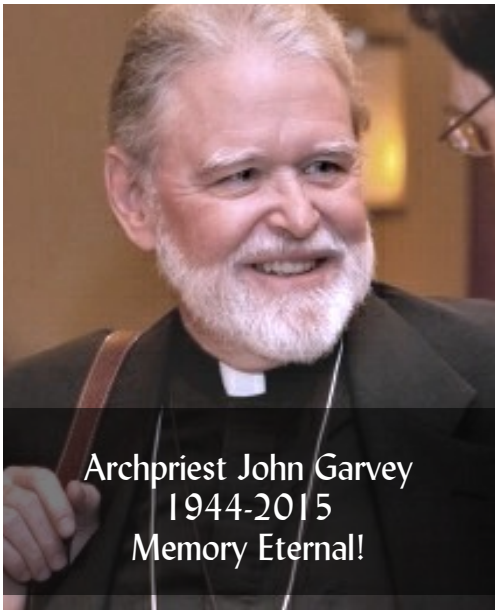
by Fr. John Garvey

When I was involved in draft counseling during the war in Vietnam, I had a liberal friend who knew I was anti-war and was also opposed to the death penalty. She was shocked when I said I was also opposed to abortion. When I told her I thought I was being pretty consistent, she didn't get it. As she saw it, I was violating a kind of liberal package deal.

A couple of years later I met a man who was not at all liberal. He was very much in favor of both the death penalty and abortion rights, and saw no inconsistency. I found myself sadly agreeing with him: he was consistent.

What made him consistent was a total absence of any sense of the sacred. He didn't think of life at any point as sacred. He wasn't liberal in any sense of the word. He had a kind of heartless sense of the convenient: get rid of murderers and other unwanted criminals and also get rid of unwanted unborn children—anything or anyone who might interrupt his life was fair game.

My liberal friend was a more complicated case. She did have a half-baked sense of the sacred, of some value that should attach to a woman's right to choose whether to give birth to or kill the life in her womb, and she knew that innocent people might be mistakenly convicted, and that even guilty people should not be killed.



But neither had a sense of life as truly sacred. Nor, I think it must be said, do those who call themselves pro-life and defend capital punishment based on the argument that the murderer has forfeited the right to life by taking the life of another. In both cases—one side often secular and the other side often ostensibly religious—there is a sense that a life's value depends somehow on our end of the deal, our sense that a life is of value (because completely innocent, as in the case of the child in the womb) or that a life has forfeited its

sacred status (because it violated the sacred status of another life, as in the case of a murderer).

This makes us too important, and God's role as creator a wimpy cameo. How I regard the life of a child in the womb—whether I want it to be born or not—does not matter in the face of the fact that this unique being exists. To argue that it is a tiny collection of cells and therefore unimportant is not far from arguing that it is not so grave a matter to murder a dwarf as it is to murder a giant; it makes my attitude toward a life more important than that life's existence, its God-givenness.

To argue that the life of a murderer can be taken because the murderer has violated the life of his victim is to say that the murderer gets to define the limits of the sacred. The terrible fact is that the murderer's life is sacred, because God has willed that life, and none of us has the power to cancel the holiness of having been called into existence from nothingness. We may wish to cancel our vocation; in the horror of some lives it may be an overwhelming desire. But we cannot. And Christians have to bear witness to the sacred character of all human beings, no matter how innocent or how guilty, all of them people for whom Jesus Christ died. We are not our own. This applies to the newly conceived baby, and to any murderer on death row. *IC*

What Has Love Got To Do With It?

Reflection on John 15:8-13

by Fr. Dn. John D. Jones

> *My Father is glorified by this: that you should bear much fruit and come to be my disciples. As the Father loved me, I also have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15: 8-13).*

LOVE ONE ANOTHER as I have loved you." Or, as Jesus said to his followers another time: "Be merciful as your Father is merciful," or "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate" (Luke 6:36). Jesus exemplifies this mercy and compassion throughout his own life and in various parables: In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father moved by compassion rushes out to welcome his wayward son home. So too, moved by compassion the Good Samaritan takes immediate steps to alleviate the suffering of the man who was beaten and robbed. Drawing on very early Christian theology, Orthodox Christian icons of the parable of the Good Samaritan always represent the Good Samaritan by Christ. St. Clement of Alexandria observes that "we call the savior our neighbor because he drew near to us in saving us" (Stromata IV.7). And Blessed Theophlyact develops this idea: "Our Lord and God…journeyed to us…. He did not just catch a glimpse of us as He happened to pass by. He actually came to us and lived together with us and spoke to us. Therefore, He at once bound up our wounds" (Commentary on Luke 10:29-37).

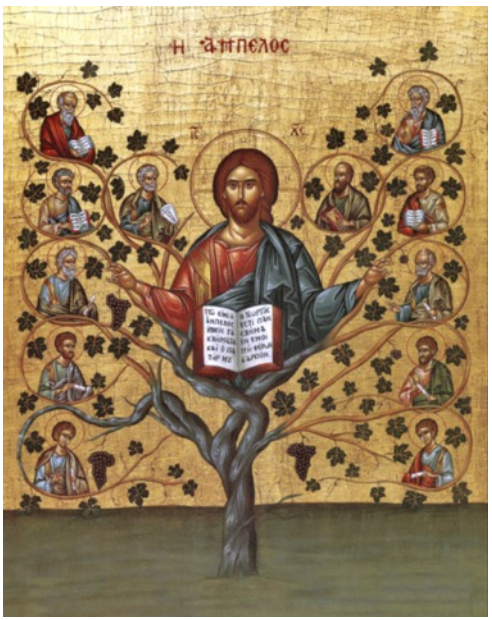
Mercy and compassion are not trivial or incidental characteristics of God. Before Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of the law for the second time, he audaciously asked God to see His glory. On Mount Sinai, God displays his glory and goodness to Moses making Himself present to Moses by calling on His own name: "The Lord, the Lord, compassionate, gracious, long suffering, full of mercy and truth" (Exodus 34:6). Throughout the Old Testament, God makes clear that because of his compassion and mercy, he will not abandon the Israelites, but in solidarity with them, promises that he will restore them to the fullness of life.

In Isaiah, God promises to extend this compassionate restoration to all people through the suffering servant, the prototype for Christ in the Christian faith. The Son of God fulfills this promise in His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. The express image of the Father, the Son of God incarnate as Christ reflects and radiates the glory of the Father among us. Abiding in the love of the Father, Christ radiates

and reflects that love, his love, to us. It is through this love that we are saved—that is, healed from sinfulness, death, and estrangement and brought into the fullness of life in communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and with one another in the communion of saints. Salvation is never merely personal but always a matter of koinonia—communion and fellowship with God and others.

But as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes, "While Christ's victory over death and sin…is indeed complete and definitive…, [our] personal participation in that victory is as yet far from complete" (How We are Saved, p.4). Put simply, we have free will. God won't drag us into the fullness of life—eternal life—with him. God cannot compel us to love him. We must freely consent to the gift of life that he offers. This consent involves both faith and the fruit of works. As Blessed Theophlyact writes, "Faith truly comes alive only when accompanied by God-pleasing actions.… Likewise, works are enlivened by faith. Apart from one another, both are dead" (Commentary on Gospel of John 9:30-33.)

Why? We are created in the image (ikon) of God: We are created *as* icons of God. More specifically, we are created as icons of the Son of God, the express image of the Father, who is incarnate as Jesus Christ. The icons that Orthodox Christians produce always represent Christ, His Mother, and the saints in a transfigured state in which the glory of God, the Trinity, infuses and transforms earthly reality. All of our icons are painted or produced to reflect the uncreated light and glory of God: the compassion, grace, patience, mercy, and humility of God. That glory is manifest in the icon for the Nativity of Christ, His resurrection, and His Crucifixion. It is manifest in the icon of the extreme humility of Christ. We venerate icons because we venerate those persons in whom we have found the glory of God to be manifest amongst us. It is no accident that we refer to saints as our god-bearing fathers and mothers.



We produce painted icons only because the Son of God becomes incarnate and because we ourselves are living icons. As Christ abides in and reflects the glory of the Father, so we are created to abide in the love of Christ and to reflect that love in our loves. But in doing so, we are created to reflect the very glory of God—God's compassion, graciousness, patience, and mercy—in our own lives. "God crowns us with compassion and mercy" (Ps. 103:4). In one sense, this means that God

abundantly blesses us with the actions that flow from His compassion and mercy. But there is another, deeper sense to this crowning, as illustrated in an Orthodox Christian wedding service.

The sacramental highpoint of this service is found in the crowning of the bride and groom to and for one another. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the bride and groom symbolically receive martyrs' crowns. It might seem odd and depressing to bestow martyr-like crowns at a wedding ceremony. But a martyr, first of all, is one who bears witness to someone or something and who also is willing to lay down his or her life in response to that witness. At their crowning, the bride and groom are given grace by the Holy Spirit to mutually bear witness to one another of the self-sacrificial love that Christ has shown to them. They are given the grace to abide in Christ's love and to bear the cross of a true self-sacrificial love. Thus, in their own love for one another, they are called to die to mere self-interest; they are called to mutually reflect Christ's love for one another and any children which they might have in creating the community or communion of a family.

Being created in the image of God, all of us are crowned by him with his compassion and mercy. He shares something of Himself—we Orthodox Christians would say his "energies"—with us. But compassion always moves us away from ourselves to others. As parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan show, compassion for others expresses itself in actions for others and on their behalf. In being crowned with mercy and compassion, we are all of us, at the core of our reality, crowned to another. We are created to bear witness to the love, compassion, and mercy that Christ has shown us by laboring to reflect it through the love, compassion, and mercy that we show to others. As Christ says in the opening scripture text here "My Father is glorified by this: that you should bear much fruit and come to be My disciples." We are called to do all things for the glory of God. But we are also called to reflect that glory—His compassion and mercy—in our own lives. We do so in our own small ways by, borrowing a phrase from Marquette's Jesuit heritage, "becoming men and women for others."

Being a living icon of God is a bit like being a wind spinner. The wind blows, the spinner turns, and it passes the wind on. A well-made spinner doesn't try to hold onto the wind or

hoard it. It responds to all breezes. But we humans have to be very vigilant about the "winds" and "breezes" to which we respond. There are the many breezes of our own passions and thoughts as well as the seductive influences of our society. These breezes blow us away from God and our neighbors into the prideful individualism of seeking our own self-interest above everything else. If we respond to these breezes, we become obsessed "selfies" cut off from any fullness of life. Rather, we must attend to the breeze, the wind, of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us and renews our lives. For that wind directs us to the kingdom of heaven, which Christ tells us is even now at hand, in which we are enabled to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds, and to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Allowing ourselves to be directed by the grace of the Holy Spirit is the ongoing struggle that we call repentance. Repentance involves a change of mind and heart and a desire for healing in which, with God's grace, we open ourselves to really abide in Christ's love and accept what it means to be a living icon of Christ. We are, however, living icons of Christ in community with others. Crowned to one another with God's compassion and mercy, we are created to find salvation or fullness of life in communion with God, the Trinity, and in community with one another. Compassion is not a kind of feeling that we switch on and off. Compassion is an attunement to others without boundaries. This is the principal lesson of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The true neighbor is a neighbor to all.

For St. John Chrysostom, being compassionately attuned to others "is most especially characteristic of the saints. No glory, nor honor, nor anything else is more precious to them than their neighbor's welfare and salvation." Compassion takes us beyond our own interest to the welfare of others and, implicitly, to the welfare of the communities in which we live—local and global. In reflecting Christ's love in our own lives, compassion should make us attuned to the common good of all.

It is as St. John Chrysostom writes:

> But how may we become imitators of Christ? By acting in everything for the common good, and not merely seeking our own…. Let no one therefore seek his own good. In truth, a person (really) seeks his own good when he looks to that of his neighbor…. What is their good is ours; we are one body, and parts and limbs one of another. Let us not live though we were torn apart. Let no one say, "such a person is no friend of mine, nor relation, nor neighbor, I have nothing to do with him, how shall I approach, and how address him?" Though he be neither relation nor friend, yet he is a human being, who shares the same nature with you, has the same Master. He is your fellow-servant, and fellow-sojourner, for he is born in the same world (Commentary on Gospel of St. John).
>
> For nothing is so pleasing to God, as to live for the common advantage or good. For this end God gave us speech, and hands, and feet, and strength of body, mind, heart, and understanding, that we might use all these things, both for our own salvation, and for our neighbor's advantage and good (Commentary on Gospel of St. Matthew). *IC*

This essay was delivered orally at Marquette Mission Week 2015 by Prof. John D. Jones, Department of Philosophy, MU. Fr. John is an Orthodox Christian Chaplain and is Associate Priest, Sts. Cyril & Methodius Orthodox Church (OCA).

National Identity and Unity:
From Babel to Pentecost

by Archbishop Makarios of Kenya

DESPITE MANY AREAS of progress, the last one hundred years has been the most brutal age in the history of humanity. What is most shocking about modern conflicts is that it is not the combatants who have been the main victims, but rather the most vulnerable members of society: children, women, the elderly, the sick. This is due not only to violence but also to malnutrition and disease made worse by armed conflict. Wars disrupt food supplies, destroy crops and agricultural infrastructure, wreck water and sanitation systems, and disable health services. Wars displace whole populations, tearing families and communities apart.

Most modern wars are principally instigated or manipulated by what might be called the "phyletistic personality syndrome," a phenomenon which pits humans against humans in the most violent of confrontations in the name of national or tribal identity, ethnic cleansing, racial supremacy, or cultural exclusivism, often with distinct religious components.

Nationalism, in the sense of fanatical patriotism, is an obsessive sense of national superiority over other nations and a belief in one nation's inherent and pre-determined glorious future destiny. Ethnocentrism gives rise to tribal or racial intolerance and leads to the perception that one must eliminate, exclude, or dominate the "lesser tribe." In the case of cultural-ideological exclusivism, the values and norms of one's culture are regarded as superior to all others and must therefore be adopted by others or imposed on them. To better understand the phenomenon of ethnic and national identities and cast some light upon the search for human unity, it is necessary for us to explore the biblical and theological explanations for our propensity toward tribalism and nationalism.

In the period immediately preceding construction of the Tower of Babel, we learn that all people were of one race and spoke one language. The diversification of human languages was a consequence of human sin incurred during the building of the Tower of Babel, a rebellion against God's ordinances, the ambition of "making a name for one's self" by constructing a human empire and culture independent of the will and assistance of God.

Despite the post-Babel second human Fall, the freshly diversified global situation provided humans with the freedom either to identify with a wise and blessed sense of ethnic affiliation in a theocentric direction or to let their differences degenerate into demonic anthropocentric-nationalism, ethnocentrism and tribal pride. Clearly, the latter path was taken.

The step from ethnic identity to fanatical ethnocentrism, and from national

identity to obsessive nationalism, which lies behind most of our violent conflicts, must be understood through a theological, biblical prism as a fallen, corrupt human state, a spiritually dysfunctional condition, which must be condemned by the Church.

How then can the Church assist in the search for the path of human unity? Can the Church be effective? I believe the answer is yes.

A Byzantine kontakion chanted on the Sunday of Pentecost is most illuminating in terms of the post-Tower of Babel potential for a unified human condition initiated by Christ and confirmed by the Holy Spirit:

> When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations; but when He distributed tongues of fire, He called all to unity. Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the all-holy Spirit!

The Pentecost event in the Upper Room is God's reversal of the punitive measures taken at Babel. Through the "tongues of fire" and the speaking in various human tongues, the potential for reunification of humanity is made possible through the unifying operations of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit possesses a creative force to transform and renew. The Pentecost event transformed the disciples into bold witnesses for Christ by renewing their hearts and minds. This transforming "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is capable of transfiguring human hearts and making former enemies into friends and brothers. In our search for human unity, we need to consistently experience the empowering anointing of Pentecost, becoming faithful instruments of the Holy Spirit.

The initial celebration of the Lord's Supper was inaugurated not as an individual institution but within a communal setting, that is within the messianic or ecclesial community presided over by Jesus among his disciples. He formed a new, united community dedicated to loving and serving one another as well as "giving thanks" to Him who established it. The partaking of the holy Body and Blood of Christ by the ecclesial community becomes a source of growth in the image and likeness of Christ

and the ultimate bond of spiritual and social unity, for it doesn't discriminate against gender, class, or race in its sanctifying energy. In this way we are made ready to "receive one another as Christ received us."

The challenge we face is eradication of phyletism within the Church. Sadly, we Church members are often guilty of promoting nationalism at the expense of our catholic (in the sense of universal) identity. Churches constituted on national lines often involve themselves in national wars, even blessing weapons before battle, and even encouraging war and nationalism in the name of Jesus Christ! While nationalistic church leaders are certainly well intentioned, in reality they oppose the work of the Holy Spirit and the teachings of Christ.

It is significant that, at a time of heightened nationalism, a pan-Orthodox Synod held in Constantinople in 1872 condemned ethno-phyletism as a heresy: "We renounce, censure and condemn racism, that is racial discrimination, ethnic feuds, hatreds and dissensions within the Church of Christ, as contrary to the teaching of the Gospel and the holy canons of our blessed Fathers which support the holy Church and the entire Christian world, embellish it and lead it to divine godliness."

As the Orthodox canon lawyer, Grigorios Papathomas, explains, "the Church must not be confused with the destiny of a single nation or a single race."

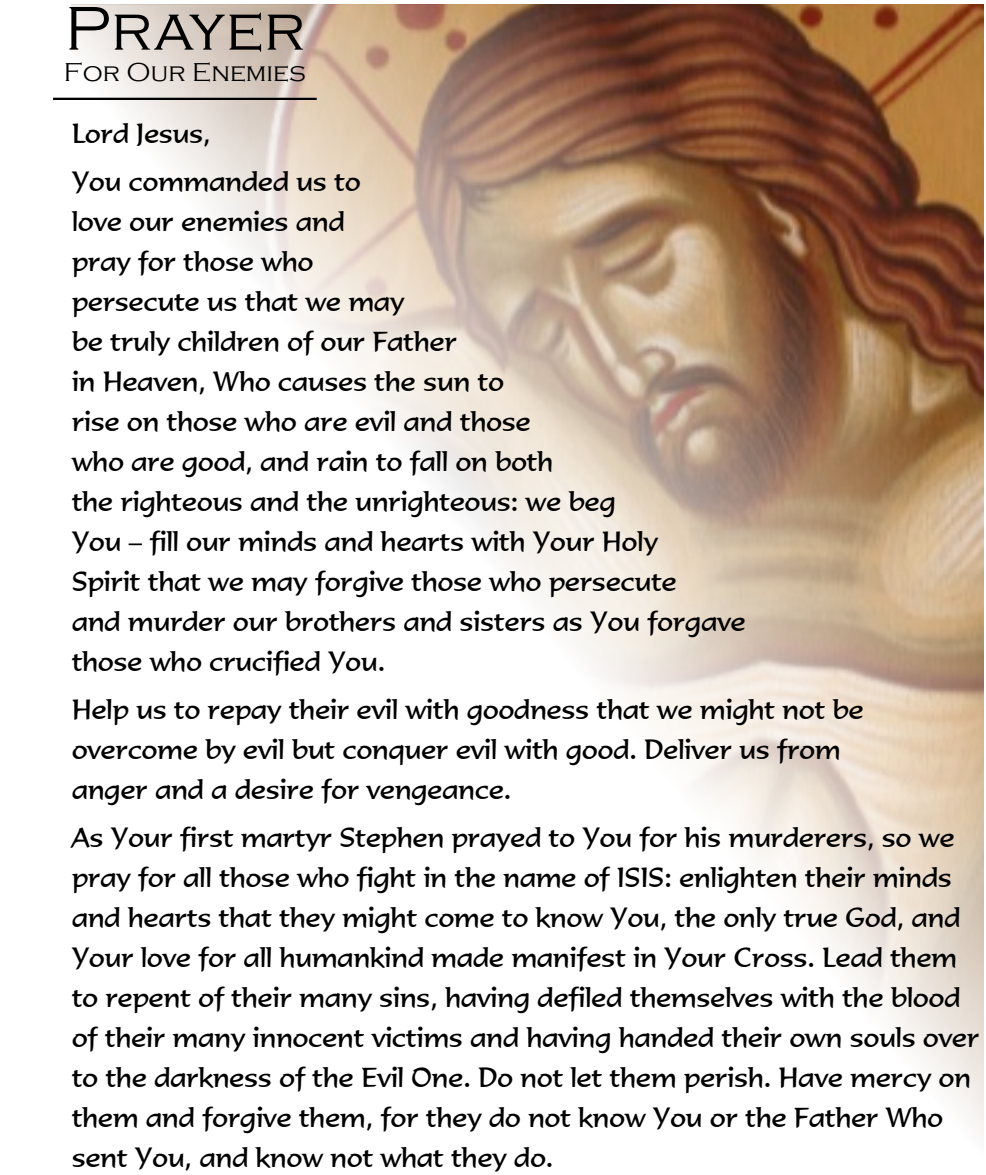
In Pauline terms, we may say that nationalism is the direct consequence of a "fleshly" anthropocentric disposition rather than a spiritual and theocentric human orientation. Nationalism remains in the realm of the "flesh" rather than the "spirit" as a manifestation of the powers and principalities at work in the "present evil age." In his letter to the Galatians, Paul insists that among Christ's followers there is "no longer Greek nor Jew" but only the unity, peace, and blessedness that derives from membership in the new "Israel of God," the Church. This unity however can only be perceived, appropriated, and accomplished in a theocentric manner by those who are reconciled in Christ. It can only be made manifest by those who bring forth the "fruits of the Spirit." It is in this way that we may receive one another as Christ receives us and thus aspire toward authentic human unity. History is littered with the failed scraps of torn anthropocentric peace treaties, international accords, and cease-fire agreements.

If the Church is to accomplish the task of human unity, it must practice its God-appointed calling. This requires that we abandon ethnic ghettos. We have been appointed to participate in Christ's great commission, the evangelization and baptism of all nations. This global evangelization mission of the Church bearing the message of unconditional love and forgiveness will eventually enable humans to "Receive one another as Christ received us" (Rom. 15:7).

I end with this question: Who is Jesus Christ for us? Is he merely a tribal leader who facilitates national unification? Or is he God, who saves us from malediction and death? For the believing mind, the answer is self-evident. *IC*

This essay is based on a paper presented in 2004 in Malaysia at a conference of the Faith and Order Plenary Commission of the World Council of Churches.

Prayer
For Our Enemies



Lord Jesus,

You commanded us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us that we may be truly children of our Father in Heaven, Who causes the sun to rise on those who are evil and those who are good, and rain to fall on both the righteous and the unrighteous: we beg You – fill our minds and hearts with Your Holy Spirit that we may forgive those who persecute and murder our brothers and sisters as You forgave those who crucified You.

Help us to repay their evil with goodness that we might not be overcome by evil but conquer evil with good. Deliver us from anger and a desire for vengeance.

As Your first martyr Stephen prayed to You for his murderers, so we pray for all those who fight in the name of ISIS: enlighten their minds and hearts that they might come to know You, the only true God, and Your love for all humankind made manifest in Your Cross. Lead them to repent of their many sins, having defiled themselves with the blood of their many innocent victims and having handed their own souls over to the darkness of the Evil One. Do not let them perish. Have mercy on them and forgive them, for they do not know You or the Father Who sent You, and know not what they do.

For blessed is Your holy Name, O Christ our God, and to You do we offer glory, honor and worship, together with Your eternal Father and Your Holy Spirit, the one true and living God, always now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer offered in September 2014 by OPF member Fr Steve Tsichlis, pastor of St Paul's Greek Orthodox Church in Irvine, California

EMAIL
CONVERSATIONS

Any member of the OPF may request to be added to our online discussion list where postings and comments are made almost daily. If you wish to join, make your request via our website or send an email to Alex Patico, Jim Forest, or Pieter Dykhorst (see inside front cover). The following were taken from the discussion list.

> *Jim Forest wrote:*
> A long-term study of Vietnam veterans with PTSD finds that among those "especially likely to develop such war-related trauma, [are] those veterans who had killed multiple times in combat.
>
> > *Catherine Jefferson wrote:*
> >
> > This is rather like a formal scientific study finding out that children whose parents read to them at home score better on reading and writing skills at school—not scientifically "inevitable," but at very least an expected result. I don't scorn the study. Scientific studies of questions that we think we already know the answers to often teach us new things. Sometimes they show us that the expected result/answer we thought we already knew is wrong.
> >
> > I am not at all surprised that expectations were confirmed when it came to PTSD rates among combat veterans. I'm just a few years younger than most younger Vietnam veterans, and most combat veterans tend to be young guys. I've known several. One fought in the Tet Offensive. His statement to me and anyone who asks, "I don't care how justified. If you ever have to kill somebody, your life will suck for a very long time."
> >
> > He never talked about Vietnam, with me anyway…. I don't know, as a fact, that he has PTSD, but I can see the obvious.
> >
> > Data is not the plural of anecdote, but I offer his story to illustrate. I expect there are plenty of young men and women from Iraq and Afghanistan who suffer the same way my friend does.
> >
> > > *Jim Forest wrote:*
> > >
> > > I agree, Catherine, that there are no surprises in this study, but one real plus is that those who wish to deny the obvious are less able to claim that killing in war leaves no hidden wounds on those who do the killing.

The following exchange was in response to an essay by Herbert A. Perkins, co-founder of an anti-racist educational group in the twin cities called ASDIC Metamorphosis, who wrote an essay "Reflection on 'Burning Down the Town'" in response to the problem of some violent protests in Ferguson after the Grand Jury decision not to indict the police officer who shot to death Michael Brown.

A few quotes from Perkins' essay:

There is no "turning-over," i.e., revolution, without burning of the "old order" and some degree of "loss" imposed on the innocent.

Who is innocent? Are any of us innocent in our "by-standing" ownership in a society that is racist? What does our DISINTEREST in the ways racism is a violence against people mean in any of our claims of "innocence"? Are we innocent as we turn our eye away from the everyday operations of US racism and the policing/law enforcement that protects the racist interests and life-ways of US communities?

Let us not be naïve! We must take sides against racism. There are no innocent by-standers!

Oppression is held in place by violence. It is removed through the violating of the norms and practices that hold it in place.

I do not advocate the burning of businesses as such, don't get me wrong. I, a reader of Mohandas Gandhi, recall him saying something like the following: "I'd rather see a man engage in violence to resist the injustice imposed on him than to see him cowardly accepting violence being done to him. Cowardice is inexcusable! But non-violence as resistance to violence is better, preferred."

Now, today, protesters in Ferguson, protestors across the country, have also violated the peace and orderly business of the towns they live in.

So, please, let us be less sanctimoniousness about this!

In the context of US enslavement of Africans and resistance, Fredrick Gabrielle Douglass' famously responded: "Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are people who want crops without ploughing the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

> *Alex Patico wrote:*
>
> The problem I have with "reactive violence"—what happened in my home city of Washington after Dr. King was shot, for example—is not that it is hard to comprehend, or that it is morally equivalent to the taking of human life by authorities, or even to long-term institutional racism that eats away at souls bit by bit. No, I object for the same reason I object to drone warfare: it ends up hurting many who are, if not totally innocent (who among is?), certainly far from being the ones mainly responsible, the persons that those who burn are really mad at. Those shop owners are "collateral damage," which is not acceptable in any situation. They become victims mostly because they are convenient targets.

> *Steve Hayes wrote:*
>
> Yes, most violence in the world is "reactive violence"—that is violence because people are angry at someone else's violence. It is "feel-good" violence, because it makes people feel good to express their anger by behaving violently. The attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 was reactive violence, and the attack on Afghanistan that followed was reactive violence reacting against that. The problem I have with reactive violence is that it just perpetuates the cycle of violence, or worse, makes it a spiral, killing and injuring more people each time round. More people have been killed in Afghanistan than were killed in the attacks on the World Trade Center, and as far as I am aware none of them were

involved in planning the attack on the World Trade Center.

That is why I am a pacifist.

I feel passions, like anger, that are sparked off by other people's violent acts, and the immediate reaction is to want to hit back. But as Orthodox Christians we are told to control the passions, and to rein in our violent urges. And it is only by doing this that we can reduce the spiral of violence, making it smaller instead of bigger.

"Vengeance is mine, says the Lord. I will repay."

Paul del Junco wrote:

God's "vengeance" was the Cross of Christ. That's how little we understand what vengeance is for God. If it's not about love in the end, it's about nothing. Justice is a degradation of love, in my mind.

Here's a reality which puts racial injustice, and any injustice, into perspective. And the contemplation of it brings me close to despair. Every single nation on earth without exception, either directly or indirectly, that contains all the finest culture, art, beauty, education, social progress (however you define it), lofty jurisprudence, every human refinement of thought word and deed, including all the finest theological thought, rests on the ugly brutality of war. Our physical security, our economic security, our leisure to pursue all these things (including this conversation!) all rest on this. This is the foundation upon which we all stand. Whether it's Pax Romana, Pax Byzantina, or Pax Americana. Pax, peace as we know it in this fallen world of ours, stands on this hideous reality. As J. L. McKenzie says, it's part of the air we breathe.

Jesus is clearly a contradiction to this reality but he lived and preached and died in the reality of Pax Romana. The peace he preached was not of this world. His perspective was not looking into improving the future. It was eschatological. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. It is not as the world gives that I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid."

Don't get me wrong, it's not that we shouldn't try to improve the world. But we need perspective. We are handing on the baton to our children (may they forgive us), but the fulfillment of our lives and this world does not lie here. The most obvious reason is that it's temporary. The world's and our fulfillment lie in eternity.

What's our job here? To love. Or as Peter Maurin put it, "We must make the kind of society where it is easier for people to be good."

Alex Patico wrote:

Wonderful, Paul! I think that speaking about justice as "love lite" might be closer to the mark. It's what passes for fair, reasonable, and good in the absence of the truly compassionate option, which is so much more, as you point out.

Steve Hayes wrote:

I see justice as congealed love.

You can't force people to love one another, but justice reduces the evil effects of their lack of love.

Recommended Reading

Being Bread

by Stephen Muse

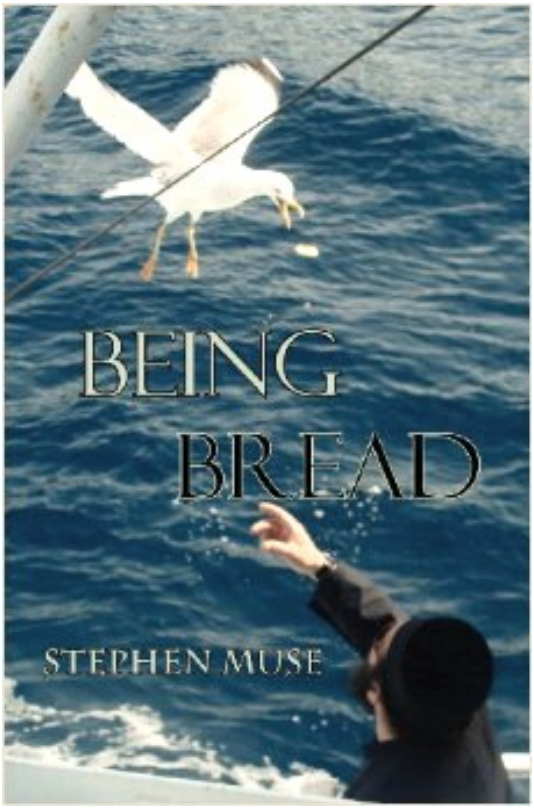
Orthodox Research Inst., 2013, 233 pp.

Reviewed by Pieter Dykhorst

Being Bread is in my opinion the kind of book Orthodox Christians long for and adds to the slowly growing body of literature for lay Orthodox who want uplifting devotional reading from and for *today.* Our faith and tradition are grounded in the past, and nobody wants that to change. But much of what we read can trick us into thinking past reality (think Saints lives) is wholly separate from present possibility. This book pushes back against that idea without disconnecting from the past at all. Dr. Muse has filled his book with stories grounded in the Orthodox understanding of what life in Christ fully lived looks like, and then gently encourages us to examine our own lives to find there really is abundant space for us to live that life every day.

I have one criticism of this book that I'll just get out of the way because it is so petty even while necessary. I sometimes skip footnotes but found the key to Dr. Muse's book partially nestled in one in the introduction. There, I've said it. Now, if you—and you'll be happy if you do—buy this book, be sure to read the footnote on page ten that explains the meaning of the Greek word rendered "daily," as in the phrase "give us our daily bread" found in the gospels of both St. Matthew and St. Luke. Maybe in a future edition this will be brought up into the text and expanded a bit. But, like I said, it's hardly a flaw.

Perhaps many of Dr. Muse's readers will already know that the English word "daily" in The Lord's Prayer isn't correctly translated at all. In fact, it turns out the word in Greek was most likely made up by the authors of the Gospels, as it appears nowhere in any extant texts in Greek prior or since, except those talking about the Lord's Prayer. There is a perfectly good word in Greek for daily, which appears once in James 2:15 where



the writer exhorts Christians to provide for brothers who don't have a sufficient food ration "equal to the span of a day," or "daily" bread, which is what the single word "ephémeros" means. So, if Jesus had meant to suggest we ask every day merely for what we need to feed our bodies that day, that's the word the Evangelists would likely have used. But they didn't.

Instead, the word they chose to coin is "epiousion," which when modifying bread means something like—lots of scholars argue about the precise meaning, which is what happens when you make up a word that ends up being very important—"from outside normal provision for the sustenance of your very existence." Some render this "super-sufficient bread." Dr. Muse packs all that into "*being* bread," as in, bread necessary for your *being* at all, as well as for your continued being. This bread Jesus is talking about is nothing less than that sacramental Word that crosses the boundary from spiritual to physical and feeds us in every way. It includes the bread "man does not live by" alone, but it really points to the Bread of Heaven, Jesus, the bread of Eucharist.

And of course, "*Being* Bread*"* is the title of the book. And no, that isn't a typo—the title italicizes being because Dr. Muse wants us to know that while the book points to our becoming, or being, bread, he uses the word as a noun phrase naming a type of bread. Because that is exactly the lens through which each chapter was written, if you read each chapter through the same lens, suddenly you are not only reading wonderful stories but devotions about how our interactions with others and the world around us are intended to feed our existence and our growth to becoming fully human in Christ. By offering us twenty-five morsels of being bread, Dr. Muse also teaches us how to become bread.

The rest of the key to this book is also found in the introduction. Together with the understanding of the sacramental nature of the bread for which we ask, is the idea that in order for that existence to have any meaning, it is to be shared. And for us to fully share it in any meaningful way, we must stop and be present and pay attention to what is *really* going on around us and with one another. Again, the focal point is the Eucharist: there we receive bread that gives life but only if we stop to reflect, receive it humbly, and go share that life-sustaining bread with others, whereby we become human the only way we can: together.

I'm reading *"Being* Bread" again. I enjoyed it the first time when I was merely reading it to write a review. I'm now reading it more in the moment. You can read the book fairly quickly as the collection of delightful stories it is, or you can (also) chew each one slowly to…well, you get the point. I recommend the book that way—it's much better the second time.

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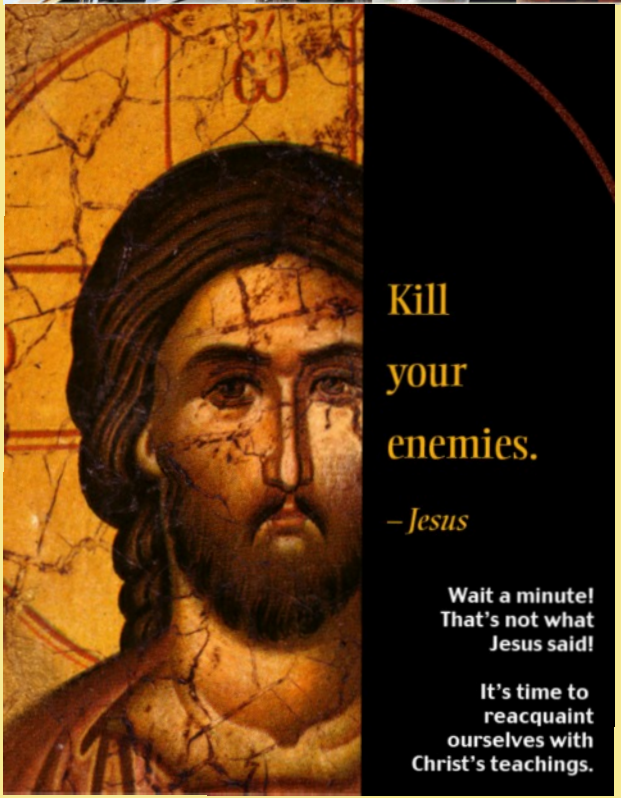

Kill your enemies.

– *Jesus*

Wait a minute! That's not what Jesus said!

It's time to reacquaint ourselves with Christ's teachings.

In Communion/OPF
3319 Alden Pl NE
Washington DC 20019