

PERSPECTIVES ON ORTHODOXY IN AMERICA

Editorials by Abbot Jonah (Paffhausen)

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Foreword

THIS COLLECTION OF EDITORIALS from *Divine Ascent*, the journal of the Monastery of Saint John of San Francisco, represents over a decade of observations on the life of the Orthodox Church in America. The articles have as their primary subjects monasticism, missionary outreach, and the vision and future of the Orthodox Church in America.

Some common themes are the necessity of Orthodox unity, the importance of monasticism to the growth of Orthodoxy in America, and the missionary imperative we face. Central to these, however, is the overall vision of what Orthodoxy can be, actualized, in this country. As the Orthodox Church in America, we must preserve a catholic vision, with full integrity and great breadth, keeping our focus on Christ and the Gospel.

— Abbot Jonah
Friday in Thomas Week, 2008

The Orthodox Church in America: Vision, Vocation, Mission, Identity

DIVINE ASCENT NO. II, LENT 2008

THE HOLY SPIRIT gives the Church her vision, which comes from our identity in Christ as His Body. This vision is identical with the vision of all those who have gone before us precisely because it is the same Body, with the same vocation, mission, and identity: to be the Body of Christ: the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Whenever we add elements to that vision, we distort it, no matter how noble our qualifications and agendas may be. Whenever we subtract from or diminish it, we do likewise. If we change the vision in any way, we exclude ourselves from it and from the Body which it constitutes.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND REPENTING

There is a lot of interest in the sad scandals that are plaguing the Orthodox Church in America, in the East and in the North. Dire warnings of doom, betrayals, and speculations of perverse motives are all over the Internet and discussed widely. In particular, much is being said and written to the affect that the OCA lacks vision and that this, in turn, is due to a lack of good leadership.

Such talk points to a truth: it is certainly the task of our ecclesiastical leaders constantly to announce and renew the Church's vision. But how, exactly, is this to happen? Is there a specifically churchly way to go about this task? For we are not a corporation or secular organization, and in this instance we cannot take recourse to secular models. Our identity, vocation, and mission – both as individual members of the Church and together as the one Body of the Church – derive from the Church's vision. Her vision is not that of any particular leader but is shared by the whole Body of the faithful.

Our task is to turn away from our own petty individual worlds, causes, and dreams – the delusions of our own reasonings. And our leaders' task is constantly to call us back to this repentance. This they must do so that

we can share the vision given by the grace of the Holy Spirit and accept our calling from Christ to be the Church, His Body, which constitutes the very core of our personal and corporate identity.

But when this leadership fails to occur – when our leaders do not call us to repentance by word and example, but instead cause scandal, sorrow, and pain – what then? For undoubtedly there has been egregious wrongdoing, and these matters are serious and profoundly affect the lives of many. Thus there is a tremendous need for healing and for restoration of confidence.

When one is suffering, all suffer together. When one member is honored, all rejoice (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 12 : 26). This is the basic principle of our communion in Christ. The bishops have a particular kind of responsibility, but they are not the Church by themselves; nor are the clergy, nor the rest of the laity. How do we support our bishops so that they can bear their portion of responsibility for the life of the whole Body? Christ is calling us to take the responsibility for the Church that is already ours by virtue of our baptism and chrismation. It's not about how "they" deal with it. It's about us. It's our life, our union in Christ with one another.

If there is a lack of accountability and transparency in the hierarchy, is it not our responsibility to correct it? How would it have arisen, had we not abrogated our responsibility to demand integrity from the very leaders we put into office?

If we judge those in positions of authority who have fallen, we only accuse and judge ourselves. It is easier to blame hypocritically than simply to accept the responsibility of cleaning up the mess. We should grieve over our brothers' sins, not judge them. And in so doing, we come together in compassion. This strengthens our unity and welds us together in a common task: to take responsibility for the life of our Church.

Authority is responsibility. When authority degenerates into power, egoism, and position, it destroys the image of Christ which those positions of responsibility are meant to depict. "Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10 : 44). The chief pastors of the Church are called to be that image of Christ, as are all of us the faithful. They fall short; we fall short. But we must constantly return in repentance, and encourage our fathers and brethren in that same repentance, supporting those who bear the responsibility for our souls. It is a heavy burden. But if we all bear it together, in a synergy of love and communion, it becomes the

easy yoke and light burden of Christ, in Christ, by Christ. When we try to bear it by ourselves in isolation, we will inevitably fall, because it becomes something outside of Christ, about our own ego.

Thus, we must not become despondent or fearful. Instead, we must repent as a body. We must turn towards God and away from the abstractions of petty personal agendas, which can include a vindictive and worldly desire for the punishment of those who have offended us. We must not be blind to our own sin and corruption. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). We must open our minds and hearts to Jesus Christ and to one another. Then we will see with great clarity the vision of the Church of Christ, and this will show us how to set our house in order, cleaning up the mess that we as a body have allowed.

THE VISION OF THE KINGDOM

So, what is the vision of the Orthodox Church in America, and thus her identity, vocation, and mission? It is nothing other than Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. This vision is revealed to us when we celebrate the Eucharist, and the Eucharist, in turn, sends us on our mission: to bring Christ's Gospel to America in all its Orthodox integrity. We do not need the ways of the corporate world (vision- and mission-brainstorming, etc.) to determine this. Rather, we need prayer and discernment – together as the body of the Church, and in particular on the part of our Holy Synod of archbishops and bishops – in order to renew the vision of the Kingdom and to preach and proclaim the unity that exists in Christ by the Holy Spirit and constitutes us as the Church.

This vision is not about programs, institutions, administrations, budgets, or bureaucrats. Even less is it about the personal ambitions, agendas, or self-aggrandizements of bishops, clergy, lay leaders, or anyone else. It is only about Jesus Christ and His Kingdom. All the concrete projects we undertake, all the offices and positions of authority and responsibility, flow from this source. "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6:33).

If as an organization we had lost our vision, then we would have ceased to be the Church. But this is not the case here. That vision, and the grace to actualize and incarnate it, is bestowed at every Eucharist.

The blessed and ever-memorable Father Alexander Schmemmann

clearly saw and clearly articulated the Kingdom of God, imparted in the Eucharist, as the focal point of the Church's life. It was this clarity of vision which gave such great strength to his leadership. We need to get back in touch with that vision. We must return to our first love. It is the Liturgy that gives us our identity and sends us on our mission, renewing our vocation to be the Body of Christ – the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church in the world.

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The Church's four characteristic "marks" – unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity – are at once the Church's content and identity, constituting both her vocation and mission. They are our goal; it is our challenge to actualize them in our lives, both personally and corporately, in order for us to be the Church.

Before anything else, these characteristics are marks of Christ Himself. Jesus Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit; He is the focal point of our unity, and the very context of our relationship with God and one another as His Body. Jesus is the ultimate criterion of holiness: the man transparent to God, revealing God, incarnating God, and imparting that holiness which is participation in God's very life, which lifts us up from the world of sin and corruption. Christ is the essence of catholicity or wholeness, in that "all things were created through Him and for Him ... and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16–17). He is also the source of universality because He embraces all things and permeates all things, and all things exist in Him. And He is the foundation of apostleship, the apostle and high priest from God, (Hebrews 3:1) Whose obedience reveals Him as transparent to God, speaking only the words of Him Who sent Him (John 3:34), and doing whatever He sees the Father do (John 5:19), transforming and redeeming the world.

Our vision as Orthodox Christians is always first and foremost Jesus Christ. His message is our message: the coming of the Kingdom. His life is our life. His mission is our mission: the salvation of all mankind and its union with the Father in Christ by the Holy Spirit. Our task in the midst of this is constantly to repent, to have this vision renewed in us, and to purge our lives of everything contrary to the vision and incarnation of

Christ in our lives. These are the marks of Christ; and if we share His life, we also share these marks.

THE ROLE OF AUTOCEPHALY

The unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity of the Orthodox Church cannot be the exclusive possession of Middle-Eastern, Mediterranean and Slavic countries and peoples. The Orthodox Church in America has the vocation to manifest all the fullness of Christ's Church here in America. Her autocephaly was sought and granted in 1970 precisely to facilitate this. Many today look on that event as a grave mistake, the sad fruits of which we are now forced to reap. But if we make the effort to build up and not to tear down, (1 Corinthians 3:10) a more constructive approach to our autocephaly becomes apparent.

For, in fact, the greatest strength of the Orthodox Church in America is that in her we have taken full responsibility for the life and integrity of our Church and do not rely on anyone anywhere else. Of course, we preserve sisterly relations and Eucharistic communion with the other Orthodox Churches. But we elect our own bishops, we oversee our own finances, and we support our own ministries. None of the other Orthodox communities in America can say that. Thus we are responsible for our own mistakes, as well as our own victories. And when we are faced with a problem, we are responsible, as a single Body in Christ, to deal with it in a Christ-like manner. Yes, we sin; and the sins of one, ultimately, belong to all of us – the healing and reconciliation of those who have been hurt by sin are the responsibility of us all.

Therefore, our problems will not be solved by someone from the outside. No one overseas can come to the rescue. No one will impose one more set of foreign ecclesiastical bureaucrats answerable only to a distant despot somewhere in the Old World. Thank God. This is the beauty and the responsibility of autocephaly. It is our great strength. We simply need to put aside the distractions of our passions and accept this responsibility given by God: to be the Orthodox Church in this country; to reveal the presence of Jesus Christ here in America to souls perishing in darkness, ignorance, and despair; to give them hope; and to lead them to repentance in the knowledge and love of God.

Where do we Go from Here?

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Father Alexander Schmemmann: In Memoriam

OVER TWENTY YEARS HAVE PASSED since the repose of Father Alexander Schmemmann. Father Alexander's vision shaped the structure and life of the Orthodox Church in America as well as St. Vladimir's Seminary. His works informed and infuriated, transformed and influenced the life of the whole Orthodox community in America and beyond.

Reading his works now, I am impressed not only by his vision, but by how far the Church has come over the past fifty years since Father Alexander came to the United States from France. No longer is lay non-participation in the Eucharist the norm, a huge transformation. No longer is it questioned that the liturgical texts are a primary access to the Mind of the Church. The liturgy in the OCA is universally served in English, or the language of the local community where necessary. No longer is the OCA a Slavic ghetto of ex-Uniates; it has become a truly catholic community based on faith rather than ethnic and family tradition. No longer is it canonically isolated; it is fully in communion with all the other Orthodox Churches. Great numbers of the clergy, many of whom are converts to Orthodoxy, are well educated with master's degrees in divinity or theology. These were some of the main issues with which Father Alexander dealt.

There are still more issues, however, which remain unresolved. The question of the so-called "diaspora" and the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is a key issue, which not only Father Alexander but many others courageously addressed. The OCA's autocephaly remains unaccepted by Constantinople, though its canonicity is unquestioned. Most of all, his vision of a united American Orthodox Church, embracing all Orthodox

Christians under a single hierarchy, fully autocephalous and engaged with the contemporary social and cultural milieu, remains unfulfilled.

Father Alexander delineated some of the key challenges that the Orthodox Church must face in its mission in this culture. One such challenge is secularization: the reduction of Orthodoxy to a compartmentalized religious form fulfilling people's "religious needs," while their overall worldview remains defined by "the world." Father Alexander wrote against this sellout to secularization, and it is one of the greatest impacts on how we do mission in our culture.

Another central issue is the relationship of monasticism to the mission of the Orthodox Church in this culture. At the time of Father Alexander's death, monasticism was very minimal in North America. The larger men's monasteries were primarily outside the canonical churches, and some were riddled with scandal. Others preserved external forms, but they sorely lacked elders with profound spiritual maturity. Still others were barely nascent, or even experimental in their forms and expression. Monasticism was entirely marginal to the life of the Orthodox community in America (except perhaps in the Russian Church Abroad). Elder Ephraim's communities were not even planned. Father Alexander took a rather dim view of monasticism, undoubtedly because of its spiritual shallowness and external religiosity, as well as his knowledge of the corruption just under the surface of so many communities. He rejected the pharisaical externalism that is such an easy temptation for monasticism, the anti-intellectualism and arrogant elitism, all of which were part of the corruption of monasticism in Romanov Russia. Some say that his attitude was a carry-over from the rivalry between white and black clergy imbedded in the Russian ecclesiastical community. My opinion is that he would have agreed entirely with St. Ignatiy Brianchaninov, that where monasticism is in line with the Gospel it is healthy and constructive. Where it is formal and external, it is useless.

Since Father Alexander's death, the Orthodox Church in America has suffered a crisis in vision. Father Alexander had provided that vision and direction, but no successors have arisen to his role of leadership. We have to ask the question, Where do we go from here? There is consensus that there is a crisis in vision and leadership. Given the foundation of Father Alexander's work, what will bring us back to a unified vision and direc-

tion as we strive to do the work of mission as the Orthodox Church in America? We must first examine the past few years, and evaluate the context we have to address, before trying to answer this question.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The mission of the Orthodox Church in North America has come a long way over the past forty years, with the formation of SCOBA, the autocephaly of the OCA, the influx of converts and translation of the services, the reconciliation of the Ukrainian Churches in North America with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the relative autonomy of the Antiochian Archdiocese, and soon, the healing of the schism between ROCOR and the Russian Mother Church. The face of the Orthodox Church has changed dramatically, with the publication of literature, the education of clergy to better minister to the people, and the establishment of monasticism on a broad scale. But the question, and the point of judgment and hence the crisis, is, Where do we go from here?

We cannot make light of any of the remarkable developments of the past years. But we are faced with an ever changing social and political situation which is leaving our churches in a rather strange predicament. The old established social institutions – the Protestant churches which were the ethnic churches of American culture – are changing so rapidly that they have lost their Christian vision and validate all sorts of immorality. They have lost their status as defining elements in American culture and morality, and have are fast becoming post-Christian, dying on the vine. The new Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are attracting large crowds, but there is little staying power. People usually remain members for no more than three years. These churches have a lot of excitement and entertainment, but the experience is often very shallow and unsatisfying. They emphasize the Bible, but preach an oversimplified and distorted Calvinism or some other strange idea, and are blown about by every wind of doctrine. Fundamentalism means either dispensationalism, Calvinism or whatever the preacher has been reading that week. The Roman Catholic Church is being battered by these same social currents, and hangs onto its orthodoxy by the strength of the papacy alone, whose authority is steadily declining in the American scene. There is theological, liturgical, and spiritual

chaos. And on top of that is the ever growing New Age conglomeration of syncretisms.

Then, you have us.

To paraphrase Father Thomas Hopko, from the inside, the Orthodox Church seems absolutely crazy. Until you look at the churches outside. Then we seem to be the paragon of stability. Orthodoxy in America has been shielded by its ethnicism and inherent conservatism from some of these social trends. It was even the most rapidly growing denomination in the country for a while. But, as the Church becomes indigenous in this country, it is encountering and has to deal with the culture at large. It can no longer hide under the dark veils of mystical antiquity and languages incomprehensible even to the faithful. Babushka watches Pat Robertson and Mother Angelica. Yaya watches Benny Hinn. Our people are now well educated and sophisticated businessmen, no longer non-English speaking immigrants. And thousands of converts have flooded the churches across the jurisdictional spectrum, each with his own baggage.

On one hand, the liturgy remains the same – though substantially in English – and there is no interest in changing it or the theology behind it. Church life remains the same, with festivals, bible studies, and dance and choral groups. Things are comfortable. But if we are going to go beyond where we are now, we are going to have to change. Not the liturgy or other services: they are a given. No one is interested in a reformation or Vatican II for Orthodoxy. Not even the day to day life of the parish or diocese will change. What must change is our fundamental attitude about who we are and what we are doing, and how we go about doing it. It is a question of vision and of mission.

For too long, we have been concerned about simply maintaining “our” church, serving “our” people, focusing on the services and on social events. But we have sorely neglected the core of the Gospel: to bring the good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to give sight to the blind and to raise the fallen. We have served mostly ourselves, and anyone who wants to join us – but not “Them.” This is not what our Lord Jesus Christ has given us to do. He has commissioned us to “Go into all the world, preach the Gospel to every nation, baptizing them ... teaching them to observe all I have commanded.” Our vision has been constricted, and our mission has been curtailed into something self-serving. We are so concerned about our

own visions and missions, consisting of the petty little agendas of our organizations, that we ignore the underlying mission of the Gospel. It is no wonder that there are multiple parallel jurisdictions. We have lost sight of the thing that really unifies us: the vision and mission of the Gospel.

So what is the Gospel? What is the Good News that we have for people? We have lots of news for people, and lots of invitations, but they are not necessarily very good.

The Gospel is not that Orthodoxy is the True Religion and all the rest are false. The Gospel is not that they can become born-again Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Syrians, Serbs or what have you. It is not that they can come help us pay the mortgage. It is not that they can support our position against the Others – like the OCA *vs.* the Ecumenical Patriarchate, or Antioch *vs.* Jerusalem, or God only knows what. It is not that they can come join some enclave of a foreign culture and even be (more or less) accepted.

THE ONLY AGENDA: THE GOSPEL

If we are really Orthodox, we should be able to preach the Gospel better than anyone else, because we have it in an undistorted form. So what is it?

First and foremost that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death and giving life to those in the tombs. It is the message of the Resurrection, the victory of Jesus Christ over death and hell. It is the Good News that the Kingdom of God is present, here and now, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and you can be baptized into it, commune of its grace, and be filled with new life. It is this that we constantly celebrate in church, in the services, in the cycles of feasts and fasts. And what does it do for us? It heals our souls, and raises us up from despair, and enables us to deal with any obstacle that comes in our way.

The good news of the “Orthodox” Gospel is that we are free from the destructive perversions of the Gospel which pervade the religious presuppositions of our post-Christian ex-Protestant culture. We don’t preach that God is a harsh judge waiting to damn us to hell for the least transgression. How often do we say in the Liturgy, “For You are a good God and the lover of mankind,” or “You are a God of mercy and compassion and love for mankind.” This is Good News. We don’t preach that we are ines-

capably predestined to be saved or damned, and there is not a thing we can do about it, either way. And we don't preach that being a Christian is about going to heaven when we die. What do we say? As St John Chrysostom said, "For You have brought us up to heaven and endowed us with your kingdom which is to come." Here and now, not just when we're dead. And we don't need to forget those who have gone before us, but we have continual remembrance of them, because in Christ they are alive with the same life with which we also live.

We celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, but it needs to be a real celebration of the integrity of the Gospel message. The triumph over iconoclasm has an essential point of faith: by His Incarnation, Jesus Christ sanctified matter. We can paint a picture of God Incarnate, and experience His Presence in and through venerating the icon. We can partake of His life by eating the bread and wine of His Body and Blood; we are immersed into His life in Baptism, anointed with the Holy Spirit in Chrismation, and made part of His Body. The world itself, matter, is sanctified by Christ's Coming, and becomes a means of communion with God. And we ourselves, in this body, in this life, here and now, are sanctified and made holy, partakers of the life of God. Salvation is about life here and now, not "fire insurance" for after death! In Christ, all things are made new. "For He has brought us up to heaven, and endowed us with His Kingdom which is to come." This is Good News!

A CALL TO REPENTANCE

So what do we need to do? We need to focus on this life-giving message of the Gospel, which is what the Church, its life and services, are about anyway. We need to surrender to Christ, and put aside our self-serving agendas. Only then can we come together to do the work of Christ: to draw all people to Him. We need to learn the Scripture, so that we can live it. We need to serve the poor and those in need without regard to who they are or whether they are "ours." In short, we need to love our neighbor as our self. In other words, it is time that we accepted the responsibility to incarnate the message of Christ at all costs. It is time we grew up.

Orthodoxy in North America has come a long way. Our forefathers in the Faith have laid a foundation for us to build upon. It is here that we can be encouraged and informed by the vision of Father Alexander

Schmemmann, and others. We have a lot of work to do and we have a long way to go. We must repent of the sins and attitudes which have distorted the life of our Church here, and then tear down the obstacles we have erected to fulfilling the mission of the Gospel.

We have to repent of ethnic phyletism. This includes convertism as well. I do not mean that our communities will not have their own traditional flavors—in more ways than one! We have to rejoice in our diversity; but not at the expense of our unity and cooperation. We can't let any human barriers get in the way of the Gospel: language, culture, social or economic status, race, or anything else. When we let any human category exclude others from the Church, we sell out Christ, as the Jews did who refused to let Gentiles enter the Church.

We have to repent of the exclusiveness that leads us into sectarianism and self-enclosure in our own little self-satisfied groups. This attitude is alien to the Catholic mind, which presupposes a holistic vision of the faith and community of the Church. This means authentic encounter with non-Orthodox Christians in a spirit of humility and openness, not insecurity and arrogance. Exclusivist sectarianism is not the vision of the Catholic Church of the Roman Empire that embraced hundreds of cultures and united them in Christ. It doesn't matter what the rituals look like if we do not have a Catholic vision. If we are not Catholic, we are not Orthodox.

We have to assert that we are *not* in diaspora. We have been here for many generations, and our churches are consecrated to last until the Second Coming. We are Americans and Canadians, with heritages to be proud of. We rejoice in our communion with the Churches of the Old World, but we are Orthodox Christians here and now, and we need to govern our own affairs and elect our own bishops and primate. The Fathers have taught us that as Christians we can have no abiding earthly country. We are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Orthodox churches can only be organized canonically on the basis of local territorial boundaries. We have to end the parallel jurisdictions, which fundamentally distort the life and mission of the Church. The most important canonical objection the Orthodox have against the Papacy is its assertion of universal jurisdiction, without territorial boundaries. Yet we have fallen into the same heresy, as virtually every national Orthodox church has jurisdiction outside its territorial borders, like in America. Just

look at a phone book. We have to remind our hierarchs that there is no such thing as “universal jurisdiction” in the Orthodox Church, so if we are to continue to consider ourselves within the Apostolic Tradition, things must change.

Repentance not only entails recognizing and admitting the sin. It is not fulfilled until the sin is overcome, not to be repeated. This means that we have to reorganize the life of the Church in North America, with one synod of all the Orthodox bishops, under one primate elected by them. This is the only way to bring an end to the confusion and competition between the jurisdictions, all of whom are doing the same thing, but are captive to foreign nationalistic agendas. The mission of the Church in America must not be held hostage to the agendas of patriarchs and synods thousands of miles away in different cultures and nations. If they could be convinced relinquish their tight hold on their American cash cows, they might find our financial support of them to increase.

Still more important, however, is the critical need to repent of our self-serving agendas, which reinforce parochial and jurisdictional isolation and competition. If we could focus on the needs of the local community around us, and not just on ourselves and our institutions, every financial need and every personnel shortage would resolve itself. We must simply open our doors and hearts to those in need: those held by the poverty of loneliness and isolation, as well as financial need; those suffering from addictions and abuse; the thousands of children needing a safe place to go after school; the women – the widows of our age, from loss or divorce – left abandoned and in poverty barely able to survive. To minister to them is to preach the Gospel in words far stronger than any rhetoric. To receive them in love incarnates the Gospel, and fulfills the church as the Body of Christ – for “they will know you are my disciples by how you love one another” (*cf.* John 13 : 35).

On a more subtle level there is another temptation which demands our repentance. Too often we reduce the life of the Church to the services, to the cult, to religion. Those of us who are priests and concerned with the integrity and beauty of the services are especially prone to this. The Church is not the services. The Church is not the Eucharist. The Eucharist constitutes and fulfills the Church, but it is there to constitute and fulfill the entire life of the whole community, its good works of charity and self-denial,

the self-offering of the faithful to those in need. But if these things are forgotten, what does the Eucharist consecrate and fulfill? It simply becomes a ritual act to fulfill the “religious needs” of the people.

Father Alexander Schmemmann drew a sharp distinction between religion and faith. How easy it is to be religious – to focus on the external dimensions of the life of the church, its services, rules, disciplines, aesthetics, structure. But if these become ends in themselves, rather than expressions and supports to a life of faith manifest in works of charity, then our trust in these things is in vain and we are hypocrites, “having the form of religion but denying its power.” As one abbot recently said, “its hard not to be a Pharisee when you look like one!” It is not the forms that are the problem, but rather, our attitude towards them and the focus of our life as a Christian community. We are called to “do the one without neglecting the other.”

The reduction of faith to observance of religious forms is a foundational element of secularization. The forms divorced from their content become meaningless, or at best nostalgic reminders of bygone days. They can thus be compartmentalized or discarded, having no real impact on how we live our lives. The only way to fight secularization is to emphasize that faith is about how we live our life: not only the remembrance of God, but how we treat other people, for how we treat our neighbor is the criterion of how we love God. In this way, our faith is not relegated to an hour or so on Sunday morning. Rather, it impacts every encounter with another person, and every relationship we have.

Our communion with our neighbor is the criterion of our faith. The agendas of power and money, organizations and institutions, by which we isolate ourselves from our neighbors, are ultimately distractions from our real vocation as the Church. Our real calling is the mission given us by Christ, the work of Christ himself: “to preach the good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to captives and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4 : 18). Then our religion will be true and authentic: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1 : 27).

As Father Alexander would remind us, the most essential elements of the Christian life are joy and thanksgiving. When we live a life of faith, overcoming our selfishness by self-denial, doing the works of charity for which we have been recreated in Christ, we can have no other attitude but joy, and we offer all things to God in a sacrifice of thanksgiving. We sin and fall short – but repenting we find joy. We have to bear our cross, whatever it may be; but “behold, through the cross, joy has come into all the world!” We have great and diverse elements within our communities; but we can rejoice in the unity of the Spirit, as one Body.

What is our vocation as the Church but to be witnesses to the world of Christ’s resurrection, to heal by our love, and to raise the whole world as an offering of thanksgiving to God? Then all our life, as persons and as community, is transformed into a Eucharistic celebration of joy, an anticipation of the Presence of Christ in His Kingdom.

*A Vision of Contemporary Monasticism:
Valaam and Elder Sophrony
From Psychology to Spirituality*

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 9, 2003

A YEAR AND A HALF AGO, in November of 2002, I was on Valaam visiting the Abbot, Archimandrite Pankratiy, with one of the brothers of our monastery. I try to go once a year for spiritual counsel and renewal, and I love to go in winter, despite the difficulties it presents.

Sometimes the lake is frozen solid, making it possible to drive there, over the icy depths on the black crystal surface, in a jeep. The cracks present the greatest problems and danger, as the sheets of ice move and shift. It is an awesome thing to drive forty miles on a transparent road marked by tree branches, with waves frozen in place, and layers of ice shimmering be-

low the depths. At other times, the ice remains only around the shoreline, despite near arctic latitude of sixty-one degrees north. Then the ship has to function as an icebreaker as it approaches the dock, and churns away the ice with its powerful propeller, creating floes and icebergs that meander out the mouths of the bays into the open water. If Ladoga is calm, even in winter, it can be like a sea of glass; but the waves can also appear seemingly out of nowhere, eight and ten feet high, and crash into the icy shore.

Such was our journey this time from St Petersburg, via Preozersk and Sortavala, on the last run of the year on the tourist boat, which did not have the hull to break ice more than six inches thick. We piled into the long ship, half of which was filled with baggage, and half with passengers huddled together. The passengers consisted of residents of the island, monks, and a few pilgrims. It was cold, well below freezing, but the ice had only just formed. Still, there were ice-fishermen on the thin surface. What must it have been like for them when the ship passed by, and their seemingly stable ice-floes began to rock and crack in the wake? The sun was going down, late afternoon.

Huddled in the back of the boat was a very sickly looking older monk, with a novice or two, all wrapped up against the cold in layers of blankets. Later I would find out that he spoke English, as well as several other languages: Father Seraphim, who had been the kellenik (cell-attendant) for Father Sophrony at Essex. We nodded but didn't speak; he was too ill. Little did I know what an opportunity I had missed.

The short trip of thirty miles took four hours, across mildly choppy waters. We were glad to get to the island.

The Monastery was resplendent like I had never seen it. The scaffolding had been removed from the catholicon and it shone in the moonlight and in the light of the sodium lamps that illumine the inner courtyard. The snow glistened like billions of diamonds in their illuminations, as it blew off the roofs and into drifts in the courtyard. Without the scaffolding, which had been erected in the early '80s when Valaam was a Soviet national park, the catholicon looked even bigger. The massive native granite columns of the front porch dwarfed the passersby. Inside, the lower church seemed even more regal, and more cavernous than I had remembered it. Athonite *sedalia*, folding monastic stall-seats, lined the sides, newly installed. Otherwise,

the warm familiarity of my spiritual home, radiant with grace, resplendent with peace.

There are many things that could be related about this trip, but this is not meant to be a travelogue. It was a feast of grace, but that is what I have come to expect from Valaam. Whether it is conversations with the Abbot and other fathers, serving with them in the long and solemn, punctionate and joyful services, or the trip to the banya and a dip through the ice of Ladoga or steaming snow angels and conversations with the banya monk over tea and biscuits. Valaam is not only the northern Athos, but a winter Paradise. It is always best in the winter, with no tourists, when the monks can simply be themselves.

We set out one morning for the Skete of St John the Forerunner, on an island about twenty minutes in a skiff from the mouth of the main harbor, the dock at the Skete of St Nicholas. Ten years ago, still a deacon, I had spent much of a summer at the Skete of the Forerunner, with a group of Orthodox Americans building a house there. This is described in the new book by John Oliver: *Touching Heaven*. That summer we did not finish the work, but had purchased the materials and gotten it started. It was later finished by the monastery, and five years ago, I had the opportunity to serve the Liturgy in the tiny chapel upstairs in the attic of that house.

Already at that time, the Skete of the Forerunner had returned to its previous level of enclosure: it had again become a place of hermits, of rigorous fasting and profound solitude. Only men with a specific blessing from the Abbot, and only for very good reasons, were given the opportunity to visit there. Then, there were little huts that had been brought in by helicopter, which have now fallen into decrepitude in the harsh climate. In one of them lived a Father John, whom I met briefly at the Liturgy. The immense granite cross, planted on the island by Abbot Damascene in the mid-nineteenth century, overlooking the vast expanse of Ladoga towards the west, will always be etched in my memory.

This time we – the Abbot, myself and our Father Kyrill, along with the monk-boat jockey – landed at the ice-clogged dock in the small skiff, and had to climb out on the icy log and iron ladder onto the snow-covered dock, from the little boat which was rocking and rolling in the chop coming in from the open lake. No one fell in, thank God. An authentic

Valaamskoe prikluchenie, a Valaam adventure. But I had no idea that the real adventure was about to begin.

We walked up the long path through deep snow, up the hill through the woods, past the old log ruins of the brotherhood corpus building – too far gone to repair – to the gardens before the church. The church of the skete had been completely repaired. No longer was it stripped of its siding, surrounded by scaffolding, and with the cupola still riddled with bullet holes from godless target practice. All renovated, with new siding and yellow paint, a shining new cupola and cross, and inside, not only beautifully finished, but with wonderful authentic ascetic icons. After venerating the icons, we went in to the main house of the skete, which our group had helped to build, and had some tea. We talked with one of the monks there, who was a cell attendant to the elders. And then we went to see Father Isaakiy.

The monk led us through the woods on a path through the newly fallen snow to a new log cabin, with a *pechka*, a Russian brick stove, smoking merrily away and promising some warmth. We entered the foyer, said the prayer before going into the inner part of the house, and saw before us a small man with burning bright eyes, in his late fifties or early sixties. This was Father Isaakiy, whom I had met as Father John years before.

Father Isaakiy had had a somewhat irregular monastic journey, as he had gone directly to live with the hermits in the Caucasus, after leaving his life in the world. He had been with Father Raphael and Father Pankratiy in the little community of ascetics high in the mountains of Abkhazia. There the fathers lived in a loose association, in huts hidden under rocks or in the deep forest, hidden from the curious and especially from the Soviet authorities. They lived in deep stillness as hesychasts. When the Soviet Union collapsed, and Abkhazia began its civil war with Georgia, the conditions became impossible for many of the fathers to continue living there. At that time Elder Raphael came to Valaam, and others eventually followed him, including then-Father John. Valaam was able to provide almost the same degree of seclusion, especially at the Skete of the Forerunner.

After introductions and pleasantries, and the kellenik rustling up some tea, we began to discuss the spiritual life. After a few minutes, the ring of the Abbot's cell phone shattered the timelessness of the moment, and he had to return to the main monastery, leaving us with Father Isaakiy. We

began to talk about spiritual warfare; Father Isaakiy was known among the brothers for the intensity and tangibility of his battles. We experienced first hand an example of that warfare, which brought us to greater sobriety.

Then the question was posed about how we grow to spiritual maturity. This began a wonderful conversation that lasted for several hours. In this conversation, I discovered Father Isaakiy to be not only a man of profound spiritual life, but an intellectual of the first class, well educated and very well read. The focus of the discussion was about the works of Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov), the founder of the Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex, England, and disciple of Saint Silouan.

How do we grow from a psychological religious life to true spirituality, *s dushevnosti do duxovnosti*? How do we attain authentic personhood? What is the meaning of noetic vision in this quest?

In the beginning of our spiritual journey, when we are spiritually immature, our entire religious outlook is ego-centered, emotional, and rational. The deeper level of awareness, the noetic consciousness, has not yet been fully opened. We don't know our true self, and we live in function of rules and external observance. Our prayer is words in the mind, and not yet descended to the heart. We love God from duty, and our neighbor from obedience. Yet, it all remains self-centered, ego-centered. We want to be "right," and we zealously defend our positions, whether doctrinal, ritual, or otherwise. In short, we are our egos, defined by our passions. We are far from being authentic persons, caught up in our isolated individualism.

As we grow, and gain more and more control over our passions, and our soul is purified, grace illumines our spiritual (noetic) consciousness. We become more aware of God's presence, more aware of the other. We move away from our self-centeredness, to the restoration of the focus of our attention on God. As this happens, as Father Isaakiy put it, our own personal "I" expands, and encompasses others, so that we cannot conceive of ourselves in isolation from God and our brothers; they are who "I" am, and "I" includes them. It is the bond of authentic spiritual love, powered by grace. The more we grow in this noetic consciousness, the more our love embraces all those around us. We pray from the heart for them, and for the whole world. We are purified by grace, so that we can authentically love in a purely unselfish way. This is the essence of what it means to be a Christian: to authentically love.

By truly loving God and our neighbor – for our love for our neighbor is the criterion of our love of God (*cf.* 1 John) – we are purified, illumined, deified. We are healed from our fallenness, from our ego or self-centeredness, from the tyranny of our rational and emotional consciousness. The passions come under our control, subordinated to the love of the Other. We become purified of all that focuses us in ourself, and becomes a barrier to love.

“Our brother is our life” as St. Silouan said. This is what authentic monasticism is: the love of our neighbor. The more purified our love is, the more we actualize our own personhood, and the more our personal “I” expands, to include the whole monastic brotherhood, the town, the region, the country, the Church, the whole world. The saints are those whose “I” includes the whole Church, and their prayer is for all as their true self. Having attained to true personhood, to authentic spiritual maturity, the Christian realizes in his life what Father Sophrony calls “the hypostatic principle,” existence like that of Christ, in Christ, for Christ, as Christ. Our deification is realized in becoming perfected in love, embracing the whole creation, as Christ did, and being grounded in His divine Person. It is a state of true synergy with God: our love in cooperation with His love, which is His energy, His grace, His life.

After several hours, in a high philosophical Russian, which stretched my languages abilities almost to the point of the interpretation of tongues, a young monk came in and said that the Abbot had been waiting for us for over an hour and what had happened to us? We needed to leave immediately. Father Isaakiy blessed us, and sent us on our way. This conversation had been a life-changing immersion into grace, and the opening of new horizons in spiritual life.

The boat ride back is impossible to forget. Having come over in a rather decent sized fishing boat, we rode back to the main monastery in a motorized row boat, or rather, an improvised speed boat. We were airborne half the time, over the crests of the waves, between the ice covered rocks jutting up from the depths, which had gutted and sunk many a craft. They do have cowboys in Russia: the young monk sailing our boat, with the spray freezing on us before it could soak in, whooped as he went over each set of waves. Monks also like to have fun. As cold and wet as it was, five miles across the waves as fast as we could go, we remained warmed and with a

profound peace that could not be shaken, our hearts illuminated by the grace of the elder and the clarity of his vision.

The writings of Father Sophrony were always central to my experience of Valaam. When I was first getting to know Father Pankratiy, on a train from St. Petersburg to Moscow, we stayed up all night talking about the book *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, and through that discovered how much of one mind and vision we are. It was the passage about the young archimandrite, a missionary to somewhere, who was zealously trying to tell the people that their non-Orthodox faith was in vain and they were going to hell. St Silouan said, If you tear down their faith, they will not believe you. Rather, the way is to affirm what is right, and build on it. That train trip – and that conversation – changed my life. I knew I could trust Father Pankratiy, and I knew we were of one mind. And I saw in him what I wanted to become. So I became a novice at Valaam, under him.

Now, more than ten years later, I have another encounter with Father Sophrony's thought at Valaam, which resonates with a much deeper and more profound vision of monasticism. And for Valaam, the past ten years have meant a radical transformation in the way of monastic life as well, under the guidance of the Abbot, Father Pankratiy. He had inherited a place in spiritual chaos, where egos ruled; and external observance, ritualism and legalism were the core of the life. It was not a very pleasant place, and the brothers lived in a spirit of competition and judgment. All that has changed dramatically, and it reflects that vision of which Father Sophrony is an expositor. Now, when you are within the community (as a brother) you can feel the love they have for one another. Thus, they realize the evangelical ideal, of what disciples of Jesus are to be.

In the days of the corrupt, Romanov dynasty structure of Russian monastic government, the *namestnik*, the deputy abbot, was an appointee of the bishop and had no spiritual relationship with the community. He lived a life of self-will in a luxurious residence apart from the community, pushing papers and presiding pompously at select services. Those days are gone.

Through relationships with Athonite monasteries and elders, in the same spirit as Father Sophrony and Essex, Valaam has become a model for contemporary monasticism. Valaam has re-instituted its ancient Typicon, written by Elder Nazariy and reflecting the very simple Rule of St. Paisiy

Velichkovsky, in which the Abbot is the spiritual father of the community, lives with and like the rest of the community, and is elected for life by the brotherhood. The monastery is ruled by the abbot with the council of elders; all decisions are conciliar, with no external interference. All forms of monastic life are now present there: the large *koinobion* in the main complex; the sketes with their elders and his disciples; and the hermits, such as Father Isaakiy. All this is external, institutional, but ultimately, only superficial.

The real significance is the spiritual authenticity of this contemporary monasticism, whether in Athos, Russia, or England, or wherever it manifests itself. It is based in love, in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the transcendence of external observance and psychological, rationalistic religiosity by the ascesis of purification from egocentrism and growth to authentic personhood through the illumination of noetic consciousness. In short, by overcoming self-love by the love of the Other. This monasticism is the way of Christ, and nurtures true disciples of Christ, who pray for the whole world as their true self, in self-denying love.

Two books have recently come out on the thought and vision of Father Sophrony, reviewed in this journal: *I Love Therefore I Am*, by Father Nicholas (Sakharov), a priestmonk in Essex and nephew of Father Sophrony; and *Christ our Way and our Life*, by Archimandrite Zacharias (Zacharou), a spiritual father in Essex. Both are brilliant expositions of the monastic and spiritual vision of Father Sophrony.

This vision of the monastic life of Father Sophrony, shared by many contemporary fathers and mothers, illumines monasticism as the very soul of the Church. It reveals what authentic Christian spirituality is about, by producing saints who incarnate the love of Christ. This vision shows what monasticism is really about: the love of the other. And it give a definition to monasticism as the mystery of holy obedience.

Obedience is the very heart of monasticism. Christian obedience, monastic obedience, has nothing at all to do with institutional or military discipline. To paraphrase Archimandrite Zacharias, those kinds of discipline are impersonal, structural, having to do with the continuity of an organization, enforced by compulsion. This may be necessary for the lowest level of spiritual development, but will otherwise quench the Spirit.

Authentic monastic obedience is profoundly personal, a communion of

love, a willing self-offering by the disciple in which there can be no compulsion. It is through this profound personal relationship of love that the disciple is transformed, empowered to transcend his passions and ego, and to control his thoughts; and to work out his growth to maturity through purification by self-denial. Being loved, he can grow in love, and be illumined by the grace of God, which is love, forgiveness, acceptance, and healing. The spiritual father becomes God's co-worker in bring a man up from an isolated individual into an authentic person. The authentic relationship of elder and disciple in holy obedience can only work in profound freedom, as the disciple's free offering to God of his obedience to his elder. The grace of self-denial in obedience breaks down the ego, the self-centeredness, and self-will. Thus the father begets a son, who in turn becomes a father. The community becomes one in Christ in the bond of love.

This is what Valaam has become, and for which it strives. The love of the brothers for one another, the growth in spiritual maturity, the transcendence of externalism and self-will, are a product of this kind of authentic obedience in love. Truly this is the model for what monasticism can and should become, as we strive to grow and to love.

Monastic Mission and Witness in the History of American Orthodoxy

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 8, PRESENTATION OF THE THEOTOKOS 2002

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY CAME to North America almost two hundred ten years ago. A missionary community of monks was sent from Valaam Monastery, "the Northern Athos", to establish the Church in the Russian colony of Alaska, and to convert the native Americans to the Orthodox Faith. The mission was led by Archimandrite Joasaph, and included the first American saints: the Proto-hieromartyr Juvenaly and the simple elder Herman. The monks followed the time-honored pattern of Orthodox mission: a group of monks is sent out from an existing monastery further into the wilderness, and they establish a mo-

nastic community as a base. The monks live their lives, work together, pray the services and preach and teach the people. The people see a functioning integrated Christian community: worshipping, praying, sharing their goods with the poor, and manifesting the Kingdom of God through their love and actions. The monks from Valaam saw the conversion of tens of thousands of native Alaskans to the Orthodox Faith, several nations and languages, united in one Church.

Much has changed in Orthodox mission in America over the past two centuries. The missionary thrust and ethos of the original mission was first buried by the needs of immigrants and the consolidation of ethnic communities. Then, the mission of the Church in this country was dominated by the proliferation of separate administrative jurisdictions. The demands put upon the church by the needs of new immigrant, followed by the political infighting which divided the Church into feuding camps, have, to a large extent, played themselves out. But their effects on the life of the Church in America will be with us for decades to come.

One of the most important elements that the twentieth-century American Orthodox mission lacked was the presence of monasticism as its foundation and inspiration. Instead, other elements came to the center of parish life: ethnic identity, social activities, and community life. The services, the spiritual striving and the actualization of the unity and catholicity of the Church, were secondary. In the attempt to blend in with “normal” American society and churches – Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian – the Orthodox communities adopted many Protestant elements, from pews and organs to parish by-laws. Most significant of all, the ascetic worldview, which is at the core of monastic witness, was replaced by an ethos of mutual support in search of worldly success and recognition. To Americanize meant to uncritically adopt the general American religious worldview, with its forms and attitudes, while retaining the external forms of Orthodox worship. As the Orthodox communities grew from immigrant to native-born populations, the Faith became more and more compartmentalized – in keeping with American culture. The full integration of life – spirituality, family life, church participation, and work – which is the fundamental worldview in both monastic life and traditional Orthodox societies, was obliterated.

Along with this subversion of the Orthodox worldview, questions arose

about how to relate to the majority non-Orthodox Christian community. Most Orthodox came to America from cultures integrated by the Church, and which had no concept of religious pluralism. While respecting other Christians in a healthy way for their faith and the work of their churches, the Orthodox tried to find a way of adapting to a culture with religious pluralism. While on one hand, it was necessary for the Orthodox to assert their own identity in the midst of this confusion; on the other, the insecurity and sense of inferiority that gripped them produced two temptations: relativism and isolationism. The relativists uncritically adopted some of the forms and much of the content of their new religious context, compromising their Orthodoxy. The isolationists clung to the traditional forms, but succumbed to the temptation of schism and sectarianism, and compromised the Catholicity of the Church. Both parties, motivated by insecurity in their religious identity, end up contributing to the compartmentalization of the Faith, and the elimination of its ability to sanctify the culture around it: the relativists by trying desperately to blend in; and the traditionalists by withdrawing into sectarian isolation.

A convert movement arose in the past forty or so years, resulting in the hardly believable statistic that Orthodoxy was the fastest growing church in the last decade of the twentieth century in America. Seeking spiritual, moral, and doctrinal integrity, people from many different religious backgrounds entered the Orthodox Church both individually and as communities. But, as strangers in a strange land, the converts tend to be fraught with insecurity as well. Many jumped into one or the other camp – mostly the “traditionalist” camp, in a firm attempt to establish an authentic Orthodox identity – or into an adopted ethnic identity. This, I believe, is a function of maturity. The task now, as the convert communities mature, is for us to realize not only the breadth of Orthodox thought and life – its catholicity; but also, having entered into the content of the Faith through the traditional forms, to interpret them to our contemporary context in language and forms that communicate that same content.

The growth of monasticism in the past decade is a manifestation of the maturation of Orthodoxy in America. A church has to come to maturity to produce Christians seeking a radical commitment of their life in a monastic context. That hunger has emerged in the American Church, and literally dozens of monasteries have sprung up. Part of that is the search for

spiritual integrity: not traditional forms of life, but penetration deeper and deeper into the living experience of salvation, the content manifested by those forms. The monastic life enables people to enter into that living experience of Christ and salvation in a more focused way, whereas life in the world is too full of distractions. As American monasticism itself matures, along with the rest of the Church here over the next generations, it will create new forms of expression that will baptize and evangelize American culture, and impart to it the full integrity of life in Christ, which is the essence of Orthodoxy. Monasticism will thus become a force for the integration of the whole life of the American Church, rather than a force for atomization.

Whereas monasticism in the American Orthodox Church remains small and marginal, as it matures it will become a major force in the evangelism of this culture. American monasticism, just as the rest of the life of the Church, may no longer bear the full external appearance of Old World monastic life. But the essential content, the love of God manifest in Christ by the Holy Spirit for the sanctification, healing, and transformation of human lives, will shine forth with the radiance of grace. Thus, the mission of the Valaam monks to Kodiak in 1794 will come to fulfillment.

Creativity and Tradition

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 7, PRESENTATION OF THE THEOTOKOS 2001

In what is necessary, unity; in what is dubious, diversity; in all things, charity.

— St. Augustine of Hippo

CREATIVITY IS INHERENT within the Tradition, as synergy vivified by the energy of the Holy Spirit. It is the power that fuels the continual growth of the life of the Church, and its adaptation to each new cultural environment. This is active within individual members of the Church, as each one personally embraces the new life communicated by grace. This divine creativity is active within communities and churches, as each particular congregation incarnates the universal Church. The saint, one who has attained “a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”

(Ephesians 4 :13), is one who has been transformed in synergy with divine grace. A church is fulfilled by its liturgical synergy, each with the others in Christ by the Holy Spirit, in communion. Both are the transformation of life – human life, the life of the creation, the life of the community – into the mystery of the presence of the Kingdom of God on earth. The inner dimension of this is the personal ascent into communion with God by purification and illumination, individually and corporately. The external dimension and expression of this movement draws all men into that same mystery of communion. This double action of the Spirit, inwards and outwards, is the core of the living Tradition, as we are drawn by God into this cosmic and Divine Liturgy.

The personal and corporate dimensions of our life in the Spirit, and the inward and outward directions of that movement, are a profoundly creative process.

On the personal level, creativity is needed to adapt one's life to the forms and traditions of the Church. But on a far deeper level, creativity rooted in synergy with grace, the process of purification, illumination and deification, motivates us as we confront our lives in the light of the living Presence of Christ.

On the corporate level, those forms which developed as means of conveying the experience of faith in Christ, both liturgical and institutional, evolved in particular cultures and times. While some forms remain stable, such as the canon of Scripture or the text of the Liturgy, the ways they are expressed and interpreted – ritual forms, institutional forms – evolve and develop as people strive in communion with Christ and one another to communicate the Gospel creatively. Without this, the forms and traditions are empty, and are simply hypocrisy with no saving value. Yet to the degree that we are involved in the great process of creative spiritual transformation, both personally and corporately, the forms and traditions are fulfilled as guides to that new life. It is the spirit of the law, not the letter that counts; yet we must fulfill the one without neglecting the other.

The personal and the corporate dimensions are in no way separate, though they are distinct. Each person must undergo the process of spiritual transformation individually through repentance and conversion. Yet, the context for this, the only context, is the community of the Church, and its liturgy of life, its procession into the Kingdom. The more thorough and

intense the process is for each member, the deeper and richer the life of the whole community will be. Much has been written on the personal process of transformation in Christ. Here, we need to explore the corporate dimension of that creative process, and its implications for the institutional forms of the Church in our own cultural context.

The Liturgy is the locus where the particular community is fulfilled as Church by itself becoming the Body of Christ. The many are united in one by the Holy Spirit, in the great movement of love and self-offering to the Father of the one Christ, head and body. The Liturgy is the focal point of the revelation of the Church as the Kingdom of God; just as communion is the focal point for each of the faithful for their personal transcendence of themselves, and their realization of their true identity as members of the Body of Christ. At this instant the personal ascetic striving and the corporate ascent coincide, intersect, and are fulfilled. It is not the case, however, that the mystery of the Church is only manifested in the eucharistic Liturgy. The sanctification of the life of the community itself, daily life, is also a fundamental element of the Church as the revelation of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The life of each community of the Church is built around the mutual support of the members for one another in their common spiritual process of transformation. This, of course, is most obvious in a monastic community. But it must also be the content of all communities of the Church. This process requires tremendous creativity: learning to deal with one another, each with a different level of spiritual, emotional, and personal maturity and experience, not to mention different characters, bearing one another's burdens, and sharing a common vision and goal. Each aspect of this has a transcendent, as well as personal, dimension. Every interaction, no matter how mundane, has an impact on the life of the community as a body, manifesting either mutual love in Christ, or the selfishness of the world. If the members are fighting among themselves, what kind of Liturgy are they going to celebrate?

The communities of the Church are made up of people from a particular place and time, with a particular culture. It is pure pretense – delusion – for them to try to be anything else. The task of the Church is to sanctify that particular culture, and those particular people, making their community transparent to the Kingdom of God, and to reveal the real-

ity of God's transforming Presence to the other people in that particular place and time and culture. A Christian community reveals the mystery of the Kingdom of God in the midst of the world, transfiguring and deifying the particular persons by grace, baptizing the particular culture, language, and forms as means of communicating that grace and the Gospel of the Kingdom. "In the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Corinthians 14 : 19).

To bring this down to concrete terms, we must ask ourselves what our institutions, our parish communities and organizations, our liturgy and our lives, communicate to the people around us. Are we communicating the Gospel and salvation, or simply the external forms of "religion"? Are our institutions, activities, and organizations effective in communicating to and supporting us in our common process of repentance and conversion, purification and illumination? Do we authentically love one another – the only mark of the disciples of the Lord Jesus? Are our communities icons of the Kingdom of God, communicating life in Christ? And further, how can we creatively engage the Tradition and our own culture, in view of our personal and corporate spiritual process, to develop the life of our communities to further that goal and vision of both personal deification and corporate salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ? This task requires tremendous creativity on the part of all members of our communities, informed by grace, and infused with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Missionary Spirituality

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 6

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, over the past few centuries, has produced some extraordinary missionaries. Among these are St. Nikolai of Japan, whose life and work are featured in this issue; St. Innocent, a mentor of St. Nikolai, and himself Enlightener of the Aleuts, first bishop of America, and finally Metropolitan of Moscow; and many others who are little known outside the places they missionized. God

uses people as His instruments, to preach, teach, evangelize, to build His Church. The Orthodox Church exists in Japan because of the efforts and struggles of St. Nikolai. The Orthodox Church exists in America because of the labors and struggles of St. Herman and the Valaam mission of 1794, St. Innocent, St. Tikhon and other apostolic laborers. Certainly it is by the grace of God that the Church came to exist in these cultures. But it is also only by the cooperation of individual Christians with that grace that this happens.

Orthodoxy is a missionary Church. It always has been, and it always will be. The Byzantine Church converted half of Europe to Christ. The Russian Church converted most of northern Eurasia all the way to Alaska and even into northern California. Today, there are Orthodox Christian missionaries throughout the world working to establish the Church in many cultures where it has never existed: Madagascar, central Africa, India, the far East, Indonesia, etc. These missionaries take Christ's imperative seriously, to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature, baptizing and teaching people to follow God's commandments. The work is then carried on not only by clergy but laity as well – the real workers in the field of mission.

We have a fundamental task to follow in the footsteps of these great pioneers of our faith who struggled to fulfill the Gospel and bring those around us to faith in Christ. To do this, we must have a clear idea of what the Gospel is; we need a clear understanding, both on a rational and practical level, of what it means to be an Orthodox Christian. And we particularly need clarity in our own lives so that our own personal agendas do not get in the way of the Gospel of Christ.

It takes a particular kind of spirituality to be a missionary. Not only does it take clarity of vision as to faith and the nature and content of the tradition, but a missionary must, above all else, love people. The great missionaries are men (and women, though they are less well known) of great faith and love, and strict personal discipline. They work tirelessly and single-mindedly in the asceticism of spreading the Gospel. They are, moreover, men of vision, with an overwhelming calling and divine compulsion to preach, teach, and baptize. They inspire and make disciples of people to carry on the same work, imparting to them the same vision and experi-

ence of Christ, infecting them with the same zeal and love for the work of evangelization.

Clarity of vision comes from intensely pursuing the work of inner purification, so that the grace of God can illumine one's soul. This purification is first and foremost a renunciation of all the elements of selfishness and passionate personal agendas. Purification comes through deep repentance, confession, renunciation of one's passionate attachments and actions. It means to unite our self to Christ in the depths of our being, to cooperate with him in unity of will. The effectiveness of our preaching depends on our inner relationship with God. Our words are empty if they are hypocritical and do not proceed from deep communion. It is not enough to teach outward forms. It is the content that counts. The passions and self-centeredness erect barriers to love of the neighbor. Tearing down these barriers by repentance and purification frees one to be an instrument of the God's will, manifesting the love of God. This is the real formation of a missionary.

Traditionally, most missionaries who established the Church throughout the world were monks. Monasteries would send out brothers to establish an outpost where the Church did not already exist. Then, people would begin to gather around them and receive the message of Christ. The process would then repeat itself. This was the pattern that established Orthodoxy from the Danube to the Pacific and beyond, to Alaska.

The missionary monastery incarnated the Gospel, in charity and brotherly love, as an example to people of what the Christian life was meant to be. It formed people in the Christian life by ascetic purification, liturgical immersion and study of the Scriptures and Holy Fathers. The monks learned theology not simply by study but by practice. They learned personal discipline through monastic spiritual discipline, and applied it to the tasks at hand. As with all authentic asceticism, their discipline is based on self-denial out of love for God and neighbor. Those called by God to the ascesis of missionary activity are thus prepared by self-denial to offer themselves to Christ in love and self-sacrifice, in order to convey the Gospel. One of the greatest missionaries of the last quarter of the twentieth century, Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania, wrote:

The question of the motive of mission can be studied from several angles: love of God and men, obedience to the Great Command of

the Lord (Matthew 28:19), desire for the salvation of souls, longing for God's glory. All these, surely, are serious motives.... However, we think that the real motive of mission, for both the individual and the Church, is something deeper. It is not simply obedience, duty or altruism. It is an inner necessity. "Necessity is laid upon me," said St. Paul. "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). All other motives are aspects of this need, derivative motives. Mission is an inner necessity (i) for the faithful and (ii) for the Church. If they refuse it, they do not merely omit a duty, they deny themselves. ("The purpose and motive of Mission," quoted in *Again* 22.1:7).

The great missionaries, like St. Nikolai of Japan and St. Innocent, gave their lives for their people. Their ascetic podvig is no less than that of the great elders and recluses. Their lives were transformed by the Gospel, transfigured by the Holy Spirit. They bore the good news of Christ not only with their lips but by the witness of their lives. They were called by God and ordained for the task of apostolic labors, and their very presence manifested the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of the Kingdom of God. It is a message of hope, of redemption, of forgiveness, and cleansing of sins. It is what gives meaning to our lives and to our struggles. It breaks down the barriers between people, giving a common vision and purpose, uniting one to another in a bond of love that transcends culture, ethnicity, language, and all other human barriers. The message of the Gospel is the very breath of the Church, inspiring and vivifying each member. We come to a living encounter with the Living God through the Gospel, through the Church, through the sacraments. It is nothing less than that living encounter with Christ that is the essence of our message of salvation. And not only the encounter, but incorporation into His very life.

Our task, as Orthodox Christians in the West, is essentially missionary. We may not personally be called to the apostolic labor of the conversion of a whole nation (or perhaps we are?), but each one of us is called to bear witness to Christ and His Kingdom with our lives and by our faith. We must ask ourselves how we are conducting that missionary task the Lord has given us, both personally and in our parishes. We need to ask ourselves

if we have a clear understanding of the message of the Gospel, and how clearly we are expressing it by our words, and incarnating it in our lives.

Orthodoxy: Mere Christianity

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 5, PRESENTATION OF THE THEOTOKOS 1999

CHRISTIANITY IN OUR WESTERN CULTURE

OUR WESTERN CULTURE, especially in America, has come to conceive Christianity as the most simple fundamentalism, without ritual, without sacred art, with very little intellectual or spiritual content. It is no wonder that the great bulk of well-educated young people have rejected it. Simplistic Christianity, the reduction of Christianity to a man and his Bible, going to listen to a sermon and sing some hymns on Sunday morning, and to being “nice,” is simply not satisfying. The more elaborate forms, both doctrinally and liturgically, of Western Christianity, high church Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, are being equally infected with this reductionism: under the overwhelming tide of post-enlightenment individualism, they have accepted compromises in both the moral and theological realms.

Essential Christian, Scriptural morality has been cast out, while hedonism, greed, and the gratification of the passions have become the basic values of our culture. The most essential Christian doctrines of the Resurrection of Christ, the Incarnation and the very divinity of Christ are not only questioned, but are even excised from the confessions of some “Protestant” groups. The very substance of what is left of a sacramental consciousness is being lost. While external forms may remain arguably somewhat intact, the inner spiritual and intellectual vision bears little resemblance to the apostolic faith given once and for all to the Church, and which has been taught everywhere by all at all times. We are often left with nostalgically and aesthetically pleasing cultural forms, with little or no spiritual content.

THE ORTHODOX SELLOUT TO THE WORLD

The Orthodox Church has fared little better in Western culture. It has condemned itself to cultural isolation by maintaining phyletist ethnic isolation from not only other Orthodox communities but from the main-line American culture itself (and thereby compromising not only its Orthodoxy but its Catholicity as well – though we are not allowed to admit that!) Perhaps this very isolation has protected it to some degree from this mortal combat with Western culture. That time is over.

Materialism threatened to destroy the Orthodox Church in its ancestral homelands, under the form of Communism. Now materialist individualism in the West undermines the essential conceptual framework of Orthodox Christians, in the relentless onslaught of consumerism and its corrupting values propagated through the media. Orthodoxy is so often reduced to a caricature: a person and “our faith” (regardless of content), some nostalgic cultural rituals on Sundays, fulfilled by their social function of bringing the community together. It is neatly compartmentalized, and has little or no impact on the rest of life, or even on one’s basic belief system.

The basic values of many Orthodox Americans are those of typical American society, not of Orthodox Christianity: wealth, power, money, influence, owning the latest, the best, the most expensive home, clothes, car, computer or whatever. Family and community are subordinated to these goals, and, should they get in the way, they are dispensable. We must ask ourselves: is the divorce rate significantly lower in the Orthodox community than elsewhere? The abortion rate?

THE LOSS OF THE ORTHODOX MIND

This is, of course, nothing but the “world,” in Scriptural terms, and it is no different than it has ever been. What is different, though, is the degree to which it has undermined the essential Christian ethos – the Orthodox *phronema* – and placed the Orthodox Church in North America in the same position as, say, the Episcopal or Methodist Church, though with a more baroque ritual system and far quainter cultural customs. Values essential to the Orthodox faith, such as hierarchy, asceticism, self-denial and the integrity of church and family structure, have been thrown out (they

are certainly politically incorrect!) and replaced with individualist egalitarianism, hedonism, and “democracy.”

Even the Mother Churches of the Old World have capitulated to the demands of their sub-pubescent daughter churches and archdioceses, who insist on getting their own way. From liturgical matters, moral questions regarding the use of *economia* in clergy discipline, to the ability of the wealthy to oust an enthroned archbishop, we have a sellout of Orthodox Christianity to the world. (Of course, we must remember how many times even Constantinople sold itself out to the Papacy and became uniate, for the sake of a crusade that never came to save it from the Turks: Lyons in 1274, Florence in 1438...).

Converts, and other zealots for Orthodoxy, are not immune from this temptation. While the sellout to the world may be a temptation “from the left,” so the capitulation to vainglorious self-satisfaction and sectarianism is a sellout “to the right.” How easily we can become obsessed with the preservation of external forms, in all their glorious traditional integrity, as a kind of guarantee of our Orthodoxy. We argue about liturgical rubrics, language, chant, iconographic style or some “issue” of calendar, ecumenism or adherence to one or another model of “canonical” ecclesiastical unity in America.

All this is vain, having the form of religion but denying its power, having an appearance of piety. Rather it is simply a justification for vainglorious hypocritical judgmentalism. How easy it is to become preoccupied with external “religious” issues, instead of confronting God in our hearts, and permitting Him to confront us. Most of these issues are simply distractions from authentic spiritual life, destructive to the unity of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. There may indeed be legitimate questions, but they must be subordinated to the one thing needful, the pursuit of our common salvation in communion with one another in the One Church.

The constant preoccupation with external issues is no less a sellout to the world than ecumenism, the calendar, or liturgical renovationism. These not only distract us from the one thing needful, the salvation of our souls, but they compromise the integrity of the Orthodox Faith in its very essence, by making membership in the Church contingent on membership in the right faction. This is simply protestantism, regardless of what

the rituals look like. The Orthodox Church is transformed into an exotic, esoteric sectarianism, constituted not by embracing the Catholic Faith through holy illumination and the mysteries, but by loyalty to an exclusive club, one's jurisdiction.

The Gospel gets lost in the endless polemics, and we treat each other in a shameful manner that makes a mockery of Jesus Christ and Christianity. We pride ourselves in doctrinal, liturgical, and moral integrity, but do we really believe it? If we did, there would not be such divisions among us, and we would not judge and condemn one another.

THE PRIMACY OF THE GOSPEL IN OUR LIVES

The Gospel of Jesus Christ must be primary in the Orthodox pursuit of spiritual life. We must constantly ask ourselves if we truly believe the Gospel, if we truly believe in Jesus Christ and the salvation to which He has called us, communion through Him with the Father in the Holy Spirit. Is our faith manifest in our actions? Do we follow the commandments of the Lord to deny ourselves and take up the cross, to seek first the Kingdom of God above all things? Do we live as Christians and treat one another as Christians?

The essence of the Orthodox Christian Faith is that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, who was crucified and rose from the dead. It is precisely this Faith that is under attack and denied by the world. It presents an ultimate challenge to the world. Not only is the Faith rationally incomprehensible; but the consequences of confessing that Faith for one's daily life are staggering. We can no longer go on living in the same way if we affirm that truth. So, it is much easier to pay it lip service, preferably in a language we don't understand, and affirm our Orthodox identity as part of our greater cultural heritage. We may do this, but if that is as far as it goes, we will go to hell.

As Orthodox Christians, we must affirm, with the Holy Fathers and the Holy Scriptures, that without this confession of Jesus Christ as Son of God there is no Christianity. That confession must not only be with our mouth, but with the entirety of our life in every aspect of every relationship. And we must affirm, with the holy martyrs and monks and saints, that that confession costs us everything, and that we can no longer live in the same way as before. Our confession of Jesus Christ as Son of God is

not only with our mind, but must be lived out by our actions. We may not personally be called to die as a martyr, leave all our possessions for the sake of Christ, or become a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom of God; only to those who can receive such a word is it required. But each and every one is commanded by Christ to deny himself, to take up his cross daily, and to follow Jesus regardless of the cost. What is required is a denial of our own will, our selfishness, our passions, and a voluntary self-offering in complete surrender to Christ.

CONCRETE IMPLICATIONS FOR US

Concretely, this means that we must not surrender ourselves to the world and its values: materialism, consumerism, the desire for wealth and power. More important still, we must deny ourselves the temptation to judge and condemn one another, much less rend the seamless garment of Christ by factionalism and disputes. It means to submit ourselves as an act of self-denial in obedience to our superiors in Christ, as hard as this may be.

Only within this ascetic worldview does the life and structure of the Church, and the very confession of Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God, make any sense, because it is how He lived. "He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant." We must deny the world and its values: the constant gratification of our passions, and especially our pride, vainglory and self-righteousness. This is the ascetic task of every Christian, married or monastic, because it is the Way of Jesus, the Orthodox way.

Orthodoxy is mere Christianity: simple, evangelical, whole, beautiful, integral; with all the riches of grace, and centuries of saints. There is nothing superfluous, nothing left out. If we are truly Orthodox, then it will be a whole way of life, shaped by the Gospel, filled with grace, and manifest concretely in human relationships; in a communion of love, unity of mind and heart, patience, understanding and bearing one another's burdens, and charity towards our neighbors. If we fall short of this, we must blame no one but ourselves, and repent.

It is this constant repentance, turning back to Christ, denying ourselves, and crucifying ourselves to the world and its values, by which we live as Orthodox Christians. It makes Orthodoxy not only the form of religion, but the power of God to transform the world, one soul at a time.

The Cross of Catholicity

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 3-4, ENTRY OF THE THEOTOKOS 1998

WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT, we have an American Orthodox Church. The current controversies in various jurisdictions have helped many Orthodox Christians realize that they are first and foremost American Orthodox Christians living and working in North America. Even those with strong ethnic identities have recognized that they are not living in diaspora but are part of a uniquely American Orthodox Church experience. A unique American Orthodox identity has evolved and is evolving, not only among converts but among “cradle Orthodox” as well, people of all jurisdictions on this continent.

This identity, however, is not reflected in the life, much less the organization, of our Church in North America. Because of this discontinuity between the identity of the Church and her organization, the Church’s very life, her Orthodoxy and her Catholicity, are imperiled.

It is imperative that we establish a united Church, a single hierarchy, a ruling synod and primate, for all the Orthodox in this continent, a synod fully responsible and accountable for the entire Orthodox community in North America.

We must dismantle the multiple overlapping jurisdictions. Not only does the existence of multiple jurisdictions support competing parallel hierarchical structures and ministries. It also fosters distinct identities that exclude Orthodox Christians of other ethnic origins. It attempts to preserve ethnic national identities in a vain battle against the very culture that their people embraced when they came to America. Jurisdictional pluralism elevates ethnic identity and ecclesio-political affiliation to a level beyond the fundamental identity of Orthodox Christian. Jurisdictional pluralism does more than impede the mission of Orthodoxy in this country: it destroys it. Must one convert to an ethno-political agenda in order to unite with Christ? Such are the results of the heresy of phyletism.

At stake are fundamental ecclesiological principles, for the existence of multiple jurisdictions is not only uncanonical, it is clearly heretical. Not only does it violate the Apostolic canons, but even more essentially, it violates the Church’s very Catholicity. The Orthodox Church, if she is tru-

ly the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, must be for all people, all Orthodox Christians, regardless of cultural identity. Catholicity must not only be vertical, maintaining the historical integrity of the fullness of the apostolic teaching and identity handed on from age to age. It must be horizontal as well, embracing all people who share that fundamental identity. We cannot juxtapose an Eastern definition of “fullness” with a Western definition of “universality.” Rather, if we are Orthodox we must see Catholicity as both fullness and universality. Where there is no Catholicity, there is no Orthodoxy.

The essence of the Orthodox form of ecclesiastical organization and structure, which maintains both Orthodoxy and Catholicity, is the ascending structure of territorial communities: parishes and ministries, dioceses, archdioceses, patriarchates. The Catholicity of the Church is realized by all the Orthodox Christians in a particular area united in a single structure of conciliarity, no matter what the human particulars of ethnicity, language, or social class are. Those structures are personified – recapitulated – in the bishop and the synod with its presiding hierarchy. The territorial basis for the Church’s organization, in which there can be no overlapping jurisdictions, is essential for maintaining the Catholicity of the Church not just in terms of her universality, but in terms of her very Orthodoxy, her unity of mind and vision, by her common life. Concretely, it is a system of accountability and discipline, embodied in the Canons. *Sobornost*, meaning both the fullness and the universality, is the Church’s very identity, throughout time and space. It is the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

The conciliar functioning of the Church maintains its Catholicity by shared mutual responsibility for the integrity of the faith and discipline. It is not a function of the hierarchy alone, but of the whole community of the faithful. The bishop personifies – recapitulates – the local church in himself and is the focal point of that unity. While a local diocese may be the fullness of the Church sacramentally, it must be in communion with the other Orthodox Churches, both with other dioceses and with the Church as a whole worldwide. The various levels of synods hold the bishops accountable to one another for their stewardship of the Church’s life and faith, precisely by maintaining or excluding from communion. Thus, there can be no Catholicity without Orthodoxy.

There needs to be a ministry of unity – the “Petrine” ministry – within the Church. That is precisely the position of a bishop in his diocese or the primate of a national Church, be he pope, patriarch, metropolitan, or archbishop. The primate’s authority proceeds from the other bishops who elect him and with whom he has mutual accountability. This mutual accountability only works when it is incarnated on the local level, among all the bishops of a given area, to ensure the local Church’s Catholicity. The integrity of the Church, her Orthodoxy and her Catholicity, proceed from the bottom up, not the top down, in this system of conciliarity and shared responsibility for the Faith. There is no sacramental mystery of ordination beyond that of bishop, and no bishop has any jurisdiction in the diocese of another. Thus, there can be no “super-episcopacy” in the Orthodox Catholic Church. There can be no such thing as universal jurisdiction. Primacy is functional, not sacramental. These are fundamental principles of the Holy Canons, of Orthodox ecclesiology, which proceed from this type of conciliar system or organization.

However, in our contemporary situation in America, with its array of “canonical” jurisdictions, each subordinate to a different patriarch, the basic principles of our ecclesiology are violated. Suddenly, begin in the 1920s, all the patriarchs acquired universal, non-territorial jurisdiction. Yet this is precisely the problem the Orthodox have with Rome! No jurisdiction in America is accountable to any other. Instead, there is only accountability to a patriarch or synod ten thousand miles away – and often dependant on its American archdiocese for its support or survival. Thus, there is virtually no accountability and no conciliarity. And without these, there is no Catholicity. It is only by a thread that Orthodoxy itself is maintained.

We are accountable to one another as Orthodox Christians for the integrity of the faith. We cannot rely on distant foreign hierarchies for the validation or integrity of our faith or the life of our local churches. We must be united with them in full communion and offer support where needed. But responsibility for the integrity and fullness of the faith rests in the body of the faithful – the bishops and people together – not in some kind of papacy.

If the local churches are not Orthodox, then no external affiliation will make them so.

Our jurisdictions are manifestations of ethnic communities, rather

than reflections of the diversity exists even in the Orthodox community, much less in our entire society. We have even let our churches be divided by secular politics and socioeconomic factors. This is contrary to the Orthodox Faith; it is contrary to the Catholicity of the Church. The division of Orthodoxy in America into ethnic jurisdictions is nothing other than phyletism. This defined heresy is an abrogation of the Catholicity of the Church by ethnic exclusiveness and chauvinism. It is not solely a matter of ethnicity, however. It is also characteristically American: that Protestant sectarianism that has created twenty-five thousand denominations, according to taste in theology, worship, race, caste, and socioeconomic status.

We labor under a false assumption that by preserving the ethnic purity of a particular archdiocese, both in terms of expression and leadership, we preserve the integrity of the Tradition. Rather, we sacrifice Orthodoxy by destroying its Catholicity. The hierarchical organization of the Church must reflect and foster the unity of the Orthodox identity of the faithful, regardless of ethnic tradition. The multiplicity of traditions, liturgical, musical, linguistic, and folk, have their place not on the level of hierarchical organization, but in the lives of the various communities. Otherwise, we are on the road to ethnic-based sectarianism.

There is no need to transform the lives of our communities into a homogeneous, all-English, “American Orthodoxy.” It is an organic process of evolution and cannot be forced; but it can, and must, be encouraged. There is no need to make all Orthodox in North America conform to a single, uniform practice. Nor is it necessary to homogenize each particular community’s practice and expression – whether that of a single parish or of an entire archdiocese – to some distinct ethnic model. After all, cultural pluralism or multiculturalism is at the core of the American reality. The Orthodox Tradition balances unity and diversity: unity in the Holy Mysteries manifested by unity of the hierarchy, concretely expressed in a single local synod of bishops; and diversity of expressions manifested in parishes, ethnic ministries, and organizations.

We must not only unite the upper levels of administration, we must also be faithful to the basic Orthodox ecclesiological principle of one bishop for each city, with no overlapping jurisdiction. This “territorial imperative” is at the core of our ecclesiology.

Unity and cooperation is the fruit of the maturity of the mission of the Church in this country. It proceeds from a realization that we must assume responsibility for ourselves, our church, and our faith if indeed we are to be Orthodox Christians. These are questions not only of maturity, but identity as The Church. We are no longer immigrants in diaspora, or an exile church: we are not awaiting the day of return to our homeland. North America is our homeland, and this culture is the context of our identity. Our true identity is only found in the Kingdom of God, not in any distant "old country." Thus, our Church in this country must no longer be divided by worldly identities that prevent us from living according to our true identity in Christ. Formerly, those ethnic and social identities aided us in preserving the integrity of Orthodoxy in this culture. Now we have realized that they can be a hindrance to the Church's mission and a source of division. We are united by our common Orthodox Faith and our American culture. If we are truly Orthodox Christians, our unity in the Faith is far stronger than our divisions according to ethnic origin. Our common culture has given us a context in which to work together, where we may embrace our diversity by overcoming its divisiveness. Now is the time to come together as a single Orthodox Church in North America, not by creating another "ethnic," "American" jurisdiction, but a single canonical national Church embracing all the Orthodox in this country. This is the fulfillment of the work begun by all the Old World patriarchates when they established missions in this country. We must seek their blessing to fulfill the calling God has given us, that their work might bear its rightful fruit, lest their branches be ultimately found barren.

Let us take up the cross of Catholicity, the challenge to be truly the One Holy Catholic Church in America: truly Orthodox in faith and worship and truly Catholic, incarnating the fullness in a unity of the mind, the heart, and the life of all who share the identity of Orthodox Christian. This is not a matter of church politics. It is a matter of our salvation, our stewardship of the gift of the Holy Spirit given and received in Baptism, Chrismation, and Ordination. It is our responsibility before God. Or else, how will we possibly answer the Lord Jesus Christ on the fearsome Day of Judgement for our stewardship of His Church, His Body, His mission, His presence in the world?

The Church as Spiritual Hospital

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 2, EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS 1997

And Jesus went about all Galilee ... healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

—Matthew 4:23

Having faith in Christ without undergoing healing in Christ is not faith at all. Here is the same contradiction that we find when a sick person who has great confidence in his doctor never carries out the treatment which he recommends. If Judaism and its successor, Christianity, had appeared in the twentieth century for the first time, they would most likely have been characterized not as religions but as medical sciences related to psychiatry.

—Father John Romanides¹

THE ESSENCE of the Orthodox Christian life is the healing of our souls. Specifically, an Orthodox Christian is one who is undergoing purification, illumination, and deification. The means of this healing of the soul are the liturgical and ascetic disciplines as laid down in the teaching of the Fathers. They are what make Orthodox Christianity not a religion, nor simply a way of coping with our problems through ritual and social interaction, but a way of complete transformation and healing in Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit. This is the tremendous power of the Faith, the grace of repentance. The liturgical and sacramental life is inextricably linked with ascetic discipline, for ascetic discipline enable us to receive and be transformed by the healing power of the Church's mysteries.

To live the spiritual and ascetic life effectively for the healing of one's soul, one must be under the direction of someone who has made sufficient progress in the spiritual life and who has a blessing to direct souls: usually a priest, a monk, or a nun. The fathers repeatedly emphasize the necessity of spiritual discipleship, of not assuming ascetic labors out of self-will, but

¹ Romanides, John. "Jesus Christ, the life of the world." (A talk in Greek translation), 28 ff.

under obedience. The spiritual father is a spiritual physician who should know about the various kinds of illnesses and what to prescribe to cure them. Only those who have moved beyond praxis and purification, or at the very least are being purified, may assume this role. A captive to the passions should not “dabble in theology.”² From this it is clear why monasteries have always led the way in providing the Church with spiritual physicians.

Monasteries and parishes have a critical, symbiotic relationship. It is said in Orthodox cultures that the health of a local church is measured by the health of its monasteries. Yet monastics come from the parishes. Abbot Pankraty of Valaam has observed that it takes a certain degree of spiritual maturity in a local church to produce those who will commit themselves to the intensity of monastic discipline. It takes pious men and women who live the vision of a life transformed in Christ and who know the need to be purified and illumined, so that they may attain communion and union with God. Such piety begins in the Christian home and the local parish, and it is fed and nourished by the presence of monasteries, and the familiarity of the faithful with the intensity of their life.

All Orthodox Christians share a common goal: the healing of their souls – purification, illumination, and deification. It is only by humility, submission to the Holy Tradition of the Church, and supporting one another in our common mission to build up the Body of Christ, that we may “all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4 : 13).

2 St. John of the Ladder. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 30.

The Monastery of St John of Shanghai and San Francisco

DIVINE ASCENT NO. 1, GREAT LENT 1997

BY THE MERCY OF GOD, His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, Bishop of San Francisco and the West of the Orthodox Church in America, established our monastery at the St. Eugene's Hermitage in Pt. Reyes Station, California, in November, 1996 under the heavenly protection of St. John (Maximovich), Archbishop and Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco.

The Monastery strives to follow the tradition of Orthodox monasticism as it is lived out today in Russian monasteries and informed by the life on the Holy Mountain. Due to the close relationships of members of the Brotherhood with spiritual fathers in Russia and on the Holy Mountain, the Brotherhood will have the benefit of their advice and experience in the monastic life. The brothers will also benefit from extended visits from some of these fathers, especially from Valaam Monastery in Russia.

The Monastery's primary means of income include candle-making, publishing, and missionary work. At present the Monastery has the ability to produce two sizes of small candles, which are a mixture of paraffin and beeswax. We are looking forward to acquiring a setup to produce hand dipped beeswax candles in the near future. Our hope is that many of the parishes in the Diocese of the West of the OCA, as well as other Orthodox parishes in the San Francisco Bay Area, will purchase our candles on a regular basis.

Missionary work is also a primary task of the Brotherhood. At present, several communities in California are being served by the fathers of the Monastery, including the missions in Chico and Sonora, the Churches of the Protection on 15th Avenue in San Francisco and St. Vladimir's in Santa Barbara, as well as the women's Skete of Our Lady of Kazan in Santa Rosa. The Monastery is working with the Diocesan Missions Board to establish new parishes in the diocese, revive old ones, and reach out to

communities where there are special needs. The Monastery also seeks to expand its work in the cultivation and education of future clergy for missionary work, especially within its Brotherhood.

The third major area of the work of the Monastery is in publications. The Monastery's journal, *Divine Ascent*, will be of the highest quality both in appearance as well as content. *Divine Ascent* will dedicate each issue to contemporary holy fathers and publish articles on Orthodox spiritual life and the lives and writings of holy elders and spiritual brethren who are significant to the life of Orthodoxy in America. It will seek to bridge the gaps between the various Orthodox communities through a selection of writers and subject matter from all the Orthodox traditions. The journal has a pan-Orthodox board of advisers and receives input from a very wide range of advisors throughout Orthodox America.

In addition, the Monastery will be cooperating in a new Orthodox publishing venture, Saint Silouan Press, which will focus mainly on the publishing of high-quality Orthodox books. Many of these books will first be serialized in *Divine Ascent*.

To date, the greatest task for the brothers has been to restore the property. St. Eugene's Hermitage was built initially in the early 1950's by the Elder Dimitry (Egoroff), who reposed in Santa Rosa in 1992. It is located on the coast, thirty-five miles north of San Francisco, on seventeen acres of magnificent forested hillside surrounded by the Point Reyes National Seashore. While a beautiful chapel was erected and consecrated in honor of St. Sergius of Radonezh in 1988, the rest of the property is in extremely poor condition. There are two buildings which desperately need to be replaced (or at least completely remodeled and rewired), virtually no workspace, guesthouse, or storage area, and only five cells, which are quickly filling up. A tremendous amount of work has been done, yet there is much more ahead.

The Monastery invites groups from parishes to come and spend a weekend working, either camping out or staying at a nearby retreat center for a small fee. Such a work group should be arranged in advance, with specific projects in mind. The group should then raise the funds to purchase materials or assist the Monastery in making the purchase. Projects include building a greenhouse, work buildings, a guesthouse, and remote cells in the forest.

The long-term plan will be to seek the donation of a larger property, which will become the main monastery, also near the coast. St. Eugene's will remain as a hermitage, with a small brotherhood – a dependency on the Monastery. In the meantime, St. Eugene's needs to be made adequate for living and working as the Monastery of Saint John of San Francisco. There is much to be done, and we are very grateful for all the help we have received already and for all that is offered.

