

ARTICLES

Back to School:
Guarding the Senses

On Priestly Formation:
Small is Beautiful

Oh Say, Can't You See?:
*The OCA and the
American Problem*

More Than Words:
On the Language of Heaven

Tearing the Family Album:
A Crime Against Love

Courting Disaster:
Dating and Orthodox Youth

POETRY

**O Thou Who Art Both Priest
and Offering**

COMMENT

Enough Already:
*Pulp Fiction isn't
Christian Epic*

**Papal Hopes and Orthodox
Popes: Did the Turks Get
Something Right?**

Back to School: *Guarding the Senses*

*"Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth, keep
watch over the door of my lips."*

- Psalm 141 (140): 3

Every classical civilization - from China to Egypt to Greece to Rome - recognized the profound impact education has not just on the mind, but on the very essence of the human person. These insights into the interior life of human beings were not lost on the pagan philosophers. Socrates, in particular, faced down the hypocrites of his time, confronting them with the reality that the education of young people is not simply a utilitarian function - a preparation for work, productivity, or even good citizenship - but something much more profound and eternal.

Centuries later, the understanding of classical paganism was revealed in its fullness with the coming of Christ. Those who had searched for the Truth, the Way, the Great Mind, were confronted with Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thus, the task of education took on an even greater importance: knowing the Truth as a Person, Jesus Christ.

The Church Fathers speak volumes about the obstacles to true learning - not learning about facts and dates or even concepts, but the true learning of the spiritual heart, the enlightenment of the darkened soul. This is of course the only real task of a true education; everything else, as the book of Ecclesiastes tells us, is ultimately useless.

Yet modern education is a world away from such insights into the realities of the human heart. Dazzled by technology and the entertainment industry, the enlightenment of the darkened soul has been replaced by the noisy distractions described by Plato in his famous discourse *The Cave*, in which prisoners of the underworld prefer speculating about shadows inside a cavern, to the acquisition



of sight for their physical and spiritual eyes.

The Desert Fathers, and others as diverse as Saints Theophan the Recluse, Dorotheus of Gaza and Ignatius Brianchaninov, repeatedly caution Christians regarding the need to guard the senses: not only to be aware of the things that we see, hear, discuss, and think about, but to actually place limits on the doors of our senses, carefully filtering that which enters, since every impression on the mind produces a life-long seed for future ideation and the stimulation of passions. Even the ancient pagans understood something of this.

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Yet modern education, with its utilitarian underpinnings and rational academics, doesn't have time for such trivialities: there is important business to do, curriculum to cover, and controversies to explore. Faced with this plethora of state-determined needs, the bloated school structure is confronted with a frightening challenge: bored students.

Of course, students have been bored for centuries. But in the modern age, current technologies - almost all of them used for

entertainment - allow a never-ending stream of noise, images, and chat to flood our senses. This is almost inevitable in any urban setting, unless a very determined effort is made to guard against it. Yet this highway of stimulation for the senses is often the very thing which is used for the occupation of students in schools, and for their distraction before, after, and in between classes.

If our Christian Faith had Truth to offer the pagans of our classical past, who knew something of the interior life, and the guarding of the senses, how much more does the Orthodox Faith have to offer modern post-Christian, post-classical pagan students. On the battlefield of the senses, the weapons of the Orthodox spiritual life - with its strategies for the interior life, offering help for freedom from addiction, and methods of breaking obsessive and lustful preoccupations - are a great gift indeed.

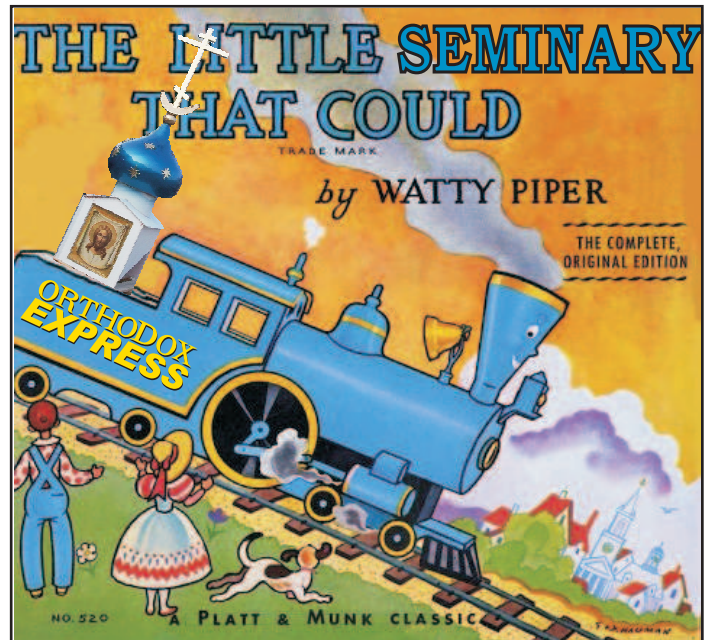
The Orthodox Faith - with its strategies for the interior life, freedom from addiction, methods of breaking obsessive and lustful preoccupations - has so much to offer modern post-Christian, post-classical pagan students.

Yet if we are to offer this great gift to young people, as they return to the spiritual battlefield of our schools, we must first immerse ourselves in recovering this lost wisdom of the Church, these strategies for the Christian life which run through all the lives and teachings of the Church Fathers. And not only must we recover them and learn them: we must struggle, with the guidance of a spiritual father or confessor, to put them into practice, lest becoming the teachers of our young people, we fail to have anything worthwhile to offer them from our own experience.

The ancient pagans of all great societies recognized that true education was the faithful passing on of all the acquired wisdom of the past, the sacred inheritance of the ancestors. This practice finds its fullness in the Holy Tradition of the Church, which is nothing more or less than the faithful transmission of all Christian experience. We owe our children no less than to begin to and to continue to acquire this experience ourselves, and to pass it on faithfully to them.

Anything else we pass on is simply dust, the useless shadows on the wall, the blue glow of the monitor.

- Father Geoffrey Korz+



On Priestly Formation: *Small is Beautiful*

"No one has ever seen a saint leaving a lecture room or a library"

- Mother Gabriela

Did you hear the joke about the Protestant minister who had so many academic degrees, he could actually spell out short sentences with the letters after his name? If you haven't heard it, don't feel left out: it's a true story, not humour.

Academia has for centuries been the crucible of the formation of Protestant clergy. Surrounded by great minds, classical philosophy, and secondary sources, Protestant seminaries have mastered the art of planting seeds in the minds of their students, and through them, in the hearts of their faithful. Modern universities are but the secular child of the grand Protestant seminary: a massive institution of learning designed to hone the rhetorical skills of the teacher, speaker, and minister.

For anyone who has walked the august streets of Boston, Massachusetts, and its sister city of Cambridge, Massachusetts, the sense of awe evoked by the great universities of the city of American freedom can leave Canadians and all Orthodox Christians with a real inferiority complex. It is for this reason that the last two centuries have deeply shaped the intellectual mind, as well as the emotional and spiritual heart, of Orthodox Christians on this continent as it pertains to the idea of the theological seminary.

While the concept of a theological school is not foreign to the Orthodox world, the kind of seed it plants, and the method by which it is planted, differs markedly from the American Protestant model, which is fundamentally academic, geared to attempting to understand Christ using the human mind, divorced from the

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ascetic struggle, in a contrived and oftentimes utopian academic enclave.

Orthodox academic institutions in the west have often suffered from this Protestant thinking. From the first foundations of Orthodox academia in Paris after the Revolution in Russia, to many of the attempts at creating seminaries amid the Protestant vacuum of North America, the recapturing of an authentic Orthodox spirit in schools of priestly formation has been a difficult struggle for the Orthodox refugees of our land.

One of the first tasks of Saint Arseny of Winnipeg was the creation of a seminary for the formation of priests in Canada, an effort matched by his work in the establishment of a school alongside the monastic community at St. Tikhon's monastery. Someone once said that only asceticism will save the clergy, and of course, this fundamental principle of authentic monastic community life as a key ingredient in priestly formation is one part of the universal inheritance of the Orthodox Church.

Far from creating an "American" or "Canadian" program, Orthodox seminary formation must bring together the universal witness of the Church across time and around the world.

It is this universal inheritance which must shape any Orthodox seminary. Far from creating an "American" or "Canadian" program, Orthodox seminary formation must in every way bring together the universal witness of the Church across time and around the world. This approach must be cut through with the fullness of Holy Tradition, since this is the true gift that the Church has for the world: the collected experience of the saints across time. To do anything less, to fall into the trap of creating a "new and improved" program, is a complete departure from this inheritance, and a complete waste of precious time in the life of a seminarian.

Saint John Maximovitch, one of North America's spiritual giants once commented that it is a good thing to encourage the faithful to partake of frequent Communion - but never without the fullness of preparation, based on the experience of the Church, not the cleverness of men. The concept of seminary instructors who were not active and experienced clergy themselves would have been quite foreign to Saint John, who laboured tirelessly in mission work in a dozen countries. A seminary that is a separate world - an academic world, populated and run by academics or clergy who have become academics - is not enough to fill and to form the hearts of the men who would be priests.

Perhaps the greatest distinction between Protestant and Orthodox life is the presence of asceticism within the Church. An authentic Orthodox seminary life would by necessity capture the fullness of this ascetical spirit as well, with every student being recommended by a confessor or spiritual father who continues to regularly hear the confession of the seminarian, including the time of their ordination and afterward. A daily rule of prayer that is regularly discussed with the confessor would be part and parcel of

this, along with fasting and a sincere effort to live out every aspect of life as an Orthodox Christian. Thus, seminary is not "camp", either in its design or in its product: it is not a chance to "build community", like a kind of religious high school, but rather to plant the seeds of authentic spiritual struggle in the hearts of future priests - seeds without which future clergy will simply crumble in their parishes.

Since seminary life cannot be a world unto itself, it must be intimately connected with parish life, not simply on a campus, but in Orthodox communities. In short, it must be living and alive, in order to avoid the intellectual disconnect of textbooks and lectures that befalls those in Protestant seminaries, including the philosophies of literary criticism, and the rejection of inherited Holy Tradition as merely "custom". This is the cold, calculated approach to Orthodoxy that builds efficient corporate congregations in the Protestant style, but fails miserably to build Orthodox parishes that are truly spiritual hospitals.

The seeds planted through an Orthodox seminary must be the seeds which will blossom into the fruit of holiness. Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos speaks to this when he reminds us that the goal of the Christian life is to produce saints. How much more the formation of the priests of the Church must be founded upon listening to, learning, and emulating the lives of the saints. Orthodoxy does not have celebrities, only saints. As such, authentic Orthodox seminary formation would discourage any cult of academic celebrity status, which is entirely foreign to the Orthodox spirit, and instead focus on those holy ones through whom God has manifest His grace through miracles, intercessions, and incorrupt relics, not merely bestselling books and successful lectures. As far as the saints of North America are

An authentic Orthodox seminary life would by necessity capture the ascetical spirit.

concerned, one practical way this applies to missionary work on this continent is the practical need to include a couple courses in a second language of the seminarian's choice. Just as Saint Innocent learned to serve the Divine Liturgy in numerous native languages in Alaska, and Saint John accomplished the services in languages as diverse as Dutch and Chinese, Orthodox seminaries in North America follow in the footsteps of the saints when they go beyond training seminarians in management skills for parish maintenance, but offering the cultural and linguistic tools to complete domestic mission work in the most culturally diverse corner of the world - Canada and the United States.

The greatest inheritance in the world has been given to the Church through Her saints, Her Holy Mysteries, and her ascetical tools for life. In building authentic Orthodox seminaries, Orthodox Christians in North America have such a vast and rich and spiritually effective depth of help, that we would be foolish to fall into the old, often repeated errors of following the heterodox path of seminary life. Instead, by the prayers of the saints of this land, let us run the race set before us, drawing on every gift we have been given through the fullness of Holy Tradition.

- Father Geoffrey Korz+



Oh Say, Can't You See?:

The OCA and the American Problem



As the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) has been rocked by certain financial scandals over the last couple years, it has been almost impossible to gauge the response of the faithful of the OCA who live outside American borders, in Canada and Mexico. The reason is much like the difficulty discussing tourism with folks from Baffin Island: the issue simply does not even register in the minds of those outside the USA.

The business of the “American” Church is very much an American business. Many - even most - Orthodox Americans are not aware of the fact that the physically largest diocese of the OCA is found outside the United States, in Canada. In a jurisdiction dominated by the white, middle class decedents of Slavic and other Europeans, her largest diocese rests within a country that is culturally diverse and culturally and regionally divided, with little time for centralized power south of the border that was drawn in the blood of Canadian soldiers. Yet Orthodox Christians in Canada can never be entirely sure if our American brethren understand our differences.

Inspired by the revolutionary, secular spirit of building a perfect, new society, America rejected a heritage of monarchy and tradition, and embraced an admiration of human intellect, philosophy, and the power of the individual.

For those living outside her, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the United States is a nation that believes it knows best. Since her own civil war, America has been engaged, on and off, in an effort to export its identity and way of life to the rest of the world, with the firm sense that the world would be better off being like America.

What does this identity look like? The American Revolution set the tone for a powerful nation, built upon the charred remains of the European inheritance America extracted from its history. Inspired by the revolutionary, secular spirit of building a perfect, new society, America rejected a heritage of monarchy and tradition, and embraced an admiration of human intellect, philosophy, and the power of the individual. The American Dream seemed like a bold new dream; it was in fact the oldest dream of all, one that promised her followers, you shall be as the gods: free and equal members of a democratic brotherhood.

The same spirit inspires many Orthodox Americans who seek an independent, unified Orthodox jurisdiction on this side of the Atlantic. While special interest groups such as Orthodox Christian Laity overtly seek to revolutionize and “Americanize” Church on this continent, even those within the leadership of “American” jurisdictions like the OCA and the autonomous Antiochian jurisdiction have been deeply shaped by such revolutionary ambitions, which seek to build a “renewed” church, in the “American” image: white, middle class, and English speaking.

For Canadians, this is downright funny. Yet for many Orthodox in the United States, this is serious business. Building suburban missionary parishes in a country with an exploding population in the inner city ghettos seems to somehow make sense. Graduating unilingual seminarians in a country in which nearly half the population is Latino is accepted as normal - because for those involved, this is the norm of American Orthodox life. this is *Brady Bunch* Orthodoxy.

White, middle class, English speaking mission work; suburban missionary parishes in a country with an exploding population in the inner city ghettos; unilingual seminarians in places where nearly half the population is Latino: this is Brady Bunch Orthodoxy.

Orthodox Americans are often shocked to discover that most parishes in Canada use no English at all, using Slavonic, Ukrainian, Romanian, Albanian, or French, in many cases because they are dealing with new immigrants. Such a discovery would not be a shock if Orthodox mission work in America was widespread among Latinos and American blacks. The reason it is not has nothing to do with missionary priests, some who have laboured in these communities for years. It has everything to do with the American elite triumphalism that has shaped American foreign policy for two centuries, and continues to shape the outlook of the Orthodox Church in America today. It is this same pride which will always lead to a fall - in recent years, to financial scandal within the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America.

Like the Emperor in the old children’s story, many Orthodox Americans cannot, do not, or will not see this delusion. It is of course such blindness which robs us of God’s blessings on mission work; the numbers in the Church bear witness to this lost opportunity. Instead of fussing over building “The Church for America”, we faithful would be much wiser to follow the path of our North American missionary saints, and minister to those who are with us already on this continent, without borrowing from the hollow nationalism of American Protestantism.

A few years ago at a convention here in Canada, I asked one of the advocates of a united “American Orthodox Church”, “Tell me, what will happen to Canada and Mexico under your little scheme?” The man replied, “Oh, you can each have your

own independent Church, too.” How nice, I thought - we can all have it our own way - like some ecclesiastical burger chain.

Later that day, I tried to purchase a book from an American merchant, who was visiting Canada.

“I’m sorry,” he explained, “We can’t take your currency - only American dollars.”

When I tried to explain that he was in *our* country, he could not understand the problem, and expressed his frustration by adding, “If Canadians want what we have to offer, they can just trade in their money for American dollars. I can’t see the problem.”

Looking at him, I thought to myself, *I can.*



- Father Geoffrey Korz+

More Than Words: *On the Language of Heaven*

“If you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say ‘Amen’ at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.”

- 1 Corinthians 14:16-17

Years ago, an aging priest from overseas was explaining that only three languages were suitable for Church services: Greek, Latin and Hebrew/Aramaic, since they were the languages written on the sign above the Lord on the Cross. Slavic languages were included by extension, he said, since they used a Greek-inspired alphabet.

“But what about Saint John Maximovitch?”, he was asked. Saint John served the Liturgy in Mandarin Chinese. Concealing his obvious amusement with a crust scowl, the priest replied, “So - what am I supposed to say?!”

The experience of Holy Tradition and mission in the history of Christ’s Church demonstrates to us that Greek or Slavonic are not “better languages” for Liturgical life. They are not even “better” expressions of Orthodox Truth - they are simply the languages that have been used from earlier centuries, since they were universally understandable, and provided languages which could articulate the faith clearly for the salvation of the whole world. Today, this is no longer the case.

Those who would cling to their exclusive use as liturgical languages, or mission languages, or instructional languages, not only lack an understanding of the lives of missionary saints, and of the universal history of the Church, but also must respond to Christ’s great commandment: the commandment of *love*.

Love has been both the motivation and the method of all missionary saints, who used language of the people among whom they lived. Saint Nicolai of Japan lived in the midst of a tiny Russian community in Japan, but he used Japanese - why? Because the saints always have an outward-looking view, and a long-term view: outward looking for evangelism of the nations, and long-term in terms of preserving in the faith of the children of those already in the Church.

On both these counts, most Orthodox in North America fail



miserably:

Multi-lingual countries like USA and Canada see few who would take the Gospel to most language groups: older ethnic jurisdictions protect their language ghetto with almost no mission work to those who are around them. So-called “missionary” jurisdictions focus almost exclusively on mission to white, English speaking middle class people. Both these approaches - at least on a diocesan level - fall short of the path of the missionary saints, since both tend to view one language as supreme - whether Greek, Russian, English, or any other language.

But isn’t it impossible to cater to all sorts of language within a single mission territory? Doesn’t it make sense to approach Orthodox witness with a single unifying language? This is the argument of the Roman Catholics, with the historical use of Latin. It is also the approach of much Orthodox “missionary” work today - whether those who would try to teach Africans to speak Greek, or those who would try to take an English-only approach to missions in North America. The approach of the saints is markedly different. Saint Innocent and the Alaskan mission, finding themselves in a multilingual environment, did not try to impose

Slavonic on Alaskan natives, even though many Russians were already filling the churches in Alaska. They could have made the argument that they had many Russian faithful for whom they must care, and welcome those natives who were willing to submit to the Russian environment and the use of the Slavonic liturgical tongue. They could have done this - but they didn't. The question is, why didn't they?

The answer is found in the presence of Christian love. Orthodox mission work must be first and foremost based in Christian love - love which is willing to leave behind anything of language or culture which is secondary to the Gospel, which would create a barrier to sharing the Orthodox faith. Saint Nicolai of Japan had such love, as did Saints Cyril and Methodius, and the saints of the Alaskan mission. This is the motive and the sustenance of real mission. Without it, any work of the Church inevitably becomes a club, lacking in love, heaping abuse on factions within it, driving faithful souls out of the parish, and eventually, out of the Church.

There are those who would argue that the use of a language or foreign cultural context provides a protection from the influences of modernism and ecumenism. This is simply not borne out in the experience of the Church.

There are those who today would make the argument that the use of a language or foreign cultural context provides a protection from the influences of modernism and ecumenism. This is simply not borne out in the experience of the Church. When we look at the greatest culturally adapted missions today - from China to Japan to Alaska - we find the most traditionally minded church communities, overflowing with love, despite their material poverty as local churches. When we look at the most culturally intransigent Orthodox groups - particularly the Greek jurisdictions in the west under the Ecumenical Patriarchate - we find the most vigorous involvement in ecumenism, and the most liberal approach to parish life, despite the greatest material wealth.

History presents us with a number of examples of Orthodox Christians who refused to speak the language of Heaven, cocooning themselves in their cultural and linguistic pride. The Celtic Orthodox in Britain, the Viking Christians of the North Atlantic, certain of the North African Orthodox of the early centuries, and others. What we see after centuries, in each of these cases, is the presence of the Orthodox Church erased, church temples reduced to dust, replaced with the worship of false gods, materialism not least among them. This is the fruit of so-called Orthodox witness that lacks enough love to cross cultural and linguistic barriers.

The language of Christ, and the language of Heaven, is not a language of the earth, nor a language that resulted as the Lord's punishment from the division of mankind at the Tower of Babel. The language of Heaven is the language of *love*, the love which shines through the missionary lives of the saints of God, who like Saint Paul, became and still become Gentiles for the sake of the salvation of the Gentiles. Any other approach simply does not

match the witness and path of the saints, whether they were intentional missionaries like Saints Paul, Innocent, Nicolai, Cyril, or Methodius, or accidental missionaries, who found themselves in the midst of people in non-Orthodox Christian lands. The language of Heaven, like the Orthodox Faith, is universal: it is the language of love - not Greek, not Russian, and not English.



- Father Geoffrey Korz+

Tearing the Family Album: *A Crime Against Love*

"First remove the plank in your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye."

- Luke 6:42

In the midst of the celebration of the joyful reunion of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia with the Moscow Patriarchate, one tiny news story was almost universally missed.

Perhaps the mainstream and Church media outlets missed it because the backwoods of Alberta, Canada, do not enjoy a speedy newsfeed to CNN or other news outlets. More likely, it was the nature of this rather obscure story - one which speaks to the heart of the struggle of Orthodox Christians in North America - which simply did not garner wider interest.

The Russian Orthodox Convent of the Protection of the Mother of God is the oldest continuously functioning Orthodox monastery in Canada, situated in Bluffton, Alberta. Up unto the spring of 2007, the convent functioned under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, until certain fears and concerns about the upcoming reunion with the Patriarch of Moscow led the tiny community to switch to a Greek Old Calendarist jurisdiction, breaking communion with the rest of the Orthodox Church. The Convent joined a few other parishes of the ROCOR, along with monasteries in both England and France in placing themselves under the Old Calendarist Greeks - a small number of faithful, to be sure, but a group which shared in common a serious concern about the directions of Orthodox involvement with the ecumenical movement.

It must be made clear that for the Orthodox, so-called "ecumenical" involvement with organizations including Protestants, Roman Catholics, and various sectarian groups, has never been widely condemned as heresy by councils of the Orthodox Church, although such a decision could happen at some time in the future. As such, the departure of the Convent from the fold of the Russian Church is a schism - a break in normal relations with the Body of the Church for reasons not grounded in Canon Law. The responsibility for such a decision can only be placed at the feet of those making such a choice.

That being said, one must ask: what was it which was so repellant, so scandalous, about the Church in Russia and in the West, that would bring faithful people - indeed, faithful monastics - to such a move? There was no hint that bribery was involved. There were no sexual scandals, or accusations of the misuse of Church funds. While personality conflicts may well have existed, these are a regular part of human existence. What, then, brought about such a split?



The heart of the concerns, fears, anxieties, or scandal which motivated these small schisms, including one in the heart of Canada, is to be found in the current tone of the discourse of the Church itself with those outside Her. For traditional Orthodox faithful (indeed, for all true Orthodox faithful, since without Tradition, one cannot be Orthodox), the direction and acceleration of so-called “dialogue” with those outside the Church - the misnamed ecumenical movement - has already led to endless rancor and division among those inside the Church. To judge the ecumenical movement by her fruits - the internal division of the Church, the creation of parties and factions, and the increased disharmony where love should abide - the logical impact on faithful Orthodox, and on monastic communities - was easy to foresee.

Orthodox who involve themselves in ecumenical dialogues too often fail to put the spiritual safety of other faithful ahead of their hopes for union with those outside the Body of Christ.

Each time some Orthodox “representative” stands shoulder to shoulder with heterodox Christians at a joint prayer service, thousands - even hundreds of thousands - of Orthodox observers, many of them converts, are dealt a hand of confusion about the nature of the Church. Each time some Orthodox academic issues a treatise equating the Holy Mysteries of the Orthodox Church with the rites of various other groups, it is individual souls - not factions or “wings” of the Church - who are scandalized, and sometimes even lost. The effect on the Body of the Church is not an attack with a single blow, but death by a thousand cuts, each one inflicted on the fragile conscience of a single member, caught in the spiral of parish politeness and Internet gossip, leading down and down into spiritual oblivion. It is not simply a crime against the truth: it is a crime against *love*.

Whatever the ecumenical advocates might say in support of their responsibility to “dialogue” with those outside the Church, the first responsibility of every Orthodox Christian is to love those within the Church, and to do everything possible to ensure that the faithful - particularly those new to the faith - do not stumble. This is where the Orthodox who involve themselves in ecumenical dialogues fail: they fail to put the spiritual safety of other faithful ahead of their hopes for union with those outside the Body of Christ.

And if the cost of such involvement is so high - numbered in souls caused to stumble, and souls lost from the Church - what is it that such involvement offers in exchange for these lost and scandalized souls? Certainly, the repayment is not new souls, won to the Church through ecumenical efforts, since such are almost never produced. Is the prize in fact the esteem gained in the eyes of those outside the Church, or in the eyes of the popular media, who value secular humanitarian efforts in the name of unity? Perhaps - the potential gains of Orthodox involvement are impossible to quantify. The losses are much easier to count, because each loss is personal, individual, and eternal.

Years ago, at my ordination to the priesthood, a brother priest approached and reminded me that each fringe on the priestly stole represented the soul of one person entrusted to my pastoral care. It was a statement which still hangs heavy on me each time I place the stole around my neck.

Yet as the Russian monasteries announced their departure, one by one, from the fold of the Church, scandalized by the ecumenical dancing of some individuals in the Church, the image of that stole, those fringes, flashed through my mind - this time, with the fringes cut through, scandalized souls dropping to the ground.

For those who remain in the Church, the question we must ask ourselves has nothing to do with the agenda items of ecumenical dialogue, nor does it have anything to do with how we might find better ways to articulate our positions to the unwashed - or washed - masses. The only question that really matters, as we watch souls drop from the stole that is the pastoral care of the Church, is whether we are the ones holding the proverbial scissors.



- Father Geoffrey Korz+

Courting Disaster

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

- 2 Corinthians 6:14

With all the emphasis the Church places on family related rites - marriage, baptism of children, and memorials for departed relatives - any thoughtful reflection brings surprise at the absolute absence of an emphasis on courtship among Orthodox youth. Outside the village context of traditionally Orthodox places, North American parishes, clergy, and families do not as a rule prepare Orthodox youth for courting, or even discuss the impact on married and family life.

The results are too obvious. Orthodox youth display largely the



same sexual activity, pregnancy, and abortion rates as other North American youth. So-called “Orthodox” countries such as Greece and Russia have the highest abortion rates in Europe. Pornography is rampant and public in these nations, the effect of a global assault on and abandonment of the Christian lifestyle. Intermarriage rates between Orthodox and heterodox youth (with the exception of Serbs) are at such high levels that the diminishing size of church schools in many older parishes should be little surprise to anyone. All these realities leave many a pious grandparent in a spin; yet panic is not an appropriate reaction for those who trust in Christ.

What are some appropriate ways in which faithful Orthodox families and parishes might address the dilemmas of courting? A few present themselves for our consideration:

1) Pray for your kids and grandkids. God can guide and protect our children at all times, and in all places and situations. We cannot. Be sure to ask the prayers of the saints, especially those known to intercede with Christ for those searching for a faithful and Orthodox spouse.

2) Parishes and priests must address courting/marriage and faith questions from the earliest age, setting out parameters of the Orthodox life. In many parishes, the horse is already out of the barn on this one - most children only come for holidays and dance or language classes, and are not even available in the churches for spiritual guidance. Why would we expect them to turn out any differently than the neighbours, with divorces, infidelities, and addictions to online pornography?

3) Recognize that children aren’t the future of the Church: they are the present. They live their lives right now, have struggles, temptations, and about a million alternatives to Orthodox Christianity, brought to them courtesy of the Internet - and most of these alternatives are bad. If parishes, priests, and parents fail to give authentic Orthodox answers to their children, there are about a thousand other sources of “guidance” - from television to Internet chat to *Cosmopolitan* magazine - standing by, waiting to offer the advice kids are seeking.

4) A radical adjustment in parish focus for youth is needed: one well-meaning Orthodox gentleman suggested we need more barbeques, along with history and language instruction, ethnic

dancing, and cultural festivals. If these form a large and integrated block of activities (with hundreds of Orthodox young people, from whom there is a good chance to find a spouse), then they will work, in producing friendships and relationships, and eventually marriages and families between Orthodox young people of different backgrounds. Usually, however, parishes exist in isolation from each other, particularly from other Orthodox jurisdictions. One remembers hearing an Orthodox man - a faithful, educated professional - saying that he would rather his sons marry outside the Orthodox faith, than marry a member of another Orthodox cultural group. In all likelihood, God will grant him this prayer, and will allow him to live with the consequences.

5) Many Orthodox communities suffer from a brand of racism that goes far beyond colour of skin. It is not difficult to determine if a parish is so afflicted; one may simply ask the faithful, “If you had a choice between your child or grandchild marrying a faithful Orthodox Christian who is a different culture or nationality, or marrying a member of your own culture who has really nothing to do with the Church, which would you choose?” The answers speak volumes. Regrettably, many in the Orthodox immigration to Canada suffer from 19th century Protestant concepts of race and culture: these are false constructs, which fly in the face of the teaching of the Church fathers of the Orthodox Tradition, who consistently teach about our common ancestry, and the fact that racial differentiations are incidental, while differences in faith are critical. Sadly, one hears even pious clergy and laity object to their children marrying outside their culture or race: this attitude is not Orthodox.

The fact is, most parish youth programs provide only a fraction of the social life for only a small segment of Orthodox young people; the rest comes from the popular culture, and from public high schools. It would be very nice if young people knew their culture, heritage language, recipes, and folk traditions, especially Orthodox ones. The reality is, Orthodox Christians are heading in the same direction as Jewish Americans, with their children marrying out of the faith in about ninety percent of cases, and living moral lives that are not very different from their non-Christian peers. With Canadian cultural hegemony as it is, non-Orthodox spouses, even if they formally convert, do not usually become an integral part of Orthodox community life. Italians don’t become Greeks. Chinese don’t become Serbs. Anglos do not become Ukrainians. Do a count at the average Orthodox parish - and tremble.

6) With limited resources, our emphasis must be very specific: spend our time and money on teaching the faith first. The last century has shown that a divided effort produces young people who can dance, sing, dye Easter eggs, eat *kolach* and *spanikopita*, but who cannot recognize most icons or follow along in basic services of the Church. They play, but do not pray, at least on a daily basis. (Even atheists pray in a crisis - is that the point we’re at?)

7) Combine our efforts. If we’re serious about our children having friends and by extension, spouses, who hold the same Orthodox faith, we must put inter-Orthodox activities for youth at the centre of our work. The reality is, most Orthodox in Canada are not serious about this, and are drunk with the dream that Costa or Dragica or Lucian or Olga are going to meet some nice young person who will recognize their ethnic dance costume, and fall

head over heels - into what? Into a secularized marriage with all the cultural trimmings, and some "Orthodox Christianity on the side with that, thank you very much". When families live this fantasy, they usually get mixed marriages who are marginal in their faith, at best.

8) Talk about the teachings of the saints on sex and marriage.

No questions are more common among Orthodox young people than these. It is really quite encouraging to see, since even those from marginal Church backgrounds really want to hear what the Church has to say - and the Church has a lot to say! The saints talk endlessly about ways to have success in spiritual struggles, temptation, lust, adultery, fornication, self abuse, fantasies, and all the things with which young people (and not so young people) struggle. It is not enough to tell young people to be Greek and be good. It is not enough to tell them to be Serbs and to be safe. It is not enough to tell them to be anything - except Orthodox Christians, striving to live holy lives. Without very specific lessons, from the simple lessons at a young age to more serious lessons at an older age, Orthodox young people will become just what they are often becoming: Orthodox adults without a clue how to raise their kids in the Orthodox faith.

9) In laying the limits for the lives of teens, start when they are born.

Parents should know the families of the friends of their child. Visits are nice - and much better if supervised. Socializing in groups is normal, but one must ask: what is the actual goal of dating, one-on-one? I remember asking this question of a group of teens, and they all replied: the goal is fun. When I asked for a more detailed definition of "fun", they all conceded that the real goal of dating - whether it is spoken or unspoken - is sex. And therein lies the reason parents should steer kids away from the notion of "having a boyfriend/girlfriend": because as Orthodox Christians, we recognize that courting is to find marriage, and marriage is the place for sex - courting (or "dating") is simply a recreational sport in the arena of immorality.

10) Watch the bedroom door. The concept of sleepovers, at the homes of friends who live within easy driving distance has always baffled us: if an eight-year-old can sleep over, why can't a sixteen year old? Of course, with a sixteen year old, the possibilities for troubles are endless, yet many parents lie to themselves about the very real temptations that present themselves to kids, young and old. Having a separate play area - a rec room, a play room, or the livingroom floor - is a key ingredient in laying down parameters that allow children to avoid pitfalls and temptations in later life: the child that plays in their bedroom with friends with the door open when they are five, will be going there when they are fifteen - and will close the door.

11) Isolation. Whether it is a remote corner of the house where a student socializes, or a young person whose electronic communication with friends dominates their time at home, parents should lay down ground rules early on which keep a family knit together, in time, activities, and place. I remember a mother complaining that her teenage son got no homework done, although he never seemed to talk on the phone, never went out, and stayed in his room awake until late at night. She was surprised at the suggestion that they might consider removing the big-screen television and satellite connection access from the room, and placing some limits on his internet access. Isolation from the family had clearly produced a whole new circle of "friends" and

social activities for the young man.

12) Modesty. Volumes could be written about the topic of modesty, particularly among young women. In general, three things should be kept in mind. Firstly, as a rule, whatever choice of clothes they make when they are children will become more revealing as they get older, so purchase appropriately when they are young, and speak up about the need for modesty of dress and behaviour. Secondly, if a piece of clothing would seem provocative if worn by an adult, it should not be worn by a child. Thirdly, Orthodox Christians are engaged in the struggle to become holy - like Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints - and their lives and habits should provide a general rule for the conduct of the faithful, young and old alike.



- Father Geoffrey Korz+

Poetry

O Thou Who Art Both Priest and Offering

O Thou who art both Priest and Offering,
Both Lamb and Shepherd, Gift and He Who Gives;
O Thou who lay entombed and yet who lives,
To Thee I pledge myself, Immortal King.

And yet, My Lord, this is a little thing,
This gift a trifling, tarnished heart which strives
And seeks for tears, on which repentance thrives,
But tears from true humility do spring.

And so I pray Thee, Lord, to let me see
How small a thing I give--a widow's mite
Compared with Thine unending love--my will.

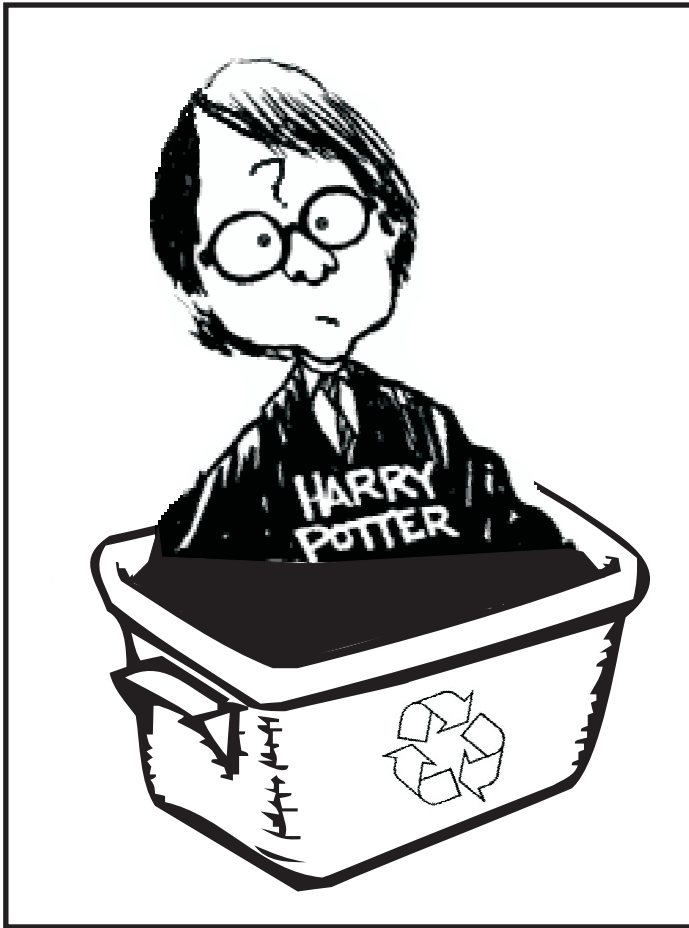
Thy mercy true shall take that which is free
For me to squander or to spend aright,
And shall my soul with virtue's riches fill!

- Sara Hillis

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Enough Already: Pulp Fiction isn't Christian Epic

"The child who has been educated in good literature... will not easily become an addict of contemporary movies and television programs and cheap novels that devastate the soul and take it away from the Christian path."

- Father Seraphim Rose, *His Life and Works*

As latest pulp fiction fad by J.K. Rowling, the *Harry Potter* series, crashes to a stop amid a gargantuan pile of revenues, the tired debate over the merits of the series is also drawing to a close - proof that while all good things must come to an end, hopelessly trivial and unedifying things never seem to come to their end soon enough.

To a certain extent, one can humour the less than literate secular parent who sees in this series a certain excitement that can entice little Johnny to read: this is a goal divorced from its content of effect, free from any spiritual or moral filter. It reminds one of the joke decades ago that young men actually read dirty magazines for the articles.

One might even excuse those in the mainstream culture who can overlook the omnipresent content of black magic, occultism, and the plethora of authentic witchcraft references

throughout both the books and the movies in this popular series. Those who have no experience with the occult and its effects, no familiarity with the teachings of the Church about the cultivation of curiosity in such subjects, or the real life pastoral impact in the lives of those who take these matters seriously - perhaps the ignorant can be forgiven.

The last ten years have seen the growth among a certain segment of Christians - even Orthodox Christians - of a kind of Harry Potter fan club, focusing on two basic ideas. The first argues that the Harry Potter series is a piece of quality literature, with great capacity to engage its readers in the fundamental questions of good and evil. The second point argues that Harry Potter can be read as a Christian epic analogy, in a way which bolsters the traditional Christian life.

The popular press has proven eager to take up the first cause, but there are exceptions. As writer A. S. Byatt in the *New York Times* pointed out, Rowling's universe forms a "secondary world, made up of intelligently patchworked derivative motifs from all sorts of children's literature ... Written for people whose imaginative lives are confined to TV cartoons, and the exaggerated (more exciting, not threatening) mirror-worlds of soaps, reality TV and celebrity gossip". Another reviewer suggested, "Rowling's mind is so governed by clichés and dead metaphors that she has no other style of writing." Yet another comment decried, "the Potter saga (is)... very conservative... dispiritingly nostalgic for a bygone Britain,".

Harry Potter fills the void for literary Anglophiles who yearn for the Anglo-Christian epics of bygone days, yet the authentic inheritance of Britain - its Orthodox Christian essence - is entirely displaced.

Far be it from me to be hard on any book for undertaking the noble task of harkening back to a bygone Britain. Yet this is not what Harry Potter does. The authentic inheritance of Britain - its Orthodox Christian essence - is entirely displaced in the novels and films, replaced with the titillation of a modernized, materialistic world without God. The shreds of Orthodoxy still extant in Britain today are carefully filtered out by Rowling. The very things which could and should make these novels appealing to Orthodox Christians are missing, replaced with things that are very spiritually disturbing indeed.

In the case of Orthodox Christian admirers of the *Harry Potter* series, one can also detect something of the elements of an ethnic ghetto. Just as certain cultural preoccupations afflict Greek, Serbian, Russian or Ukrainian communities, Orthodox Christians with Anglo roots or preferences often share certain tastes. This goes for Anglophiles in general, too. Harry Potter fills the void for literary Anglophiles who yearn for the Anglo-Christian epics of bygone days. This is perhaps part of the reason Russians and Greeks don't seem to be running around in a flurry anticipating *Harry Potter* plot twists, while many (but

not all) Anglo-Canadian and American converts are doing just that.

Which brings us to the argument that the Potter stories can be approached as Christian epic analogies. Harry Potter fans often draw comparisons between the series and such classics as *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, and the *Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien - a committed and conscientiously Christian writer - purposefully attempts to reconstruct a mythical world based on the inheritance of Anglo-Saxon Orthodox England. Tolkien further takes the clear steps to base his plotlines on the idea that evil is evil, and that the use of power - particularly magical power - has an inherently self-destructive quality, which enslaves the soul, leading it away from Truth, into demonic slavery. Magic is presented as a dangerous force, and even those virtuous characters who deal with it - such as elves and the wizard Gandalf - do so with great personal caution and restraint, much like the restraint one sees demonstrated in the life of the Orthodox Church. By contrast, the disciples of Hogwarts school are not offered this lesson: it is assumed in the Rowling's books that magic is a resource to be learned and exploited: power is in itself a neutral thing, and the difference between good and evil tends to be more a matter of whether one tries to trespass on the souls of other people.

The biggest threat of the Harry Potter phenomenon is not something as simple as the popularization of the occult: it is the forgetfulness of the mind of the Church.

Tolkien presents an epic which intentionally depicts the Christian struggle against the corrupting influences of the personalized use of supernatural power, in which humility is the key to spiritual freedom, and the end game is one of being rid of the burden of supernatural power. Unlike Tolkien, Rowling knits together a mere caricature of mythological history. Tolkien's is an intentional analogy of the Christian struggle against sin and death; Rowling's is an intentional analogy of occult libertarianism, crafted for a modern market, and those who read into it a Christian analogy are finding in it what they want to find - not that which the author has planted there. This approach in itself is a rejection of the traditional approach to literature, which seeks the lessons the author has to offer. Orthodox Christian readers should know better than to fall into this imaginative and speculative game.

The works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis are fantasy literature with an explicitly Christian purpose, which have stood the test of time, and which draw on the mythology of once living Orthodox Christian cultures - yet even these qualities do not make these books required reading for Orthodox Christians, young or old. They may compliment the Orthodox life, but they are not central to it.

The Harry Potter series offers far less than these classic Christian sagas, offering the vague impressions of modernity and sprinklings of the occult as a caricature of a mythical

English culture, stripped of its Orthodox Christian qualities. It, too, is not required reading for Orthodox Christians, yet for those who would choose to read it, it offers many elements which do not compliment or support the struggle to live the Orthodox life, and at least a few elements which are very real stumbling blocks to the formation of an Orthodox view of the world.

For Orthodox Christians, the biggest threat of the Harry Potter phenomenon is not something as simple as the popularization of the occult: it is the forgetfulness of the mind of the Church, the Orthodox inheritance as it is and was, intentionally expressed in cultures past and present. For Orthodox Christians bombarded by the deluge of modern pop culture, perhaps it is time to take refuge in that traditional inheritance once again - and leave Harry and Hogwarts out in the dustbin.



- Father Geoffrey Korz+

Papal Hopes & Orthodox Popes: *Did the Turks Get Something Right?*

In what was perhaps the biggest non-news of the Orthodox Church this year, a Turkish court ruled in June that the Patriarch of Constantinople enjoys the legal status of bishop of the Orthodox faithful in his city, but does not enjoy the legal status as head of the Orthodox Church around the world. Turkey has long held the view that the Istanbul-based patriarch is only the head of the city's tiny Greek community, and not the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians.

As perennial rivals of Greeks at home and abroad, the Turkish authorities have long been suspicious of the Patriarchate's cultural and religious ties with Greece. The Turkish authorities argued that their government was in no position to grant special status to the Patriarchate as a minority group within their ostensibly secular country, a move which brought criticism of the Turks from Greek sources worldwide.

Orthodox worldwide have never viewed the Patriarch as "head" of the Orthodox Church. Such a claim is absurd from an Orthodox point of view.

Not surprisingly, certain Greek officials dismissed the Turkish decision as politically motivated at worst, irrelevant at best. Greek Foreign Ministry spokesman George Koumoutsakos summed up the Greek position, noting, "above all, recognition of the Ecumenical Patriarch as a spiritual leader is - and has been for centuries - deeply rooted in the conscience of hundreds of millions of Christians, Orthodox or not, worldwide."

But what does this actually mean? The Orthodox have long



seen the Patriarch of Constantinople as the highest court of appeal in the Church, since the See of Rome was left vacant in the eleventh century with the departure of the Roman Catholic west from the Church. Yet with the exception of certain nationalists, Orthodox worldwide have never viewed the Patriarch as “head” of the Orthodox Church - a position belonging solely to Jesus Christ. Such a claim is absurd from an Orthodox point of view, and smacks of the same ambition that led to the Latin departure from the Orthodox fold a millennium ago.

So what does this mean? In a strict sense, it means that the Turkish court is absolutely correct. The concept that Turks could be correct about anything is of course entirely foreign to the Greek nationalist mind, yet in this case, the ostensibly secular, vaguely Islamic court at Ankara articulated the true Orthodox position: the Patriarch is a local bishop, albeit the most highly honoured one, and has no ecclesiastical jurisdiction over

Orthodox Christians outside his see.

Today, through various historical hiccups, the see of Constantinople extends to various isolated islands around the globe: Greeks in North America are within his jurisdiction, while the actual Church of Greece is not. Ukrainians in the west fall under Constantinople, while those living in Ukraine do not. A handful of liberal intelligentsia in Western Europe, eager to escape traditional Orthodox life and practice in their region, have come under Constantinople over the years. Yet ninety percent of Orthodox Christians worldwide, while honouring the historical significance of the Patriarchate, are not under its jurisdiction.

Ninety percent of Orthodox Christians worldwide, while honouring the historical significance of the Patriarchate, are not under its jurisdiction.

Those who would like to see the extension of the power base of Constantinople along Roman Catholic lines are keenly aware of this demographic inconvenience. Although it smarts them to admit or to discuss it, their press releases still read as if the Byzantine Empire is still alive and kicking. A still greater thorn in the side of those supporting a papal-style Patriarchate is the reality that the first Patriarch to claim universal rights was the controversial Meletios Metaxakis in the 1920s, the mastermind of radical changes within the Greek speaking churches - not an ancient historical precedent, to be sure.

For Orthodox living in North America, all this news and history comes as a proverbial blip on the radar screen. With the decline in immigration to the west among those jurisdictions under Constantinople, combined with a declining birthrate and an evangelical spirit which has almost entirely been ceded to Russian-based jurisdictions, the future influence of the Patriarchate at Istanbul does not look promising for those under her. God is not left without witnesses - whether they are the growing Orthodox diaspora outside Constantinople’s jurisdiction, or the numerical decline within her.

As the Patriarch from Istanbul continues his dialogue with Benedict the XVI of Rome, the Turkish court decision only serves to underscore the increasing irrelevance of the dialogue. Those who find themselves concerned about a union between the two should take heart: should such apostasy take place, much of the Orthodox world might not even notice.

And on this issue, the Turks actually got it right.

- Father Geoffrey Korz+



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