



PASTORS TO PASTORS

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Ministry and Authority

by Fr Alexander Garklavs, Editor



"You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

The above quote appeared in the very first issue of *Pastors to Pastors*, in an article devoted to the perception of the priesthood in its own eyes. At the heart of that brief and excellent commentary is a pastoral issue that we would like to revisit. It may very well be that this is the source of much of the frustration in the professional life of the Orthodox priest.

The issue is this: What is closer to the essence of the Orthodox Christian priesthood, ministry or authority? By priesthood we could imply the broad sense, including bishops, priests and deacons, but for our discussion we will limit it to priests only. Is the fundamental task of priests to be ministers, that is, to be, because of their dedication and proficiency in skills, capable of accomplishing various liturgical, educational and charitable functions, in service of and to a group of people, who could be believers or non-believers (as in the case of missionaries)? Or, is the task of the Orthodox Christian priesthood to be an authority, that is, to be in possession of special knowledge and privileges, and to determine the content and expression of religious life for a given group or community, and therefore to be regarded with special reverence and esteem? In the former, the orientation of the priest is to be a "servant", while in the latter he functions more in the position of "leader".

In the case of the priest as minister we find numerous Scriptural references relating to Jesus Christ as well as the Apostolic examples. We have, for

example, the above quote from the Gospel of St Mark. St Paul speaks of his ministry in terms of submissiveness; **"I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some"** (I Corinthians 9:22). In fact, the priest is a servant! He performs services, he preaches to instruct, he visits the sick, he does various pastoral and sacramental needs at the request of parishioners. Jesus Christ washed the feet of the disciples and so the priest is to serve in humility, without pride, without ambition to worldly honors or fame. As they perform their service, priests do not praise their own accomplishments, saying only **"We are unworthy servants; we have only done what is our duty"** (Luke 17:10). In all the priest follows the model of Jesus Christ Who "came not to be served but to serve." Associated with the perspective of priesthood as ministry are some well-known theological concepts. Conciliarity or sobornost', accountability, and lay ministry are closely related to the idea of ministry as defined here.

The tensions between ministry and authority have everyday implications in the life of a parish priest.

On the other hand, the priest is also an authority. This too has Scriptural basis. Jesus' teaching is effective because **"His word was with authority"** (Luke 4:32). Very significant is the final encounter between Jesus and His apostles as related in the Gospel of St Matthew. Jesus sends out the disciples and declares that **"all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"** (Matthew 28:18). Following the Great Commission, the apostles too will rely on principles of spiritual authority to accomplish their tasks. St Paul even says **"if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame"** (II Corinthians 10:8). The existence of authority in the Church gave rise to a necessary structure. From the beginning the priesthood has been governed by internal rules (canons) within a hierarchical structure. The hierarchical-canonical structure is the means by which the Church regulates

authority. The life of the Church, and its crucial objectives of proclamation, evangelization and teaching, is dependent on effective management and strict formality. Throughout history the Church has been challenged by resistance to, or even attacks on, its authority. Schisms and heresies have caused alterations within the canonical structure, but the Church has safeguarded its authority to this day. Without that authority, that canonical structure, the Church as we know it could not exist.

Of course, both ministry and authority are dimensions of the priest's life. Both are essential to pastoral work. There is a tension between them which requires discerning how to vary emphasis on each at different times. The term "servant-leader", as applied to Jesus Christ and by extension to the priesthood, attempts to bring into a unity the two distinct concepts. The problem is that, all too often, an irreconcilable divergence develops between ministry and authority. The ministerial and authoritative dimensions of the Church find themselves at odds with each other. In the Orthodox Church today there exist both enthusiastic exponents of ministerial activity and conciliarity, and well-versed thinkers who categorically deny the existence of conciliarity in the history of the Church. On another level, we consider the composition of the Church: Is the Church made up of "ministerial" components such as parishes, dioceses, administrative units, seminaries, monasteries, etc., that collected together constitute the whole body? Or, is the Church, following Ignatian ecclesiology, composed of various emanations (dioceses, parishes, etc) that originate from a source of personal spiritual authority (a bishop) through his plenipotentiaries (priests, deacons, etc.)?

This is not only an academic-theological issue. The tensions between ministry and authority have everyday implications in the life of a parish priest. The priest must be a minister and servant, yet he must also exercise the authority that is duly placed on him. A pastor may have to address that tension in a variety of ways. Since every case is different, there may be no known precedent for a given situation. Inevitably mistakes are made. Often we do the exact

(continued)

opposite of what should be done. When we should be humble, we exhibit an attitude of authority; when a situation requires priests to be authoritative, we manifest a quality of submissiveness.

Some areas of pastoral life clearly call for either ministry or authority. For example, during liturgical services or while preaching, the priest functions on the basis of spiritual authority. Visiting the sick or teaching catechumens he is performing a ministerial task. However, there are numerous situations, depending on the particular parish, that pose difficulties for the priest. What if he cannot chair Parish Council meetings or co-sign checks? Is his authority compromised? What is the right attitude in dealing with nominal parishioners? Does he treat such people with authority or compliant ministry? What if a parish refuses to grant the priest proper financial remuneration? Does he have authority to demand compensation? What if the priest is expected to exercise authority with certain misguided souls, when his pastoral sense calls for sympathy and a humble approach?

Life in American Orthodox parishes has complicated the situation. The political concept of democracy is so entrenched that all forms of authority are questioned. The laity in general prefer and expect a ministerial approach from their priest, but not always for spiritual reasons. It should be recognized that a spiritually-mature laity would never abuse their servant-priest. However, many of the

laity prefer that priests act passively because they feel that he is their employee. The priest-parishioner relationship is viewed in terms of a business contract. Clearly, this is an unhealthy situation. If parishioners want their priests to be good and faithful servants, they too must act accordingly. The priest may be their servant, but in no way are parishioners the "masters" of the clergy.

On the other hand, the abuse of authority may not be from the laity. Reacting to abnormal parish conditions or from some personal need for self-affirmation, priests come to regard their authority as a shield and a weapon. Confusing their role of spiritual authority, priests press their advantage in administrative areas. Occasionally they feel that they must assert their authority at all costs. This usually means trouble. In almost all parishes, there are cases of parishioners who have left the Church because of some instance of abuse of pastoral authority. Sometimes it is a perceived abuse and merely the exaggerated posture by an unstable parishioner. Often, unfortunately, a priest did abuse his authority. We are not concerned with the incidents of sexual abuse (which are related to our theme, but will not be discussed here). We are referring to those times when, for insignificant reasons, the priest's wounded ego overreacts. He intimidates with canonical restrictions, he speaks with anger in his heart, declares ultimatums, personally insults or demeans someone, or even instigates parishioners to assist him in blackballing his perceived enemy. When subsequent apologies are not forthcoming, dramatic actions follow.

The abuse of priestly power is a fact. Incidents of it in Orthodox churches may only be a fraction of what is happening elsewhere. Recent studies devoted exclusively to spiritual abuse lead us to believe that manipulation and abusive practices are widespread. Needless to say, this discredits the priesthood and the Church. It has also given rise to that typical and ugly American phenomenon; the lawsuit or threat thereof, which consumes so much time and resources. Yet of course, it is not a financial or even administrative matter. It is a spiritual issue. The abuse of spiritual authority is one of the most serious of sins!

Authority is something that priests need to seriously reflect upon. Prayer and serenity should precede any affirmations of pastoral authority. When a priest is compelled to exercise authority in a spontaneous incident, it is always best to

say less than more. If we look at how Jesus Christ uses authority, we are struck by the fact that He never actually "enforces" His views or teachings. His authority was in the subtle but persuasive effect on the human conscience. As priests, who are to imitate Our Chief Archpastor, we need to approach the use of authority with the greatest care and humility. St Tikhon of Zadonsk makes the following observation:

"For Christians, all authority is neither a comfort or honor, but an enormous Cross. Authority comes with many and tremendous hardships, anxiety and much suffering; it is something no one should envy. Those who are chosen for positions of authority must first make themselves worthy of that honor and God's call."

It may be impossible to teach priests and seminarians the full implications of how ministry and authority interact in the execution of pastoral duties. Sadly, little thoughtful attention has been given to this. A recent OCA publication entitled *"Oriented Leadership"*, dealing with issues of leadership and authority in the Church, has not yet received enough attention or evaluation. In some ways it is easier to come to terms with pastoral life as ministry, as obedience and service. Proper and honorable methods of exercising pastoral authority are complex and elusive.

In our time and place we find few examples of gifted and spiritual leadership. Today, ambition rather than duty have come to characterize leadership. In most instances leadership is of the type censured in the Gospel: leaders who "lord it over" people. True spiritual leadership is devoid of the haughty and pretentious love of self that drives contemporary "successful" people to the top. However, "being flesh and dwelling in this world," priests have also been caught up in trends and thinking that are alien to the tradition of the Church. A return to tradition requires a careful study of the past and a penitential inventory of our present condition. A sober assessment of our social circumstances, ethnic attitudes and behavioral psychology, as they relate to pastoral life and spirituality, is also necessary.

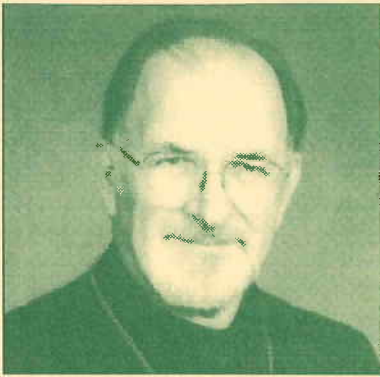
Without ministry, the priesthood is meaningless. Without authority, it becomes hollow. A wise balance between the two is the beauty and glory of the priesthood. The elucidation of the appropriate use of each and the nurturing transmission of this knowledge can be one of the great theological achievements of our era. □

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"Thoughts and Recollections"

"Pastors to Pastors" looks to another of the "elders" of the Church for guidance and inspiration. We are pleased herein to share our interview with

Fr John Nehrebecki

Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church, Paramus New Jersey

Q. Fr John, what was it like being an Orthodox American when you were growing up; did you have a strong "ethnic" sense as a young man; are Orthodox-Americans today more or less a part of society than when you were young?

A. I was born at a very special time in the history of this country and at a very special place. As an Orthodox-American growing up in a small industrial town, I was very "American" and yet blessed to have one foot still touching the fertile soil of the "Old Country." I was born and raised in Donora, a small town in western Pennsylvania, that had a population of about 10,000 people. When I was growing up, it had over 20 churches and a synagogue. About one-half of the churches in town belonged to people from Eastern Europe. Donora also had about 20 beer gardens and as many beauty shops which satisfied all aspects of our exciting steel-mill town life.

We had a strong ethnic sense since we lived within our own boundaries. I had the privilege of living in a Slovak neighborhood where we learned to respect one another. We were brought up to be proud of our ethnicity -- "Thank God we are Russians!" and, "Thank God we are Orthodox!"

As students and workers in the local "Mill" we discussed what the priests said on Sunday -- it was very important to all of us -- and the housewives discussed the Sunday activity over their physical boundaries which were the "wooden fences". Even today, when I recently attended my 50th High School Reunion, I found that Donorans still like to talk about religion!

It seems to me that when I was young, Orthodox Christians had more of a sense of compelling duty to God and the Church; they just *knew* that they had to attend the divine services and were less secularized than Orthodox Christians generally are today. On the other hand,

despite the constant bombardment by today's secular, neo-pagan media, there is a deeper understanding and participation in the sacramental life of the Church by those who have committed themselves to being Orthodox Christians today.

Q. Why did you choose to pursue a vocation in the priesthood; who were instrumental in forming your decision to do this -- parents, relatives, friends, priests?

A. As a young boy, I greatly admired my parish priest Fr John Kivko. I wanted to become a priest since I was in the seventh grade -- but it was a secret! I chose the Priesthood because I wanted to help the Russian People to be recognized -- to be appreciated and to be understood as a Christian nation.

As a family, my father instilled in us the love of God and the Russian Orthodox Church. We had no other life in our family but the Church. It was a full-time vocation if you wanted to live in peace in the Nehrebecki household. My father died when I was eleven years old -- then my mother began to cultivate me to be a good boy and to serve in the Altar, clean the church, and attend all the funerals in Donora. My brother Paul and I were pallbearers in all the "ethnic" churches; we were always sitting up front and listening to various eulogies. My mother never told me to be a priest, but we understood each other. All of the altar boys I was associated with are still active as Orthodox Christians ... and two are priests!

Q. Tell us about St Tikhon's Seminary during the time of your studies there. Who were some of the spiritual figures in the seminary and monastery at that time?

A. Fr Nicholas Yuschak and I were the two seminarians from Donora who went to St Tikhon's. In our class, ten enrolled,

ten graduated (in 1950) and ten became priests!

At that time, I found the spiritual and academic climate at St Tikhon's to be electrifying. All those of the faculty, staff, and monastic community had a great influence on us. Fr Basil Amatoff taught us to read; he would always say, "Students read!". Fr Afanasy (Ossorogin) and Fr Paul Nervana of Chicago taught us to be evangelical. Fr George Popoff of Reading taught us to be faithful in diversity and suffering. Bishop NIKON taught us to serve in solemnity. Vladislav Mayevsky taught us to theologize. Evgeny Novitsky taught us to know Russian Church history and to love our work. We had Fr Vasily at the monastery and all the pious monks teaching the importance of Church services. And Fr Basil Mussin-Pushkin trained us to read Church Slavonic correctly and with understanding. My real "conversion" took place in St Tikhon's Seminary; to become a priest of Christ's Holy Church and not an ethnic leader!

Q. As an Orthodox priest for over 45 years, you have seen many changes. As far as life for OCA priests is concerned, what has improved and what has deteriorated?

A. Throughout the years of my priesthood, I have always tried to stay focused on Jesus Christ and the teachings of His Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

When Wilma Supik, Religious News Editor for *The Record* Newspaper of New Jersey, retired after 40 years of service, she stated that, "I have known Fr John Nehrebecki for 40 years and he is the only priest I have ever met who hasn't changed." I am sure I have changed, but Christ and the Church do not change: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8)

(...continued)

When Our Parishioners Minister To Us

by Fr John Garvey



Sometimes priests get so used to the role of ministry that they find it difficult, or at least surprising, to be ministered to. This is something we must learn, however: not to learn how to receive a gift is finally not to understand the essence of Christianity.

A couple of years ago a tragedy affected our church. Like most OCA churches, ours is a small one, and most of us know one another pretty well. Anna, two years old, choked to death on a grape while her mother was on the telephone. She was a lively and wonderful child who, the Sunday before, was running around the parish hall and amusing older children with her answers to Sunday school questions. I had blessed her home a few hours before her death, and the night of her death was having dinner with a member of the church, Mark, and his family. I spoke with them that night about that home blessing, and about what a delight Anna was.

Mark called me a couple of days after Anna's death and asked how I was doing. "This must really be a tough time for you," he said. "Let me know if there's anything I can do."

I was deeply moved. This was such a kind gesture, and it came from a man who understands (I know from conversations with him about other pastors) that priests are human in every complicated sense of that word. It made me reflect on the fact that although there is a danger in becoming too close to some people in the

parish (where this can be seen by other parishioners as a matter of "playing favorites" -- something we may be accused of in any case) -- there is also a danger in *not* allowing people in our parishes to come close to us; and if we do this, we run the danger of becoming so isolated that when we could use the help they may be able to give us, we will have closed ourselves off and it will not be forthcoming. I know, in any case, that this was help I very much appreciated having!

➤ **CORRECTION: St Silouan Retreat** in South Carolina, noted in our previous issue, may be reached at **(803) 559-1404**. The published number was incorrect.

Fr John Nehrebecki (from page 3)

We, both clergy and laity, as "*a royal priesthood, a holy nation*" (1 Peter 2:9) are called to be apostles of Truth and Righteousness. Truth is a person and that person is Jesus the Christ. Fr George Florovsky taught us to preach the creeds and that remains the same. Fr Alexander Schmemmann told us our problems are liturgical -- please do not experiment with the Liturgy! -- the Liturgy represents the Kingdom of God which is to come and is already here. Fr John Meyendorff kept the history of the Orthodox Church alive and before us so that we would know and practice the Faith with the Saints as our contemporaries.

One of the most disheartening changes that has taken place is that we do not consider ourselves to be the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church any longer. This is evidenced in our constant, misleading reference to so-called "sister" churches. As Archbishop NICHOLAI of Presov said, "Who needs sisters like that?" I recall statements such as "We must attend ecumenical gatherings so that

Saint Innocent Apostle to America

As the bicentennial celebration of the birth of St Innocent draws near (August 26, 1997), we should remember that in addition to everything else, he was a devoted husband and loving father of seven children. All was not 'a rose garden' in the Veniaminov household! Regarding the ordination of his son, the saint writes to Archimandrite Mitrophanes; "**If it were up to me, I wouldn't lay so much as a finger on him -- much less hands!**"

Pastors take heart! Even the saints suffered for their children! ☐

we might bear witness to the true Faith and Church." And that is what we need to these meetings." He said that today's representatives be... by a tide of ill-advised justice and leaving the Ship of Salvation to flounder upon the troubled waters of ecumenism. We must listen to our Theologians: St John the Theologian, St Gregory the Theologian, and St Simeon the New Theologian. Any other creeds are to be avoided.

In today's American "ecumenical" society each of us must also strive to emulate St Athanasius the Great and St Mark of Ephesus and bear witness to God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to the true Faith and Church "with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind".

The greatest improvement in Church life has been the advent of the Orthodox Church in America. I think that we should always remember to be what we are called to be; An indigenous church on American soil so that this church becomes the Church for all the people in this country and nothing less! ☐

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