



ECUMENISM and ORTHODOXY

by Father John Garvey



Most of us have seen complaints about the Orthodox involvement with the ecumenical movement, and even have heard of the "heresy" of ecumenism. Some of the charges are that we are being asked to water down our beliefs; and accept a "branch theory" of Christianity in which Orthodoxy would be one part of the Christian church, abandoning its claim to be the Apostolic Church.

The fact that no Orthodox participant in the National or World Council of Churches has done any of these things, or endorsed any of them, doesn't move the critics. From their point of view, we have nothing to learn and other Christians have nothing to offer.

Here we are in North America, a church which fails to live up to some elemental canons, fighting each other or ignoring each other or struggling simply to survive at the parish level, and we have nothing to learn?

I would agree that we have nothing to learn at the strictly doctrinal level from any other church. But our arrogance may doom us.

I met a minister from the Church of the Brethren, a confession with its origins in the Anabaptist movement. They celebrate the Lord's Supper only once a year. But in their churches, if it is known that some members of the community have refused to be reconciled with others, they do not celebrate the Lord's Supper even on an annual basis -- because it would be a lie.

Can we really say we have nothing to learn from this? We are willing to go to the mat over issues involving the calendar, the frequency

of confession, fasting -- but here, at the level of simple reconciliation, there is something we tend in practice to pay far too little attention to, and this Protestant example could instruct us. There are brothers and sisters in some of our parishes who are not speaking to one another. One hopes that their fellow parishioners and priests are talking with them, but there is a stark and ultimately true lesson to be learned from the Brethren. I don't mean in any way that this is a practice we should adopt, but it illuminates a central truth about the eucharist. It is a truth which can also be found in our tradition, but seeing it spelled out so explicitly, so starkly, can teach us.

The truth of what has been revealed in Christ can also be found in the lives of such exemplary Christians as Therese of Lisieux, Charles de Foucauld, Edith Stein, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is arguably a sin against the Holy Spirit to deny the holiness that can be found there.

This is not to deny that ecumenism is difficult and complicated. Other Christians (including most mainstream Protestants) have little appreciation for what we mean by tradition, or Church. They resent our insistence that intercommunion is not only *not* a way to unity; it isn't truly communion

without unity in understanding the "true glory / true worship" which characterizes the fullness of the Church.

But the Lord never said that we would avoid difficulty, complication, or even ambiguity. In his introduction to *Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (later to be revised as *For the Life of the World*) Father Alexander Schmemmann wrote:

"I am not trying, of course, to obliterate or minimize the areas of doctrinal disagreements, for to do so would be in contradiction with the very foundation of a truly ecumenical spirit. Ecumenism means not a relativistic attitude, not a compromise, but, first of all, the readiness to listen and to be listened to, to make the search for truth -- difficult and painful as it may be -- a common task."

The need to be right usually has more to do with defending the ego than with any love for truth. Non-Orthodox Christians increasingly find help from us, and it is part of our vocation to offer it. Similarly, we must feel free as Christians to pray for the gift of discernment, to see what signs of Christ's presence we may find in those places where the Holy Spirit has moved beyond the boundaries of canonical Orthodoxy. □

Pastoral Conference Slated

This past July, 182 participants from throughout the country gathered at the *Parish Ministries Conference* at St Tikhon's for four days of worship, talks, workshops and fellowship. In view of the overwhelming success of that experience, many clergy expressed a desire to participate in a Pastoral Conference utilizing a similar format and location.

Thus, the Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry is pleased to announce the scheduling of a *Pastoral Conference* to be held at **St Tikhon's Monastery/Seminary in South Canaan PA, June 9-11, 1998.**

Details will be forthcoming in a special mailing to all clergy. Mark the dates and plan to be part of this 'experience'.

BOOK REVIEW:

MISSING IN ACTION

2nd Edition, by Weldon

Hardenbrook with Terry Somerville

(Ben Lomond CA:

Conciliar Press, 1996)

reviewed by Fr Alexander Garklavs

This book is very important for Orthodox clergy; not because we are clergy, but because, as clergy, we happen to be of the male gender. In addition to being male, a good many of us are also husbands and fathers in the biological sense. The book's subtitle is descriptive: "A Powerful Historical Response to the Crisis Among American Men". Of course, celibate men and women too can read and appreciate this book. It is not a thorough theological or psychological study. It attempts to appeal to a broad spectrum and to be an "easy read" (even its large print attests to this).

Reading the book will not be, for Orthodox clergymen, a discovery of something unknown, though some of the insights and statistics are revealing. The book is special because it is a 'first'. It is a serious examination of the problem: Why is the contemporary American male in the state of crisis? Why does

American society portray him as a dolt or misfit? Why is he an "absent" and ineffectual member within the family? Why is he prone to addictive disorders?

So, what is the crisis of the American male? According to Hardenbrook, who is an Orthodox priest, it is the disconnectedness of the man from his proper position of leadership in family and in society. The author makes a strong point when he states that "the ultimate responsibility for moral and spiritual leadership in human affairs has been and should be the distinct domain of the male gender." That not only radical feminists but even some red-blooded American males feel some discomfort with that statement is only proof, the author would say, that there has been a radical shift in our society and that men have given up their legitimate positions of leadership in society, education and in the family. There must be a renewal of a spiritually and psychologically healthy "maleness", and in particular of responsible "fatherhood".

The direction of the author's vision is well within the realm of traditional Orthodox theology. He sees the process of recovery clearly in spiritual, and scriptural, terms. While there is an absence of good contemporary role models, we can turn to the Church and to the Church Fathers who "are examples *par excellence* of Christian manhood".

The analysis of the problem is insightful and perceptive. The focusing of the solution on the basis of Orthodox Christian spirituality is certainly positive. There are, however, some things to carefully consider. I would not agree with a recent review in an Orthodox journal that characterizes the book as "dangerous", but that review is right in that the "historical overview" that the author attempts leaves a number of loopholes.

The book is written from a very unique, and hence limited, perspective. The analysis is based on American history, American social events and American contemporary problems. To some extent these may

apply to Western Europe, but not to Eastern Europe (including, in this case, the Middle East) or to other parts of the world. On the other hand, the author points to the Orthodox Church with the intent of finding there positive male role models. The spirituality and ideology of the Orthodox Church is one thing, while the actual social and family structures among Orthodox East European people is quite another.

The problem of what a male is, or what is an ideal father or husband should be, is not any better defined among the people who were historically Orthodox than it is in America. In fact, the Orthodox Church has not really formulated any specific theological guidelines that describe what a good husband or father should be like. (Consider, for example, the fact that among the canonized saints, almost all of the males are celibate and very few were sanctified precisely for being good fathers and/or husbands.)

It is still too soon to formulate anything like an American Orthodox collective consciousness, though in fact this book is a welcome contribution to that process. The reality is that besides the new American converts to Orthodoxy, of which the author is one, Americans who are Orthodox come from those Eastern European backgrounds that have not produced any ideal gender or family role models. We too, native Orthodox, have had crises in gender issues.

The problem is not new. It is the problem of what is a male and what is a female, how does each gender relate to the other and, as Christians we would add, what does it mean to be a Christian and either a male or female? While Christianity did not formulate dogmas about gender responsibilities in family life, it "controlled" the problems with Christian virtues: temperance, patience, compassion, etc. The contemporary manifestations of these problems are acute and they are dangerous. Men and women live in a world that has discredited the moral underpinnings of gender relations that have developed throughout the

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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 Vasile Hategan

Retired priest of the Romanian Diocese

Q. Fr Vasile; you received your theological education in Romania. What was it like? What factors prepared you for the priesthood?

A. I was born, raised and received my early education in Youngstown, Ohio. At the age of 12, when I became an altar boy, I felt a "calling" for the priesthood. I pursued my theological education in Romania from 1933 to 1940, since at that time there were no Orthodox theological schools in America. I had to brush up on my Romanian since English was my basic language.

While there, I discovered my "roots". I fell in love with Romania, its Church and its people, but I never forgot that I was an American by birth and conviction.

Theological education in Romania is serious and thorough. All priests in Romania must obtain a theological degree. Naturally, pastoral theology and practices were directed to the conditions and experiences of that country. Back in America, I furthered my studies in American seminaries and universities, where I became acquainted with Roman Catholic and Protestant perspectives of church practice. It was all very useful. During my 56 years as a priest (as an active priest: 15 years in New York City and 27 years in Cleveland) I came up with a pastoral philosophy that was genuinely Orthodox but also addressed the conditions and circumstances of parishes in the American milieu.

To be effective, the theories we learn in seminaries and schools must be adapted to the situations in which we live. For us in America, there are no precedents for what could be considered a normal, functioning parish. We must learn and change accordingly as time goes on. It will be some time before we have a definitive Orthodox pastoral theology in America. In the meantime, we must be flexible in our thinking while keeping in mind the aims and purposes of an Orthodox parish.

Q. As a Romanian-American Orthodox priest, what were some of the challenges that you faced when you began your ministry? How have things changed in the last 50 years?

A. The early Orthodox parishes in America were exclusively ethnic, devoted to the preservation of their religious traditions and also their specific culture, language and heritage. As children of emigrants were born and educated in America, generational conflicts arose regarding the aims and purposes of the parishes. These "generation gaps" still exist in some instances. The ultimate outcome will depend largely upon the wisdom, patience and understanding of the priests and the laity.

I do not agree with those priests who promote ethnic culture to the detriment of the welfare of the parish and its future. They can manifest ethnicity without being offensive. However, the all-English parishes that are made up of several ethnic groups and which stress the development of faith and spirituality are on the increase. These are the model for the future of Orthodoxy in America. The primary purpose of a parish is to preach the gospel. In the case of the Orthodox Church, this was always done in the language of the people, which in America is increasingly becoming English. On the other hand, nothing prevents one from learning the language of their ancestors and preserving their culture. Parishes that are made up of a mixture of older and American-born parishioners ought to be bilingual.

In my own case, I have many ethnic Romanian preoccupations. I wrote a book, *Romanian Culture in America*. I founded seminars and organizations to preserve Romanian culture. But that was not my chief concern. Above all, my mission is to preach the Gospel of Christ and to promote the Orthodox faith regardless of ethnicity.

As far as the priest is concerned, he must show love, patience, sincerity, forgiveness and kindness. He cannot demand respect, but must earn it through dedication and cooperation. A smile and sincere concern for people never hurts.

Q. You have been known for your progressive views on Orthodox unity in America and you have done much to further that cause. What is the future of Orthodox unity in America?

A. I strongly believe in Orthodox unity in America and have strongly supported it throughout my priestly career. There is no alternative to unity. Ultimately, we shall have one Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, which is already in the making.

I was ordained by Archbishop ATHENOGORAS, who later became the Ecumenical Patriarch, and from the beginning I promoted pan-Orthodox activities. While in New York City, I was instrumental in initiating the first pan-Orthodox Service on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. I was a founder of the Orthodox Clergy Association in greater New York City and the Orthodox Christian Fellowship at Columbia University. We printed a Prayer Book which was distributed to all Orthodox servicemen during World War II. I was also involved in the Federation of Primary Jurisdictions, which was the precursor of the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA). In Cleveland, I was chairman of the Orthodox Clergy Association for many years and instrumental in a number of inter-Orthodox affairs and activities. Presently, I am in the process of writing a history of the Orthodox Churches in greater Cleveland.

I shall not live to see a united Orthodox Church in this country, but it will come. I am happy that I was able to work for this great goal, and I hope that others will continue to do so also. □

MISSING IN ACTION

Book Review (continued from page 2)

centuries and have been, until recently, considered as norms.

Moral relativism, cultural nihilism and the pervasive and corrosive effects of Western secularism have made it very difficult for both males and females to effectively accept their genders as vocations, as a God-given biological potential. The American experience has not been without value in the realm of gender identity, but Fr Hardenbrook is right to call our attention to what is negative. We do need to become aware of the problem. I think he misses a point in portraying males as victims, either of corruptive feminizing trends or external social pressures. Actually, males themselves are at fault! Historically they were abusive and tyrannical, and presently they do opt too often to avoid serious issues. Males have also, both historically and presently, voluntarily

stayed away from the Church. The women's movements in Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are simply the voices of the active majority. When this will happen in the Orthodox Church remains to be seen. It is true that we, male Orthodox clergy, are much more involved in ministry to women (as Church School educators, as singers, as workers, as congregants at services, etc.). After years of giving sermons, it has been a rare Sunday when a man has commented on a homily, but women frequently do. Fr Hardenbrook is right that men have forfeited the realm of spirituality to women. Perhaps Orthodox men are guiltier of this than our Catholic and Protestant brothers.

For all concerned Orthodox people and Orthodox clergy, this book is a wake-up call. The "male crisis" is only one facet of the prevalent spiritual ills of our times, but it does

affect us, Orthodox priests, directly. We can neither pretend that there are no such problems nor wish them away. Within our parishes, seminaries, and discussion groups, we generally shy away from such issues to our detriment. Fr Hardenbrook deserves credit for his courage and honesty in facing the necessary challenge and articulating his reflections with inspired conviction. □

On the lighter side...

LETTER FROM MOUNT APPALACHIA

Dear Milly,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Long time, no see! Good to hear from you! And how good of you to remember the parish! Thanks for your cash donation of \$5 to our endowment fund in loving memory of your departed family members; Bill, Jean, Dorothy, Glenn, Heather, Amelia, Lizzy, Sam, Horace and Rocky.

I'm sorry I wasn't able to make it to your grandson's soccer game last Sunday as you suggested. Our service is still at 10 o'clock. Johnny must be quite an athlete by now. I regret not having seen him since his baptism (could it be 10 years already?!).

I appreciate your suggestion to have a Liturgy on Saturday night but it's just not possible. And concerning your offer to donate a 'basket of cheer' for a church raffle, we'll have to discuss this with the board.

I do hope to see you again soon in church. Perhaps you can bring your grandson too! We'd all love to see him!

In Christ, Father

PS: I almost forgot to mention that our parish is now Methodist. Hope we can still count on your membership!

"If you see or hear someone sin, keep from slandering him and judging him. You tell someone else about him, he tells it to another, the other to the third, the third to the fourth, and so everyone will come to know it and be tempted. And they will judge the one who has sinned, which is a very serious thing. And you will be the cause of all of this, by publishing your brother's sin.

Slanderers are like lepers that harm others by their foul odor, or like those stricken by the plague who carry the disease from place to place and destroy others. Keep yourself, then, from slandering your neighbor, lest you sin gravely and give someone else cause for sin."

--- St Tikhon of Zadonsk
"Journey to Heaven"

PASTORS TO PASTORS is published by the OCA Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry, PO Box 675, Syosset NY 11791, and is distributed to all hierarchs, parish and institutional clergy, military chaplains, and monastic clergy, active and retired, on the rolls of the Orthodox Church in America, and to OCA seminarians.

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Orthodox Church in America
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Syosset NY 11791

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