

PROPERTY OF ARCHIVES  
Orthodox Church in America  
Syosset, N. Y. 11791

## No. 1 THE SPIRITUAL SOCIOLOGY OF PARISH COMMUNITIES

by Fr Alexander Garklavs

***"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom"***

-- Luke 12:32

The twentieth-century Russian Orthodox priest and theologian, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, began his intellectual life as a student of political science. As a young man he embraced socialism, but rejected it when he discovered that its reality fell far short of the ideology. Later, as a devout Orthodox thinker, he would return to the subjects of sociology and economics. He concluded that contemporary political theories waver between two extremes, capitalism and socialism. Both of these arise from the same false premise (that man is the supreme master of his destiny) and they both affect humanity with the same predicament (the alienation and destruction of the human person). Though less destructive than militant socialism, capitalism also reduces the person into a class or category, where the sanctity and suffering of an individual life are inconsequential.

*"The single, irreplaceable, and absolutely unique human personality (which, for only a single moment, flashes in history) lays claim upon*

*eternity, on absolute totality, on an insurmountable significance. In the social context this can only be achieved by religion -- a vital 'God of the living' religion -- and not by a 'god of the dead' sociology."* According to Bulgakov, only the integration of Christianity into the framework of political structure can produce an ideal social community.

Despite the best intentions, the creation of a perfect society seems impossible. Societies are built on principles of accumulation of resources and power, on the acquisition and management of wealth and property, and on the assumption that the life worth living is one of fulfillment of every willful desire, as long as no one gets hurt. Human relationships are conducted in the convoluted interplay of influence sought and advantages attained, patronage promised and rewarded for unquestioned loyalty, or in terms of what financial profits can be had. Utopian society is a dream; the best state is but the lesser of evils.

However, there does exist the real possibility of an utopia. We are talking about a Christian parish! An Orthodox parish can be a living

example of the ideal human community. "Human alienation can only be overcome in the loving environment of the Church and in the participation of sacramental life," Fr. Sergius writes, "only here do social inequalities become insignificant in the light of the spiritual equality of people." Balancing authority with the recognition of each person's value, the parish community is built on the very standards that political idealists would like to see actualized: selfless leadership, consensual governance, mutual respect, accountability, concern for the helpless, and egalitarian principles without racial, gender, age or class restrictions. Because the Orthodox Christian community is built on moral principles derived from the New Testament, the social dimensions of a parish are spiritual and not easily characterized in terms of social theory. At times parish life may appear to be uncompromisingly authoritarian, at other times it is assuredly democratic; conciliarity may outline the administrative course, or a voice of one person "crying in the wilderness" can challenge the overwhelming majority. The Orthodox parish is resolutely hierarchical while at the same time every member is equal!

Such is the distinction of Christ-centered community life. Yet, is it true? Are our Orthodox parishes models of fairness, equality and love? At the core of this question are pastoral issues, based on fundamental Gospel truths. Do we actively promote impartial charity for all? Do we encourage or accept parish leadership that is limited to an exclusive group, with certain racial

(over)



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-- St Gregory the Theologian

*"Spiritual Sociology" continued*

preferences or ethnic loyalties? Are we fair and compassionate with all, or do we prefer certain parishioners for personal reasons? Are we uncomfortable in ministering to certain types of people? In cases of people who disagree with us, do we wish, or work, for their disappearance from the parish? The way that we answer the above does not necessarily make us bad priests. Yet these questions should motivate a thoughtful self-evaluation about our ministry.

*"Since the common body of the church is composed of many different characters and minds, it is absolutely necessary that its ruler [the pastor] should be at once simple in his uprightness in all respects and, as far as possible, diverse and varied in his treatment of individuals, and in dealing with all in an appropriate and suitable manner"*

-- St Gregory the Theologian.

Being an Orthodox pastor means aiming for goals that transcend all human logic, psychology, talent and even intelligence. Inasmuch as ministry requires almost superhuman efforts, we occasionally feel personal frustration and even despair. Like all professionals, the clergy can be

afflicted by self-doubt. Unlike other professionals, such personal failings can have disastrous effects on the community. Called to be holy, just and loving, priests can become profane, unjust and incapable of charity, thus depriving the parish of the very qualities that are essential to its well-being.

A priest's shortcomings may be personal and secret, but his relations with parishioners are always affected. If he is honest with himself, the priest discovers that at times dealing with people is painful and unpleasant. Problems in his relationships with parishioners should not go undetected. The symptoms are clear. Normative pastoral qualities such as sensitivity, empathy, sympathy, compassion, forgiveness, willingness to compromise and the ability to listen, all become difficult efforts. In serious cases, where conflicts need to be resolved or dilemmas arise in supervision (e.g., with a parish warden, choir director, church school coordinator, sisterhood president, etc.), a pastor's deficiency in people skills can only produce disagreeable ordeals.

Sometimes a relatively simple procedure, such as Confession or a discussion with an experienced pastor, can resolve issues at hand. Priests can also borrow concepts from the new field that is called human resources. It is now a well-established subject of study, with various programs and degrees being offered. Herein are addressed all aspects that affect people's physical health, emotional well being, enthusiasm, confidence, human inter-relationships and self-insight. Businesses have found that positive mental attitudes boost

employee's morale and increase productivity. Healthy and content people produce beneficial results. Though productivity is not the goal of parish life, the Orthodox pastor is constantly engaged in managing human resources. Ministry, starting with liturgical celebration but extending even to menial tasks, is the active witnessing of God's eternal interactions *within* the human community. The priest uses all of his personal "resources" to articulate, establish and nurture among the "human resources" a healthy and thriving community, where the Holy Spirit's presence is evident.

One of the most awesome of events in the life of a priest occurs at his ordination. The bishop places into the hands of the newly-ordained a portion of the consecrated Eucharistic Lamb with the words, **"Guard and preserve this whole and unharmed until your final breath."** Sustaining the integrity of the "little flock" that is entrusted to pastors is an assiduous and formidable task. Today there are many challenges facing Orthodox communities in North America. Yet we are blessed with economic prosperity and opportunities to seriously study the nature of the parish. Having inherited Orthodox theology's grand vision of community life, God has called us, pastors and laity alike, to the actualization of church life in this New World. In a way, it is nothing short of performing miracles. The creation of human communities that recognize hierarchy and authority as well as freedom and equality is an incredible human accomplishment. It is also a spiritual achievement. The Orthodox parish is as close as we can come to the original conditions of Paradise. □

## PASTORS TO PASTORS

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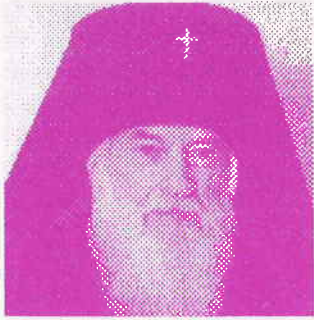
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### Troparion to the newly-glorified ST. RAPHAEL (Hawaweeny)

Your proclamation has gone forth throughout North America, calling the scattered sheep into the unity of the Church. Hearing your voice, they responded to your teaching, and through your writings you instructed them in piety. Now guided by your example, O Father Raphael, we sing hymns of praise to Christ our God: Glory to Him Who gave you strength! Glory to Him Who granted you a crown! Glory to Him Who through you grants healing to all!





# "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 PART 2 of our interview with

## His Eminence, Archbishop DMITRI

Archbishop of Dallas, Diocese of the South

**Q. Your Eminence, do you see Orthodox pastoral work in America as having goals that differ from those of other forms of Christianity in this country?**

**A.** The goals of Orthodox pastoral work in America are conditioned principally, as they are everywhere, by the Orthodox concept of salvation. In some non-Orthodox Churches, especially the one in which I grew up -- the Baptist Church -- the aim of faith in Christ is to be "saved" almost exclusively in order to escape the punishment of hell. The notion of having "accepted Christ as one's personal Savior," results in a kind of self-satisfaction and in a kind of feeling that there is nothing for a Christian to do after his "rebirth" that would affect his salvation. On the other hand, with us, once a person has come to faith in Christ, he sets out on the path of holiness, to conform to the model of Christ, to wage a constant battle against the temptations of Satan, to acquire the Holy Spirit and to live a life that prepares him to be with God in His eternal Kingdom, a life the goal of which is deification. The asceticism of Orthodox life, in which one is always thankful to God, and at the same time, aware of his unworthiness, his need of God's mercy, of repentance and unceasing prayer, is a necessary basis for pastoral guidance. To omit these things would be sinful and a grave injustice to those who are our spiritual children.

**Q. Your Eminence has been recognized for "missionary zeal." What advice can you give to younger priest-missionaries who are now beginning or who are already engaged in their pastoral work?**

**A.** First and foremost I would say that the pastor-missionary must be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He must have the mind of Christ in that he sees his people as sheep who need a shepherd. He must relate to them with love and

compassion. I would stress to all pastors, love your flock and spare no effort to bring the Gospel to them. The pastor-missionary must never see the people entrusted to his care as obstacles to his own personal well-being and happiness. Rather, he must learn to rejoice and suffer with them, to teach and not chide the sheep for any apparent deficiencies or faults. I would further emphasize that many have found it to be true that if one's ministry is being exercised properly that the pastor-missionary will find joy and personal fulfillment in faithful service to God's people; that there will be no opposition between the two.

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**-- Archbishop DMITRI**

The pastor-missionary must welcome inquiries that come from those who may have heard something about the Orthodox Church, and take time to explain the faith with all care and love. He must be open always to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, especially when He seems to challenge pre-conceived notions of what one's work consists of.

In the South, I think that most of us have been so challenged. We might have thought of our work, for example in certain terms: to care for displaced Orthodox and to make converts, always in the English language. Early in the life of the Diocese, however, we found that we might have to use Spanish, since Spanish-speaking people were beginning to knock at our doors. Lately, an influx of Russian immigrants has challenged us with the possibility of having to use

Slavonic in special services, of using interpreters for talks and sermons, of providing Orthodox literature in Russian and Spanish in our bookracks and bookstores.

The pastor-missionary often finds himself in a town or city where the Orthodox Faith is completely unknown. This means that he must be willing and able to reach out to the public: be willing speakers in neutral settings, utilize the news media, encourage visitor groups to attend services, in short, never be reluctant to witness to Christ's Truth. In many of our churches we have found that a good introduction for visitors is a Vespers service, followed by an explanation of the Faith. In some places we have even advertised such special services. In the South not a few churches celebrate Wednesday night Vespers regularly as a mid-week "oasis" for the faithful, and as an opportunity for non-Orthodox, already accustomed to Wednesday services, to visit the local Orthodox Church.

Finally, I would emphasize to the pastor-missionary, particularly to one just starting out in his own ministry, that he pray and strive for a godly combination of zeal and patience. Zeal is normally a given for the mission-minded individual. Patience, however, is another matter altogether. In our enthusiasm and desire to "make the Church grow" we often forget to allow the Lord to act, when and how He sees fit. We also forget that spiritual growth takes time. If every pastor would just think of himself, of the time and struggles involved for him personally to acquire a deeper understanding of God's will, then it is very likely that he will learn to be more patient with his own flock, as well as with the perceived weaknesses of his Diocese, the National Church and other jurisdictions.

...Thank you for this opportunity and for your interest. I hope that maybe some of what I have said will be of some interest or benefit to your readers. □

## Seminarian Internship Program is Inaugurated



Members of the Pastoral Life Ministries Unit have been busy working on the Seminarian Internship Program, which was approved as a "Church Wide Initiative" at the All-American Council in Pittsburgh last summer. After many meetings the Seminarian Internship Program was inaugurated this summer (2000).

With the blessings of His Beatitude, Metropolitan THEODOSIUS, seven young men have been assigned to as many parishes. The group includes both lay seminarians as well as new deacons and priests. One is a recent seminary graduate, three have graduated this spring and three will be returning to complete their studies in the fall.

The communities and pastors selected exemplify the broad variety of OCA parish life. Ranging from larger, established East-coast parishes to newer, West-coast congregations to brand new mission communities, the pastors also reveal a diversity of ages, styles, backgrounds, etc. What they all share is pastoral zeal, enthusiasm about the program and the commitment to seriously work with the interns.

The Internship Committee has prepared documents and an exacting curriculum for the program. Interns will be exposed to as much of pastoral life as is possible in three months.

They will be preparing extensive reports, which will be the substance of in depth discussions with the mentors. Some of the prepared reports will be forwarded to the Committee for review. Seminarian Internship Committee members will oversee the program through its duration. As this is the first year, several unexpected

issues have come up, and more will undoubtedly surface. All participants will be submitting evaluation forms and suggestions at the conclusion of the program. A careful review and study will be undertaken in order to make next years Internship Program even more efficient and meaningful. □

### From "*Instructions to Diocesan Clergy*"

-- *Attributed to St Leonty of Rostov, +1088*

Hear my words, O venerable priests, you who are earthly angels and heavenly men. Consider what capabilities God has given you. He has entrusted you with the mysteries of salvation, appointing you to be protectors and shepherds of His flock. He bestowed talents upon you, which He will expect to be multiplied at His second coming. Develop your talents, preserve your soul in holiness and purity, and do not lead the faithful into evil ways. When a layman sins, he alone answers for his soul; the priest's sin brings temptations to many, for which he must account. Avoid arguments, anger, slander, pride, excessive talk, rage, vileness, stinginess, lack of charity, jealousy, lies and calumnies. Serve the awesome Divine Liturgy with trembling. Never enter the sanctuary with animosity for anyone in your heart. In preparing for the Holy Mysteries, do not engage in frivolous conversation, but enter into your mind with prayer. Call on your Lord, do not look back and raise your thoughts on high. Pray for me also, a sinner, that our Lord will give to me fortitude for my ministry and, through your prayers, forgiveness of my sins. May we together glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.



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