

Growth in Christ

If God has through Christ granted new life to the world, why do many Christians not experience it more tangibly? If Christians are promised a life of joy and spiritual victory in Jesus Christ, why are so many baptized believers, so called, leading spiritually defeated lives marked by dissatisfaction, fear, and boredom, or even by conflict, sin, and guilt?

There are several answers to these difficult questions. First, the new life in Christ involves growth. Different people are at various stages. People are different, with different experiences and different spiritual struggles. But the same Spirit is given to all who are in Christ. The same Lord Jesus is the Lord of all. Christian love does not permit comparisons, self-righteousness or elitism. What is important is to believe in Who Jesus Christ is and what He has accomplished for us in His incarnation, life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and continued ministry at the right hand of His Father in heaven. To hold to the Orthodox Faith, to share fully in the life of the Church and to continue to grow in the new life granted to us by God, each according to one's gifts and capacities.

Secondly, we must also consider that a Christian may not have let Christ truly take over his or her heart, mind, and affections. A Christian adult may not have consciously accepted Christ with genuine repentance and loving obedience. In that case he or she may still be self-centered and not Christ-centered; he or she remains inwardly unconverted, living out of their ego, rather than through the grace given to them in baptism. Another problem may be unconfessed sin or

unwillingness to forgive someone who has wronged us.

In spiritual renewal Jesus Christ is the Center of the Church AND the believer. As we pray in the Liturgy, *let us commit ourselves, each other and all our life to Christ our God*, entrusting ourselves to Him and placing our lives in His hands. At the core of our being, where thoughts and feelings are born, where motivations and decisions have their root, we must trust Jesus Christ and let Him rule so that all we think, say and do is according to His love, not according to our self-will. When He ask Him to come into our life, into our hearts, a personal relationship develops between Christ and the believer, as real as between good friends, or a husband and wife. Spiritual renewal is a deeper knowledge of Christ Himself. Jesus Christ comes alive in us. As one of the Church Fathers has written: ***For the believer Christ is all!***

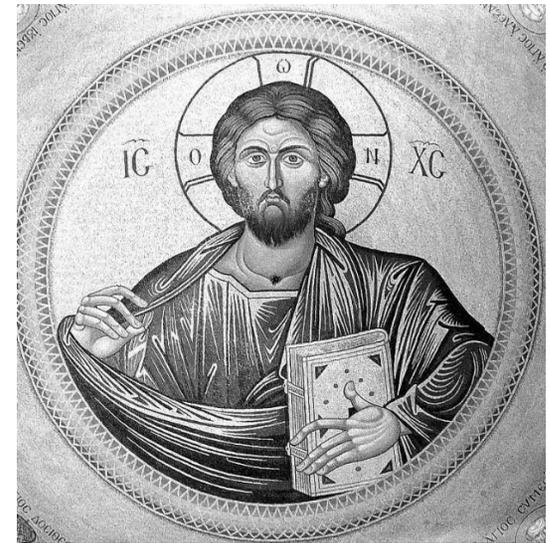
(This pamphlet was originally published around 1980, by the "Commission on Spiritual Renewal", established by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North & South America. It has been updated & edited by Fr. Timothy Cremeens, PhD. You can communicate with him at: dr.cremeens@ggsm.us)

Sign used by early Christian believers to identify themselves.



I – JESUS
X – CHRIST
Θ – GOD'S
Y – SON
Σ – SAVIOR

Spiritual Renewal in the Orthodox Church



Whoever is in Christ is a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

SPRITUAL RENEWAL COMMISSION
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF
NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA

Abundant Life

Each person in his or her daily life frequently senses the difference between *existing* and *living*. We want to *live* but often we merely *exist* as we deal with ourselves, others, jobs, marriage, family, problems, and responsibilities.

Jesus Christ said: *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.* (John 10:10)

Christ's words were not spoken only for the future, in His heavenly Kingdom, but also for our daily lives, NOW. Jesus completed His redemptive work through His person, teachings, miracles, suffering, death, and resurrection. Those who believe, that is put their full faith, trust, and confidence in Him, can now enjoy the fruits of new life – true communion, fellowship with God through the person and power of the Holy Spirit.

Both the Bible and holy Tradition assure Orthodox Christians that the new life in Christ is possible for us now, that is it is meant for ordinary, everyday Christians, and that it is a sure gift flowing from the saving work of Jesus Christ. The Apostles, Martyrs, Church Fathers and Mothers, Saints and countless Christians were empowered by this new life in Christ and testify to it as a dynamic and experiential reality which changed their lives.

How can this abundant life that Jesus promised, become a part of our daily existence and life?

Cooperation: Humanity and God

According to Orthodox Christian teaching, authentic Christian life is a *synergy*, a cooperation between each person and God. *Synergy* does not of course mean that God does half of the work

and we do the other half. Rather it means that while God does all of the saving work, we must freely respond to God with our whole being.

For the majority of Orthodox Christians, the response to God begins at infancy with Baptism and Chrismation. Through Baptism and Chrismation each Orthodox Christian receives Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit *mystically* (μυστικῶς). The response to God is initially made by one's parents and sponsor who *acknowledge* Christ and pledge to Him, as it were: *This child, this young person, is Yours!*

Afterwards, the goal of the Christian life is to become *aware* of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit *actively, experientially, or consciously* (ἐνεργῶς). As the baptized Orthodox Christian grows from child to adolescent to adult, and consciously, intentionally, and experientially participates in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, his or her personal response becomes crucial. Each Christian **MUST** personally re-affirm the baptism pledge and themselves say by *free choice* to Jesus: *Yes, I am yours!* Spiritual renewal comes from this conscious commitment to Christ, sharing in the Eucharist, daily prayer, confession, and sincere efforts to live the kind of life Christ lived and proclaimed.

Our Personal Response

A genuine personal response to God involves faith, repentance, and repentance.

FAITH is the acceptance of the Gospel (Good News), that is, acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, Who He is, what He did, what He taught.

REPENTANCE is a thorough conversion of the mind, heart, affections, and actions to Christ, with sincere confession of our sins, so that He may forgive us and reconcile us to our Father, God.

OBEDIENCE is the willing use of one's total inner and outer resources toward the building up of a life of Christian discipleship. This includes daily prayer, reading the Bible, attending the prayer and worship services of the Church, learning about the Faith and spending time with other Christians who can assist us in our spiritual growth.

That we will stumble and fall along the way does not so much matter because God lovingly forgives us and teaches us precious lessons throughout mistakes and shortcomings. What does matter is that we turn back to Jesus Christ as often as we fall, tell Him everything about everything, trust Him for strength and guidance and learn daily dependence upon Him. As we endeavor to keep our eyes upon Him, and united with Him in prayer and the sacraments, He renews our lives during daily tasks and responsibilities by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual renewal is ordinary Christian life in its fullness through Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Confession, communal worship, personal daily prayer, study of God's word in the Bible and the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and authentic Christian living in the world. For the Orthodox Christian spiritual renewal cannot be something separate from the life of the Church. It *is* the life of the Church effectively lived, in all its sacramental, catechetical, and pastoral ministries.

