

Selection of Hierarchy

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INTRODUCTION

Membership in Orthodox Christian Laity has always been open to all baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christians, including priests, bishops and archbishops. The OCL ministry was initiated by a group of lay persons, with strong encouragement and support of priests, some of whom have joined as members of the ministry, and others who have offered their moral support. OCL has also enjoyed input and moral support of several bishops who share OCL's belief that our church in America is in need of renewal.

The work of this Commission was authorized by the membership of the Orthodox Christian Laity at its Third Annual Meeting at St. Basil's Church in Chicago, Illinois in November, 1990. The Commission has had the benefit of advice from a number of individuals, including priests, who have reviewed some but not necessarily all, of the sections of this Report. They have acted as consultants to the Commission, but the conclusions of the Commission as contained in this Report are not necessarily those of the priests who acted as consultants.

This Report is not intended to be the last word on the questions it deals with. It is intended to generate discussion, and hopefully, to shed some light on those questions. It is our hope and our prayer that all Orthodox Christians living and practicing their faith in America, will engage in the dialogue this and the other Commission Reports are intended to spark, so that the Church can "function as a living organism in which all its members and parts are organically related and alive."

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE COMMISSION

One of the initially stated goals of the Orthodox Christian Laity ministry is: To restore the role of the laity in the election of the hierarchy. Our discussion will focus on the situation confronting members of the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America, but it will also consider Orthodox practice in general and as it exists in other Orthodox jurisdictions. Any discussion of this issue also raises the issues of Canonical unity of the Orthodox Church in America, Autonomy and Autocephaly, which is discussed in detail later in this book.

SCRIPTURAL TESTIMONY AND THE APOSTOLIC PATTERN

The process, if not the exact procedure, of the all important matter of selecting the spiritual leaders must trace its origins to the infant Apostolic Church and the testimony of the Church Fathers. The process of ordination or commissioning a spiritual leader of the Church in a formal-structured service, such as we know today, does not appear in the New Testament. However, what is mentioned there indicates some type of ceremony, albeit a very simple one:

- The twelve "chosen" and "sent" by Christ. (Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16).
- The election of Matthias (Acts 1:26).
- The seven elected and commissioned by the "laying on of hands." (Acts 6:6).
- The commissioning of Paul and Barnabas by the Antioch church by the "laying on of hands." (Acts 13:3).
- And the primary source of an ordination service comes from I Timothy 4:14; and II Timothy 1:6.

As for the election of those to be ordained and commissioned, the prominent lay theologian Panagiotis Trembelas of Athens, Greece (Religious and Ethical Encyclopedia) says:

Already from the first days of the establishment of the Church, with the question that arose to replace the fallen twelfth apostle, despite the fact that the apostolic chorus constitutes a special class in the Church, selected by the Lord directly and undertaking an extraordinary mission, the entire Church is invited to participate in the election of Peter "with the expression of public opinion and allowing the judgment of the masses. . . . Men were called brothers, by all present." This proclaimed in such a way that "none of the faithful there were split, neither male or female." (Chrysostom). Thus, women also participated in the election.

When after a while the matter arose about electing the seven deacons, "the twelve summoned the body of the disciples [i.e. the followers of Christ]" (Acts 6:2-3), and charged that body to select the seven. Chrysostom commenting on what happened says "the right to determine the number and the placing of the hands [ordination], the apostles reserved for themselves, but allow the people to elect the specific men."

THE PRACTICE IN THE TIME OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

In the period of the Apostolic Fathers following the time of the apostles, there are numerous references to the selection of hierarchy by the people, as well as the example being followed by the civic authorities. Some examples:

1. There is witness from the First Epistle to the Corinthians of Clement of Rome (Chapter 44,3) which proclaims that "the installed [bishops] by them [the Apostles], or the other worthy men agreed to by the whole church . . . these we believe cannot justifiably be eliminated from the liturgy." This witness takes on a special meaning if it is related to another of the author Lampridius, certifying about Alexander Severi (222-225) that leaving the election of rulers to the people, was following the practice of Christians and Jews (Vita. Alex Severi, Chapter 45).
2. During those same years, Cyprian of Carthage (+258) witnesses about Pope Cornelius that on the one hand, he became bishop by the judgment of God and Christ, and on the other hand, by the witness of almost all of the clergy and the vote of all of the people present and the college of

the old priests and good men (Epistle 10, Paragraph 8).

3. At the same time, there is the election of Pope Fabian, who was martyred in the reign of Decius (251-258). While all the brothers were deliberating about filling the widowed throne of Rome, he too came from his fields, at the moment when "in no one's mind did the thought exist that it was possible Fabian could be elected." But it is universally mentioned that a dove from the heights alighted on Fabian's head. "Following which the entire people as if by a single spirit divinely moved, carried him and placed him on the throne of the episcopate" (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History VI:29).
4. Examples of elections in which it is evident that the vote of the people was victorious and prevailing, are all too numerous in church history. Gregory of Nazianzos (Homily 21 8:35, 1089) certifies explicitly the witness that the elections were by "the vote of all the people" of such hierarchs as Athanasius the Great, Nectarios, John Chrysostom, Sisinius, Germanos, and Tarasias, all of Constantinople, Eustathius of Antioch, etc. Theodoritos (Ecclesiastical History V:982, 1217) says on the subject: "the entire city voted" and Socrates (Ecclesiastical History VI:2 67, 661) states that there was "a public vote by all the clergy and the voice of the people."

THE DECREES OF THE HOLY CANONS

The Holy Canons and other edicts have much to say about the election process.

1. Perhaps the oldest written monument, stipulating the election of bishops is an encyclical of the synod which convened around 258 in Carthage. It is included in the Number 67 (or 68) epistle of Cyprian in which it is stated, "The divine and apostolic tradition must be followed" so that concerning the ordination of a bishop it must be done "among the people of which the one to be ordained will be the leader, and the bishops neighboring on this diocese to assemble, and the bishop to be elected in the presence of the people, who know the life of each and witnesses about all the deeds of each."
2. Considered as contemporary is a stipulation in the Apostolic Decrees referred to earlier also in the Canons under the name of Hippolytos. There it is stated that the candidate bishop must be irreproachable in all respects with superior merits, elected by all the people. During a Sunday gathering of all, the presiding notable would ask the presbyter and the people if the candidate was the one they wanted as leader. If they would assent, there would be an examination by the bishops to ascertain if truly the proposed candidate is "witnessed by all as being worthy of the great and brilliant position." Thereafter the people once again were invited to acclaim a third time and the ordination followed. (Apostolic Decree VIII 5:1, 1069). The Synod of bishops had the right and duty to dissent in the election of the people whenever it was convinced that the proposed candidate was unworthy. However from the 18th Canon of the Synod of Antioch (314 A.D.) and the 18th Canon of the Ancyra Synod (314 A.D.), it is evident that the right of the people to elect their bishops remained strong.
3. The 4th Canon of the First Ecumenical Synod stipulates that a new bishop would be elevated by all the bishops in the province and the authority of the decision rests with the metropolitan of the province. However that Canon, in combination with the letter of the same Synod to the

Church of Alexandria, proves that the rights of the people were not being limited. The letter reaffirms the voting obligations of the people (Socrates, Ecclesiastical History I:9). "Thus also at the time of the First Ecumenical Synod, the people elected and the Metropolitan, with the Synod around him, ratified or invalidated the election" says theologian Trembelas.

4. The clever and the selfish have never been absent from the Church of Christ, and among the people, there are always the gullible and the easily deceived. Thus, very early extremes were noted, fomented, and aroused by ambitious clerics, who usurped vacant episcopal thrones by mob actions. These excesses were addressed in the 4th Canon of the First Ecumenical Council, the 16th Canon of the Antioch Synod, and the 13th Canon of the Laodician Synod. These Canons in effect say that a bishop having usurped a throne would be expelled even if "he were elected by all the people" and the mobs should not be permitted to elect those who would in the future be elevated to the hierarchy.
5. Practices involving the laity in the elevation to the hierarchy were also followed in the West. Thus, Leo the Great ordered that from all those proposed for the episcopacy, the one who would be preferred should be the person agreed to by clergy and laity (Epistle 14, 5, PL 54, 673). He also pronounced the classic: "He who is to be the superior of all should be elected by all." (Qui praefuturus est omnibus eligatur) (Epistle 10, 5, PL, 632). Also, Gregory the Great strongly espouses the right of the clergy and the laity to participate in the election of the bishop (Thomassinum, Vet. et Nov. Eccl. Discipl. H 7C 34 Paragraph 10).

SUCCESSION OF THE EPISCOPATE IN THE BYZANTINE WORLD

In Byzantine times Emperor Justinian (527-565) issued the Nearai No. 6, 123, 137 (see also the code Justinian, Book I, Title III, Law 42 about bishops). In those decrees among other provisions, it was stipulated that for the election of bishops the "clergy and the primates of the city, in which the bishop will be ordained" should come together and they should propose three individuals so that from them the best would be ordained (Neara 123, Chapter 1, In Vasilika Book III, Title I).

It is true that many extremes were perpetrated by the emperors, the kings and other rulers in the West, the mob interventions of the masses, and the coups by metropolitans and bishops. Especially in the election of the Patriarchs of Constantinople, as well as the filling of vacant thrones in the West, the emperors and kings dictated beforehand the ones they preferred, and afterwards the ones who voted were usually the simple executors of the sovereign commands. History also notes instances where synodic ordinations were not acceptable to the people, the ordinations were invalidated, and the elevated prelates were transferred to another see.

The ordination of the bishops took place usually in the widowed sees where the metropolitan would meet with all the bishops in the area and presided over the election. When the bishops were convinced that the candidate enjoyed the common approval, the first of the bishops would proclaim him officially in the church saying to the people among other things "this person, dear brethren, who has been elected as most worthy for the hierarchy, agreeing he is laudable, assist and proclaim: he is worthy. [Axios.]" With the proclamation of "Axios," the ordination ceremony would begin. This practice has now been reversed. The acclamation of "Axios," he is worthy, in today's ordinations is invited after the ordination sacrament has been completed, and not before as was the ancient practice. In other words, the

ordination is a fait accompli when the congregation is asked to give its assent, rendering the role of the people a subservient, acquiescing formality. In some instances, mainly in Greece, where congregations have asserted their free judgment to proclaim the ordained bishop as "Axios," unrest, turmoil, and even riots have ensued.

This information about the historical right and practice of the People of God to express their approval or disapproval of the one who will be their shepherd is seldom, if ever, mentioned by our current shepherds, inferring that things are being done as they always have been.

There is, in fact, no disagreement in the official Church, even today, over the testimony of the ancient Church in this regard. The evidence is unmistakable and incontrovertible. Since Constantine the Great, however, lay participation in the election of bishops increasingly meant imperial involvement. The election of the Ecumenical Patriarch was virtually the Emperor's prerogative as the Byzantine Age moved on. For example, St. John Chrysostom was, by imperial decree, transferred from Antioch and enthroned as Patriarch in Constantinople (Emperor Arcadius). Emperors banished and replaced bishops at will, often over the protests of the Bishop of Rome. The struggle for control between emperors and the institutional church may have led to some of the restrictions on the role of the laity at large in the selection of bishops.

HOW BISHOPS ARE ELECTED TODAY IN GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE

Professor James Steve Counelis has written an excellent analysis of the four Constitutions of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America under which our Archdiocese has functioned since its establishment. The article appears in the 26th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress Album, San Francisco, July, 1982. He concluded his analysis of the four constitutions with this personal observation:²

This writer believes that the development of an operative democratic church within the title of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America is inevitable, though he may not live to see it. Further, this democratization will occur only when the American Church takes seriously the theological anthropology of the Church and sees that that anthropology becomes the basis of a Christ-like church . . . a Christ-like ecclesiology in living practice. The true ecclesial independence of the American Orthodox Church rests in the achievement of a Christ-like ecclesiology, for creativity, wisdom and piety will be her gifts. The Church is one priesthood of believers, clergy, and lay, with one Head - the Christ.

If it is indeed inevitable that the Orthodox Church in America is going to develop into an "operative democratic church" as Dr. Counelis predicts, the recognition of the theological anthropology of the church must come from the entire church, not only from a few of its members. It will also be necessary for the church to confront, and reverse, the "Constitutional Regressions" noted by Dr. Counelis in his analysis of the four (1922, 1927, 1931 and 1977) Constitutions of the Archdiocese. As Dr. Counelis notes:

[A] document by document review of the four Constitutions reveals that two retrogressions have occurred . . . (1) the participation and approval of the archdiocesan constitution by laymen and lower clergy; (2) the method of selecting bishops.

"The Constitution of 1922 was developed and approved by the 2nd Clergy-Laity Congress in 1922 The 1927 revision . . . was approved at a general meeting in the then Cathedral of St. Basil in Chicago. As to the monarchical constitution of 1931, it is a well known fact that it was imposed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Government. And as for the 1977 Constitution, it was never presented at a referendum at any Clergy-Laity Congress, though a small committee of bishops, lower clergy and laymen participated in its construction. It appears that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was more Christian and more trusting in the past than in the present.

The method of selecting bishops has also retrogressed since the 1922 and 1927 Constitutions. In these two earlier constitutions, the Clergy-Laity Congress had the opportunity to submit the names of three clergymen for transmission to the American Synod of Bishops. They, in turn, would nominate one of the three, sending that candidate's name on to Constantinople. The Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate would accept the decision of the American Synod and would elect that candidate to episcopal office. No such process is available in the 1977 constitution; and certainly nothing is said in the 1931 constitution. In the 1977 constitution there is a vaguely worded reference to the American Synod of Bishops consulting with the Archdiocesan Council, on which laymen and lower clergy are present. However, the Ecumenical Patriarchate reserves the right to name bishops to American dioceses. Obviously, the ancient tradition of the local diocese selecting its own bishop and proclaiming him "Axios," is dead. There is no question that the 1922 and 1927 Constitutions were superior to the 1977 Constitution in both the constitutional procedures and the method of selecting bishops. [Emphasis Supplied]

Notwithstanding Professor Counelis's commentary, the evidence seems to indicate that this "right" of the Patriarchate exists in theory rather than in practice. The practice appears to be that the Archbishop handpicks his bishops and the Ecumenical Patriarch simply rubberstamps his choices and validates them for consecration. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that on one occasion in recent years, Constantinople withheld.

HOW BISHOPS ARE ELECTED IN OTHER ORTHODOX JURISDICTIONS

In Russia, where the Church is only now emerging from seventy years of often brutal suppression, the Patriarch of Moscow was recently elected by 66 bishops, 66 priests and 66 laypersons representing each of the 66 Dioceses. The Commission has not been able to determine how the priests and laypersons were selected, but the ancient tradition of participation by priests and laity in the election was reaffirmed.

The Orthodox Church in America (OCA) and the Antiochan Archdiocese here in America, also maintain at least to some extent the tradition of lay participation in the election of its Bishops. However, the Commission has received anecdotal evidence that OCA Hierarchy has on at least one occasion reversed an election in which the laity had voted.

As this Report is discussed in the coming months, we hope to develop more information about both the theory and the practice of other Orthodox jurisdictions. We invite comments, articles and information from all of our readers, which we will share with the entire Church.

SUGGESTED PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT - THE GREEK ORTHODOX JURISDICTION

There seems to be little dispute that the laity has had an inherent and historically confirmed right to participate in the process by which priests and bishops are selected. Professor Lewis J. Patsavos of the Holy Cross School of Theology has written:

Then there is the very sensitive issue to consider of the election of the clergy by the laity. The prominent role given the laity in the election of Matthias to replace Judas is an indisputable fact. It set the pace for what was to follow in this regard during the next three centuries. Abuses, however, and the ever-increasing influence of secular rulers in the affairs of the Church had as their consequence the abolition of the God-given right of the laity to elect its spiritual leaders. Sufficient historical precedents do exist as a reminder of what was once an inherent right of the laity, even though the final act of laying on of hands was always the exclusive privilege of the episcopacy. [Emphasis Supplied]

All Orthodox are familiar with the now ritualistic shouts of "Axios" (he is Worthy) which the laity are called upon to proclaim at every ordination of a priest and elevation of a hierarch, which in Orthodox Churches must occur during a Liturgy. Although we have heard of no instance in the Greek Archdiocese in America, stories abound of instance where the laity in Greece have actually caused the proceedings to be halted by their shouts of Unworthy, which required the convening of an investigation into the reasons for rejection. Such occurrences are surely not to be encouraged, but they may disclose a weakness in the process which excludes the laity from any meaningful role in the process which permits only such a public last ditch venue for the expression of the laity's will.

This right is still exercised, albeit in a sometimes purely symbolic manner, in some Orthodox Churches. In the Church of Cyprus, for example, the laity participate in the election of the Archbishop. Likewise, in Russia, a new Patriarch of Moscow was recently elected at a meeting called for that purpose which included bishops, clergy, and laity representing every Diocese. If the laity in Cyprus and Russia do not exclusively exercise their God-given right to select their spiritual leaders, they at least have the opportunity to participate in the process. Any effort to involve the laity in the selection process in any meaningful manner must take into account the cautionary admonition of Professor Patsavos that:

Only believing and worshipping laypersons should be allowed to assist in the governing of the Church; nominal Christians should at all costs be excluded.

The issue should not be whether the laity should have a voice, rather the issue should be what that voice should be and how, and by whom should it be expressed? Regrettably, in the past, it can be argued that in some instances the least spiritually qualified were involved. Even today the risk persists. Historically, wealthy, secular-minded barons in the court of the Church could cast a decisive vote. In the recent past the wealthy merchant class of Phanariots in Constantinople were influential in elections of the Patriarch. In the Soviet Union, it is suspected that the KGB has played a role in the selection of Bishops. The restoration of lay participation as such is not necessarily a guarantee that the laos, or People of God, is participating. The baron-type of laity can turn into rubber-stamping the preference of some Church prelate or primate. We do not need that in the Church in America.

Improper External Influences

One objection that can be made to lay participation in the election of bishops is the possibility that secular influences will be introduced into the choice. However, it is likely that the current practice of the Greek Orthodox Church is far more vulnerable to such influences than is a system in which the laity exercise their appropriate role.

The "Church," which we define for our purposes here, as all of the Orthodox communicants who find themselves in America today, regardless of ethnic jurisdiction, enjoys total freedom from any influence from any secular leaders of the United States Government. The genius of the Founding Fathers of this Nation was in their understanding that Religion would flourish in an environment where it was not only free, but totally separate from, and unsupported by the Government. If there are any influences of secular rulers in the affairs of the Orthodox Church in America, they are the influences which the Turkish Government has over decisions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate located in Constantinople and which the Greek Government exercises over the Greek Archdiocese, directly through the Church of Greece, or indirectly through its influence over the Ecumenical Patriarchate. To a greater or lesser extent, other foreign governments, such as Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Syria, etc. may exercise, or attempt to exercise, some influence through the Mother Churches of those jurisdictions over the affairs of their daughter Churches in America.

In order for the Orthodox Church in the United States to address the problem of the unwarranted and improper influences of secular rulers especially the Greek and Turkish Governments, the Church in America must define its existence in terms of its own needs, realities and self-governance, while at all times maintaining its ties with its historical past and roots. This discussion cannot avoid the question of the establishment of one Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America.³

Although this issue will be discussed by the Commission which is studying the issue of Orthodox Unity, it is one which has to be addressed as well in our discussion concerning the elimination of improper influences from the election of bishops. Clearly, the constitutional guarantees that have existed for more than two hundred years in this Country are so well-established that there is no question of U. S. governmental interference with the affairs of the Church in America. A single, united and autocephalous Orthodox Church in America would be able to elect its bishops and patriarch without interference from secular rulers. If the model we wish to establish for Church governance of an Orthodox Church in America is closer to that of the first three centuries of our Church, and further from the Byzantine "Emperor-Patriarch" or the subsequent "Sultan-Patriarch" models, there has never been a better time or a better place for the establishment or re-establishment of such a model.

Christianity flourished during its first three centuries, in spite of persecution because of the spiritual fervor of its adherents. Although the Church achieved political recognition after its establishment by Emperor and later Saint Constantine, and material gains during the next several centuries, the decline in spiritual life led to the establishment of the Monastic Movement. Most will agree that the spiritual life of the faithful is damaged when the Church becomes established and intertwined with the affairs of State. This indeed is one of the central insights of the American Bill of Rights, that both the State and the Church function best when they are independent of one another.

As we have seen, the involvement and participation of the laity in the election of the clergy of all ranks has roots in Christianity's earliest days. Another aspect of the clergy-laity relationship has a

geographical dimension to it.

The episcopate is the essence of the church only because it belongs within the sacramental framework of the believing community. According to Orthodox teaching the bishop is the chief celebrant of all the sacraments, with the priests receiving their limited sacramental authority from the bishop. Thus, the bishop should be a local chief pastor. "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be," writes St. Ignatius of Antioch. This would be impossible and meaningless if the bishop is hundreds, or even thousands of miles away. "There is one altar as there is one bishop with the priests and deacons." (To the Phil. 3) A bishop could not be at the altar of all churches at the same time as would be expected in a jurisdiction the size that is under the supervision of the "Archbishop of North and South America and Exarch of the Atlantic and Pacific." The community/parish model was a limited number of faithful in a limited geographical area under one bishop. The whole church was the local church found most often within the bounds of a single city. For if the prayer of one or two has so much power, how much greater is that of the bishop and of the whole church? (To the Eph. 3) The bishop is viewed always in connection with the council of priests. The collegiality of the priests is directly related to the authority of the ruling bishop. This too is comprehensible only on a local level.

When St. Ignatius states: "You must continue to do nothing apart from the bishop," he is referring to a bishop who is physically accessible and not a remote ceremonial figurehead hundreds or thousands of miles away. Otherwise the life of the church would be paralyzed and remain at an impasse caused by inaction, indecision and anxiety arising from the remoteness of the bishop. It is, therefore, clear that St. Ignatius sees the bishop as a father of a small, tightly-knit spiritual family in which the lay members and the priests are in close proximity to the bishop. "Be obedient too to the priests as the Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope" demonstrates the authority of the collegiality of the priests within a given area who maintain a close proximity with the ruling bishop. The bishop is a typos or icon of Christ only in a local setting. The wisdom of the practices of the early church having localized bishops (in the fourth century, for example, four hundred bishops existed in Asia Minor) has relevance in our times as well.

The human heart is lashed with the same kinds of failings throughout the ages and pride has never ceased to be among the most pernicious evils. Bishops are not immune from this sin. Indeed the early church recognized this and used the practice of limiting the geographic sway of bishoprics to reinforce the dictates of spiritual humility. Many lay members of the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America apparently view church governance in terms of the Roman Catholic rather than the Orthodox model. Generations of adherence to the principle of blind obedience coupled with little, if any, religious education have conditioned the laity into acceptance of a mind-set that varies between indifference or hopeless exasperation on the one hand, and blissful hero-worship bordering on cult-like adoration of visible "Ethno-Religious" leaders, on the other hand. Few among the appointed lay leaders in the American Church seem to be aware that "the Patriarch of Constantinople's role is essentially that of a convener rather than that of a chief executive of a closely organized corporation. Orthodoxy is governed, on the world scene, by a spirit of consensus, rather than by directives from above For the Orthodox the head of the Church is Christ, both in spirit and in reality." (Rev. Dr. Stanley Harakas.) We believe that a return to the democratically elected bishops and decentralized authority of the early Church represents a model for the modern Church in America.

More than twenty years ago, Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou addressed the issue of laity involvement in church governance as follows:

The Church is the Body of Christ consisting of laity and clergy. It is the prerogative and obligation of Christ's followers to state their views after investigating the issues. So long as they sit back with indifference, the Church can never function as a living organism in which all its members and parts are organically related and alive.

The "they-know-what-they're-doing attitude" toward our hierarchy can only injure the interests of the Church. It is time this mentality changed. It is said that people get the governments they deserve. This holds true especially when applied to the Church. We get Church leadership we deserve and the decisions we deserve. We cater also to the equally harmful "What-do-the-laity-know" attitude of the clergy.

Who can doubt that the Church in America has come of age? But the priests and laity must show their age and maturity by doing more thinking and talking on the issues confronting the Church

If the Orthodox Church is the best-kept secret in America, and if it represents a spiritual alternative for the ninety million un-churched Americans who are looking for the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, it is because in its theology, beliefs, and liturgical practices it has remained true to the Church of the first three centuries. By ridding itself of the influences of the secular rulers of the Old World, the Church in America can turn its attention to Christ's Great Commission and to educating its laity in the Word of God, so that as believing and worshipping laypersons, they can assist in the governing of the Church, including the election of their spiritual leaders, without themselves being guilty of abuses in the exercise of their ministry.

Proposed Selection Procedures

We have seen that the early church has provided us with models which not only have relevance today, but which are uniquely appropriate for conditions in America. Two models that we believe must be adopted are: (a) lay participation in the election of their church leaders, and (b) a restricted geographic area over which church leaders have jurisdiction. Both models are consistent with Orthodox teachings and traditions, as is the tradition of married bishops. These are not revolutionary departures for the Orthodox Church.

The dramatic change advocated by OCL has already begun to take place. That change consists of generating the necessary study and dialogue that will engage the laity, priests and hierarchs in the search for approaches that will serve the Church in the way Christ would approve. This search must be conducted with prayer, mutual respect and love.

Some will propose that before the laity is included in the election of bishops, priests should first be given the right to elect their bishop. Only after the right of priests to elect their bishop has been established, should the laity be included, as a "natural next step." (See suggestions of Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou under Concluding Thoughts.)

Others will propose systems intended to insure that "nominal and uninformed" laity are excluded from the process. Some will propose that candidates for bishop be nominated only by bishops, or only by bishops and priests with the final election to be made by representatives of bishops, priests and the laity. Others will propose that lots be drawn either for the selection of the lay or other representatives to the body that chooses the candidates or elects the bishop from among the candidates, or as the method

for final selection from among the candidates. Changes in jurisdiction will follow as a natural consequence of Orthodox Unity and Autocephaly, but neither will happen if the entire Church in America does not discuss and reach a consensus on these two important issues. Priests and bishops who refuse to engage in dialogue with the laity about these and any other issues confronting the Church, do violence to the concept of conciliarity which is basic to the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church. (Commission 34:3). The ordination of married priests as bishops may require action at the forthcoming Great and Holy Council of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Preliminary meetings to discuss the agenda have been held in 1961, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973 and 1976. No date has been set as yet for the meeting itself but, once again, the consensus of the Church cannot be arrived at if the matter is not discussed.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Obviously, if the laity and the priests are to regain a voice in the selection of their bishops, archbishops and, yes, patriarchs - changes need to be made both in the Constitution of the Archdiocese, in the role that the laity and clergy exercise in the selection of representatives on the Archdiocesan Council, and in the planning and execution of the Clergy-Laity Congress. The time has come for the laity and the priests to recognize their responsibilities as members of the Body. Only when they do, can we hope to realize the goal of an operative democratic church in America.

In view of the current authoritarian control that the Archdiocese exercises over the agenda, planning and conduct of the Clergy-Laity Congress, the necessary changes can be made only by an outpouring of positive activity on the part of priests and laity. Generating that activity is obviously one of the major goals of the OCL ministry.

As long as priests view their attendance at Clergy-Laity Congresses as nothing more than an opportunity to have a reunion with their classmates from Holy Cross (usually subsidized in whole or in part by their parishes), as long as large numbers of parishes cannot afford the outrageous costs of attending Clergy-Laity Congresses, as long as parish council presidents, and other lay delegates view their attendance at Clergy-Laity Congresses as opportunities to attend gala banquets and luncheons featuring political speakers and secular dignitaries, as long as the majority of Archdiocesan Council members are appointed by the Archbishop, and all automatic delegates to the Clergy-Laity Congress, little progress will be made on the key issues facing the Church.

The issue of lay participation in the election of bishops is not a new issue. Twenty-two years ago, in the December, 1969 issue of *The Logos*, Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou wrote:

Lay participation in the election of the clergy, be they priests, bishops, or patriarchs, is normative in Orthodox practice and dates back to the earliest days of Christianity. Hence, the established custom of wording the announcement of such elections at the hour of consecration with: By vote of both clergy and laity. In later times it was revised thus: By vote and approval of the God-loving Priests and Clergy of the City of . . .

This is the form used currently by the consecrating bishop who is about to lay hands with two other bishops upon the candidate. But ironically not only the laity, but even the priests today in the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are kept out of the elections of their bishops. To take an example of close proximity, neither priests nor laity in the Greek Archdiocese of America are consulted

in the election of auxiliary bishops, least of all, of the archbishop. No practice in the Orthodox Church could be more untenable and harmful both canonically and historically. Only proper enlightenment and religious maturity can displace the ignorance and religious infantilism that in this respect sustain the docility and inertia among the priests and laity in the Greek Archdiocese. [Emphasis Supplied]

Father Stephanou has assisted this Commission as a consultant, and we asked him to share his current thoughts on this issue with us. He wrote to us the following:

I believe the issue of lay participation in the election of the Archbishop and Bishops is directly related to the mode of administration in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

It is generally recognized that the current mode of administration of the Church is extremely centralized: the entire Church on two continents of the whole western hemisphere comes under the authority of one prelate. His power is virtually absolute in terms of administering the internal affairs of this imperial-sized jurisdiction. In effect he is not answerable to anyone. He handpicks his bishops and prevails over the Ecumenical Patriarchate to endorse his choices. The priests are never consulted. The result is that they have shown an apathy in this regard, indifference and cynicism. The auxiliary bishops likewise have fallen into this mental state.

Our first concern should be the decentralization of the Administration of the Archdiocese. This should have first priority. It is an exercise in futility to strive for lay participation in the election of the episcopate within a framework of religious totalitarianism. Such a concern for decentralizing takes on a special urgency in view of subtle efforts already underway to abrogate the new synodical system and to restore the older system of one ruling Archbishop with several auxiliary bishops. Local diocesan authority is being eroded step by step, presumably because the synodical system has failed.

Not only should the synodical system be preserved at all costs, but it should be reinforced, improved and perfected. It is not the synodical system, as such, that is inadequate and defective, but possibly the men who are handpicked as diocesan bishops are inadequate and lacking in leadership ability and competence. It is not logical nor fair to discredit the synodical system, therefore, when we consider the fact that the ruling Archbishop selects men for the episcopate who are generally docile, subservient and harmless to his supreme authority.

There is more likelihood for success in the effort for lay participation in the election of the episcopate within the framework of a decentralized mode of administration. To decentralize the Church is to centralize Christ as the true head of the Church. Spiritual Renewal means to bring Christ out of obscurity and to allow Him to govern His Church which he purchased by His own Blood. Too long have men usurped the position of Christ!

But when God's people in collective disobedience and rebellion prefer idols in the place of the sovereignty of Christ, divine judgment falls upon them and He condemns them by giving them the idols they choose.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has from the beginning cherished the prerogative to elect the ruling archbishop for the Greek Archdiocese in America. They will need a lot of convincing otherwise in order to change at this point and begin consulting the laity in this country, or for that matter, even the

priests.

It is more logical and effective to strive first for the rights of priests in the election of bishops. How can the laity expect to be consulted in this regard when the priests themselves are totally excluded from the process of election? The Orthodox Christian Laity will be more likely to succeed on this issue if it were to first champion the rights of the priests to be involved in the election process. Once the priests are consulted in such elections, it will be far easier for the laity to follow suit and claim their prerogatives.

Priority, therefore, should be given to re-establishing the rights of the Presbyterate to participate in the election of the Episcopate. Normally a bishop is elected from within the ranks of the priests (or presbyters). If a bishop is truly "theobroletos" (singled out by God), as he is called liturgically in his pheme, then in what better manner can the divine choice be manifested than by the consensus of his fellow-presbyters?

It should be pointed out, however, that in the Early Church the laity very often decided by public acclamation their choice for the position of the local bishop who was to shepherd them. It was not the presbyters. The reason for this was simply because in that early period of the Church the bishop usually exercised pastoral authority over one city. In one sense the chief parish priest of a mother parish church in our own day is what the bishop was back then. City-bishops was the norm in the Early Church (kata polin episcopoi). Thus it was only fitting for the laity to decide who their spiritual shepherd was to be. He was a man whom they knew possibly from childhood and recognized him for his godliness and virtue. He was not a stranger coming from a distant city or country.

The vote of the laity must spring from the grass roots level of the Church, otherwise lay participation runs the danger of being no improvement over the current practice. If lay participation is defined as laity appointed by bishops, or even priests, or laity who are prominent only for their material wealth or social or professional standing with no thought to their spiritual standing and Christian character, it is doubtful that the results will be pleasing to God.

Whether, as Father Stephanou states, it will be easier or even more logical for the laity to regain the right to participate in the election of bishops by first championing the rights of priests to do so, is a question we do not answer here. It is sufficient to note that when OCL advocates the right of the laity to participate in the process, it does not mean to exclude the right of priests to also participate in the process. As we have noted elsewhere in this Report, the answer must come from the entire Church. We invite you to join in the deliberations. Every baptized, chrismated Orthodox Christian has received the gift of the Holy Spirit. To the extent that any of us remains indifferent and uninvolved we deprive the Church of the fullness it can only enjoy when we are all functioning, integral parts of the Body. Let us all join together and our efforts will surely be blessed.