

# Spiritual Renewal

## THE TOPIC

The third annual meeting of Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) held in Chicago, October 1990, approved the formation of seven study groups to explore seven topics that were identified as critical to moving the Church ahead into the twenty-first century. The topic developed in this paper is Spiritual Renewal as seen in the context of the Church and by Orthodox Christians living in the United States. Understanding Spiritual Renewal is basic to developing the OCL "Project for Orthodox Renewal" because all the other topics relate to our understanding of Spiritual Renewal.

## SUMMARY OF THE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL TASK FORCE

The task force paper defines spiritual renewal by understanding how it is seen in the tradition of the Church. This was accomplished by examining recommended books and interacting with select clergy. The perceptions of the living body of the "royal priesthood" on their understanding of spiritual renewal are examined through a survey instrument developed on the topic. The survey sample included 300 select members and the response rate exceeded 35%.

Spiritual renewal can be defined as the process of growth and transformation into the image of God. The spiritually alive are in a kinetic state because they constantly strive to approach God, become united with God by grace. God became human so we humans could become divine. He truly is in our midst! We learn to cooperate harmoniously with God and repeatedly renew our covenant with Him through the Eucharist. Through the synergy of working together with God by His grace we become obedient to His will. We are drawn to the Light. We are pure in heart. We are able to love and forgive. This transformation is accomplished through divine grace, human freedom, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, given to each of us at baptism through the Father when we are chrismated, anointed with holy oil.

We need to live the sacramental life in order to win the struggle of transforming our nature. The Church is the divine instrument through which we journey into God's time, place, and presence. The Church was established at Pentecost and is historic and apostolic. The process of learning about Orthodox spirituality and renewal is through the liturgy. Christ resides in the community of the Church. He is our living presence through His resurrection. The Holy Spirit is our guide. The Bishop, who is also the image of the Lord, is our teacher. The Bishop, through his teaching, preserves the message of the Apostles, baptized members of the body are participants in God within the Church and are to participate freely and responsibly in the life of the Church.

According to the tradition of the Church and the response of the laity, the task force on spiritual renewal concludes:

1. Life-long learning for clergy, laity and hierarchy needs to be the first priority of the Church. Christians have an insatiable natural urge to acquire spiritual knowledge because they are created in the image of God, and the Fathers teach that the image of God resides in our intellect which is the highest aspect of human nature. It is therefore natural for us to want this spiritual knowledge. Presently spiritual education is not the priority of the Church. Lay persons have not been educated nor

encouraged to understand the spiritual life of Orthodoxy, because of a combination of factors including: too few formal educational experiences available to them; major church writings not translated into English; and no official English liturgy available to the faithful.

2. Spiritual vitality in Orthodoxy can be restored only as the ministry is shared and the divine liturgy becomes participatory. We are all responsible for the spiritual life and vitality of the Church as we act together -- hierarchy, clergy and laity. Laity must once again find their place, know their duty to become aware of the traditions of the faith and then to actively assume their roles as guardians and participants in the faith. The Very Reverend Eusebius Stephanou has asked the direct questions:

Why the need for Orthodox spiritual renewal, when all the while the Holy Eucharist, which is celebrated every Sunday and on Feast days, is supposed to renew the Church both as a body of believers and as individual believers? Is there a missing ingredient? Every divine liturgy is, in a sense, a renewal conference. Why is it not meeting the need? (Stephanou).

Could it be because we are Christian spectators?

The obstacles that impede spiritual renewal can be lessened through developing a systematic process of spiritual education.

## **ELEMENTS OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL**

### **Duty of the Laity: Be Aware and Be Guardians**

Orthodox Christians have a responsibility and duty in the Holy Tradition of the Church to be fully aware of the faith. Vladimir Lossky states "that . . . each member of the Church is called to confess and to defend the truth of tradition. A Christian who has received the gift of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of the Holy Chrisma must have a full awareness of his faith! He is always responsible for the Church!" (Lossky, 10).

Baptized, chrismated members become the body of the Eucharistic Community of the living Christ and as the body are the guardians of the faith. This is our responsibility.

Among us, neither patriarch, nor councils could ever introduce new teaching, for the guardian of religion is the very body of the Church, that is, the people itself. (Patsavos, Art. 2)

*Members of the Church are called to know, to preserve and to defend the truths of the faith. The Holy Spirit makes truth manifest and inwardly plain, in greater or lesser degrees, to all the members of the Church. George Florovsky further states in quoting Metropolitan Philaret, "All the faithful united through the sacred tradition of faith, all together and all successfully, are built up by God into our Church, which is the true treasury of sacred tradition . . . ." (Florovsky 1:53)*

### **Shared Ministry**

Syndiakonia, shared ministry, is what makes the Church Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Lossky says that since the Church is catholic in all her parts, each one of her members, clergy, laity, hierarchy, is called to confess and defend the truth (Lossky 16). The religious vitality of Orthodoxy rests on an intensive

spiritual life which permeates the whole mass of believers, united in the awareness that they form a single body with the hierarchy and clergy of the Church (Lossky 17). Religious vitality got lost in the Greek Orthodox Church in North and South America when barriers were placed between the clergy and the laity that would not let them share the ministry of Christ.

Florovsky states emphatically that in the tradition of the Church, authority in the Church is a shared authority -- the sharing and working together of clergy, laity and hierarchy because the Holy Spirit moves through all of us. "The whole body of the Church has the right . . . of verifying, or to be more exact, . . . the duty of certifying the truth" (Florovsky 1:53).

Spiritual Renewal will become a more vital part of our Church and be seen as a priority when laypersons once again realize their place in the Church. It is their duty to become aware of the traditions of the faith and then to actively assume their roles as guardians and participants in the faith. Clergy have a responsibility to help the laity discover their own unique duty within the Church. The truth of the matter is that laypersons do not know their duties and obligations. They have not been educated nor encouraged to understand the spiritual life of Orthodoxy, which includes active participation in the ministry of the Church, and they remain in a state of spiritual adolescence. The Christian education program of our Church is inadequate. The laity already discern this, as the survey included in this study indicates. We will mature in the faith when we assume our proper roles as individuals and members of the Body and allow Syndiakonia to become a reality in the Church.

As practicing Orthodox Christians we are Holy, we are reflections of God's Glory, we are the affirmation of God's Word. We must have the confidence to be spiritually aware and involved in the syndiakonia, shared ministry, of all aspects of the Church.

*And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. **Ephesians 4:11-13***

### **WHAT IS SPIRITUAL RENEWAL?**

Spiritual Renewal is the process for growth and transformation into the image of God. Therefore, the Orthodox Church and the spiritually alive members of the body are in a constant state of movement. This is so because the goal of our lives is striving to approach God, becoming united with God by grace. Orthodox Theology describes this process as Theosis/Deification. Christ is in our midst because God became human so we humans could become divine. "The perfection of the human person and the very substance of human spiritual life is to partake of God's nature and to share in His life. And in this world this means always and of necessity to share in His sufferings, joyfully and gladly" (Hopko, Fullness 47).

Indeed God created us in His image and after His likeness. We strive to be like God. Likeness is the dynamic and not yet realized potential to be with God (Mantzarides 17-21). We choose to be like God. We are already in God's image. All of us start in His indistinct image and we share His image as common property as baptized humans. Being in the image of God, Gregory Palamas teaches, "resides not in the body but in the intellect, which is the highest aspect of human nature" (Mantzarides 17). Man fashioned in His image exhibits an inherent conjunction of intellect, intelligence (logos) and spirit. This

is why man has an insatiable natural urge to acquire spiritual knowledge (Mantzarides 19).

### **Cooperation Between Man and God**

To become like God we must cooperate with God. Our "spiritual life is the result of a harmonious divine-human action" (Stylianopoulos 32). Orthodox theologians define the cooperation between God and man as synergy. But in this relationship we depend entirely on the love of God. The Kingdom of Heaven is a gift of the Lord (Grace) prepared for His faithful servants. We are responsible for fulfilling His commandments. We need to fully respond to God, both in faith and works, if we are to share in the fruits of salvation. While God's part in salvation is decisive, and always assured in Christ, each person's part is also indispensable for his or her own individual salvation. One's relationship with God remains free and personal. Our willingness to accept Christ and to follow His ways pleases God. What is the disposition and direction of our hearts? Are we willing to cooperate with God? What and where are our treasures?

The basis of the harmonious cooperation of God and humankind is the New Testament agreement (covenant) affirmed and renewed in each Eucharist which is the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. The New Testament covenant implies the commandment of love (John 13:34) which is a personal and mutual relationship between God and humankind. The covenant is accessible to us through the mystery of the Resurrection and the presence of the spirit (Meyendorff, Living Tradition 30).

“He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

We are obedient servants.

We achieve theosis by subjecting our will to God's will. "Thy will be done" (Matthew 6:10). We are invited to become like "God by grace" to become one with God, as we cooperate with God for our personal salvation (Stylianopoulos 38). Let God draw you in; God takes us.

“For every one who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God” (John 3:20-21).

The pure in heart and the faithful see and know God. Orthodox theology holds that rediscovery and uncovering our pure heart is the way we come to be with God. "God's gracious action through His word and His spirit . . ." is the means of rediscovery of our spiritual being (Hopko, et al. God and Charity 5)

"The pure in heart see God everywhere, within their own nature and in everything that God has made. The pure in heart know that 'the whole earth is full of His glory' (Isaiah 6:3). The pure in heart are capable of seeing and believing, of believing and coming to know" (Hopko, et al. 6).

"The knowledge of God is given to those willing to know" (Hopko, et al. 7). Christ helps us put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the Creator (Colossians 2:3-10). The Orthodox writer, the Elder Silouan wrote, The Lord is not made known through learning, but by

the Holy Spirit. "Jesus Christ renews the nature of man by sanctifying and sealing it with the spirit of God. It is by the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father and is sent into the world through the Son, that human beings come to know and exalt God" (Hopko, et al. 12).

Spiritual renewal is the process for growth and transformation into the image of God. We focus on the Trinity as we go up and down the spiritual ladder. As we move from Glory to Glory, we move closer to the image of God. This transformation is accomplished through divine grace, human freedom and the gift of the Holy Spirit given us at baptism, Chrismation and through the Father. The Holy Spirit is never lost to us. "The sacramental life -- 'The Life in Christ' -- is thus seen to be an unceasing struggle for the acquisition of that grace which must transfigure nature . . . . As we aspire to be united with God, the gift of grace shifts and varies according to the fluctuations of the infirmities of the human will" (Lossky 180). The climb upward on our spiritual ladder is sometimes shaky.

## **THE CHURCH**

"The Church of the living God exists on earth . . . ." It is a sacramental and Eucharistic community. "It is one Church, with the unity of God, holy with the thrice Holy Lord, catholic with the boundless fullness of His divine being and life, and apostolic with His own divine mission. It is eternal life, God's kingdom on earth, salvation itself" (Hopko, et al. 20). God invites us to ascend our spiritual ladder from Glory to Glory through His Church. The Liturgy is the process through which we learn about orthodox spirituality and renewal. The Church brings us into God's time, God's place, and God's presence. The Church gives us daily and yearly liturgical cycles in order to relate to God. The Church sets forth practices: "prayer, worship, fasting, attentiveness, struggle, temperance, confession of sins, participation in the sacramental life particularly the Eucharist" all leading us toward the transfigured life (Harakas 37). We grow whole in Christ within the cycles of the Church.

Christ and His Church are the answer to the crying needs of the world. We are the witness of this conviction through service, ministry and love. Our actions and energy demonstrate to the world how the needs of the world are satisfied by Christ and His Church "not in words and speech, but in deeds and in truth" (Hopko Fullness 72).

As members of the Body of Christ, our participation in the Church is communal because the Triune God is present in the community through the Holy Spirit. We the Body have renewed the seal of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) and are taught in the spirit (1 Corinthians 2:3).

Our absolute, unique human person is guaranteed and perfected through communal existence with others. We become more and more ourselves as we become more and more an incomparable and externally valuable member of the community which is the Body of Christ (Meyendorff, Living Tradition 184). True community is achieved only by the abandonment of self to love for others. A person discovers himself and others by forsaking his or her self and by living for others, with others, and even "in" others, with compassionate, co-suffering love. We are whole in community. We are closer to the image of God in community. Our world needs this understanding.

### **Authority in the Church**

The Body of Christ is directed by the authority of Christ who teaches us to follow His commandments through love (Matthew 22:35-40). Because the living presence of the risen Christ is in our midst, there is no authority over the community. Christ and the community are identified together. Authority in the

Orthodox Church is established and confirmed at Pentecost by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the apostolic witnesses to the historical events of the life of Jesus. The community, the Body, preserved the apostolic message in its original purity and continues the missionary and pastoral ministry with the Bishops.

In the Church everything occurs within the sacramental framework of the Eucharistic assembly whose president, the Bishop, is an image of the Lord and is called to express the will of God. The Bishop expresses the nature of the community. The continuity of the episcopal office in each community preserves the message of the apostles (Meyendorff, Living Tradition 32).

The Bishop's ministry is to be in charge of defining the historical continuity and consistency of the Christian Gospel and tradition. He defines the unity of the faith and sacramental communion. Only he has the full authority and power to speak in the name of the Body. The Body speaks through the Bishop. The Bishop never speaks for himself, he speaks in the name of the Church.

Christ through Apostolic Succession gives the Bishop the full power to teach, to witness the catholic experience of the Body of the Church. The Bishop of the Church is a teacher.

But the whole Body is the Guardian of the Church. (Therefore the "royal priesthood," laypersons, also have a role and responsibility for judging the teachings of the Bishop.) The spirit makes the community the Body of Christ. Inside the Body, God not only speaks to us, but He also makes us speak out His will. Baptized members of the Body are participants in God within the Church and are to freely and responsibly participate in the life of the Church. The teaching of the Bishop finds its limits in the expression of the whole Church (Florovsky 1:54). The Church is called to witness this experience, which is a spiritual vision.

The clergy, laity and hierarchy have different functions and gifts within the Church. They are the gifts within the Church. They are the gifts of the same Spirit given for the glory and unity of the Church. The ecclesiastical conscience includes the clergy, laity and hierarchy. The Church works in a conciliarly way.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

The purpose of religious education is to impart upon the laity, clergy and hierarchy the truths, continuity, unity and patterns of our faith, so that we can grow in the Image of God. Religious education helps us grow in His Image by developing our sensitivities to receive God's love, to be open to His self-manifestation and revelation which strengthens our faith. Through faith and religious education we learn how to pray, to be obedient to God's way and to have integrity. With these elements in hand, we can actively serve our fellow human beings and overcome evil. Clergy, laity and hierarchy are truly servants of the Lord.

The first conclusion of the commission for an Archdiocesan Theological Agenda states, "We must focus resources and attention upon the developing of a spiritually formed membership. This means much more attention to all aspects of Church life as it touches personal, ecclesial and outreach dimensions of our existence. It means priority attention to education and spiritual formation on all levels" ("Commission" 34:3:305). The laity must insist that these task force conclusions be implemented. Spiritual renewal is why the Church exists. In order to cope with the secular world forces around us it is

imperative that the Archdiocese make its priority "Extending the Benefit of Theological Education Beyond the Ordained Ministry to the People of God" (Harakas, qtd.in Patsavos).

### **What Do We Think About Spiritual Renewal In Our Time And Place?**

In order to connect with and understand what other brothers and sisters think about Orthodox Spiritual Renewal, a questionnaire on the topic was prepared and mailed to a select group of 300 Orthodox Christians. A questionnaire enables one to see consensus and involves others in the process, which is a conciliar approach and within the tradition of the Church. It also enables us to see how those of us living in the United States today, in the two thousand year old tradition of the Church, fit into the context of the Church's understanding of Spiritual Renewal, which is outlined in the first half of this discussion.

A response rate of 10-15% to a questionnaire is considered good. Our response rate was 35%! The quality of responses and vigilant consideration given to each answer is a witness to the Holy Spirit working with the Orthodox church. Two responses are reprinted in their entirety with the approval of the authors. These two, in particular, capture what the others were saying, but these authors chose to be more complete in their responses. They represent the discernment used by all the other respondents. Thank you to all who responded!

### **Overview of Results**

A few generalizations gleaned from the responses are presented.

The responses came from all geographic areas of the United States: Oregon, California, Illinois, Wisconsin, Maryland, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, Florida, Texas, Utah, District of Columbia, and other states too.

Three percent (3%) of the respondents were clergy.

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the respondents demonstrated an understanding of Spiritual Renewal in the tradition of the teachings of the Church. A representative sample of the meaning of Spiritual Renewal follows:

Spiritual Renewal Means:

- "[A] rebirth of love for Christ and our Orthodox Christian faith in the hearts and minds of all our people, clergy and laity"
- "[C]ontinued growth to attain "Theosis" through the Church, which is the vehicle"
- "Christ-centered contemplation"
- "[B]ut we all . . . are being transformed (renewed) . . . by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18). A personal experience/relationship with God's Holy Spirit, bringing Spiritual Renewal."

- "Thy will be done . . . for me personally it was similar to the story of the prodigal Son's repentance when He returned to His Father"
- "[O]ffering our people incentives and stimulation to re-evaluate their commitment to our Church and to Christ"
- "[A]ctive participation in the full sacramental life of the Church. For the baptized Orthodox Christian, this means full participation in Holy Confession, Holy Communion and an active personal prayer life. The motive for the Christian would be just one - Jesus commanded this and I believe and love Him."
- "[L]earning to live more fully with Christ at the center of life and family"

### **Consensus on Education and Involvement**

The questionnaire revealed an overwhelming consensus on two points:

1. Eighty-five percent (85%) believe that lifelong education in our Church should be the number one priority for clergy, laity and hierarchy. Spiritual Renewal is directly related to religious education. At the end of the twentieth century, Orthodox Christians in the United States still have an insatiable natural urge to acquire spiritual knowledge as Gregory Palamas taught.

### **Education**

- "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).
- "Seminarians are to receive full, complete thorough Theological training in addition to a well-rounded education of secular studies" (The library at Holy Cross needs to be the concern of all of us who care about the Church).
- "Train our priests in a legitimate seminary with Orthodox views with the intent to be priests rather than academicians and/or businessmen."
- "Some Bishops are very strong in their personal views". (Bishops speak for the Church. They should not speak personally.)
- "Educate the laity and serve them . . . ." Do not be "arrogant and try to dictate to them."
- "The hierarchy seems to have lost touch with the individual Church member."
- "Priests need continuing education."
- "Educate converts"
- "Teaching all the things that Jesus taught, in English." (40% of the respondents volunteered that the use of English is an educational issue and essential to Spiritual Renewal. "You can not be

spiritually involved in services you cannot understand.")

- "The people need to hear more than the 52 Gospels and 52 Epistles repeated century after century."
- "The laity have a responsibility to learn their faith, practice their beliefs and support parish programs that promote Spiritual Renewal, through Bible studies, charity work, etc. Their role is to their Church more than a Greek social club."
- "Teach Christ above human categories (language, ethnicity, culture, etc.)"
- "[T]o educate the laity about the Theology and traditions of the faith."
- "Adult education should be stressed because it helps us clarify the beliefs that lead us to Spiritual Renewal."
- "We should encourage writers to prepare Orthodox literature." (utilize and pay retired clergy to translate sacred texts into English) "This encouragement includes both the purchase of literature by Churches and grants for new literature."
- "[E]ncourage women Orthodox writers since there is a lack of this type of literature."
- "Religious literature should be easily available and cover a wide range of subjects."
- "[W]orkshops for parish council members so they can be Church leaders."
- "Organize study/seminars to train lay teachers."
- "The role of the laity is to avail themselves of . . . opportunities to learn and worship and develop a personal prayer life."

### **Involvement - Shared Ministry**

- "Laity have an equal claim in the Holy Spirit."
- "Laity want to share in full responsibilities in the life of the Church at all levels."
- "We have one master, Jesus Christ. All others must serve in unity, compassion and understanding to renew a faltering Church."
- "Expressing a genuine concern for each other and our feelings in the name of Christ."
- "We cannot assume that everyone shares the same concept of what ministry is. Therefore, a clear and concrete definition has to be established before we enter into the idea of syndiakonia/ shared ministry. Ministry needs to be defined in generalized terms so that all of God's People

can be part of it. I suggest that ministry is the concrete and constructive expression of Christ when two or more people gather in His name. I believe the real issue is developing ministry, rather than education."

### **Liturgical Involvement**

- "Meaningful, active participation in the full sacramental life of the Church . . . ."
- "Liturgical participation - laity need to learn and be encouraged to participate in the Liturgy - to me, this means less reliance on formal choirs and more emphasis on simply sung responses by the entire congregation. The difference in feeling the liturgy or just being a spectator is tremendous."
- "Parishes should be instructed by clergy to sing the responses in the liturgy. Passive sitting and watching a performance should be eliminated from Orthodox Churches."
- "Women should be allowed to chant." (Young women should serve in altar and be lay readers.)
- "Clergy should share the ministry."
- "Laity need to take on ministries."

### **Community Involvement**

- "Develop strong outreach programs that get parishioners involved in helping others, thereby giving them a chance to practice what their religion preaches."
- "Reach out into the peripheries of our congregations to bring people in, and together to make them feel a part of the whole . . . ." "More participation in the community outside the Church."
- "Act jointly in support of member needs and problems."

### **Administration**

- "[S]taffing of parishes - we need paid staff to meet the needs of the community. One person can't do everything."
- "Participation of professional and volunteers in parish life."
- "First we need administrative renewal. We have a crisis of leadership. Bishops must be elected by the people, clergy and laity . . . from the most qualified candidates, celibate or married." (Laity need to participate in election of archbishop and participate in synods and councils.)
- "[N]ew church leadership, to set the tone."

- "[A]dministration is not elected . . . it does not rotate (stagnation). Money is the primary reason for appointment."
- "Real legislative authority for clergy-laity conferences. Greater lay input in the selection of archdiocesan council members."
- "Presently only one voice is heard - no chance of many voices contributing to make the one."
- "Hierarchy is now dominating with advice only from an appointed cadre . . . if all are the Body of Christ, the ultimate authority is the people. The historic Church is conciliar - all working harmoniously together for the Glory of God." (Seventy-five percent (75%) believe the Church administration from parish, diocese, archdiocese needs to use conciliar approaches.)
- "Providing honest information to all concerned about Church matters . . . honesty is a spiritual matter."
- "Establish an American Orthodox Church on conciliar basis with a clear commitment to renewal . . . empower parish clergy and laity to act."

## **Summary**

The OCL survey shows that there is overwhelming agreement on the part of the laity concerning what the priorities of the Church should be:

1. Lifelong religious education should be the first priority;
2. Reinvolving the laity in the Church - sharing the ministry should be the second priority.

OCL will use its resources to make these priorities a reality in the Orthodox Church of the Twenty-First Century!

## **Response to Questionnaire**

from Nancy C. McNeil - Waco, Texas

Nancy is a full-time mother. She has been an art teacher and graphic artist. She sings in her Church choir.

1. I received this questionnaire on Holy Wednesday - an appropriate time to reflect on spiritual renewal. I pray that I will be spiritually and physically renewed this evening as I participate in the Holy Unction. I believe that I am spiritually renewed each time I prepare and receive Holy Eucharist. I think that on a personal level spiritual renewal is an ongoing discipline involving prayer, education and participation.

For the church as a whole, the concept of spiritual renewal takes on a corporate view of this set of disciplines. It involves the Christian community actively renewing its life in Christ or the

living faith. The Church should be involved in providing guidance and education for living one's faith and activities in which to participate in the life of Christ. It must also engender a spirit of participation.

In talking about spiritual renewal of the Church, I also include spiritual renewal of the clergy and hierarchy both on an individual and corporate level.

1. My list seems to focus more on elements of the Church that need to be reviewed rather than just renewed.

First and foremost, I see a great need for more and better education of our laity - and some priests. In many places, the need exists for basic education e.g., reading and using the Bible, understanding the Liturgy and other services of the Church, understanding the Sacraments of the Church. In all places we need to make available the wonderful resources of the Orthodox faith. It was through my non-Orthodox husband that I was introduced to the Philokalia! What an incredible source of spiritual guidance. Through the book store run by the Y.A.L. in Houston I came to know Mother Maria of Normandy and Father Schmemmann. On a Y.A.L. retreat I was introduced to the work of Father Florovsky. All parishes need access to this type of material whether by library, exchange library, book store, classes, etc.

Secondly, I think we need to review some of the social activities within the Church. I have a hard time sensing spiritual community when I see things like trips to horse races, casino nights, etc. advertised by different groups in the Church bulletin. In fact the plethora of raffles in the church these days bothers me. I do not mind groups loosely associated with the Church community doing these activities e.g., AHEPA, Daughters of Penelope. I do not believe they have a place at church or in Church publications. Likewise I don't think it is helpful when church organizations engage in activities that promote or allow excessive behaviors such as drunkenness (as at a Food Festival) or \$100 per plate dinners. I enjoy social events at church, yet I think they must be held within the context of living our faith and therefore they must attempt to be an outstanding example of, if you will, "good clean Christian fun!"

Finally, I see a need to renew or, in some instances, establish sources for spiritual enrichment. By this I mean retreats, Bible study groups, prayer groups/breakfasts, conferences. Annunciation Church in Houston holds an annual winter retreat for the women of the parish. They bring in a guest speaker and spend two nights and one full day in a retreat center. Here the participants have a wonderful opportunity to reflect on, learn more about, grow in and share their faith. I would propose that retreats of this type should be available to all parishioners, perhaps provided through cooperation and organization on a regional basis. Within each parish, I think that many opportunities should be available for spiritual growth and renewal. These could include Bible study groups, adult "Sunday School" classes, one day retreats, etc. On a larger scale each region of the U.S. has a choir federation and most of these, if not all, hold an annual conference. I would like to see these organizations raise the level of spiritual awareness within their conferences or organize retreats for their members.

In short, in almost every aspect of Church life there are elements that need to be reviewed and renewed.

2. Causing spiritual renewal is an interesting idea. As a group, as an institution, we can engender a desire for spiritual renewal, but I don't believe we can effectively cause spiritual renewal to happen. As I noted in my response to a preceding question, I think the corporate church needs to provide the instruments, activities, guidance to engender and aid personal spiritual renewal.

Father Florovsky speaks of the necessity and appropriateness of "fixed formularies of worship" in his article *The Worshipping Church*. I think what he has to say can apply to Church activities as a whole not merely the liturgical aspects. He states that it is "spiritually dangerous to neglect the 'books,' . . . . The settled formulae not only help to fix attention, but also feed the heart and mind of the worshippers. . . ." This is how the Church can "cause" spiritual renewal. By providing "food" for the hearts and minds of its members, the Church can "set the table" of spiritual renewal.

3. I think the laity has the greatest role and responsibility in the spiritual renewal of our church. Without each individual commitment to spiritual renewal, i.e. without individual participation in prayer, confession, communion, there is no renewal of the Church at large. I pass on the following in support of lay involvement and responsibility.

In talking about the mission of the Orthodox Church, Father Alexander Schmemmann calls for a "movement" of the laity to "fulfill the tasks that institutions alone cannot and must not fulfill." He further discusses the spiritual profile of this movement and notes that he sees it based upon three specific vows. This is what he says in elaboration:

Prayer: The first vow is to keep a certain well-defined spiritual discipline of life, and this means a rule of prayer: an effort to maintain a level of personal contact with God, what the Fathers call the 'inner memory of Him.' It is very fashionable today to discuss spirituality and to read books about it. But whatever the degree of our theoretical knowledge of spirituality, it must begin with a simple and humble decision, an effort, and - what is the most difficult - regularity. Nothing indeed is more dangerous than pseudo-spirituality whose unmistakable signs are self-righteousness, pride, readiness to measure other people's spirituality, and emotionalism.

What the world needs now is a generation of men and women not only speaking about Christianity, but living it.

Father Schmemmann's second vow is obedience, which he sees as the antithesis of hysterical individualism. Finally, the third vow of the lay movement should be acceptance or accepting precisely what God wants us to do. He notes that "It is very significant that ascetic literature is full of warnings against changing places, against leaving monasteries for other and 'better' ones, against the spirit of unrest, that constant search for the best external conditions."

Father Schmemmann then discusses the goals of this lay movement and he states,

The first goal would be to help people . . . to experience and to live their Orthodox faith. We all know there exists today a real discrepancy between the Orthodox ideal of the Church . . . of liturgical life - and reality. There must be a place, a situation, where this ideal can be tasted, experienced, lived, be it only partially and imperfectly. Here the experience of other Orthodox movements is conclusive. It is because their members experienced - at their conferences,

retreats, study groups - the joy and the meaning of Church life that they could witness to it and call to the Church "at large."

4. I see the role of the clergy and hierarchy as empowerers, assistants, guides and examples.
5. a. As I have previously noted, I see the laity's role and responsibility in spiritual renewal as most important. Therefore, they need to be able to work in conjunction with and in harmony with the clergy and hierarchy. Without involvement of all three entities - laity, clergy and hierarchy - I don't believe a true and complete spiritual renewal of the Church can be achieved.  
  
b. When, within a monarchical administration, there is only direction from the top down and there is no inclusion of all entities within administrative functioning, then the model doesn't seem to work. In parishes where the laity seek all solutions and answers from the priest or other hierarchy, there seems to be a rather lifeless sense of community as opposed to those parishes where the laity take an active role in problem solving and resolution making.

(How would you restructure the Church to encourage Spiritual Renewal?)

1. I am not sure of my answer here. I think I see not so much a need for restructuring as a need for reinvolvement. My problem here is that I am not particularly well-versed in the "structure" of the church. My response comes from having seen parishes within the present structure that can and do encourage spiritual renewal while others seem to lie spiritually comatose. So my question becomes what is it that makes some parishes "work" spiritually while others do not? My experience seems to dictate that it is not the structure per se but the parish's particular view of the structure. And most importantly it is, again, the lay involvement in the "structure."

### **Response to Questionnaire:**

Joint effort of Albert Alexander and Dr. Susan Alexander.

Albert and Susan coordinated the Feeding the Hungry Program at St. George Greek Orthodox Church, Bethesda Maryland. Albert is a career civil servant. He is a foreign trade specialist at the International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. Susan is a professor of sociology and is presently writing a book on attitudes in the popular press concerning immigrants and immigration.

1. Spiritual renewal means commitment to actions which strengthen and emphasize the primary role of the church as an instrument of religion and spirituality. While strong fellowship among parishioners is desirable and should be encouraged, fellowship should stem primarily from bonds of common religious belief. The Church should not be misused as a vehicle for maintaining ethnicity or as a locus for social activities to the extent that it overwhelms and distorts the Church's dominant spiritual character.
2. Most parishes include elements of Church life that (1) provide activities for men, women, young adults, and teenagers; (2) administration and finance (Parish Council and supporting committees); (3) education (Sunday School, discussion groups, Bible study, etc.) Too often these elements are focused primarily on the business affairs of the parish (fund raising, building and maintenance) or activities that are purely social or ethnic in character. Such activities are

important and necessary but they should not be allowed to be the core of parish life.

To attain the full meaning of Church life, all parish activities should aim to encourage regular attendance (and participation) at the Divine Liturgy and other religious services, community/charitable service to the community at large both within and outside the Orthodox community, and increased efforts to spread knowledge and understanding of the Orthodox Christian faith to the non-Orthodox.

3. (3-8) With regard to structure, roles and responsibilities, I would like to offer some general observations.

Both the laity and the clergy (including the hierarchy) have roles to play in the spiritual renewal to the Church. I do not have an opinion on what structure works best but an essential ingredient in any successful organizational relationship is that the participants have democratic opportunity to express opinions and views and that the organization has the flexibility to change when it is clear that the majority desire change and it would be of benefit. There must be opportunity for dialogue and the structure must be responsive to the views of the individuals and groups that make up the Church. I am not well-informed enough to judge what that structure should be.

Spiritual renewal is best achieved through "grass roots" and spiritual renewal of each individual Orthodox Christian. Currently, there is a good deal of holiness in the Church. But its potential for being a greater spiritual force is hindered by the tendency of traditional, born-in-the-faith Orthodox to regard the Church as a closed club for ethnically-correct persons who make a nominal appearance at Christmas and Easter.

The surest way to cause and achieve a spiritual renewal in the Church as a whole is for each individual to live his/her Orthodox Christian faith in a manner that sets an example that others cannot resist following. We cannot reform a body unless the individual members of that body reform themselves first. The most efficient organization is empty if it is not at base true to its ideals and is made up of persons who gain the respect of others and thereby influence others far beyond their numbers. This is what I perceive what OCL is attempting to do.

## CONCLUSION

### **OCL and Commission: Archdiocesan Theological Agenda**

The "Committee on Spiritual Renewal, Decisions of the 22nd Clergy - Laity Congress, Chicago, Illinois, June 30 - July 7, 1974" left us a list of recommendations for renewal. The recommendations were not implemented as policy. The insights and findings of the commission titled "Archdiocesan Theological Agenda," published in 1989 in the Greek Orthodox Theological Review, are excellent. Why did it take so long to circulate this study to the Body of the Church? Could it be that the Orthodox Observer decided to print the study, Winter, 1991, because OCL has raised similar issues? Nevertheless, the laity need to become familiar with the findings of the Commission so that clergy, laity and hierarchy can work together for their implementation.

Orthodox Christian Laity supports the study as a blueprint for Spiritual Renewal and reordering

priorities within the Orthodox Church. OCL has advocated these priorities since its founding in 1988 and the enclosed survey also reinforces the commission study. The challenge is how can we work together to translate these insights and truths into Church policy? If we don't work together, the findings will go the way of the Orthodox-Catholic Commission on Marriage - nowhere!

We reprint the Commission's conclusion because our survey demonstrates there is a consensus on priorities. We have a take-off point for entering the Twenty-First Century. It should be noted that the OCL survey reinforces the commission's first priority, i.e. implementing syndiakonia.

- "Our survival and growth as a Church depends on lifting up four major concerns and opportunities for future policy direction."
- "First, we must focus resources and attention upon the developing of a spiritually formed membership. This means much more attention to all aspects of Church life as it touches personal, ecclesial, and outreach dimensions of our existence. It means priority attention to education and spiritual formation on all levels." The OCL task force reinforces this conclusion and it is our number one priority along with redefining the role of the laity in the life of the Church.
- "Secondly, we must focus resources and attention upon the parish, the focus of the religious, cultural and spiritual life of our Church. Vigorous, informed, participatory parish life is a key to the future of the Church."
- "Thirdly, the leadership of our Church especially the hierarchy and the presbyters, need to find ways to understand their roles in ways which focus resources and attention on the conciliar understanding of the life of the Body of Christ, and to emphasize their facilitative role in building up the people of God. Inevitably this will demand changes in role expectations in regard to the laity and lead to increased concern with Pan-Orthodox cooperation and unity." This is the second priority of OCL based on the enclosed survey information.

Finally, an honest assessment of our number and the realities of inter-marriage demand serious reflection and reorientation of basic assumptions about our identity and the future course of our Archdiocese. A firm, clear and unequivocal acceptance of the social realities in which we live need not mean an abandonment of our ethnic heritage, but like many other ethnic groups in America, it will be preserved only within the framework of a larger commitment to the Orthodox Christian faith (Review 34:305-06).

### **CALL TO ACTION: IMPLEMENTING PRIORITIES**

The OCL task force on Spiritual Renewal concludes with a call to action! The laity can help restore Orthodox tradition and vitality by getting reinvolved and working to implement the priorities outlined in the task force studies. Our grandparents were involved. They established the Church in this country before there was a Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. They struggled, uprooted from their homeland and families, overcoming material obstacles, to establish the faith here. Three generations later in our overwhelming affluence the Church has been reduced to a social club and lobby of disjointed interests - more secular than spiritual - under the direction of the Archdiocese. This state of affairs is the result of

inadequate religious education and misguided priorities.

The Church will once again become a vital spiritual force in the United States of America when the laity re-establish the harmony of shared ministry in the Church as expressed by respondents from the questionnaire.

- "Pray to God continuously for renewal. Begin with oneself - true repentance. Witness the Orthodox way of life with love and humility."
- "The distorted notion of separation between clergy and laity must be completely rejected."
- "Renewal process will never occur as long as the laity are left out of the process as is now the case."

### **PRIORITIES RECOMMENDED**

By Spiritual Renewal Task Force:

1. A properly educated clergy is fundamental to the life of the Church. Seminarians must receive a thorough theological training coupled with a well-rounded program of secular studies. Regular programs of continuing education must be required of all clergy.
2. The laity have an equal responsibility to learn their faith, practice their beliefs and support programs in their parishes for Spiritual Renewal, including study groups, organized retreats, and charity work.
3. The Holy Cross Seminary and in particular its library and publishing activities must become a high priority of the Archdiocese in commitment of resources and attention. The school must be held to the highest academic standards of comparable American colleges and universities.
4. Holy Cross Seminary should organize extension programs and continuing education programs to facilitate both continuing education for clergy and lay education. The seminary should seek formal academic accreditation of these programs.
5. Formal education programs should be established to welcome and educate converts into the Orthodox faith.
6. The seminary and the Archdiocese should encourage active scholarship in Orthodoxy in the seminary, but also in non-Orthodox universities. Foundations and private donors should be encouraged to fund such scholarship.
7. Special efforts must be made to encourage scholarship by and about women in the Orthodox Church.
8. There should be organized training and educational programs for the orientation of Parish Council members.

9. The laity should be encouraged to take an active role in the liturgical life of the community rather than be passive observers of the liturgy. The parish should be encouraged to sing the responses in the liturgy.
10. The use of English in the liturgy and in instruction is necessary for the spiritual growth of the community.
11. There needs to be special emphasis on the spiritual growth of persons in mixed marriages and of their children.