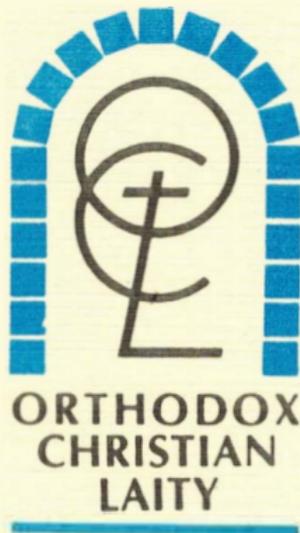


TRANSITION, RENEWAL:

ONE FAITH, ONE CHURCH

by

Bishop Iacovos of Catania:
Locum-Tenens, Greek Orthodox
Diocese of Atlanta



Inaugural Edition

Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL)
Occasional Papers Series, No.1, 1997

Dedication

*This first occasional paper is dedicated to the memory of
ESTELLE KANAKIS, OCL Executive Secretary,
who passed away on July 15, 1996.
She touched our lives through a lifetime of humility,
service and love. May her memory be eternal.*

Inaugural Edition Orthodox Christian Laity Occasional Papers

In celebration of the 10th anniversary (1987-1997) of the establishment of Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) the Board of Directors is happy to expand its educational ministry to include the publication of a series of Occasional Papers. The Executive Board thanks Alice O. Kopan for editing and organizing the format of the series.

*The first paper is "Transition, Renewal: One Faith, One Church," the theme of the 9th Annual OCL Meeting, delivered as the keynote address by His Grace Bishop Iakovos of Catania to the participants at Sarasota, Florida, October 13, 1996. It is appropriate that this be the first paper in the OCL series because it is an in depth discussion of spiritual renewal of our church and ourselves. OCL's mission is to call upon clergy, laity, and hierarchy to work together in synergy with the Holy Spirit to bring about spiritual renewal within the Church. An achievement of our first ten years is **Project for Orthodox Renewal**, published by Light & Life Press, 1993.*

His Grace delivered three lectures during the October 11-13 weekend. In addition to the keynote he discussed the Nature of Christ and the Nature of the Church. We reprint the keynote so you too can appreciate the profound love and intelligence of Bishop Iakovos. He truly is a teacher in the tradition of the Church Fathers. May God Grant Him Many Years!

**George Matsoukas
OCL President**

"Transition, Renewal: One Faith, One Church"

*Bishop Iacovos of Catania: Locum-Tenens, Greek
Orthodox Diocese of Atlanta*

*Keynote Speaker: 9th Annual Meeting, Orthodox
Christian Laity*

Sarasota, Florida - October 13, 1996

It is in Christian love that I welcome you today. The Bible tells us that "GOD IS LOVE" (1 John 4:8). Jesus told us to love one another, even as He has loved us (John 15:12). The Bible never undertakes to define this love, but it demonstrates it in a language too deep for words. So, I shall not discourse about love but try to display it as I take you into my heart.

Christians today are looking and searching for a new world. A world that will fulfill all dreams. A world motivated by transition and guided by a spirit within. A world founded on the principles of spiritual uplift and personal acknowledgment. A world that will bring them closer to the Lord. A world that will erase evil desires and reject personal failures.

It will be a world unknown and unseen by the naked eye in our day. This kind of world will be our dream fulfilled.

Today, we find ourselves in a strange and difficult world, full of peril and anxiety. In this world you and all faithful Christians know Christ and believe in him, and we cannot forget what Christ has done for us in our own lives. On the basis of this knowledge and faith we seek to understand and adjust to the terrible questions and uncertainties of the times. Our Lord knows it is unworthy of us as Christians to bewail our fate and to exaggerate the challenges before us. The unprecedented difficulties and tremendous challenges we face do not lessen God's love towards us; nor has God singled out today's Christian for a special trial beyond his power to bear or to overcome. Easily, a true believing Christian remembers what Paul told the Corinthians and he understands it to be meant exactly for him: "God is faithful, and he

will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way, that you may be able to endure it" (Cor. 10:13). Every age has its own problems, its own burdens and complexities; and throughout the ages man is fundamentally the same, able to know the rest in the truth or to rebel; and the devil is precisely the same old wily adversary; and of course "Jesus Christ is the yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

But if man and the devil and Christ are the same in every age, still every man lives in his own age and in no other. We have this one life to live, a life which is absolutely unique and absolutely our own. Ours is not the decaying Athenian world which Socrates refused to adjust to at the cost of his life; nor is it the Roman world at the peak of its splendor which Paul had to contend with and utilize in the service of the gospel, nor is it the Hellenistic world at Antioch to which Chrysostom preached his golden sermons. We do not live in any of these worlds, although our indebtedness to the scholars who live in them in thought and lovingly re-create them for us is incalculable. But even the scholars see and interpret the past from the only vantage point accessible to them, namely from that of this 20th century world to which they and we belong. Today, everyone must work out his or her own destiny, meet their own fate, carry their own burden, come to terms with themselves and with God, from inside the unique world into which he or she has been set. This will require a new transition renewal within the spirit of the individual.

What, then, is the burden of this Christian today, you the Christian who shares humanity with Socrates and Paul--this same humanity over which the devil and Jesus Christ are engaged in eternal combat--and yet must carry on the warfare of the soul in the age where everyone is demanding the right to some place under the sun?

Now, before I endeavor to answer this question, I must say a word about the essence of the

Christian, for we are speaking of the burden not of the American or the Greek, but of you the Christian. We are assuming the existence of a distinct being called you--the Christian. The Christian is defined by a kind of love: the Christian loves Jesus Christ above everything else. This love is not an ordinary act of the will on his part, as for instance when he decided to read a book or take a trip abroad or visit a friend. The drawing of Christ's love is not something we conjure up ourselves. We love Jesus Christ only when we realize how much He loved us, and indeed loved us without first seeking or receiving our consent. Though our love of Jesus Christ is a pale reflection of His love for us, it is a love with deep roots motivated by the human spirit, and perhaps spirituality. Granting this love of Jesus Christ above everything else--and if it does not exist, then we are talking about something other than the Christian--the following appears to me to constitute the burden of all Christians today. Nothing that stirs us at the center of our lives is foreign to our minds. Where there is being, where there is decision, where there is change and renewal, where there is determination of events, there the Christian is, at least in interest and concern. For he knows that Jesus Christ has a will for all these matters.

The Christian in his renewal of faith must seek to know the facts, and this is not easy in our day, with so much hearsay, sentimentalism and prejudice; -- and he cannot be too wary against propaganda and falsehood. His duty is to seek the truth and his destiny is to find it and feed on it. The difference between the attitude of the Christian and that of so many others is that, whereas others may wish to transform the nature of things to suit their own purposes, you the Christian desire only to discover that nature so as to conform to it. This transition is more so one of yourself - will and power, and his attitude is more one of understanding and love. In your renewal of faith you must carry on the struggle with human-spirited strength knowing that our Lord is "THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE and that in Him is no darkness at all" (John 14:6).

Now, in our day, you the Christian is called upon to witness to your faith perhaps as never before, and to know the grace wherein you stand only when you are pierced in your heart by Christ's saying: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the Holy Angels" (Mark 8:38). This shame expresses itself nowadays in many strange and subtle ways.

As the new Christian of tomorrow you must generate within yourself a spiritual renewal defined as an ongoing effort to find the means whereby God's Grace can be revived through your spiritual discipline. His virtues and Christian values must be a solid foundation unshaken by foreign obstacles. To be fair, to be positive, to be thankful--you must acquire highly desirable Christian values and virtues if a new transition of your life is to have any sort of value. And of course, we will not be fair at all if, in trying to be fair to others, we cease to be fair to Christ, who was much more than just fair to us when He took our sins upon Himself on the cross.

You, as the now-day Christian Disciples, cannot possibly be thankful enough to all those throughout the ages who through their faithfulness have passed on the light of Christ from generation to generation until it finally shone upon their faces. This is why a voice in the wilderness keeps telling us that never let the light of Jesus Christ dim; let it continue to be handed down and replenished with power from above. This will be our renewal of faith as we build for the future. In essence, it will be the beginning of a new day, creating a new missionary movement spirited by our love in Jesus Christ. Yes, transition is the key word, and we must all turn ourselves with a renewed commitment of faith to witness for Christ.

While there is much that is good in our land, nothing better or deeper or more lasting has radiated than this mighty missionary witness in Jesus Christ. In our own quiet way, Orthodoxy

will place a greater role to awaken and enlighten many to Christ.

Allow me to quote from Holy Scripture (Book of Revelation 22:4) "...Glory, honor and peace shall be given to those who labor in His vineyard, who shall certainly see the Lamb, whose name shall be on their foreheads."

Witnessing to Christ, suffering for His name, passing on His light, mediating His salvation, building the household of God, preaching the Word to all mankind---this mission among all Orthodox Christians must become a full commitment in our quest for a new renewal of faith for the years ahead. It is urgent that we all awaken to this reality. It is urgent today to begin a movement to rediscover the wholeness of the Christian tradition.

Beyond every burden and care you have your own soul to worry about. Every day we see in our religious community many who are honest and upright. Many who work hard, and perhaps some may read the Bible. Many who mediate on the Holy Saints with profound prayer. Many who live an active life in the Holy Church, and are actively involved in the stirring spiritual movement of the day. But are all of these people the master of their own passions? How deeply do they know the living power of God in their daily lives--the power that is much more than the daimon of Socrates which only warns and forbids--the power that also directs and constitutes and provides? Are we at peace with ourselves? Are we totally true to Jesus Christ? How else can we hope for the forgiveness of God, of which we stand in desperate need? In reality, we cannot stand still in the future. We must achieve honest renewal and reconciliation and closeness to God through the mighty infusion of the Holy Spirit.

Now our present life is interesting; let no one belittle its duties and challenges. But all things will come to pass and with them life itself. What then is life eternal? This is the first and the last quest. And I am told and I believe that "this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3).

JESUS demands all of our life, every part of ours. He promises in return to transform us--to make us a new creature in Himself--to bestow upon us a life that is truly abundant now and throughout the ages to come. The choice is ours. The invitation stands. "COME FOLLOW ME."

Earlier, you entered into this room wholeheartedly. You have shared with me some ideas and thoughts on how to improve self spiritual transformation.

Now, as it is time for me to offer my appreciation, I do with a feeling of confidence that you will work to carry out the things we have learned. Thank you for a very special, inspiring visit, and God Bless You All.

About the Author:

HIS GRACE BISHOP IACOVOS OF CATANIA

His Grace Bishop Iacovos, Titular Bishop of Catania, was born in Megara of Attica, Greece, and was educated at the Universities of Athens, Greece and London, England, and the Universities of Fordham and Columbia in New York City. His fields of study included Theology, Philosophy, Comparative Religions, Byzantine and Church History. Following outstanding studies in New York City, He was awarded the "Master of Arts" (MA) Degree by Columbia University and the "Doctor of Philosophy" (Ph.D.) Degree by Fordham University.

Bishop Iacovos was ordained into the priesthood in Greece. He served in parishes in Athens and Kifisia, Greece, in London, England, and in New York City. While in New York City, he was elevated to Episcopacy by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and consecrated as Titular Bishop of Catania, an ancient Diocesan See in Sicily by His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos of North and South America and several other bishops.

His Grace Bishop Iacovos is a prolific writer. He has written and published a good number of books and numerous articles and special studies in professional journals and periodicals in Greece, Europe and the USA.

His Grace Bishop Iacovos was called upon by His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos to assume the leadership of the Holy Diocese of Atlanta, as Locum-Tenens, following the sudden falling asleep in the Lord on December 29, 1995, of His Grace Philip, the late Bishop of Atlanta. This appointment was put into effect on January 2, 1996.

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