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HOLY WISDOM-HOLY SOPHIA

СВЯТА ПРЕМУДРІСТЬ-СВЯТА СОФІЯ

СВЯТО-СОФІЇВСЬКА
УКРАЇНСЬКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА
БОГОСЛОВСЬКА СЕМІНАРІЯ

WINTER- ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-26
VOL. II - NO. 2



**HOLY WISDOM-HOLY SOPHIA
СВЯТА ПРЕМУДРІСТЬ-СВЯТА СОФІЯ**

WINTER - ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-26

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In the Eastern Orthodox Church, Christ is revered as the Incarnate Wisdom of God, a central truth that permeates our theology, liturgy, and spiritual life. The Holy Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers consistently reveal Christ as the Divine Logos, the eternal Word and Wisdom through whom all things were created and are sustained. St. Paul declares, Christ is “*the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.*” (1 Corinthians 1:24)

“*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His Glory, the Glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth.*” (John 1:1-3, 14) In the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, the Wisdom of God is not an abstract concept but a living reality. He is the perfect expression of God’s Will and Purpose, making visible the invisible and revealing the mysteries of Divine Life to humanity. This Divine Wisdom is manifest in His teachings, which offer a path to spiritual enlightenment and communion with God in the Holy Trinity, transcending mere intellectual knowledge.

The Orthodox Church sees Christ’s incarnation as the ultimate act of Divine Wisdom - God taking on human flesh to heal, sanctify, and restore creation. In Christ our Lord, Wisdom is not only a guide for moral and ethical living but is the very source of our salvation. The hymns and prayers of the Church often praise Christ as “Wisdom” (Sophia), calling the faithful to recognize and embrace Him as the True Light that enlightens every person who comes into the world. St. Athanasius of Alexandria: “*For the Son of God became man so that we might become God; He manifested Himself by means of*

a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father; He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality.” (On the Incarnation, 54:3)

Orthodox spirituality is deeply rooted in the understanding that to follow Christ is to partake in the Divine Wisdom. This is evident in the Church’s emphasis on THEOSIS, the process by which we are one with God and transformed into His likeness. Through participation in the sacramental life of the Church, especially in the Eucharist, the faithful are invited to partake of the Divine Wisdom, which leads them from darkness to Light, from ignorance to understanding, and from death to Life. THEOSIS is the ultimate goal for each of our lives.

In the Divine Liturgy, the proclamation of “Wisdom! Let us attend!” calls the faithful to open their hearts and minds to Christ, who is both the source and fullness of all Wisdom. It is a call to live in accordance with the Divine Wisdom that leads to true Life, Peace, and Union with God.

As most aptly explained in the writings of St. Gregory Palamas, in our Eastern Orthodox comprehension, *“Christ as Wisdom is the Eternal and Uncreated Light that illuminates our path to God, guiding us through the complexities of life and leading us into the fullness of Divine Love and Truth”*...and to THEOSIS.

We have chosen to identify our Quarterly as: HOLY WISDOM – HOLY SOPHIA and we pray that the words that fill its pages in each issue will serve to emphasize the thought of St. Maximus the Confessor: *“The Word of God, who became incarnate in the fullness of time, revealed Himself as the Divine Wisdom that had been hidden in mystery from the foundation of the world. Through Christ, this Wisdom is made manifest and draws all creation back to the Father.”* May those words serve, indeed, to truly draw all who read them “back to the Father”.

We look forward to lively interaction with our readers and we pray that all our conversations, correspondence and contributions will reflect the GRACE of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the LOVE of God the Father and the COMMUNION of the Holy Spirit.

PEACE BE WITH US ALL...

The Editorial Team

У Східній Православній Церкві Христос вшановується як Втілена Божка Премудрість, центральна істина, яка пронизує наше богослів'я, літургію та духовне життя. Святе Письмо та писання Отців Церкви послідовно розкривають Христа як Божественний Логос, вічне Слово і Премудрість, через Яку все було створено і підтримується. Св. Павло проголошує, що Христос є «Божа Сила і Божка Премудрість». (1 Коринтян 1:24)

«Споконвіку було Слово, а Слово в Бога було, і Бог було Слово. Воно в Бога було споконвіку. Усе через Нього повстало, і ніщо, що повстало, не повстало без Нього. ...І Слово сталося тілом, і перебувало між нами, повне благодаті та правди, і ми бачили славу Його, славу як Однородженого від Отця.» (Івана 1:1-3, 14) В особі Ісуса Христа, нашого Господа, Премудрість Бога не є абстрактним поняттям, а живою реальністю. Він є досконалим вираженням Божої Волі та Призначення, робить видимим невидиме та відкриває людству таємниці Божественного життя. Ця Божественна Премудрість проявляється в Його вченнях, які стелять шлях до духовного просвітлення та спілкування з Богом у Святій Трійці, виходячи за межі простих інтелектуальних знань.

Православна Церква вбачає втілення Христа як найвищий акт Божественної Премудрості – Бог приймає людську плоть, щоб зцілити, освятити та відновити творіння. У Христі, нашому Господі, Премудрість є не лише дороговказом для морального та етичного життя, але й самим джерелом нашого спасіння. Піснеспіви та молитви Церкви часто оспівують Христа як «Премудрість» (Софію), закликаючи вірних пізнати і прийняти Його як Правдиве Світло, що просвічує кожну людину, яка приходить у світ. Св. Афанасій Олександрійський: «Бо Син Божий став людиною, щоб ми стали Богом; Він явив Себе через тіло, щоб ми могли сприйняти Розум невидимого Батька; Він терпів ганьбу від людей, щоб ми могли успадкувати безсмертя». (Про Втілення, 54:3)

Православна духовність глибоко вкорінена в твердженні того, що слідувати за Христом означає бути причетним до Божественної Премудрості. Це очевидно в тому, що Церква

наголошує на ТЕОЗІСІ (Обоженні), процесі, завдяки якому ми є єдиними з Богом і перетворюємося на Його подобу. Через участь у сакраментальному житті Церкви, особливо в Євхаристії, вірні покликані до участі в Божественній Премудрості, яка веде їх від темряви до Світла, від невігластва до розуміння і від смерті до Життя. ТЕОЗІС – це кінцева мета кожного з нас у житті.

У Божественній Літургії виголос «Премудрість! Будьмо уважні!» закликає вірних відкрити свої серця та розум для Христа, Який є джерелом і повнотою всієї Премудрості. Це заклик жити згідно з Божественною Премудростю, яка веде до правдивого Життя, Миру та Єдності з Богом.

Як найвлучніше пояснено у творах святого Григорія Палами, у нашому східно-православному розумінні «Христос як Премудрість є Вічне і Нетварне Світло, яке освітлює наш шлях до Бога, ведучи нас через складності життя і ведучи до повноти Божественної Любові і Правди»... та до ТЕОЗІСУ (Обоження).

Ми вирішили назвати наш Щоквартальний випуск: СВЯТА ПРЕМУДРІСТЬ – СВЯТА СОФІЯ і молимося, щоб слова, якими наповнюватимуться сторінки кожного випуску, підкреслювали думку св. Максима Сповідника: «Слово Боже, яке втілилося в повноті часу, об'явилося як Божественна Премудрість, Яка була прихована в таємниці від заснування світу. Через Христа ця Премудрість проявляється і повертає все створіння назад до Отця». Нехай ці слова й дійсно, по-справжньому навернуть усіх, хто їх читає, «назад до Отця».

Ми з нетерпінням чекаємо живої взаємодії з нашими читачами та молимося, щоб все наше спілкування, листування та увесь вклад у ці щоквартальні випуски відображали БЛАГОДАТЬ нашого Господа і Спасителя Ісуса Христа, ЛЮБОВ Бога Отця і ПРИЧАСТЯ Святого Духа.

МИР З УСІМА НАМИ...

Редакція



MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR: FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD, TOWARD A SOCIAL ETHOS FOR THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

GAYLE WOŁOSCHAK, *Editor-in-Chief*

This issue of *Holy Wisdom! Holy Sophia* is devoted to the document *For the Life of the World*, a social ethos (ethics) written to relate Orthodox Christian perspectives on the problems of today's world. The full text in English and Ukrainian is available on our Seminary Website (<https://stsuots.edu>), and all Orthodox Christians should read it. It was written from a pastoral perspective with the typical parishioner in mind. I was part of the team that drafted the document *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, and as such, I think I can provide some context. Other members of the Commission who contributed to the document included: Fr. Deacon John Chryssavgis and Dr. David Bentley Hart as main editors; as contributing authors to different sections Dr. Carrie Frederick Frost, Rev. Dr. Brandon Gallaher, Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou, Rev. Dr. Nicolas Kazarian, Dr. George Demacopoulos, Rev. Dr. Perry Hamalis, Dr. James Skedros; contributing authors also included Dr. Konstantinos Delikostantis and Dr. Theodoros Yiagou. Fr. Nicholas Anton served as secretary for the group.

The document started as an effort after the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held on Crete in 2016. With a few exceptions, the delegates to the Council were hierarchs from Orthodox jurisdictions around the world. I participated in the Council press team appointed by the Ecumenical Patriarch, which was not part of the official delegation. However, members of the team had some input to some of the official documents that were a product of the Council including the documents on fasting, marriage, ecumenical relations, and others. Most of these documents had been prepared several years in advance; topics were limited because of the limited time available for the Council. As a result, many important topics were not brought up for discussion at the Council as a whole.

Following the Council, Fr. Deacon John Chryssavgis, upon the instruction of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, called together a group of scholars with a wide range of specialties with the goal of developing a contemporary social ethos document for the Orthodox Church. Another driver for our efforts was that the only social ethics

document that was available was one done by the Russian Orthodox Church, available on the web in English translation. Many people were using this document as a reflection of Orthodox ethical thought, and the statement had some errors in it as well as some concepts that were, perhaps, specific to the Russian Church but without broad applicability. It was important that an updated perspective be available.

Our process involved several in-person meetings as well as several Zoom meetings. A list of topics that we considered to be important (war, capital punishment, human trafficking, nationalism, health care, economic justice, environmental protection, and more) was developed. Teams of 2 or 3 people were assigned to each topic and were responsible for drafting those sections. Fr. John Chryssavgis and David Bentley Hart were charged with “smoothing” this information into a single coherent document and became the chief editors of the work. The document was sent out to eparchies of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for comments and then was formally submitted to the Holy and Sacred Synod which approved the document in 2020.

Since the approval of the document, now five years ago, there has been considerable discussion and dialogue associated with it: academic publications in Ecumenical Trends, Theology Today, a special issue of Studies in Christian Ethics and others. There have been conferences held on the document at Georgetown University, University of Chicago, and many others. In the Chicago Greek Orthodox parishes we had a virtual book club on the document with small teams led by many of its authors in an effort to bring the document into parish life. Courses on it have been offered at Lumen Christi Institute in Chicago and at Holy Cross Theological Seminary, among others. There have been numerous critiques and commentaries that have been productive and have stimulated significant discussion on topics of seminal importance. There are four frameworks that shape the document that readers should notice throughout: Liturgical focus; the Divine Image in each person; the human condition; and the example of Christ.

This issue of *Holy Wisdom - Holy Sophia* Includes papers from many of the authors of the document reflecting on its reception and perspectives now, five years since it was originally written (Drs. David Bentley Hart, Carrie Frederick Frost, George Demacopoulos, Jim Skedros, and Aristotle Papanikolaou). Dr. Lydiya Lozova was a translator of the document from English to Ukrainian and also wrote an article about her perspectives on the document. The issue also includes commentaries from Orthodox Christians who reflect

upon the document from the vantage point of those not involved in any way in its writing: an invitation to discernment by V. Rev. Fr. Anthony Perkins; a discussion by Dr. Dylan Pahman; and an accompanying commentary on Pahman's book about social ethical concerns for Orthodox by V. Rev. Fr. Gregory Jensen. We also have discussion reviews by two non-Orthodox Christian scholars given at the Society for Christian Ethics Conference in York, UK this past fall: Dr. John Berkman (Roman Catholic) and Dr. Elizabeth Phillips (Anglican), both scholars in the area of Christian ethics, and an accompanying commentary by the Orthodox scholar and member of the writing Commission for the social ethos document, Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou. Finally, we have an interview with His Grace Bishop Demetrios (Kantzavelos) of Mokissos whose book Grace Unbound reflects a living testimony to the FLOW document through his social work as an advocate, both in the Orthodox Church as well as the broad community, for HIV patients and against capital punishment.

It is our hope that this issue will stimulate Orthodox Christians to read FLOW, reflect upon it and upon the papers included in this issue, and contribute to continued discussion on this topic in the seminary, in parishes, in homes, and elsewhere.

In Christ's love,

Gayle Woloschak, Editor-in-Chief

Звернення редактора

«Заради життя світу: до соціального етосу Православної Церкви»

Гейл Волошак

Цей випуск Свята Премудрість (Holy Wisdom! Holy Sophia!) присвячений документу «Заради життя світу», соціальному етосу (етиці), написаному для того, щоб подати Православне Християнське бачення проблем сучасного світу. Повний текст англійською та українською мовами доступний на сайті нашої Семінарії (<https://stsuots.edu>), і всім Православним Християнам варто з ним ознайомитися. Документ написаний з пастирської перспективи, з урахуванням звичайного парафіяніна. Я був учасником команди, яка готувала документ «Заради життя світу: до соціального етосу Православної Церкви», і тому можу надати певний контекст. Серед інших членів Комісії, які долучилися до роботи над документом, були: протодиякон Джон Хриссавгіс та д-р Девід Бентлі Гарт як головні редактори; авторами окремих розділів стали д-р Керрі Фредерік Фрост,

о. д-р Брендон Галлахер, д-р Арістотель Папаніколау, о. д-р Ніколас Казарян, д-р Джордж Демакопулос, о. д-р Перрі Хамаліс, д-р Джеймс Скедрос; серед авторів-учасників також були д-р Константіос Делікостантіс та д-р Теодорос Янгу. О. Ніколас Антон виконував обов'язки секретаря групи.

Документ бере свій початок з ініціативи, що виникла після Святого і Великого Собору Православної Церкви, який відбувся на Криті у 2016 році. За кількома винятками, делегатами Собору були ієархи з Православних юрисдикцій усього світу. Я брав участь у прес-команді Собору, призначений Вселенським Патріархом, яка не входила до офіційної делегації. Водночас члени цієї команди мали певний вплив на деякі офіційні документи Собору, зокрема на документи про піст, шлюб, екуменічні відносини та інші. Більшість цих документів готувалися за кілька років до Собору; перелік тем був обмежений через нестачу часу. Унаслідок цього багато важливих питань не були винесені на загальне обговорення Собору.

Після Собору протодиякон Джон Хриссавгіс, за дорученням Вселенського Патріарха Варфоломія, зібрав групу науковців з широким спектром спеціалізацій із метою розробки сучасного документа з соціального етосу для Православної Церкви. Ще одним поштовхом до цієї роботи було те, що на той час єдиним доступним документом із соціальної етики був документ Російської Православної Церкви, оприлюднений в англійському перекладі в інтернеті. Багато хто використовував його як відображення Православної етичної думки, однак він містив певні помилки, а також концепції, можливо притаманні саме Російській Церкві і не завжди універсально застосовні. Тому було важливо представити оновлене бачення.

Наша робота включала кілька очних зустрічей, а також численні зустрічі в Zoom. Було сформовано перелік тем, які ми вважали важливими (війна, смертна кара, торгівля людьми, націоналізм, охорона здоров'я, економічна справедливість, захист довкілля та інші). Команди з двох-трьох осіб відповідали за підготовку відповідних розділів. О. Джон Хриссавгіс і Девід Бентлі Гарт мали завдання «згладити» цей матеріал і перетворити його на єдиний цілісний документ, ставши головними редакторами. Документ був надісланий до єпархій Вселенського Патріархату для поправок, а згодом офіційно поданий до Святого і Священного Синоду, який затвердив його у 2020 році.

Від часу затвердження документа, тобто за останні п'ять років, навколо нього відбулося багато обговорень і діалогів: академічні публікації в Ecumenical Trends, Theology Today,

спеціальний випуск *Studies in Christian Ethics* та інші. Конференції, присвячені документу, проходили в Джорджтаунському університеті, Чиказькому університеті та багатьох інших. У Грецьких Православних парафіях Чикаго ми організували віртуальний книжковий клуб із вивчення документа, з малими групами, які очолювали багато його авторів, з метою інтеграції документа в парафіяльнежиття. Курси, присвячені цьому документу, викладалися в Інституті *Lumen Christi* у Чикаго, в Богословській семінарії Святого Хреста та в інших навчальних закладах. З'явилися численні критичні відгуки й коментарі, які виявилися плідними та сприяли важливій дискусії з ключових питань. Читачам варто звернути увагу на чотири рамки, що формують документ і проходять крізь нього наскрізно: літургійна спрямованість; Божественний образ у кожній людині; людський стан; і приклад Христа.

Цей випуск Свята Премудрість (*Holy Wisdom - Holy Sophia*) містить статті багатьох авторів документа, які розмірковують про його сприйняття та сучасні перспективи через п'ять років після написання (д-ри Девід Бентлі Гарт, Керрі Фредерік Фрост, Джордж Демакопулос, Джим Скедрос та Арістотель Папаніколау). Д-р Лідія Лозова була перекладачкою документа з англійської на українську мову й також написала статтю про своє бачення цього тексту. До випуску також увійшли коментарі Православних Християн, які осмислюють документ з позиції тих, хто не брав участі в його написанні: запрошення до розудливості Прото. Антоній Перкінсом; дискусія д-ра Діланна Пахмана; а також супровідний коментар до книги Пахмана про соціально-етичні питання для Православних, написаний Прото. Григорій Дженсеном. Також подано рецензійні обговорення двох неортодоксальних Християнських науковців, представлені на конференції Товариства Християнської етики в Йорку (Велика Британія) минулого осені: д-ра Джона Беркмана (римсько-католицького богослова) та д-ра Елізабет Філліпс (англіканки), обох фахівців у сфері християнської етики, а також супровідний коментар Православного науковця і члена Комісії з підготовки соціального етосу д-ра Арістотеля Папаніколау. Нарешті, у випуску вміщено інтерв'ю з Його Преосвященством єпископом Димитрієм (Канцавелосом) Мокісським, чия книга *Grace Unbound* є живим свідченням втілення документа FLOW через його соціальне служіння як захисника прав ВІЛ-пацієнтів і противника смертної кари – як у Православній Церкві, так і в ширшій спільноті.

Ми сподіваємося, що цей випуск здохочотить православних християн прочитати документ FLOW, осмислити його та матеріали, представлені в цьому номері, і долучитися до подальшого обговорення цієї теми в семінаріях, парафіях, домівках та в інших середовищах.



OF THE TIMELESS AND THE TIMELY

DAVID BENTLEY HART

At the time of its appearance, *For the Life of the World* was in part a response to what could justly be described as a period of crisis within global Orthodoxy, though with a special emphasis perhaps on the situation of the Church in America. This is not to say that the document was not first and foremost an attempt to identify universal principles of social love and justice of a 'timeless' nature, implicit in Orthodox tradition from the earliest centuries, but from the perspective and in the idiom of the present. And it was also, of course, meant to supply a certain lack in ecclesial pronouncements on the ethical position of the Church in regard to the structures and shared civic habits of all human society. But, it seems fair to say, it was still a document prompted by the peculiar distress and uncertainty of the historical moment in which it was incubated; and, if anything, the situation has become considerably graver in just the short interval between the document's initial publication and now. If a clear articulation of the Church's social vision seemed a timely endeavor back then, it now feels somewhat well past time, and more than a little urgent.

It was inevitable, needless to say, that a document of this sort would attract some degree of hostility from those in the Church who would prefer to promote a different picture of Orthodoxy's social doctrine, as well as a few accusations of attempting to conscript the Church into a particular ideological project. For all those scholars, theologians, and pastoral authorities who were well pleased by or, at least, sympathetic to the document, there were others who saw it more as a political than as a truly social and spiritual work. And yet, as far as the authors and editors were concerned, politics—either administrative or cultural—was always at most a vanishingly subordinate issue in the drafting of the final statement. The principal emphasis was always upon the sources of Orthodox tradition, in scripture, in the writings of the Church Fathers, in the teachings of its greatest spiritual authorities, and in the examples of the saints. If the final result seemed like a political manifesto

at certain junctures, this is simply because there are certain clear pronouncements on the social requirements of Christian love and conscience in scripture and tradition, on matters such as wealth and poverty, mercy and justice, community and civility, that will always have political consequences in any era, no matter what the particular difficulties of the moment may happen to be. In that sense, the Sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain, the ode of the Theotokos to Elizabeth, the judgement allegory of Matthew 25, the social commentary of Paul's epistles or the Epistle of James, the evidence of the Didache, the explicit social teachings of such figures as St. Basil the Great or St. John Chrysostom, the examples of the Desert Fathers and other great figures across all the centuries of Orthodox practice and proclamation, and so forth, constitute a kind of politics, one that will always prove unpalatable to those of any epoch who are unprepared for a moral grammar so uncompromising in its demands of us. Every age of human culture is also a particular arrangement of power, property, privilege, and coercive logic, and at every point in Christian history there are many baptized souls who, however sincere they may be in their professions of faith, are sometimes swayed by the spirits of their age rather than by the Spirit poured out by the Father. The Gospel will always be a scandal; and, wherever private interests or 'reasons of state' enjoy precedence over the law of charity, Jesus will seem something of a radical. All of us at times find ourselves more on the side of Caiaphas or Pilate than on the side of Christ, and all of us need to be reminded that fidelity to the God who appeared among us in the form of a slave will often look like infidelity to such things as the nation, a people, 'responsible' policy, or political prudence.

All of which having been said, *For the Life of the World* was definitely prompted by a number of concerns that have become especially poignant in recent years, and it definitely addresses itself to conditions of the present that seem to be in special need of a Christian corrective and a genuinely Orthodox response. There is no need to be coy here. Written at another moment in history, its stresses would have fallen on different notes or themes, and it would have employed another set of guiding motifs. Written when it was, its tune could scarcely have been other than it is without being rendered vacuous and morally derelict. The historical moment in which we find ourselves, and in which the Orthodox Church is called to lift up the light of Christ before the world, is arguably the most perilous for the whole of the earth since the Second World

War. It is undeniably a moment of profound crisis, or even a moment of the convergence of several crises at once, any one of which might seem intractable on its own, and all of which in combination seem positively catastrophic. And, for Orthodoxy, the crisis is not merely one of political order and social morality, but also one of internal institutional tension and disruption.

The great curse of Orthodox history, of course, principally as the result of political misfortunes, but also as the result of unresolved contradictions within the Byzantine imperial inheritance, has been the association of regional episcopates with the interests of monarchs and nations and ethnic identities. There is nothing new in this situation. From the early modern period until now, however, since the purely sovereign nation-state first became an ideal and then a *fait accompli* and then a habit of thought that we hardly ever think to question, the temptation to function as the chaplaincy of a particular national order has afflicted Orthodoxy like a chronic illness that, when it becomes acute, is absolutely pernicious. This has become especially obvious since *For the Life of the World* appeared. In the four years so far of Russia's brutal renewed invasion of Ukraine, and its persistent and pitiless terrorist attacks on Ukraine's people, the principal institutional apparatus of the Moscow Patriarchate has become nothing more than a cult of blood, soil, national 'destiny', cruelty, and mass murder. Under the authority of Kirill of Moscow, Russian clergy and many of the faithful have been absorbed into a diabolical parody of a Christian communion. The sight of Russian priests blessing munitions with holy water and litanies is among the most blasphemous spectacles any Christian conscience could possibly confront; icons mingling the imagery of Russian aggression with depictions of Christ, the Theotokos, or the saints is a desecration of everything holy in Orthodox tradition; and a church that encourages or even only tolerates such things is essentially a species of satanism, perversely mocking the Christian forms in which it garbs itself. And yet here we are.

That is one extreme of the pathologies of contemporary Orthodoxy. Another is to be found principally in America, where there is no national church, but where the vagaries and complexities of America's religious and social history have led to a different but still deeply destructive association of the Church with ethnic, cultural, and ideological projects that could not be more contrary to the teachings of Christ. Simply as a result of America's population by successive waves of immigrants from every quarter of the globe, the

irregular situation of plural, discontinuous, but overlapping ecclesial jurisdictions has become the established reality of Orthodoxy there. And, for obvious reasons, these distinct jurisdictions each became early on a repository and curator of one or another ethnic or national identity. In many cases, this was a perfectly benign phenomenon and one that did much to create places of community and welcome for peoples from foreign lands, while also enriching American society with the special memories and gifts that immigrants brought with them. But, in recent years especially, we have seen an invasion of American Orthodoxy by ideologues who seek not to celebrate the diverse contributions these communities make to a plural and polyethnic society, but rather the division into quarantined ethnic identities, as if the separations between peoples is itself a moral and spiritual ideal. In recent years, the Orthodox communions in America have seen an unprecedented influx of new converts, preponderantly from the white evangelical world—though ‘converts’ might not be quite the correct term, since many have not so much taken on the spiritual heritage of Orthodox Christianity as imported much of the ethos of American fundamentalist religion and its apocalyptic confusion between Christianity and Americanism into the Church’s internal culture. Part of this ideological contagion, moreover, has taken the peculiar form of a pathetic cult of ‘true’ masculinity, which increasingly makes certain parishes centers of indoctrination in an ethos of militant misogyny. How this particular deformation of values has migrated from popular culture into the Church is difficult to comprehend, but its effects have been disastrous.

All of these institutional issues, however, and many others of similar sort, are of a piece with the disintegration of the world order that has prevailed for roughly eight decades. That order was always a precarious one in many ways—geopolitical, social, economic, and so forth—and did its part to preserve old inequities and injustices while also producing new ones of its own. Now, however, its internal contradictions and external stresses have become impossible to sustain. Not only is there a land war in Europe larger than any conflict there since the Second World War; there is as well a massive realignment within the ‘developed’ world of political alliances, systems of trade, conventions of international relations, and commitment to certain binding principles, to a large degree led by the United States. Democracy as an ideal is in retreat, autocratic governments are using the apparatus of the administrative state to overcome constitutional obstacles to despotic power, the unholy

marriage of corporate interests and national regimes has become increasingly explicit and pervasive, and ethno-nationalist bigotries have become the most redoubtable weapon in the arsenals of corrupt tyrants. All of this, moreover, has been animated by the very social evils most explicitly condemned in scripture: the merciless exploitation of the poor by the rich, the failure to care for the sick and the suffering, and hostility to the stranger, the foreigner, the displaced. There has not been in living memory anything like the current disparity between the wealth of the few and the poverty of the many. We live in a moment when the richest man on earth not only pays no personal taxes—living as he does off the loans he can procure by virtue of a private portfolio far exceeding in monetary value the GDP of most nations—but can casually cancel deliveries of food and medical aid for the poorest people on earth, condemning hundreds of thousands of them to slow and agonizing death, more or less on a whim or as a publicity stunt, without legal repercussion. Meanwhile, real wages among those who actually work and pay taxes remain not only frozen, but effectively in a state of progressive emaciation in terms of real purchasing power. The inevitable disaffections of the working class as a result of these conditions are then, as is so often the case, redirected by those who enjoy the benefits of the system into racialist and nationalist hatreds. The rise of the far-right in Europe and the Americas is the most convulsive evidence of how rapidly the old order is disintegrating under the weight of its own inequities. In the United States, for instance, a fascist government employs a brutal secret police to terrorize, abuse, abduct, and torture ethnic minorities while also engaging in acts of murder and piracy on the high seas, and stripping its vulnerable citizens of public services, healthcare, and legal protections; and yet that government succeeds in winning the loyalty of many of the persons it most cynically exploits purely by playing upon racial anxieties and vicious prejudices. Then, too, the catastrophic consequences of the modern culture of economic production and consumption on the environment are met in most cases by a vapid commitment to ‘sustainability’ while the governments of the world continue to conspire, willy-nilly, with billionaires who have invested in technologies that can only accelerate the ecological collapse, perhaps beyond any point of return.

Why, though, rehearse all of this? Most of us realize how grave the state of things at present is. Simply enough, it seems to me wise to remember, whenever *For the Life of the World* is arraigned

by certain critics for its ‘political’ provocations or positions, that in fact it really is no more than an earnest attempt to articulate the moral demands of Christ’s teachings in relation to the present, and that the only reason it might seem to some a political rather than spiritual document is that our politics—our ways of living with one another or refusing to live with one another—are so far removed from the vision of the Gospel that what Christ demands of us seems positively revolutionary and obnoxious. Our values are not the values of the faith, and certainly should not be the values of the Church. Perhaps this is true in every generation. If so, however, perhaps the best evidence of the document’s timeliness is that it can strike many of us as politically offensive. Indeed, what a failure it would be if it did not.

Про вічне й Своечасне

Девід Бентлі Гарт

На момент своєї появи документ «Заради життя світу» частково був відповідлю на те, що цілком справедливо можна було б назвати періодом кризи у світовому Православ’ї, з особливим наголосом, можливо, на становищі Церкви в Америці. Це не означає, що документ не був насамперед спробою окреслити універсальні принципи соціальної любові та справедливості «вічного» характеру, які з найдавніших століть були притаманні православній традиції, але висловлені з перспективитамовою сучасності. І, звісно, він також мав на меті заповнити певну прогалину в церковних заявах щодо етичної позиції Церкви стосовно структур і спільніх громадянських звичок усього людського суспільства. Проте справедливо буде сказати, що цей документ усе ж був породжений особливим занепокоєнням і невизначеністю історичного моменту, в якому він визрівав; і, якщо вже на те пішло, ситуація за короткий проміжок часу від першої публікації документа до сьогодні стала значно тяжчою. Якщо тоді чітке формулювання соціального бачення Церкви здавалося своечасною справою, то нині воно виглядає не просто запізнілим, а й більш ніж нагальним.

Звісно, було неминуче, що документ такого роду виклике певну ворожість з боку тих у Церкві, хто волів би

просувати інше уявлення про соціальне вчення Православ'я, а також звинувачення у спробі залучити Церкву до певного ідеологічного проєкту. Для всіх тих учених, богословів і пасторів, які були задоволені документом або принаймні ставилися до нього з симпатією, знайшлися й інші, хто бачив у ньому радше політичний, ніж справді соціальний і духовний твір. І все ж, з погляду авторів і редакторів, політика – чи то адміністративна, чи культурна – завжди була щонайбільше другорядним, майже зникаючим питанням у процесі укладання остаточного тексту. Головний наголос завжди робився на джерелах православної традиції: у Святому Письмі, у творах Отців Церкви, у вченні її найвидатніших духовних авторитетів і в прикладах святих. Якщо кінцевий результат у певних місцях виглядав як політичний маніфест, то лише тому, що в Писанні й Переданні містяться чіткі твердження про соціальні вимоги християнської любові та совісті – у питаннях багатства і бідності, милосердя і справедливості, спільноти й громадянськості, – які завжди матимуть політичні наслідки в будь-яку епоху, незалежно від конкретних труднощів часу. У цьому сенсі Нагірна проповідь чи Проповідь на рівнині, пісня Богородиці Єлизаветі, аллегорія Страшного суду з 25-ї глави Євангелія від Матфея, соціальні настанови послань апостола Павла чи Послання апостола Якова, свідчення Дідахе, виразне соціальне вчення таких постатей, як святитель Василій Великий чи святитель Іоан Золотоустий, приклади пустельних отців та інших великих діячів усіх століть православної практики й проповіді – усе це становить певний різновид «політики», яка завжди буде неприйнятною для людей будь-якої епохи, не готових до моральної граматики, настільки безкомпромісної у своїх вимогах до нас. Кожна епоха людської культури є також певною конфігурацією влади, власності, привілеїв і примусової логіки, і на кожному етапі християнської історії є чимало охрещених душ, які, попри щирість своєї віри, іноді більше керуються духом свого часу, ніж Духом, вилитим Отцем. Євангеліє завжди буде спокусою; і там, де приватні інтереси чи «державні міркування» мають перевагу над законом любові, Ісус виглядатиме радикалом. Усі ми часом опиняємося більше на боці Каяфи чи Пилата, ніж на боці Христа, і всім нам потрібно нагадувати, що вірність Богові, Який з'явився серед нас у вигляді раба, часто виглядатиме як невірність таким речам, як нація, народ, «відповідальна» політика чи політична розсудливість.

Усе це сказавши, слід визнати, що «Заради життя світу» справді був породжений низкою занепокоєнь, які в останні роки стали особливо гострими, і він безперечно звертається до умов сучасності, що особливо потребують християнського виправлення і справді православної відповіді. Тут немає потреби у двозначності. Якби його писали в інший історичний момент, наголоси впали б на інші ноти чи теми, і були б використані інші провідні мотиви. Написаний тоді, коли його було написано, він навряд чи міг би звучати інакше, не ставши порожнім і морально занепалим. Історичний момент, у якому ми перебуваємо і в якому Православна Церква покликана піднести світло Христове перед світом, є, мабуть, найнебезпечнішим для всієї землі з часів Другої світової війни. Це безсумнівно момент глибокої кризи, або навіть збігу кількох криз водночас, кожна з яких окремо могла б здаватися нерозв'язною, а разом вони виглядають відверто катастрофічними. І для Православ'я ця криза є не лише кризою політичного порядку й соціальної моралі, але й кризою внутрішньої інституційної напруги та розладу.

Великим прокляттям православної історії — головно внаслідок політичних нещасть, але також через невирішені суперечності візантійської імперської спадщини — було ототожнення регіональних єпископатів з інтересами монархів, націй та етнічних ідентичностей. У цьому немає нічого нового. Проте від ранньомодерного періоду і донині, відколи суверенна національна держава спершу стала ідеалом, потім доконаним фактом, а згодом звичкою мислення, яку ми майже не ставимо під сумнів, спокуса бути капеланством певного національного порядку вразила Православ'я, мов хронічна хвороба, яка в гострій формі є вкрай згубною. Це стало особливо очевидним після появи «Заради життя світу». За чотири роки жорстокого поновленого вторгнення Росії в Україну та її безперервних і безжалільних терористичних атак проти українського народу головний інституційний апарат Московського патріархату перетворився на культ крові, ґрунту, національної «долі», жорстокості та масового вбивства. Під владою Кирила Московського російське духовенство і багато вірних були втягнуті в диявольську пародію на християнське євхаристійне спілкування. Вид російських священників, які освячують боєприпаси святою водою й літіями, є одним з найстрашніших блузнірств, з якими може зіткнутися християнська совість;

ікони, що поєднують образи російської агресії з зображеннями Христа, Богородиці чи святих, є наругою над усім святым у православній традиції; а церква, яка заохочує або навіть просто терпить таке, по суті є різновидом сатанізму, що збочено висміює християнські форми, якими вона прикривається. І все ж ми опинилися саме тут.

Це — одна з крайніх патологій сучасного Православ'я. Іншу можна знайти переважно в Америці, де немає національної церкви, але де примхі й складності американської релігійної та соціальної історії привели до іншого, але не менш руйнівного ототожнення Церкви з етнічними, культурними та ідеологічними проектами, що не могли б бути більш суперечливими вченням Христа. Внаслідок хвиль імміграції з усього світу нерегулярна ситуація множинних, розірваних, але таких, що накладаються одна на одну, церковних юрисдикцій стала усталеною реальністю православ'я в Америці. З очевидних причин ці юрисдикції з самого початку стали сковищем і хранителями тієї чи іншої етнічної або національної ідентичності. У багатьох випадках це було цілком доброякісним явищем, яке створювало простори спільноти й гостинності для людей з чужих країв, а також збагачувало американське суспільство пам'яттю та дарами, принесеними іммігрантами. Проте в останні роки ми стали свідками вторгнення в американське Православ'я ідеологів, які прагнуть не святкувати різноманітні внески цих спільнот у плюральне та багатоетнічне суспільство, а навпаки — розділити на ізольовані етнічні ідентичності, ніби самі по собі поділи між народами є моральним і духовним ідеалом. Останніми роками православні спільноти в Америці зазнали безпредентного напливу нових «навернених», переважно з білого євангельського середовища, — хоча слово «навернені» тут не зовсім точне, бо багато хто з них не стільки прийняв духовну спадщину православного християнства, скільки приніс у церковне життя значну частину етосу американського фундаменталізму з його апокаліптичною плутаниною між християнством і американізмом. Частиною цієї ідеологічної зарази стала й жалюгідна культова ідея «справжньої» маскулінності, яка дедалі більше перетворює деякі парафії на осередки індоктринації мілітаризованої мізогінії. Важко збагнути, як саме ця деформація цінностей перекочувала з масової культури до Церкви, але її наслідки виявилися катастрофічними.

Усі ці інституційні проблеми, як і багато інших подібного роду, є частиною загального розпаду світового порядку, який існував приблизно вісім десятиліть. Цей порядок завжди був у багатьох аспектах крихким – геополітичних, соціальних, економічних – і, з одного боку, зберігав старі нерівності й несправедливості, а з іншого – породжував нові. Тепер же його внутрішні суперечності та зовнішні напруження стали нестерпними. У Європі точиться найбільша сухопутна війна з часів Другої світової війни; водночас у «розвиненому» світі відбувається масштабне перегрупування політичних союзів, торговельних систем, норм міжнародних відносин і прихильності до певних зобов'язальних принципів, значною мірою під проводом Сполучених Штатів. Демократія як ідеал відступає, автократичні уряди використовують апарат адміністративної держави, щоб долати конституційні перешкоди на шляху до деспотичної влади, нечестивий союз корпоративних інтересів і національних режимів стає дедалі відкритішим і всеосяжним, а етнонаціоналістичні упередження перетворюються на найгрізнішу зброю в арсеналах корумпованих тиранів. Усе це, до того ж, живиться тими самими соціальними злами, які найвиразніше засуджуються в Писанні: безжалісною експлуатацією бідних багатими, байдужістю до хворих і стражденних, ворожістю до чужинця, іноземця, переселенця. У живій пам'яті людства не було нічого подібного до нинішньої прірви між багатством небагатьох і бідністю багатьох. Ми живемо в час, коли найбагатша людина на землі не лише не сплачує особистих податків – живучи за рахунок кредитів, які може отримати завдяки приватному портфелю, що перевищує ВВП більшості держав, – але й може безкарно скасовувати постачання їжі та медичної допомоги для найбідніших людей планети, прирікаючи сотні тисяч на повільну й болісну смерть, майже з примхи або як піар-акцію. Тим часом реальні заробітки тих, хто справді працює і сплачує податки, не лише не зростають, а фактично виснажуються з погляду купівельної спроможності. Неминуче розчарування робітничого класу за таких умов, як це часто буває, спрямовується тими, хто отримує вигоду з системи, у руслі расистських і націоналістичних ненавистей. Піднесення ультраправих у Європі та Америці є найяскравішим свідченням того, як швидко старий порядок руйнується під тягарем власних несправедливостей. У Сполучених Штатах, наприклад, фашистський уряд використовує жорстоку таємну

поліцію для залякування, знущань, викрадень і катувань етнічних меншин, вдається до вбивств і піратства у відкритому морі, позбавляє вразливих громадян соціальних послуг, медичної допомоги та правового захисту, — і водночас здобуває лояльність багатьох із тих, кого найбільш цинічно експлуатує, просто граючи на расових страхах і злісних упередженнях. До того ж катастрофічні наслідки сучасної культури виробництва й споживання для довкілля в більшості випадків зустрічаються порожніми деклараціями про «сталий розвиток», тоді як уряди світу й далі, свідомо чи ні, співпрацюють з мільярдерами, які інвестують у технології, здатні лише прискорити екологічний колапс — можливо, за межу будь-якого повернення.

Навіщо ж усе це повторювати? Більшість із нас і так усвідомлює, наскільки тяжким є нинішній стан речей. Дуже просто: мені видається мудрим пам'ятати, щоразу коли «Заради життя світу» піддається критиці за свої «політичні» провокації чи позиції, що насправді він є не чим іншим, як щирою спробою висловити моральні вимоги вчення Христа щодо сучасності. І єдина причина, чому комусь він може здаватися політичним, а не духовним документом, полягає в тому, що наша політика — наші способи жити разом або відмовлятися жити разом — настільки відєвангельського бачення, що, чого Христос вимагає від нас, виглядає по-справжньому революційним і навіть образливим. Наші цінності — не є цінностями віри і, безумовно, не повинні бути цінностями Церкви. Можливо, так є в кожному поколінні. Але якщо так, то, можливо, найкращим доказом своєчасності цього документа є те, що він може здаватися багатьом із нас політично неприйнятним. Справді, якою ж поразкою було б, якби це було не так.

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PERSONAL AND PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENTS OF THE “HUMAN COURSE OF LIFE”

CARRIE FREDERICK FROST

For the Life of the World: Toward an Orthodox Social Ethos (FLOW) is, and will likely remain, one of the most interesting projects on which I have ever worked.

Our task was daunting. We aimed to address contemporary social issues in a way that was general enough so that the document was not immediately out of date soon after publication and to allow for personal discernment on many issues, but also specific enough so that it was meaningful and useful to Orthodox people navigating these issues. We aimed to write on behalf of the Orthodox Church, not on behalf of ourselves as individual scholars and theologians. We aimed to address the needs and concerns of the flock of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a flock that is far-flung and more diverse than any other patriarchate. We aimed to create a document about the social “ethos” of the Church, not social “doctrine,” meaning we did not aim to make a final statement or decree but to provide guidance and to begin a much-needed conversation on contemporary social issues.

Were we successful in these aims? In some ways, it is too soon to say—the vantage point is a mere five years, a blink of the eye in an Orthodox perspective. Also, more Orthodox Christians must read and evaluate FLOW over time; the document was published just as the Covid pandemic began so it did not initially receive the attention we had hoped. The process of the document’s reception is still ongoing.

Even so, I will offer here some personal and preliminary assessments of ways in which FLOW succeeded and ways in which it fell short, especially as concerns the “Course of Human Life” section, to which I contributed the most.

Women in the Orthodox Church

The authorship of *For the Life of the World: Toward an Orthodox Social Ethos* is unique, both in terms of its collaboration between hierarchs and lay scholars and theologians, but—perhaps most remarkably—in the inclusion of two women on the special commission: myself and Dr. Gayle Woloschak. Possibly related to

the inclusion of two women on the commission, the document is also unique in its willingness to address matters of women in the Orthodox Church.

Most remarkably, *For the Life of the World* clearly states that the Orthodox Church's record on women is imperfect: ". . . while the Orthodox Church has always held as a matter of doctrine and theology that men and women are equals in personhood, it has not always proved scrupulously faithful to this ideal" (§29). I do not think the importance of this statement can be overestimated. There has been a reluctance in Orthodox circles to acknowledge that the Orthodox Church today is imperfect because of the eschatological vision of the Church as a perfect expression of the Body of Christ. This reluctance has led to a dangerously mistaken mythological version of the Church, making it into a golden calf and turning a blind eye to human weakness and sinfulness that includes not just matters relating to women, but other matters as well, such as sexual abuse and misuse and abuse of authority. *For the Life of the World* instead acknowledges that while the Orthodox Church in its fullness affirms the humanity and dignity of women, but its practices, teachings, and structures fall short.

FLOW follows this frank acknowledgement of the Church's failures with the example of the theological poor practices around impurity in the Orthodox Church such as banning women from the Eucharist during menstruation and the language around childbirth and impurity in the First Day and Churching prayers: "The Church has, for instance, for far too long retained in her prayers and Eucharistic practices ancient and essentially superstitious prejudices about purity and impurity in regard to women's bodies, and has even allowed the idea of ritual impurity to attach itself to childbirth. Yet no Christian woman who has prepared herself for communion through prayer and fasting should be discouraged from approaching the chalice" (§29).

Though for many years, scholars, laypeople, and clergy have acknowledged the poor theology in these practices, very little action has been taken on the part of the institutional Church to correct them. While I have not observed a dramatic shift in how the flock of the Ecumenical Patriarchate addresses these impurity practices since the publication of FLOW, I would like to think that such a powerful statement from the Church will have a positive effect over time. Perhaps FLOW, even in a roundabout way, influenced the recent Assembly of Bishop's publication of new miscarriage prayers

that prioritize compassion for the grieving family over the mother's purification.

I have seen a shift within the last five years regarding women in the Orthodox Church in the increasing conversation around women's roles in the Church, perhaps in response to the next statement in FLOW: "The Church must also remain attentive to the promptings of the Spirit in regard to the ministry of women, especially in our time, when many of the most crucial offices of ecclesial life—theologians, seminary professors, canonists, readers, choir directors, and experts in any number of professions that benefit the community of faith—are occupied by women in increasingly great numbers; and the Church must continue to consider how women can best participate in building up the body of Christ, including a renewal of the order of the female diaconate for today (§29)."

Prior to the publication of FLOW, an influx of women into roles in the Orthodox Church such as those mentioned above was already underway. Since the publication, there has been a marked increase in the conversation particularly about renewing the female diaconate and, indeed, one autocephalous Orthodox Church has begun this process.

The order of deaconess was integral to the early Church, with women ministering mostly to other women, including taking the Eucharist to women at home, accompanying women to confession, and assisting with the baptism of women and children and also other non-gendered tasks shared with male deacons such as overseeing the philanthropic efforts of the Church. The order mostly fell out of use in the late Byzantine era (though there have been one-off ordinations ever since), but now is being revived in the Alexandrian Patriarchate which ordained Angelic Molen as a deaconess in Zimbabwe 2024.

The idea of renewing the order of deaconess certainly does not originate within FLOW; it has many predecessors including the Conclusions of the Inter-Orthodox Consultation of Rhodes in 1988 (convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate attended by many of the autocephalous churches) which endorsed ordaining women as deaconesses again for the good of the Church. But my observation is that FLOW's endorsement of the order of deaconess (both in §29 and in §82) has bolstered the conversation about the renewal of ordination of deaconesses around the world, evidenced by many books, conferences, podcasts, lectures, and documents that came in its wake. Given the fact that the Orthodox patriarchates look

to each other for example, it may well have contributed to the Patriarchate of Alexandria's willingness to proceed with the ordination of Archdeaconess Angelic-Phoebe Molen.

Abuse and the Orthodox Church

In comparison to my positive assessment of FLOW's treatment of women in the Orthodox Church, I have a mixed review of the document's treatment of matters of abuse.

FLOW's statement on sexual abuse of children is the strongest statement I know of from the Orthodox Church:

No offense against God is worse than is the sexual abuse of children, and none more intolerable to the conscience of the Church. All members of Christ's body are charged with the protection of the young against such violation, and there is no situation in which a member of the Church, on learning of any case of the sexual abuse of a child, may fail immediately to report it to the civil authorities and to the local bishop. Moreover, every faithful Christian is no less bound to expose those who would conceal such crimes from public knowledge or shield them from legal punishment. (§16)

I have recently reviewed the sexual abuse policies of the Orthodox jurisdictions in the US (not just the ones under the Ecumenical Patriarchate) and this statement of FLOW comparatively shines with clarity in its conviction that situations of abuse of children demand *both* the awareness and responsiveness of the Orthodox Church as well as civil authorities.

However, FLOW goes on to dictate the role of the priest when sexual abuse is confessed: "Neither should any priest ever grant absolution to the perpetrator of such a crime until the latter has surrendered himself or herself to criminal prosecution" (§16). Alexis Torrance, in his review of FLOW, asks a valid question in response to this statement: ". . . is it strictly speaking the place of such a document to legislate the prerogatives of the priestly ministry?" (Torrance, "To Live is Christ," 8). In my estimation, this is a case in which FLOW oversteps its mission; dictating how priests ought to handle certain situations is outside of its purview. This is an especially interesting point because since FLOW's composition several US states, including my state of Washington, have passed laws revoking the privileged status of the relationship of priest and penitent in confession. Now priests are mandatory reporters based

on anything they hear within the confines of confession (as they were already required outside of confession).

Though I remain pleased with FLOW's sound condemnation of the sexual abuse of children, I am dismayed from the perspective of five years that I and others on the Special Commission did not directly address two other matters of abuse: domestic abuse and clergy abuse.

Mentions of abuse occur throughout the document, including abuse of sex-trafficked people, employees, immigrants, and technology. Direct reference to *domestic abuse* comes in two places. The section on War, Peace, and Violence lists "sexual abuse and domestic violence" among the many forms and manifestation of violence (§43) and states that the Orthodox Church cannot approve of violence in any form, including physical violence, sexual abuse, or the abuse of authority (§44). The section on the Course of Human life addresses domestic violence in the context of marriage: "All marriages—whether the spouses be Orthodox, non-Orthodox, or both—are marred by the effects of sin. Precisely because it is a place of such immense responsibility, emotional commitment, and intimate relations, the family is also a place where the most shattering kinds of mental, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse can occur" (§22).

These sections are appropriate places to address the issue of domestic violence. But it is not enough to include domestic violence in a list of other forms of violence. Many statistics show that nearly 30% of women have been subjected to physical and/ or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life ("UN Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women"). Domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are scandalously common and FLOW should have included a direct and thorough treatment of the matter. This lacunae is all the more glaring in light of the Moscow Patriarchate's tacit affirmation of the Russian government's decriminalization of domestic abuse in 2017. FLOW would have been the ideal place for the Ecumenical Patriarchate to, in contrast, compassionately and firmly condemn domestic abuse.

Clergy abuse, when clergy use their power and position to exploit and sexually abuse an individual (adult or child), is not directly addressed in FLOW at all. Clergy abuse receives more attention in the Roman Catholic setting, but it is absolutely present in the Orthodox Church today, though rarely talked about and inadequately addressed in the seminary education of future clergy. FLOW should

have included a section dedicated to the presence and abhorrence of clergy abuse.

In my assessment, the scant treatment of domestic abuse and clergy abuse are the most egregious oversights and failures of the document. Like the section on sexual abuse of children, FLOW should have discussed these issues and named them as ones that must be addressed both by the Church and the civil authorities. I am grieved that it did not occur to me or other members of the Special Commission to include these issues. I ask the faithful for forgiveness.

Conclusion

In my most recent re-reading of FLOW, I was struck by its hopeful tone. This is a gift to not just the Orthodox Church, but the larger culture, when so much of the current conversation is grounded in panic and hopelessness. FLOW is a reminder that “gratitude and wonder, hope and joy” for the goodness of all Creation are humanity’s “truly creative and fruitful” ways of responding to contemporary crises and challenges (§78). By summoning this attitude of hope FLOW inspires us to refocus our commitment to bringing the earthly Church closer to the Kingdom, which—even though inadequately addressed within FLOW—will allow us to address the omnipresent issues of domestic abuse and clergy abuse together.

Torrance, Alexis. “To Life is Christ: Exploring the Promise and Limits of *For the Life of the World*.” *Studies in Christian Ethics*. “Special Issue: A Fresh Vision for Orthodox Social Ethics: Responses to *For the Life of the World* (2020).” Vol. 25, Issue 2. 1-13.

“UN Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women,” <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-ending-violence-against-women>, accessed 11/15/25.

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A WATERSHED RESPONSE TO MODERN VIOLENCE

GEORGE DEMACOPOULOS

All too often, people see the Church's tradition as a static or sealed repository of ancient guidance that has, once and for all, answered all of the important questions. It is precisely for this reason that *For the Life of the World* is such a refreshing and important document because it approaches the tradition in a more constructive way by treating tradition as an evolving resource rather than a hermetically sealed set of laws. This is the more "traditional" way to approach this material, because it is precisely the way that premodern Christians drew upon the ancient faith.

This constructive use of the tradition is perhaps nowhere more apparent or significant than sections 42-49, which engage the tragic reality of violence in the modern world. These sections are, simultaneously, an eloquent articulation of patristic wisdom and a groundbreaking statement that addresses, with unprecedented clarity and specificity, the moral complexities of war, state violence, and capital punishment in the modern world. This synthesis of fidelity to tradition with bold contemporary application marks this text as uniquely significant for the Orthodox Church in the twenty-first century.

Orthodox Christians have always maintained a profound commitment to peace as a fundamental dimension of God's created order. Yet prior to this text, the Church lacked a concise, systematically developed moral framework for addressing the concrete realities of modern warfare, military technology, state violence, and capital punishment.

To be sure, the Church possessed a rich spiritual tradition - embodied in the lives of the martyrs, the teachings of the Fathers, and the liturgical prayers that permeate Orthodox worship. But, prior to the production of *For the Life of the World*, the tradition had never been formally synthesized into a clear moral doctrine capable of guiding the faithful through the ethical dilemmas posed by contemporary geopolitical realities. This text remedies that lacuna. It provides what might be called the first thoroughgoing and

authoritative Orthodox moral teaching on these matters, doing so in a way that honors the deepest currents of Orthodox theology while speaking directly to the unique circumstances of the modern age.

The text's grounding in traditional theology is evident from its opening paragraphs. The invocation of Genesis - the claim that "harmony, peace, communion, and abundance are the true 'grammar' of creation" - reaches back to the most fundamental Christian understanding of God's creative intention. This is not innovation; it is the essential voice of Christian tradition across the centuries. Similarly, the appeal to patristic authority, the citation of numerous Church Fathers, and the repeated reference to Scripture demonstrate that this teaching emerges from deep wells of Orthodox learning and spiritual wisdom. The text does not impose novel philosophical frameworks upon Christian tradition; rather, it distills that tradition into systematic moral guidance.

Yet what makes this text pioneering is precisely how it takes these ancient truths and applies them to questions that the early Church and even the medieval Church could never have contemplated in their modern forms. The Church Fathers spoke of violence and peace, but they did not have to articulate moral positions regarding nuclear weapons, drone technology, or the strategic bombing of civilian populations. They could not foresee the industrial scale of modern warfare or the development of weapons of such catastrophic destructive capacity. The earliest Christians famously refused military service and capital punishment, but they did so as small, persecuted communities living under pagan empires. Many Orthodox Christians of the medieval and early modern periods inhabited a very different political space, within Christian empires and nation-states. In this context, Christian sensibilities to war and violence were quite different, even compromised, when compared to those of the earliest Christians.

For the Life of the World, remarkably, calls the Church back to its ancient witness while acknowledging the genuine complexities introduced by modernity. Consider the text's treatment of the concept of "just war." Many Christian traditions, particularly in the Roman Catholic and Protestant worlds, have developed elaborate Just War theories—systematic criteria by which a state's resort to military force might be morally justified in advance, under specified conditions. The Orthodox Church, notably, has never adopted such a theory, and this text makes that refusal explicit and authoritative. The Church "has merely recognized the inescapably tragic reality

that sin sometimes requires a heart-breaking choice between allowing violence to continue or employing force to bring that violence to an end." This formulation is theologically sophisticated: it acknowledges genuine moral tragedy, the reality that sometimes all available options are morally compromised, while resisting the temptation to systematize warfare into a moral category. The Church does not ask "under what conditions is war just?" but rather "how do we respond with Christian love when faced with the necessity of defending the innocent from violence?" The distinction is profound and represents a distinctly Orthodox approach that previous statements had never articulated with such clarity.

The text's treatment of modern warfare technology is equally pioneering. It identifies "one of the defining features of modern warfare" as "the effective conflation of the strategies of battle and the intentional terrorization of civilian populations." This observation speaks directly to the reality that distinguishes contemporary military practice from earlier forms of warfare. When strategic bombing, drone strikes, and precision-guided munitions are routinely employed in ways that blur the distinction between military targets and civilian populations, the Church must speak to this reality. The text does so by insisting that actions "that would be considered acts of terrorism when perpetrated by individuals or organized factions" do not become morally acceptable when employed by recognized states or with advanced technology. This represents a crystalline moral judgment that, while consistent with ancient Christian principles, had never been articulated with such directness regarding contemporary military practice.

The most striking evidence of the text's pioneering character is its unequivocal rejection of capital punishment. While the early Church clearly opposed capital punishment and the early Fathers consistently argued against it, the Orthodox Church had never, to this point, issued a formal, authoritative statement calling for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty. The text does precisely this, and it does so by recovering the prophetic witness of the earliest Christians and the Church Fathers while addressing contemporary debates about justice, proportionality, and the nature of Christian forgiveness. The detailed documentation of patristic opposition to capital punishment - the citations of Justin Martyr, the Apostolic Tradition, Arnobius, Athenagoras, and others - serves to demonstrate that this is not a modern innovation but a retrieval

of ancient Christian truth. Yet the application of this truth to modern jurisprudence and the call for abolition in all countries is thoroughly contemporary in its directness and scope.

The text's explicit acknowledgment that the Church had "accommodated herself to the cultures and rulers with which it allied herself" and thus "frequently forgotten" its "prophetic hostility to capital punishment" is remarkable for its candor. Rather than obscuring this historical reality, the text faces it squarely and calls the Church to recover what medieval and early modern Christians seem to have forgotten. This is not a repudiation of tradition but a return to the truest and deepest tradition, even if that return requires a critique of intervening centuries. This honesty itself - the willingness to name ways in which members within the tradition had compromised its witness - distinguishes this document from typical ecclesiastical self-congratulatory pronouncements.

Furthermore, the text's treatment of the spiritual effects of violence, even defensive violence, introduces a dimension of moral anthropology that is distinctly Orthodox. The insistence that participation in violence, even when morally justified, causes damage to "the whole person" and harms "one's relationship with God, neighbor, and creation" reflects a thoroughly Orthodox understanding of the human being as an integrated whole whose every act has spiritual ramifications. The reference to Saint Basil's teaching that a soldier who kills in war should abstain from the Eucharist and undertake penitential discipline, while "not himself an intentional murderer," demonstrates how this text recovers patristic insights about the spiritual consequences of violence that modern Christian ethics often neglects. The Church's call to offer "ministries of spiritual healing to those who have been the victims of violence and to those who have used violence" recognizes that moral justification does not eliminate spiritual damage.

The text's final vision of Christian holiness is instructive: it locates the highest expression of Christian holiness not in military valor or defense but in those who "strive every day to create understanding and respect among persons, to prevent conflict, to reunite those who are divided, to seek to create economic and social mechanisms for alleviating the problems that often lead to violence." This is a prophetic call to the Church and to Christian nations to invest their resources and ingenuity in the prevention of violence rather than its prosecution. It is a vision that is rooted in the Gospel and represents a bold challenge to the assumptions and practices of modern nation-states.

In conclusion, this text is unprecedented in the history of Orthodox Christianity precisely because it does what no previous Orthodox document had done with such comprehensiveness and authority: it takes the Church's ancient, deeply held commitments to peace, opposition to capital punishment, and the dignity of human life created in God's image, and it applies them with prophetic clarity to the specific moral crises of the modern world. It refuses the path of just war theory while acknowledging genuine moral dilemmas. It confronts the realities of contemporary military technology while insisting upon the moral significance of civilian life. It calls for the abolition of capital punishment while recovering the prophetic witness of the early Church. It is, in short, both deeply traditional and genuinely pioneering - a retrieval of ancient wisdom in service of contemporary moral guidance. For the Orthodox Church, which has for too long lacked such clarity on these matters, this text represents not merely a significant statement but a foundational document that will shape Orthodox moral teaching for generations to come.

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Переломна Відповідь На Сучасне Насильство

Джордж Демакопулос

Надто часто люди сприймають церковну традицію як статичне або замкнене сховище давніх настанов, яке раз і назавжди дало відповіді на всі важливі питання. Саме тому документ «Заради життя світу» є таким свіжим і важливим: він підходить до традиції значно конструктивніше, розглядаючи її не як герметично замкнену систему законів, а як живий і динамічний ресурс. Саме такий підхід і є більш «традиційним», адже саме так до давньої віри зверталися домодерні християни.

Цей конструктивний спосіб використання традиції, мабуть, ніде не виявляється так очевидно й значуще, як у

розділах 42–49, присвячених трагічній реальності насильства в сучасному світі. Ці розділи є водночас і красномовним викладом патристичної мудрості, і новаторським твердженням, яке з безпредecedентною ясністю та конкретністю розглядає моральні складнощі війни, державного насильства та смертної кари в умовах сучасності. Саме цей синтез вірності традиції з відважним сучасним застосуванням робить текст унікально важливим для Православної Церкви у ХХІ столітті.

Православні християни завжди зберігали глибоку відданість миру як фундаментальному вимірові створеного Богом порядку. Проте до появи цього тексту Церква не мала стисло й систематично сформульованої моральної рамки, здатної відповісти на конкретні реалії сучасної війни, військових технологій, державного насильства та смертної кари.

Безперечно, Церква володіла багатою духовною спадщиною — втіленою в життях мучеників, у вченні Отців Церкви та в літургійних молитвах, що пронизують православне богослужіння. Однак до появі «Заради життя світу» ця традиція ніколи не була формально синтезована в чітке моральне вчення, здатне провадити вірних крізь етичні дилеми, які постають перед сучасними геополітичними реаліями. Цей текст заповнює цю прогалину. Він пропонує те, що можна назвати першим всебічним і авторитетним православним моральним вченням з цих питань, роблячи це у спосіб, який шанує найглибші течії православного богослов'я і водночас безпосередньо звертається до унікальних обставин модерної доби.

Закоріненість тексту в традиційному богослов'ї помітна вже з перших абзаців. Звернення до Книги Буття — твердження про те, що «гармонія, мир, сопричастя і достаток є справжньою “граматикою” творіння» — сягає самого осердя християнського розуміння Божого задуму щодо створеного світу. Це не нововведення, а сутнісний голос християнської традиції впродовж століть. Так само апеляція до патристичного авторитету, численні цитати Отців Церкви та постійні посилання на Святе Письмо свідчать, що це вчення постає з глибоких джерел православної освіти й духовної мудрості. Текст не нав'язує християнській традиції нових філософських схем; натомість він систематизує саму традицію у формі морального керівництва.

Втім, новаторство цього тексту полягає саме в тому, як він застосовує ці давні істини до питань, яких ані раніше, ані навіть середньовічна Церква не могла осмислити в їхньому сучасному вигляді. Отці Церкви говорили про насильство й мир, але їм не доводилося формулювати моральні позиції щодо ядерної зброї, дронів чи стратегічних бомбардувань цивільного населення. Вони не могли передбачити індустріальних масштабів сучасної війни або створення зброї з катастрофічною руйнівною силою. Перші християни відомі своєю відмовою від військової служби та смертної кари, але вони робили це як невеликі переслідувані спільноти, що жили в умовах язичницьких імперій. Православні християни середньовіччя та раннього модерну існували в зовсім іншому політичному просторі — у межах християнських імперій і національних держав. У цьому контексті християнське ставлення до війни та насильства було істотно іншим і навіть компромісним у порівнянні з позицією найдавніших християн.

«Заради життя світу» разюче повертає Церкву до її давнього свідчення, водночас визнаючи реальні складнощі принесені сучасністю. Особливо показовим є розгляд поняття «справедливої війни». Багато християнських традицій — передусім у римо-католицькому та протестантському світах — розробили складні теорії справедливої війни, тобто систематичні критерії, за якими застосування військової сили державою може вважатися морально віправданим заздалегідь і за певних умов. Православна Церква, натомість, ніколи не приймала такої теорії, і цей текст робить цю відмову явною й авторитетною. Церква, як зазначається, «лише визнавала неминуче трагічну реальність того, що гріх інколи змушує робити болісний вибір між дозволом насильству тривати і застосуванням сили для припинення цього насильства». Це формулювання є богословським виваженням: воно визнає справжню моральну трагедію, реальність того, що іноді всі доступні варіанти є морально зіпсованими, і водночас чинить опір спокусі систематизувати війну як моральну категорію. Церква запитує не «за яких умов війна є справедливою», а радше «як нам відповідати з християнською любов'ю, коли ми стикаємося з необхідністю захищати невинних від насильства». Це розрізнення є глибоким і виражає суті православний підхід, який раніше не був сформульований з такою ясністю.

Не менш новаторським є ставлення тексту до сучасних військових технологій. Він визначає «однією з визначальних

рис сучасної війни» «фактичне злиття бойових стратегій з навмисним тероризуванням цивільного населення». Це спостереження прямо вказує на те, що відрізняє сучасну військову практику від попередніх форм війни. Коли стратегічні бомбардування, удари дронами та високоточна зброя регулярно застосовуються так, що стирається межа між військовими цілями та цивільним населенням, Церква мусить дати моральну оцінку цій реальності. Текст робить це, наполягаючи, що дії, «які вважалися б актами тероризму, якби їх здійснювали окремі особи чи організовані угруповання», не стають морально прийнятними лише тому, що їх здійснюють визнані держави або з використанням передових технологій. Це кристально чітке моральне судження, яке, будучи цілком узгодженим із давніми християнськими принципами, раніше ніколи не було сформульоване з такою прямотою щодо сучасної військової практики.

Найяскравішим свідченням новаторського характеру тексту є його однозначне відкидання смертної кари. Хоча рання Церква чітко виступала проти смертної кари, а Отці Церкви послідовно аргументували проти неї, Православна Церква досі не робила формальної, авторитетної заяви із закликом до повсюдного скасування смертної кари. Цей текст робить саме це, відновлюючи пророче свідчення перших християн і Отців Церкви та водночас вступаючи в сучасні дискусії про справедливість, пропорційність і природу християнського прощення. Детальне документування патристичного спротиву смертній карі – із посиланнями на Юстина Мученика, «Апостольське передання», Арнобія, Афінагора та інших – показує, що йдеться не про модерну інновацію, а про повернення до давньої християнської істини. Водночас застосування цієї істини до сучасного правосуддя та заклик до скасування смертної кари в усіх країнах є цілком сучасними за своєю прямотою та маштабом.

Особливо показовим є відверте визнання в тексті того, що Церква «пристосовувалася до культур і правителів, з якими вступала в союз», і тому «часто забувала» своє «пророче неприйняття смертної кари». Замість того щоб приховувати цю історичну реальність, текст прямо дивиться їй у вічі й закликає Церкву відновити те, що середньовічні та ранньомодерні християни, здається, втратили з поля зору. Це не відкидання традиції, а повернення до її найглибшого й найавтентичнішого

ядра — навіть якщо таке повернення вимагає критичного погляду на проміжні століття. Сама ця чесність — готовність назвати ті способи, якими члени традиції компрометували своє свідчення, — вирізняє цей документ серед типових самозадоволених церковних декларацій.

Крім того, розгляд духовних наслідків насильства, навіть оборонного, вводить вимір моральної антропології, глибоко притаманний Православ'ю. Наполягання на тому, що участь у насильстві, навіть морально виправданому, завдає шкоди «цілісній особі» та ранить «стосунки з Богом, біжнім і творінням», відображає суто православне розуміння людини як інтегрованої цілісності, кожен учинок якої має духовні наслідки. Посилання на вчення святого Василія Великого про те, що воїн, який убив на війні, повинен утримуватися від Євхаристії та проходити покаянну дисципліну, хоча він «не є навмисним убивцею», демонструє, як текст відновлює патристичне розуміння духовних наслідків насильства, яке часто ігнорується в сучасній християнській етиці. Заклик Церкви надавати «служіння духовного зцілення тим, хто став жертвами насильства, і тим, хто застосовував насильство», визнає, що моральне виправдання не усуває духовної шкоди.

Завершальне бачення християнської святості в тексті є повчальним: найвищий вияв святості він убачає не у військовій доблесті чи обороні, а в тих, хто «щодня прагне творити взаєморозуміння й повагу між людьми, запобігати конфліктам, возз'єднувати розділених, шукати створення економічних і соціальних механізмів для подолання проблем, які часто призводять до насильства». Це пророчий заклик до Церкви й до християнських народів спрямовувати свої ресурси та творчість на запобігання насильству, а не на його здійснення. Це бачення глибоко вкорінене в Євангелії та становить сміливий виклик припущенням і практикам сучасних національних держав.

Висновок: Цей текст є безпрецедентним в історії православного християнства саме тому, що він робить те, чого жоден попередній православний документ не здійснив із такою повнотою й авторитетом: він бере давні й глибоко вкорінені церковні переконання щодо миру, неприйняття смертної кари та гідності людського життя, створеного за образом Божим, і з пророочною ясністю застосовує їх до конкретних моральних криз сучасного світу. Він відкидає шлях теорії справедливої війни,

водночас визнаючи справжні моральні дилеми. Він звертається до реалій сучасних військових технологій, наполягаючи на моральній значущості життя цивільного населення. Він закликає до скасування смертної кари, відновлюючи пророче свідчення ранньої Церкви. Коротко кажучи, цей текст є водночас глибоко традиційним і справді новаторським – поверненням давньої мудрості на служіння сучасному моральному проводу. Для Православної Церкви, яка надто довго не мала такої ясності з цих питань, цей документ є не просто важливою заявою, а фундаментальним орієнтиром, що формуватиме православне моральне вчення на багато поколінь уперед.

WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

“For he who endeavours to return an injury, desires to imitate that very person by whom he has been injured. Thus he who imitates a bad man can by no means be good. . . Now if, when provoked by injury, he has begun to follow up his assailant with violence, he is overcome. But if he shall have repressed that emotion by reasoning, he altogether has command over himself: he is able to rule himself. And this restraining of oneself is rightly named patience, which single virtue is opposed to all vices and affections.”

(Lactantius, Divine Institutes 6.18)

“Above all, Christians are not allowed to correct with violence the delinquencies of sins. For it is not those that abstain from wickedness from compulsion, but those that abstain from choice, that God crowns.”

(Clement of Alexandria, fragment ANF)

[Christians] do not attack their assailants in return, for it is not lawful for the innocent to kill even the guilty.

(Cyprian, c. 250)



DIALOGUE AND CHANGE “FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD” A PERSONAL REFLECTION

JAMES C. SKEDROS

In his address delivered at the acceptance of the 2025 Templeton Prize, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew noted the following:

“Yet religion also possesses a unique gift for getting things magnificently right. We excel when we provide what the world desperately needs: the longer view, the deeper story, the bigger picture. We get it right when we remember that caring for creation is not merely about climate change, but about changing ourselves - in fact about changing everything.”

The Templeton Prize is an internationally recognized award in the area of science and religion. Patriarch Bartholomew received the award for his pioneering efforts in bringing theologians and scientists together to highlight the spiritual significance of the environmental crisis facing the world. His All-Holiness' address covered many areas of significance related to the environment and highlighted the responsibility that religious communities and people of faith have for the environment. Stewardship of the environment is dialogical precisely because the Christian journey towards salvation, towards wholeness, towards holiness is founded upon encounter and dialogue. It is only through dialogue that a Christian can change; it is only through encounter, whether that be with the environment, with other human beings, or with God, that one can change (that is, repent, in the foundational meaning of the Greek term *metanoia*) into the person God created one to be.

Encountering God and the Other

Orthodox spirituality emphasizes the encounter between the human person and God. The retreat to the desert, admired and emulated by Christians since the fourth century, and today one of the elements that leads seekers to the doors of an Orthodox house of worship, is less an escape from something as it is a movement or journey towards God. It is an experiential journey that needs the other: the “I and Thou” of Martin Buber. It is a dialogue with

God (*dia-logos*; *For the Life of the World*, §54). Orthodoxy does not dialogue alone; the encounter of God is always personal; it cannot be individualistic. Externally, the ascetic retreat appears to be a movement towards individualism - a sort of self-encounter. On the contrary, it is an encounter with the Other.

Christianity is a personal religion; not in the sense of private, personal religion that underpins western democratic societies' notion of separation of church and state. Christianity can only be lived through encounter with the other. And the other is always personal. Whether it is a spiritual guide, whether it is the body of Christ (communally or within the eucharist), whether it is the person in need, Orthodox Christians draw closer to God and closer to the person God created them to be in relationship with others.

It is only in encountering the other that we can encounter ourselves. The last judgement scene of Matthew 25 places emphasis on encountering God in the other. Orthodox social ethics and Orthodox spirituality agree with this. The retreat to "your room" (*to tameion sou*) is a retreat to find God (Mt 6.6; "...pray to your Father who is in secret"). Retreat is dialogical; dialogue is self-discovery; authentic humanity can only be discovered in dialogue.

Dialogue and Change

Encounter and dialogue changes you. If it doesn't, then it isn't a credible encounter. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is a well-known encapsulation of Jesus' message in first-century Palestine. Described by Matthew as a "teaching" (Mt 5.2) to the crowd, there is no indication that Jesus' words impacted the crowd other than that "large crowds followed Him". (Mt 8.1) However, immediately after his teaching, Jesus is confronted by a man with leprosy, whom Jesus heals. Here, as elsewhere in the Gospels, a personal encounter with Jesus changed the person who approached Christ. Examples from the Gospels are numerous: those who encounter Jesus are changed; the encounter changes not only the current situation but impacts the individual moving forward. The woman caught in adultery has her life spared from imminent stoning and then is commanded to sin no more (John 8.1-11). The impact of the encounter was both immediate and life changing. In similar fashion, the Orthodox spiritual journey is one of encounter that has both an immediacy and long-term impact on the individual.

Similarly, authentic dialogue requires change. If there is no change, then there was never authentic dialogue. In ecumenical encounters and those dialogues with non-Christian faith traditions,

as well as with non-believers, every personal encounter results in change on the level of personhood. This might sound antithetical to what the Orthodox Church stands for: "This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Orthodox faith, this faith has established the universe". (*For the Life of the World*, §50) Christ does not change--"Christ is the same, yesterday today and forever". (Heb 13:8; RSV) The Church does not change; only we change. Change occurs on the personal level, not on the ecclesiological level. It is only through dialogue that one can appreciate, understand, and accept the other as a unique person created in God's image. Ecumenical dialogue, and in particular, inter-faith dialogue, reflects this most emphatically.

To Dare to Dialogue

When Orthodox Christians "circle the wagons" in order to protect the faith, we do so at our own peril. Not that defense, protection, preservation, are antithetical to our identity. We are the historic Church and we claim direct spiritual and ecclesial continuity with the community of apostles who followed Jesus in the hills of Galilee. We are the same faith; the same apostolic faith. We are also the community who encountered the anti-Christian persecutions of imperial Rome only to emerge and become part of one of the greatest historical transformations ever: the creation of a Christian *oikomene*. We are also the Church that continues to live through a second historical transformation that saw the rise and expansion of Islam that has dominated the Middle East, the homeland of Christianity, since the seventh century. We are the same Church that was nearly annihilated in twentieth-century Soviet Union only to see a rebirth of Christianity in Russia as remarkable as Soviet Communism was brutal. We should fear nothing but our own sinfulness. Throughout all of this remarkable history the Orthodox Church has remained in dialogue with others. The Church is never afraid to enter into dialogue since all dialogue is personal and God calls all of us to encounter the other, to serve "the least of these".

Dialogue does not mean an abandonment of the Orthodox faith. In 1965, when Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras lifted the mutual anathemas of 1054, many throughout the Orthodox world saw this as the end of Orthodox identity... a selling out to the Latin Church. Some Orthodox churches adopted an anathema against ecumenism and inserted it into the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*. The mutual lifting of the anathemas caused some

Orthodox to claim that “grace” had left the sacraments of the Church of Constantinople. Sixty years later, none of what was feared about the mutual lifting of the anathemas has occurred. There has been no union of Christians; the feared “branch theory” that some Orthodox ecumenists espoused has been discarded to the heap of other ill-informed theological speculations; and some of the most respected Orthodox theologians involved in the Ecumenical movement have become beacons of Orthodoxy in the twenty-first century.

A Personal Note

Not all encounters are positive. Not all encounters should take place. Within the Orthodox spiritual tradition, there is the healthy practice of saying “no”. The fathers and mothers of the Church call this “discernment” (*diakrisis*). To discern whether or not a particular encounter with the other should take place is not an easy task and requires prayerful wisdom. We have all had our personal moments of regret in accepting or rejecting an encounter, an opportunity for dialogue, an opportunity for change.

I share here a personal experience of missed dialogue; of a missed opportunity to grow and to change. I grew up in the heart of Mormonism in the 1960s and 1970s in Salt Lake City, Utah, where I constantly encountered people of a different faith, a faith that saw itself as the true Church. During my final year in college, my longtime friend and neighbor decided to go on a Mormon mission. In the early 1980s it was somewhat unusual for a young single Mormon woman to go on a mission. She and I, over the years, had numerous conversations about our personal religious beliefs. She was so excited for her mission and she invited me to attend her farewell service at the local Mormon Ward down the street from where we grew up. The missionary farewell is a time-honored and integral part of a Mormon missionary’s journey. I told her I would not attend the service since my attendance would give credence to the truth of her convictions. I was so “Orthodox”; and I felt proud of my decision. It was the wrong decision. To this day, my decision has left a scar in her heart and in mine. But, more importantly, I failed to encounter the other, my friend and neighbor, because of my “Orthodox” pride. Putting aside the pain that I caused someone, I too was damaged by this decision. I had passed up an opportunity to grow, to encounter the other, to change myself... not change my religion or my Orthodox theological principles. My actions did not change Mormonism; my actions did not stop the growth and spread

of Mormonism; rather, my actions impeded me from encountering the other on my journey of becoming the person God created me to be. Had my faith been strong, I would not have feared attending.

A Final Thought

I, like so many Orthodox Christians living in non-Orthodox settings, face a dual reality. On the one hand, I find refuge and identity in my Orthodox roots and the several Greek Orthodox communities of faith that have nurtured and continue to nurture me. Retreat to the comfortable confines of the Byzantine liturgy strengthens me and allows me to meet God. Yet, I live in a diverse world in which nearly every encounter of the other is with a non-Orthodox person. This is certainly not new or unique. However, if such encounters are normal and do, in fact, change us, then why do many Orthodox tend to shy away from formalized ecumenical encounters? Is it because we are afraid of change? Rather, I think that the fear of ecumenical or interfaith encounters comes from a misunderstanding of change. The change I am speaking of is the change of heart, the call to repentance, the ability to place oneself in someone else's shoes. That is, dialogue with and encounter of the other changes one on the personal level. It does not change the Church. The change that Orthodox apologists fear is precisely the wrong fear; the Church will not change... but are you and I willing to change? Dialogue without personal change is not dialogue; it is monologue which leads to isolation, the "othering" of people, and eventually to hatred. Thus, do the words of Patriarch Bartholomew ring out with clarity: "caring for creation is... about changing ourselves."

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WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

"If we cannot accomplish anything (in the arts and sciences) by ourselves.... but still need someone who will instruct us well and guide us; how can it be anything but foolish to think that the spiritual art, the most difficult of all arts, has no need of a teacher?"

St. John Cassian



HUMAN FREEDOM, ETHICAL JUDGMENT, AND THE GOD IMPLIED IN FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

LIDIYA LOZOVA

The Human Person at the Heart of FLOW's Ethical Vision

To date, numerous publications have examined the *For the Life of the World* (FLOW) document¹. All of them highlight the obvious: unlike many other official Orthodox statements, it does not shy away from addressing the pressing issues confronting the Church in the modern world—human rights, democracy and totalitarianism, war and peace, poverty and wealth, gender relations and sexuality, marriage and celibacy, bioethics, technology, climate change, and more—while seeking contemporary responses from the Church to these challenges.

I have repeatedly argued that at the root of this daring quest lies FLOW's humanistic emphasis, which clearly sets it apart from Russian social doctrine.² FLOW is positively—rather than negatively—

1 See a special issue of *Studies in Christian Ethics* 35, no. 2 (2022), <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/sce/35/2>, dedicated to scholarly responses to FLOW with contributions by Perry T. Hamalis, Gayle E. Woloschak, Alexis Torrance, Vasileios Thermos, Stephen M. Meawad, Carrie Frederick Frost, Elizabeth Theokritoff, Philip LeMasters, John D. Jones, Demetrios Harper, and Patrick Comerford; the issue on FLOW of *Theology Today* 78, no. 4 (2022), <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/ttja/78/4>, with contributions by Cyril Hovorun, Jean Porter, John Bowlin, C. Clifton Black, Frederick V. Simmons, Brandon Gallaher, Nicu Dumitrașcu, Jonathan Tobias, and John Chryssavgis; Carrie Frederick Frost and Nadieszda Kizenko, "For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church," *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2022): 119–139, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/joc.2022.0005>, with contributions by Radu Bordeianu, Will Cohen, Regina Elsner, Lidiya Lozova, Tamara Grdzelidze, Evgeny Pilipenko, Rowan Williams; Heta Hurskainen, "The Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Social Ethos of the Ecumenical Patriarchate: A Comparison of Central Aspects," in Thomas Bremer, Alfons Brüning, & Nadieszda Kizenko (eds.), *Orthodoxy in Two Manifestations? The Conflict in Ukraine as Expression of a Fault Line in World Orthodoxy* (Peter Lang, 2022): 73–96.

2 Lidiya Lozova, "Individual and Community in the Document

centered on the human person, with whom the text begins, though always in relation to God. This brings to mind a significant episode from the biography of Patriarch Bartholomew, who himself initiated and highly praised FLOW. When young Demetrios (later Bartholomew) was preparing to enter the Halki Seminary, he met with Patriarch Athenagoras to receive his blessing for his studies. Athenagoras remarked that he had heard good things about the young man and advised him to maintain both good grades and good character, but also asked who, in Demetrios's opinion, ultimately required this. Predictably, Demetrios mentioned the Church and his bishop, his parents, and God, but this was not sufficient for Athenagoras. The patriarch insisted that the first person Demetrios should never offend above all others in this world was actually *himself*.³ Thus, for both Athenagoras and Bartholomew, as well as for FLOW, the human person—endowed with dignity and freedom—possesses real, not illusory, significance. This is why FLOW affirms not only the compatibility (though not the equality) of political and civil human rights with Christian teaching, but also the Church's duty to defend an individual's freedom to renounce the Gospel and even God Himself (§81). Such a striking stance follows directly from FLOW's anthropology: the capacity to choose God without coercion is treated as integral to being human and Christian, as well as a prerequisite for authentically ethical action; it is also justified as corresponding to the authentic Tradition of the Church.

However, it is no secret that in the modern Orthodox environment, an emphasis on the human person and human freedom often provokes concern, distrust, or even rejection as an “unorthodox” focus. Eastern Orthodox Christians frequently contrast themselves with the “West” precisely on these grounds: Western Christianity appears to them overly human and world-centered (and therefore too changeable and unreliable) and overly liberal, whereas their own tradition seems oriented exclusively toward God, eternity, and mystery, directing the believer away from self and

‘For the Life of the World’: Reception and Relevance for Democratic Transformations in Ukraine,” in *Individual and Community in the Public Discourse of the Orthodox Church*, ed. Hans-Peter Großhans and Pantelis Kalaitzidis (Brill Schöningh, 2025), 125–145, https://doi.org/10.30965/9783657798087_010; Lidiya Lozova, “Relevance of ‘For the Life of the World’ in Ukraine,” *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2022): 119–139, <https://doi.org/10.1353/joc.2022.0005>.

³ John Chryssavgis, *Bartholomew: Apostle and Visionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 251–252.

world toward an unchanging eschatological reality – and therefore, necessarily conservative. In our present time of crisis – marked by global conflicts, wars, and widespread loss of belonging and orientation–this “transcendent” and “conservative” interpretation of Orthodoxy is especially attractive to new converts in Western parishes, even when their thirst for God may be overshadowed by forms of fundamentalism. Can FLOW–conceived as the Church’s contextual response to contemporary challenges arising within human history rather than as a timeless divine instruction valid for all circumstances–offer anything to such people? And if so, what?

Responsibility and judgement: in dialogue with Hannah Arendt

As Father Cyril Hovorun notes⁴, in many ways FLOW, though published in 2020, is a manifesto of the ideals of humanistic and pro-democratic trends that originated in the post-war theology of the 1960s. Indeed, it was that period’s theological climate that shaped Patriarch Bartholomew and influenced many of the document’s authors. Around the same time, philosopher Hannah Arendt–though entirely outside the Orthodox Church–reflected, drawing on Socrates and Kant, on human freedom and ability to make judgments as fundamental to moral behavior in society⁵. According to Arendt, Germans who carried out Nazi orders during World War II or cooperated with Hitler’s regime without experiencing any moral qualms did so precisely because they were incapable of forming their own judgments. Their thoughts and actions were determined by external authority, systems, and forces – whatever their orientation – rather than by honest dialogue with themselves and personal discernment. This incapacity for judgement made it difficult for them to grasp their own responsibility, even in court. In contrast, the practice of making judgments–understood, following Kant’s Critique of Judgment, as an aesthetic capacity cultivated through reflection—is, according to Arendt, an antidote to totalitarianism and a school of democracy. It is precisely this training of personal judgment that is a prerequisite for a social life oriented toward the common good.

4 Cyril Hovorun, “For the Life of the World and Orthodox Political Theology,” *Theology Today*, Vol. 78, no. 4 (2022), 350–351.

5 Hannah Arendt’s later essays in Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), especially “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” (49–147) and “Thinking and Moral Considerations” (159–193).

Hannah Arendt was not a Christian, yet she was deeply disappointed and outraged by the Catholic Church's collaboration with the Nazi regime in Germany⁶. One might expect that Christians in Germany would have been immune to such a blatant violation of the commandments of both the Old and New Testaments. In practice, however, many who were highly educated and well-versed in traditional Christian ethics proved more likely to obey and justify the anti-human regime than to oppose it, following the lead of their church authorities. Was not the underlying cause here the corruption of the capacity for personal judgment—associated in the Christian tradition since the Apostle Paul with conscience—and its replacement by complete reliance on external authority? And is this not the very problem we encounter in the Orthodox Church today—when enthusiasm for Orthodoxy so often ignores or justifies the Russian Orthodox Church's blessing of mass killing in Russia's "holy war" against Ukraine and the instrumentalisation of Orthodox Christianity as a weapon against the collective West in the name of "traditional values"? Is not the root of this phenomenon the temptation to renounce the capacity for personal judgment and responsibility, surrendering instead to the external ("mystical") and collective authority of those who demonstrate strength, power, and the loudest voice?

Navigating ambiguity: judgment and discernment in FLOW

In a recent discussion of FLOW, one of its authors, Aristotle Papanikolaou, characterised this document as "specific enough to give a sense of direction, yet broad enough to allow for personal judgment"⁷, clearly considering the ability to judge a positive value for an Orthodox Christian. According to Papanikolaou⁸, it is precisely the training in making judgments and cultivating virtues—guided by the Tradition of the Church—that renders the Christian an "athlete" in St Paul's understanding (1 Cor. 9:24–27) and Christian ethics an artistic training that embraces the social and political dimensions

6 See the essay "The Deputy: Guilt by Silence" in Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 214–227.

7 Online lecture Aristotle Papanikolaou on the topic "For the Life of the World." YouTube video, 1:10:56. Posted by Volos Academy for Theological Studies, March 10, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seZKA_kGdGw.

8 Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Ethics as Art," *Public Orthodoxy*, January 8, 2025, <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2025/01/08/ethics-as-art/>.

of the human path to holiness. Unsurprisingly, FLOW—unlike the social documents of the Russian Orthodox Church and like Hannah Arendt—places high value on democratic rule, considering it most favourable for the Church today.

It is obvious that personal judgment is possible and necessary precisely where there is no absolute, predetermined certainty, no unambiguity, no black-and-white answers. While the modern ideology, or even heresy, of the “Russian world” rests on a rigidly dualistic worldview—portraying the West as an evil to be opposed in a so-called “metaphysical battle” for “traditional values”⁹—FLOW presents the world as complex and multifaceted. It is a world in which human experience encounters many “grey areas” where confusion is easy; the Church should neither simplify nor ignore this reality but, drawing on Tradition, open space for conscientious discernment and responsibility¹⁰.

For example, in the section on vocations (§28), the document moves beyond the traditional dichotomy of “family or monastery” to address the contemporary growing reality of people who are lonely for various reasons; this reality does not fit established Orthodox patterns and therefore calls for new (yet virtually nonexistent) pastoral practices adequate to their needs. Suicide (§31) is traditionally deemed a sin, yet the text acknowledges its link to mental suffering that can diminish personal responsibility; here, too, the Church must leave space for pastoral judgment and compassion. On abortion (§25–26), the sanctity of the unborn child is affirmed, but tragic cases where the mother’s life is directly threatened are also recognized; in such situations, “the Church cannot claim competence in how best to act in each specific case and must entrust this question to the prayerful consideration of parents and doctors” (§26). The same complexity, as well the need for specific judgment and discernment, is evident in other areas FLOW addresses—in economic life, ecology, and science and technology—where neither rejection nor uncritical embrace is prescribed, but careful weighing of benefits and risks

9 See the recent analysis of the “Russian world” in *Helsinki Conference Statement, Resisting Empire, Promoting Peace: Churches Confront the ‘Russian World’ Ideology*, Conference of European Churches, Helsinki, May 2025, https://ceceurope.org/storage/app/media/2025-news/Helsinki%20Conference%20statement_final.pdf.

10 Gayle Woloschak emphasizes this point in her article, “For the Life of the World: Conscience and Discernment,” *The Wheel* 21–22 (2020): 60–62, https://wheeljournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/21-22_09_Woloschak.pdf.

in light of human dignity. Finally, on war and peace, the document does not impose a single position: it condemns violence but leaves Christians free either to participate in defense of themselves and their neighbors (discerning for themselves the extent of that participation), or to bear witness through nonviolence—“according to their own faith and love” (§45).

It cannot be said that the document leaves room for open-ended interpretations in all modern contexts; on certain issues it speaks with categorical clarity. In the section on the protection of children (§16), it explicitly declares that “no offense against God is worse than is the sexual abuse of children” and that a priest cannot absolve the offender in confession unless he first surrenders himself to the authorities. Such unconditional judgments reflect the gravity of Christian teaching on care for and protection of the most vulnerable. Yet overall, FLOW balances categorical instructions with the recognition that much of our reality consists of questions without ready-made answers. And it is precisely this humble recognition that imparts to the text its prayerful character, making clear that the many challenging situations FLOW describes cannot be discerned without prayer and participation in the mysteries of the Church.

What God do the Orthodox believe in?

For those unsettled by the uncertainty of the contemporary world, it is important to emphasize that amid all the ambiguities of life, FLOW recognizes one fundamental and unchanging truth that provides believers with a firm foundation in every challenge and trial: God truly loves humanity, and the Church is always called to alleviate suffering, not add to it. The document’s peculiar anthropocentrism—set against modern totalitarianism, the devaluation of human beings, and the denial of their freedom, judgment, and responsibility—ultimately bears witness not only to humanity, but also to God Himself. As disclosed by the pastoral guidelines offered by the Church in FLOW, this is unmistakably the God who, though incomprehensible, reveals His greatness in His closeness to humanity and His participation in human life; the God who desires not to diminish human freedom but to affirm it; the God who seeks not to devalue human judgment but to enlighten it; and finally, the God who does not reject human weakness but transforms it into a place where His glory may be revealed.

The strongest example of this positive understanding of God discernible in the document is, perhaps, its interpretation of disability. In Christian tradition, disability has often been described as a consequence of sin or divine punishment, but FLOW confidently asserts that “each of us is born as we are, so that the works of God may be revealed in us (Jn 9:3)” (§26). More fundamentally, however, the ethos of FLOW implies that not only disability but any life tragedy, suffering, difficult circumstance, or experience of social injustice—including poverty, displacement and migration, illness, addiction, family breakdown, violence and war, ecological devastation, economic exploitation, discrimination, and the wounds of abuse—is potentially a place where God’s love and glory may be revealed, as God Himself desires. The task of the people of the Church is therefore to ensure that their free and responsible judgments and actions in the world foster the conditions in which God’s love and glory can be manifested. This, in short, is the essence of the proposed social ethos of the Orthodox Church: a lived response to contemporary challenges that ultimately bears witness to the truly loving and faithful God in whom Orthodox Christians have always believed and trusted.

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WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

"Very many wish to be vouchsafed the Kingdom without labors, without struggles, without sweat; but this is impossible. If you love the glories of men, and desire to be worshipped, and seek comfort, you are going off the path. You must be crucified with the Crucified One, suffer with Him that suffered, that you may be glorified with Him that is glorified."

St. Macarius of Egypt



READING FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD: DISCERNMENT AND CHARITY IN A POLARIZED AGE

FR. ANTHONY PERKINS

Abstract

For the Life of the World has generated strong and often polarized reactions within the Orthodox Church. Rather than treating the document as either a manifesto to be defended or a threat to be resisted, this article proposes reading it as an invitation to discernment. Beginning from shared Orthodox first principles—the goodness of God, the dignity and vocation of the human person, and the call to enacted love—it examines how the document moves from theology into social application, and where that movement calls for further clarification. Through a series of brief case studies addressing nationalism, pluralism, human dignity, and prudential judgment, the article affirms the pastoral intent of the work while identifying places where greater precision and restraint may strengthen its reception. The aim is not to resolve disagreement, but to model how Orthodox Christians might listen charitably and speak faithfully together "for the life of the world."

Discernment and the Shape of Faithful Theology¹

When Orthodox theology is done well, it has a recognizable shape. It begins with God - His goodness, beauty, and love—and only then moves outward to creation, to the human person created in His image, and to our calling to participate in the healing and perfection of the world. From these first principles, theology learns how to see. It discerns what has gone wrong, what has been distorted, and where the wounds of the world now lie. Only after this work does it turn toward action: how grace may be received, embodied, and cooperated with in concrete circumstances.

For the Life of the World largely follows this movement, and it does so with care. In its opening affirmations—concerning the goodness of God, the dignity of the human person, and the Christian

¹ I used generative AI to help with the coherence and flow of this article. All of its mistakes remain my own.

obligation to respond to suffering—the document stands on ground that is firm and unmistakably Orthodox. Here, the discernment has largely already been done. These are not speculative claims, but truths formed by Scripture, liturgy, and the lived experience of the Church. The authors summarize them clearly, pastorally, and beautifully, glory to God.

The task of discernment becomes more demanding, however, as theology moves from first principles into the discernment of present challenges, and more demanding still when it turns toward proposals for ecclesial or social response. At this stage, theology is no longer simply recalling what the Church knows, but exercising judgment when the underlying conditions are not fully known nor what the unintended consequences of proposed responses might be. This is not a defect. It is the normal condition of faithful theologizing in history.

The authors of *For the Life of the World* were well-suited for this work. I know and have worshiped with some of them. They are formed by prayer and the sacramental life and their work flows from that source. They love God, the Church, and the world God created. They are also theologically trained and experienced in applying theology within particular social and technological contexts. None of this guarantees agreement, but it does establish good faith—and good faith matters. They are not, as has been asserted, trying to provide Orthodox legitimacy to worldly ideologies or platforms. They also did what discernment requires: they shared their work, tested it within their community, and offered it publicly not as a final word, but as a contribution to an ongoing ecclesial conversation. In doing so, they invited the next stage of discernment: reception by a wider body of Orthodox Christians—clergy, scholars, and laypeople—who share their desire that God’s will be done.

That invitation, however, arrives in a difficult moment. We live in a culture shaped by polarization, suspicion, and tribal reflexes. Disagreement is easily interpreted as malice. Language itself has become a marker of allegiance rather than a tool for understanding. It should be easier for Orthodox Christians to resist these habits, but our recent experience suggests that we are not immune to them.

What follows is offered in that spirit of love. Not as a judgment upon the authors, but as a participation in the discernment they themselves have initiated. My own formation is more modest than theirs. I have worked in the fields of theology, political science, and military analysis, but I am less interested in going into the weeds

of these than in sharing the fruit of something that they all have in common: a recognition of the limits of individual judgment and the necessity of communal correction. What I am offering, then, is not an alternative vision, but a set of reflections on where broader conversation may strengthen this work and improve its reception.

Why This Document Requires Discernment More Than Defense

The reactions to *For the Life of the World* have been swift and intense. Some have embraced it as a much-needed articulation of Orthodox social witness; others have dismissed it as overly political or ideologically compromised. It often seems that the people commenting on it are reading different documents. Psychology says they probably are. The question is frequently not what the document says, but whether it and its authors can be trusted.

Jonathan Haidt's work in moral psychology helps illuminate this dynamic. In *The Righteous Mind*, he observes that moral reasoning usually operates not on the question "Must I believe this?" but on the more intuitive "Can I believe this?" When a claim appears to come from the wrong place—or the wrong people—it is dismissed as suspect before its substance is considered.

In polarized environments, this tendency is amplified. Certain words trigger suspicion. Certain concerns are assumed to mask ulterior motives. Interpretation gives way to diagnosis. This is the soil in which a hermeneutic of suspicion flourishes. Once again, God's people have failed to follow God's precept that we become One as His in One.

There are times when suspicion is warranted. But where good faith is evident—especially in an ecclesial document that presents itself as pastoral and provisional—suspicion becomes a vice rather than a virtue. Discernment cannot proceed without charity. Not charity as a sentiment, but charity as a method.

What Kind of Document This Is—and Is Not

For the Life of the World is not a policy platform. It does not claim to offer definitive answers to complex social questions. The authors are explicit about the difficulty of translating the Gospel into social life and about the ambiguity that inevitably accompanies such efforts. Disagreement, therefore, is not a sign that the document has failed; it is evidence that it is functioning as intended.

The document also situates itself squarely within a plural social context. It neither imagines a world in which Orthodox Christians dictate terms to society, nor retreats into sectarian withdrawal. Instead, it seeks to articulate what faithful witness might look like under conditions that are, for better or worse, given.

In this sense, the document is not only *about* discernment; it is an instance of it. Like love, life is a verb. To act “for the life of the world” is to enter into a process—one that unfolds over time, invites correction, and depends upon communion.

My focus, therefore, is not on adjudicating conclusions, but on examining how discernment functions when theology moves from settled principles into contested terrain. I offer a small number of case studies from *For the Life of the World* that I believe would benefit from further conversation—particularly conversation that includes those who share the document’s moral aims but differ on the prudence or feasibility of some of its proposed applications.

Underlying this concern is a recognition that all prophetic speech is conditioned by the words, stories, and symbols available to the speaker. Two prophets may be granted the same vision of truth, yet articulate it in markedly different ways, because each can speak only through the conceptual and symbolic resources they have internalized. The Revelation of St. John the Theologian is so profound precisely because he was deeply formed by Scripture, liturgy, and the lived life of the Church. His language was capacious enough to bear the weight of what he was shown.

But the same symbols are often heard quite differently by readers who are less formed by liturgy and traditional modes of reading Scripture. We are neither as prophetic nor as well formed as St. John, so it should come as no surprise when people—even those of good will—misunderstand us. The obverse is also true: we should assume that we, too, are likely to misunderstand what those with different backgrounds are trying to convey.

As the authors of *For the Life of the World* rightly note, the Church is blessed by diversity, and by the conversations that emerge when people bring differing experiences and perspectives into shared discernment.

It should be clear that I do not question the formation of the authors of *For the Life of the World*. Rather, I suggest that others—equally committed to Christ and His Church—bring overlapping but distinct vocabularies, experiences, and forms of expertise that can deepen and clarify the discernment already underway. Such

contributions may at times require softening, reframing, or even setting aside strongly stated prescriptions. This is not a failure of fidelity. It is the ordinary and necessary work of discernment when the Church seeks not only to speak truthfully, but to speak "for the life of the world."

Case Study One: Nation and the Temptation of Absolutization

The document's treatment of nationalism has been heard by some as an attack on patriotism. Given contemporary political rhetoric, this reaction is understandable. But the theological concern here is older and more precise: the Church's rejection of ethnophyletism—the identification of ecclesial belonging with national or ethnic identity.

History has given the Church ample reason for vigilance on this point. Again and again, national myth has overwhelmed ecclesial allegiance, often with grave spiritual consequences. Baptism places our ultimate loyalty elsewhere. Nations may be honored and loved, but they cannot be made ultimate without distorting the Church's life.

At the same time, rejecting ethnophyletism does not require political indifference. The limit cuts both ways. The Church must not be captured by nationalism, but neither should she be reduced to an abstraction detached from real civic responsibility.

Case Study Two: Pluralism, Democracy, and the Question of Limits

The document's affirmation of pluralism has unsettled many readers, particularly those who hear the term as a synonym for relativism. The authors attempt to clarify this by distinguishing pluralism as a social condition from pluralism as a theological claim. The Church does not abandon truth in a plural society, nor does she seek to impose it by force.

The document also expresses appreciation for constitutional democracy, especially insofar as it restrains power and guards against tyranny. This appreciation is not naïve. The Church's historical experience with coercive authority makes such protections morally significant.²

² Not all Orthodox thinkers evaluate constitutional democracy in the same way. Some, shaped by different historical experiences, favor more explicitly symphonic or authoritative political systems. Engaging these perspectives may further enrich the Church's discernment. Notably,

What remains underdeveloped is the question of limits. Pluralism and constitutional democracy are not self-sustaining. They can be exploited by movements—religious or secular, left or right—that reject the goods that make plural coexistence possible. Hospitality requires discernment. Accommodation has boundaries.

Naming those boundaries would strengthen the document's witness rather than weaken it.

Case Study Three: Human Dignity, Rights, and Sacramental Grounding

Concerns about the document's use of human rights language are often principled. Modern secular rights discourse frequently rests on anthropological assumptions that do not completely match Orthodox expectations. These concerns should not be dismissed.

Here the document shows real strength. Human dignity is grounded explicitly in God, in creation, and in the human vocation to communion. Rights, insofar as they are invoked, flow from this sacramental vision of reality.

This grounding matters. In a culture where even allies affirm human rights while denying their transcendent source, the Church must be explicit. There is no meaningful account of human dignity apart from God. Even when goods can be described without reference to grace, the Church must still witness to grace as their true source.

At the same time, rights language is a limited tool. Detached from its foundation, it can be turned against the very anthropology it was meant to protect. As with pluralism, discernment requires limits. Making those limits clearer would help read the document that the authors intend.

Case Study Four: Moral Ends and Prudential Means

The most difficult passages are those that gesture toward specific policy solutions. The authors' pastoral impulse here is laudable. Abstraction can excuse inaction; silence can be mistaken for indifference. As a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, I especially appreciated their words on the damage that violence – and especially institutionalized violence – does to souls and societies.³

"human rights," "democracy," and "pluralism" have been used pejoratively by the Russian Orthodox Church and those whom they influence as they try to present their own symphonic system as a better alternative than those offered in the West.

3 This is another area, however, which might be sharpened

But the Church calls us without hesitation or reservation to address societal problems, although it is rarely specific about prudential means. When that distinction collapses, communion is put at risk. Our faith is pastoral, something that implies that there is often more than one way to work towards the better and the good. Judgments about specific policies and actions, even sincere ones, should not be stated as if they bore some kind of scriptural, patristic, or ecclesial mandate. There are too many variables that must be considered for anyone to be sure of the utility of, and demand, specific solutions (e.g., universal health care). Some policies and proposed cures are clearly better than others, but charity demands that we give the same level of critical analysis to our own policies and cures as we do to others; it also demands that we take seriously the concerns of others, even when we do not share them. For example, many of the most obvious solutions involve increasing the scope of government, something that many believe comes with its own downstream costs that are rarely considered.

Conclusion: Discernment as Ecclesial Witness

The tensions surrounding *For the Life of the World* arise **not from doctrinal error**, but from the difficulty of **listening charitably and speaking faithfully** in a polarized age. Different communities will naturally perceive different dangers as most urgent. This diversity is not a failure of discernment, but one of its necessary conditions.

Discernment presumes good faith. It tests claims over time. It translates where needed and restrains where authority gives way to prudence. Above all, it preserves communion.

Read this way, *For the Life of the World* is not a threat to be neutralized or a manifesto to be defended, but a serious ecclesial proposal that deserves to become a focus for discerning the challenges of the world and how we – Christians living in a specific times and places – should respond to them. To act "for the life of the world" is to remain in that work—truthfully, charitably, and united in the One Who demands it.

by broadening the pool of discernment. There are serious Orthodox theologians, such as Fr. Alexander Webster, that posit the equivalent of a just war theory within Orthodoxy (e.g. Alexander F.C. Webster and Darrell Cole. *The Virtue of War: Reclaiming the Classic Christian Traditions East and West*. United States: Regina Orthodox Press, 2004.

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Читаючи «Заради Життя Світу» (For the Life of the World): розсудливість і любов у поляризовану добу

о. Ентоні Перкінс

Анотація

Документ «Заради Життя Світу» викликав сильні й часто поляризовані реакції в Православній Церкві. Замість того, щоб розглядати його або як маніфест, який слід захищати, або як загрозу, якій потрібно чинити опір, ця стаття пропонує читати його як запрошення до розсудливості. Виходячи зі спільніх православних першооснов — доброти Бога, гідності та покликання людської особи й заклику до втіленої в діях любові, — вона досліджує, як документ переходить від богослов'я до соціального застосування і де цей рух потребує подальшого уточнення. Через низку коротких тематичних прикладів, присвячених націоналізмові, плюралізмові, людській гідності та розсудливому судженню, стаття стверджує пастирський намір праці, водночас указуючи на місця, де більша точність і стриманість могли б посилити її сприйняття. Метою є не усунення розбіжностей, а показ того, як православні християни можуть уважно й з любов'ю слухати та вірно говорити разом — заради життя світу.

Розсудливість і Форма Вірного Богослов'я¹

Коли православне богослов'я здійснюється належним чином, воно має впізнавану форму. Воно починається з Бога —

¹ Яскористався генеративним штучним інтелектом для покращення зв'язності та плавності цього тексту. Усі можливі помилки залишаються виключно моєю відповідальністю.

Його доброти, краси й любові – і лише потім рухається назовні: до створіння, до людської особи, створеної за Його образом, і до нашого покликання брати участь у зціленні та довершенні світу. Виходячи з цих першооснов, богослов'я вчиться бачити. Воно розпізнає, що пішло не так, що було спотворено і де нині лежать рани світу. Лише після цього воно звертається до дій: як благодать може бути прийнята, втілена й співпрацьована в конкретних обставинах.

«Заради життя світу» значною мірою дотримується цього руху і робить це уважно. У своїх початкових твердженнях – щодо доброти Бога, гідності людської особи та християнського обов'язку відповідати на страждання – документ стоїть на твердому й безсумнівно православному ґрунті. Тут розсудливість уже значною мірою здійснена. Це не спекулятивні твердження, а істини, сформовані Святым Письмом, літургією та живим досвідом Церкви. Автори викладають їх ясно, пастирськи й красиво – слава Богові.

Однак завдання розсудливості стає вимогливішим тоді, коли богослов'я переходить від першооснов до розпізнавання сучасних викликів, і ще вимогливішим – коли воно доходить до пропозицій щодо церковної чи соціальної відповіді. На цьому етапі богослов'я вже не просто пригадує те, що Церква знає, а здійснює судження в умовах, коли вихідні обставини не повністю відомі, а ненавмисні наслідки запропонованих відповідей – непевні. Це не вада, а нормальний стан вірного богослов'я в історії.

Автори «Заради життя світу» були добре підготовлені до цієї праці. Я знаю деяких із них і молився разом із ними. Вони сформовані молитвою та сакраментальним життям, і їхня праця випливає з цього формування. Вони люблять Бога, Церкву і світ, створений Богом. Вони також мають богословську освіту та мають досвід застосування богослов'я в конкретних соціальних контекстах. Усе це не гарантує згоди, але засвідчує добру волю – а добра воля має значення. Вони не намагаються, як це подекуди стверджується, надати православної легітимності світським ідеологіям чи політичним платформам.

Вони також зробили те, чого вимагає розсудливість: поділилися своєю працею, випробували її в межах своєї спільноти й запропонували її публічно не як остаточне слово, а як внесок у тривалу церковну розмову. Тим самим вони запросили до наступного етапу розсудливості –

прийняття (рецепції) ширшим колом православних християн: духовенством, науковцями й мирянами, які поділяють їхнє прагнення, щоб звершувалася воля Божа.

Однак це запрошення пролунало у важкий момент. Ми живемо в культурі, сформованій поляризацією, підозрою та племінними рефлексами. Незгода легко сприймається як зловмисність. Сама мова стала маркером належності, а не знаряддям розуміння. Для православних християн мало б бути легше протистояти цим звичкам, але наш недавній досвід показує, що ми не застраховані від них.

Те, що подано нижче, пропонується саме в цьому дусі. Не як осуд авторів, а як участь у розсудливості, яку вони самі ініціювали. Мое власне формування скромніше за їхнє. Я працював у сферах богослов'я, політичної науки та військового аналізу, але мене менше цікавить заглиблення в технічні деталі цих дисциплін, а більше — поділитися плодом того, що їх усіх об'єднує: усвідомленням меж індивідуального судження та необхідності спільнотного виправлення. Отже, я пропоную не альтернативне бачення, а низку роздумів про те, де ширша розмова могла б зміцнити цю працю й поліпшити її сприйняття.

Чому цей Документ Потребує Розсудливості Більше, ніж Захисту

Реакції на «Заради життя світу» були швидкими й інтенсивними. Дехто прийняв його як вкрай потрібне формулювання православного соціального свідчення; інші відкинули як надмірно політичний або ідеологічно скомпрометований. Часто здається, що люди, які його коментують, читають різні документи. Психологія підказує, що, ймовірно, так і є. Питання нерідко полягає не в тому, що документ говорить, а в тому, чи можна йому довіряти.

Праця Джонатана Гайта з моральної психології допомагає прояснити цю динаміку. У книзі *The Righteous Mind* він зауважує, що моральне міркування зазвичай зосереджується не на питанні «Чи мушу я в це повірити?», а на більш інтуїтивному «Чи можу я в це повірити?». Коли твердження здається таким, що походить «не з того місця» або «не від тих людей», його відкидають як підозріле ще до розгляду суті.

У поляризованому середовищі ця тенденція посилюється. Певні слова викликають підозру. Певні теми

сприймаються як прикриття прихованіх мотивів. Тлумачення поступається місцем діагнозу. Саме на такому ґрунті розквітає герменевтика підозри.

Іноді підозра виправдана. Але там, де очевидна добра воля — особливо в церковному документі, який подає себе як пастирський і тимчасовий, — підозра стає не чеснотою, а вадою. Розсудливість не може відбуватися без любові. Не любові як почуття, а любові як методу.

Яким є Цей Документ — і Яким Він Не є

«Заради життя світу» не є політичною програмою. Він не претендує на надання остаточних відповідей на складні соціальні питання. Автори відкрито говорять про труднощі перекладу Євангелія в соціальне життя і про неоднозначність, яка неминуче супроводжує такі спроби. Тому незгода не є ознакою провалу документа. Навпаки, це свідчення того, що він функціонує так, як задумано.

Документ також чітко розміщує себе в плуральному соціальному контексті. Він не уявляє світу, в якому православні християни диктують суспільству умови, але й не відступає в сектантську ізоляцію. Натомість він намагається окреслити, яким може бути вірне свідчення в умовах, які — на краще чи на гірше — є даними.

У цьому сенсі документ не лише про розсудливість; він сам є її прикладом. Як і любов, життя — це дієслово. Діяти «заради життя світу» означає вступати в процес, що розгортається з часом, запрошує до виправлення і залежить від сопричастя.

Приклад Перший: Нація і Спокуса Абсолютизації

Розгляд націоналізму в документі дехто сприйняв як напад на патріотизм. З огляду на сучасну політичну риторику, така реакція зрозуміла. Але богословське занепокоєння тут давніше й точніше: це відкидання Церквою етнофілетизму — ототожнення церковної принадлежності з національною чи етнічною ідентичністю.

Історія дала Церкві чимало підстав для пильності в цьому питанні. Знову і знову національний міф затьмарював церковну вірність, часто з тяжкими духовними наслідками. Хрещення спрямовує нашу остаточну лояльність в інше місце.

Нації можна шанувати й любити, але їх не можна робити абсолютном без спотворення життя Церкви.

Водночас відкинення етнофілетизму не вимагає політичної байдужості. Межа проходить у двох напрямках. Церква не повинна бути захоплена націоналізмом, але й не може бути зведена до абстракції, відірваної від реальної громадянської відповідальності.

Приклад Другий: Плюралізм, Демократія і Питання Меж

Схвальне ставлення документа до плюралізму стривожило багатьох читачів, особливо тих, хто чує в цьому слові синонім релятивізму. Автори намагаються це прояснити, розрізняючи плюралізм як соціальну умову і плюралізм як богословське твердження. Церква не відмовляється від істини в плюральному суспільстві і не намагається нав'язати її силою.

Документ також висловлює вдячність конституційній демократії, особливо настільки, наскільки вона обмежує владу і захищає від тиранії. Ця оцінка не є наївною. Історичний досвід Церкви з примусовою владою робить такі запобіжники морально значущими.²

Водночас недостатньо розробленим залишається питання меж. Плюралізм і конституційна демократія не підтримують себе автоматично. Ними можуть скористатися рухи – релігійні чи світські, ліві чи праві, – які відкидають ті блага, що роблять можливим плюральне співіснування. Гостинність потребує розсудливості. Пристосування має свої межі.

Окреслення цих меж радше посилило б свідчення документа, ніж послабило його.

² Не всі православні мислителі однаково оцінюють конституційну демократію. Дехто, сформований іншими історичними досвідами, віддає перевагу більш виразно симфонійним або авторитетним політичним системам. Залучення цих перспектив могло б ще більше збагатити церковну розсудливість. Варто також зауважити, що поняття “права людини”, “демократія” та “плюралізм” використовувалися Російською Православною Церквою та тими, хто перебуває під її впливом, у пейоративному сенсі – як частина спроб представити власну симфонійну систему як кращу альтернативу тим моделям, що пропонуються Заходом.

Приклад Третій: Людська Гідність, Права і Сакраментальне Підґрунтя

Застереження щодо використання в документі мови прав людини часто мають принциповий характер. Сучасний світський дискурс прав нерідко ґрунтуються на антропологічних припущеннях, які не повністю відповідають православному баченню. Ці застереження не слід відкидати.

Саме тут документ виявляє справжню силу. Людська гідність чітко вкорінена в Бозі, у творінні та в людському покликанні до сопричастя. Права, наскільки вони згадуються, випливають із цього сакраментального бачення реальності.

Таке підґрунтя має значення. У культурі, де навіть союзники стверджують права людини, водночас заперечуючи їхнє трансцендентне джерело, Церква мусить бути чіткою. Не існує змістового розуміння людської гідності без Бога. Навіть коли блага можна описувати без посилання на благодать, Церква все одно повинна свідчити про благодать як їхнє справжнє джерело.

Водночас мова прав є обмеженим інструментом. Відірвана від свого фундаменту, вона може бути обернена проти тієї самої антропології, яку мала захищати. Як і у випадку з плуралізмом, розсудливість вимагає меж. Чіткіше означення цих меж допомогло б читати документ так, як його задумали автори.

Приклад Четвертий: Моральні Цілі й Розсудливі Засоби

Найскладнішими є ті місця, де документ натякає на конкретні політичні рішення. Пастирський імпульс авторів тут заслуговує на повагу. Абстракція може виправдовувати бездіяльність; мовчання можуть сприймати як байдужість. Як ветеран війни в Афганістані, я особливо оцінив їхні слова про шкоду, якої насилиство — а особливо інституціоналізоване насилиство — завдає душам і суспільствам.³

Проте Церква без вагань закликає нас долати суспільні

³ Утім, і ця сфера могла б бути прояснена точніше через розширення кола розсудження. Існують серйозні православні богослови — зокрема о. Александр Вебстер, — які обстоюють наявність у Православ'ї функціонального аналога теорії справедливої війни (див., наприклад: Alexander F. C. Webster, Darrell Cole, *The Virtue of War: Reclaiming the Classic Christian Traditions East and West*, United States: Regina Orthodox Press, 2004).

проблеми, але рідко конкретизує розсудливі засоби. Коли це розрізнення зникає, під загрозою опиняється єдність. Наша віра є пастирською, а це означає, що часто існує більше, ніж один шлях до кращого й доброго. Судження щодо конкретних політик і дій, навіть щирі, не слід подавати так, ніби вони мають якийсь безпосередній біблійний, патристичний чи церковний мандат. Існує надто багато змінних, щоб хтось міг бути певним у корисності та необхідності конкретних рішень (наприклад, універсальної системи охорони здоров'я). Деякі політики й запропоновані «ліки» явно кращі за інші, але любов вимагає, щоб ми застосовували однаковий рівень критичного аналізу як до власних пропозицій, так і до чужих; вона також вимагає серйозно ставитися до застережень інших, навіть коли ми їх не поділяємо. Наприклад, багато з найочевидніших рішень передбачають розширення ролі держави — а чимало людей вважають, що це має власні віддалені наслідки, які рідко беруться до уваги.

Висновок: Розсудливість Як Церковне Свідчення

Напруження довкола «Заради життя світу» виникає не через доктринальну помилку, а через складність уважно слухати з любов'ю та вірно говорити в поляризовану добу. Різні спільноти природно сприйматимуть різні небезпеки як найнагальніші. Ця різноманітність є не провалом розсудливості, а однією з її необхідних умов.

Розсудливість передбачає добру волю. Вона випробовує твердження з часом. Вона перекладає там, де потрібно, і стримується там, де авторитет поступається місцем розсудливості. Понад усе вона зберігає сопричастя.

Прочитаний у такий спосіб, «Заради життя світу» є не загрозою, яку потрібно нейтралізувати, і не маніфестом, який слід захищати, а серйозною церковною пропозицією, що заслуговує стати осердям розсудження викликів сучасного світу і того, як ми — християни, що живуть у конкретному часі й місці, — маємо на них відповідати. Діяти заради життя світу означає залишатися в цій праці — правдиво, з любов'ю і в єдності з Тим Єдиним, Хто цього від нас вимагає.



WEALTH, POVERTY, AND FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD AFTER FIVE YEARS

DYLAN PAHMAN

Introduction

Though Orthodox scholars and theologians in recent years have amassed significant contributions to environmental theology and political theology, we lag behind other Christian traditions when it comes to reflection on economic matters or “Christian social thought.” Nevertheless, there have been some significant contributions, from Vladimir Soloviev to Sergei Bulgakov, S. L. Frank, and St. Maria Skobtsova.¹ And the recent 2020 document *For the Life of the World* (henceforth FLW), written by a commission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in response to the encyclical of the Council of Crete in 2016,² contains a whole section on wealth and poverty in our modern world. Unfortunately, we can and should do much better than its unhelpful diagnoses and prescriptions, as detailed below. First, I will survey some basic distinctions from Holy Tradition that this document misses, in addition to ignoring the insights of modern economics, then I will examine the document itself, beginning with the good before airing my criticisms, ending with a better alternative in Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

The Law, the Gospel, Catholicity, and Sobornost'

In my own research for more than a decade now, I have focused specifically on the social and economic significance of Orthodox asceticism.³ Additionally, in my recent book, *The Kingdom*

1 See Vladimir Solovyov, *The Justification of the Good*, rev. ed., ed. Boris Jakim, trans. Natalie A. Duddington (Eerdmans, 2005); Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. Catherine Evtuhov (Yale University Press, 2000); S. L. Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*, trans. Boris Jakim (Ohio University Press, 1987); Mother Maria Skobtsova: *Essential Writings*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Orbis Books, 2003).

2 See *Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete 2016)*, 5.13, retrieved from <https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council>.

3 See Dylan Pahman, *Orthodox Christian Social Thought and Asceticism*,

of God and the Common Good, from which this article is adapted, I survey other Christian traditions, the Bible, Orthodox Church history, modern economics, and contemporary Orthodox contributions.⁴ Among other insights, the most relevant for this discussion are the relation of the Law to the Gospel and the principle of catholicity.

In short, the Law aims at justice and is thus fundamentally impersonal in order to be impartial. Thus, because God is just, “there is no partiality with God” (Romans 2:11). All need to be treated equally by the law (rule of law), because all are equally human and created after the image of God. However, the Gospel aims at mercy: “be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). Mercy looks different for each person, because each person is a unique creation and at different stages of spiritual development. Jesus tells the rich young ruler, “sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Mark 10:21), but Clement of Alexandria notes that by contrast, “He bids Zaccheus and Matthew, the rich tax-gathers, entertain Him hospitably. And He does not bid them part with their property, but ... He subjoins, ‘Today salvation has come to this house.’”⁵ Mercy does not violate justice but goes beyond justice, to the extent that St. Isaac the Syrian exhorted his readers to be “above justice ... surpassing justice by mercy, wreathing for [your]self the crown not of the just under the law, but of the perfect under the new covenant.”⁶

As for catholicity, it can be traced to St. Ignatius of Antioch on the road to martyrdom in AD 110. St. Ignatius is the first known author to refer to the Church as “catholic,” as we confess in the Creed. Writing to warn the Smyrnaeans about the errors of the Gnostics, he says, “They care nothing about love: they have no concern for widows or orphans, for the oppressed, for those in prison or released, for the hungry or the thirsty. They hold aloof from the Eucharist... because they refuse to admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ ... which, in His goodness,

PhD by Published Works Thesis (St. Mary’s University, Twickenham, London, 2025).

4 See Dylan Pahman, *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good: Orthodox Christian Social Thought* (Ancient Faith, 2025).

5 Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?*, 13, in ANF 2:594–595.

6 Isaac the Syrian, “Treatise IV,” in *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans. A. J. Wensinck (Koninklijke Akademie Van Wetenschappen, 1923), 30.

the Father raised [from the dead].”⁷ By contrast, “You should regard that Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”⁸

The word “catholic,” often used synonymously with “universal,” more accurately means holistic. It is the uniting of all things through the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ: God and humanity, spiritual and material, virginity and motherhood, clergy and lay, even rich and poor. In later years, we see this reflected in what Fr. Alexander Schmemann referred to as “Byzantine humanism.”⁹ In the Russian Empire, catholicity would be rediscovered by the Slavophiles, then elaborated by Soloviev, Frank, and others, in the principle of *sobornost'*. Frank, in particular, emphasizes *sobornost'* as the element of personal trust and love that must pervade all of society, including even fundamentally impersonal relations like employers and employees or generals and soldiers. He then emphasizes that while this can be found, imperfectly, across all social spheres and cultures, we see it most fundamentally instantiated in the Church. It thus relates to the distinction between Law and Gospel by embodying the grace and mercy characteristic of the latter.¹⁰

The Good of FLW

“Our service to God is fundamentally doxological in nature and essentially Eucharist in character,”¹¹ says FLW. It continues, “Communion with Christ in the face of our neighbor ... lies behind the first and great commandment of the Law to love God with one’s whole heart and one’s neighbor as oneself.”¹² Furthermore, “Being made in the image and likeness of God, each person is unique and infinitely precious, and each is a special object of God’s love.”¹³ It

7 Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans*, 6.2–7.1, in *Early Christian Fathers*, ed. Cyril C. Richardson (Westminster Press, 1953), 114.

8 Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*, 8.1–2, 115.

9 Alexander Schmemann, *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, trans. Lydia W. Kesich (SVS Press, 2003), 220.

10 See Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*.

11 David Bentley Hart and John Chryssavgis, ed., *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020), 1.1, 2. Henceforth, FLW.

12 FLW, 1.2, 2.

13 FLW, 1.3, 2.

also acknowledges the importance of asceticism,¹⁴ connecting it with the Eucharist.¹⁵ And it insists, “Christ’s teachings confirm, while making even more urgent, the largest and most universal moral demands made by the Law and the Prophets of Israel: provision for the destitute, care for the stranger, justice for the wronged, mercy for all.”¹⁶ Though the term catholicity is only used in the context of ecumenical relations,¹⁷ we can charitably see at least an intuition that Eucharist, asceticism, and care for the poor and marginalized should form a seamless garment for any Orthodox social ethos. Additionally, it at least acknowledges the importance of natural law and does repeatedly emphasize the inviolability of human dignity, from conception to natural death.

Furthermore, Archdeacon John Chryssavgis and philosopher David Bentley Hart make clear in their editorial preface that the commission “endeavored to steer well clear of simplistic, pietistic, or legalistic pronouncements”¹⁸ and that they “sought to abstain altogether from the language and intonations of judgment or condemnation”¹⁹ and that “its critiques [are] strictly constructive.”²⁰ On several issues the document strikes that tone well. For example, it acknowledges the great benefits of modern medicine while warning of bioethical challenges, likely benefitting from the expertise of commission member Gayle Woloschak, an expert in radiobiology and bionanotechnology at Northwestern University. Its ecological perspective no doubt benefited from Archdeacon Chryssavgis’s expertise in environmental theology as well. It also praises the many blessings of modern democracy, while nevertheless warning of nationalism, secularism, and politicization, likely benefitting from the expertise of commission member Aristotle Papanikolaou, an expert in Orthodox political theology. Indeed, much better than Moscow’s 2000 document *The Basis of the Social Concept*,²¹ the document deserves commendation for its clear and unambiguous support for freedom of conscience.

14 See FLW, 1.4, 4.

15 See FLW, 1.5, 5.

16 FLW, 1.6, 6.

17 See FLW, 6.50, 68–69.

18 Hart and Chryssavgis, “Preface,” in FLW, xviii.

19 Hart and Chryssavgis, xix.

20 Hart and Chryssavgis, xix.

21 See *The Basis of the Social Concept* (Moscow: Department of External Church Relations, 2000), retrieved from <https://old.mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>. Henceforth BSC.

The Bad of FLW

Unfortunately, the commission did not include any Orthodox economists, businesspeople, or other scholars of related topics, and it shows. Its section on wealth and poverty is devoid of any praise or gratitude whatsoever for the unprecedented abundance of the world we live in today or the economic arrangements and entrepreneurial endeavors that have made that abundance possible. This abundance has led to the most drastic—and ongoing—reduction of poverty in human history since the late eighteenth century. Doesn't it deserve mention in a statement like this? Indeed, despite the editors' foreswearing of judgmentalism, the section on wealth and poverty contains nine instances of the word "condemn." It correctly notes that "all creation's plenty comes from God and is the common birthright of all persons; anything the rich man possesses has been entrusted to him for the common good, and all he has belongs to all others."²² But without understanding this—as the Fathers did—within the context of the proper ends of one's stewardship of private property, the statement starts to sound nearly communist, in the sense of condemning private ownership. Indeed, despite its praise for human rights, it never once even acknowledges private property to be among them, which according to the Edict of Milan and St. Nicholas Cabasilas would unintentionally undermine its support for freedom of conscience as well.²³

Far more troubling, FLW actually employs Marxist language, such as "wage slavery"²⁴ and "the late capitalist world."²⁵ To be clear, I'm not calling anyone on the commission a Marxist. They clearly are not, given that they are not atheists and do not appeal to a deterministic social-historical dialectic, which characterize the Marxist worldview. However, these terms are Marxist in their origin, and it is only Marxist analysis that makes them comprehensible.

22 FLW, 4.34, 45.

23 See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 10.5, in NPNF² 1:378-380; Nicholas Cabasilas, *Ruler's Illegal Outrages against Sacred Property*, 10, in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (Eerdmans, 1999), 477-481. The Edict of Milan references a previous edict of tolerance from 311 that no one remembers, because that edict, unlike Milan, failed to return confiscated property to the Church. Thus, the liberty of the Church in ancient Rome was connected to the recognition of the Church's property rights.

24 FLW, 4.36, 48.

25 FLW, 3.30, 39.

As the economist John Maynard Keynes put it, “Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”²⁶ In the case of FLW, that economist is Karl Marx.

The term “wage slavery” depends on the debunked ideas of the labor theory of value and equality in exchange. Thus, reasoning that prices reflect the amount of labor required to make a product and that all exchanges represent an equality of economic value between money and products, the term “wage slavery” presumes that all profit can only come from the exploitation of workers, paying them less than the value of their labor. “Late capitalism” refers to the belief that the class conflict caused by this alleged exploitation will lead to a crisis and collapse of modern market economies, and that we are very close to such a tipping point. These phrases make for effective memes on social media, but from the perspective of modern economics, they are pseudoscientific.

Rather, according to modern economics, prices reflect the subjective marginal utility of products, not “congealed labour-time,”²⁷ to use Marx’s term. That is, profit comes from producing and exchanging goods that people want and value differently based on their personal preferences (thus, no labor theory of value or equality in exchange) and that they are willing to pay more than the costs of production to get. And Marxists have been talking about “late capitalism” for over a century now but the supposedly imminent crisis and collapse remains yet to come. Why? Because Marxist analysis does not accurately describe social or economic reality and thus cannot help us better understand or improve them. Exploitation only happens when labor contracts result not from freedom but from force or fraud, in which cases, to be clear, the Church certainly should denounce it.

Unfortunately, Marxist memes are not the only problem with FLW. It is furthermore plagued by factual inaccuracies. For example, it asserts that economic globalization has increased poverty and inequality. This is an empirical claim that therefore requires empirical evidence to support it, which FLW does not provide. Thank God, according to Oxford’s Our World in Data project, the opposite is the

26 John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), 384.

27 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Friedrich Engels, vol. 1 (Swan Sonnenschein, 1904), 6.

case.²⁸ Indeed, to cite just one remarkable example, in 2024, according to the World Bank, India completely eliminated extreme poverty through international trade, economic liberalization (which includes private property and the rule of law), infrastructure improvements, and educational initiatives²⁹—basically everything involved in Adam Smith’s “obvious and simple system of natural liberty.”³⁰ India still has a long way to go, but it continues to improve. And when over a billion people no longer face the harshest poverty in the world, those of us concerned with feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and sheltering the homeless ought to listen and learn from how it happened.

Instead, FLW adds more inaccuracies, claiming, “Whole schools of economics arose in the twentieth century at the service of [extreme] inequality, arguing that it is a necessary concomitant of any functioning economy. Without fail, however, the arguments employed by these schools are tautologous at best, and proof of how impoverished the human moral imagination can make itself in servitude to ideology.”³¹ To which twentieth-century schools of economics do they refer? Not the Keynesian, Austrian, Ordoliberal, Chicago, Institutional, Experimental, or Behavioral schools. The supposedly tautological arguments of whatever unnamed schools the authors intend are not discussed, and so the document asserts as “proof” a statement it has not proved.

This way of speaking shows a disappointing lack of intellectual charity and humility, a failure to first listen to economists and businesspeople before moralizing about their vocational areas of expertise. In light of this, when FLW then suggests that “new economic models” are needed, one must wonder, what is problematic about the current models? There is an opportunity today not so

28 See Joe Hasell, Bertha Rohenkohl, Pablo Arriagada, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, and Max Roser, “Economic Inequality,” *Our World in Data* (2023), <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-inequality>; Joe Hasell et al., “Poverty,” *Our World in Data* (2022), <https://ourworldindata.org/poverty>; Max Roser, “Extreme Poverty: How Far Have We Come, and How Far Do We Still Have to Go?” *Our World in Data*, August 27, 2023, <https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty-in-brief>.

29 See “The World Bank in India,” *World Bank Group*, last updated September 16, 2024. Amazingly, the benefits of basic education and other skills training for poverty alleviation are not mentioned by FLW either.

30 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 5th ed., 2 vol. (Methuen & Co., 1904), 2.4.9, 184.

31 FLW, 4.41, 56–57.

much for new models but for fuller models that also account for spiritual, moral, and other noneconomic aspects of life. But FLW doesn't even identify this opportunity, nor does it encourage its readers to do so. In fact, it discourages them from doing so with its dismissive rhetoric.

The inaccuracies continue when FLW claims, "The poor of most societies are victims of unprincipled credit institutions, and as a rule enjoy little protection from creditors who have exploited their need to place them in a condition of perpetual debt."³² In fact, the poor in most societies cannot get loans at all because they have no credit or bad credit. Furthermore, the evaluation of credit scores as a prerequisite to lending is one way that modern lending largely is not usurious. The other way it avoids this sin is through modern bankruptcy laws, which allow people to renegotiate or cancel their debts if they become unable to pay, rather than being thrown into debtors' prisons or sold into slavery, as was the case in the ancient, medieval, and early modern eras. Moreover, Bangladeshi economist Muhammad Yunus received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 precisely for his work in microlending, which extends the benefits of credit to the poor through very small loans, because lending is a key means to alleviating poverty, not its cause.³³

Holy Tradition has tools we can use, along with modern economics, to enable our Orthodox Tradition to speak into concerns like this in our world today.³⁴ Unfortunately, FLW does not properly draw from the wisdom of either when it comes to its treatment of wealth and poverty. Indeed, its exhortations seem to imagine that we still live in the mid-nineteenth century, before things like bankruptcy laws, the forty-hour work week, mandatory holidays, and the social safety nets every developed nation provides today, as do even many developing ones.

32 FLW, 4.39, 53.

33 See Muhammad Yunus, "Nobel Prize Lecture," Nobel Prize, December 10, 2006, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2006/yunus/lecture/>.

34 For example, with economist James Caton I have argued that student loans in the United States, which do not consider creditworthiness and are uniquely difficult to discharge in bankruptcy, in some cases qualify as usury according to the standards of the Scriptures and Church Fathers. See James Caton and Dylan Pahman, "Student Loans and the Sin of Usury," *Religion & Liberty Online*, September 6, 2023, <https://rlo.acton.org/archives/124841-student-loans-and-the-sin-of-usury.html>.

An Assessment of FLW

I've found Fr. Alexis Torrance's evaluation of FLW to be an accurate distillation of the key problem: "At times, such as during the protracted critique of unfettered capitalism, one senses an optimism that simply with the correct governmental policies and taxation models in place, the Gospel ideal as portrayed in Acts 2 might be, if not reached, at least approximated. Thus the document does not hesitate to call on the Church to 'require' and 'insist upon' certain governmental policies, including the active coercion of the wealthy to 'contribute as much as they can to the welfare of society as a whole."³⁵

Indeed, though FLW acknowledges natural law (the basis of universal, Ten Commandments morality and justice), it claims that the Gospel merely "enlarges its range and makes its demands upon us absolute."³⁶ This misses the key distinction that the justice of the Law is necessarily impersonal while the mercy of the Gospel is necessarily personal, thus falling into the sort of legalism the editors' sought to avoid. As illustrative of this, FLW quotes St. Maria Skobtsova's exhortation to personal charity as a support for national-level, impersonal state action.³⁷

Alas, too often, issues that could better be addressed by institutions on a more personal and local level are harmfully elevated by FLW to the national and international levels and limited to state action, which blurs the boundaries between the spheres of social life. At the same time, national and transnational issues are either not mentioned at all—like inflation—or are badly misrepresented—like international trade.³⁸ Once again, Holy Tradition does have a vital voice to add to these conversations, but I'm afraid it truly would have been better for FLW to stay silent on economics. Though it wishes to be a prophetic "voice ... crying in the wilderness" (Is. 40:3),

35 Alexis Torrance, "To Live is Christ: Exploring the Promise and Limits of *For the Life of the World*," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 35, no. 2 (2022): 229.

36 FLW, 1.7, 8.

37 See FLW, 4.41, 57

38 With economist Alexander Salter, I've been able to write about how inflationary monetary policy falls short of "a perfect and just measure" (Deut. 25:15), as well as how international trade allows people to serve their neighbors across the world, getting the words of Nicaea II and St. John Chrysostom published in the *Wall Street Journal*. See Dylan Pahman and Alexander William Salter, "In God—and Sound Money—We Trust," *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 2022; "Jesus Saves, but He's No Protectionist," *Wall Street Journal*, October 21, 2022.

its lack of charity and understanding of economic issues makes it more like “sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1).

To be fair, as Torrance points out, “This is a text that calls its readers to go further and does not arrogate any special binding authority to itself. It would be a mistake either to treat the document as a last word on the matter, or as an ethical programme sufficient unto itself.”³⁹ Torrance suggests that future work should focus more on the transformation of the heart through repentance, since the heart is the source of sin. I second that. The heart should be an altar of prayer out of which we eucharistically offer the world back to God in all our vocations.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

I’ll close with a better alternative: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew’s 2008 book *Encountering the Mystery*. Bartholomew’s perspective on economic globalization is not without its own inaccuracies,⁴⁰ but his tone in this work at least evinces an effort to listen in charity, and his eyes aren’t blind to the blessings we’ve received alongside the novel challenges of our world today, especially environmental concerns. “The globalization of the world’s economy,” writes His All-Holiness, “is ... a continuous process, which cannot be understood even minimally without patient, careful analysis.”⁴¹ He notes that “its consequences are both positive and negative,” and thus “it would not be correct simply to say that globalization is detrimental in all circumstances.... On the contrary, it is worth reflecting on how much has been achieved in recent years, in particular for the 800 million people in Asia—especially in India and China—whose poverty has been alleviated and whose quality of life has improved through education, health, and technology.”⁴² All the more so, I would add, we should reflect on the progress that has been made in Asia—as well as Africa and elsewhere—since he wrote this in 2008.

Bartholomew additionally articulates the Stoic and Patristic⁴³

39 Torrance, “To Live is Christ,” 224.

40 See, e.g., Bartholomew I of Constantinople, *Encountering the Mystery Perennial Values of the Orthodox Church* (Doubleday, 2008), 157, 164.

41 Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 153.

42 Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 153.

43 See John Chrysostom, *Against Publishing the Errors of the Brethren*, 2, in NPNF¹ 9:236; John Cassian, *Conferences*, 21.14, in NPNF² 11:508–09; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations*, 2.22, in NPNF² 7:209; Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, 236.7, in NPNF² 8:278.

distinction between good, evil, and indifferent things, writing, “It is true, of course, that many people are uncomfortable speaking about money and wealth; this is perhaps more true of religious people, who will either denounce money as demonic (see Matt. 6:24) or silently idolize wealth as a blessing. Theologically and spiritually, however, the significance of money depends very much on what we do with it.”⁴⁴ This perspective is so necessary and helpful for responsible Orthodox Christian social thought.

Bartholomew furthermore draws out the principle of ecumenicity in a way that echoes catholicity and sobornost’: “The ecumenicity of the Orthodox Church differs substantially from the recent phenomenon of economic globalization. The former is based on love for all people and respects the human person, whom it serves in its totality. The latter is primarily motivated by the desire to enlarge the economy.”⁴⁵ Combining this with S. L. Frank’s perspective,⁴⁶ we can see how that ecumenicity might truly fulfill, rather than abolish, that global economic order. How so?

“Western societies have not really found any more beneficial economic mechanism than the markets to regulate the activities of labor and capital,” writes Bartholomew. He then continues in a way that echoes Ordoliberal economist Wilhelm Röpke: “The Western system of capitalism forever seeks new ways of reducing costs and increasing gains. Nevertheless, not even the strongest advocates of capitalism would claim that it can serve as a basis for human society unless its activity is underpinned and regulated in the light of moral and spiritual values, which recognize the ultimate value of human beings,” citing concerns such as care for the environment and upholding a moral culture.⁴⁷

Indeed, Bartholomew makes clear, “I am by no means advocating sharing of wealth or eradication of poverty through some abstract dogma or Marxist formula for the redistribution of

44 Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 157.

45 Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 159.

46 See Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society*.

47 Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 170. Compare to Wilhelm Röpke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time*, trans. Annette and Peter Schiffer Jacobsohn (University of Chicago Press, 1950); idem, *A Humane Economy: The Social Framework of the Free Market*, trans. Elizabeth Henderson (Henry Regnery Company, 1960).

wealth.”⁴⁸ Commenting on how ineffective international aid often is, he writes, “The kind of aid that is required is such that the recipient will be enabled to produce and empowered to thrive as a particular and unique nation in a global market. Then the act of giving—which is transformed into the art of communion and encounter—becomes an enrichment and blessing for all.”⁴⁹

If any council or patriarchate of the Orthodox Church should choose to make another statement—official or otherwise—on economic issues in the future, I suggest it take His All-Holiness’s balanced approach here as a better baseline. Bartholomew both listens and speaks in a way that witnesses to, rather than detracts from, the Gospel of the Kingdom and its essential role in advancing the common good of our economies and communities today.

48 Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*, 170.

49 Bartholomew, 168.

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WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

"The demons always lead us into sin by means of deceitful fantasies. Through the fantasy of gaining wealth they led the wretched Judas to betray the Lord and God of all; through the deceit of worthless bodily comfort and of esteem, gain and glory they put the noose around his neck and brought him to age-long death. The scoundrels requited him with precisely the opposite of what their fantasy, or provocation, had suggested to him."

St. Hesychios the Priest

"The goal of human freedom is not in freedom itself, nor it is in man, but in God. By giving man freedom, God has yielded to man a piece of His Divine authority, but with the intention that man himself would voluntarily bring it as a sacrifice to God, a most perfect offering."

St. Theophan the Recluse



THE MORAL WITNESS OF FRIENDSHIP: EXAMINING ORTHODOX SOCIAL THOUGHT AMID CRISIS AND CONVERSIONS

FR. GREGORY JENSEN

Abstract

This review analyzes Dylan Pahman's *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good*, evaluating its contribution to Orthodox Social Thought (OST) amidst contemporary crises. While Pahman lucidly summarizes biblical, patristic, and Western social foundations, the book is structurally fragmented and contains a serious critique: Pahman uses "moral equivalency rhetoric" when excusing discussion of Russia's "unjust act of aggression" against Ukraine, damaging the credibility of the Orthodox moral witness. Claims of increasing converts also lack "empirical evidence," requiring "intellectual humility". The reviewer argues that true OST is best expressed through "civic friendship" (*politikē philia*), demonstrated by unheralded parish action, and cultivated by the "ascetical discipline of silence" and listening for effective spiritual formation.

Review: Pahman, Dylan. *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good: Orthodox Christian Social Thought*. Ancient Faith Publishing, 2025.

Setting the Stage: Trauma Abroad, Wishful Thinking at Home

Over the last few years, we've seen a bump in media coverage about the Orthodox Church. Almost all of this pertains to Russia's ongoing genocidal campaign in Ukraine. One Orthodox nation has seen fit not only to invade, but try to eradicate another Orthodox country. That they do so with the blessing of their own hierarchs, demonstrates not only the necessity of a clearly and even forcibly articulated Orthodox social ethic, but of the practical problem of translating theory into practice and holding accountable those who--as in the case of the Russian Orthodox Church--flagrantly teach moral heresy.

To be sure, this is hardly a problem of our own age. The New Testament offers us several, albeit less dramatic, examples of the disconnect between how Christians treated each other and

what today we would call Orthodox Social Teaching (OST). We have, for example, the conflict over the daily distribution of food to widows in Acts 6. In 1 Corinthians 11, St. Paul intervenes to correct overeating, drunkenness, and neglect of the poor by the wealthy at the celebration of the Eucharist. And, as we see in Russia today, some in the early church sought to curry the favor of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor, whose concerns they dismiss with platitudinous indifference. “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James 2:16) I’ll come back to the invasion below. For now though, I want to turn to other media reports which, while of an altogether different tone, are not wholly unrelated to events in Ukraine.

American Orthodoxy, so we are told, is experiencing an uptick in men and women (primarily men) becoming Orthodox.¹ Depending on who you ask, this is either a very good thing—“The Church is growing!”²—or if not quite a bad thing, something about which we should be concerned—“Many of these young men becoming Orthodox are hyperconservative, authoritarian, and dangerously enamored of Putin and Russia!”³

Both in the media⁴ and at the 24th Regular Sobor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA,⁵ I’ve offered my own thoughts about what we are hearing in the secular press and online about increasing interest in the Church. My thoughts are in line with Dylan Pahman’s in *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good: Orthodox Christian Social Thought*. He writes that “empirical claims,” in our case, the Church is growing (or we are potentially being overwhelmed by hyperconservative converts), “require

1 Ruth Graham, “Orthodox Church Pews Are Overflowing With Converts.” *The New York Times*, November 19, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/19/us/orthodox-christianity.html>.

2 See for example, Lucy Ash, “Orthodox Christianity: Young US Men Joining ‘masculine’ Russian Churches,” BBC News, May 24, 2025, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c30q5l8d4lro>.

3 Riccardi-Swartz, Sarah. *Between Heaven and Russia: Religious Conversion and Political Apostasy in Appalachia*. Fordham University Press, 2022.

4 Gregory Jensen, “Men Flocking to Orthodoxy: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” The Dispatch, January 26, 2025, <https://thedispatch.com/newsletter/dispatch-faith/men-flocking-to-orthodoxy-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>.

5 16-19 October 2025, South Bound Brook, NJ.

empirical evidence.” Just as “Marx supplies no empirical evidence for the labor theory of value,”⁶ claims about the benefits or risks of converts in the life of the Church in America, are offered without the data necessary to determine the validity of the various claims and counter-claims. That such claims are made in the absence of empirical evidence is not unexpected; it simply doesn’t exist. This means that there is no check on our imaginations. This isn’t to say there is no data about the Church in America. We have macro-level data about the size of the Orthodox community. What we lack is specific, granular data on conversion rates.

In response to the New York Times article cited above, the political scientist Ryan Burge makes precisely this argument. He points out that “a random sample of 1000 American adults, ... would likely contain less than 10 Orthodox Christians.” This means “that any type of question about Gen Z men joining the Church is statistically impossible to answer using modern polling techniques.” Absent “a random sample survey of 1M [sic] Americans each year for the last 5 years or so,” we simply can depend on empirical based assertions about the health of the Church in America.⁷ This isn’t to dismiss anecdotal reports of growing parishes, far from it! Thank God for their growth! It is only to say, again to quote Pahman, that when we discuss potential growth or harm in the Church we must do so with “intellectual humility.”⁸ At a minimum, this means not making broad empirical claims not supported by data.

Let me shift gears, and speak about my pastoral experience as a college chaplain. Most of the religious interested young men I met on campus are not “Orthobros,”⁹ though many are “Orthobro”

6 Dylan Pahman, *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good: Orthodox Christian Social Thought* (Ancient Faith Publishing, 2025), 336. Citations are from the Kindle edition.

7 Ryan Burge, X (Formerly Twitter), November 19, 2025, <https://x.com/ryanburge/status/1991138422245695627>. In this same post, Burge points out that “According to the Religion Census, the Church had a 17% drop in adherents and a 14% decline in regular attendees between 2010 and 2020.” Any arguments that the Church in America is growing, it seems to me, is misleading if it fails to take into account what appears to be a downward demographic trend.

8 Pahman, 385.

9 Again, referring only to my own pastoral experience, the “Orthobros” aren’t simply an Orthodox phenomenon. Catholic, Reformed, and Evangelical Christians all have their own version of intellectually aggressive, theologically polemical, and often socially awkward, young

adjacent. To avoid a negative judgment, let's call them "Ortho-curious." I don't want to litigate here the many questions that surround recent, male converts to the Orthodox Church. Interesting though it would be, reviewing the literature and the different arguments is sadly beyond our scope. But, with your indulgence, I would like to use my experience with ministry with high school and college aged young adults—as well as events in Ukraine—to help us understand not just its strengths and weakness, but also the importance of *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good: Orthodox Christian Social Thought* to ongoing projects of OST.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have known Dylan for at least 15 years. He is the editor of a monograph on consumerism I wrote for the Acton Institute. At his request, I offered feedback on a chapter of *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good* ("How Should We Think Socially?"). This brings us to the heart of the connection between the Ortho-curious, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and this review. Simply put, Dylan is my friend. My own view is that while policy considerations and empirical data all have their place, OST is at its best when it helps foster friendship between individuals and communities. The "mature heir and child (or friend) of God obeys simply out of love for the Father in perfect mercy, as Christ demonstrated for us even with His last breath from the Cross: "It is perfected" (*tetelestai*—John 19:30, my translation)."¹⁰ That said, and before I offer my own reflections on the book and the contribution it can make to the pastoral life of the Church and OST more broadly, let me offer a quick overview of the text.

Assessing Pahman's Scope and Structural Challenges

Pahman presents a great deal of information in a very succinct manner. He summarizes the biblical and patristic foundations of OST, as well as the broader historical and theological context of Western Christian social thought. Of the latter, he writes that "The plight of the working poor in the nineteenth century" or what "came to be called the 'Social Question,'" inspires the social ethical

men who seem to use religion to construct a personal identity. Think of this as a form of right leaning identity politics. As Fr. Vaselios Thermos argues in *The Dramatic Journey of Faith: Orthodox Religious Conversion in America* (St. Sebastian Press, 2024) as a matter of psychological and moral development, this isn't unexpected or necessarily unhealthy even if it does present a whole series of pastoral challenges and, I would emphasize, opportunities.

10 Pahman, 119.

reflection by Christians in a wide range of theological traditions. Most notably, this includes Pope Leo XIII in “Rerum Novarum” and “the Dutch Neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper’s address to the First Christian Social Congress in the Netherlands ‘The Social Question and the Christian Religion.’” What begins in the West, soon moves East with “Vladimir Soloviev’s 1897 work The Justification of the Good” and Fr. Georges Florovsky in the 20th century, offering their own insights as Orthodox Christians into the social implications of the Gospel. Though the phrase is suspect for some, beginning in the late 1800’s and continuing until today,

...an ecumenical movement of “social Christianity” can be observed across the world at this time, variously emphasizing: 1) the duty of Christian care for the poor and marginalized; 2) the pluriform nature of social life that cannot be reduced to politics; and 3) an insistence that, despite their importance, the material needs of the body ought never to distract us from the spiritual needs of the soul, or vice versa. Salvation of the whole person means that one cannot displace the other. As Soloviev put it, “It is written that man does not live by bread alone, but it is not written that he lives without bread.”¹¹

Here, as he does several times throughout the text, the author concludes his discussions of non-Orthodox thinkers with “An Orthodox Assessment” of the idea presented in the chapter. I found this helpful and I think it will inspire conversation in the classroom.

At over 350 pages, *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good*, is possibly too long for parish use. While doing a good job in explaining what is often technical material in theology and economics, I think those without a good grasp of one or both might struggle in understanding and presenting the material. I’m familiar with the majority of the Western theologians and secular economists we meet. At the same time, I would have difficulty making the material accessible in either a parish setting and in a seminary classroom.

The reason has little to do with the clarity of the writing; Pahman is lucid and non-polemical throughout. It is rather that today even otherwise well-educated people often don’t have the necessary academic background to understand the basics of Orthodox theology. The liberal arts don’t hold the place they once did in American education. Lament this though we may, pedagogically it means that teachers must know the material well enough not just to summarize it but to explain the presuppositions that undergird Holy Tradition and the economists discussed. While

11 Pahman, 28, 29.

overall an excellent book, before using the text for adult religious education or in a seminary class, it would be good for instructors not only to read the book carefully but (to borrow a phrase that was prominent not so long ago), “do their own research.” For many clergy, a basic text on economics.

Before we move on to my one-and only-serious criticism of the book, let me make two more observations about its structure. Some of the chapters began as blog posts; others were written especially for the book. These newly researched chapters tend to be two or three times longer than those that started life online. They also contain more references. This leaves me feeling that *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good* is less one book, and more two, or possibly, three, published as one.

We have short books on Western social thought. A historical survey of Orthodox social thought that touches on Scripture, the Church fathers, and contemporary Russian theology. Finally, we have an Orthodox apology (in the best sense) for what the Catholic theologian and economist Michael Novak calls “democratic capitalism.”¹² These three smaller books are all well-done, but I cannot help wonder if it might not have been better to publish them separately. I understand why this is likely not a realistic option. And as much as I agree with Pahman’s discussion of the free market, the lack of other topics in social ethics might lead a reader to think that for OST “the common good” is primarily a matter of economics. Pahman doesn’t say anything remotely like this, but I do think it’s something even a careful reader might conclude. This is made all the more likely by the author’s brief comments of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Basis of the Social Concept and the Ecumenical Patriarchate’s *For the Life of the World*. In both cases, his criticism centers around their misunderstanding of free market economics.

The Crisis of Credibility: Culpability and Moral Equivalence in the Ukraine Invasion

I don’t want to criticize the author for not writing the book I wish he had written; overall, this is an excellent book. The one reservation I do have is with his comments at the beginning of chapter 23. Here he references Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. He describes this a tragedy of “bloodshed between predominantly Orthodox Christian peoples.” He assures the reader that “I have

12 Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Simon & Schuster, 1982).

opinions” about this, before excusing himself from a discussion of Russia’s genocidal war, since “it would be an error to politicize our history.”¹³ I understand why, editorially, a discussion of the invasion would take the text too far afield, but doing so is not to “politicize our history.” Additionally, while strictly speaking Orthodox Christians are killing each other, culpability for these deaths isn’t shared equally by both nations. Whatever legitimate security concerns Russia has, its invasion is an unjust act of aggression against Ukraine and frankly against the Orthodox Church. Pahman’s language here is all too reminiscent of the moral equivalency rhetoric heard during the Cold War. In any case, as I said above, the invasion and how we respond to it (or not), has implications for both how we understand the substance of OST and the credibility of our moral witness. And this brings me back to Ortho-curious.

From Critique to Praxis: The Foundation of Civic Friendship

The Apostle James asks, “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” before going on to answer his own question:

“The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? (4:1-5) Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain.

St. James suggests a connection between personal failings and political conflict. John Adams makes a similar point in his 1798 letter to the Massachusetts Militia about the moral foundations of the then newly established American Republic.

...We have no Government armed with Power capable of contending with human Passions unbridled by morality and Religion. Avarice, Ambition, Revenge or Gallantry, would break the strongest Cords of our Constitution as a Whale goes through a Net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.¹⁴

At the risk of trivializing Russia’s crimes, what unites that country to

13 Pahman, 229.

14 John Adams, “John Adams to Massachusetts Militia, 11 October 1798,” National Archives: Founders Online, accessed December 17, 2025, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102>.

nascent Ortho-broism and the civil conflict Adams warns against, is the absence of civic friendship (*politikē philia*). It is here that I think we find the real blessing of Pahman's book.

As I said above, the general absence of a liberal education means that both in the parish and in seminary education, I will sometimes need to offer remedial education in the humanities to help people know what they need to know to understand Holy Tradition. Like their elders, the college students in my parish typically don't know what they need to know to understand what the Church believes. They also come from an environment that has become more divisive and polemical. Some are eager to join the fray; others self-censure to avoid conflict, judgment, or scorn. Whatever the case, typical catechesis is difficult, if not impossible. I think Pahman's reflecting on listening and friendship offer us a way forward not only catechetically, but also evangelically.

Orthodox Social Action: Friendship and the Example of Parish Life

As I said above, in my reading Pahman places friendship at the heart of OST. Christ calls us His friends and calls us to be friends not only to each other, but to those we meet as we go about our daily life. In the early Church, friendship was a means of evangelizing.¹⁵ The friendship to which Christ calls us, is not the world's transactional friendship or the self-serving friendship of Job's companions, who seek to avoid their own discomfort by offering him false comfort.¹⁶ Rather, we are called to be virtuous friends, that is men and women of faith concerned with the flourishing and sanctification of others whether Christian or not. As Pahman writes, while "Orthodox social thought may have been undertheorized in recent times, ... it has always existed. Moreover, Orthodox social action continues in all ages despite persecutions, hardships, crises, and sins." He goes on to refer to his own parish, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Grand Rapids, MI.

At Holy Trinity, he has

seen lavish generosity, often hidden and unheralded. The priests, imitating St. Nicholas, have at least once donated their services—and the parish donated its hall—to a young couple who otherwise could not afford a wedding. Parishioners have doted upon new parents and their children. The dead have been buried and memorialized.

15 Mike Aquilina, *Friendship and the Fathers: How the Early Church Evangelized* (Emmaus Road Publishing, 2021).

16 Compare, Pahman, 95.

Care packages have been distributed to the homeless. His conclusions about his parish are replicated in many of our parishes.

Again and again, strangers and refugees have been welcomed with love and hospitality. The lonely have found friends. The fatherless, orphaned, and estranged have gained good families, father confessors, and God himself as their Father. The jobless have found employment through business owners willing to take a risk and invest in them. Those struggling financially received help paying their bills. More than one autistic youth has been welcomed and integrated by his young peers into Greek Orthodox Youth of America (GOYA) events and teams. Parish council and endowment board members have worked without pay to ensure the continual functioning of our community life.¹⁷

If educational deficits, social context, and developmental needs make the usual catechesis strategies for inquirers and catechumens difficult or even counterproductive, we shouldn't throw up our hands. Rather, let us take our circumstances as an invitation to shift our pastoral work from merely communicating information about Orthodoxy to spiritual formation guided by Holy Tradition. While more difficult and labor-intensive than delivering a lecture, the work of spiritual formation, of helping people discover and express who they are in Christ, is a better approach in our device age where information is weaponized.

Wholesome spiritual formation in light of Holy Tradition and with a critical appreciation of human uniqueness, requires, again as Pahman makes clear both by what he says and the example of his own work, that we listen and befriend each other. As he points out, this is what Saints Cyril and Methodius did; they listened and created a written language that becomes the foundation of their evangelical mission, the baptism of Rus, and the creation of pluriformity of cultures¹⁸ rooted in the Gospel. Fidelity to the saints' example, however, requires that we resist the temptation, "the impulse ... to have done something." Instead, we must cultivate the ascetical discipline of silence; "sometimes silence - and listening - is a better witness."¹⁹ In my admittedly limited experience, I find silence and listening to be what is needed, especially with those wounded by our divisive times.

17 Ibid., 468.

18 Including, I would argue, being formed in America and the West more generally.

19 Ibid., 442; emphasis in original.

Silence and Listening: The Necessary Discipline for Spiritual Formation

Max Picard, in his philosophical meditation on the ontology of silence as a basic, irreducible phenomenon in human life, observes that the “human face is the ultimate frontier between silence and speech. It is the wall from which language arises.”²⁰ It is only through the spoken word that humanity “becomes more than a mere physical phenomenon and breaks through the limitations” of the body. Though speech is foundational, it is silence that makes speech meaningful. Without silence, without a gap between appearance and reality, the human person is divested of mystery and instead becomes a mere “word-machine.”²¹

“Too much talk radically dissipates the intellect,” says St. Diadochos of Photiki. He goes on to say our chatting away “not only making it lazy in spiritual works, but also handing it over to the demon of listlessness, who first enervates it completely and then passes it on to the demons of dejection and anger” (“On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: One Hundred Texts,” #96). The social psychologist Jonathan Haidt makes a similar argument in *The Anxious Generation*, where he identifies what he calls “spiritual practices”²² that historically and cross-culturally have helped “elevate” us above our tendencies to “behaving in petty, nasty ways, or doing physically disguising things” that “close us off” or “turn [us] away” from “our elevated nature.”²³

For the neptic fathers, outer and inner silence have both a prophylactic and therapeutic role to play in our spiritual lives. Silence guards the dissipation of the intellect (nous), which in our fallen state is forever at risk of being distracted by novelties of one kind or another. Our well-intentioned but often misguided desire to do something reflects the misuse of “personal freedom” after the example of “Adam and Eve... after the Fall, in separation from God, from true knowledge, from all the assurance secured by ‘natural’ existence” experienced life as one of “hesitation, wandering, and suffering; this is the gnomic will (gnome, opinion), a function of the hypostatic, or personal, life, not of nature.”²⁴ To pursue novelty, to

20 Max Picard, *The World of Silence* (Gateway Editions, Ltd., 1952), 99.

21 *Ibid.*, 103, 104.

22 Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (Penguin, 2024), 201-215.

23 *Ibid.*, 200.

24 John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and*

want to have done something is to succumb to the sins of curiosity, inquisitiveness, or more bluntly, pride (see Psalm 131:1 and Job 42:3) and invite the dissipation the saint warns against.

The silence that Pahman suggests, on the other hand, is the intentional discipline of the nous and the refusal to chase the various novelties presented to us. To cultivate silence is to liberate ourselves, first, from our attention to the world of persons, events, and things. Delightfully, rather than finding ourselves alone or failing, this liberation turns out to be the very means, as Picard suggests, by which we see not only lasting success in this world, but communion with the very world of persons, events, and things we seemingly left behind.

It is tempting to imagine that if only the Church could say it better, the world would conform itself to the Gospel. I think the value of The Kingdom of God and the Common Good, is that it reminds us that this is simply not the case. Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants have all spoken to the world from within our own traditions and about the various facets of the Social Question. Likewise, economists have also sought to answer, from the perspective of their science, many of the same questions. While all have achieved some success, not one has had complete, much less, lasting success.

Far from being a cause of despair, maybe (as Pahman suggests), their success—and especially their failures—are an invitation to those of us who are in Christ, to preach, teach, and witness by our lives in a manner characterized by an intellectual humility that is the fruit of silent and listening.

Doctrinal Themes (Fordham Univ Press, 1987), 38.

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WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

"Conquer evil men by your gentle kindness, and make zealous men wonder at your goodness. Put the lover of legality to shame by your compassion. With the afflicted be afflicted in mind. Love all men, but keep distant from all men."

St. Isaac of Syria



A REVIEW OF FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD: TOWARD A SOCIAL ETHOS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

JOHN BERKMAN

As one who is not an Orthodox Christian, it is not my place to pass judgment on specific judgments made in light of weighty Orthodox Tradition. Where I perhaps can be of service to the development of social ethical reflection for the Orthodox tradition is to note ways the document strikes me as an outsider. So I will raise questions external and internal to the document, noting differences in tone and emphasis, and some internal tensions within the document.

As an outsider, perhaps my varied appreciation, puzzlement, and concerns will assist Orthodox readers of the document in seeing how it reads to one who is not Orthodox, and thus how and why some things stated in the document sound odd or puzzling to my ears in a way that they would not and perhaps even should not sound odd or puzzling to one more familiar with the Orthodox tradition.

Part I - Contextual Questions for FLOW

1.1 Does FLOW inaugurate a new Orthodox tradition of social ethics?

Does FLOW constitute a new field of study, inaugurating an authoritative tradition within Orthodoxy on social ethics? Or should this document be understood as part of a larger context of 20th Century work in social ethics upon which it builds? Although there are a few citations to 20th C writers and councils, these are not self-consciously works in social ethics.¹ Thus, I am inclined to interpret this document's self-understanding as inaugurating the field of social ethics within Orthodoxy.²

1 There are eleven citations to 20th C authors and Councils. Of these citations, six are to the 2016 Holy and Great Council, two to Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945), one to George Florovsky (1893-1979), one to the Orthodox Bishops of the Americas (2007), and one to the German Orthodox Bishops (2017).

2 It has been brought to my attention that the Russian Orthodox

1.2 What Degree of Authority should this document be understood to possess?

In reading FLOW, I notice that the commission's task, as stated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, is to present a document on the "social doctrine" of the Orthodox Church. (FLW, xiii). Since Bartholomew is the Eastern Orthodox Church leader entrusted with promulgating statements of Orthodox teaching, one would expect this document – commissioned by the Ecumenical Patriarch – to have a strong claim to authority for Orthodox Christians.

However, a key question arises.. What should we understand to be the authority of a document, which while praised by the Ecumenical Patriarch, is neither issued by the Ecumenical Patriarch nor by any other representative body of the Orthodox Church? Would the document be more authoritative if it was signed or authorised by the Ecumenical Patriarch, and/or by numerous Orthodox bishops, metropolitans, etc.? Or, to put the matter another way, if an informed Eastern Orthodox believer was asked "what is the most authoritative document in your tradition in terms of its social doctrine?" would the correct answer be this document?

1.3 Should the particular cultural and political contexts of Eastern Orthodox countries be addressed?

One wonders about the paucity of (explicit) references to the historical and cultural contexts of the countries with significant Eastern Orthodox populations. If my internet sources are to be trusted, there are twelve nations with a majority (60-93%) Eastern Orthodox population, and another five with a significant minority (14-31%) Eastern Orthodox population.³ These seventeen nations are located in a more-or-less contiguous geographical region. Considering their distinctive social and cultural histories, I find surprisingly little explicitly attentive to those histories and cultures.⁴

Church published 'The Basis of the Social Concept' (in English) in November of 2002, a document which had been authorized at the Jubilee Bishops Conference in 2000. It is focused primarily on questions of Church-State relations. Since this document is nowhere referred to in this document, I will not be addressing it in this discussion of *For the Life of the World*.

3 The twelve countries with a majority Eastern Orthodox population are Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Greece, Belarus, Serbia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Georgia, North Macedonia, Cyprus, Montenegro. The five countries with a significant minority Eastern Orthodox population are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia, and Estonia.

4 An important exception to this concern is the criticism of Orthodox

With regard to the *political* histories of these seventeen nations, it was surprising that there is no explicit reference to the fact that up until approximately thirty-five years ago, as many as fifteen of these seventeen countries were under communist regimes that officially promoted atheism.

Part II - A Brief Analysis of the Contents of FLOW

Five of FLOW's seven chapters take up standard topics in social ethics – politics (ch 1), economics (ch 3), violence (ch 4), human rights (ch 6), and the dignity of God's created order (ch 7). However, the size of the volume means the range of topics covered is narrow and limited.

The politics chapter is largely limited to church-state relations, although it also lucidly addresses the evil of racism, and “the conflation of national, ethnic, and religious identity” (§10). The economics chapter has two disparate foci: first, it presents in the starker terms the gospel's demand upon all believers who wish to be saved to unreservedly share their possessions with the poor and dispossessed (§32-34); second, it presents a series of punchy public policy recommendations e.g. taxation (§35), the international flow of labour (§36), international debt (§39), and universal healthcare (§40), each of which is freighted with necessarily questionable political and economic assumptions. I can find no explicable transition between these two foci. The chapter on violence begins with a (problematic) definition of violence, and takes up three issues, devoting two pages to self-defence (§45 & §47), one page to war (§46), and three pages to capital punishment (§48). The chapter on human rights has an extremely positive view of the possibilities for human rights language, takes a surprisingly broad view of the scope of human rights, and focuses on two issues – modern slavery and migrants/asylum seekers. And the chapter on our appropriate response to the beauty and goodness of God's creation is moving but generally avoids taking up practical issues.

Two of FLOW's chapters take up unexpected topics. Most unexpected is the one on ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue (ch 5), not a typical topic in social ethics. Somewhat unexpected is the chapter on the human life cycle (ch 2), where one would expect a chapter providing an account of the intrinsic goodness and dignity of human life (which instead is taken up in the chapter on human nostalgia for the Byzantine Empire. (§10)

rights). Instead, the life cycle chapter ranges over a highly divergent set of issues — e.g. abortion, child abuse, vocations of marriage, religious life, and singleness, suicide and euthanasia — which do not permit the discussion of an underlying moral methodology. While these issues arguably have social dimensions (in the sense that *all* ethical questions have social dimensions) — the questions taken up in this chapter are typically those that call for individual moral discernment and decision-making, and are typically taken up in relation either to the confessional or spiritual direction.

Part III - External Questions regarding FLW

3.1 Who is the Audience for this Document?

For a document intended to be “practical and pastoral” (x), we might ask - practical and pastoral for whom? Is the volume meant for the guidance of the typical Orthodox believer, with their very limited role in public affairs? If so, then one might expect the guidance in the volume to be about matters for individuals in public life - getting involved in local public affairs, guidance on voting, the nature and dignity of work, and how to treat those who work for you, how to welcome refugees in one’s parish what kind of activities to be involved in or not involved in - e.g. gambling, the significance of sports and entertainment in one’s society, and so forth.

However, with some exceptions, this is not the general tenor of this volume. On two topics which the document speaks particularly forcefully — on economic justice and capital punishment — the primary audience appears to be political leaders of societies. We might then ask — are these directives intended for Orthodox political leaders — to be witnesses to their varying societies? Or are they intended as ‘natural law’ directives incumbent on all political leaders, upon which Orthodox political leaders should expect the agreement of all morally serious political leaders?

3.2 The Composition of the Committee?

Continuing with the question of the audience, the willingness to focus on moral issues particularly relevant to majority Eastern Orthodox countries was rather mixed. On the one hand, it is rather puzzling that when discussing some particular issues, examples would be taken from countries with minute Eastern Orthodox populations — e.g. in discussing racism, reference was made to South Africa and the United States. Surely it would not be hard to

find examples of racism in dominantly Eastern Orthodox countries. On the other hand, there are numerous clear references to real problems that characterize many Orthodox countries, e.g. issues of nationalism and corruption, and the document speaks very clearly to the evil of nationalism. So the document is mixed in this way.

In terms of some of the choices of topics, I cannot help but wonder about the fact that the commission is overwhelmingly made up of United States theologians, with almost no representation from countries with majority or even sizeable Eastern Orthodox populations. No doubt there are good reasons why the makeup of the commission was the way it was, but the committee makeup on the face of it is very odd.

One of the topics that would have been interesting for the document to have considered would be a discussion of the social role of Orthodox believers in nations with an Orthodox majority versus an Orthodox minority.

3.3 Why are Ecumenism, Interfaith Dialogue and Human Rights central to FLOW

As noted above, the most unexpected chapter was on ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue, and that it was followed by a chapter on human rights. Intuitively, one expects the question of human rights, particularly as it tends to get argued as something inalienable to human beings qua human beings, as prior to and setting up a discussion of inter-faith dialogue. So why were things done in this order? My speculation is that the background narrative driving the jump from inter-faith dialogue to human rights is the persecution of Orthodox Christians by both secular and religious extremisms. To take the most obvious example, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew's See is in Turkey, which was once a dominantly Eastern Orthodox country. Now less than one tenth of one percent of Turkey's population is Eastern Orthodox.

3.4 Do Economic ethics only address questions of Wealth and Poverty

The chapter on wealth and poverty is the longest 'topical' chapter, is the most directive, and has the strongest tone. In contrast to the previous chapter, which has a very pastoral tone despite full of 'hot button' issues like e.g. abortion and euthanasia, in the economics chapter the demand for the wealthy to aid the poor is littered with the language of God's judgment and damnation in relation to the treatment of the poor, for just labour laws, for universal medical care, and so on.

And whereas the previous chapter avoided references to a society's responsibility with regard to its laws on protecting children, on abortion or euthanasia, etc., the economics chapter has numerous directives with regard to what every just and decent society is required to do. "It is a necessary means of salvation, ... to fail in these responsibilities is to invite condemnation before the judgment seat of God." (43) "anyone who exploits the poor for his own profit stores up damnation for himself." (44). "Anyone who fails to share his money with the hungry is guilty of murder." (45)⁵ It seems to me there is a good reason why the language of this chapter is so strong - the reason being the document is quoting from the Eastern Fathers. Their language was strong, and the strong language is almost always quoting from the Fathers.

Part IV - An Internal Question about FLOW : Violence and War

The fourth chapter, on violence, war, and capital punishment is a surprising chapter, as it is relatively short, and while war only gets one page of discussion, capital punishment receives four pages. The rhetoric with regard to violence is very strong, the document objecting to any and all forms of violence, force, and coercion. If the Orthodox tradition was a pacifist tradition, the seemingly absolute objection to violence and coercion would be completely understandable. At the same time as objection to all violence and coercion, it allows some force or coercion as a "tragic necessity." Rather than nuancing in what instances coercion and force are morally legitimate, the language of "tragic necessity" seems to advocate the necessity in some cases of morally wrong actions.

Considering that arguably the most pressing social issue in the Eastern Orthodox world for the last dozen years has been Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the failure to make any serious moral distinctions about the conduct of war is a massive failure in this document. One can wring one's hands about violence, but surely it is absolutely essential to make appropriate moral distinctions about e.g. legitimate killing in war, versus the targeting and murder of innocents, and why there is something called 'war crimes' and the moral basis for such a category.

⁵ St Basil "human beings ... must share their goods with one another in order to end poverty: he insisted it is a necessary public policy in a Christian society that a treasury be established from which the basic needs of all might be met."

Conclusion

At various points in the document, FLOW refers to and appeals to the social ethics of the early Church:

We find the most resplendent examples of Christian social morality ... in the life of the Apostolic Church, which ... created for itself a new kind of polity ... The earliest Christians were a community committed to a radical life of love, in which all other allegiances—nation, race, class—were replaced by a singular fidelity to Christ's law of charity. ... it was a community that shared all things in common, that provided for those in need, that permitted those with means to return to the common good the bounty they had reaped from creation ... [the Church] holds up the ideal of the Apostolic Church as the purest expression of Christian charity as a social logic and communal practice. (§6)

Throughout the early centuries of the faith, the Church's provisions for the desperate—widows and orphans especially... — made it the first organized institution of social welfare in Western society. (§14)

Wherever there is suffering, Christians are called to bring healing as relief and reconciliation. This is why the Church early in its history began founding hospitals open to all persons, and employing such therapies and medicines as were known in their day. (§69)

In passages such as those above, FLOW puts forward the practices of the early Church as the “social logic” for an Orthodox social ethic. Here FLOW highlights that it was the actual practices of the Church itself that constituted the social logic of the Church, e.g. that it “shared all things in common, that it provided for those in need”, it was an “organized institution of social welfare,” founding “hospitals open to all persons.”

However, while the practices of the early Church are held up as what is to be the ‘social logic’ of an Orthodox social ethic, I fail to find any examples in the entire document that call for particular practices of the Church itself as even a part of an Orthodox social ethic, much less the heart of an Orthodox social ethic. Instead, the responsibility embodying an Orthodox social ethic is given entirely to individual Christians and the State.

Throughout FLOW, what is the role of the Church? The Church 'encourages'⁶ (7 times), 'condemns'⁷ (7 times), 'praises'⁸ (3 times), 'supports'⁹ (4 times), 'cooperates', 'counsels'¹⁰, concern¹¹, judge, appeal, accompany, propose, offer solace. But the Church itself in this document fails to constitute the social logic the document is calling for but never embodies in practice.

Perhaps the largest problem with FLOW is that it set itself an impossible task. It sought to be all things for all people, and yet tries to do all of those things in a very short document. The document wished to "present a foundation for an Orthodox social ethics," but then claims that the document is only an "initiation of a continuing conversation." Can those two fit together? Furthermore, while seeking both to initiate a conversation about and present a foundation it claims that "its intentions are purely pastoral"(xix). Unfortunately, ethical foundations and pastoral applications are two different genres and tasks, and trying to combine them in one document cannot help but generate the various tensions that can be seen in this document.

6 §18, 34, 37, 39, 71 x2, 78, 82.

7 §9, 11, 34, 38, 39, 45, 82. Interesting that the preface says that the "commission sought to abstain altogether from the language of ... condemnation." (xix)

8 §34, 67, 71,

9 §12, 23, 25, 69,

10 §15, 18, 22, 26, 82

11 16, 34, 71,

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WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

"No human being can take God as his Father unless he takes the Church as his mother."

St. Cyprian



COMMENTARY ON THE SOCIAL ETHOS DOCUMENT FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

ELIZABETH PHILLIPS

Introduction

When the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics gathered in York in September 2025, I was honoured to be on a panel responding to *For the Life of the World*. I was especially honoured by the generosity with which Dr Gayle Woloschak received and responded to our presentations, and the further opportunity to share my reflections here. For the Life of the World closes with the 'humble acknowledgment that it is in many respects quite inadequate as a comprehensive statement of the social ethos of the Church', saying 'it is at most an invitation to further and deeper reflection on the parts of the faithful' (79). My comments on the document are offered in that spirit of further reflection, with full awareness that I am not necessarily one of 'the faithful' addressed in this invitation. I come from and work within theological and ecclesial traditions that are very different from Orthodoxy and what I can offer is 'a view from here' rather than a view that is fully attuned to the internal riches, realities, debates, and dynamics within Orthodoxy.

For the Life of the World is an impressive document, in which there is a great deal that is praiseworthy and instructive for wider Christianity and for society. I will begin by highlighting some of these aspects before moving one to some observations and finally some critical reflections.

Appreciations

As a scholar working in political theology, Christian ethics, and interfaith relations, there were some particular points that stood out to me, both as important and as more clear and pointed articulations of these particular points than are usually found in documents of this nature.

There was an insistence on relativising and decentring the nation-state, noting that it 'is not a sacred institution, even if it can at times serve the causes of justice, equity, and peace'. Especially pointed was the statement, 'Nor are borders anything more than

accidents of history and conventions of law' (67). If the state is not sacred, there should be clear provision of grounds for resistance against state authority, which was also clear: 'When the commands of even a legally established political authority contradict our responsibilities as Christians, we must obey God rather than men' (9).

Violence was categorically rejected, not only as unethical and/or ineffective, but as sacrilege (42). This general rejection was made concrete in some importantly pointed ways, such as the critique of national spending on the military-industrial complex instead of welfare (51).

The document includes a forceful rejection of racism, insisting there 'could be no greater contradiction of the Gospel' than 'the poisonous notion of race' (11). The authors recognise both wide and localised implications: that 'crimes born of racial injustice . . . are very much a part of the whole of modern Western history' and that racist pseudo-science is currently resurgent in Christian, including Orthodox, communities (11). It was also evident that the authors took time and care to avoid supersessionism and the lingering residue of anti-Semitism in Christian tradition, by embracing the Jewishness of Jesus and articulating the continuity of law, prophets, and gospel rather than placing them in opposition (6, 32).

The authors were willing to be surprisingly frank about some historical shortcomings and perennial temptations faced within Orthodoxy. All traditions have their particular failings and internal obstacles, but many do not name them explicitly in these sorts of documents. In relation to politics, there is a recognition of 'a dangerous temptation among Orthodox Christians to surrender to a debilitating and in many respects fantastical nostalgia for some long-vanished golden era, and to imagine that it constituted something like the sole ideal Orthodox polity' (10). The authors note that, 'Far too often, the Orthodox Church has allowed for the conflation of national, ethnic, and religious identity, to the point that the external forms and language of the faith—quite evacuated of their true content—have come to be used as instruments for advancing national and cultural interests under the guise of Christian adherence' (10).

In relation to matters of sexuality and gender, there is an acknowledgement that 'until fairly recently in Eastern Christian tradition, spiritual teachings on these matters have been advanced principally by celibate men' (20), as well as an acknowledgement that 'essentially superstitious prejudices about purity and impurity in regard to women's bodies' have been retained liturgically, even

allowing ‘the idea of ritual impurity to attach itself to childbirth’ (29). The authors’ candour and willingness, at least in some areas, to critique their own tradition even as they describe the normative ethos they want to proclaim and uphold, is commendable.

Observations

As an Anglican who appreciatively draws on Catholic Social Teaching, I feel it is worth noting some of the ways in which this document shares many commonalities with CST, as one would expect given that they both draw on scripture and many shared sources in Christian history and philosophy. In both CST and *For the Life of the World*, the creation of every human in the image of God, the dignity of every individual, and the centrality of love and the common good are key themes. Both employ natural law reasoning teleologically. They both advocate for democracy and human rights without seeing them as ultimate, and they pay particular attention to marriage and family alongside economics and labour. This document also shares with CST an absolute rejection of capital punishment.

There are many other ways in which this document is distinctively Orthodox, using different themes, terms, and sources in contrast to CST or other Christian social documents. The particular teleology at work here has theosis in view as its telos (3, 15). Humanity’s role is described as the ‘transfiguration’ of the world, which is an ‘ascetical labor’ (4,5); this is notable in contrast to the language of ‘transformation’ in other traditions, or more muscular, Protestant language like ‘building the kingdom’. Human presence in creation is further described as priestly mediation, occupying a place of methorios ‘the boundary where the spiritual and material realms meet and are united’ (62, 68). Perhaps drawing on this, the response to environmental crisis articulated here is liturgical and sacramental, centred on gratitude and wonder. In relation to governments, the principle of symphonia is invoked, calling for cooperation between church and state for the common good (14).

It is striking, and I would argue, important, that most of these distinctives are more mystical or ontological when compared to documents of this nature from other traditions. I see this as a helpful reminder that Christian reflection on and practices within the political and the social can and should exceed the ethical frame alone.

Perhaps it is also instructive to observe where some of the most forceful and emphatic language was employed in the document. Particularly strong language is used against:

- Racist nationalists: 'The Orthodox Church condemns their views without qualification, and calls them to a complete repentance and penitential reconciliation with the body of Christ. And it must be incumbent on every Orthodox community, when it discovers such persons in its midst and cannot move them to renounce the evils they promote, to expose, denounce, and expel them. Any ecclesial community that fails in this has betrayed Christ' (11).
- Child abuse: 'No offense against God is worse than is the sexual abuse of children, and none more intolerable to the conscience of the Church' (16).
- Hostility towards and abuse of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers: 'All such actions are assaults upon the image of God in those who seek our mercy. They are offenses against the Holy Spirit. In the name of Christ, the Orthodox Church denounces these practices, and implores those who are guilty of them to repent and to seek instead to become servants of justice and charity' (67).

There is also particularly strong language used in affirmation of:

- Social justice: 'The pursuit of social justice and civil equity is not merely an ethos the Church recommends for the sake of a comfortable conscience, but is a necessary means of salvation, the indispensable path to union with God in Christ' (33).
- Human rights: 'it is a language that must be unfailingly affirmed and supported by all Christians in the modern world' (84).

Thus, the most emphatic language in the document is used for some of the most pressing social problems not only in society today but in teachings and practices being embraced within Christian communities globally: abuse of the vulnerable, rejection of social justice, democracy, and human rights, and embrace of racism, xenophobia, and racist nationalism.

Critiques

There are two broad areas where it seems important to address shortcomings. The first relates to ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. This section of the document (VI) begins with and returns in multiple ways to the insistence that the Orthodox Church is the church, that the Orthodox Church itself 'lacks nothing essential to the full catholicity and full unity of the body of Christ' (50), and that

Christianity only finds 'coherence and clarity within the Orthodox Church' (58). In relation to other faiths, the authors affirmatively cite Justin Martyr's view that, 'seeds of the eternal Logos have been planted in all human beings' and all 'who have lived in harmony with this Logos are already in some sense Christians, while Christians may claim as their own any and every truth known to the nations of the earth by God's inspiration' (55). Neither of these sets of assertions are promising beginnings in terms of signalling genuine openness in either ecumenical or interfaith dialogue.

The document is expressly supportive of dialogue with those of other beliefs and practice, and articulates a good understanding of dialogue – that it must include full recognition of differences instead of only seeking commonalities, and that it is driven by love and the real possibility of cooperation. It is unfortunate, therefore, that dialogue is repeatedly limited with qualifiers about its openness to others' 'experience' and 'culture' and 'philosophy', which seem to signal that there is not openness to learn from their theologies or religious practices (Christian or otherwise).

The second area to consider here is how the document addresses women, gender, sexuality, and reproduction. The word 'gender' actually never appears in the document, and there is no mention of gender identity. At one point Galatians 3 is quoted, but changed: 'It [the early church] was a community established in the knowledge that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor *any division in dignity between man and woman* [emphasis mine], because all are one' (6). The reader has to wonder what has gone wrong when this verse cannot simply be quoted in full, including 'nor is there male or female'.

The section on 'The Course of Human Life' is the longest section of the document. It addresses a wide range of subjects by moving through human life stages and stations: childhood, adolescence, marriage, celibacy, singleness, reproduction, parenthood, old age, and death. This is a very different framework to most documents of this nature. It has some advantages: it does not create a rift between 'personal ethics' and 'social ethics', and it overcomes the insufficiency of the heading of 'Family' used in many documents, including within CST. However, there are also some considerable problems.

All sexualities outside of heteronormativity are swept aside flippantly as "identities" relativised by the image of God; the quotation marks placed around 'identities' feel intentionally

dismissive (19). Although it is acknowledged that the lay single life is an increasing reality, and should no longer be condemned or ignored (i.e. marriage and monastic celibacy are not the only paths), this has no impact on the sexual ethic advanced (20, 28).

The fact that the only dedicated paragraph on women (29) is shoe-horned into this section – rather than there being any dedicated discussions of women or gender in the sections related to the dignity of all humans, or human rights, or matters of social justice – seems to betray that, even though the paragraph affirms ‘full equality and dignity’ of women, there is a continued underlying assumption that women matter insofar as we are related to our parents, husbands, children, and reproduction. This amounts to a recapitulation of patriarchy.

The document also includes two particularly troubling statements on abortion. In the first, the authors say that ‘The Church recognizes, of course, that pregnancies are often terminated as a result of poverty, despair, coercion, or abuse’ and yet it goes on to insist that every woman who has an abortion ‘takes an innocent human life’ and must ‘acknowledge this truth before complete repentance, reconciliation, and healing are possible’ (25). Even if we set aside disagreement about abortion itself and whether it is morally justifiable outside of this list of tragic circumstances – i.e., even taken within a strictly anti-abortion framework – it is both ethically and pastorally chilling to insist that a woman or girl who has been raped, abused, coerced, or left with no other options must still be forced to confess sin – as if the sin of any of these situations would be hers to confess. Equally chilling is that later in the document abortion is explicitly equated with sexual assault, domestic violence, hate crimes, acts of terrorism, and acts of war (43). This equation would also mean that a woman or girl who has been raped, abused, coerced, or left with no other options is morally equivalent to her own rapist or abuser, as well as to terrorists and war criminals, if she terminates her pregnancy.

Conclusion

In summary, in *For the Life of the World*, I found a timely, urgent, and important document in its relativising of the state, forceful rejection of racist nationalisms, and affirmation of the necessity of sometimes resisting legitimate authorities. The particularities of Orthodox tradition in the document offer a needed and poignant reminder that where the churches speak on social and

political realities – whether in word or in deed – our grammar should be ontological and mystical in addition to ethical. By contrast, in my estimation, the document fails to be timely or just or loving when it comes to women, gender, sexuality, and reproduction. And its important contributions to ecumenism and interfaith relations are undermined by a lack of openness to truth in other traditions.

My critiques will no doubt bring the reader back to where I began, which is the observation that I have offered a response that is not entirely cognisant of or speaking from within the ethos or realities of Orthodoxy. This makes it all the more commendable, I believe, that the authors have invited discussions with and responses from so many outside of the tradition, opening the document both to appreciative and critical engagement so that it can receive the attention it rightfully deserves.

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WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

Once, monks who had heard of his discernment came to St. Agathon to see if they could make him lose his temper. They asked him, "Are you Abba Agathon, a fornicator and a proud man?" "Yes, that is true," the monk replied. "Are you the Agathon who is always talking nonsense?" the monks inquired. "I am," the saint agreed. "Are you Agathon the heretic?" the monks persisted. St. Agathon said, "I am not a heretic." They asked the saint why he agreed with them when they accused him of vices, but then denied this last charge. Agathon replied, "I accepted the first accusations, since that was beneficial for my soul. But heresy is separation from God, and I do not wish to be separated from God."

St. Agathon



RESPONSE TO ELIZABETH PHILLIPS AND JOHN BERKMAN

ARISTOTLE PAPANIKOLAOU

It's a little strange for me, as a member of the team that contributed to *For the Life of the World: The Social Document of the Orthodox Church* (FLOW), to respond to ecumenical reflections on FLOW. Perhaps it's an opportunity to highlight the ecclesial nature of the document itself, notwithstanding John Berkman's understandable confusion on how exactly it functions as an ecclesial document. Perhaps that is the first issue to address—the nature of the document itself, which is not readily understandable without a brief mention of the history of the Orthodox Church.

When asked to comment on FLOW, it's predictable that Berkman might expect a kind of document that has taken shape in the Roman Catholic world, one could even say, after centuries of refinement—documents from ecumenical councils, local episcopal councils, papal encyclicals, and so on. The Orthodox Churches, however, didn't have that luxury after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, when most of the Orthodox world was under Ottoman oppression for five hundred years. Under such conditions, where use of the printing press was allowed one hundred years after its invention, survival was the priority; everything else took a back seat. Russia was never under Ottoman rule, but it did not develop its theological foundations until the nineteenth century. Then came the communists, who shut down theological inquiry in most of the Orthodox world. Therefore, the Orthodox never really had the opportunity to develop a tradition of document formation, unlike the Roman Catholics. But we are trying.

And FLOW is an attempt to provide a framework for thinking through select issues, taking into account the Orthodox context. In this context, we have a reestablished Russian Orthodox Church that released its own "Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church," which, in my personal opinion, is theologically weak and full of clichés. If not for FLOW, then given the oversized presence of the Russian Orthodox Church, their "social concept" document could be mistaken as presenting the Orthodox "teaching"

on select issues. Only a document with some relation to the Ecumenical Patriarchate could have the weight to offer a different vision of what it means to be Orthodox.

Then, of course, there is the rising tide of converts to Orthodoxy who simply assume that Orthodoxy aligns with a right-wing politics of traditional values that revolve primarily around issues of gender and sexuality. Related to this trend is the geopolitical soft power activity of the Russian Orthodox Church, which serves as the international guardian of traditional values. It is no secret that the Russian Orthodox Church has formed transnational alliances with American Evangelicals to promote traditional values and influence institutions such as the United Nations and the World Council of Churches. It's also well known that the language of traditional values was used as a partial justification for Russia's attack on Ukraine. Given this current reality in the Orthodox Church, there was a felt need for a statement on a different kind of Orthodoxy, one more thoughtfully aligned with its core theological axioms, especially the centrality of theosis, which every Orthodox would affirm. FLOW is a product of the question, "what would reflection look like on social issues if we took *theosis* seriously?"

Berkman is right that such a statement would carry more "authority" if representatives from other Orthodox churches were involved, but what Berkman doesn't understand (and I don't blame him, as it's very confusing) is that the Orthodox church has no pope and no Vatican. In other words, after the fall of empires, it is only now that it is learning how to speak in a unified global voice. Put more simply, there is no mechanism in place to gather such a group to produce such a statement. What Berkman also doesn't know is that to gather a group of primarily Anglo-speaking theologians twenty years ago would've been impossible. To see such a document produced by such a group is a sign of growth in a post-Ottoman and post-communist Orthodox world. In short, the audience is primarily Orthodox Christians of all stripes—clergy and laity—but it's also a broader non-Orthodox audience that may be seeing only a particular kind of Orthodoxy emerging from Russia and the internet.

Both Berkman and Phillips raise a more substantive issue that revolves around the question "what is ethics?" Phillips, on the one hand, admires the document's turn to the mystical and the ontological, while Berkman was left wondering, "where are the ethics?" What was impossible for both to know is that a strange conversation is occurring in the Orthodox world, one in which some

would argue that the Orthodox Church does not have an ethic. Two well-known Greek theologians, Christos Yannaras and John Zizioulas, offered this idea. What could that possibly mean that the Orthodox Church does not have an ethic? How can there be no ethics? What's trying to be conveyed is that being Orthodox is not about rules or ethical directives; being Orthodox is about union with God, theosis, transformation, and being itself. Of course, to move toward such a union with God requires rules, directives, and ethical frameworks; however, the danger is that the Christian way of life veers toward a kind of legalism, in which our relationship with God is judged in terms of an ethical checklist rather than being itself.

FLOW is not trying to make the statement that the Orthodox Church has no ethics, but wants to avoid an overly prescriptive manual that would give the impression that the point of Christian life is simply to follow the rules for some reward after death. Perhaps the difference is best illustrated with an example. Both Phillips and Berkman mention FLOW's comments on violence. Berkman, however, makes the following claim: "One can wring one's hands about violence, but surely it is absolutely essential to make appropriate moral distinctions about e.g. legitimate killing in war, versus the targeting and murder of innocents, and why there is something called 'war crimes' and the moral basis for such a category." Is it really absolutely essential to make such moral distinctions? What good do they do when it comes to violence? So, for example, one could kill in what might be determined to be a "just war," but it's now abundantly clear that many soldiers, if not most, suffer from some kind of trauma when they return from war. It's also clear that the consequences of trauma are anti-theotic insofar as they affect a person's capacity for the relational and, thus, love. Trauma makes love difficult. If that's the case, what work is being done by the moral distinctions? Does it provide some comfort that the soldiers will get a reward after they die? One is compelled to ask as Ivan did in the *Brothers Karamazov*, "what does hell set right?"

It's here that we actually see a fundamental disagreement with the drafters of the document and Berkman (and the strands of Roman Catholicism he represents)—FLOW is troubling the distinction between the ethical, the mystical, and the pastoral. There is no real separation between them, especially if the point of the ethical is a kind of transformation that can only occur in union with God. One can do the right thing their entire life, but if it does not lead to transformation, as it did not in the brother in the Parable

of the Prodigal Son, then such ethical doing is worthless. Ethics without mysticism is self-righteous; mysticism without ethics is lost. In my opinion, the pastoral mediates between the ethical and the mystical. So, the thing Berkman complains about is the very thing the document is attempting to trouble. Perhaps it's not a failure of the document, but Berkman's failure to see other ways of thinking about ethics.

The unity of the mystical, ethical, and pastoral helps explain why “ecumenism” is in a social document. Berkman and Phillips both raise this point, and understandably, they are not aware of the visceral anti-ecumenism in the Orthodox world, led by the monastic communities of Mount Athos, which have a global influence. This anti-ecumenism is fueled not simply by theology or ecclesiology, but by “ethics.” The anti-ecumenists think the ecumenists are going to hell; thus, they are doing the morally wrong thing. FLOW is attempting to assert that ecumenism is an ascetical practice, a product of transformation, and a stance that involves the active employment of virtues. In that sense, it has everything to do with an ethics that is also mystical and pastoral.

I personally agree, however, with Phillips that the document in some respects sends the wrong message in its discussion of ecumenism when there's no indication that the Orthodox Church may actually learn something when in dialogue, and, worst, that despite FLOW's attempt to establish a different tone, on the issue of gender, it reads as the same old patriarchy. I also agree that the wording around abortion is unfortunate and militates against the discernment that was a primary goal of the contributors. FLOW could have much more prudently and delicately emphasized the spiritual damage surrounding abortion in a way that does not reiterate a legalistic and damaging notion of repentance. In this sense, Berkman is right that despite FLOW's best attempts to avoid prescriptions, it can't help itself. Although an aspiration, FLOW is not always consistent. Given, however, what I know about the discussions within the Orthodox world, FLOW is as much about strategy as about content. On some issues, FLOW could set the tone, allowing Orthodox thinkers to provide more nuanced approaches to topics such as gender and enabling clergy to make more discerning decisions in their parishes. Since its publication, it has been the most commented Orthodox document in centuries, both within and outside the Orthodox world. That says something.

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WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

"Good behavior for acquiring virtues is better than performing miracles. The human being can be easily overcome Satan if he worships God with all his heart, with inner spiritual joy, and constantly have God in his mind because this light tears the darkness and quickly removes the temptations of the enemy. What would help us in this is to look at the lives of the Saints and follow their path for it leads us to emulating them."

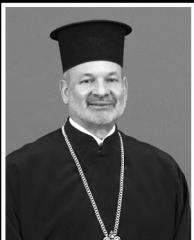
St. Antony the Great

"We should love the Lord as we do our friends. Many times I have seen people bring grief to God, without being bothered about it, and I have seen these very same people resort to every device, plan, pressure, plea from themselves and their friends, and every gift, simply to restore an old relationship upset by some minor grievance."

St. John Climacus

" Teach your children this lesson: The rewards of evil are temporary; The rewards of goodliness are eternal."

St. Cyprian of Carthage



AN INTERVIEW WITH HIS GRACE
BISHOP DEMETRIOS
(KANTZAVELOS)
ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK "GRACE UNBOUND: THE
SACRED ACTIVISM OF AN ORTHODOX BISHOP"

This is an interview with His Grace Bishop Demetrios (Kantzavelos) of Mokissos about his new book "Grace Unbound: The Sacred Activism of an Orthodox Bishop," co-authored by Patra McSharry Sevastiades, with an Introduction by Bill Kurtis. The work that His Grace has done over the years, particularly with HIV patients and with capital punishment is a real expression of the ethos expressed in the document For The Life of the World. The book is published by Rowman and Littlefield, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, and is available through Amazon.

Gayle Woloschak: Your Grace, I read your book with extreme interest, perhaps in part because I am from Chicago and really enjoyed seeing all of the Chicago political and ecclesiastical references in your stories, but also because I was fascinated by the specific expressions of spiritual activism that you demonstrated in the book. I found the discussion about your battle against capital punishment to be intriguing and perhaps unusual for an Orthodox bishop. Clearly this was motivated in large part by your experience with Andrew. Can you talk about why you felt so strongly about capital punishment and why you decided to fight so hard on this particular issue?

Bishop Demetrios: Thank you for that thoughtful question. For me, the issue of capital punishment was never simply a political or legal debate—it was a profoundly spiritual one. As a bishop, I have always believed that our witness must reflect the Gospel's call to uphold the dignity of every human life, even in its most broken and wounded form. When I encountered Andrew's case, it was no longer abstract. I was confronted with a living, breathing child of God whose life hung in the balance. Walking with him through that ordeal, I could not escape the conviction that to take his life would not only be an act of violence against him but also a wound to the soul of our society.

In Chicago, this conviction became lived action. I worked alongside legislators, interfaith leaders, and advocacy groups to form coalitions that united moral conviction with practical evidence.

We demonstrated that the death penalty neither deters crime nor upholds true justice, and that it falls most heavily on the poor and marginalized. I also listened to victims' families—some of the most powerful voices in this debate—who, despite their pain, rejected vengeance. These experiences underscored for me that justice must leave space for healing and mercy, not simply retribution.

From an Orthodox perspective, this stance is deeply rooted in our understanding of justice. In the East, justice is not primarily juridical—as it often is in Western thought—but relational and eschatological. It is less about enforcing a distribution of rights or resources, and more about living now in the way we believe we will live in God's Kingdom: with selfless love, compassion, and recognition of every human being as the image of God. That is why Orthodox Christianity has historically resisted definitions of "social justice" that impose outcomes by force. Instead, our ethic asks: *How do I love?* How do I honor the image of God, even in those who have committed grievous wrongs?

For me, then, opposing capital punishment was not "unusual" for an Orthodox bishop—it was consistent with the heart of our tradition. Faith calls us to bring the light of Christ into society's darkest places. To be silent in the face of a system that takes life in the name of justice would have been, in my conscience, a betrayal of the Gospel itself.

Gayle Woloschak: Your outreach to AIDS patients started in Chicago but became known and even a model for HIV ministry throughout the world. I was especially impressed with how you managed to work with many different Christian leaders as well as with the broad medicine, scientific and pastoral communities; can you talk about some of the challenges this posed and approaches you used to overcome the challenges?

Bishop Demetrios: When I first began this ministry in Chicago, I did not imagine we would be creating a "model." In fact, I looked to other faith traditions that had already been ministering in the midst of the HIV/AIDS crisis long before we in the Orthodox Church began to address it. Their experience proved invaluable: it helped me see both what had worked and where mistakes had been made, so that we could avoid repeating those pitfalls. That spirit of humility—of learning from others—set the tone for everything that followed.

The challenges, however, were real. Within the religious world, there was deep suspicion, sometimes even hostility, toward engaging HIV/AIDS because of the stigma surrounding sexuality and addiction. In my own Greek Orthodox context, I also faced resistance from clergy and faithful who were uncomfortable with ecumenical or interfaith cooperation, believing that such collaboration compromised our identity. Added to this was widespread ignorance among many of the faithful, including the false and dangerous belief that AIDS was a contagious disease rather than an infectious one. Some even feared that HIV could be contracted by receiving Holy Communion from the common spoon. These misconceptions struck at the very heart of our sacramental life. It was essential to affirm clearly—both theologically and pastorally—that the sacraments of the Church must never be withheld from those living with HIV/AIDS, and that fear must never dictate sacramental practice.

Our approach was to listen before speaking. We listened to doctors and scientists so we could communicate clearly and accurately within the Church. We listened to clergy so that we could address their fears and prejudices directly but pastorally. Most importantly, we listened to those living with HIV/AIDS, ensuring their voices were at the center of the ministry. From there, we worked closely with others—through the AIDS Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, through Catholic Charities, and through a dynamic initiative we helped to launch called *Interfaith Response to AIDS*, to name a few. Together, we trained clergy, offered pastoral care, and collaborated with health providers. Over time, this collective, listening-first approach allowed a local initiative to grow into a model that others could adapt both in the U.S. and abroad.

At the core of this effort was trust: trust between clergy and doctors, trust between churches and secular agencies, and most of all, trust between the Church and people who had every reason to feel abandoned by it. Once that trust was earned, walls came down, and genuine ministry was possible.

Gayle Woloschak: A key dynamic in your work with both death-row inmates and people living with AIDS was advocacy. Please talk about why this became so important a part of your ministry and how you think this should relate to the work of an Orthodox Christian in the world.

Bishop Demetrios: As I mentioned earlier in connection with my opposition to capital punishment, I came to see that faith

compels us not only to be present with those on the margins, but to advocate fiercely when their dignity and even their lives are at stake. That same conviction shaped my ministry with those living with HIV/AIDS. Here the challenge was not the machinery of the state, but the weight of stigma, ignorance, and silence—forces just as destructive to human dignity.

Advocacy in this setting took a very different form. It was not about legislation or courtrooms but about education, compassion, and sacramental integrity. Many of our clergy, through lack of knowledge, did not know how to minister properly to those impacted by HIV/AIDS. Too often, fear and misunderstanding led to pastoral failures. It became essential to help our priests see that the sacraments—Holy Communion, Holy Unction, and Confession—were to be offered freely and without fear of contagion. Anything less was a betrayal of the Gospel. At the same time, I stressed what I often call the **“sacrament of presence”**: simply sitting at a bedside, listening without judgment, and allowing those who felt abandoned to know they were not alone.

With death row, my advocacy confronted a justice system that dehumanized the condemned; with HIV/AIDS, it confronted social and even ecclesial attitudes that shamed and isolated the sick. The settings were different, but the principle was the same: the Church must be the place where human dignity is upheld and Christ’s mercy is made visible.

For Orthodox Christians, this remains vital. Our faith is not lived in abstractions but in concrete acts of love. Sometimes that means raising our voices in the public square, and sometimes it means making sure the chalice of Christ is extended without fear or hesitation. Either way, advocacy is a natural expression of our calling to see Christ in every human being.

Gayle Woloschak: From your experiences working in this arena of social activism, what do you think are the most important lessons that you learned and how did you apply these to your ministry as a priest and then as a bishop for the Orthodox Church? What advice would you give to a new priest who is starting work in his parish on how to engage social-ethical-pastoral issues of this type in his ministry?

Bishop Demetrios: One of the most important lessons I learned is that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and carries within them the gift of transcendence. This

conviction shaped my ministry with people living with HIV/AIDS and with those awaiting execution: no matter their circumstances, they bore the divine imprint, and therefore deserved dignity, compassion, and care. If we fail to see Christ in “the least of these,” we fail to see Christ at all.

This truth is dramatically embodied in Christ Himself. He spent three days on death row before being unjustly executed by the state. When I ministered to those awaiting execution, I never forgot that their suffering was inseparably linked to His. Likewise, when I walked with people living with HIV/AIDS, often cast aside and stigmatized, I remembered St. Paul’s words: *“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it”* (1 Corinthians 12:26). To ignore their suffering would have been to deny that we are one Body in Christ.

As a priest and later as a bishop, I applied these lessons by grounding every action in the sacramental life of the Church. The Eucharist, especially, teaches us that we share one chalice because we are one Body. That meant we could never allow fear or prejudice to withhold the sacraments from anyone—not those living with HIV/AIDS, not those despised by society, not those condemned to die. The sacraments are for healing and for communion, never for exclusion.

To a new priest beginning his ministry, I would say this: remember that this type of ministry is not easy. No matter how far we have come as a society and as a Church, you will encounter very real obstacles—fear, ignorance, prejudice, and even the self-righteous, pharisaical judgment of those who believe such ministry does not belong “in their backyard.” Do not be surprised by this, and do not let it deter you. Listen deeply, love without fear, and remember that your role is not to avoid the difficult issues of our time but to bring the light of Christ into them. Equip yourself with knowledge—scientific as well as theological—so that ignorance does not distort your pastoral care. Be bold in advocacy, but let it always flow from the Gospel and from your priestly vocation, not from ideology. Build partnerships with others, within and beyond the Church, because the work of healing and justice is too great for any one of us alone. Above all, proclaim the Truth without compromise, for Truth is of utmost importance—and Truth is not an abstract concept but a Person: Jesus Christ, *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life”* (John 14:6).

If we as clergy remain steadfast in this calling, then together we can teach the world *“a more excellent way”* (1 Corinthians 12:31).

Demetri C. Kantzavelos, Bishop of Mokissos, has been an ordained clergyman for over thirty years and a bishop for the last seventeen. He retired from active ministry in early 2023 after a long career with the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago. Between 1992 and 2017, he was a dynamic leader in social activism, earning numerous awards for his groundbreaking AIDS ministry and his successful advocacy to abolish the death penalty in Illinois. His extensive interfaith, ecumenical, and Greek Orthodox networks, growing media presence, and broad social connections in Chicago have made him a recognized figure. He has been featured over a dozen times in outlets like the Wall Street Journal, the Chicago Tribune, the Philadelphia Inquirer, radio, and YouTube. His social and professional networks include many Greek Orthodox believers and extend well beyond the sphere of Greek Orthodoxy. Bishop Demetrios resides in Chicago, Illinois, and in a rural village in the Peloponnese region of Greece.

WISDOM THROUGH THE HOLY FATHERS

"The flood of temporal things draws us after itself, but in this flood there is, as it were, a fullgrown tree: our Lord Jesus Christ. He took flesh, died, and ascended to heaven. It is as if He agreed to be in the flood of the temporal. Is this stream dragging you headlong? Hold on to Christ. He became temporal for you, so that you might become eternal, for He became temporal in such a way that He remained eternal. What difference is there between two men in a prison when one of them is a convict and the other a visitor! Sometimes a man comes to visit his friend, and it seems that both are in prison, but there is a great difference between them. One of them is held there because of guilt, while the other has come out of love for mankind. Thus it is with our mortality: guilt holds us here, but Christ had come out of mercy. He came freely into bondage, and not as a convict."

St. Augustin, Sermons on I John, II.10

"A man in this world must solve a problem: to be with Christ, or to be against Him. And every man decides this, whether he wants to or not. He will either be a lover of Christ or a fighter of Christ. There is no third option."

St. Justin Popovich, Explanation of I John, 4.3



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