

IN RESTON, VIRGINIA
REMEMBERING
OUR FATHER AMONG THE SAINTS
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE
26TH ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS UNTIMELY EXODUS.

ВѢЧНАА ѸМѸ ПАМЯТЬ!
Eternal be his memory!

PROBLEMS OF ORTHODOXY IN AMERICA

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II. The Liturgical Problem

1. *The Situation*

THE LITURGICAL PROBLEM of American Orthodoxy can be formulated as a **double question**: how much of our liturgical tradition can be preserved here, and how well can it be preserved? The first question is a quantitative one. An Orthodox born and educated in America probably does not realize that, of the tremendously rich and truly “all-embracing” liturgical treasure of the Church, a very small part is really used on the parish level. The fact must be stated bluntly: from the liturgical point of view we are rapidly becoming a Sunday Church and even our Sunday worship is drastically curtailed. To a great, if not overwhelming, majority of our people the liturgical life of the Church is limited to Sunday morning and two or three additional “must” days: Christmas, Epiphany [Theophany], Holy Friday.... All that, which was so vital, so central, so essential in the liturgical piety of the past: the feasts and their eves, the “bright sadness” of the Lenten services, the unique celestial beauty of the Mariological cycle, the warm, almost personal, commemoration of the Saints, the long and

solemn crescendo of the Holy Week—all this, although it is still dutifully listed in ecclesiastical calendars—is virtually absent from the real liturgical life. Neglect? Lack of time? Certainly not, for, at the same time a parish is filled to capacity with activities of all kinds. In a normal urban community something is “going on” every night: a meeting, a youth or adult group, a lecture, a dinner, a get-together.... But all this is for the parish hall, not for the Church. During six days the parish is in fact a secular institution—busy, well-organized, smoothly run, but *a-liturgical*. Worship here is approached and considered in terms of a “required minimum” and, to be sure, minimum it is. Therefore, one must ask—is this situation to be taken for granted, as the normal “adjustment” of Orthodoxy to America, as something not to be questioned any more?

The second problem—*how well*—is a qualitative one. And by quality I certainly do not mean beautiful vestments and elaborate musical “numbers,” the amount of gold and silver on icons or the money paid for the [164] altar. What I mean is the *power* of the liturgy, first, to impress on the soul of man the Orthodox vision of life and, second, to help him live in accordance with that vision. Or, to put it in simple terms, the influence of that liturgy on our ideas, decisions, behavior, evaluations—on the totality of our life. This was for centuries and centuries the real function of the liturgy in the Orthodox Church: to immerse the man in the spiritual reality, beauty and depth of the Kingdom of God and to change his mind and his heart. By revealing and manifesting the “bridal chamber adorned” the liturgy was revealing to man his exile and alienation from God and thus was bringing him to repentance, to the desire to return to God and do his commandments. It was both judgment and inspiration, condemnation and transformation. I do not mean that the Orthodox man of the past was more “moral” or led a better life. But, at least, he knew he was a sinner and in the best part of himself he had a nostalgia for the “peace and joy” of the Kingdom; he referred his life to it and judged it by Christian standards. He knew, and he knew it by and through the power

of worship, that God wants him to be a saint and that he is not a saint. Today, however, this power of worship has all but vanished. Worship is something one must attend and even enjoy, it is a self-evident “obligation” for the religious man, but it has lost all relevance for the real life. Not that our modern Orthodox is a greater “sinner,” but his whole approach to “sin” and “righteousness,” to “right” and “wrong” has radically changed. It is no longer rooted in the total vision of life as revealed in worship, but somewhere else—in the “common sense,” the “golden rule,” the “ideal of moderation,” *etc.* The Orthodox of the past could lead a miserable life, full of greed and material preoccupations, but he knew that, as a Christian, he was *wrong*, and he knew it because he lived in a world shaped morally and spiritually by the liturgical experience, by this constantly renewed vision and gift of another Reality, of the inaccessible, yet desirable, beauty of the Kingdom. The modern Orthodox has lost this desire and this nostalgia. All he wants from the Church is the acknowledgment that he is in “good standing,” that he has fulfilled his religious obligations and can, with a free conscience, give himself to the “pursuit of happiness”.... There exists today a wall between *worship*—its spirit, its “message” and “call”—and the community, which in theory exists in order to worship God. And this wall is especially obvious in the radical “secularism” that dominates in fact the daily life of the parish. All problems of parish administration, management, property, *etc.*, are discussed and understood as if the two hours spent in Church together, the participation in the *leitourgía*—a common and corporate act of worship, sacrifice, love, dedication and reconciliation—had *nothing to do* with these problems, were not even meant to have any application to the “practical” needs and responsibilities of life. [165]

How much, how well.... The time has come to face, to ask these questions even if we do not have immediate and final answers to them. If we are to speak of American Orthodoxy, we must, first of all, care about it being Orthodox. But Orthodoxy has always had its heart, its

criterion and its power in its worship. And if I am right in describing our present situation as a deep liturgical crisis, it is here—in an attempt to understand and to overcome it—that begins our truly responsible preoccupation with the future of Orthodoxy in America.

2. *The Linguistic Reduction*

Before we reach the heart of the matter, however, we must give some attention to the various “reductions” of the liturgical problem, popular among those who care about the liturgy and are concerned about our present liturgical crisis. I use the term “reduction” because the common feature of all these approaches is that instead of seeing the problem in all its complexities and depth, they reduce it to one aspect, however important, and consider this aspect as the whole problem. A critical analysis of such “reductions” will show, I hope, their insufficiency for the understanding and treatment of the real issues.

The first and by far the most popular “reduction” can be termed linguistic. Here the solution to all liturgical difficulties and deficiencies is seen in translating everything into English. When people will understand the words of the liturgy they will, so to speak automatically, come back to its true meaning and recover its power—such is, in a simplified form, the basic affirmation. And of course, no one can really defend the perpetuation of the liturgical celebration in a foreign tongue, no one can deny the necessity of translations and the self-obvious need for understanding. And yet, when all this is granted there remains something which, in spite of all its evident truth, makes this whole approach only half-true. This something is precisely the reduction of the whole liturgical problem to its linguistic dimension, the claim that translation constitutes a panacea against all evils of our present liturgical situation. And this “reduction” becomes even dangerous when, in their enthusiasm for a quick translation, its partisans seem to overlook the tremendous difficulties implied in the very notion of liturgical translation, or more explicitly, the very problem of liturgical language.

Most of our translators seem to forget that the basic “key” to the liturgy is primarily of esthetical and not of rational, nature. Liturgical texts are not mere statements—theological or ethical—whose only purpose is to convey and communicate an idea, a commandment, a knowledge. Or, rather, it is their purpose, but they fulfill it by means different from those of theology or preaching. The esthetical element in the liturgy: in liturgical poetry, music and rite—is not accidental but essential; it is rooted in the very [166] nature of cult, so that when deprived of it, liturgy ceases properly to fulfill its very function, which is not simply to communicate ideas about God, but to reveal “heaven on earth,” to put man in direct contact with Reality, of which cult is the adequate and efficient *symbol*. In our liturgical tradition this esthetical structure of worship is absolutely essential because it is rooted in the Orthodox concept and experience of the Church as the manifestation in this *aion*, in this world, of the Kingdom which is to come, of that ultimate Reality which the Church not only announces, but of which she makes us partakers. To be sure, liturgy has a didactic or educational function, one can even say that in a sense the whole of worship *is* teaching, *is* theology, *is* preaching, yet this teaching not only is not separated and distinguished from “beauty,” but “beauty” is its very content and means of communication. And it is here that the problem of liturgical translation acquires its real significance. Two-thirds of all liturgical texts in our tradition are *hymns*—*i.e.*, poetry meant to be sung. And poetry is by definition untranslatable for its meaning lies in the organic blend of the order, the rhythm and the music of words. The difficulty is increased by the fact that the very complex and sophisticated pattern of Byzantine hymnography, its whole “genius” is extremely different from the “genius” of the English language and the patterns of English poetry. One points sometimes to the success of the Slavonic translations of Byzantine texts. But this success was indeed unique and can hardly serve as a precedent, because the Slavonic liturgical language was somehow created in the process

of translation and, for all practical reasons, is an almost miraculous replica of the Greek.

All these difficulties are simply ignored by our translators. They go by the naive assumption that if one “knows” Greek, Slavonic and English there should be “no problem” in producing the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete or the Akathistos Hymn—masterpieces of very subtle and refined poetry! The results, to be quite frank, are sometimes disastrous. At the best, they provide us with dull, confused and “queer” (from the point of view of the English language) texts like: “...Boast not for thou art flesh, and thrice thou shalt deny Me, Me, Whom all creation blesses, and glorifies to all ages.” or—“...Thou wilt fail me, O Simon Peter, saith the Lord, as soon as the word is put to thee, although thou art persuaded, and the maidservant approaching very hastily will dismay thee....” At the worst we have simply horrible verses like this one: “The heifer mourned beholding the Calf elevated on a Tree!”

Needless to say, such translations, although they may have some usefulness in the classroom where one studies what is meant in this or that liturgical service, are virtually useless within the liturgy itself where they remain doubly “alien”: alien to the poetical power of the original and alien to the poetical possibilities of the English language. And the spontaneous and [167] chaotic process of translations that is going on almost everywhere today, without plan, without supervision, without qualifications and, what is much more serious—without even the discussion of the problems involved in translation, can do an almost irreparable harm to the future of American Orthodoxy. In reality, the question of translation can be answered only within a wider question that of the liturgical continuity of Orthodoxy in America. We shall deal with this question later in the “positive” part of this article. Now we must turn to the next—the “rubricistic” reduction.

3. The “Rubricistic” Reduction

This reduction consists in solving all liturgical problems in terms of “right” and “wrong” practices, in referring them in a formal and almost

juridical way to the “rubrics” of the Typikon. We must restore services in all their Orthodox purity and this means, first of all, that we must fight the numerous Western, Latin, Uniate or Protestant distortions that have crept into them. Once these distortions are eliminated all problems will be solved *ipso facto*. In fact, a few isolated issues (kneeling on Sunday, Typika, immersion at Baptism, lace in sacerdotal vestments) were selected and constitute a favorite battleground where accusations and counter-accusations, denunciations and condemnations provoke on both sides a complex of superiority, self-righteousness and bitterness. And here again, there can be no doubt that certain openly non-Orthodox practices must be denounced and fought. But the question is in the name of what and how are they to be fought? One can easily imagine a parish from which all these distortions would be completely eliminated and where everything will be done in accordance with the “rubrics.” Will this formal rectitude by itself and [of] itself make this parish more “Orthodox” in the sense alluded to at the beginning of this article: really open to the whole spirit and power of the liturgy, permeating its whole life with it, and not simply abiding in the self-righteous satisfaction: “we here do the ‘right’ things”....? And then that whole notion of what is “right” and what is “wrong,” that reference to rubrics is it all absolutely clear? The Typikon itself, and I have tried to show it elsewhere¹, is far from being “self-explanatory,” for it represents and reflects a peculiarly complicated liturgical development in which many different strata are sometimes even in contradiction with one another and which needs—to be understood and applied—an effort of reflection and thought. Many of our practices—those that are universally accepted as “right,” are questionable from the point of view of the genuine liturgical tradition of the Church: the isolation of Baptism from the Eucharist and its transformation into a [168] private service, the approach to Communion in terms of a “required minimum,” the transfer of Vespers to the morning and that of Matins to the evening to mention but a few examples. One

should read, for example, the opinions of the Russian Bishops, written in preparation of the *Sobor* [Council] of 1917 to realize how many liturgical problems were raised by them, how dissatisfied they were with the liturgical practices of their time, and how pastoral (and not formal or juridical) they were in approaching all these questions. Simply to “transplant” the liturgical “situation” of Russia or Greece of the nineteenth century to America is neither possible nor wise. It is not possible because much of that “situation” was rooted in and justified by local conditions which no longer exist; and it is not wise because not everything then was “right” or “correct” from the truly liturgical point of view, and the liturgical decay in the Orthodox Church began long before its appearance in America. **The Orthodox Church needs a liturgical revival and renewal no less than the Christian West** and the lasting success and a certain “absolutizing” of books like Bulgakov’s *Desk-Manual for Pastors*—books totally deprived of theological, historical and spiritual perspective and even elementary liturgical knowledge, only indicates how far we still are from the real concern for the “right” things in liturgy.

Similar to “rubricisticism” is the widely spread obsession with uniformity. For several centuries the Orthodox Church happily lived with a certain pluralism of liturgical customs and traditions, pluralism which in no way diminished or broke its fundamental liturgical unity. The student of the early Church knows what a wonderful and rich variety of liturgical expressions existed in the “golden age” of Christian liturgy. No doubt a certain degree of uniformity—especially here, in America—is necessary and, therefore, desirable. But that it has become a real obsession, that one can for decades discuss the “Orthodox” form of the Cross or the cut of priestly vestments—is the sign of an unhealthy and dangerous preoccupation with the externals at the expense of the meaning of worship. “In things necessary unity, in things dubious liberty, in all things charity”—this axiom seems to have been completely forgotten and the level of liturgical interests and debates

remains incredibly low. And, of course, the tragedy again is that uniformity for uniformity's sake does not solve any real problem and only obscures its true scope.

4. *The Western Rite*

A few years ago I had the opportunity to express **my views on the Western Rite** in the American Orthodox Church and since my convictions have not changed, I can only repeat here what I wrote then in my answer to [169] Father W. Schneirla's brilliant and thoughtful defense of the Western rite.²

In my article I wrote: "Let me first of all make it clear that theoretically I find myself in basic agreement with Father Schneirla. The unity of rite in the Orthodox Church is comparatively a late phenomenon and the Church never considered liturgical uniformity a *conditio sine qua non* of her unity. No one who knows the history of Christian worship will deny the richness of the Western liturgical tradition, especially that of the old and venerable Roman liturgy. One may even ask whether the liturgical unification performed by Byzantium and which deprived the Orthodox East of the wonderful liturgies of Alexandria, Syria, Mesopotamia, *etc.* was in itself a wholly positive achievement. Last, but not least, it is obvious that in case of an eventual return of the West to Orthodoxy, the Western Church will have her own Western Liturgy and this will mean a tremendous enrichment of the Church Universal. . . In all this and thus far my agreement with Father Schneirla is complete.

"My doubts concern not the theoretical, but the practical aspect of the whole problem. Yet by practical, I mean something much more important than the simple question of prerequisites which would make a definite rite formally acceptable as 'Orthodox.' No doubt, in advocating the Western Rite, Father Schneirla is ultimately moved by practical, *i.e.* missionary considerations: its acceptance by the Church should make conversion to Orthodoxy easier for Western Christians. Such is also the main motivation of Metropolitan Antony's Edict: 'it (*i.e.*, the Western Rite) might serve

the.... purpose of facilitating the conversion of groups of non-Orthodox Western Christians to the Church....' Maybe it is unfair to point out that the scholarly and objective analysis by Fr. Schneirla of the various Orthodox experiments in the Western Rite hardly substantiates this optimistic assertion that some future experiment can achieve a greater measure of success in such corporate conversion. The center of my doubts is not here. **For me, the only important question is: What exactly do we mean by conversion to Orthodoxy?** The following definition will, I presume, be acceptable to everybody: *it is the individual or the corporate acceptance of the Orthodox faith and the integration in the life of the Church, in the full communion of faith and love.* If this definition is correct, we must ask; can the 'conversion' of a group or a parish, for which its spiritual leaders have signed a formal doctrinal statement and which has retained its Western rite, however purified or amended, can such a 'conversion'—in our present situation, *i.e.*, in the whole context of the Orthodox Church as she exists in America today—be [170] considered as a true conversion? Personally, I doubt it very much. And I consider this growing interpretation of conversion in terms of a mere jurisdictional belonging to some Orthodox Diocese [Eparchy], of a 'minimum' of doctrinal and liturgical requirements and of an almost mechanical understanding of the 'Apostolic Succession' as a very real danger to Orthodoxy. This means the replacement of Orthodoxy of 'content' by Orthodoxy of 'form,' which certainly is not an Orthodox idea. **For we believe that Orthodoxy is above all, faith that one must live, in which one grows, a communion, a 'way of life' into which one is more and more deeply integrated.** And now, whether we want it or not, this living faith, this organic spirit and vision of Orthodoxy is being preserved and conveyed to us mainly if not uniquely, by the Orthodox worship. In our state of national divisions, of theological weakness, in the lack of living spiritual and monastic centers, of unpreparedness of our clergy and laity for more articulate doctrinal and spiritual teaching,

of absence of a real canonical and pastoral care on the part of the various jurisdictional centers, **what holds the Orthodox Church together, assures its real continuity with tradition and gives the hope of a revival is precisely the liturgical tradition. It is a unique synthesis of the doctrinal, ethical and canonical teachings of Orthodoxy and I do not see how a real integration into the Orthodox Church, a genuine communion of faith and life may be achieved without an integration into the Orthodox worship.**

“I agree with Fr. Schneirla and I have said it on several occasions, that our liturgical tradition has to be purified from many local, antiquated and sometimes utterly un-Orthodox elements and practices. Nevertheless, it stands at present as a living bond of unity and *koinonia*.

“And then the last question: is it quite correct to define our rite as ‘Eastern’ and therefore ‘foreign to all the Western Christians have known’ to quote the Edict? I would like to suggest a rather sharp distinction between ‘Eastern’ and ‘oriental.’ No doubt there are many oriental features, oriental ingredients in our liturgical life. No doubt also, that for many Orthodox this ‘orientalism’ seems to be the essential element. But we know that it is not essential and we know that progressively all these ‘orientalisms’ are being eliminated in a very natural and spontaneous process of adjustment of our cult to the American life. But then what remains and what can be described as ‘Eastern’ is nothing else but the Biblical and Patristic, and therefore, it is ‘Eastern’ in exactly the same measure in which the Bible and the Fathers, or rather, the whole Christianity can be termed ‘Eastern.’ But have we not proclaimed time and again in all our encounters with our Western brothers that it is this ‘East’ precisely that constitutes the common and the Catholic heritage of the Church and can supply us with a common language which has been lost or distorted? The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom or the Paschal Canon of St. John of Damascus, are, I believe, much closer to that common [171] and Catholic language of the Church than anything else in any Christian tradition. And I cannot think of any word or

phrase in these services that would be ‘foreign’ to a Western Christian and would not be capable of expressing his faith and his experience if the latter would be genuinely Orthodox.

“These considerations, however fragmentary and incomplete, lead to the following conclusion: I think that in the present situation of the Orthodox Church in America, the Western Rite, theoretically justified and acceptable as it is, would, instead of ‘facilitating conversion,’ dangerously multiply spiritual adventures of which we have had too many in the past, and which can but hinder the real progress of Orthodoxy in the West.”

5. The Real Problem

But what then is the real problem and what are the ways to its solution? It is my deep conviction that the roots of our liturgical crisis are to be found not in any particular “deviation” although there are many of them; not in the linguistic barrier although, to be sure it is a very serious one, but first of all in the totally new and unprecedented situation of Orthodoxy in America and within the “American Way of Life.” Deviations and, to some extent, even the linguistic “conservatism” are not the causes but the result of that situation, which, in my article dealing with canonical problems, I described as shaped primarily by the secularism of Western culture in general and of the “American Way of Life” in particular. For the first time in her long history, the Orthodox Church is to live within a culture, a “way of life” to which she is deeply alien, and this, not because of her “orientalism” or a difference in ethnical background, but, because of her fundamental theological and spiritual presuppositions, of her whole “worldview.” **Secularism is a complex phenomenon** and it is impossible, of course, to analyze it here in all its aspects. **For our purpose it is sufficient to define it as the autonomy of the secular, i.e. worldly life of man and society from religion and its scale of values, a radical distinction between the religious and the secular “sec-tors” of life.** Secularism is **not necessarily**

antireligious: America, for example, is both deeply religious and deeply secularistic. It may sincerely proclaim the need for religion, give it a place of honor and cover it with many privileges. **But this coexistence, cooperation and even mutual inspiration does not alter the fundamental dichotomy of religion and life.** Religion can supply life with ethical standards, with help and comfort, but it cannot *transform life into religion*, make it a religious life whose very content is God and His Kingdom. Thus, for example, a businessman can believe in God and in the immortality of the soul, he can pray and find great help in prayer, but once he has entered his office and begun working, this work itself is not even supposed to be “referred to” the fundamental religious realities [172] of Creation, Fall and Redemption, but is indeed “self-sufficient” or *autonomous*.

But **the Orthodox “worldview” excludes secularism, for it is indeed the central and all-embracing idea and inspiration of Orthodoxy that the whole life not only belongs to God, but is to be made Godlike and God-centered, transformed into communion with God, and, therefore—no “sector” of human activity or creativity, be it the most “secular” or “profane” can be neutral, not capable of being sanctified, i.e., transformed into communion with God.** This is not naive optimism, for Orthodoxy knows and affirms that the fulfillment of all sanctification is in the Kingdom which is beyond this world. It knows and affirms that there is no other way to that fulfillment but the “narrow way” of renunciation and self-denial. Yet, it affirms with equal certitude that in the Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Glorification of the Son of God the *whole life* and not its “spiritual” or “religious” part, was returned to God and made again life in God.

And the means of this sanctification of life and the world is precisely the liturgy. For in liturgical worship we are not only put “in contact” with God, but are given the vision of the Kingdom of God, as fulfillment in Him of all that exists, of all that He has created for Himself, and

also we are made partakers of that new Reality. And having seen and tasted of the “heaven and earth as full of His glory” we are then to relate all life, all activity, all time to this vision and experience, to judge and to transform our life by it. Thus **the very “other-worldliness” of the liturgy makes it a real power of transformation in “this world.” This has always been the liturgical experience within Orthodoxy.... Not that this experience has always and automatically led to positive results and really transformed human existence—there were probably as many sins and deficiencies in the “Orthodox” societies as in any other society—but, as I wrote elsewhere: “...self-satisfaction was not one of them.** Toward the end of the Byzantine period, it was as if the whole Church were decked in black monastic garb and had taken the road of repentance and self-condemnation. The stronger the outward victory of the Church and the more solemn, rich and magnificent the outward forms of Christian Byzantinism became, the more strongly sounded this outcry of repentance, the entreaty for forgiveness: ‘I have sinned, I have transgressed’.... The surpassing beauty and splendor of St. Sophia; the holy rhythm, seeming to measure eternity, of the liturgical mystery that revealed heaven on earth and transformed the world again and again into its pristine cosmic beauty; the bitter sadness and reality of sin, the awareness of constant downfall all this was the ultimate profundity of this world and the fruit of the Church within it.”³ It means that, the whole life was at least seen and judged [173] in the light of the Kingdom as manifested in the liturgy; it means also that there was within that world a hunger and thirst not only for the “right things” but for the total perfection announced by the Gospel, and last but not least, the certitude that if not for the weakness and sinfulness, that perfection is the only destiny worthy of man, the “image of God’s ineffable glory.”

Our tragedy here, in America, is that the liturgy ceased to be thus related to life in its totality, to serve in the true sense as Sanctification of life. And this was not because of

any greater sinfulness or laziness of our communities, but precisely because of secularism's philosophy of life which is "taken for granted" without our clergy or people even being aware of it. **Secularism is not the product of any special indoctrination**; it is the very way of life of the American society. **It comes to us by thousands of channels: through schools, through publicity, through magazines, through the whole "ethos" of our society.** And yet it is a consistent, closed and very powerful philosophy of life which, unless it is challenged and questioned as a whole, not only cannot be overcome but even seen and understood as something radically alien to Orthodoxy. Maybe nowhere can one better realize to what degree secularism has invaded our Orthodox communities than in the pattern of our parish life. We constantly discuss the relationship within the Church of clergy and laity, their respective "rights" and "obligations" in the administration of parish affairs. Yet what is never seriously discussed in this whole debate is the nature of these "parish affairs," their relation to the whole purpose and nature of the Church. For, indeed, if the main "content" of Church administration is to "count money"—*i.e.*, to care for the material "success" of a parish—one does not see very well (and here the laity certainly have a point) why a priest should do it better or more competently than a group of "professional" men. And if the priest simply proclaims and affirms his *right* to do it, there is not one single chance that this conflict will be ever solved in a Christian Orthodox way. **For as long as "counting money" remains unrelated to the "offering" and the "offering" to the Eucharist and, finally, the Eucharist to the whole life, as long, in other terms, as it has not been transformed into a religious act**—and to perform this transformation is exactly the duty of the Priest because he offers the Sacrifice of the Church to God, makes our life sacrifice—as long as all this is not comprehended, **the parish remains a secular society** and it is irrelevant, in the last analysis, who "presides" at its meetings—a priest or a layman. But, I repeat, this ultimate question is not raised

on either side—the clerical or the lay because in fact both sides have accepted a secularistic idea of administration, "rights," "obligations," *etc.*, because in their own consciousness all this is related in no way to the two hours spent together—as the Church of God—"upstairs," in the Eucharistic gathering. But if even within the Church herself, a vital "sector" of her life is viewed entirely in secular terms and all reference to the meaning of **the [174] Church as revealed in the liturgy is simply and radically ignored as irrelevant**, how can one even speak of the liturgy's impact on the really secular life? In fact, all aspects of our life—be it family, profession, relaxation or education—are shaped and governed by principles and standards which no one has even tried to "reconsider" in the light of the "worldview" communicated to us in the liturgy. The latter becomes thus **an engine not connected to the wheels**, producing an energy which nowhere becomes motion, light or warmth.

And in this situation it becomes inevitable that the approach to the liturgy, its fundamental comprehension undergoes a radical transformation. The question, which underlies the whole liturgical experience of Orthodoxy, "what does it reveal about me and my life, what does it mean for my activity and my relation to men, nature and time," is replaced little by little by an entirely different question: "how much of the liturgy is needed to put me in 'good standing'?" And where religion becomes a matter of obligation and good standing, there inevitably all questions concerning the "right" and the "wrong" practices acquire a kind of independence from their moral, existential, truly religious implications. The priest is satisfied if he celebrates the "correct" liturgy, the people are satisfied if they know exactly the amount of their religious obligations, the whole parish is proud of its beautiful church and beautiful services but that which, from the very beginning was the real fruit of the Liturgy, that unique mixture of joy ("We have seen the true light") and deep *dissatisfaction* or repentance ("I see thy bridal chamber adorned but I have no garment to enter it"), that challenge to my whole life, that call to

perfection, that nostalgia for a change, a transformation, a transfiguration—all this is absent. **The liturgy is still the center of our Church life, unquestioned, unchallenged, unopposed. But it is in fact a center without periphery, a heart with no control on blood circulation, a fire with nothing to purify and to consume, because that life which had to be embraced by it, has been *satisfied with itself* and has chosen other lights to guide and to shape it.**

6. Liturgical Teaching

Having stated all this we seem to find ourselves in a vicious circle. For, on the one hand, if it is secularism—*i.e.*, the alienation of the *way of life* from the Church's *vision of life*—that conditions our liturgical crisis, by depriving liturgy from its relevance and, therefore, power, no translation, no restoration of the “right practices” will by themselves cure the disease. It is the language of the Church in the deep all-embracing, and not only linguistic, meaning of the word that man and society do not hear or understand, the language which includes the texts and the rites, the whole rhythm and the whole structure of worship. **For man has adopted, without even knowing it, [175] another way of looking at himself and at his life and this makes him truly blind and deaf to the liturgy** which he dutifully attends. Yet, on the other hand, only liturgy can—and we have explained why—break through this all-pervading secularism, for it has always been the proper function of worship to communicate and to convey to man that vision which alone can instill in him the desire for change, the nostalgia for the ineffable glory of his vocation, that true repentance (*metánoia*—change of mind) which alone can judge, redeem and transform.

But it is good that we have reached what looks like a dead-end. For only now can we see the real problem in all its complexity and cope with it without reducing it to pseudo-solutions. It is indeed the eternal logics of Christianity that it wins only when it *faces reality*, when it sees the truth about each situation and calls things by their names. And once we have

adopted this attitude we understand that, in fact, there is no vicious circle, no dead-end, but the same and eternal conflict which each Christian generation must rediscover for itself, for it is the very Christian condition in the world. **We understand that instead of giving orders and prescribing, we must start working; this work will be a difficult and thankless one,** and finally its success will depend on our patience and our readiness to go to the very bottom of the difficulties we face.

The beginning of all Christian work is always in *teaching*. And we must realize that we have no liturgical teaching, if by liturgical teaching one means precisely the consistent explanation of the *liturgical language of the Church, the initiation of man into the mystery of the Church's worship*. Such teaching may have not been necessary as long as the Church and the world spoke the same language, *i.e.*, referred themselves to the same values, had the same vision of the ultimate meaning of things, as long, in other terms, as the world, in spite of all its “worldliness,” was not secularistic. Today, however, such initiation is an absolute necessity, the very condition of any liturgical restoration or, rather, of the restoration of liturgy to its proper function and meaning in the Church. But the real liturgical teaching—and it is here that we approach the heart of the whole matter—is precisely the explanation of the liturgy in its connection to life, revelation of its “existential” power. As such, this liturgical teaching is almost diametrically opposed to the popular and extremely superficial “symbolical” interpretation of rites, interpretation which “fits” very well the secularistic mentality because it does not challenge, judge or question anything in it. To say, for example, that the “Little Entrance” in the Divine Liturgy “symbolizes” Christ going to preach is to satisfy a natural inclination for religious pageantry, of which the “secular” man is very fond (*cf.* **his love for** ceremonies, processions, **rehearsals of weddings, etc.**) but certainly not to raise questions about himself and his own life. To explain it, however, as something that

[176] happens to him and to the whole Church, as the real (and not symbolical) movement of the Church entering into the Presence of God, summoned to His throne, separated from the world, lifted into a totally other dimension of reality, immersed in the very Holiness of God (“Holy God! Holy mighty! Holy immortal....” of the Trisagion) is to challenge the man not only with his own participation in the liturgy but also with the truly “awful” implications it has for his whole life.⁴ For if indeed as a Christian I am the one who has been given access to the heavenly things, united to God and made participant of Christ’s entrance into the Kingdom, then the words of the Apostle are applicable to me: “for **it is impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again and again unto repentance; seeing they crucify the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame” (Heb. 6.4). All of a sudden the liturgy ceases to be a “venerable,” “ancient,” “colorful” and “beautiful” rite and becomes a terribly serious thing. All of a sudden my whole life is questioned and everything in it is seen under this terrifying possibility: “to put the Son of God to an open shame.” And this possibility is here because the liturgy reveals to me who I am, what I am *given*, it puts me face to face with the glory of the Kingdom and, *therefore*, reveals the exile and alienation from God of my whole life. . .

The water of baptism, the anointment of the body, the bread and wine of our eucharistic offering, the dates and hours of our calendar—all this makes our liturgy very “real,” very “material”—connects it with the real life, the real matter, the real time of our world in order to give them a new meaning, and put into them a new power. **The tragedy of secularism is precisely that it “disconnects” these two orders of existence and makes “food,” “love,” “time,” “matter,” “money” entities-in-themselves, incapable of transformation, closed to grace.** And, therefore, **secularism is very happy with**

the “sacred symbolism” so often offered as Christian teaching because it leaves intact and unquestioned the self-sufficiency of the “real life.” But the one who has understood, be it only partially, that all food and, therefore, all life as maintained by food, is directly related to the great mystery of the Eucharist (“eat.... drink....”) is already beginning to look at the world in a new way, to see in it what he has [not] seen before. And this precisely is for secularism the beginning of its end.

Thus the liturgical teaching can be defined as making explicit the Christian *philosophy of life* or *way of life* implied in the liturgy. **Let us not be mistaken: this teaching is to be created almost *ex nihilo*, because for centuries, [177] in fact since the disappearance of the catechumenate in its early form, it was simply nonexistent.** Neither theology nor piety paid much attention to this “existential” aspect of the liturgy. Theology—because, under the Western influences which pervaded it since the end of the patristic age, it adopted a purely intellectual structure,⁵ and piety, because, as said above, in the “organic” Orthodox worlds of the past, secularism was only beginning to creep in and to undermine the “wholeness” of the Orthodox vision of life, and piety thus remained, in spite of possible deficiencies, liturgical in its essence and inspiration. **To create such teaching, to find for it right words and the right perspective is an urgent task for theologians and pastors, for all those who are concerned with religious education.** This is the first—the “theoretical”—step towards the solution of the liturgical crisis.

7. Liturgical Restoration

But it is only this theory, the effort to create a consistent understanding of the liturgy and its meaning for life that can provide us with a “blueprint” of a real liturgical restoration. The deficiency of the “rubricistic reduction” discussed above is that in its goal for restoring and defending the “right” things it mixes things essential with those that are nonessential, wants to restore practices which may be secondary,

and omits or overlooks issues of primordial importance. What is absent here is the pastoral, and this means, the truly liturgical approach to, and interest in, the liturgy as concerned primarily with the life of man, with its *churchng*⁶ and not as a “correct-thing-in-itself.” And it is only when we begin to think in these pastoral terms that it becomes possible to plan a real, and not nominal, restoration of the liturgical life, for the plan itself is then rooted in our real needs, in the difficult fight for human souls.

It is impossible to give here more than a few isolated “hints” of what such a “blueprint” ought to contain. **There can be no doubt**, for example, **that the first and the most important revelation of the Christian vision of life in all its aspects: cosmic, social, personal, ecclesiological, spiritual, material and eschatological, has always been given and communicated in the liturgy of baptism, which in the past constituted, together with the Eucharist the “focal” point of the whole liturgical life of the Church.**⁷ Yet it is not only difficult, it is impossible to reveal and to communicate this all-embracing and decisive meaning of Baptism, if the latter is virtually absent from the liturgy of the Church and has become a private family ceremony. [178]

How can an adult Christian, who, of course, does not remember his own baptism, realize that his own life as Christian and the life of the whole Church are rooted in that great act of rebirth and renewal, that made him a citizen of heaven and, therefore, has given a wholly new dimension to his life in the world? How can he “experience” the Church as indeed created and recreated through Baptism if he simply does not see it performed as an act of the Church? And yet properly understood, taught and performed, the Liturgy of Baptism is, indeed, the very first challenge to secularism, the very key to our life as Christians in “this world.”

The liturgical restoration must then begin at the very beginning: with the restoration of Baptism as the liturgical act concerning the whole Church, as the very source of all

liturgical piety which, in the past, was first of all a baptismal piety, a constant reference of the whole life to this mystery of its renewal and regeneration through the baptismal death and resurrection. **This means, first, the celebration of Baptism within the eucharistic gathering of the Church. It is enough simply to read the texts of baptism and chrismation to understand that they organically lead to the fulfillment of the sacrament of initiation in the sacrament of the Church, that they are the entrance into the eucharistic fullness and fulfillment of the Church.** It means also the preparation of the whole community (and not only of the immediate relatives) for the baptism, a “baptismal preaching” in which the liturgy of baptism: exorcisms, blessing of water, anointment with the “oil of gladness,” immersion, the white garment and chrismation would be revealed again in their “existential” meaning for the whole Church as the community of baptized men, would be referred to life. **And this means, finally, the explanation in terms of baptism of *repentance* which is the fundamental dimension of the Christian life, its openness to Divine judgment, its ability to be transformed by grace.**

The second area of liturgical restoration is certainly that of our *eucharistic piety*. Of the many important problems involved here, the most urgent one is that of the proper understanding of communion. From its reduction either to a “religious obligation” to be performed once a year, or to an individual act of piety, completely disconnected from the liturgy as a corporate act, we must return to its true liturgical nature, and, first of all, to its relation to the Eucharist as offering and thanksgiving. The present eucharistic piety can very well exist within a perfectly secularistic worldview because it is nowhere related to life as a whole. It is a contact with the “supernatural” that has nothing to say to, or about, the “nature.” And only if we rediscover that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are, first of all, our very life, our “nature,” our whole world and its whole matter offered to God in Christ, returned to God in order to become again what God meant it to be

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from the very beginning—*communion with God*, only if we thus relate our whole life to [179] the Eucharistic offering, can we understand the act of communion as God entering our life in order to fill it with His transforming grace. To take the same example when a “Church Committee” will understand that its meeting is a direct continuation of the Divine Liturgy, its fulfillment in life, and not a “business session” dealing with the “material” problems of the parish, radically distinct from the “spiritual” ones which were dealt [with] within the service, our piety will begin to undermine secularism. But **what an effort, what a real conversion of our whole liturgical consciousness is needed to achieve this!**

Then, the whole liturgical experience of *time*, so obviously central in the structure of worship, in its rhythm of preparation and fulfillment, fast and feast, liturgical seasons, *etc.*, must be “deciphered,” *i.e.*, understood and explained in their relation to the real time of our life, to all time,⁸ and not only to the “sacred” hours we spend in Church. I have said above that we are rapidly becoming a “Sunday” Church, but even if we succeed in adding to Sunday a few more “days of obligation,” this by itself will not change the secularistic view and experience of time, its total autonomy from the days and hours of worship. For the liturgy is *sanctification of time* and not of certain moments of time. And it sanctifies time by referring it—by means of the *liturgy of time*—to that event, the Coming of Christ, which transformed time, made it a meaningful pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God. The liturgy of time has always had a double rhythm: that of repentance, preparation, effort, expectation and this in liturgical terms, is the function of fasts, eves, vigils; and that of fulfillment and joy—and this is the feast. They represent and convey to us the two fundamental dimensions or experiences of Christian life. It is rooted, first of all, in the joy of knowing Christ, of being with Him, of remembering Him. And it is rooted, also, in the “bright sadness” of repentance, in the experience of life as exile and effort. Both are extremely essential and to restore the liturgy of

time is, therefore, to restore this basic rhythm. **It is not true that people do not come to Church on holy days because they have no time. One always has time for what one enjoys. People do not come to Church because they quite literally do not enjoy it** and they do not enjoy it because the very reality of *joy is absent from our teaching and preaching*, from the way we present the liturgy in terms of obligations, of *musts* and *must-not[s]*. I mentioned before, that there is always something going on in the evening in the parish hall. Yet **evenings have always been the basic liturgical “time” in the Church**. And if, by a slow and patient effort, we could restore—in ourselves, first of all—the *joy* of this “liturgy of time,” reveal and “put across” its heavenly beauty, be it the beauty of penitential services, the spiritual beauty of repentance, or the [180] beauty of joy, as revealed in the feasts, not only will people “come back,” but they will understand the importance of these services for their “secular” life as well.

The true liturgical restoration will come not from a blind compliance with the “rubrics” but from their understanding. And this requires a tremendous effort of entering into the spirit of the worshipping Church.

8. *Liturgical Translation*

This brings us back to the problem of translation. There can be no doubt that if Orthodoxy is to become truly American, it will be an English-speaking and an English-praying Orthodoxy. But precisely because of the tremendous importance of this linguistic integration and of all that we have said about the function of the liturgy in our “secularistic” predicament, the mere notion of translation is not sufficient. I have explained why, for **as long as American Orthodoxy is only translated it is neither fully American nor fully Orthodox**. It is not fully American because the literal translations of Byzantine or Russian texts (and these are the only translations we have so far) remain odd and alien to the genius of English language, result in—to say the truth—Greek or Russian services in English, but not *English* ser-

vices. And it is not fully Orthodox because what gives these texts their real power and fulfills their liturgical function—their *beauty*—is simply lost in these literal renderings. But again a situation which seems hopeless is hopeless only as long as we do not dare to take the problem in all its seriousness and apply to it the only remedy: the faith in the Church which “never grows old but always renews her youthfulness.” And it means, in this particular case, that the true continuity with the living Tradition of the Church requires from us more than translation: a real *re-creation* of the same and eternal message, its true incarnation in English. One example will help to understand what I mean. Recently the diary of Dag Hammarskjöld—a deeply poetical and mystical document in which the late Secretary General of the United Nations expressed his religious life—was translated from Swedish into English by the poet W. H. Auden. In his preface, Auden confesses that he does not know one single word in Swedish. He used a literal translation—but he recreated it and gave it, so to speak, a value and an existence, independent from the Swedish original. Yet he could do it only because he was in “sympathy” with the content of Hammar-skjöld’s book, understood from “inside” his religious experience. *Mutatis mutandis* this example can be applied to our situation. The problem is not just to translate but to give again the hymns and the texts of the Byzantine liturgy the power they have in the original and which is rooted in the organic unity of meaning and “beauty.” Yet to achieve this, one must go beyond the literal meaning and understand the place and the function of a given text or series of texts within the whole, their relation [181] to the entire *message* of the service of which they are a part. Here again, the understanding of the *whole* precedes and conditions the real understanding of any part of this whole. It provides us, first, with the criterion by which to judge what in this particular “whole”—is essential and must be preserved and what is merely accidental, repetitious and of doubtful liturgical quality. It will, then, provide us with a method of translation which is not necessarily a blind “faithfulness” to the original: **it may be that**

in order to convey the meaning and the power of the original, **one has to paraphrase it and shorten it**, rather than try to “squeeze” into the sober English the luxurious and untranslatable “richness” of the Byzantine text.

Thus, for example, if one understands the meaning of Palm Sunday as being the great messianic feast, the solemn liturgical affirmation of Christ’s Lordship in the world, and, therefore as the inauguration of the Holy Week, which is the fulfillment of Christ’s victory over the “prince of this world,” if one has, in other words, the vision of the whole—the interdependence of the Lazarus Saturday, the Palm Sunday and Pascha, one has the key to the proper “recreation” of the liturgy of Palm Sunday. One sees, first of all, the central position and function within the service of the messianic greetings: “Hosanna” and “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” the theme of Jerusalem as the Holy Sion, as the place where the history of salvation is to find its fulfillment, the constant reference to Zachariah’s dichotomy “King” and “lowly” as reference to the Kingdom of peace and love which is being inaugurated, and, finally, the *leit motiv* of the whole service “Six days before the Passover” by which this feast is set as the “ante-feast” of the Holy Week, the real entrance of the Messiah into His glory. Then having “seen” all this, having truly entered the mind of the Church as she celebrates this feast and the mind of those who expressed this celebration, one will not simply translate, but, indeed, express the same celebration, although maybe in texts somewhat different from the original: shortened here, paraphrased there, omitted or even replaced in certain places.

I do not claim to be a specialist in English, which is not my native tongue. But, as a very “tentative” example let me once more hint at what I mean by “re-creation.” Here is one stichiron of Palm Sunday in literal translation:

Six days before the Passover,
thy voice, O Lord, was heard in the depths
of Hades,
by which Thou hast risen [raised] Lazarus

of four days;
as to the children of Israel,
they were shouting ‘Hosanna’;
O our God, glory to Thee.

If we remember that this text is to be sung, and yet heard as a whole, all these “by which,” “for which cause,” “as to,” the endless genitives, the heavy forms such as “for which cause, the Hebrew children, bearing branches of trees in their hands, exalted him with the shout,” not only create an anticlimax [182] to music (as if someone were singing a paragraph from a newspaper), but they simply do not communicate the synthetic image underlying these words. The structure of Greek language is different: there “for which cause,” or “in which” never acquire the phonetical independence which they have in English: they frame the main word or symbol without burdening it to such a degree that it is completely lost in this heavy gravity. A first requirement, therefore, is to *cut* the Byzantine period into short affirmative (kerygmatic!) sentences, centering each in one clear image and bypassing all words or even images, that “fit” into the Greek, but dissolve the English sentence. A possible rendering could be then something like this:

Six days before Pascha
Thy voice was heard in Hades.
It raised Lazarus.
Hosanna, glory to thee....

Another stichiron from the same service in literal translation:

When Thou was[t] entering the Holy City
sitting upon an ass,
Thou was[t] speeding to come to suffering
in order to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.
As to the Hebrew children, foretelling the
victory of the Resurrection,
they met Thee with branches and palms,
saying,
Blessed art Thou, O Saviour, have mercy
on us....

Possible translation:

Entering the Holy City
Riding upon an ass,
He was coming to suffer,
To fulfill the Law and the Prophets.
The palms and the branches
Announced the victory of the Resurrection.
Blessed art Thou, O Saviour,
Have mercy upon us.

Needless to say, this work of “re-creation” cannot be amateurish. The whole point of my thought is that it requires a very serious liturgical and theological study of the liturgy, of its structure, of its connotations. We need, indeed, a *liturgical movement*: the rediscovery of the *meaning* first, then its “reincarnation” in adequate words and categories. But nothing short of that serious and patient work will make our liturgy again what it has always meant to be and to fulfill in the Church.

9. *The Liturgical Problem and “American Orthodoxy”*

I hope I have made it sufficiently clear that the future of “American Orthodoxy” depends, to a large degree, on our proper understanding and [183] proper treatment of the liturgical problem.. At present this future is viewed in two mutually exclusive ways. There are those, on the one hand, who in the name of Orthodoxy reject its “Americanization” and there are those, on the other hand, who are ready, in the name of “Americanization” to give up much of Orthodoxy. For the first group, the future of Orthodoxy in America can only mean the perpetuation of Greek or Russian Orthodoxy and the attitude, here, is that of a pure *negativism*: the whole world is in Apostasy and the Church, to preserve Orthodoxy, must simply isolate herself in an artificially recreated past. In the second group, by far the most numerous, acceptance of America and “Americanization” may mean a simple surrender to secularism; recently a group of lay parish leaders took an Encyclical addressed to the parishes and signed by several bishops to a non-Christian lawyer in order to “check” whether the episcopal text offers sufficient guarantees to the “rights” and the

EDITOR'S NOTE.—*If memory serves, Fr. Alexander never returned to the subject of translating ecclesiastical poetry. And as far as we know, only Fr. Laurence Mancuso and the monks of New Skete—and to a lesser extent Fr. Paul in Reston—ever took him up on the challenge. Here is a brief quote from a monk there writing on the subject (Gleanings, Winter, 1973):*

If the liturgical poetry of the Oktoïchos, Minaion, and other church books is to come to life, the texts cannot be simply translated. They must be painstakingly rephrased so the poetry can make the meaning clear to a native speaker of English. Here is a fairly typical example, the idiomelon of the Third Tone (the first on Ps. 140 in the traditional Oktoïchos). We sing:

Your Cross has broken the grip of death, O Lord,
and foiled Satan's dark designs!

So, with all mankind we offer you
our songs of endless praise,
for our faith has saved us!

but the Monastery of the Veil's more literal translation runs like this:

The power of death has been destroyed
by Thy cross,
and the wiles of the devil
have been set to naught,
O Christ our Savior,
while mankind, saved by faith,
offers Thee hymns of praise forever.

To render the voice of the original Greek verb by the English passive voice is very weak and unimpressive. It is far more powerful to use the normal active voice.

On the next page we give a short extract from Fr. Alexander's remarkable "Letter to My Bishop" (January, 1973) as it will appear in the new edition of our handbook on the Divine Liturgy. In early 1979 Fr. Alexander suggested his idea to the monks of New Skete; Bishops one might think wouldn't approved. In due course Archbishop Theodosius gave his blessing to use it here in Reston, and thus pages six and seven in the Text of the Divine Liturgy [at hand] and which Archbishop Theodosius always followed on his pastoral visitations here.

“A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION”

Obviously the omission of two litanies^[1] merely for the sake of shortening the service cannot be justified. If, however, the reason for it is to allow the celebrant to read the beautiful and deeply *corporate* prayers of the antiphons, now read secretly [Gk. *mystikōs*, Slav. *tájno*], this may be a step in the right direction.^[2] It is clear that the original form was:^[3]

- an invitation to pray («Let us pray»),
- the reading of the prayer,
- and the *ekphōnēsis*.^[4]

Incidentally, it may be surprising to learn how many priests, while saying all the litanies, quietly omit [*it's true! —Ed.*] the reading of the “secret prayers”....

—**Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann**,
“On the Question of Liturgical Practices, A Letter to My Bishop,”
St. Vladimir's Seminary Theological Quarterly, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1973 (pg. 233)

[1. The two short litanies between the antiphons are not ancient. They are a late development, as Mateos shows. Their function: to cover with repetitious bidding the priestly prayers said *praeia tē phōnē* or *chamēlōs*, i.e., in a low spoken voice, and often these days during the singing of the antiphon or psalm, the little litany thus losing its cover function.—*Ed.*]

[2. In February, 1979, the Lesser Synod—Archbishop Kiprian of Philadelphia, Bishops Dimitri of Dallas and Kirill of Pittsburgh, together with Metropolitan Theodosius of New York—meeting in the Temple of the Transfiguration at New Skete in Cambridge, N.Y., commended Fr. Alexander's “step in the right direction” to the Monks of New Skete. Regarding our *corrected order* for the three so-called antiphon prayers—accepted into the Finnish Liturgikon of 1985—see our Afterword hereinbelow.—*Ed.*]

[3. Toward the end of the 1960s Fr. Schmemmann began to consider in greater depth the studies of Fr. J. Mateos thanks to privately circulated materials of R.A. Lewis.—*Ed.*]

[4. In fact a musical term (E. Wellesz) equivalent to *recitativo*, the customary intonation—*ekphōnēsis*, *vózglas*—of the doxology concluding a prayer in the hearing of all—inviting a “so be it” from people who've heard no prayer—“remembers” the voice proper to the prayer itself. “Secret” prayers being “declassified” in the name of Renewal must be intoned—as the priest-monks do at New Skete—as indeed the great Basil and Gregory and John did. A loud spoken voice is problematic, however venerable, however understandable its origin. For starters, why chant, *Let us pray to the Lord*, then speak the prayer? Is one merely throwing cues to a choir? Why chant, *Let us give thanks to the Lord*, then speak the thanksgiving? Is there a subtext? You need to hear this, but I'll hurry it along? God forbid! As we have been teaching: We must shorten the Liturgy—liturgical history and informed critical understanding show the way—and then lengthen it... a little, (1) to give Holy Scripture its due by restoring the Old Testament reading; and by resuscitating the responsory psalms—prokimenon and alleluia; and (2) by restoring to the hearing of all the priest's “prophetic” prayers which “explain” liturgical action and thus engage the assembly in heart and mind. Then, sometime in the third millennium (3) by restoring the original, conatural priorities of the Synaxis: we come into God's presence first of all to hear his word, and *only after this act of latreia, this service to God, this show of reverence*, do we make petitions in litany.—*Ed.*]

“A LITURGICAL CATECHESIS”

Brief extract from Fr. Alexander’s *Liturgy and Life* (DRE/OCA, 1974), originally published in 1959 under a different title. It presents some of the first more weighty thoughts Fr. Alexander had to tell the Church in this country. (Page numbers in brackets.)

“Liturgical catechesis” is not just an interesting custom of the ancient Church, but the traditional method of religious education, an organic part of the very nature of the Church and of its conception of spiritual “enlightenment.”

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Liturgical catechesis shows us first of all the main purpose, the aim of religious education as it is understood by the Church. This aim is to bring the individual into the life of the Church. I emphasize: it is not merely the communication of “religious knowledge,” not training a human being to become a “good person,” but the “edification”—the “building up”—of a member of the Body of Christ, a member of that new “chosen race” and “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2.9) whose mysterious life in this world began on the day of Pentecost. “And make him (or her) a reason-endowed sheep in the holy flock of Thy Christ, an honorable member of Thy Church,” says the baptismal prayer. Religious education is nothing else but the disclosing of that which happened to man when he was born again through water and Spirit, and was made a member of the Church.

The concept of the Church as God’s people and as Body of Christ has become abstract for modern Christians. On [12] the one hand the Church is identified with “parish,” an incorporated organization with business meetings, elections, votes, property and financial policies. On the other hand, it is to the church building that we come to pray, to “fulfill our religious duty,” enjoy good singing, and receive comfort and consolation. The purpose of a parish is understood as a means of assuring the material welfare of the church building and its contents; the purpose of the church as a building is the spiritual satisfaction that the parishioners gain from the beautiful church services and from the sense of having fulfilled their religious duty. But the

modern Christian has forgotten, or perhaps has never known, that these aims are secondary when compared to the main goal: the edification of the Church of Christ, the growth of all in the new unity in Christ that they received in Baptism and always receive in the Holy Eucharist: “And unite all of us to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and Cup in the communion of the Holy Spirit” (Liturgy of St. Basil the Great). “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12.13). “Where the Church is, there is the Holy Spirit; where the Holy Spirit is, there is the Church and the fullness of grace” (St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adv. haer.* III, 24, 1) .

The Church: New Life in Christ

Christianity is neither a philosophy nor a morality nor a ritual, but the gift of a new life in Christ, and this new life is the Church. In it, we who “now have received mercy” (1 Pet. 2.10) constitute a new nation under God, which offers to God spiritual thanks and offering, carries on His work in the world, is a witness of salvation and grows in the knowledge of Truth and Grace; hence the unique place and function of liturgy in its life. Liturgical services are not one of the “aspects” of the Church; they express its very essence, are its breath, its heartbeat, its constant self-revelation. Through the sacraments and especially through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the [13] Church, as one theologian worded it, always “becomes that which it is,” *i.e.*, the Body of Christ, a new unity of men in Him. Liturgy implies above all the gathering of the faithful, yet the word Church itself means precisely gathering, “where two or three are gathered . . .” In this gathering and through it we, “though many, are one body” (1 Cor. 12.12). Through liturgy we enter into communion with the Word of God, learn to know His will, remember the death and resurrection of Christ, and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, indispensable for our Christian life and action in this world. It can truly be said that through its liturgy the Church becomes a “union of faith and love,” as it was defined by St. Ignatius of Antioch. The sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation bring us into the life of the

Church. Baptism is our birth into a new life; the Holy Chrism consecrates us to the service of God together with all the other members of the Church; in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist we renew the gift of unity, through the offering of one sacrifice and the communion of one Bread and one Cup. In the daily, weekly, and yearly liturgical cycles the Church fills time with the memory of Christ. His presence and the grace of the Holy Spirit permeate all the aspects of our life. To sum up, through liturgy a human society (the “parish”) realizes itself as a Church, *i.e.*, as a new unity, as knowledge of and communion with God.

Education: “Taste, and see”

What then should Christian education be, if not the introduction into this life of the Church, an unfolding of its meaning, its contents and its purpose? And how can it introduce anyone into this life, if not by participation in the liturgical services on the one hand, and their explanation on the other hand? “Taste and see that the Lord is good”: first taste, then see—*i.e.*, understand. The method of liturgical catechesis is truly the Orthodox method of religious education because it proceeds from the Church and because the Church is its goal. [14] In the past the catechumens were first brought into the church gathering, and only then the meaning, the joy, and the purpose of this gathering was explained to them. And what would we communicate in our Christian education today, if explanation is not preceded by experience, by all that we unconsciously inhale and assimilate even before we begin to understand?

Everything I have said above may seem utopian in our present conditions. How can these theories be applied in practice? How can they become effective? There is no easy and simple answer to this question. Whether we want it or not, we are challenged today with the tremendously difficult task of rethinking Church tradition as a whole, of applying it in a situation radically different from that of the past. It will take more than one generation to solve this problem but we

must at least face it and also become aware of its meaning. Compromises, temporary solutions, adjustments—all these are admissible only if we firmly refuse once and for all consciously to alter Church traditions, to lower its standards in order to “fit” them into our needs.

Rebirth of the concept of Church

First of all, we must recognize that we cannot artificially separate the problem of the religious upbringing of our children from that of a renewal of the entire Orthodox community. We cannot teach what we do not practice ourselves. Our churches will have the schools which they deserve. And **it is obvious that the rebirth of “liturgical catechesis” requires first of all a rebirth of the liturgical life of the Church, its better understanding by the faithful, a more responsible attitude to it, a more active participation in it.** As long as we have ‘private liturgies during Holy Week; as long as our churches remain virtually empty on the day of our most beautiful—spiritually and theologically—service, Holy Saturday; as long as priests on that day are busy blessing Easter food in private homes; as long as Baptism remains a private family [15] celebration, and weddings a social ceremony at which the photographer is more prominent than the priest; as long as the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ remains a “duty” to be fulfilled once a year; as long as all this remains true, it is difficult to teach our children to see in the liturgical services the very essence of the Church, of its teachings and its life. We need a liturgical catechesis for adults, and in the clergy itself. We need a rebirth of the very concept of Church, the spiritualization of the parish, the renovation of our prayer life. All this is the basic condition for a true Christian education of our children, and unless we face this, all our discussions of “methods” and “principles” of church school work will be useless.

Sunday of Flowering Branches, 1 May 1983. Eternal be your memory, truly blest and ever-in-mind father and teacher of ours, Alexander!



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