



the *Presbyter*



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Letter from the President

Shortly after becoming president of the APC in 2006, I met with His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios at the Archdiocese in NY together with my immediate predecessor, Father Jim Moulketis. His Eminence was – and has continued to be - very supportive of the work of the APC, encouraging us to grow the ministry of the APC and focus specifically on finding ways to strengthen clergy family life and develop continuing education programs that would assist us in our work as pastors. That conversation has set the agenda for the APC over the last four years.

It set the tone for our 2007 National Clergy Retreat at Antiochian Village on clergy family life and last year’s “The Art of Speaking Workshop” at Holy Cross, as well as the clergy marriage enrichment seminars at the 2008 Clergy-Laity Congress. None of these programs could have taken place without the hard work of brother priests. I am especially grateful to Fathers Bill Christ, Jerry Hall, George Livanos and John Touloumes for their work on the National Clergy Retreat; Jim Moulketis and Nicholas Anctil for their work on the Clergy Family Life seminars; and Chris Metropulos, Bill Gikas, Chris Foustoukos, Dean Panagos, Thomas Fitzgerald and Nicholas Triantafilou for all they did to make “The Art of Speaking Workshop” a reality.

We have also tried to put out an issue of The Presbyter on a quarterly basis and make it into something that can be of practical assistance to us as we pursue our ministries, providing us with some of the best writing on the pastoral craft – the “art of arts” as St. Gregory the Theologian called it – that could be found. This would never have happened without the computer/editorial skills of Father Chris Margaritis and I am very grateful to him for all the time and energy he has put into this project with me.

I am also very, very grateful to Presvyteras Cynthia Paleologos, Stephanie Panagos and Alice Noplos as well as Fathers Tom Chininis and Nicholas Anctil for their work with the APC/NSP Benevolent Fund. Over the last four years more than \$100,000 has been distributed to clergy families in cases of extreme need. These funds have helped pay for everything from medical bills resulting from catastrophic illness to funeral expenses in the tragic deaths of children.

None of these programs would have been possible without the financial support of Leadership 100 and National Philoptochos. The generosity of our laity and their desire to support the clergy of our Archdiocese and our families has been inspirational!

In addition, the members of the APC – as representatives of all the Syndesmoi around the country – have stepped up to the plate and raised enough money for us to establish an APC Holy Cross Scholarship of \$3,000 given in consultation with the President of HC/HC to GOA seminarians preparing for ordination; support the construction of the Memorial Wall behind the School Chapel; financially assist the NSP in their work; and develop a series of PSA’s in conjunction with Father Chris Metropulos and OCN.

Much else has taken place over the last four years, too much to go into detail about here. One thing has been made abundantly clear to me: we need to continually be seeking new ways of building ourselves up as pastors, developing the spiritual insights, skills and practices necessary to do ministry in 21st century America to the glory of His Name.

This year, at the Clergy-Laity Congress in Atlanta, the APC will celebrate the 40th anniversary of its establishment at the 1970 Clergy-Laity Congress in Washington, DC when Father Alkiviadis Calivas was elected the first president of what was then called the National Presbyters Council. Much has been accomplished since then; much more remains to be done.

I look forward to seeing you at the CLC in Atlanta next month!

—Rev. Steven P. Tsihchlis
President, APC
Pastor, St. Paul’s Church
Irvine, CA



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The Perils of the Priesthood

Ever since reading it a half-century ago, I have wondered how anyone familiar with St. John Chrysostom's treatise on ordination could still summon the nerve to go through with the rite. The message of that book seemed to be: "Go ahead, fool, get yourself ordained; the devil is just waiting for you!"

Holy Scripture, too, speaks of the perils of the priesthood: Even as the rules for that institution were still being established, two brand new priests, Nadab and Abihu, came abruptly to a bad end when they decided to get fancy with the censer. (I've seen this, actually.) As a solemn warning on the subject of alcohol follows the story of their demise, I suspect the two new priests were intoxicated at the time (Leviticus 10:1-9). Not good.

Another pair of unworthy priests were the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, who served the shrine at Shiloh. They, too, came to a sudden bad end (1 Samuel 4:11-17), after ignoring their father's warning to mend their ways (2:23-25).

The offenses of Hophni and Phineas were not common moral failings, such as drunkenness; they were directly related, rather, to the ministry itself. That is to say, these two scoundrels used their priestly authority and position to take advantage of the very people for whom they were ordained (Hebrews 5:1). Their sins were particularly heinous.

Holy Scripture mentions two abuses of Hophni and Phineas:

For one thing, they violated the trust of "the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle" (1 Samuel 2:22). It was a sin of raw and crude exploitation: For the purpose of sexual gratification, they betrayed the confidence and exploited the vulnerabilities of those religious women, whom it was their responsibility to serve and care for. That is to say, their ministry in the Lord's house provided the very means and context of their infidelity.

The other offense of Hophni and Phineas involved the act of sacrifice itself. Disdaining that part of the sacrificial victim assigned to the priest, these two scoundrels insisted on taking a "choice cut" from the offered meat prior to the sacrifice itself (2:12-16). Thus, instead of serving the Lord's house, they made sure the Lord's house served them. This will always be the mark of an unworthy priest.

Following the lead of Venerable Bede's commentary on this story, we should regard those unworthy priests at Shiloh as a foreshadowing of the later priests — chiefly Caiaphas — who condemned Jesus in the Sanhedrin and then accused Him before the judgment seat of Pontius Pilate. Indeed, it was at the home of Caiaphas that the whole plot was planned (Matthew 26:3-4). This supreme representative of the Jewish people used the very office of his ministry — the worship of God — to murder God's Son. Even Pilate read the motive as envy (27:18; cf. 21:38). Thus, Caiaphas remains for all time the egregious example of a genuinely rotten priest.

At the same time, the Gospel writers were aware of the irony involved in that singular betrayal of the priestly office: By condemning Jesus to death (26:63-66), this unworthy priest unwittingly provided the means of God's perfect worship, the unique and supreme sacrifice to take away the sins of the world.

Given even the minimum standards for the ministry — "blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous" — it is not surprising that we find the occasional minister who doesn't measure up.



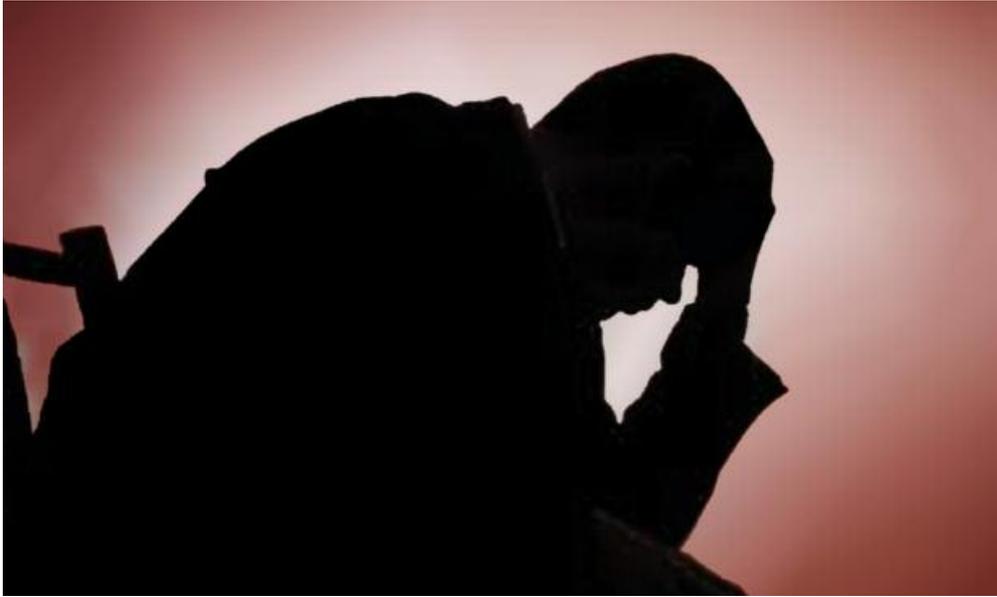
I fear the worst examples, however, are not those weak individuals who carry on a double life — priests with a gambling problem, for example, or drunken priests, even priests who violate their marriage vows. Although the canons of the Church properly bar such men from priestly ministry, their offenses are essentially manifestations of weakness, not malice.

Far worse, certainly, are those offenses associated with the very exercise of the priesthood, sins directly concerned with the setting and context of the ministry, such as the quest for power and absolute control. I have in mind the violation of trust in matters of conscience, the cultivation of malice in place of mercy, the disposition to answer criticism with revenge, and the abuse of authority to tyrannize the hearts and minds of the Lord's flock. Such offenses come closer to the sins of Eli's sons, and, more ominously, the unspeakable crime of Caiaphas.

—Rev. Patrick Reardon
Pastor, All Saints Antiochian Orthodox Church
Chicago, IL



Physician, heal yourself!



“Clergy aren’t supposed to need help. They have God.” I hear this often from the pastors I work with. Usually, it is said with the cynicism, anger and despair that mark the low self-esteem which is part of the profile of those pastors who have “burned out” in ministry because they operated as if this were true. I believe that this is bad theology as well as bad psychology.

It is not that we love God but that He first loved us

It is bad theology because God’s power is made manifest in our weakness, in our humanity, and not by giving the pharisaical appearance of “having it all together.” We cannot give love that we have not first received. “It is not that we love God but that He first loved us” (1 John 4:10). This is both the wellspring of ministry and an absolute necessity for continuing in it.

It is bad psychology because it creates a tendency towards denial and a pretense of invulnerability. Such an attitude creates a situation like that of a pastor I worked with who was himself involved in counseling

others. At the first session, I noticed that he was afraid of being seen by any of the people he had counseled while in our waiting room. This quickly became a topic of discussion and proved to be only the tip of a very large iceberg that had caused him problems in his ministry. Like so many clergy, he was “helping” people as a means of bolstering his own flagging ego. He was unwilling to walk where the people he served walked. He walked “above” them because he felt so far below them.

I was so grateful in the beginning of my training as a pastoral counselor for the humanity of the priest who taught my first counseling theory class. He was the director of the program and he wept in class. It deeply moved me. I told him later how important it had been for me to see him allow this kind of vulnerability without shame. “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). He was vulnerable and not ashamed.

Orthodox clergy face an enormous challenge in a contemporary America that is a smorgasbord of cultural and religious pluralism, each group claiming equality and legitimacy among the panoply of “gods” offered. In a society as consumer-oriented and dominated by corporate interests and self-help pop psychology as ours is, clergy can lose their way and begin to think in terms of meeting people’s wants and desires rather than being faithful to God’s call to be their shepherd. A priest can feel overwhelmed simply by the task of being orator, counselor, social director, fund raiser, theologian, parish administrator, crisis interventionist and officiator at baptisms, wedding and funerals, all while conducting 100 house blessings a year and special liturgical feast day vigils and celebrations.

A priest can feel overwhelmed

It is no wonder that in general surveys of Christian clergy, 50% say they can’t meet the demands placed upon them by the communities they serve. 90% say they feel pressure to have an “ideal” family; while as many as 80% say that their ministries have had a negative impact upon their family life.



At the Pastoral Institute we see a lot of clergy and their families. Two scenarios frequently emerge behind problems of burn-out, depression and various crises within ministry. In one scenario, the idealism of a youthful pastor from an alcoholic family (some estimates are that as many as 60% of clergy come from very dysfunctional families) is frustrated. His need for praise is thwarted. Scheduled days off are ignored to catch up on demands and yet demands increase. His family is frustrated with a husband and father they never see and when they do see him, he is grumpy and preoccupied. Resentment grows as he gives his best love and affection to his flock and little to the family which he expects should live to keep him bolstered up. He feels split between satisfying the demands of his family and his parish. Depression, anger, cynicism and breakdown result, usually after a problem in the parish arises as a result of the pastor's decreased effectiveness and increasing poor self-esteem. In the second scenario, there is the situation in which a successful, charismatic pastor builds a kind of kingdom. Large structures are built and extensive programs are offered. Sunday mornings are packed with people eager to hear a successful preacher and model of the spiritual life that represents for many the American dream of the good life and success. But few realize that this pastor's home life is a shambles, his children's hearts wounded by neglect and a wife who is frustrated, sad and demoralized. We do not need clergy whose families are disintegrating because of a narcissistic flight from familial responsibility into trying to be everything the parish wants

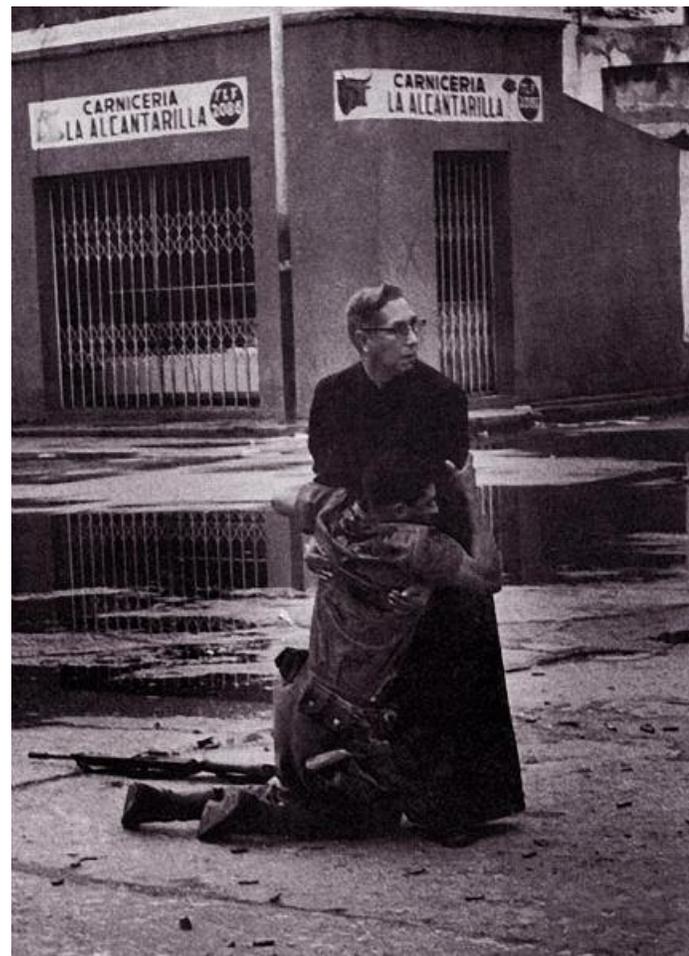
them to be for the best of conscious reasons (to serve God) but for the wrong unconscious reasons (to be the star of the family show, to be liked and praised by everyone and avoid the pain of criticism).

Here is an important question to ask: what do people get from having a burned out priest who consistently works 60 to 70 hours a week and ruins his marriage and family in the process? Burned out priests have little to give. They are poor examples to their parish and damage people's faith, people who need to find living examples in their shepherds.

Many conflicts are the result of persons with severe personality disorders

40% of clergy say they have a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month. Many of these conflicts are the result of persons with severe personality disorders which remain undiagnosed. People in congregations have all kinds of what is popularly called "unfinished business" left over from childhood. None of us were perfectly loved. We are all wounded. Often we look around us to those who have power and are supposed to care to meet the needs our parents failed to. Much of this is more or less unconscious and pretty true for everyone to some degree. In the midst of all this, clergy are a prime target for projections and expectations of those they attempt to serve.

Seeking to avoid conflict in such situations, clergy easily get caught up in trying to "be all things to all people" or to "be liked by everyone." We fear losing our jobs if we upset the members of the congregation or the parish council. Yet this is inevitable if a priest is to uphold the teaching of the Scriptures, follow the canons of the Church and maintain the purity of the sacramental life, etc. The Church is at times an incredible battlefield in which the clergy are sometimes simply out-manuevered. For example, in some situations I'm aware of, clergy have had their paychecks withheld over disagreements in the parish; in effect, being held hostage by their "employers." More often than not the reasons stated for the disagreement are not the real issues and unless addressed, the conflict is very difficult to diffuse.

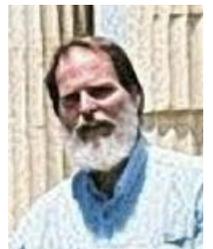




The priest functions as a model for the Christian way of life

Every Orthodox priest, by virtue of his vocational identity as well as his priestly role in the community functions as a model for the Christian way of life. He is an icon for those he serves in ministry. Americans desperately need the living example of priests who can serve the Church while also handling family responsibilities with wisdom and compassion. When a priest “burns out” or sets a poor example as a husband and father within his parish and/or his own family, it reflects on the validity of the Christian faith. However true his words might be and however correct in form he may conduct the Divine Liturgy, his life also speaks loudly and eloquently. As Metropolitan Kallistos Ware has put it, “What the world needs now is not people who *say* their prayers but people who *are* prayers.” We need people who live the faith they’re talking about.

—J. Stephen Muse, Ph.D.
The Pastoral Institute
Columbus, Georgia



Psychotherapists acquire special training to handle the difficult emotional turbulence that is part of the transference and counter-transference distorting relationships in which authority figures such as clergy wind up being the movie screens upon which parishioners unconsciously project all sorts of unfinished childhood agendas related to their parents. Clergy generally learn to recognize this primarily through hard knocks. But until they do, this can also lead to low self-esteem, overwork and drains on energy left for the rest of the parish and family life.

Priests need to recognize the difference between the necessary and intentional suffering of Christian *asceticism* that leads to life and the unnecessary, involuntary suffering that is a mark of psychological illness, ignorance, co-dependency, passions and/or mental illness. For example, there is a difference between taking up your cross and becoming a doormat. When priests begin to feel like doormats, they need to consider the nature of their suffering. In addiction counseling, we speak of the

concept of being an enabler of another person’s sickness or addiction. Enabling or co-dependency is a useless sort of suffering that the addict’s spouse and family members fall into, habitually ignoring their own needs with the intent of “saving” the addict, but in effect only making the addict worse and losing oneself in the process. Pastoral integrity comes not only from right faith and right worship, but also right self-knowledge. The relationships we have with others are a reflection of our relationship with God. If we simply become what everyone else around us wants us to be in order to survive in the parish, then we are not being the person God has called us to be.

When a priest refuses to acknowledge his pain and continues to refuse to take a day of rest “because of the needs of the parish” he may end up like the pastor who came for a week of intensive therapy at our Institute: burnt out, cynical, unmotivated, depressed and ready to change professions. He was carrying the cross, but by himself and without God.

The Priesthood

Even after two thousand years of Christian history, the ordained priesthood remains a “mystery” in every sense of the term. Why do some men who are called to this role fail miserably while others succeed? Can seminarians be prepared for the presbytery in a way that is neither hyper-spiritualized (“just send them all to a monastery for a few years”) nor McDonaldized (“we need to produce a consistent and dependable product to serve our parishes”)? Can older priests learn to mentor young clergy without becoming their tormentors? What criteria do veteran priests use to evaluate themselves and avoid stagnation in their ministries?

There are four different ways of looking at the priesthood that work together to sharpen our vision about the work of the parish priest. We can't see the entire picture without comprehending what each perspective reveals. They are:

- 1.) The Priesthood as Science;
- 2.) The Priesthood as Craft;
- 3.) The Priesthood as Art; and
- 4.) The Priesthood as a Gift of the Spirit.

1.) *The Priesthood as Science*

Every person possesses a unique set of intellectual gifts, but the fact that most people don't earn a Ph.D. doesn't mean that seminarians and priests can be intellectually lazy. Reading exposes us to new ideas. Not reading relegates us to a life of pettiness and parochialism.

Writing teaches us how to think clearly and share those thoughts with others. Priests and seminarians who study aren't “modernists.” Rather, they're pragmatists who understand that learning makes us better confessors, teachers, counselors, and preachers.

In fact, seminarians who complain that Professor Book Smart is too rigorous should write that man a thank you note.



Young clergy need to worry less about being liked and more about having a book in their briefcase and on their bedside table. Journeymen who proclaim that “I learn by serving my people” better figure out sooner than later that intellectual atrophy weakens our ministry as well.

2.) *The Priesthood as Craft*

Orthodox priests must possess a certain set of skills. Some come easily while others are mastered after years of struggle. Nothing new here; life teaches us that the things of highest value usually require the most sacrifice. Below is a list of the tasks that most priests can master with adequate proficiency if, like all craftsmen, he invests the time to learn it. The sooner he pours his heart and soul into learning his craft, the sooner he will master it. These tasks constituting the priesthood as craft are: 1.) Liturgics; 2.) Preaching; 3.) Language; 4.) Music; and 5.) Counseling.

Liturgics

Liturgical rubrics and movements are not rocket science, but doing them correctly and prayerfully requires study and practice. A table didn't drop out of the sky. Rather, men and women who devoted their lives to the craft of woodworking made it. In the

same way, the young priest must haul out his service books and study them, to transform that table into something holy.

He must practice, and then practice again — enough so that the worship becomes second nature. Remember the coach's line: “Practice doesn't make perfect, correct practice makes perfect”? The same is true for the liturgist. In his book *The Science of Hitting*, Ted Williams advised batters to sit around and discuss the ins and outs of hitting with other players. Priests need to do the same thing. The best celebrants learn from one another, correct one another, and ask one another questions. At first liturgical klutziness might be due to inexperience. After a few years however, show me a klutzy liturgist and I'll show you a lazy priest.

Preaching

The more we pray, the better we preach. Why? Because it frees the Holy Spirit to guide the thoughts and words of the homilist. At the same time, preparing and delivering sermons is a skill that requires attention, perspiration, and revision. There are very few natural born preachers. Most good preachers just make it look effortless because they work hard preparing their sermons. There are a variety of approaches to

sermon preparation and delivery. Write it out and read it. Write it out and memorize it. Write it out and reduce it to an outline and use the outline when preaching. Write it out, reduce it to outline and memorize the outline. Write an outline and refer to the outline and notes as necessary in delivering the sermon. Write only an outline and commit it to memory. It is never acceptable to show up and just start talking. This is especially true when preaching in a language that is not our mother tongue — no matter how well we think we speak that second language. Stream of consciousness worked for Hunter S. Thompson. For the rest of us, it only creates fear and loathing in the hearts of our listeners.

Preachers should record their sermons and listen to them. This helps us spot the linguistic quirks (rushing, not letting a period be a cadence, filler words such as “you know,” etc.) that keep our message from reaching the congregation.

Why all this attention to preaching? Is it to keep from being embarrassed? To look good? To gain favor? To justify a pay raise? No. In the words of an older, much wiser priest, “When we preach, we are telling a group of people we love something that will save their lives.” That’s why the craft of homiletics deserves so much attention.

Language

A foreign-born priest living and serving in America needs to speak English as perfectly as possible. Get a tutor. Go to community college. Do whatever it takes to master the vernacular. A little bit of an accent is charming and gets us off the hook when we misspeak (Americans who teach abroad regularly exploit this), but consistent bad grammar and a limited vocabulary distracts listeners from the life-saving message that we are trying to convey.

American born priests who misuse, and even abuse, English have no excuse. They illustrate why the priesthood is first a science and then a craft: people who don’t read and write — regularly and attentively — will never master a true command of language.

Music

Orthodox priests have to know how to sing. For some this comes naturally, for others it is work — often hard work. Only a handful of priests need to know the subtleties of Byzantine chant, but all need to be able to enunciate and hold a pitch. I have never met a seminarian or priest who struggled with music that wasn’t helped by a voice coach. (Note: a voice coach is not the same thing as an abusive and intimidating music professor.) As with preaching, the quickest avenue to fine tuning our singing is to record ourselves; this includes those clergy who already “know it all” musically.

Counseling

All parish priests are thrown into the role of counselor, whether they like it or not. Not all cases can or should be referred to professionals. Many people just want to be heard and pointed in the right direction. Most people already know what to do about their problem before they come to see the priest. They just want him to give them “permission” to do the right thing.

There is no shortage of counseling techniques and monographs that describe them. One basic approach to pastoral conversation uses the EAR (empathy, active listening and reflection) method. A straightforward approach to short-term counseling asks three “magic” questions: What do you want to see happen in your life? What are you doing about it? Is it working?

Remember, counseling is a craft; it requires study and practice. As with liturgics, priests benefit greatly when they share ideas and techniques with one another.

3.) *The Priesthood as Art*

The artisan transforms craft into an object of beauty. A painter combines the well practiced use of colors and brush technique to produce a picture that is at once real and intangible. Jazz musicians spend hours committing scales to memory, only to apply these tonalities and modalities in a way that is beyond sublime. So too, must the priest create. His tool is prayer, and his object is changed lives.

Priest as man of prayer

Prayer starts out as a science. It is difficult to begin to pray without superficiality unless we open a prayer book. Prayer develops into a craft. Reading a simple treatise such as Metropolitan Anthony Bloom’s *Beginning to Pray* will elevate anyone’s prayer life to new levels. Finally prayer is art. As with any creative endeavor, prayer moves from technique to transcendence.

Further, each of us knows God differently because none of us are the same. A biological father has a special relationship with each of his children. Our Heavenly Father’s relationship with us is no different. The currently popular Russian movie *Ostrov* captures the notion of prayer as art. In one scene the film captures the three monks who are the film’s central characters. Each monk is shown praying in cell, standing before the same icon, saying the same prayer. Yet, for each man the prayer is a distinct out pouring of the soul that reflects his own concerns and weaknesses.

Priest as confessor

Confession is an art. Confessors counsel, but they are more than counselors. Confessors are teachers, but they do more than teach. Confessors are men of prayer, but they do more than pray.

We tell the faithful that the confessor does not judge the penitent because the confessor is himself a sinner. We explain that Confession brings us face to face with the living God. We assure persons coming for this sacrament that in our humility it is not only we who are speaking; rather, our time together is guided by the Divine Logos and filled with the Holy Spirit. These are things that must be seared into the heart of the priest. The confessor is called to *know* God, and not only believe that God exists. He must not only recognize his sins, but weep over them. He must struggle to die to himself so that Christ might live in him. When these things happen a transformation occurs. The term "Confessor" ceases to be a priestly office and becomes an identity. How, when, and where this begins to happen for each of us is a mystery, but happen it must. Perhaps more than any other distinctive in the life of the priest, the role of Confessor exemplifies the notion of Priesthood as Art.

4.) *The Priesthood as a Gift of the Spirit*

Both St. Paul and the latest management gurus agree that each person has different gifts. Moreover, these gifts have different sources. Some come only as the result of suffering. All play an indispensable role in forming a priest's self-identity.

Internally generated characteristics

Some traits are so intrinsic that they seem to be part of our DNA. The world is made up of visual and tactile learners, strategic and linear thinkers, glad-handers and bookworms. The Church needs them all. Knowing what built-in features make us tick leads to happiness and fulfillment. It explains why the priest who is uncomfortable at cocktail parties can spend hours talking with a penitent or leading a small group discussion, and why the person who plans a retreat might not be the best person to hear the confessions at that retreat.

Not knowing ourselves can lead to disaster. Don't be a chancellor if you don't like administrative work. Don't apply for a Ph.D. program unless sitting in a library for hours on end doesn't bother you. Don't be a parish priest unless you know how to take a punch.

Characteristics resulting from childhood experiences

Why live in denial any longer? Many of the men called to the priesthood were raised in dysfunctional homes. If this doesn't describe you, thank God! For the rest of us, the time has come to examine our need for approval, desire to rescue others, and our irrational insecurities.

If someone is in seminary or ordained as a response to external, pathological influences from childhood, does this make his calling false? Not at all! God called this man to the priesthood to save his soul, and in working out his own healing, the clergyman is able to help others step out of the darkness and into the light. To ignore the pain of childhood is to miss one of the greatest opportunities to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling. More importantly, this denial is a disservice to every person to whom the priest ministers. If you are one of the seminarians or priests that grew up in a dysfunctional home, there's only one thing to do: Thank God and get to work.

Characteristics resulting from painful priestly experiences

A sure path to encountering — and finally knowing — Christ is found when external forces beat us down to the point where we lose our self-reliance and are forced to throw our lives into His hands. Serving as a parish priest is one such path. The job of a parish priest might be the most uplifting job in the world because you see God at work every day. At the same time, few other jobs expose a person to such a great amount of unwarranted attacks, betrayal, and isolation.

The frequent abuse of priests at the hands of the irrational, the ignorant, and the down-right mean is the 300 pound gorilla of American Orthodoxy. Why are our seminaries filled with converts? At least one priest's young son knows the answer. When his father suggested that the 12 year-old would make a good priest, the boy responded without hesitation: "I've thought a lot about it and it would be pretty cool. But I see the way people treat you. I couldn't do that."

Just like childhood pain, the priest must face and deal with the hurt that the pastorate brings, lest he fall victim to addictive or immoral behavior, burnout or despair. Years ago I saw a sign on a country church that read "When all you have is Jesus, you realize that all you need is Jesus." A cynical seminarian might regard this as "too Protestant." As I approach two decades of ordained service, the truth of the words could not ring clearer.

The priest is an artisan. And just as good art opens the soul to higher things, so the priest when practicing his craft as a good journeyman opens the minds and hearts of others to the good things of God. Meanwhile, this experience of the life-giving breath of God compels the priest to go back and learn even more, and so the cycle continues.

—Rev. Aris Metrakos
Pastor, Holy Trinity Church
San Francisco, CA



What is a Priest?

The Church is not an institution with sacraments understood as particular channels of grace existing within it. The Church is rather itself a sacrament, indeed *the sacrament par excellance*. The Church is the great mystery of new life in the new humanity of the new Adam in the new creation. The Church is the new Eve, the new mother of the living. The Church is a sacramental reality with sacramental expressions as its essential realization within the time and space of the old creation. The Church is the new creation and the new life in Christ, *one* with the unity of God; *holy* with His sanctity; *catholic* with His divine fullness; *apostolic* with His eternal mission of salvation through communion with Himself. The Church is Christ's deified body by grace and is Christ's glorious bride by love. The Church has purely human, historical institutions and organizations, but it is not essentially identified with its institutions and organizations, nor is it essentially identified by them. The essential being of the Church is the mystery hidden for ages in God but now revealed to the human race, the mystery of our salvation and deification in communion with God through the Son of God in the Holy Spirit. As such, it is the "Church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). It is the "Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).



The ordained priesthood in the Church and for the Church—not without or apart, from or over the Church—is the sacramental presence of Christ Himself in and for the Church. The priesthood is the sacrament of Christ's abiding presence in the Church as its husband and head, priest and pastor, prophet and teacher, master and lord, forgiver, reconciler and healer. The priesthood is the mystery within the great mystery of Christ and the Church which guarantees the objective presence of salvation in the Body, for it guarantees the objective presence of the Savior in all the fullness and power of His messianic activity. The ordained priesthood is the sacrament which guarantees the objective identify and continuity of the Church in space and time—apostolic succession—because it manifests and realizes in the body the identity and continuity of the saving presence and activity in and for the Church of the "one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5; cf. Hebrews 8-10).

The ordained priesthood in the Church exists to manifest and realize the priesthood of Christ, and so the priesthood of all Christian believers, in and for the Body. For the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the believers are not two priesthoods; they are one and the same. The ordained, sacramental priesthood is the objective sacramental realization and expression within the Church of this one priesthood. The question whether the ordained priest, bishop or presbyter, represents Christ or represents the people is unanswerable. In the first place the ordained priest does not *represent* anyone. He *presents* Christ in the community and actualizes his presence in a sacramental way within the Body. The Christ whose presence is manifested sacramentally in the Church is "the one mediator" whose unique, perfect, divine, and eternal priesthood—the only priesthood that exists—lives in the Church as its own priesthood in Him as his Body and his Bride; "...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9).

The priesthood of the Head is the priesthood of the Body. The priesthood of the husband becomes the priesthood of the bride. The priesthood of the Savior is the very priesthood of the saved. As Christ himself is the presentation (and not the representative) of God to man; so also is He the presentation of humanity to God. But He is the latter only because He is the former. He takes us to the Father as His children only because He first brings his Father to us who were not His children, but the children of darkness and of the "father of lies." In like manner, the ordained priest in the Church presents the community to God because first and primarily he presents God in the community.

The ordained priest has all vocations

The ordained priesthood is a sacrament of the Church. As such it is not an individual vocation or a personal *charism*. It is not one of the many ministries of the members of the Church. It is rather the sacramental ministry of the ministry of Christ, in whom all partial and personal ministries are fulfilled and by whom they are judged. In this sense it may be said that the ordained priest in the Church, as Jesus Christ himself, has no particular ministry and no individual vocation. He has none because He is the *term of reference* and *norm of evaluation* of all. And so, in the opposite way, it may be said that the ordained priest has all vocations, precisely because, by the very sacramental nature of his being a priest in the Church of Christ, he has none in particular.

The sacramental priest exists in and for the Church, being himself a human member of the Church, as the living *term of reference* for all personal and individual vocations and ministries of the members of the Church. He is the one whose sacramental vocation it is to be the sign and the presence, and in a sense even the judge, of the value and significance of all human activities and modes of existence. He is the pastor who witnesses to the pastoral dimension of all human vocations. He is the priest who

purpose of their ministry. He is, in a word, the sign of the presence of Christ and the expression of his presence in the Church as the source and the goal, the content and the judge, of all human life and activity.

With such a sacramental vocation, the qualifications for being a priest in Christ's Church are not reducible to any purely human talents or skills. The priest must teach, but he need not be a theologian. He must preach, but rhetorical eloquence is not a necessity. He must



testifies that all human being and life must be offered to God in Christ by the grace of the Spirit. He is the teacher whose presence is the measure and norm for all human teaching. He is the judge whose very presence judges all who execute justice. He is the healer who demonstrates what healing is. He is the servant reminding all who serve of the

shepherd the flock, but he need not be a specialist in pastoral counseling. He must administer, but purely executive gifts may belong to another. Of course he must pray, but the particular *charism* of prayer is not a requirement. The qualifications which a priest must necessarily possess are traditionally external rather than internal. His specific

charism may vary, but his objective image must be vivid and firm. He must be a male member of the Church, physically whole, totally identified with the faith of the Church and professing it soundly and clearly. He must be of spotless reputation to those inside and outside the Church. He must have no record of grave sin after baptism, specifically including the shedding of blood, sexual immorality, or public deceit. He must be the husband of one wife or a celibate virgin. If he is married, the wife and children within his household must be members of the Church with similar qualifications. He must not be involved in political, economic, or military affairs or in any secular business; nor can his wife. His individual talents and gifts must be such that they do not conflict with his sacramental being and life.

The ordained priest is a sacramental image, a living sign and expression of Christ

Thus, for example, should he feel called to a life of social activity, government service, monastic contemplation, or legal advocacy; or should he feel compelled to take a second wife, to join the military, to pursue an academic career, or to propagate one or another specific form of Christian activity or piety, he must give up his sacramental office. In a word, the ordained priest is a sacramental image, an animate symbol, a living sign and expression of Christ in whom dwells bodily all the fullness of God. He is not necessarily the bearer of specific gifts, the most gifts, or the best gifts. He is not the holiest member of the

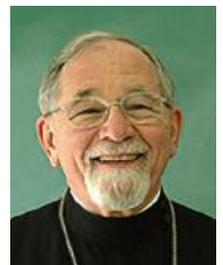
Church. He is not the one who takes the faith most seriously. He certainly is not the one who has a “religious vocation.” Every human being has a “religious vocation” simply because every human being is made in the image and likeness of God, as an Adam or as an Eve. And there is no doubt that most human beings are more talented and more skilled in one or another specific way than is the priest. Certainly many members of the Church are personally more holy, including repentant sinners, handicapped persons, people twice married, and those who bear the humanity of Eve.

But this is beside the point. There is not some sort of “competition” between the bishops and presbyters in the Church and the rest of the members on the basis of talents, gifts, or personal sanctity. For the priesthood is not a profession, a job, or a way of self-fulfillment in personal holiness. It is a sacrament of the Church, in and for the Church, of Him who is the Church’s only pastor and priest, its head and its husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course all will agree that the bearer of this sacrament should be holy and talented. But the holiness and the gifts are included within the sacrament, and the sacrament is not dependent on the sanctity and skills of its bearer. For this reason no person can claim the



office of priesthood on the basis of professional qualifications or personal holiness. The priest is called by God with the consent of the faithful. Some may force their way into the office for one reason or other, but this is a violation of the sacrament undertaken unto condemnation and judgment. For the priest is called and chosen by God as the sacramental guarantee of the continuity and identity, the purity and integrity, of the body and bride of his Son until He comes gain in glory to establish His kingdom in which there will be no sacraments, for then He will be all and in all.

—*Very Rev. Thomas Hopko*
Dean Emeritus, St. Vladimir’s
Orthodox Seminary
Ellwood City, PA





You are invited to attend
the APC/NSP
Clergy Marriage
Enrichment Workshops
at the 2010 Clergy Laity Congress
Tuesday, July 6th
3:30—6:00PM

Topics and Speakers

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with Dr. J. Stephen Muse

2. Keeping Christ Present in our Marriage & Family

with Dr. Joseph P. Amato

3. Marriage Insurance: Safeguarding your Investment

with Father Jim & Presvytera Donna Pappas

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How does one prepare for retirement?

**What about the Archdiocesan Pension Program,
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How can I continue to serve the Church?

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Contemporary and Classic Excerpts

The Priesthood in the *Philokalia*

The Priesthood

Let us return to the subject of the priesthood. Salvation is attained through simplicity and virtue, not through the glories of the priesthood, which demands from us an angelic way of life. Either you should become dispassionate like the angels, in thought and purpose superior to the world and the flesh; or else, aware of your weakness you should in fear avoid the high rank of the priesthood, for the form of life followed by the laity brings one no less close to God than the priesthood.

The priestly dignity, like the priestly vestments, is full of splendor, but only so long as it is illumined from within by purity of soul. As an angelic order it requires of us an angelic purification and a degree of discernment and self-restraint greater than in our previous life. What is defiled can in some measure become pure; it is far worse for the pure to become defiled. If we mix darkness with light, foul odors with sweet, we shall inherit calamity and destruction because of our sacrilege, like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).

Wisely bear in mind that if God acquits no one can condemn. If you have been called to enter into the grace of the priesthood, do not worry about your past life, even if to some extent it has been soiled: for it has been purified once more by God and through your own

self-correction. But afterwards be diligent and watchful so as not to eclipse grace. Then if someone stupidly casts aspersions on your priesthood because of your past, he will hear a voice from heaven saying, "What God has cleansed, do not call unclean" (Acts 10: 15).

When you boldly take up the yoke of the priesthood, you should mend your ways and expound the truth rightly, thus working out your salvation with fear and trembling, "for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12: 29). If you are as gold or silver and you touch this fire, have no fear of being burnt. But if you are like grass or reeds or some other easily combustible material as a result of your earthly thoughts, then tremble lest you should be reduced to ashes in the heavenly fire – unless like Lot (Genesis 19: 17, 29) you escape God's wrath by quitting the priesthood. Yet it may be that some of the lighter faults that results from weaknesses are consumed by this divine fire during the celebration of the Liturgy, while you yourself remain unburned and unharmed in the fire, like the fragile bush in the desert (Exodus 3:2).

The office of the priesthood is light and its yoke is easy so long as it is discharged as it should be, and so long as the grace of the Holy Spirit is not put up for sale. When what is beyond price is bartered in the name of human expedience and for perishable gifts, and when the

call is not from above, the burden is heavy indeed; for it is borne by someone unworthy, whose powers it exceeds. Then the yoke is extremely harsh, chafing the neck of him who carries it and sapping his strength; and unless it is taken from him, it will exhaust and destroy him utterly.

If, lost and useless though you are, you decide after superficial purification to enter the heavenly, angelic order of the priesthood and to become a chosen vessel suitable for the Lord's use, as St. Paul says, then you should keep unsullied the office of which you have been found worthy, guarding the divine gift as you would the pupil of your eye. Otherwise, fulfilling your role in a perfunctory manner, you will be cast down from the heights into the abyss and find it hard to climb out again.

If there is no fear of God before your eyes you will think it a trivial matter to officiate unworthily for you will be deceived by your own self-love into imagining that God will be charitable to you. Long ago, Dathan and Abiram imagined the same thing until the earth opened beneath them and swallowed them up (Numbers 16:25-33). Standing with genuine awe and fear before Him, recognize how great a matter it is to officiate, and either engage in the priesthood worthily and purely – like an angel – or wisely keep away from this dread ministry.

I myself have known a priest who dared to celebrate the mysteries unworthily, having succumbed to the passion of unchastity. First, he fell victim to a dreadful, incurable disease and was near death. Then, after doing everything he could to rid himself of the disease, all to no avail – in fact, it even got worse – he began to realize that he was dying because he had celebrated the mysteries unworthily. Straight away he took a vow to desist from celebrating and recovered at once, so that not even a trace of his illness remained.

You who sacrifice God's flesh and share in it through Holy Communion should also be united to Him by sharing the death that he died. As St. Paul says, you should live not for yourself but for Him who was crucified and died on your behalf (Galatians 2:20). If, dominated by passion, you live for the flesh and the world prepare yourself for deathless punishment through death unless you resign of your own accord from your priesthood before you die. But many unworthy priests have been snatched away by sudden death and sent to the halls of judgment.

There was once a monk-priest who had a reputation for piety and was held in honor by many on account of his outward behavior, though within he was licentious and defiled. One day he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy and, on reaching the cherubic hymn, he had bent his head as usual before the holy table and was reading the prayer, "No one is worthy..." when he suddenly died, his soul having left him in that position.

—*St. Theognostos*
On the Practice of the Virtues,
Contemplation and Priesthood
The Philokalia, Volume II

The Qualities Required of a Priest

St. Symeon the New Theologian was once asked what a priest ought to be like and he replied as follows: "I am not worthy to be a priest; but I know very well what someone who is to celebrate the sacred mysteries of God should be like. In the first place, he should be chaste, not only in body but also in soul, and he should be free of all sin. Secondly, he should be humble both in his external manner and in the inner state of his soul. Then, when he stands before the holy altar, while gazing with his physical eyes upon the holy gifts, spiritually – and with total certainty – he should perceive the Godhead. Moreover, his heart should be consciously aware of Him who is invisibly present and dwelling in the gifts, so that he may offer the petitions with confidence; and when, like a friend speaking to a friend, he says, 'Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,' the way in which he recites the prayer will show that he has dwelling within him the true Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. I have seen such priests. Forgive me, fathers and brothers."

St. Symeon also spoke the following words, as if about someone else, thereby concealing himself to avoid human adulation, even though because of his love for others he felt at the same time compelled to reveal himself: "A certain priest-monk, who had full confidence in me as a friend, once told me this: 'I have never celebrated the Liturgy without seeing the Holy Spirit, just as I saw Him come upon me when I was ordained and the metropolitan said the prayer while the service book rested on my head.' When I asked him how he saw it at that time and in what form, he said: 'Undifferentiated and without form, except as light. At first, I was

astonished, beholding what I had never beheld before; and as I was asking myself what it might be, the Light said to me, its voice heard only by the intellect: 'Thus have I appeared to all the prophets and apostles, and to those who are now the saints and the elect of God, for I am the Spirit of God.'"

To Him be glory and power through all the ages. Amen!

—*St. Symeon the New Theologian*
Practical and Theological Texts
The Philokalia, Volume IV

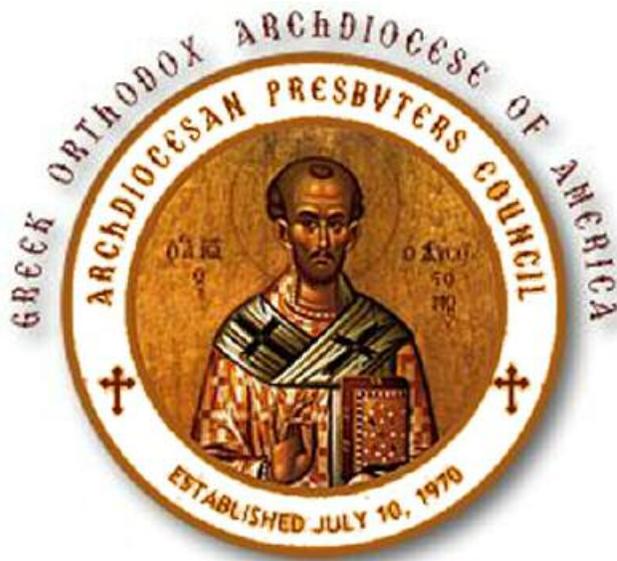
The Royal Priesthood of all the Faithful

"All the faithful are truly anointed priests and kings in the spiritual renewal brought about through baptism, just as priests and kings were anointed figuratively in former times. For those anointings were pre-figurations of the truth of our anointing: pre-figurations in relation not merely to some of us but to all of us. For our kingship and priesthood are not of the same character as theirs, even though the symbolic actions are the same. Nor does our anointing recognize any distinction in nature, grace or calling, in such a way that those who are anointed essentially differ one from the other; we have but one and the same faith, calling and ritual. The true significance of this is that the person anointed is pure, dispassionate and wholly consecrated to God now and forever."

—*St. Gregory of Sinai*
On Commandments and Doctrines
The Philokalia, Volume IV

The Presbyter

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'The Presbyter'

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St. Paul Church

4949 Alton Parkway • Irvine, CA 92604-8606

(949) 733-2366 • (949) 733-0962 fax

father@stpaulsirvine.org

Co-Editor: Rev. Chris Margaritis

Greek Orthodox Church of Greater Omaha

9012 "Q" St. • Omaha, NE 68127-3549

(402) 578-6871

kalos@cox.net

*Clergy email addresses provided by the Archdiocese.
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