



## *Fire & Light*

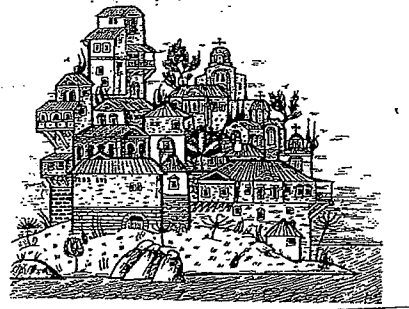
### **St. Symeon Orthodox Church**

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✠ **January 26, 2014** ✠



### **Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia**

**St. Xenophon and St. Mary, his wife, and their two sons, Sts. Arcadius and John of Constantinople (6<sup>th</sup> C)**  
**St. Ammon of Egypt, Disciple of St. Anthony (350), St. Paula of Palestine (404), St. Theodore the Confessor of Studion (Relics – 826) St. David the Builder, King of Georgia (1125)**

+ **Next Sunday is the Feast of the Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple**

+ **Parish Council Meeting Next Sunday following Divine Liturgy / Today ~ Skating: 4:00pm – 6:00pm**

**"Glory to Thee, Who hast shown us the light!"** we announce at the beginning of the Great Doxology of Matins. This means, "Glory be to Thee, O Lord, Who hast revealed to us the light of the true knowledge of God." These words also carry us back to the days of Christianity's deepest antiquity, and better than any other words remind us that this service should continue through to the rising of the sun. Properly, seeing the first rays of the light of dawn, on behalf of all the people the priest gives thanks unto the Lord.

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### **Excerpt from the Nativity 2013 Archpastoral Letter of His Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople**

Beloved brothers and sisters, Children in Christ,

2013 years have passed since the birth of Christ in the flesh

2013 years have passed and, like then, Christ continues to be persecuted in the person of the weak by Herod and all kinds of contemporary Herods

2013 years have passed and Jesus is persecuted in the person of Christians in Syria and elsewhere

2013 years have passed and Christ still flees like a refugee not only in Egypt, but also in the Lebanon, Europe, America and elsewhere, seeking security in an insecure world

2013 years have passed and the child Jesus remains imprisoned with the two hierarchs in Syria, Paul (Yazigi) and Youhanna (Ibrahim), as well as the Orthodox nuns and many other known and unknown Christians

2013 years have passed and Christ is crucified with those who are tortured and killed in order not to betray their faith in Him

2013 years have passed and Jesus is daily put to death in the person of thousands of embryos, whose parents prevent from being born

2013 years have passed and Christ is mocked and ridiculed in the person of unfortunate children, who experience the crisis of the family, destitution and poverty.

It is this human pain, sorrow and affliction that our Lord came and once more comes to assume during this Christmas season. After all, He said: "As you have done to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters," you have done to me." (Matt. 25.40-41) It is for these that He was born of a Virgin, for these that He became human, for these that He suffered, was crucified and arose from the dead. That is to say: for all of us. Thus, let each of us lift up our personal cross in order to find grace and mercy when we seek His assistance. Then, the born Emmanuel, our Savior and Lord, will "be with us." Amen.

## Same-Sex Marriage Not Condoned by The Eastern Orthodox Church

The Rev. Andrew Harmon, Orthodox Priest - Cleveland Plain Dealer

Over the last few years I have been asked many times about same-sex marriage. Especially in the last few months, as this issue has become so big, the question repeatedly comes: "What does the Eastern Orthodox Church say about this matter?"

~~Some denominations will now perform such~~ ceremonies. Within some denominations, some pastors will and some won't. The Orthodox Church is the second largest Christian body in the world and usually considered the most traditional. Will the Orthodox Church do same-sex marriages? No, we won't.

Let me explain why. Marriage has always been between males and females. That is the very meaning of the word. Some cultures in history, most famously ancient Greece, were — shall we say — rather easygoing about homosexuality. But even they never accepted same-sex marriage as an open and legal institution.

If this huge change now takes place, as it seems it might, it will be a first in the history of the human race. Marriage is one of the holy sacraments of the church. And it has always been between a woman and a man. To change this would be to change the very nature of the sacrament and that we cannot do.

The Sacrament of Christian marriage reflects the loving union between Jesus Christ and his church. This is clear in the epistle lesson written by the Holy Apostle Paul, Ephesians 5:21-33, which is read at every Orthodox wedding. In this epistle reading, St. Paul clearly teaches that the marital union reflects the union between Christ, the bridegroom, and his spouse the church, the bride.

A human bride and groom hopefully have a similarly loving relationship and union as do Christ and his church. But the marriage between Christ and the church can't work if

there are two Christs and no church, or two churches and no Christ! And, similarly, the human marital reflection of the union between Christ and the church won't work if there are two human brides and no groom, or two grooms and no bride.

To have such a "marriage" would make nonsense of everything Paul says and that fact shows that such a "marriage" really isn't marriage, no matter what terminology we humans wish to use. Ultimately, real marriage is what God says real marriage is, not what we say it is. ~~Through the inspiration of Scripture by~~ the Holy Spirit, God has spoken through the writings of St. Paul.

Both the Bible and the tradition of the church teach that same-sex sexual activity is sinful. It's not an unforgivable sin or the worst sin, but it is a sin. Therefore, the church asks those who are tempted to such sin to refrain from it and be chaste. In a similar way the church asks those with no same-sex struggles to refrain from heterosexual sexual activity outside of marriage. Chastity is asked from both and it is believed that God can help a person remain chaste.

So in closing, the Orthodox Church is happy to minister to those struggling with homosexuality. Such ministering goes on pretty much everywhere and in most parishes —our people have the same struggles as everyone else does. We certainly have no hatred against people with this struggle and no interest in "gay bashing."

We will not turn someone away because of a particular sin they struggle with. They are sinners like the rest of us who need God's forgiveness and help.

But performing or approving of same-sex marriages? No, we can't do that. That would be saying that what is a sin isn't a sin. That would be a lie, so we can't participate or approve. May God have mercy on all of us sinners and bring us to repent of our sins and bring us all into his heavenly kingdom.

*The Rev. Andrew Harmon is pastor of St. Matthew Orthodox Church (OCA) in North Royalton, OH.*

## Elder Paisios – On Life's Tribulations

"This life is false and fleeting; our years are numbered. And it is fortunate that our years are few, for our bitterness due to tribulation will also pass quickly --- healing our souls in the process like bitter medicines. Doctors, you see, give bitter medicines to their suffering patients, because it is with the bitter medicines that they will recover, not with the sweet ones. I'm just trying to say that as health comes from the bitter medicine, so too does the salvation of souls come from bitter experiences."

"Before permitting a tribulation to come upon us, God worked in a good and kind way; but people did not understand Him, so He then permits the tribulation. You see, even when a child is misbehaving, his father - at first - tries with kindness to help him change; but when the child does not change his behavior, then the father resorts to strictness in order to correct the bad behavior. In much the same way, when people refuse to change in response to kindness, God sometimes allows tribulation to come upon them so they can recover. If there were no pain, no illness, no tribulations, people would turn into wild beasts; they wouldn't approach God at all"

"You see, even Panaghia (the Theotokos) suffered, and our Saints also suffered. Therefore, we too must be ready to suffer; since we are on the same path of life. The only difference is that when we experience a little tribulation in this life, we pay off our debt of sins and are saved. Even Christ Himself came into the world with pain: He descended from Heaven; He became incarnate; He suffered; He was crucified. Even now, a Christian comes to understand the coming of Christ into his life through pain."

"What does the Sacred Scripture say? *'For whom the Lord loveth, He correcteth.'* [Proverbs 3:12]

"Let's say a father has eight children. Five of them stay at home with him, and the other three go far away and don't ever think of their father. For the five who stay at home, if they misbehave, he can discipline them by giving their ears a tug, or giving them a little slap; or if they are well-behaved, he can caress them or give them a chocolate. But those who have gone far away, receive neither hugs nor slaps. This is also how God works. He may just give a little smack to those who are near Him, and - if they falter - to those who have a good disposition, and they'll have paid off their debt ... To those who are far away from Him, God provides years of time for them to repent. This is why we see worldly people who have committed serious sins, and yet seem to have an abundance of material goods and live to a long life without going through trials. This happens according to the plan of God, in order to give them time to repent. If they don't repent during this time, they will be left without an excuse in the other life."

"The tribulations that come to us are sometimes the antibiotics given by God for the illnesses of our soul, and - spiritually - help us very much. A person receives a soft "smack" and his heart is softened. God, of course, knows the condition of each person. However, because we do not know this condition, He allows that we be tested, so that we come: to know ourselves; to find the passions hidden within us; and [to] not have unreasonable expectations on the Day of Judgment."

"If He overlooked our passions and received us into Paradise as we are, we would again create problems there. This is why God permits the devil to create temptations here: in order to clean us up, until our soul becomes humble and purified through sorrows, and then He grants us Grace."

## BUT I DON'T WANT TO GO TO SUNDAY SCHOOL

Shall I **MAKE** my child go to Sunday School and Church? **YES!** Are you startled by such an abrupt answer? Why? How do you answer your daughter when she comes to breakfast on Monday morning and announces that she is not going to school? That's simple! She goes anyway. Or how about your son, after a sweaty football practice, when he lets you know that he is ~~not going to take a shower before supper?~~

He takes one anyway, right? So then, why are we so hesitant when it comes to spiritual discipline and growth? Why do we feel it will "warp" or "pressure" our children if we insist on Sunday School and Church? We have no problem insisting on school attendance, homework, the dentist's office, or ball practice. Obviously, from this inconsistency, our children soon learn that we "make" them do what we think is important.

Therefore, Christian education and worship must not be so important as other life-style habits. In the long run, in terms of the eternal issues of our existence, is this the message we want to teach? What then, will we say when our children announce they do not "want" to go to Sunday School and Church? The answer is easy: **BE AS CONSISTENT** in this discipline as you are in the other experiences in life. This goes for us as parents also. We must lead by example. Tell them, "In our home we **ALL** go to Sunday School and Worship, that includes you. It may not be appreciated at the moment, but an attitude of parental interest, even joy-filled participation, will make an impact on the development of your value structures which will last a life-time.... and beyond.

One grasshopper seems insignificant as it leaps across the lawn. But when it joins forces with other grasshoppers, the resulting swarm can soon devour all the vegetation in it's path.

Grasshoppers demonstrate the power of community. What they cannot do by themselves, they can accomplish together. In the book of Proverbs, the wise man Agur observed, "The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks" (30:27).

We can learn a lesson from these little creatures. Believers can make far greater advances for Christ's cause when they act and pray together than they could ever make alone. When Christians are united in serving the Church, they can become a mighty force for God.

Although the New Testament urges us to possess a *personal* faith in Jesus Christ, it says nothing at all about a *private* faith. We need other believers, and other believers need us.

Let's enjoy the strength and fellowship available in the unified body of Christ. An effective church will reflect "the good sense of the grasshopper" by it's love and unity in the Holy Spirit.

JK

**TWO CHRISTIANS ARE  
BETTER THAN ONE -  
WHEN THEY'RE ONE**

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## Given over to the Barbarians (excerpt) ~ Fr. Gregory Jensen

It seems that we have simply lost sight of the beauty and power of Christian virtue; perhaps worse, it seems that we have given over leadership to moral barbarians.

I know that sounds like a harsh judgment, but what else can one call it? A barbarian isn't a bad person. A barbarian isn't likely to love his wife and children any less than you or I. He isn't necessarily an atheist or polytheist. In fact, many barbarians believed — and believe — in Christ, though for the same reason that they believed in the old gods: to secure power for their people. John Courtney Murray writes in his introduction to The Civilization of the Pluralist Society that “the barbarian need not appear in bearskins with a club in hand,” Instead he:

“...May wear a Brooks Brothers suit and carry a ball-point pen with which to write his advertising copy. In fact, even beneath the academic gown there may lurk a child of the wilderness, untutored in the high tradition of civility, who goes busily and happily about his work, a domesticated and law-abiding man, engaged in the construction of a philosophy to put an end to all philosophy, and thus put an end to the possibility of a vital consensus and to civility itself.”

In Murray's view, the perennial “work of the barbarian” is “to undermine rational standards of judgment, to corrupt the inherited intuitive wisdom by which the people have always lived.” He does this not “by spreading new beliefs” but, ...by creating a climate of doubt and bewilderment in which clarity about the larger aims of life is dimmed and the self-confidence of the people is destroyed, so that finally what you have is the impotent nihilism of the “generation of the third eye,” now presently appearing on our university campuses. (One is, I take it, on the brink of impotence and nihilism when one begins to be aware of one's own awareness of what one is doing, saying, thinking. This is the paralysis of all serious thought; it is likewise the destruction of all the spontaneities of love.)

In the modern world, then, “the barbarian is the man who makes open and explicit rejection of the traditional role of reason and logic in human affairs. He is the man who reduces all spiritual and moral questions to the test of practical results or to an analysis of language or to decision in terms of individual subjective feeling.” By this criteria, it seems that we live in an increasingly barbarian world — even in our own parishes.

....both personally and socially, we live “life always more or less close to the brink of barbarism.” The prospect of collapse into barbarism reflects the fragility of our world in both its physical and cultural dimensions. At the same time he is clear that threat we face today arises from more than the usual challenges to our health and well-being posed by “physical illness” or “the disorganizations of mental imbalance.” No, the real threat comes from “the decadence of moral corruption and the political chaos of formlessness or the moral chaos of tyranny.”

In a civilized society Murray says, we “live together according to reason, embodied in law and custom, and incorporated in a web of institutions that sufficiently reveal rational influences, even though they are not, and cannot be, wholly rational.” In a barbarous society, on the other hand, reason is no longer given its rightful place in human life and instead we “are huddled together under the rule of force and fear.”

Once force and fear come to dominate, as they do in the barbarous society, power becomes the key value. Now, it is certainly true that civilized societies are also concerned with power—with acquiring it, exercising it and even extending it. The difference is that for the barbarian, even the “Christian” barbarian, power is always an end in itself.

Murray's observation from almost 50 years ago is as true today as it was then. Looking around he saw the emergence of an increasingly barbarous society in which, ... economic interests assume the primacy over higher values; when material standards of mass and quantity crush out the values of quality and excellence; when technology assumes an autonomous existence and embarks on a course of unlimited self-exploitation without purposeful guidance from the higher disciplines of politics and morals (one thinks of Cape Canaveral); when the state reaches the paradoxical point of being everywhere intrusive and also impotent, possessed of immense power and powerless to achieve rational ends; when the ways of men come under the sway of the instinctual, the impulsive, the compulsive. When things like this happen, barbarism is abroad, whatever the surface impressions of urbanity. Men have ceased to live together according to reasonable laws.

You might well be asking at this point, what does any of this have to do with the life of the American Orthodox Church?

I would suggest that in American culture we are facing trends that will ultimately lead to a barbarous society. ~~This is not happening because this is a "Western Christian" society but because it is~~ increasingly neither Western nor Christian. However unintentionally, many Orthodox Christians have allied themselves with our society's willful rejection of its own Western Christian foundations. If we are not careful, we may find ourselves repeating the mistakes of "the eighteenth-century philosopher, who neither anticipated nor desired the brutalities of the Revolution with its Committee on the Public Safety" but who Murray argues, "prepared the ways for the Revolution by creating a vacuum which he was not able to fill."

*Rev. Gregory Jensen is psychologist of religion and a priest of the Diocese of Chicago and the Midwest. Orthodox Net.com*

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**Lest we forget, it is freedom that produces inequality.**

Even a partly free nation unleashes the natural and acquired abilities of peoples, and the more industrious and talented inevitably excel and rise and reap the greater rewards. "Inequality ... is rooted in the biological nature of man," said James Fenimore Cooper...

Where in history have the poor been treated better? Certainly not in the USA in the 1950s or during the Depression. Why, then, all this sudden talk about reducing the gap between rich and poor?

A good society will take care of its poor. But envy that others have more, and coveting the goods of the more successful, used to constitute two of the seven capital sins...

Yet the only way to make people who are unequal in talents equal in rewards is to use governmental power to dispossess some and favor others. Alexis de Tocqueville saw it coming:

"The sole condition which is required in order to succeed in centralizing the supreme power in a democratic community, is to love equality or to get men to believe you love it. Thus, the science of despotism, which was once so complex, is simplified, and reduced ... to a single principle."

Get people to believe you are seeking the utopian goal of equality of all and there is no limit to the power you can amass.

~ Patrick Buchanan

**In the Hollywood of the late 1940s, Communism was persona non grata. In the 21st century, biblical Christianity is persona non grata. No, this is not the America we grew up in. And it is becoming less so. According to a CNN poll last week, while belief in God and the divinity of Christ is still shared by two-thirds of Americans, that share-- is falling. ~ Patrick Buchanan**

## ***Is Putin One of Us?*** (Strange times, indeed...)

By Patrick J. Buchanan, Dec. 17, 2013

**With America clearly in mind, (Vladimir) Putin recently declared, "In many countries today, moral and ethical norms are being reconsidered."**

**"They're now requiring not only the proper acknowledgment of freedom of conscience, political views and private life, but also the mandatory acknowledgment of the equality of good and evil."**

**Translation: While privacy and freedom of thought, religion and speech are cherished rights, to equate traditional marriage and same-sex marriage is to equate good with evil.**

**No moral confusion here, this is moral clarity, agree or disagree.**

Nor is he without an argument when we reflect on America's embrace of abortion on demand, homosexual marriage, pornography, promiscuity, and the whole panoply of Hollywood values.

Our grandparents would not recognize the America in which we live.

Moreover, Putin asserts, the new immorality has been imposed undemocratically.

The "destruction of traditional values" in these countries, he said, comes "from the top" and is "inherently undemocratic because it is based on abstract ideas and runs counter to the will of the majority of people."

*Does he not have a point?*

Unelected justices declared abortion and homosexual acts to be constitutionally protected rights. Judges have been the driving force behind the imposition of same-sex marriage. Attorney General Eric Holder refused to enforce the Defense of Marriage Act.

America was de-Christianized in the second half of the 20th century by court orders, over the vehement objections of a huge majority of a country that was overwhelmingly Christian.

And same-sex marriage is indeed an "abstract" idea un-rooted in the history or tradition of the West. Where did it come from?

Peoples all over the world, claims Putin, are supporting Russia's "defense of traditional values" against a "so-called tolerance" that is "genderless and infertile."

While his stance as a defender of traditional values has drawn the mockery of Western media and cultural elites, Putin is not wrong in saying that he can speak for much of mankind.

Same-sex marriage is supported by America's young, but most states still resist it, with black pastors visible in the vanguard of the counterrevolution.

In France, a million people took to the streets of Paris to denounce the Socialists' imposition of homosexual marriage. Only 15 nations out of more than 190 have recognized it.

In India, the world's largest democracy, the Supreme Court has struck down a lower court ruling that made same-sex marriage a right. And the parliament in this socially conservative nation of more than a billion people is unlikely soon to reverse the high court.

In the four dozen nations that are predominantly Muslim, which make up a fourth of the U.N. General Assembly and a fifth of mankind, same-sex marriage is not even on the table. And Pope Francis has reaffirmed Catholic doctrine on the issue for over a billion Catholics.

While much of American and Western media dismiss him as an authoritarian and reactionary, a throwback, Putin may be seeing the future with more clarity than Americans still caught up in a Cold War paradigm.

As the decisive struggle in the second half of the 20th century was vertical, East vs. West, the 21st century struggle may be horizontal, with conservatives and traditionalists in every country arrayed against the militant secularism of a multicultural and transnational elite.

And though America's elite may be found at the epicenter of anti-conservatism and anti-traditionalism, the American people have never been more alienated or more divided culturally, socially and morally.

We are two countries now.

Putin says his mother had him secretly baptized as a baby and professes to be a Christian. And what he is talking about here is ambitious, even audacious.

He is seeking to redefine the "Us vs. Them" world conflict of the future as one in which conservatives, traditionalists and nationalists of all continents and countries stand up against the cultural and ideological imperialism of what he sees as a decadent west.

"We do not infringe on anyone's interests," said Putin, "or try to teach anyone how to live." The adversary he has identified is not the America we grew up in, but the America we live in, which Putin sees as pagan and wildly progressive.

Without naming any country, Putin attacked "attempts to enforce more progressive development models" on other nations, which have led to "decline, barbarity and big blood..."

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**~ From Newly Canonized Elder St. Porphyrios (+1991):**

**~ There is an electric generator, and in the room there is a lamp. If, however, we do not flip the switch, we will remain in darkness. Similarly, there is Christ and there is our soul. If, however, we do not flip the switch of prayer, our soul will not see the light of Christ and will remain in the darkness of the devil.**

**~ Be especially careful of the demon of listlessness (*in Greek, 'Akydia*). Don't underestimate it. When it subjugates the soul, it drugs and paralyzes it. It is a large demon and enters man together with a great number of other demons.**

**~ You find yourself in a darkened room and you try to move your hands so as to brush away the darkness, which - of course - doesn't move. If you open a window and light enters, the darkness disappears. The same happens with study. The Holy Scripture, the lives of the Saints and the writings of the Fathers are the light that chases away the darkness of the soul.**