

# THE PROPHET

Monthly Newsletter of

## St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church

Orthodox Church in America (OCA)

Archdiocese of Pittsburgh

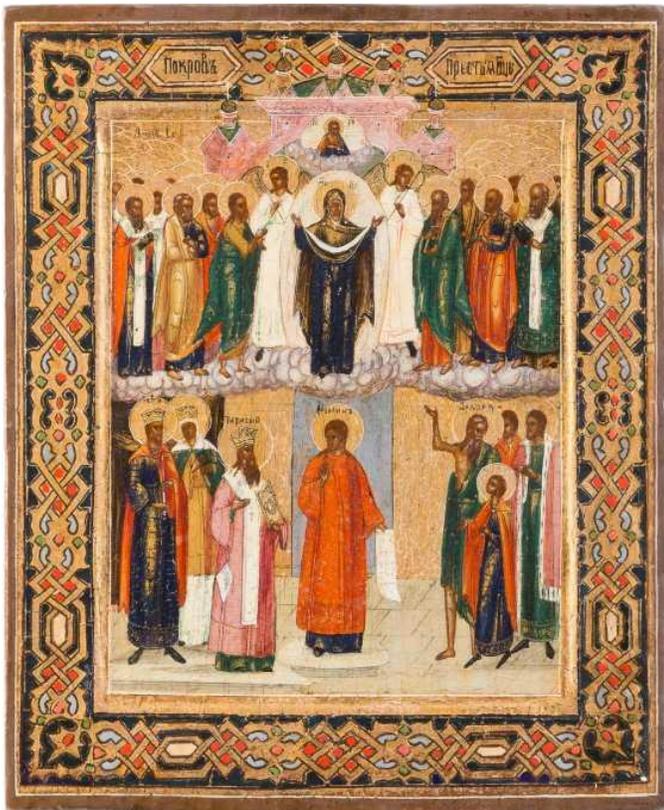
His Eminence, Most Rev. Melchisedek

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## October 2021



*Protection of the Mother of God (Oct. 1)*

Rector, **Fr. John Joseph Kotalik**

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### RECTOR'S REPORT:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Slava Isusu Christu!

October may be the 'slowest' month of the Church Year - though we should not discount that it begins with the Great Feast of the Protection of the Theotokos - but our church life never ceases, even in such months when less is going on liturgically.

Part of that church life is growing deeper in the Orthodox Faith, and learning to think and breath with the Church - to be literally inspired by the Holy Spirit, who abides in Christ's Body: the Church - and that means always struggling to come to a deeper understanding of what Christ teaches us through His Church, and how we are live out the Christian life in the world.

To help us along this path, our Met. Theodosius Memorial Lecture this month will be presented by Fr. Matthew Markewich, who will be coming to speak to us about why the Church believes what she believes in regards to some of the most pressing issues facing society today: sexual orientation and gender identity. We are all being taught something by the world, and - as Christians - we need to better equip ourselves with understanding not only where the world is coming from, but how the Church understands these issues. The articles in this month's Prophet Newsletter are aimed at accompanying Fr. Markewich's talk. I highly encourage us all - both mature adults and younger children - to not only attend this lecture, but to read these articles.

By the protection and intercession of the Mother of God, may we all be strengthened to respond to the moral and ethical issues of our times!

*-Fr. John Joseph Kotalik IV, Rector*

## MEMORY ETERNAL:

### (Въчна память!)

#### We commemorate the anniversaries of:

John Anischenko (10/1/1918)  
 Katherine Pirchina (10/1/1957)  
 Michael Gabowsky (10/1/2000)  
 Helen Sevak (10/2/1957)  
 Paul Telep (10/4/1990)  
 Anna Zsidisian (10/4/1996)  
 Andrew Pashkevich (10/5/1918)  
 Michael Matyuf (KIA 10/5/1944)  
 Sophia Chizhmody (10/6/1937)  
 Frank Roman (10/6/1957)  
 John Minenko (10/7/1937)  
 Stephan Petronka (10/7/1984)  
 Arthur Talpa (10/7/2018)  
 Joseph Witko (10/8/1942)  
 Mary Maceiko (10/9/1973)  
 Mary Godish (10/9/1975)  
 Joseph Chobany (10/10/2002)  
 Yuri Oros (10/11/1935)  
 Anna Zaken (10/11/1990)  
 John Rusinko (10/11/2019)  
 Anna Matlaga (10/12/1973)  
 John Schimansky (10/13/1988)  
 Mary Wilson (10/13/1994)  
 Michael Drochak (10/14/1921)  
 Mary Petronka (10/14/1957)  
 Mary Bilnok (10/15/1941)  
 John Chicarella (10/15/1947)  
 Michael Madosky (10/15/1966)  
 Roman Kopyy (10/17/1958)  
 Dolores Marie Soroka (10/17/1999)  
 Margaret Udodow (10/18/1991)  
 Anna Drochak (10/19/1924)  
 Stella Maceiko (10/19/1966)  
**His Beatitude, Met. Theodosius (Lazor)**  
 (10/19/2020)  
 Joseph Lazor (10/20/1975)  
 Charles Lenart (10/20/2008)  
 Eva Melnyk (10/20/2014)  
 Mary Balog (10/21/1933)  
 Mary Sarek (10/21/1933)  
 Alexei Roman (10/21/1945)  
 Mary Kurtiniec (10/21/1960)  
 Michael Furman (10/21/2000)  
 Elsie Zubenko (10/21/2004)  
 Julia Holovach (10/22/2007)  
 Nicholas Dano (10/22/2011)  
 Michael Melnyk (10/23/1949)  
 Evelyn Kozares (10/23/1959)  
 Anna Chicarella (10/23/1977)  
 Paul Chupinsky (10/24/1921)

Helen Kirr (10/25/1922)  
 Mary Uchal (10/25/1981)  
 John Danyo (10/26/1923)  
 John Wengrim (10/26/1949)  
 Wasyl Dayak (10/26/1962)  
 Hermine Feyche (10/26/1996)  
 Stephen Zubenko (10/26/1999)  
 John Goga (10/27/1918)  
 Gary Dougall (10/27/1965)  
 Andrew Chopak (10/28/1990)  
 Thomas Chopak (10/28/2009)  
 John Krasnovksy (10/29/1933)  
 Michael Poznyakov (10/29/1947)  
 John Senko (10/30/1920)  
 Anna Nestor (10/30/1940)  
 Mary Kotyk (10/30/1942)  
 John Gillespie (10/30/2000)  
 Peter Kulashenko (10/30/1919)  
 Pozalia Stofko (10/31/1931)

## MANY YEARS:

### (Многая и благая лѣта!)

#### Namedays:

Richard Romanus Pierce (10/1)  
 Dr. Dennis Davis (10/3)  
 Dennis Sweda (10/3)  
 Luke Phillis (10/18)  
 Luke Ruffing (10/18)  
 Abigail Joelle Strenen (10/19)  
 Alfred Davis (10/26)

#### Birthdays:

Steven Schenken (10/2)  
 Daniel Thacker (10/2)  
 Apr. Joseph Oleynik (10/4)  
 Julianna Cario (10/4)  
 Michael Pazuchanics (10/6)  
 Daniel Cario (10/6)  
 John Petronka (10/11)  
 Nora Lee Roberto (10/13)  
 Isabella Petronka (10/15)  
 Lindsey Basso (10/16)  
 Daniel Yarosh (10/16)  
 Thomas Cario (10/16)  
 John Migyanko (10/17)  
 Nicholas Basso (10/20)  
 Kyra Schenken (10/23)  
 Katie Roberto (10/24)  
 Jane Shamitko (10/29)  
 Samuel Simko (10/29)

**Wedding Anniversaries:**

Steve & Julie Simko (10/4)  
 Robert & Kyra Schenken (10/8)  
 Cirio & Kathleen Signorini (10/13)  
 Gregory & Jane Shamitko (10/14)  
 Randy & Katie Roberto (10/14)  
 Alexander & Marissa Schenken (10/19)  
 John & Lisanne Migyanko (10/20)  
 Chris & Wendy Petronka (10/21)

*If you or a loved one are missing, please let  
 Fr. John know so that we can correct our records!*

**Sexuality and Gender:**  
**Response to Open Letter**

*by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick  
 September 25, 2018*

On September 24, 2018, [a website which will not be publicized here] published an open letter to the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, calling upon them to make a radical revision of the sexual ethical teachings of the Orthodox Church. The following is a point-for-point response, arranged roughly according to topic, with relevant quotes from the [website's] piece.

**Abortion**

« 1). Cease issuing condemnations of abortion, participating in the March for Life, and advocating for the elimination of legal, accessible abortion.

Instead, create a committee of clergy, laypersons, and especially women to explore options for a pan-Orthodox initiative to offer financial, material, emotional, spiritual, and social support to pregnant women in need and to their children after birth.»

Abortion is the murder of the most innocent and vulnerable among us. Orthodox Christians must unequivocally condemn such an act in the strongest possible terms. It is among the most heinous acts of mankind in our day. To cease condemnation of murder is to become complicit in murder. We encourage our hierarchs to continue to lead us in public opposition to legalized abortion and thank them for their heroic and loving witness in this regard.

That said, there is absolutely nothing inconsistent with that condemnation and also offering

“financial, material, emotional, spiritual, and social support to pregnant women in need and to their children after birth.” Indeed, numerous Orthodox parishes all over America do this by supporting local crisis pregnancy centers and/or the Orthodox ministry Zoe for Life.

There is no contradiction between opposing the killing of the unborn and also providing as much support as possible for those who may find themselves drawn to that horrifying “solution” to whatever pressures or crises they may face. They are often driven in that direction by situations most of us hope we never find ourselves in. So we do not condemn, but rather give love and authentic support, while seeking to rescue that most precious gift of life from God.

**Same-Sex Attraction**

« 2). Cease issuing condemnations of same-sex orientation.

These condemnations inflict lasting emotional and spiritual harm on Orthodox children, teens, and adults who regard their orientation as a good and natural part of their personal identity. They seek from their Church, not a cover for sexual permissiveness, but a profound and affirmative theological articulation of how their orientation reflects the divine image and participates in the acquisition of the divine likeness through the collaboration of human ascesis with uncreated grace.»

The teaching of the Orthodox Church is not about condemning an “orientation,” however one defines that (feelings, very deep feelings, psychological tendencies, attraction, etc.). So this is disingenuous on its face. The sin is not an “orientation” toward homosexuality but rather in acting upon it. The exact same thing is true for any sexual sins, whether homosexual, heterosexual, adulterous, or whatever else.

It is also not ascetical to give in to sin, so listening to the thoughts and feelings that are oriented toward sin is not an ascetical act.

It is true that individual Orthodox Christians or even clergy may treat someone badly because they express having same-sex attraction (SSA), but it is not the teaching of the Church to condemn an “orientation.” It is also wrong to treat people badly. And

even then, condemnation is not the Church's approach when it comes to sin, but rather an invitation to be healed of it. What is worthy of condemnation is teaching against the path of healing. The anathema is reserved for those who lead others astray, not for those so led.

Even if someone cannot remember a time feeling anything other than SSA, it is not the way God made anyone. Rather, such feelings are a result of the Fall as are every other inclination toward sin. An inclination toward sin is not sin, but it is also not what we were created to be.

«Instead, create a committee of clergy, theologians, psychologists, therapists, laypersons, and especially Orthodox individuals who identify as same-sex oriented to study questions of sexual orientation in all their complexity.»

Would such a committee include those who identify themselves as experiencing SSA and yet remain chaste according to the teaching of Christ? Would that study include scientific studies which don't support the asked-for revision of the Church's sexual ethics? Would that study include the Biblical and patristic teaching on sexuality?

I'm guessing probably not.

«The committee should be open to examining possibilities for blessing Orthodox same-sex couples who wish to make a monogamous, lifelong commitment to each other.»

The committee definitely should not. Marriage is between one man and one woman, not any other combination. To bless such a union would be to bless a plan to sin. The Church does not bless plans to sin. The Church calls for us to repent of our sins. It does not matter how many times we sin. We repent as many times. We can't say, in effect, "It is okay to sin in this way so long as you commit to sin with only this one other person."

«The blanket excommunication of Orthodox Christians who present as same-sex oriented must cease.»

Citation, please. Where is there a "blanket excommunication of Orthodox Christians who present as same-sex oriented"? Again, the problem here is not how one "presents" or is "oriented" but rather

what one does with one's body. Those who sin in certain ways sexually are excommunicated of their own accord. But they are also invited to repentance and restoration. There is always a path for wholeness.

This is not to say that someone who experiences SSA can be "cured" of that attraction. There are of course some who say that that has happened for them (and if we are to believe those who say that it cannot happen for them, we also have to believe those who say it can — both are their lived experience), but I can't claim to know whether it can happen for everyone. But we do know that we do not have to obey our attractions. We are not our thoughts and feelings.

« 3). Remove from the websites of the Assembly, its member jurisdictions, and each jurisdiction's individual dioceses all past condemnations of same-sex orientation.»

In other words, simply capitulate to this radical revision of the Church's sexual teachings. But, again, there are no "condemnations of same-sex orientation." Rather, there is the teaching that homosexual acts are sin. All sexual acts outside of God's design for marriage are sin.

And what is the Church's approach to sin? It is to "open the doors of repentance," which is a positive, vivifying, healing, loving way of return to the Father, to become like our Lord Jesus Christ and stand with Him as sons of the Most High.

### Transgenderism

« 4). Instruct the clergy to cease issuing condemnations of transgender identities.

Arguably these condemnations inflict even greater emotional and spiritual harm on those targeted than condemnations of same-sex orientation. It has been demonstrated statistically that transgender persons comprise one of society's most vulnerable demographics.

We as Church have not even begun to examine — let alone understand — the complex interplay of emotional, spiritual, psychological, social, and even biological factors that lead a person to identify as transgender and then to commence his or her transition to the gender opposite the one assigned at birth.

Indeed some persons experience themselves as having both genders or neither gender.»

One's sex is not "assigned at birth." Rather, it is written into the very fabric of one's DNA, which is a creation of God and a normal function of human life.

What is condemnable is the teaching that people can change their sex just by thinking it so. Those who think this way ought to be loved and shepherded to accepting the reality of who they are, not into denying the plain evidence that stares at them nakedly in the mirror. To reject the reality of one's body is essentially a gnostic sensibility. Human beings are not putty that may be remade into whatever we feel — even if we feel it very deeply.

Human beings are both body and soul. Neither is plastic in the sense that their very nature can be rewritten. Both body and soul need to be reoriented toward God because of the Fall, and so we cannot merely trust in our thoughts and feelings to guide us correctly. Our thoughts and feelings are broken. That does not make us worthless, but it does mean that we need to be healed, and that we are indeed worthy of being healed because we are created according to the image of God.

Because our thoughts and feelings are so untrustworthy (Jer. 17:9), we trust in Christ, in His apostles and prophets, in the Holy Fathers, in the successors to the apostles and our own father-confessors. We do not have to make this spiritual life up for ourselves, and we actually should not — because Christianity is a revealed faith, not one that has to be discovered through committees.

«Others are born intersex, which means that their biological bodies possess some configuration of both male and female organs, whether externally, internally, or both.»

This is extremely rare and actually has almost no bearing on the current movement toward transgenerism. In such difficult cases, one must do the best one can, but these cases do not set the rule for anyone else.

«The blanket excommunication of Orthodox Christians who present as transgender or intersex must cease.»

Again: Citation, please.

## **Ministry to Orthodox Christians Related to the Above**

« 5). Authorize, endorse, and sponsor — as an official, permanent ministry of the Assembly — an international support organization for Orthodox Christians who identify anywhere along the LGBTQI spectrum.»

This is actually not a bad idea, but it ought to be an organization about the healing of all who find that their internal inclinations are toward sexual sin, not toward one that encourages obeying those inclinations. There is no shame in this, by the way. We are all inclined toward sin.

### **Final Thoughts**

To be quite frank, I don't think that the website in question is generally worth responding to or even reading, not just because their articles so often contradict the teachings of Christ and His Church but because they make a pretense at academic integrity which they rarely have. But this seemed like an opportune moment to reiterate a few of these things.

I know that reiterating the Church's teachings on these things will be received by some as hateful, insensitive, etc. But it is not. It is love to speak reality and to embrace someone however he presents himself.

And let me state unequivocally that I absolutely reject mistreating anyone on account of their personal identification with any of the issues mentioned above — no one should be condemned, bullied, harmed, ridiculed, rejected, etc. Every person who comes to the Church must be treated with love, care, understanding, an orientation toward listening, support and blessing. All this is toward the goal given by Christ Himself, in the words of the apostle:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

This is the true ascetical struggle — not to believe our thoughts and feelings on their face, but to present ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord and

to be healed of our addictions and sinful inclinations, aware that while they may never fully disappear in this life, there is nevertheless the possibility to be conformed to Christ, to be transformed in the renewing of our minds and to be made holy by His love.

## Christian Sexual Ethics: What Went Wrong?

*Dr. David Bradshaw; Sept. 16 & 22, 2021*

### Part I

On September 12, 1966, William F. Buckley hosted Hugh Hefner on his weekly talk program, *Firing Line*. Their subject was the “Playboy philosophy” that Hefner advocated through his magazine and associated enterprises such as the Playboy Clubs. Hefner was an articulate and thoughtful spokesman for his views. He described his goal as to replace the “old legalism” of “thou shalt not” with a more flexible and realistic approach to sex that truly promotes human happiness. Far from seeking to undermine marriage, he said, the Playboy philosophy by emphasizing sexual enjoyment would lead to a “more truly monogamous society” characterized by “happy monogamy” rather than the “sequential polygamy” of repeated divorce and remarriage. He further prophesied that more emphasis on “the heterosexual and the healthy” would lead to a decline in homosexuality, perversions, and frigidity, all of which are due to the frustrations introduced by the old sexual ethic. Perhaps most importantly, it would lead to a reduction in sex crimes, which are primarily a result of “repressive attitudes” and “sex suppression.”

Five decades later, one can only marvel at how wrong he was. Spurred by *Playboy* and its cultural allies, our society has indeed made a priority of sexual enjoyment of all kinds. But the results have not been what Hefner envisioned. Far from shrinking, homosexuality has ramified into the immensely powerful LGBT movement which continues to transform American society. Sex crimes are still very much with us, not only in the grislier forms of rape and murder but in the epidemic of child sexual abuse and other predatory misuses of power

exposed by the #MeToo movement. We are now so far from being a monogamous society that many do not bother to get married at all, drifting instead from one hook-up or cohabitation to another, and many others who would like to get married can find no suitable partner. Most surprisingly from the standpoint of the heady optimism of the 1960’s, sex itself (at least of the heterosexual variety) seems to be in retreat. As a writer for the *Atlantic* reported a few years ago, “despite the easing of taboos and the rise of hookup apps, Americans are in the midst of a sex recession,” as many find pursuing and engaging the opposite sex simply too much trouble in light of the easy availability of on-line alternatives.

Obviously not all of these ills can be laid at the door of any one person or agency. The sexual transformations of the last fifty years have been complex and are the result of many factors. I cite Hefner merely because he offers an especially striking example of an assumption that remains as pervasive today as it was in the 1960’s. This is that human sexuality is something naturally good and pleasant, and would remain so were it not for the various forms of repression imposed upon it by Christianity; therefore, in order to return it to its naturally healthy state we need only remove this Christian repression.

This view was hardly new in the 1960’s. Faramerz Dabhoiwala has traced its first great efflorescence (in England, at least) in his *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution*. A number of factors converged in England in the latter seventeenth century to undermine traditional sexual morality. They began with the Restoration of Charles II and his notoriously libertine court, as well as other aspects of the reaction against Puritanism, and culminated with the Act of Toleration of 1689, which effectively eliminated ecclesiastical courts as enforcers of public morality. Deists and free-thinkers contributed a more radical strand, asserting that “organized religion did not teach virtue but concealed it” and “a great part of morality (if not all) was of merely human invention.” By the mid-eighteenth century prostitution was both legal and commonplace, as was the seduction of serving girls and other vulnerables, whether married or not, by those in positions of power. It is true that the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a powerful reaction driven by evangelical revival movements. Yet the ideas set loose by the deists and free-thinkers

remained current, often blending with popular ideals of liberty and hatred of “priestcraft.” Percy Bysshe Shelley, for example, went Hugh Hefner one better by rejecting marriage itself, writing in a note to his highly popular poem, *Queen Mab* (1813): “Love withers under constraint: its very essence is liberty ... That which will result from the abolition of marriage, will be natural and right, because choice and change will be exempted from restraint.”

One advantage we have today compared to earlier generations is that we have seen the consequences of the enactment of such ideas on a large scale. Marriage has been, if not abolished, at least effectively put out of reach for vast swathes of the lower classes and working poor, who today marry and remain married at vanishingly low rates. Charles Murray has documented the consequences in his *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*. They are all too familiar: crime, poverty, drug addiction, educational failure, welfare dependency, and others that are just as important though less quantifiable, such as loneliness, despair, and a sense of alienation from the larger society. Nor are these consequences restricted to the poor; it is well known how devastating divorce can be even to the children of affluent parents. One cause of the “sex recession” mentioned earlier is the sense of wariness that the children of divorce have toward marital commitment. As Murray observes, marital stability today is increasingly a luxury good hoarded and handed down among the families of the elites, for whom it enables other goods like educational and career attainment. It is all too easy to fall out of this charmed circle, and all too hard to enter it.

In view of the experience of the past fifty years, I would propose a conclusion that is controversial but that I nonetheless believe is well supported by the evidence. It is that—precisely contrary to the view held by Hefner and still held by many others—in modern western societies, something like *Christian sexual morality is required if there is to be long-lasting love, stable families, and a secure environment for raising children.*

Let me briefly explain the main elements of this statement. In speaking of Christian sexual morality, I have in mind primarily three main points. The first is that man and woman are equal but different, and furthermore are made for one another in the way presented so powerfully in the opening chapters of

Genesis. The second is that, as a consequence, marriage can exist only between a man and a woman, and, once formed, should in normal circumstances last until death; furthermore, sex, the joining of male and female into one flesh, should occur only in marriage. The third is that, out of respect for the integrity of marriage as well as that of the human body itself, lasciviousness of the kind promoted by Hefner and his like must be rejected; one should seek to cultivate purity and chastity as an interior orientation regardless of one’s marital state or walk of life.

In restricting my statement to modern western societies, I certainly do not mean to suggest that this ethic is not timeless and eternal. However, its necessity for the health of love, families, and children is a more contingent matter, for arguably these have done well enough in many non-Christian societies. What is distinctive about the modern West is that we continue to hold to ideals that emerged from, and find their natural home within, Christian civilization. These include human equality, respect for the individual conscience, the sanctity of human life, the protection and nurturing of children, and (at least for many) the significance and value of romantic love. Within such a context, marriage and the family take on added weight that they do not normally bear in other societies. We expect them to be the arena in which equality, mutual respect, the nurturing of children, and romantic love can most fully flourish and through which they are passed on to succeeding generations. Only the Christian sexual ethic can, at a broad cultural level, give them the strength to meet such high demands.

Much more would need to be said to fully explain and defend my statement. For the moment, however, I merely note that it is an assumption I will make going forward. I believe that many Christians, and perhaps even some secular thinkers, will find it plausible.

The main point I wish to make is that, if my statement is even roughly true, it raises a pointed question: *what went wrong?* Why, if the Christian sexual ethic is indeed so wholesome and essential, does it provoke such bitter opposition? For plainly the opposition to it today is not only of the measured sort exhibited by Hefner in his interview. It is hatred. The hatred can be expressed in more vulgar ways (“keep your rosaries off my ovaries”) or with more polish (as in *The Handmaid’s Tale*). But it is unquestionably

hatred that is bitter, deep, and potent. Nor is it really new. Granted that it has grown more outspoken in recent decades, Dabhoiwala shows that a sense of indignation against Christian sexual morality has been a driving force within western society since at least the seventeenth century.

There are several ways one could approach the question, *what went wrong?* One is an idea voiced occasionally on the right – namely, that the hatred is a form of blame-shifting arising from sexual sin, or the desire for such sin, and is thus a suppressed form of guilt. Although this may well be true in many cases, as a global explanation it is speculative, at best. I do not know how it could be either proven or disproven.

A more philosophical explanation would be to locate the fault within the internal dynamic of Christian civilization itself. On this view, conflict arose inevitably as Christianity gave rise to ideals of freedom, autonomy, and self-realization that are in conflict with Christian sexual morality. Christianity thus contains the seeds of its own destruction, and the destructive process, in light of the resistance to it, must necessarily include an element of violent reaction. What we are witnessing now is the emergence of a hatchling (secular ethics) as it breaks out of its shell (Christian teaching). This is an intriguing idea, and I do not deny that it contains an element of truth. However, the fundamental premise that Christianity is self-contradictory is one that I reject, as any Christian must. Although Christianity as it is realized at any time and place may contain many faults, “the faith once delivered to the saints” is from God, and this faith surely includes at least the core elements of Christian moral teaching.

The approach I will take here bears some similarity to this, in that it seeks to identify internal tensions in Christian teaching that have led to our current predicament. I do not regard these as intrinsic contradictions, however, but as partial and temporary limitations that can be overcome. It should not surprise us that there are such limitations. The doctrine of the Trinity was part of the Christian faith from the beginning, but centuries had to pass before it began to find an adequate articulation at Nicaea. The doctrine of the Incarnation took even longer, in a period stretching from at least the fourth through the seventh centuries. Much the same can be said of the Christian view of sacred art, which had to wait

until the Seventh Ecumenical Council, in 787, for an adequate articulation. Ideas that are both profound and revolutionary naturally take a long time to be assimilated, and the full effort to do so may not be undertaken until it is forced by external circumstances. I believe that we are largely in that situation with regard to Christian sexual ethics. We have been working with an idea (or set of ideas) that is fundamentally true, but has been poorly articulated and not properly integrated with the rest of Christian belief. It is time for this to change.

## Part II

We must begin by recognizing that Christianity was born into a world whose assumptions about sex and marriage were radically foreign to our own. Aristotle devotes a chapter of the *Politics* to discussing the ideal age of marriage. Questions of mutual compatibility or love do not enter the discussion. The issue as he frames it is that of how to maximize the couple’s childbearing potential. Since a man (as he believes) remains fertile about twenty years longer than a woman, the man should be roughly that much older at marriage. It is important, too, that both be physically healthy and mature. He concludes that ideally the woman should be eighteen and the man thirty-seven.

It is not hard to see what would become of the possibility of equal companionship given such a beginning. Even setting aside differences of education and social status – which were immense – it is unlikely that a man and woman entering marriage at those ages could view one another as equals. We may add that the man would have been (and was expected to be) sexually experienced with slave girls and prostitutes, whereas the woman would have been a virgin. The man’s sexual freedom would have continued after marriage, too, whereas the woman would have remained sequestered if the family could afford it, and in any case would have been expected to remain strictly faithful. This is not to say that there would have been no love in such a marriage. Most commonly there was, but the love was *philia*, the affection that comes of living and laboring together. As Plato’s dialogues attest, passionate desire or *eros* most commonly existed between an older man and a male youth. A man could have *eros* for a woman, too – as Paris notoriously did for Helen of Troy – but it was likely to come to no good.

Roman women had more freedom than those of the Greeks, but in other respects Roman practices were equally far removed from our own. The legal age of marriage for a Roman woman was twelve. As Rodney Stark has observed, there is evidence that some girls were married even younger, although the marriage did not become legitimate until she came of age. Regardless of the bride's age, the marriage was consummated without regard to whether she had passed through puberty. Roman marriage practices thus were predicated upon what we would consider to be child rape.

Repugnant though such practices are, we must see them in light of the demographic realities of the age. Life expectancy was short—less than thirty at birth—and furthermore, due to the widespread exposure of female infants, there was a dearth of marriageable women. Stark cites a study estimating 1.3 males per female in Rome and 1.4 in the rest of the empire. There was thus immense pressure to produce children. Yet the long-term effect of Roman marriage practices was precisely the opposite of that intended, for men as well as women found marriage under such circumstances unappealing. As the classicist Beryl Rawson observed, “one theme that recurs in Latin literature is that wives are difficult and therefore men do not care much for marriage.” It could hardly be otherwise when girls were married as children and expected to accept without complaint their husbands' extra-marital indulgences. Despite much official encouragement of marriage and children, and legal prohibition of adultery, birth rates remained low and adultery and divorce commonplace.

It was into this world that Christianity was born. Christians were sharply critical of much that they found in society around them, including abortion, infanticide, adultery, divorce, homosexuality, and prostitution, as well the general atmosphere of licentiousness and debauchery that characterized much of ancient life. They also “voted with their feet” in less vocal ways that over time had an immense effect. As Stark has shown, Christian girls tended to marry at an older age than their pagan counterparts, due no doubt to the expectation that the marriage would last a lifetime and must therefore be entered into freely. Christian men moved in the opposite direction, marrying younger than their pagan counterparts because they did not have the same freedom in

the meanwhile of indulging in prostitutes. By the Byzantine era these trends produced an average age at marriage of around fifteen for women and twenty for men. This convergence in ages worked with more explicit aspects of Christian teaching, such as the ban on adultery for both sexes, to produce what were no doubt in practice more equal and companionate marriages.

What Christians did *not* do was to offer a full-scale program for the reform of marriage. Christianity was not a social reform movement. Abortion and the other acts mentioned were ready targets because they were sinful acts that could be freely renounced by individuals. The very institution of marriage as it then existed, despite its many noxious features, was not itself a sin but simply part of the existing furniture of the world.

By the same token, although the early Christians had much to say about right and wrong sexual practices, they did not challenge prevailing assumptions about the very purpose of sex. Pagans tended to approach this subject through a few simple categories: the purpose of sex in marriage was to bear children and (for the husband, at least) sexual release; that of sex outside of marriage was pleasure. As Demosthenes notoriously remarked, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.” Plato, it is true, had explored the potency of eros as a means of spiritual growth and interpersonal communion, but he had seen these as occurring precisely through the *renunciation* of sex, and in any case he focused almost exclusively on the attraction of an adult man to a youth. Only in the Renaissance did Christian authors begin, with considerable hesitation, to explore how the Platonic teaching about eros could apply to the relation of a man and a woman.

We might be inclined to think that the early Christians should have sought to articulate a higher view of sex by drawing on biblical sources. After all, Christ based his teaching about divorce on the beautiful and evocative statement of Adam when God presented him with Eve: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh ... Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:23-24). The reference to becoming one flesh places sexual union simultaneously in two lights: as a sign or

token of the permanent union of marriage, and as a reunion of man with woman, who was originally taken from his side. This statement is undoubtedly important for the ontological and moral depth it gives to what might otherwise be mistaken for a merely biological act. However, that very depth means that the value thus assigned to the sexual act is decidedly two-sided. According to St. Paul, sex can also make one of one flesh with a harlot (I Cor. 6:16). The Genesis story thus does not give *intrinsic* value to sex. Sexuality is like so much else, a power we have that can be used for good or evil.

Lest we overlook the obvious, let me add that Christ cites the Genesis passage not to exalt sex, but to exalt marriage. Elsewhere he warns against the corrupting power of sexual desire: “whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). St. Paul, too, although he offers a profound interpretation of marriage in Ephesians 5, says little about its physical dimension. Husband and wife are not to deny one another without mutual consent, a commandment that did much to encourage greater equality in marriage (I Cor. 7:3-5). Yet this passage goes on to recommend celibacy for those who are capable of it and to present marriage primarily as a remedy for concupiscence—as St. Paul remarks drily, “it is better to marry than to burn” (I Cor. 7:9). It was partly in deference to this passage that the early Christians, too, showed little interest in exploring the positive potentialities of sex or marriage.

But this was far from the whole story. Rather than challenge ancient views of marriage directly, the ancient Church executed what may with hindsight be seen as a kind of end-run around the entire marital-procreative complex of antiquity. I would emphasize that to execute such an end-run was not primarily its purpose. The purpose was to seek Christ, to glorify him, and to live in obedience to his commandments. Nonetheless, the Church in pursuing its own ends revolutionized human society, including how marriage was understood and experienced, as well as how sex came to be viewed in its human and ethical dimension.

Much could be said on this subject, beginning with how the Christian understanding of God as one who loves mankind and underwent suffering for our sake was itself revolutionary. However, here I will concentrate on two factors that I believe are

most germane to our question about how Christian sexual ethics went wrong. These factors were not themselves the cause of the problem; it was rather the failure to integrate and appropriate them fully that led, over time, to the failures that concern us. Those two factors are monasticism and the Christian devotion to the Virgin Mary.

*More Parts are Forthcoming!*

### **Clinging to God and Grammar**

*by Carl R. Trueman, Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Grove City College  
September 23, 2021*

In times past, progressive politicians described those they despised as clinging to “God and guns.” I suspect that we are not too far from a time when they will insult those they deplore for clinging to God and grammar. That might sound an odd claim, but the days are coming rapidly to an end when it was morally acceptable to think that language, among its many functions, had a positive relation to reality. Today, dictionaries and grammars look set to become relics of a bygone age of evil oppression.

Take, for example, the trend of specifying preferred pronouns on everything from Twitter to business cards—a fascinating sign of our times. Even some Christians are participating. Whether people do it out of genuine confusion, positive commitment to queer theory, or in pre-emptive anticipation of it becoming the equivalent of Havel’s greengrocer shop sign in our brave new world, it is an action that most would have regarded as absurd even five years ago. Most (probably) still regard it as absurd today. But that old consensus is crumbling, just like every other once-unquestionable Western cultural belief. Queerness is moving rapidly from arcane, implausible theory to practical, everyday reality.

While many on the right default to accusations of cultural Marxism when confronted with such iconoclasm, I would argue that this latest trend is reminiscent of nothing so much as Friedrich Nietzsche’s haunting statement in *Twilight of the Idols*: “I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar.” This sounds odd but in the context of his argument, it makes sense. What

Nietzsche is saying here is that language tricks us into thinking that it expresses reality but it does not do so; rather, it constructs concepts that it presents as real and seductively traps us into thinking of the world in particular ways.

If ever there was a philosophical position that placed the individual and his (or her or zir) will at the center of the universe, then this is it. Such radical nominalism may be nonsense but, like sex, it sells, appealing as it does to our intuitive sense of freedom and desire for autonomy. And rather like current attitudes toward sex, it makes the world's purpose making us feel good about ourselves. To accomplish this, it asserts that God, and all that he created, from male and female to notions of right and wrong, are simply linguistic constructs, mere con tricks that capture the imagination of the unthinking herd.

Nietzsche was prescient. The current battles for the future shape of Western society are being waged most fiercely in the area of language. That would not be so worrying if the fight was about conforming language to reality. For example, to object to a demeaning racial epithet would seem not merely philosophically legitimate but morally imperative, a way of preventing the constructed category of race from being used to demonize another human being. Human nature is real; we all share it; and that places moral responsibilities upon us. But when we decry pronouns that assume the reality of bodily sex, we are coming close to denying the universal truth that all humans are embodied beings. Indeed, we are tearing away the very foundation upon which a common humanity and a common humanitarian ethic can be built.

Josef Pieper expressed an insight similar to Nietzsche's, though he does so with foreboding and dread rather than joy, and with far more political prescience. In an important essay, "The Abuse of Language and the Abuse of Power," he observed:

Once the word, as it is employed by the communications media, has, as a matter of principle, been rendered neutral to the norm of truth, it is, by its very nature, a ready-made tool just waiting to be picked up by "the powers that be" and "employed" for violent or despotic ends.

Pieper is saying that once language is detached from any greater reality, it becomes a weapon in the

hands of the powerful for the manipulation and the abuse of others. When we consider this in light of Nietzsche's observation on God and grammar, a rather grim truth becomes evident: The abolition of grammar merely changes one authority for another. The old God might be held to his (pardon the phrase) word, as reflected in reality. The new gods are but raw power writ large, unattached to anything beyond themselves. Ironically, that means that the thing Nietzsche feared above all – the herd mentality and its mindless morality – is precisely what will emerge, because the individual has nothing with which to resist the power of the strong. That is what we are witnessing in the unthinking rush to specify pronouns among people who have never considered their bodies to be unreliable guides to their gender.

The battle over pronouns on social media and in public spaces, as trivial as it seems, is actually of great importance. The abandonment of reality that queer ideology demands may be marketed as nothing more than sensitivity toward the feelings of others, but in fact it is imposing a view of the relationship between language and reality that makes the latter nothing more than a function of the former. And the reason it is being pressed with such force is because it is a bid for power by those who deem any and all categories oppressive except those they invent themselves. They hate reality. And they hate the God who made that reality and the grammar and syntax by which it is expressed. Nietzsche knew it; it is a shame that some Christians seem rather confused on the matter.

And as for politicians who despise those who believe in a God-given reality: You can take my grammar and dictionary from me when you tear them from my cold, dead hands.

## **The Doctrine of Christ:**

### **A Layman's Handbook**

*by Abp. Dmitri (Royster) of Dallas, 1984*

Orthodox Philosopher Teena Blackburn reminds us that *Christian teachings, especially Christian sexual teachings, will not make any sense if you don't know Christ first, and if you don't understand what the Faith says about anthropology: about who Jesus is, what a human is, what life is all about. All that has to come first,*

*or you just get a long list of rules. Christians are following Someone; the pattern of our life is not arbitrary! It is, ideally, rooted in the idea (and experience) that nothing God asks of us is for anything but our good, our joy, our ultimate happiness* (adapted by the editor). In order to help us come to know who Christ is and what the Church teaches us about Christ's divinity and his humanity (a pattern for our humanity!), each month of 2021 we will be looking at a chapter of "The Doctrine of Christ" by the ever-memorable Abp. Dmitri of Dallas (+2011), renowned Orthodox biblical scholar, theologian, missionary, and pastor.

## Chapter 9:

### THE PRIESTLY MINISTRY OF CHRIST

The prophets of the Old Testament had announced the accomplishment of God's plan for the salvation of the human race in the Messiah, the Christ. When He came, He was seen fulfilling all those prophecies and proclaiming that the deliverance that had been promised was at hand. He, the great Prophet, was the end of prophecy, because all the prophets before Him had looked forward toward Him and because any future prophet would be unable to say anything about the redemption that had not already been said.

When Jesus began to preach, He first declared that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 4:17) Indeed, the process of redemption had already begun, and Jesus' priestly ministry, though usually thought of in connection with His death on the cross, spans His entire lifetime.

The very Incarnation was an act of submission and of obedience to the will of the Father. On coming into the world, Christ said, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body thou hast prepared me ... Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God." (Hb.10:5-7) This is addressed to God the Father, repeating the prophetic utterance of David in Psalm 39[40]:6.

In the Incarnation, Christ humiliated or abased Himself and "took upon Him the form of a servant ..." (Phil. 2:7) He took upon Himself the sins of the world: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (Gal. 3:13)

### Christ Our Sacrifice

As Prophet, Christ taught and gave the perfect example: He made God known to man and He showed man how to live in relation to God and his fellow-man. He reunited God and man in His own person, being perfect God and perfect man.

Yet man's chief enemy, death, still reigned. It was in giving Himself over to death, so that, in experiencing what all men have to experience as a consequence of sin, Christ might defeat death by rising from the dead.

Christ offered Himself in sacrifice. He who had no sin offered Himself out of love for man even unto death. Yet death could not hold the One who was not deserving of it.

Therefore, Christ is the **Priest** in the basic sense of the word. He is a representative of the people. He offers sacrifice for their sins. Yet the uniqueness of His sacrifice lies in the fact that He had no sin of His own, unlike the priests of the Old Testament. Then again, as the celebrant prays during the Cherubic Hymn at the Divine Liturgy, Christ is both the One who "offers and is offered."

Although many prophecies, especially those of David in the Psalms, refer to the suffering and death of Christ as an offering for the sins of man (i.e., Psalm 21[22]), it is Isaiah, in Chapter 53, who gives the clearest picture of His rejection, suffering and death. "Surely, He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." (vv. 4, 5)

John the Forerunner, on seeing Jesus for the first time, declared to the people: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (Jn. 1:29) The lamb, which was the innocent, pure victim sacrificed under the old law for the sins of men, is applied to Christ as the Lamb sent from God, who would be sacrificed for the sins of the whole human race.

The Saviour Himself made many references to the sacrifice He was to make. In fact, according to His own statement, this was the very purpose of His coming into the world: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mt. 20:28)

As the time for His giving His life approached, Christ spoke of the sacrifice as His glorification. "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." (Jn. 12:23) He goes on to speak of His own anguish, "Now is my own soul troubled." (Ibid.) Then in answer to His own question, "What shall I say, Father save me from this hour?" He declared, "But for this cause came I unto this hour." (v.27)

From the beginning, Christ foretold the way in which He was to die and showed how Moses' action symbolized His crucifixion: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." (Jn. 3:14) The expression "lifted up" was understood to mean specifically "lifted up upon the cross." Those who look upon the crucified Christ and believe on Him will be saved just as those who looked upon the serpent which Moses raised were spared from death.

In calling Himself the only true Shepherd of the spiritual sheep, Jesus also said: "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep ... I am the good Shepherd ... and I lay down my life for the sheep." (Jn. 10:11-15) Again, it is the priestly sacrifice which is being referred to.

He also told the Jews how mankind was to receive the gift of eternal life: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (Jn. 6:51) The meaning of this passage becomes clear at the Last Supper. He takes bread and wine and institutes the Eucharist with terms and actions fitting for offering sacrifice. He will give His Body as a sacrifice. He will make bread that sacrificed Body, so that those who believe may consume the sacrifice. This was, of course, the normal order for the sacrifices of the Old Testament, according to God's commandment.

As the end approached, Christ's prophecies had to do with His suffering and death. After Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus began "to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 10:33, 34; Lk. 9:44)

The Lord further shows that the prophets prophesied concerning Him. Thus, in Jerusalem "all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son

of man shall be accomplished." (Lk. 18:31) There He should be delivered, mocked, spitefully entreated, spat upon, scourged, put to death, and then rise again the third day. (Lk. 18:32, 33)

On almost every one of these occasions, it is noted in the Gospel that the disciples did not understand what the Lord meant. Peter even objected saying that these things could never happen to his Lord, but Christ rebuked him: "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou art an offense to me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (Mt. 16:22, 23)

Finally, after having suffered death for the sins of the world, and after His resurrection, "He opened the understanding" of His disciples, that "they might understand the Scriptures ... thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day ..." (Lk. 24:45-47)

Thus Christ spoke many times about the sacrifice that He was to offer on behalf of the human race. While not actually calling Himself "Priest", it is clear from what He said about giving His life that He indeed exercised a priesthood. This is shown to us in the Gospels, not only by Christ's own references to His death, but especially in the very act of His bearing out His ministry.

### **The Bread of Life**

The whole sixth chapter of the Gospel according to John proclaims the sacrifice that is to take place. After the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, the Lord calls Himself "the Bread of Life". (v.35) The words which He used are crucially important: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (v.51) Then He astounded all those who heard Him when He declared, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in Him." (v. 56)

In yet another chapter of this Gospel, there is what is often called the "high priestly prayer" of Christ. (Jn. 17) It is so called because it was offered immediately before His betrayal, arrest and all the things that culminated in His death on the cross.

The content of the "high priestly prayer" deals more with the consequences of the redemption, the salvation of humanity. Here this is spoken of as its sanctification and glorification. Hence, the term "redemption" means the rescue of man from the reign and power of death by Christ's victory over death.

This salvation wrought by Christ's sacrifice has been called by the Fathers of the Church **theosis** (divinization or deification). And in this prayer this is spoken of in precisely these terms: "...[That] they also might be sanctified ... the glory which thou gavest me I have given them ... that they also may be one in us ..." (vv. 19, 22)

The relation between the "high priestly prayer" and Christ's previous reference to Himself as the Bread of Life can be understood when it is pointed out that the "high priestly prayer" was offered at the institution of the Eucharist. Here the "hard saying" is explained. The question, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" is answered. The sanctification, the divinization or deification of man, is revealed as possible through the Eucharist, wherein the flesh and blood of Christ are given. Those who partake therein dwell in Him, and He in them, sanctifying them.

### **The Blood of Christ**

There are numerous texts from the apostolic epistles which speak of the redemption from sins by the blood of Jesus. For example, "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood ..." (Rm. 3:24, 25); "[Jesus Christ,] in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7); "[Jesus Christ,] who gave Himself a ransom for all ..." (I Tm. 2:6); "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (Rm. 5:10). This last passage makes obvious the relationship between the two aspects of Christ's priestly work, redemption and salvation.

All the evidence cited above is convincing enough to acknowledge Christ's priesthood. Yet the most direct and detailed presentation is furnished by the Epistle to the Hebrews. This letter's fundamental thesis is the understanding of the Old Testament with the aid of the New. Briefly, its main features in relation to the priesthood of Christ are the following.

### **§ Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest:**

Jesus Christ is called repeatedly "priest," "great priest" and "high priest." His "appointment" was given Him by the heavenly Father: "So also Christ

glorified not Himself to be made an high priest but He that said to Him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As He saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." (5:5, 6)

Although His priesthood was not of the order of Aaron, it is placed on a parallel with his. "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house." (3:1, 2)

This great "High Priest" is passed into the heavens, but He can be "touched with the feelings of our infirmities," for, like us, He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (4:14, 15)

It was Christ, the High Priest, "who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears to Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect ... [was] called of God an High Priest." (5:7-10)

### **§ A Priest Forever**

#### **after the Order of Melchizedek:**

As noted above, Christ is called a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was not only a priest of the Most High God, but also a King of Salem, that is, of justice and of peace. By this extraordinary association of two high functions, Melchizedek typified Christ, the extraordinary priest-king. (7:1, 2)

Because Holy Scripture gives neither Melchizedek's genealogy, nor his origin, nor the end of his life, nor his predecessor, nor his successor, he again presented an image of Christ, the Son of God, who remains a priest for ever. (7:3)

Finally, Melchizedek received the tithes of Abraham himself and blessed them. In so doing, he blessed in the person of Abraham all of his descendants. All the children of Levi, the priests of the Old Testament, were thus blessed in Abraham by Melchizedek. Melchizedek received tithes of them all.

The point to be made here is that since he that receives the blessing is inferior to the one that gives it, Melchizedek is thereby superior to the priests of the Old Testament. In this he typified the priest that is above all priests, the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. (7:1-10)

### § The Superiority of Christ's Priesthood:

The previous point, that by being a priest after the order of Melchizedek, Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, which was after the order of Aaron, is amply detailed in Hebrews.

The priesthood possessed by Aaron was but for a time and was not sanctioned by an oath. Yet the priesthood of Jesus Christ, as changeless and eternal, was sanctioned by God's oath, "the Lord sware and will not repent." (7:20, 21)

Then again, the priests of the Old Testament died as men, their priesthood passing from one to another. Jesus Christ remains **eternally**; He possesses a priesthood that is **eternal**. (7:23, 24)

The priests of the Old Testament were sinful men. They offered sacrifices both for their own sins and for those of the people. However, Jesus Christ, who had no sin, offered sacrifice for the sins of the world. (7:26, 27)

Ultimately, the superiority of Christ's priesthood is demonstrated by the fact that the priests after the order of Aaron offered sacrifice daily. These sacrifices typified the expiatory sacrifice, but did not remove sins from themselves. (10:1-11) Jesus Christ offered Himself only once, as the true expiatory victim for the sins of the world. "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." (10:12, 14; see also, 7:27; and 9:12-14, 26)

#### The Fathers on the Priesthood of Christ

The teachings of the Fathers of the Church in every generation have been identical with the biblical concept of Christ's priesthood. Some of the testimonies from the generation which immediately followed the time of the Apostles follow.

"Jesus Christ, the High Priest of our offerings, the protector and helper of our weakness ..." (*I Clement*, 36,1)

"Priests are a good thing, but better still is the High Priest who was entrusted with the Holy of Holies, Jesus Christ ..." (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Philadelphians*, 9,1)

"May the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the eternal High Priest Himself, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, build you up in faith ..." (St. Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 12,2)

Then too, there are the following examples from the universally accepted Doctors of the Fourth Century.

"The sheep, as the victim; the lamb, as being perfect; the high priest, as the offerer; Melchizedek, as without mother in that nature which is above us, and without Father in ours; and without genealogy above (for 'who,' its says, 'shall declare His generation?' – Isaiah 53:8) and, moreover, as King of Salem, which means peace, and King of righteousness, and receiving tithes from patriarchs, when they prevail over powers of evil." (St. Gregory the Theologian, *Fourth Theological Oration*, 21)

"He was the victim, but at the same time, the High Priest, the Sacrificer, but also God: He offered blood to God, but He purified the world; He was lifted up on the cross, but He nailed sin to the cross." (St. Gregory the Theologian, *Mystigogical Hymn to the Son*)

"He is called priest, because in His body He offered Himself in sacrifice to the Father for the human race; sacrificer and victim, He sacrificed Himself, accomplishing His work for the whole world." (Epiphanius, *Heresies*, 69, 39)

"He offered Himself in sacrifice in order to abolish the sacrifices of the Old Testament, in offering a perfect and living victim, for all; Himself, at the same time, victim sacrificial altar, God, Man, King, High Priest, flock, sheep, having done all for us." (*Ibid.*, 55,4)

#### Why Christ Was Appointed Priest

Now, what essentially was the purpose and the effect of that sacrifice of which Christ was the High Priest? Why was it needed and what did it accomplish?

The Holy Scriptures give us a very precise answer to these questions. They provide us with a remarkable picture of man's state without the redemption, the condition from which the human race needed to be redeemed.

#### § We were under the Curse:

Because of man's sin, God placed him under the curse, and he suffered the punishment due to sin: death. It was from that curse that man had to be rescued or redeemed, if he was to fulfill the purpose for which he was created.

"In Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:22)

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written,

Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (Gal. 3:13)

"[Jesus Christ,] who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Tit.2:14)

"Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (I Pet. 1:18, 19)

Thus, the debt that we owed because of our sins has been paid: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." (Col. 2:14)

"Ye are bought with a price." (I Cor. 6:20; 7:23)

### **§ We were Enemies of God:**

We were alienated from God because of sin. What was necessary for man was to be restored to friendship with God, that is, to be reconciled.

"For it pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself: by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight." (Col. 1:19-22)

By man's free choice, he had preferred the world to God. "Whosoever therefore will be friend of the world is the enemy of God." (Jas. 4:4) Yet it is the death of God's Son that has reconciled us to Him. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (Rm. 5:10)

### **§ We were Servants of Sin:**

The Scriptural evidence is clear. We were servants of sin. (Rm. 6:20) We were captives of the devil. (II Tm. 2:26) We were condemned to death. (Gn. 3:19).

Jesus Christ destroyed that slavery to the devil. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part of the same: that through death He might destroy Him that

had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hb. 2:14, 15)

### **§ We were Idolaters:**

We were idolaters, making gods out of everything: man and beasts (Rm. 1:23), lusts and pleasures (I Pt. 4:3), worshipping and serving "the creature more than the Creator ..." (Rm. 1:25). Even covetousness or greed was idolatry. (Col. 3:5).

For this idolatry, too, man was condemned to death. "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death ..." (Rm. 1:32) "... [Idolaters] ... shall not inherit the Kingdom of God." (I Cor. 6:9, 10)

It is in Christ that man has been able to return to the worship of the true God. "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." (I Th. 1:9, 10)

St. Paul, in exhorting the Corinthians to flee from idolatry, reminds them that their worship of the true God has been made possible by the death of Christ and is realized for them in the communion of His body and blood. (I Cor. 10:14-20)

Since Christ has offered Himself as a sacrifice to God, those who believe in His saving death can have no further part in idolatry, nor any other thing equally detestable to God. (Eph. 5:2-5)

### **The Consequences of Redemption**

Man, then, has been redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ from his sinful state, from the curse and the sentence of death, from enmity with God, from slavery to sin and the devil, and from idolatry.

Does this rescue from sin and death bring with it any positive consequences? For the person who has faith in Christ, it does most assuredly. Yet that faith is necessary for his participation in the effects of the redemption.

### **§ Children of God by Adoption:**

Christ made us the adopted children of God and dwellers in His house. "God sent forth His Son ... to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Gal. 4:4, 5) "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." (Eph. 2:19)

## § Justification and Sanctification:

By His death, Christ has given us the means of being justified, sanctified, and deified, "... being now justified by His blood ..." (Rm. 5:9) He "bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness ..." (I Pet. 2:24) "... Now hath He reconciled [you] in the body of His flesh to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight" (Col. 1:21, 22), "that ... ye might be partakers of the divine nature ..." (II Pet. 1:4). "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them ..." (Jn. 17:22)

## § Eternal Life and Glory:

Christ has gained eternal life and glory for us. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:14, 15) "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one ..." (Hb. 2:10, 11)

### Can One Die for Many?

Now, how can it be that the sacrificial death of One can accomplish all these things for the rest? After all, it was man that had sinned and owed the debt, even though we admit that the eternal Son of God became man and offered Himself in sacrifice to God. To say that He suffered for us and died for us must mean that He took our place and offered a representative sacrifice for our sins. Is this kind of substitution consistent with the principles of equity and justice?

In order to answer this crucial question, consider the explanation given by St. Paul in the fifth chapter of Romans: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (v. 12) So it was that sin was first committed by one, and the consequence of that sin was death. This death passed to all men, not as to innocent bystanders, but because they have all sinned.

"... For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." (v. 15) The effects of sin were so extensive that all men were subject to death. [The

word "many" in the language of the New Testament means "all."]

"For if by one man's offense death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift and of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." (v. 17) The gift of Christ, eternal life, far outweighed the results of sin.

"Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." (v. 18) Just as mortality was inherited by all, even though they may not have been guilty, so also the gift of justification was bestowed upon all without their deserving it.

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (v. 19) So everyone became a sinner as a consequence of the first man's disobedience. By Christ's perfect obedience, all have the possibility of being righteous.

What was inherited by all, as a consequence of the sin of Adam, was death, judgment to condemnation, and sinfulness. The expression "for all have sinned" emphasizes the fact that each man not only sins but has the responsibility or guilt for it.

The underlying idea in all the passages cited is that what affects one man affects all, although each man or woman is a person and not a part of some larger superperson.

St. Athanasius perceives the truth of the matter and provides the solution to the problem. "The solidarity of the human race is such that, since the Word of God dwelt in a single human body, the corruption which accompanies death lost its power over all." (*The Incarnation of the Word of God*, 9, n. 2) In the same way that death had passed to all from the place of its original infection, the cure is affected from one starting point.

There is a real unity of human nature, although there are millions of persons, each one with his integrity. The Son of God identified with the human race in the Incarnation. In the same way, Christ, the New Adam, comprises each human individual. He is not just "another".

He that "taketh away the sins of the world" took upon Himself the sins of all men and of all times. In His holy humanity He committed no sin, but He was made sin for us. (II Cor. 5:21) "For being over all, the Word of God naturally by offering His own temple

and bodily instrument for the life of all satisfied the debt of all by His death." (St. Athanasius, *Op.cit.*)

None of this can be understood purely in a juridical sense. From a purely human idea of justice, this way of redemption can appear to be absurd. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God ... the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (I Cor. 1:18, 25)

The divine principle at work in the whole process of the redemption is love. For "God is love." In this was manifested the love of God toward us. God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (I Jn. 4:10) "For God so loved the world," in spite of its sinfulness. "that He gave His only begotten Son." Christ took upon Himself human nature with its sins, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn. 3:16) For Christ the High Priest, by virtue of His redemptive sacrifice, remits the sins of those who go to Him with love and repentance.

### **Are All Then Saved?**

The sacrifice of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ, was offered for all. Its propitiatory effects extend to all men.

The will of God is certainly that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ; who gave Himself a ransom for all ..." (I Tm. 2:4-6)

All men were lost, and in the Saviour's own words, He came "to save that which was lost." (Mt. 18:11) He is the propitiation for and the salvation of the whole world. (I Jn. 2:2; 4:14)

St. Basil the Great summarizes this point in this way: "There is one superior to our nature; not a mere man, but one who is man and God, Jesus Christ, who alone is able to make atonement for us all because God 'appointed Him to be a propitiation through faith in His blood' - Romans 3:25." (On Psalm 48:3)

Again, St. Gregory of Nyssa remarks: "As a priest after the order of Melchizedek, He offered Himself to God in redemption, not only for Israel, but also for all men." (On the Lord's Prayer)

Although Christ died for all, only those who believe in Him are saved. (Jn. 3:16) As St. John Chrysostom says: "The Lord died for all in order to save all; this death corresponded to the perdition of all, but it did not erase the sins of all, because they themselves did not wish it so." (On Hebrews, Homily 17, n. 2)

The sacrifice of Christ redeems us from sin in general, from original sin, from past sins and from future sins. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." (I Jn. 1:7) "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Rm. 5:19)

"God ... set forth [Jesus Christ] to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." (Rm. 3:25)

"My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ..." (I Jn. 2:1, 2)

St. John Chrysostom describes the effect of the sacrifice in this way: "Grace has destroyed not only original sin, but also all other sins; moreover, not only has it destroyed sins, but it has also given us holiness; and Jesus Christ has not only restored everything that had been corrupted by Adam, but also has reestablished it more abundantly and to a better degree." (On the Epistle to the Romans, Homily 10, n. 2)

Christ's sacrifice is effective for all times. This is why He is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8) and "a priest for ever" (Hb. 7:21). The redemption He has gained for us is eternal. "Christ being come a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." (Hb. 9:11, 12)

His reconciliation was universal, in that He tore down the wall of separation between heaven and earth by His cross. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they

be things in earth, or things in heaven.” (Col. 1:19, 20)

Jesus Christ, in His sacrificial death, carried out the will of His Father who had decreed to save the world by the blood of His Son-made-Man. By the Son’s own will, He was obedient and underwent a lifetime of humiliation. “For the joy that was set before Him, [He] endured the cross, despising the shame ...” (Hb. 12:2)

Now, His state of humiliation was followed by His glorification. (Jn. 12:16) This was a glorification not of His divinity, which was always glorious, but in His human nature, which He had taken into the unity of His person.

Just before His death, Christ prayed: “Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee ... I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” (Jn. 17:1, 4, 5)

Then after His resurrection, having appeared to two of His Apostles returning to Emmaus, who were uncertain about the death of their Master, Christ said to them: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?” (Lk. 24:25, 26)

In his discourse to the Jews, St. Peter said: “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up.” (Acts 3:13) Peter later wrote in his first epistle that the prophets foretold the sufferings of Christ and His glorification that was to follow. (1:11)

St. Paul likewise testifies to the glorification and exaltation of the God-Man after His death. (Phil. 2:9; Hb. 2:9)

This glorification is to be understood in the following terms. Christ entered as God-Man into the same glory that He had as God with the Father before the world was. (Jn. 17:5) The Father raised Christ from the dead, His body being made glorious (Phil. 3:21) and set Him down at His own right hand (Eph. 1:20). The God-Man ascended into heaven and was given authority over all, even the angels. (I Pet. 3:22) In fact, as Christ Himself says: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Mt. 28:18)

He receives as God-Man the adoration that always belonged to Him in His divinity. (Phil. 2:10)

In the fullness of His divine glory, Christ will come again one day as King to judge the living and the dead (Mt. 16:27; 19:28; 24:30), and of His Kingdom there shall be no end (Lk. 1:33).

*If there are any topics you would like covered in future editions of the Prophet, or if you have any articles which you found to be a blessing, please let Fr. John know!*