

CHAPTER THREE

Fasting and Contemporary Orthodoxy in the Americas

Despite the fact that the Eastern Orthodox Church is the second largest Christian community in the world, after the Roman Catholic Church,¹⁴⁰ with as many as five million adherents in the Americas, it is not well known in the West. Popular considerations of the Orthodox Church have traditionally obscured its antiquity, identifying it with those Churches in Eastern Europe, Constantinople, Greece, and the Levant which broke from the Pope of Rome in the Great Schism of 1054 (though of late increased interest in and improved scholarship about the Eastern Church have prompted more accurate, popular portrayals of

¹⁴⁰ Almanacs and encyclopædias report the world population of Eastern Orthodox Christians as anywhere from eighty-five million to as many as 250 million believers. This confusion arises because many of the national Orthodox Churches, including those of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Serbia, were for many decades under largely anti-religious, Communist rule and were unable to collect reliable statistics about their Churches and believers. It is estimated, for example, that there are between fifty and seventy million Orthodox Christians in the former Soviet Union. While the Communist régime was still in power, Archbishop Chrysostomos observed that, "Believers in that country...report that this number would be almost double, were there no negative consequences for reporting religious affiliation." Statistics for the Americas are more accurate, he notes, "but they do not reflect a pattern of growth." Many of the children of the Eastern European immigrants from the great political upheavals of the early twentieth century—immigrants who so swelled the population of Eastern Orthodox Christians in the Americas—have abandoned the religious traditions of their forefathers. The result is a "steady decline—despite the great hopes of a zealous, but small, convert population—in the number of Orthodox Christians in the United States, Canada, and South America." See Archimandrite [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, "Misrepresentative Demography, the Hope of World Orthodoxy; Painful Trends, the Plight of American Orthodoxy: A Statistical Study of the Orthodox Population," paper presented at the Orthodox Student Association, University of California, Riverside, October 1975, TMs [photocopy], pp. 13–16 *pass*.

“one of the three major branches of Christianity, which stands in historical continuity with the communities created by the apostles of Jesus in the region of the eastern Mediterranean”¹⁴¹ and “Christendom’s oldest Church”¹⁴²). Moreover, the very history and ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church, so complex and subtle in nature, have inevitably invited the kind of misunderstanding which accrues to all that defies encyclopædic descriptions:

[Orthodox theologians]...argue that a definite doctrine of the Church is impossible just as a definition of life itself would make no sense. ...The Church as the primordial reality resists any dogmatic definition; its real being exists beyond human abstractions and categories. ...It is senseless to start from a definition or dogma of the Church.¹⁴³

Orthodox Christians in contemporary times and especially in the West, then, have found it difficult to explain to the very denominational Christian West just what the Orthodox Church is. The national Orthodox Churches in Europe, the Churches of Greece (including the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople in Istanbul, Turkey) and Russia, perhaps the best known among them, have always existed in the cultural and religious hegemony which they inherited from the Byzantine Empire.¹⁴⁴ Their unity and common identity thus arise from a consensus about the Orthodox Faith that rests in such foundational prerequisites as Apostolic Succession in the Bishops who lead the Church, adherence to the Synods (the Seven Œcumenical Councils) which governed the undivided Christian Church before the Great

¹⁴¹ *Funk and Wagnall’s New Encyclopedia*, 1983 ed., s. v. “Orthodox Church.”

¹⁴² “The Eastern Orthodox: Christendom’s Oldest Church Faces Difficult Problems,” chap. in *Christendom and Christianity Today*, Vol. 3 of *The World’s Great Religions* (New York: Time, Inc., 1963), p. 266.

¹⁴³ Joseph L. Hromádka, “Eastern Orthodoxy,” chap. in *The Great Religions of the Modern World* (Princeton, nj: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 289–290.

¹⁴⁴ “History and Politics of the Byzantine Church: Some Historiographical Perspectives,” *Kleronomia*, Vol. 8 (1976), pp. 294–295.

Schism of 1054, and the primacy and authority of Scripture and Holy Tradition. But even these definitions, as one authority points out, are founded on a mystical idea of the Church and its nature:

The Church has an unambiguous, unqualifiedly valid confession of faith, a doctrine concerning God, Christ, salvation, and eternal life. The seven Ecumenical councils were official gatherings of the Church acting, speaking, and defining the Creed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Historically or empirically, these councils of all bishops represented the Church and have been interpreted as infallible spokesmen of the whole Church. Yet, the theologians of the East more and more energetically object to this interpretation, and insist upon the fact that the Church as a whole, is an organic, mystical body of all believers, and has been the medium, instrument, and embodiment of the infallible truth of Christ.¹⁴⁵

As various national Orthodox Churches established immigrant communities in America, usually organized under a Synod of Bishops or an Exarch tied to the Mother Church in Europe, a multiplicity of jurisdictions arose, mirroring the co-existence of many separate national Churches in the Old World. Churches in exile, fleeing the anti-religious spirit of the Communist revolutions in the first few decades of this century, were also established in the Americas. This increased the number of jurisdictions, since most of these exile groups established themselves side by side with the Churches of their fellow Orthodox nationals, but remained separated from them over the issue of fidelity to their Communist-dominated Mother Churches.¹⁴⁶ As well,

¹⁴⁵ Hromádka, "Orthodoxy," p. 292.

¹⁴⁶ There are multiple jurisdictions of the Slavic Churches in the Americas, some aligned with their formerly Communist-dominated Mother Churches, others refusing to cooperate with their parent Orthodox bodies until all residual influence by the atheistic Communist states—especially involvement in the ecumenical movement—is removed from the Church. Thus the Russian Church, for example, maintains a jurisdiction in the Americas under the direction of the Moscow Patriarchate and is represented, at the same time, by a Synod of Bishops in Exile, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (roca), which

many Greek Catholics—products of the Unia or the incorporation of Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe into the Latin Church—, coming to the Americas and seeing that their married priesthood and Byzantine worship were unacceptable to the American Latin bishops, returned to the Orthodox Church, forming, in some cases, their own separate Churches and thus also adding to the number of different jurisdictions.¹⁴⁷ Explaining to Western Christians that these various groups, often, as we have noted, separated from one another, nonetheless constituted a single Orthodox witness was to a great extent beyond the ability of these Orthodox immigrants and converts.

In the first place, many of the original immigrants to America from Eastern Europe, Greece, and the Levant, both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were simple workers seeking a better life in America. They had neither the education nor the inclination to explain the peculiar history and tenets of their Faith. In the second place, the national Churches from which these immigrants came had themselves suffered tremendous decline in traditional Church life. The Eastern European Slavic Churches, for example, were for centuries, beginning as early as the 1500s, missionary ground for the Church of Rome, accounting not only for the Uniate movement but for a Western influence on their theological outlook that persists in many circles to this day. Even a Latin-style veneration of the Virgin Mary, “by claims to be the uncompromised voice of the Russian Church.

¹⁴⁷ Two of the largest of these former Uniate groups are the Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholic Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church in America (oca). The Carpatho-Russian Church operates as an Eparchy of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America. The oca, while popular almanacs and its own historical caricatures link it to the original Russian Orthodox missions in Alaska, is actually an outgrowth of the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Metropolia, which was formed when a short-lived union of Russian Orthodox and former Greek Catholic converts was ruptured in the mid-1940s. Although the Metropolia was granted self-governing status by the Moscow Patriarchate two and a half decades ago, when it changed its name to the Orthodox Church in America, a generation ago “seventy-five percent of the forefathers of the present members” of the Church were Greek Catholics (see Chrysostomos *et al.*, *Orthodox Thought*, p. iii).

no means the same” as “the veneration of [the] Panagia and Theotokos by the Orthodox,” and advocacy of the “Immaculate Conception” crept into the celebrated Kievan school of Russian thought.¹⁴⁸ And “although the Ukrainian Baroque came to an end during the early eighteenth century, its traces have not fully vanished.”¹⁴⁹ What Father Florovsky has said of this influence in Russian Orthodox spiritual life may be said of the Slavic Orthodox Churches in general:

From the cultural and historical points of view, Kievan learning was not a mere passing episode but an event of unquestionable significance. This was the first outright encounter with the West. ...A scholastic tradition was developed and a school begun, yet no spiritually creative movement resulted. Instead there emerged an imitative and provincial scholasticism, in its literal sense a *theologica scholastica* or ‘school theology.’ This signified a new stage in religious and cultural consciousness. But in the process theology was torn from its living roots. A malignant schism set in between life and thought. Certainly the horizon of the Kievan erudites was wide enough. ...Still, the aura of doom hovered over the entire movement, for it comprised a ‘pseudomorphosis’ of Orthodox thought.¹⁵⁰

The Greek Church which dominated the spiritual lives of immigrants from Greece and the Levant, had, at the beginning of the Orthodox immigrations to the Americas, only recently emerged from centuries of domination under Turkish rule, which took its toll on the intellectual and theological life of the Greek world. Though, to be sure, there survived some tradition of Byzantine scholarship under the Turkish yoke,¹⁵¹ the tradi-

¹⁴⁸ Protopresbyter Georges Florovsky, *The Ways of Russian Theology: Part One*, ed. Richard S. Haugh, Vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, ma: Nordland Publishing Co., 1979), p. 84.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁵¹ As Professor Cavarnos has pointed out, “It is a mistake to believe that following the conquest of Byzantium by the Turks the Greek people sank to a state of complete darkness and barbarism. ...Men of extraordinary learning were

tional theological and popular religious life in the Orthodox countries of the Mediterranean declined immensely. Theological studies, in disarray after the end of Turkish domination in the nineteenth century, came under heavy Western influence—an influence still felt in this century and which has only of late given way to the restoration of traditional Patristic studies in the Greek world.¹⁵²

Moreover, in the early 1920s, under the leadership of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, most of the Greek Churches, as part of a reform movement, adopted the Papal or Gregorian Calendar and abandoned their use of the Julian or Old Calendar, which has always been used to calculate the Church's festal seasons. This reform movement, part of a program of ecumenical outreach, embraced proposals for the abolition of the traditional fasting rules of the Orthodox Church, as well as the adoption of a common date for the celebration of Pascha (Easter) with the Western Churches. (Orthodox have always followed, as an essential part of their fidelity to Church Tradition, the formulation for the celebration of Pascha decided upon at the Synod of Nicæa in 325.¹⁵³) While the abandonment of the Orthodox formula for determining the date of Pascha and fasting reforms were not officially adopted, this so-called "New Calendar" movement had tremendously negative effects on the spiritual life of the Church of Greece and on Orthodox Greeks in the diaspora,¹⁵⁴ who are for the most part organized under an Exarchate of

not as scarce as has often been supposed" (Constantine Cavarnos, *Modern Greek Thought* [Belmont, ma: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1986], p. 9).

¹⁵² The effects of Western influence on theology in contemporary Greece are insightfully discussed by Christos Yannaras, "Theology in Present-Day Greece," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (1972), pp. 195-197 *pass*.

¹⁵³ See A. D. Delembases, *Pascha Kyriou* [*The Lord's Pascha*] (Athens: 1985), pp. 697-699.

¹⁵⁴ Archbishop Chrysostomos has addressed the problems of Orthodox Greeks in an interesting article tracing the ills of the Orthodox Greek population in Greece and the Americas to a spirit of innovation and secularization that

the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America.

In Greece, the New Calendar movement sparked a protest by more traditionalist believers and Hierarchs, finally leading to the establishment of the so-called True, or Old Calendar, Orthodox Church of Greece by three Hierarchs who refused to follow what they saw as the innovative course of the State Church of Greece.¹⁵⁵ These traditionalist Orthodox believers, variously numbered between several hundred thousand and two million of the Orthodox Faithful of modern-day Greece,¹⁵⁶ have assiduously resisted for more than seventy years any reform movement that might compromise traditional Orthodox ecclesiology and spiritual practice, including reforms in the fasting regulations of

can be attributed to the reform spirit of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate at the beginning of this century: Archimandrite [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, "Cultural *Paradosis* and Orthodox America," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 25 (1980) pp. 266–271 *pass.*; see also "The Integrity of the One Church," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1989), p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ A very complete and objective study of the Greek Old Calendar movement and its history is Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, Bishop Auxentios, and Bishop Ambrose, *The Old Calendar Orthodox Church of Greece*, 4th ed. (Etna, ca: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1994). The introduction to the book contains an excellent review of English-language materials on the Old Calendar movement, both those of a polemical nature and those of scholarly import.

¹⁵⁶ The popular press in Greece tends to number the Old Calendarists at about two million; see, for example, Stelios I. Artemakis, "Ti Symbainei Me Tous Palaioemerogites [Current Events Among the Old Calendarists]," writing for the Athens daily, *He Bradyne*, 19 February 1986. Most Old Calendarists put their numbers in the "hundreds of thousands" (Chrysostomos *et al.*, *Old Calendar Church*, p. 46). Rather severe persecution of Old Calendarists several decades ago in Greece and persistent hostility towards their witness account in some part for this conflicting demographic information, since many members will not openly report their involvement in the movement. As well, since the distinction between traditionalists and non-traditionalists in America is not so clearly made in Greece, where even New Calendarists hold to much of the traditional piety of the Orthodox Church, not a few members of the State Church of Greece also attend Old Calendarist Churches on a fairly regular basis. Thus statistical statements of affiliation are obfuscated.

the Church. The so-called Old Calendarists have been at times brutally persecuted by the State Church and were initially subject to excommunication.¹⁵⁷ Their traditionalist movement has nonetheless survived, though divided into separate Synods of Bishops distinguished by their acceptance or denial of the validity of the Mysteries (Sacraments) of what they perceive to be the erring Mother Church of Greece.

The State Church has relented to some extent in its persecution of the Old Calendarists, so that Archbishop Dorotheos of Athens, Primate of the Greek Church from 1956 to 1957, wrote of them, "The Old Calendar movement is neither a heresy nor a schism, and those who follow it are neither heretics nor heterodox nor schismatics, but are Orthodox Christians."¹⁵⁸ As well, since 1975, the Greek Constitution has recognized the status of the Old Calendarists as a valid Orthodox body and has fully recognized their Mysteries as Orthodox.¹⁵⁹

Small communities of Old Calendarist Greeks migrated a few decades ago to the Americas, partly to escape persecution in Greece, thus adding their Churches to the witness of Greek Orthodoxy in the United States and Canada. They are distinguished here, as in Greece, by their strict adherence to traditional Eastern Orthodox customs, both in the dress of their clergy (uncut hair and beards and the black robes dictated by Church Canons) and the conservative spiritual practices of the Faithful. They fiercely resist what they call the apostasy of the more mod-

¹⁵⁷ The vividly brutal details of this persecution were recently presented in a Swedish sociology journal: Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, "Diskrimineringsens Psykologi [The Psychology of Discrimination]," *Invandrarer & Minoriteter: Scandanavian Migration and Ethnic Minority Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1988), p. 31 esp.; see also Abbot Akakios, "The Old Calendarist Movement: A Demand for an End to Murder, Persecution, and Hatred," *The Orthodox Path*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1986), pp. 1-4.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in "Jurisdictional Sectarianism: A Scourge," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1989), p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ "Crisis and Dialogue in Greece: Metropolitan Cyprian and Bishop Chrysostomos Meet with Greek Heads of State," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1986), p. 3.

ernist Orthodox Faithful in the New World from the traditional spirituality of the Church. The influence of the Old Calendarists in American Orthodox circles, however, is limited by their smaller numbers; their strongly ethnic base of support; the presence in their ranks of some voices immoderate in their opposition to the New Calendarists; and by an often rabidly hostile reaction to their traditionalist witness by some modernist Orthodox jurisdictions. In short, their entire witness is at odds with the imprint of the spirit of reform left by the New Calendar movement both on the Greek Church and other Orthodox bodies in America and isolates them from these fellow believers.

The Greek Catholics who brought with them to America their hybrid Christianity—a Christianity blending Western theological precepts with Eastern liturgical trappings—were absorbed into the Orthodox Church in America, early in this century, with almost no preparation. True, some of the leaders of this move by Uniates back to their Orthodox roots had come to accept the non-Papal administrative tenets of the Orthodox Church, but the bulk of the clergy and believers were simply seeking to preserve their traditions of a married priesthood and Eastern liturgical practices. Thus, the return of these Latinized Easterners to the Orthodox Church created in America large groups of believers whose religious psychology and theological foundations were fundamentally different than those of the communities to which they added their witness:

The effect of this union, the former Uniates far outnumbering the [Eastern European] ethnics, was to introduce a spirit and tradition to American Orthodoxy that separates it from the centuries-old Orthodox witness of Greece, the Holy Land, and eastern Europe.

These new converts brought with them many ideas and art forms that are far more western than eastern. At the same time, save for tiny communities of strict traditionalist Orthodox (the so-called Old Calendarists who symbolize their resistance to reforms by adherence to the Julian calendar), most of the ethnic Orthodox have themselves fallen under the influence of these western ideas

and the western ethos.¹⁶⁰

As a result of all of these things, contemporary Orthodox Christians in the Americas are hard-pressed to explain their Church, the jurisdictional divisions which they inherited from the Old World, and themselves. Except for a small minority of Old Calendarist traditionalists, they are beset by innovation, by accommodation to a culture which, unlike the cultures which fostered the national Orthodox Churches, is not Orthodox in its origins, and—especially in the case of converts and Orthodox with a Greek Catholic background—by a crisis in self-identity. Aside from a kind of spiritual malaise, this situation has resulted in a move away from an organic, spiritual understanding of the Church towards a preoccupation with structure and legitimacy or “canonicity.”¹⁶¹ Therefore, for several decades American Orthodox have seen repeated attempts by various groups to establish a single ecclesiastical jurisdiction as *the* American Orthodox Church, in order to solve the lingering crisis in self-identity—albeit a false crisis which rises out of a misunderstanding of the unity within Orthodox disunity and which sets aside the subtle advantages of a more traditional, organic ecclesiology for the concerns of institutional self-definition.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, “Heaven Meets Earth: Eastern Orthodox Church Art and Architecture,” *Faith and Form*, Vol. 20 (Fall 1986), p. 26.

¹⁶¹ Orthodox writers in the West often use ecclesiastical terminology in a loose way or with Western overtones. The validity of any Orthodox Church rests on the valid Apostolic Succession of its Bishops, its adherence to Holy Tradition, the quality of its spiritual life as measured by the so-called “barometer” of monasticism, and its consistent production of Saints. Jurisdictional canonicity is a matter of administration, not validity, and is a secondary issue. Moreover, it is an issue that presents tremendous problems for Orthodoxy in America, where the administrative Canons of the Church must be applied with great discretion. Indeed, it is often precisely on canonical grounds that various Churches in exile and in resistance have established their administrative facilities, so that “canonicity” characterized by certain structural or institutional affiliations comes to naught in the face of these movements.

¹⁶² The penchant of modernist Orthodox jurisdictions in America to fix-

In the light of this artificial crisis, American Orthodox have undertaken to define their Church on correspondingly artificial models which are more institutional and structural and which are clearly better understood in the West. The Patriarch of Constantinople, a “first among equals” and a Hierarch with nothing more than a primacy of honor in the Orthodox Church, has begun to take on the qualities of a “Pope of the East.”¹⁶³ Jurisdictions attached to Constantinople, therefore, look to the “Prince of Equals” for their claims to primacy. Of late, this neo-Papal trend has been transformed into a kind of “Patriarchal” ecclesiology, in which official relations between the Mother Churches in Europe and their Orthodox counterparts in the Americas have been taken as a sign of “canonicity” or jurisdictional legitimacy.¹⁶⁴ Various Churches have thus clamored to form or to strengthen relations with several ancient Patriarchates, in order to lay claim to a certain validity or primacy.

These definitions and attempts at establishing a firm self-ate on external, institutional unity was well illustrated recently by the highly publicized meeting of the so-called “Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas” (scoba)—an extra-canonical body notorious for its unjustified exclusion of traditionalist Orthodox jurisdictions from its ranks—at Ligonier, Pennsylvania, in December of 1994. Referring to itself as “the Orthodox Church in North America,” scoba declared that it was “one Church, not multiple ‘jurisdictions’” and “outlined future work towards becoming an ‘administratively united’ Church” (*The Shepherd*, Vol. 15, No. 4 [January 1995], p. 21). The Œcumenical Patriarchate, however, threatened by the prospect of losing its most successful Exarchate (in worldly, not spiritual, terms), “moved quickly to quash the unity initiative” (*Ibid.*, No. 6 [March 1995], p. 20).

¹⁶³ See “Œcumenical Patriarch to Athos: ‘Remain Silent,’” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1989), p. 5. This interesting article recounts the response of Patriarch Demetrios to a protest by the monks of Mount Athos with regard to what they see as the increasingly inappropriate leadership being assumed by the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate as a spokesman for the Orthodox Church in general.

¹⁶⁴ Just such a theory was the theme of a book written by a Russian Patriarchal clergyman, Archimandrite Seraphim, *The Quest for Orthodox Church Unity in America* (New York: Sts. Boris and Gleb Press, 1973).

identity have had the effect of wholly invalidating the positions of the Churches in exile, such as those resisting the lingering Communist contamination of their Mother Churches, and traditionalist resistance movements, such as that of the Old Calendarists. As we have already noted, these innovative efforts to re-define the Church in a contrived way move one away from the organic substructure of the Church and set aside, for the sake of external definitions of validity, the integrity of the resistance movements which have always facilitated natural reform in the Church by an insistence on the primacy of Church Tradition. The end product of these inauthentic attempts at self-definition has been a spirit of jurisdictional conflict in American Orthodoxy that has invited adolescent rivalry, slander, and the most vulgar political intrigues,¹⁶⁵ and which has seriously compromised the whole Church's witness.

Ironically enough, this departure in American Orthodoxy from traditional self-definition has been aided by the ecumenical movement, a movement frantically embraced by some Orthodox, who find in the recognition afforded them by other Christians a sense of identity which they cannot always find in their own Faith. In an atmosphere that emphasizes Christian similarity over and above dissimilarity, many Orthodox participants in the ecumenical movement have been reinforced for their Westernized views of the Church and have further moved away from strengthening their ties to its authentically unique life. All of this is reminiscent of Professor Allan Bloom's popular observations about the religious immaturity of the closed American mind: "It was not necessarily the best of times in America when Catholics and Protestants were suspicious of and hated one another; but at least they were taking their beliefs seriously."¹⁶⁶ Indeed, religious bigotry is an ugly thing, and understanding between different religions is a crucial and desired goal. But this understanding must begin with self-knowledge, with a clear knowl-

¹⁶⁵ "Jurisdictional Sectarianism," *pass*.

¹⁶⁶ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 35.

edge of who we are, and with the ability to tell others what we believe, not to form what we believe on the basis of what others understand and expect from us. This is precisely what has happened in American Orthodoxy's involvement in the ecumenical movement, an involvement that has produced hostility and separation between Orthodox and between many traditional Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christians who do not understand the traditionalist Orthodox stand.¹⁶⁷

Without a thorough comprehension of the complex jurisdictional history of the Orthodox Church in the Americas, it is impossible to understand the concerns and ills of its contemporary members. For this reason, the foregoing commentary is essential to our discussion of the rôle that fasting plays in modern-day Orthodox spiritual life. Constant concern for the institutional aspects of the Church, frantic efforts at self-definition in a largely foreign context and in artificial categories, and the alienation of more traditionalist elements from the so-called "mainstream" of the Church have led to a widespread deterioration in the spiritual life of American Orthodoxy.¹⁶⁸ Jurisdictional rival-

¹⁶⁷ Indeed, in a spirit hardly consistent with religious tolerance and understanding, traditionalist Orthodox Christians, demanding dialogue between Orthodox themselves as a prerequisite for wider ecumenical activity, have been openly disavowed by many voices in the ecumenical movement—even to the point of dismissing Old Calendarists as "non-Orthodox" (see "A New Orthodoxy," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 4 [1989], p. 2). This has extended, as well, to some heterodox voices. Several years ago, for example, the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity undertook to warn the Church of Greece about the impediment to Orthodox-Catholic unity presented by the Old Calendarists in the Greek Church, stating that, unless action was taken to silence their resistance movement, serious consequences would result with regard to the ecumenical dialogues between Rome and the Church of Greece (see "Crisis and Dialogue," p. 4).

¹⁶⁸ At a recent triennial council of the Orthodox Church in America, participants spoke of this deterioration in uncharacteristically bold and direct terms. Writing in the official publication of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate, a Romanian group independent from their Mother Church and under the jurisdiction of the oca, one observer writes: "The council also recognized that individually and collectively we are not courageous and bold enough in the

ry and its expression in ugly political tactics and polemical exchanges have, indeed, compromised the very Christian character of much of the Orthodox witness in the United States, Canada, and even some South American countries. The energy of the Church has been sapped by the tremendous emphasis placed on structure and the pitifully little attention paid to spiritual matters.

As we so clearly saw in the preceding chapter, the very goal of the Orthodox Church is the divinization of humankind—the transformation and elevation of all men and women—through ascetic practice and spiritual commitment. And while this goal may be served by the Church as an institution, the institutional aspect of the Church is secondary to its spiritual mission. It is a mere structural means to a spiritual end. For this reason, what becomes merely institutional in Orthodox life becomes dead and unproductive. An Orthodoxy which concentrates on jurisdictional self-definition sacrifices the greater spiritual aim of self-transformation. And with this sacrifice, the practices of asceticism and fasting are lost. Only the self benefits from ascetic labor; to the institution it is something foreign and absurd.

Fasting, then, has been largely set aside in the modernist or New Calendar Orthodox Churches in America, despite frequent and rather unconvincing protests to the contrary. It is talked about, and the fasting periods are announced on Church calendars. But the great majority of believers have little knowledge of fasting and its significance, and treat it either as an Old Country phenomenon, a health hazard, or a matter of voluntary practice. Living in a Church which fails to understand its own institutional make-up as a means to an end, the average American Orthodox Christian can hardly be expected to understand fasting as a means to an end. Indeed, if their Churches struggle for self-definition rooted more in institutional concerns than spiritual aims, how can these Faithful be expected to understand something like fasting even in its structural form, let alone for its spir-

Holy Spirit to share the Way" ("The 9th All America Council," *Solia: The Herald*, Vol. 54, No. 9 [1989], p. 3).

itual content?

The limited instances where fasting is practiced in modernist American Orthodox jurisdictions are beset by confusion and innovation. As we pointed out earlier, many of the Orthodox immigrants who came here from the Old Country failed to preserve their fasting routines in a country where new foods and new menus changed their way of life. Many came with an improper understanding of fasting to begin with. As we have also commented, the spirit of reform embraced by the calendar change in the Greek Churches included specific proposals for the relaxation of fasting rules. Brought to the Americas by immigrants—many of them coming as Hierarchs to serve the Church—, this spirit deeply affected the Orthodox population here. The Eastern European Greek Catholics who converted to Orthodoxy in America came from a spiritual milieu in which fasting neither took the same form nor had the same theological significance as it does in the Orthodox Church itself. And the national Slavic Churches in the emigration also at times understood asceticism from a far more Western than Orthodox perspective.

So it is that the ethnic Orthodox Churches saw the birth of “relaxed fasts,” “severe” as opposed to “moderate” rules for fasting, and even such incredible things as a “dispensation” from fasting on Thanksgiving Day, in the United States, which falls during the Nativity (Christmas) Fast for those Orthodox who follow the New Calendar. All of this they have passed on to a new generation of Orthodox and to converts coming into these jurisdictions. Wholly unfamiliar with Orthodox fasting traditions, many Orthodox today have taken these contrived notions in the immigrant Churches as authentic practices and have come to treat them as part and parcel of Church teaching.

By way of anecdotal evidence of this tragic misunderstanding of fasting by contemporary Orthodox Christians, Archbishop Chrysostomos, an Old Calendarist Hierarch, tells of visiting a modernist monastic community in the United States during a

lenten period, according to the New Calendar, and seeing a gallon of milk in the center of the refectory table. Talking later with the spiritual director of the community, he was told that the monastics were quite strict and that, despite the “voluntary nature of fasting,” ate fish instead of meat every Wednesday and Friday and avoided “heavy foods” during Lent. Though no doubt sincere in their intentions, these monastics were actually unaware that Orthodox Christians eat neither fish, meat, nor dairy products on Wednesdays and Fridays; that monastics normally fast on Mondays as well as Wednesdays and Fridays; that monastics refrain at all times from eating meat;¹⁶⁹ that lenten periods entail very specific and severe curtailments in dietary intake; and that fasting is anything but a “voluntary” practice for Orthodox Christians. This lack of awareness they share with all too many Orthodox Christians in the Americas.

Tragically enough, ignorance of the Church’s fasting rules has led to a superficial religious life in American Orthodoxy that simply reinforces the weaknesses and ills created by the institutionalization of the Church’s witness, jurisdictional strife, and the spiritual deterioration to which we have referred. The restorative effects of fasting, one of the fundamental spiritual practices by which the Christian rises above the foibles of external religion, have been lost to several generations of Orthodox. For want of a medicine that lies at hand, the patient continues in his illness. Moreover, the witness of the traditionalist Orthodox Christians in the Americas, who have maintained fidelity to the Church’s fasting rules, has been obscured by the hostility shown to them by modernists who are threatened by their example, and by the hostility of some traditionalists who have made of their

¹⁶⁹ Despite clear canonical proscriptions against their eating meat, some modernist monastics apply this rule only to the confines of the monastery and eat meat when they travel or find themselves in secular society. Among the various arguments to support this practice is the claim that one must not offend his host by turning away anything that he is offered. This of course sets a rather poor example for the lay people, who are also bound by the rules of fasting, and one might just as logically argue that good hosts do not offend their guests by offering them foods which they cannot eat.

traditionalism a personal prerogative rather than a teaching tool. Hence, a corrective standard of reference—a living paradigm of the Faith correctly lived—is available to but a few modernist Orthodox. They are left to a great extent without competent guides and without a knowledge of the spiritual steps which they must take to restore themselves to a traditional Orthodox life and to find true self-identity.

At the same time, Orthodoxy in America has fallen prey to a spirit which is wholly antithetical to the spiritual precepts which underlie the practice of fasting. As the Faithful have lost traditional spirituality, they have also abandoned many of its values. The quest for jurisdictional primacy, ecumenical recognition, and a Church that fits into the American scene has brought with it many of the negative values of contemporary American society. If Orthodox in the Americas know little of fasting and benefit little from the example of the spiritual lives of the Old Calendarists and other traditionalists, these circumstances are not always innocent.

Some modernist Orthodox find in fasting and in the traditionalism of the Old Calendarists a way of life flatly opposed to the selfishness of the social values which they have learned and to which they cling. A whole generation of Orthodox, especially in the United States, has come to seek not spiritual goals, but the benefits of materialism. They strive to make of Orthodoxy a religion which validates the body and its pleasures, which places a blessing on wealth and possessions, and which puts the enhancement, not the death, of the ego at the zenith of human concerns. Their goal is not the transformation of fallen human nature, but the glorification of human life without the painful process necessary to its transformation. Fasting to these Orthodox, then, is of the very least interest and their reactions to the Old Calendarists and traditionalists are marked by disdain and a repudiation of their way of life.

To a Church that is easy, that is immature in its spiritual life, and that is bereft of solid self-identity, personal discipline, a

rejection of materialism, and spiritual practices that test human endurance and demand of us almsgiving and concern for others in the process of restoring ourselves, are not attractive things. The “me” generation as it has touched such Orthodox Churches—and almost every other Christian community—in the United States has created an image of the restored human that is anything but spiritual. As Allan Bloom has commented, to this “me” generation, “starvation in Ethiopia, mass murder in Cambodia, as well as nuclear war, are all real calamities worthy of attention..., but they are not immediate, not organically connected to...[their] lives.”¹⁷⁰ To the Orthodox of this generation, the restoration of their Church’s traditional spirituality, if they indeed care about it at all, is nothing “immediate.” It comes in the form of lip service to fasting, written commentaries about asceticism, and revivals in Patristic studies. It encompasses an off-handed interest in mysticism and ethnic studies. But it never touches the question of fasting as a part of the personal spiritual life.

In what has been called a culture of satiation in the United States, self-gratification and physical satisfaction are a *sine qua non* for good living and for so-called spiritual well-being. We measure things by what pleasure they bring us, not by the pain which they occasion. Yet, the Orthodox Church, even in the midst of such a society, is bound to preach a different message. Writing about the *Philokalia*, Professor Cavarnos observes:

Man is in need of what the Watchful Fathers call the ‘beautiful’ or ‘good’ change (*alloiosis*), which is growth in likeness to God leading to union with Him, to deification. This change is to be brought about by means of ‘work’ (*ergasia*) or ‘training’ (*askesis*). ...In order to bring about the desired transformation, ‘work’ must be performed with great diligence and energy, enough to cause painful sensations. Hence the bodily and spiritual practices are often referred to as ‘voluntary suffering’ (*hekousioi ponoï*).¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Bloom, *American Mind*, p. 84.

¹⁷¹ Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Thought and Art* (Belmont, ma: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1968), p. 53.

What the “me” generation knows of this “no pain—no gain” philosophy is confined to the health spa and concentrated on the glorification of the external body rather than the transformation of the internal person. If suffering is to be endured at all, this is only for the sake of eventual material gain. For such a society, the fasting regulations of the Orthodox Church have little or no significance, for the goal of fasting is lost on superficial views of humankind. And the result of this is not only a tragedy for the contemporary Orthodox Church in the Americas, but for society in general:

In generations past, when the Church was not part of the materialistic world itself, but was respected for its resistance to society’s selfish and materialistic goals, monasticism and vocations dedicated to the fulfillment of our fellow man flourished. One was respected for self-sacrifice. Today, such vocations have largely become the refuge of social misfits. Those who would have sacrificed themselves in the past for a life of dedication to God and their fellow man are now on Wall Street, reaping the benefits of a life squandered in wealth and worldly pleasure. Hospitals and charitable foundations worldwide have nearly given up in their quest for nurses and physicians who will work without remuneration [and] merely for the betterment of society.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, “O, Perverse Generation!,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1989) p. 2.