

The Lion

March 2012 Vol. CXXXVII, No. 03

*An Unofficial Newsletter for Members Only of
Saint Mark's Parish, Denver, Colorado*

Founded 1875

A Sermon for Sexagesima 2012

Delivered by the Rev'd David Cook
at St. Paul's Church, Houston, Texas

St. Matthew 25.31-46

THIS PARTICULAR GOSPEL reading strikes a chord in me every time I read it. It has led me to do some pretty dumb things in my life but it wasn't until I was standing outside the Cathedral in Oslo at 2 o'clock in the morning, in the middle of December, in a snowstorm, talking with an elderly Salvation Army volunteer that I began to understand what Jesus was trying to tell us.

I had worked very late that night, as I did almost every night while I was in Norway, and a young man had come up to me and asked me for money. I gave him every kroner I had. It wasn't very much, and what I gave him would not go very far in Oslo, but I gave him everything that I had because I knew I could go to the ATM in the morning and get more money. I also gave it to him because I had been thinking about this very Gospel lesson when he came up to me and asked me for the money. A few minutes later as I walked up Karl Johan's Gate I began to wonder if I had done the right thing. Had I indeed helped someone who was hungry, thirsty, naked or had I just been played for a fool?

Just before I got to the Storting, the Norwegian Parliament building, I saw a Salvation Army volunteer trying to get those sleeping on the street into shelters and I decided to ask him if I had done the right thing. That conversation helped change my life.

I introduced myself and explained to the volunteer what I had done and why I had done it. I specifically told

him that I was a Christian and felt that I had to try as best as I could to do as our Lord God Almighty had commanded us -- feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty and clothe the naked. He told me that while my heart was in the right place, that at least in Norway, my gesture was probably not a Christian act but one that put that young man's life in danger. He explained to me that Norway had the highest levels of hard drug use in Europe and that my money was probably going to be spent on drugs instead of food or shelter as I had been told. He also told me that the Oslo county and Norwegian government spent a great deal of money providing social services to the poor and that there was probably no one in Norway that went without unless they wanted to do so. He said his job that night was to get people out of the cold and into one of the government supplied shelters.

Now you may ask yourself what was so important about that? There was nothing earth-shattering in what he told me. You are correct, there isn't, but what happened next was this.

We continued to talk and during the course of our conversation, the volunteer told me about his son. His son's name was David and he had not seen nor heard from him in more than ten years. The volunteer and his wife had raised David in a Christian home but somewhere along the way David fell and had left the Church and turned his back on Christ. He took up drink and drugs and eventually disappeared. His father's heart was broken. His wife had died without their son being reconciled to the family and his only wish was that his son would "come to himself," repent and return to God. The volunteer then asked me to pray for his son and his return to Christ. I told him that I would and I have tried to continue to do so to this day.

I have no idea who that man was, and I never saw him again in the months I spent in Oslo, but in that moment he represented Christ to me. He was my neighbor. He was my brother in Christ.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, if we ever needed a stark warning to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves -- today's Gospel reading is it.

The righteous -- those who loved their neighbor as themselves -- are welcomed into the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom prepared by God for all men "from the foundation of the world." The unrighteous -- those who loved only

themselves -- are cast into the eternal fire created for the Devil and his angels.

Notice who these destinations were created for. The Kingdom of Heaven is created for God and man. This is where we all belong. Gehenna was created for the Devil and his angels for their eternal punishment. It was not created for man nor was he ever intended for it. It is man who consigns himself to it.

Notice why the unrighteous were condemned. They were not condemned for what they did, rather they were condemned for what they did not do. They did not love their neighbor as themselves. They only loved themselves.

Notice also that the righteous were surprised by Christ's approbation that they had fed Him when He was hungry, gave Him drink when He was thirsty, visited Him when He was sick or in prison. They were surprised by this praise because they did what was natural to those who truly love God: they helped their brothers in their physical and spiritual need. As St. James says, much to chagrin of some of our Protestant brothers, "faith without works is dead". We can not claim to love God if we do not love our brothers. And if there were ever confirmation of St. James' words this is it.

Notice also that this is the Final Judgement. We live our entire lives in preparation for this awesome and dreadful day. Are we sheep or are we goats? The very actions that we make every day free or condemn us.

How do we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned? Do we quit our jobs and go and tend to these things to the exclusion of all other things?

Does Christ ask us to sell all that we have to give to the poor? No. We do whatever we can, whenever we can. For example, we give money and/or food to food banks. We work in the food banks to sort and distribute the food to those in need. We give clothes to Boys and Girls Country. We visit the sick in hospital.

We share the Gospel of Christ to who ever asks us about God. We pray for the sons of Norwegian Salvation Army volunteers when they ask us to do so. It is the little things that mean so much to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to God himself. These little things don't cost us much but the reward is immense -- heaven. We can not buy our way there, but by our faith and our works we will surely be judged to be among the righteous. §

A Lenten Retreat at St. Laurence

Canon City, Colorado

Fr. Lester Michael Bundy
will offer a Retreat on the theme

"Voices from the Crowd on the Via Dolorosa, The Way of the Cross."

St. Laurence campus is a mountain valley ten miles West of Canon City on Hiway 50, then North eleven miles on Hiway 9 and then West on County Road 21. Call 303-722-0707 or go to saintlaurenceosb.org for directions.

Friday evening, March 30

5:00 PM to 7:00 PM Lenten Soup Buffet

7:30 First presentation

Silent meditation

10:00 compline

Saturday, March 31

7:30 Mass

8:30 Breakfast

9:30 Matins

10:00 Reflection

Break

10:30 Second Presentation

11:30 Silent reflection

Lenten Lunch

1:00 PM Third presentation

1:15 reflection

3:00 PM conclusion OR

Retreat continues with

Snacks

4:30 PM Fourth presentation

Silent reflection

6:30 PM Vespers

7:15 Supper

8:30 PM Fifth presentation

Silence

10:00 PM Compline

Confessions as arranged

Sunday, April 1

Mass

Breakfast

Matins

Silence

Sixth presentation

reflection, Lunch, departure

-\$ 49 per person through Sunday, \$39 Saturday, free to staff-

OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST. THE CHURCH AS THE NEW TEMPLE. By Margaret Barker ©

January 2012

th
29 Annual Father Alexander Schmemmann Memorial Lecture St.

Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Yonkers, New York

Publically delivered on January 29, 2012

The following is a brief selection from the Lecture. Go to : www.svots.edu for the whole text.

THE WRITER OF HEBREWS described Jesus as a great high priest, and assumed, in his exposition, that the temple — its worship and its furnishings — had foreshadowed the work of Jesus, and was therefore the best framework within which to describe the person and work of our LORD. First, let us look at the temple itself. It is important to distinguish between the first temple, built by Solomon and destroyed by the Babylonians in 597 BCE, and the temple that was rebuilt about 70 years later when the exiles returned from Babylon. The restored temple was much simpler than the original, and the memory persisted that the second temple had been less glorious than the first. There were many reasons for this, not least that Jerusalem was no longer the capital city of an independent state, and so had to operate within the constraints of its overlords.

For our purposes, the most important differences between the first and second temples were the items that were *not restored*. The furnishings of the temple symbolised its teachings, and the missing items were a sign that certain teachings and rituals were missing from the second temple. People said the missing items would all be restored in the time of the Messiah.

One of the missing items was the anointing oil, and so there was no anointed Messiah figure in the second temple. There was no anointed high priest, and, of course, there were no more anointed kings. It was a very different temple, and people knew it was incomplete because the oil was missing.

In the first temple there had been priest-kings who were anointed and then known as 'Melchizedek' priests. In Genesis, we read how Abraham met Melchizedek, the priest-king of Jerusalem who offered him bread and wine; and in Psalm 110 [109] the king in Jerusalem is said to be an eternal priest like Melchizedek. In the second temple it seems there were no more Melchizedek priests. Among the Dead Sea scrolls a document was found that looked forward to the return of Melchizedek. Unfortunately, this document is badly damaged, but enough has survived to show that Melchizedek was expected to return at a particular time. A new Melchizedek

priest would appear, to fulfil various prophecies and redeem his people.

Melchizedek is a key figure in our exploration. The word means 'Righteous King', or 'King of Righteousness', but was probably a title rather than a name. Most often it was written as two words, Melchi-Zedek — 'King of Righteousness' — and it was a title of the ancient priest-kings in Jerusalem. 'Righteousness' was a temple-term that described bringing the whole of creation and human society back to its God-given state of peace, *shalom*. The writer of Hebrews called Melchizedek the King of righteousness, the king of peace. It is likely that all the ancient priest-kings in Jerusalem had been Melchizedek priests, whose role was to uphold righteousness.

From the Dead Sea scrolls Melchizedek text, we can see there are several places where the New Testament presents Jesus as the long-expected Melchizedek. Hebrews says he was Melchizedek, and contrasted his priesthood with the other temple priesthood, the family of Aaron, as we shall see. Jesus began his public ministry at exactly the time Melchizedek was expected to return, and when he spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth, he chose to read Isaiah 61, one of the Melchizedek prophecies. Jesus said it was being fulfilled. He was Melchizedek, the great high priest.

But Melchizedek had been the royal high priest in the original temple, not the restored temple that was so diminished in its furnishings and its teachings. The actual temple in the time of Jesus was this diminished temple, and yet people still remembered what the temple had been and what it should be. *This means 'what its teachings should be'*. One of the most remarkable aspects of Christian origins is that the early Church knew these teachings and developed them into what we now call Christianity. Jesus had fulfilled the prophecies, the true temple was being restored, and they called him Melchizedek.

Scholars sometimes wonder how Christianity developed so quickly into such a sophisticated theological system, especially as the first disciples are often portrayed as uneducated fishermen from Galilee. The answer to that question is very clear in the New Testament, if it is read with eyes accustomed to the world of the original temple. When St. Peter wrote to the scattered Jewish communities in Asia Minor who had become Christians, he said: 'Like living stones, be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.' The Christian community was the temple of the Messiah, the original temple restored, and it was a living temple.

The fact that we call Jesus the Messiah, the Christ, which means the Anointed One, shows that Christians live and think in a world where the lost anointing oil and everything it stood for has been restored. *The perfumed*

anointing oil was fundamental to the original temple world. Tradition remembered that it represented oil from the tree of life, and the tree of life was the ancient symbol of the Holy Wisdom. One of the wise teachers of Israel had said: 'Wisdom is a tree of life for those who hold on to her.'

The oil from the tree of life opened one's spiritual eyes. When the high priest was anointed, the oil was put on his eyelids. It changed the way everything was seen. In fact, the oil transformed and heightened all the senses. The anointed ones saw and heard differently, and so they thought differently. The anointed mind was transformed, and this became the characteristic temple world view. Isaiah said the anointed one received the Spirit of the LORD, the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the LORD. When the priests of the original temple abandoned Wisdom, Isaiah said their punishment would be to see and not see, to hear and not hear, and so they would no longer understand. These events were remembered as the loss of the holy oil, and this was encoded in the story of the Garden of Eden.

When Adam was set in the Garden of Eden, he was permitted to eat from every tree except one, which means that the fruit of the tree of life was intended to nourish him. But he was persuaded to eat from the forbidden tree, and then found he no longer had access to the tree of life. He had lost contact with Wisdom and her anointing oil and everything they represented. The story told in the Hebrew Scriptures reflects the situation in the second temple, when the scribes were collecting and preserving whatever had survived the destruction of the original temple.

As they retold the ancient stories, the scribes were reflecting on their own situation. Why had everything gone so wrong? How had they lost their beautiful temple, which they remembered as the Garden of Eden? It was, they said, because Adam had rejected Wisdom and so lost everything that her oil conferred. We do not know for certain what they meant by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, except that the LORD had forbidden it, and once its fruit had been tasted, Adam cut himself off from the source of Wisdom.

In the Church all this was restored. The name 'Christians', first used in Antioch meant more than just 'followers of the Christ, the anointed one.' Since Christians were also anointed at their baptism, the name means something like 'little anointed ones', and so we are all little Melchizedeks, little royal high priests. This is what St. Peter said to those Christians in Asia Minor: 'You are a royal priesthood.'

When the risen LORD spoke in a vision to St. John, he promised that the faithful would once again eat from the tree of life, that they would have the right to the tree

of life. The Christians were the restored royal priesthood. Their home was true temple restored, and so they returned to the Garden of Eden which was the Church.

There is a lovely story in a 3rd century AD Syriac text which tells how Adam took three things with him when he left Eden: gold, frankincense and myrrh, which were the symbols of the original temple. These were buried with him in a cave when he died, and when the magi came seeking the infant Jesus, they took those same treasures from the cave to offer to the new Adam. Symbolism from the original temple runs all through early Christian texts: the New Testament and many other stories...

The writer of Hebrews, who described Jesus as a great high priest explained this too. He said that the temple — furnishings and rituals — had foreshadowed what was to come. He emphasised that Jesus fulfilled what the day of atonement had foreshadowed: 'taking not the blood of goats and calves, but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.' Therefore Jesus was the mediator of a new covenant.

When Constantine had a great church built at the site of Jesus' tomb, it was a conscious replacement for the temple. The proportions [not the actual design] of the new church were those of the temple and it was consecrated in 335 CE on the date when Solomon consecrated the original temple. Eusebius said the holy of holies was the cave tomb.

Now there was no place for a tomb in temple symbolism. The holy of holies had been the place of the ark and the throne with its flanking cherubim and seraphim, the place whence living water flowed. It was the golden place of divine light, the place where the human entered and was resurrected as the divine Son.

Not long after this great church had been built to mark the site of the resurrection, the symbolism of the tomb as the holy of holies was used in the divine liturgy. It may have been used before that — I do not know of any evidence — but Constantine's new church could have been the inspiration. The tomb of Christ was the holy of holies in the new temple, the life-giving place, fairer than Paradise, more splendid than any king's throne room, the fountain of new life. The Church was beyond any doubt the new temple. It was proclaimed as such from the beginning, and Christian theology developed from temple theology. Christians are the anointed ones of the restored temple, and our covenant is the eternal covenant entrusted to the ancient temple priesthood, renewed by our great High Priest. §

Review of Margaret Barker's Lecture "Our Great High Priest. The Church as the new Temple" at St. Vladimir's Seminary

by SubDn James Tochihara

FIRST OF ALL, let me say that I consider the work of Margaret Barker to be hugely significant. I occasionally disagree with her choice of words or interpretation, but the substance of her work is precisely what the Orthodox Church needs to survive in the modern world. I know that many in the Orthodox Church speak about the need to have a new Ecumenical Council. Being somewhat familiar with the history and repercussions of the Second Vatican Council in the Roman Church, I have my reservations when it comes to calling grand Ecumenical Councils. On the other hand, most of the problem with the Second Vatican Council was bad theology based on bad scholarship, especially scriptural and liturgical theology. If Prof. Barker had been present at the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Church could have turned into something very close to the Western Orthodox Rite. Perhaps it's better that she wasn't there—I still have a problem with the Roman doctrine and culture of the papacy. It might be asking for too much to have Prof. Barker attend an Ecumenical Council (I believe she remains a Methodist), but every father attending any such hypothetical future council had better be familiar with the content of her work.

Unlike the trendy and hip scholars of the last few generations, Prof. Barker has a much clearer vision of what the Christian religion is all about, and this lecture at St. Vladimir's Seminary is basically an abbreviated survey of her major themes. She gets past the idiotic ideas of the "Jewish Jesus" that seem hell-bent on turning Jesus into a modern Jew (attending a synagogue near you!). Judaism in the time of Jesus was radically different from Judaism today, as any mainstream rabbi or Jewish scholar would admit—which is not to claim that modern Judaism doesn't have authentic roots, it's just that ancient Judaism was quite a different animal, so to speak. As Prof. Barker says, the particular Judaism of Jesus would look a lot like... the Orthodox Church, Eastern or Western Rite. The Eucharist is *NOT* based on the typical Passover meal, as if that weren't patently obvious. The Eucharist has roots in priestly Temple rituals that celebrated a heavenly meal in the presence of God, whereby holiness is imparted to the participants. (Hmm, that sounds familiar. I think we've been teaching that for 2,000 years or so.)

If we study in this direction, then we can share Prof. Barker's clearer vision—and hers is not an unprecedented vision. Much of her supporting arguments are very old

liturgical wisdom that she has the grace to resurrect (in a scholarly way) for our edification. We also gain a clearer vision of what is not central or essential to Christianity. Eucharistic worship is essential and authentically Jewish and scriptural, despite the ravings of Baptists, Quakers and Evangelicals. Perhaps I should add that eucharistic worship *IS* scriptural, despite the ravings of pietistic Orthodox or Catholics. Orthodox Christians must see the scriptures as more than "proving" the Eucharist with proof texts from the Gospel of John or elsewhere, as if the scriptures existed only to add extra weight to the pronouncement of some patriarch or council or synod. The scriptures, Old and New, guide us through the eucharistic experience, as well as fleshing out (pun intended) our understanding of that Christ who is the Great High Priest of our Eucharist. We must experience the Eucharist primarily through a scriptural spirituality, not primarily through the pious pronouncements of a pope, or through the pious observations of a saint (although these have their value and place).

To be honest, there are a few items in this lecture (which also appear in her books) that always annoy me a little. For instance, she often says that the Israelites "worshipped" Solomon as the LORD on the occasion of his enthronement and anointing. Perhaps I can forgive her this overstatement, as she was not raised in the Orthodox Church and may not appreciate the intensity and depth of Orthodox teaching on the Holy Icons. I think it safer and more accurate to say that the Israelites worshipped the presence of the LORD in the icon of Solomon—which is still a provocative statement. I think there were many icons, so to speak, in the ancient Jewish religion. The Tabernacle in the desert, and Solomon's Temple are two examples of this. Mount Sinai and Mount Zion are two more. The Davidic kings and the high priests are yet two more kinds of icons. King Solomon in his youth and righteousness, especially when acting in a priestly role, would have been one of the best icons of the LORD—perhaps the best since Moses coming out of the Tabernacle with his face shining and his lips proclaiming the words of God. The imperfect icon of the anointed king or judge becomes the prophetic approximation of the perfect icon that is Jesus, the Incarnate image of the invisible God—something that could not have been fully understood until the life and teachings of the Christ. And something that cannot be fully understood without the teachings of the Orthodox Church on icons. (That's right: the Holy Icons elevate and complete a Christian's understanding of Christ, worship, and the scriptures, Old as much as New.)

I must comment on Prof. Barker's one glaring omission, namely the avoidance of Mary, the Mother of God. Again, this might come from Prof. Barker's

Methodist background, where the Mother of Jesus doesn't have much significance, or it may come from Prof. Barker's specialization in Old Testament studies. On the other hand, I think it might actually be advantageous that she avoids Mary. She doesn't allow herself the temptation of equating Wisdom and Mary, which generally ends all exploration of the figure of Wisdom. By pursuing the figure of Wisdom in the Old Testament and other writings, Prof. Barker can give us a new understanding of Mary that never falls back on worn out formulations. Of course, I'm not arguing against the doctrinal formulations of the Great Councils, but against the sloganeering of lazy thought that defeats the greater appreciation and integration of the content of the Christian faith, such as the Mother of God, the Eucharist, Chrismation, the priesthood, etc.

Even with these quibbles, significant or not, I recommend her writings: mainly because she gets us back on track as Christians. Much of what she says is not new, only forgotten or dismissed as "mysticism," "typology," or "poetry," and most of it was well known in ages past. The newest information in her writings comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and these documents are amazing witnesses to some things only hinted at in other ancient writings. By synthesizing newly discovered sources with an ancient and disfavored point-of-view, Prof. Barker turns Christian inquiry back to a path that is genuinely *religious* (in the best and only true sense of the term). It's senseless to search the scriptures for prophecies that predict the state of the world economy or the menace of Iran. It is much better to search the scriptures for an understanding of heaven, the presence of the Almighty and All-holy God, and the worship of our God in spirit and in truth. Plus, Margaret Barker is to be applauded for emphasizing the sacrifice of the Cross, supporting this doctrine with the Old Testament.

During the lecture, Prof. Barker tips her hand that she strongly advocates environmental responsibility. Anyone who follows her already knows this, and I enthusiastically endorse this position—which brings me to what I believe to be the true power of her research. If the earth is going to remain vibrant and beautiful into the future, it will be because we make it so. The Christian promise continues to unfold, bit by bit, and humanity continues to grow in power and capability. Christ's sacrifice has liberated us from the superstitions of the past, and we have advanced to such a degree that we now hold the fate of the world in our hands. We must choose life. And it shouldn't end there. Even as many misguided Christians return superstitiously to the now-superseded Mosaic Law, Orthodox Christians must recognize that we have returned all the way to the higher covenant of Eden and Paradise, and have gone even higher than that. We have the earth-shattering worship of

God, as engineered and designed by Jesus of Nazareth, the Theanthropos. The rest of our lives and conduct must be based on love and authentic science, which are the Eternal Laws of God. It is not seemly for the royal priesthood of Christ to cower in superstition and fear. We are the stewards and representatives of a Mighty God, and he wants us to exercise his power as Lord and Giver of Life.

Please excuse the following proposition. I am not thinking of any politician, but I want to use the outlandishness of this proposition to make a point. After we make the earth the most beautiful, the most diverse, and the most life-filled planet we can, we must colonize Mars and every other possible planet. There, I said it. Prof. Barker's stirring and cosmic descriptions of the Christian liturgy always inspire me. We must understand the greatness of our calling as priest-kings in the Body of Christ. We are the stewards of God and his mysteries—WE are God's power in this world. Christians should be free and fearless and ready to do the impossible, which includes martyrdom but shouldn't be limited to that. Thanks to Christ, we have gotten this far, but Christians must always look forward, and never look back. Our God is a loving and powerful God. We should build a great temple on Mars, with a holy of holies where bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. We should establish monasteries at the far reaches of the galaxy, and proclaim the love and mercy, the light and resurrection of our Messiah. This would be a fitting show of gratitude for the gift of our chrismation into the royal priesthood of Christ. (Unless, someone has an even bigger and more outlandish dream...?)

Of course, Jesus could come back tomorrow—and what would we tell him? "O Lord, we took your teachings and the philosophical formulations of the Great Councils, and all the verses of scripture, and all the laws of morality, and we buried them deep in our selves and kept them there, pristine and untouched by the world, because we knew that you are a harsh master." Or... "O Lord, we took your teachings and scriptures, and all your truth, and we let them light our hearts on fire when we received you in the Eucharist, and we went out wanting to conquer the universe with your love and mercy." We may never make it to the other end of the galaxy, we may never cure cancer or hunger or pollution, but which should be our attitude? What will Christ see when it is our turn to step before his dread Judgment Seat? I don't agree with everything that Prof. Barker writes, but, as I said before, she is truly religious and on the right track, transcending moralism and legalism. Her line of inquiry helps me experience more of the Fire of the Holy Ghost in the Eucharist, and for this I am grateful. §

EXAMINATION OF THE ISSUE OF YOUNG ADULTS LEAVING THE CHURCH

Subdeacon Jason Falcone

Scope

It has been commonly stated that young people are the future. Due to the temporality of human life, this inevitably holds true for all human institutions; certainly the Church, despite her eternal character, is not exempt from this reality. In a hundred years, no matter what zeal we may now possess, none of us will be present to worship or serve in our churches; this will fall to our children's children. The issue of keeping Orthodox youth and young adults connected to the Church is of the preeminent importance in the Church today.

Extent of the Issue

According to a study by the Barna Group, "nearly three out of every five young Christians (59%) disconnect either permanently or for an extended period of time from church life after age 15."¹ Their absence from Church life is not temporary; the Barna Group also states that "church attendance bottoms out during the late twenties,"² with weekly attendance at only 22%. Overall, the study cites a startling drop in weekly church attendance of 58% between the ages of 18 and 29.³ A different article on the Orthodox Christian Fellowship website by Fr. Kevin Scherer cites a separate Barna Group study which found that up to 60% of those who leave for college can be expected never to return to church.⁴ Although these statistics do not pertain specifically to Orthodox young adults, the relevance of the issue for our Church can be seen by simply visiting almost any Orthodox parish. Often there are frequently few or no young people present at the Divine Services. In fact, the issue may possibly be on a greater scale for many Orthodox Churches than for Christian churches overall.

The fact that young people in particular are prone to negligence in attending church is particularly distressing due to the fact that important life decisions are made during this time. In particular, a person's decisions regarding relationships and family made during this time can have lifelong implications. Rev. Fr. Charles Joanides, in his article on the Greek Archdiocese website entitled *Key Challenges Intermarried Couples Encounter*, says that between 66% and 80% of Greek Orthodox young people in America are intermarrying with non-Orthodox.⁵ This trend can have the most devastating impact not only on the spiritual life of the intermarried individual, but on the spiritual development of the children, and in turn on their likelihood to remain in the Orthodox Church.

1 Barna Group, *Six Reasons Young Christian Leave the Church* <www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Scherer, Fr. Kevin, *Facing Up to the Reality of Youth Leaving the Church* <www.ocf.net/wikis/resources/facing-up-to-the-reality-of-youth-leaving-the-church-a-pastoral-response.aspx>

5 Joanides, Rev. Fr. Charles *Key Challenges Intermarried Couples Encounter: A Brief Description* <www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/outreach/interfaith/int-keychallenges>

Causes

The Barna Group found that a variety of reasons were at stake for young people leaving church. However, they identified six macro-themes: (1) churches seem "overprotective" in regard to "ideas" and "popular culture", (2) a "shallow" experience of Christianity, (3) a perceived "antagonistic" stance toward science on the part of churches, (4) church approaches to sexuality seem "simplistic, judgmental", (5) issues with the "exclusive nature of Christianity", and (6) churches' responses to those with doubts regarding faith.⁶ Several of these issues, such as the churches' stance toward science, are more relevant for young people in evangelical Protestant churches. However, the second, fourth, and fifth issues (depth of faith experience, approaches to sexuality, and exclusivity of Christianity) are perhaps, in my personal opinion, most relevant for young people in the Orthodox Church.

A shallow experience of the Faith. According to the Barna Group study, approximately between twenty and thirty percent of young people described their experience in churches as irrelevant, boring, lacking Scriptural teaching, or even lacking God.⁷ The Orthodox Church is doubtless not immune to these sort of perceptions. Orthodox services may seem irrelevant if the services are predominantly in a language which is not understood. They may seem boring if they are performed poorly or without zeal. The Scriptural readings may not be understood if they are not explained adequately in the homily. Without an adequate understanding of faith and the spiritual life, God may seem absent, not because He is, but because the young person may be hindered in receiving what he does not understand. However, the issue may be even deeper: we cannot give what we do not have. When a parish spends countless days and hours focused on cultural events and fund raising, while only holding one liturgical service a week, one can hardly be surprised that young people find this experience of the faith shallow at best.

Approaches to Sexuality. According to the Barna Group, living as a Christian in an openly sexual society creates an issue for young people, especially since marriage is often not entered until one's late twenties.⁸ This is a particularly salient issue for all young people today, regardless of religion. Approaching it in a simplistic, condemning manner, or simply ignoring it, can only make the Church seem less relevant for a young person.

Exclusivity of Christianity. Given the strong tide of relativism in modern thought, the exclusive claims of Christianity, and in particular of the Orthodox Church, may leave young people feeling that their faith is outdated. Without proper teaching, they may be unable to give adequate answers about their faith if questioned. Furthermore, young people may be unwilling to commit to the Church's claims of exclusivity vis-à-vis the outside world when they do not even feel a strong

6 Barna Group, *Six Reasons Young Christian Leave the Church* <www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

sense of community and belonging in their own Church.

Responses

All of the themes examined above may be summed up by saying that the Church often appears to young people as disconnected from the actual experience of modern life. An effective response to this will necessarily mandate an integrated, multi-faceted approach. It will require Church leaders to *recognize the cultural issues* facing the young people, and attempt to deal with them in an honest way.

It is impossible to understand fully, much less address, the issues young people face without personal involvement in their lives. This is, in my personal opinion, one of the single most important elements for an effective approach to these issues: *personal relationships*. Without personal relationships between clergy/leaders in the Church and young people, all other solutions will seem dry, impersonal, and ineffective. Personal relationships must be integrated into any effective approach. This is the approach used by Christ himself, our supreme Example. When he called his disciples, he did not wait for them to come to him; he went to them. Christ went and personally invited Matthew to follow him (he did not feel that, as Incarnate God, he had more important matters to which he must attend).

A second element which is needed for an effective approach is *an honest, relevant religious education program, which integrates timeless faith with current issues*. This need not be a formal catechism; it could take the form of a coffee fellowship night and informal book study. In fact, such an approach would allow more opportunity to emphasize the building of the very personal relationships mentioned previously. A more relaxed environment, such as a coffee shop, brings the Gospel to the young people's world and encourages them to ask honest questions. Such a teaching program, needless to say, requires leaders to be willing to sit and speak honestly about difficult issues. By displaying the courage required to do this, the leaders would show that the answers found in the Gospel are strong enough to stand up to real life issues outside of a book or a homily.

Another element required in an effective approach is *a non-judgmental, loving approach to issues in the personal lives of young people*. If young people do not feel that they can honestly speak about issues in their lives without being judged by the Church leadership then any opportunity to minister to them will be lost. It is a fundamental prerequisite for honest dialogue, without which no ministry can take place.

Yet another issue is *outreach*. By this I do not mean outreach to young people, but involving young people. By providing young people an opportunity to help others, such as through missions trips or soup kitchens, we offer them the opportunity to live the Great Commission, and thereby transcend themselves and transform their own lives.⁹

The last and most important element needed is *a vibrant*

⁹ According to Barna Group, more teenagers reported that they wanted to serve the poor than to be famous (<<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/366-teenagers-want-successful-careers-and-global-travel-expect-to-delay-marriage-a-parenting-?q=college+students>>). The desire to serve is often present; however what may be needed is an inspiring and accessible opportunity.

spiritual life, expressed in frequent liturgical services. As I stated previously, one cannot give what one does not possess. Young people are often uniquely honest in their approach to life, and they will be equally honest about the spirituality, or lack thereof, in our parishes. If we lament that young people do not receive our message, we must first reflect on what message we are giving. The message of institutional stability, moralistic legalism, and ethnocentricity are far from the message of Christ. All those in leadership positions in the Church must themselves possess a vibrant spiritual life, and work to guide others toward the riches of such a life. An essential element of this is frequent liturgical services in the parish. The more vibrant the spiritual life that we offer, the more apt young people are to see the priceless Treasure offered in the Church.

In summary, the trend of young people leaving Christian churches is endemic, and is an issue which threatens the future vibrancy of the Orthodox Church. This trend can only be stemmed through an approach integrating dynamic spiritual life, nonjudgmental honesty, personal relationships, relevant education, and outreach. §

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