



THE PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF ST THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

by Father Alexander Garklavs

The remarkable bishop St. Theophan (January 10) was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988. Born into a priest's family in 1815 as George Govorov, he had the customary religious education, was ordained and, taking the name Theophan, became a monk in 1841. He taught at various Russian seminaries and was sent abroad to both Constantinople and Jerusalem. There he perfected his Greek and become acquainted with the treasures of Orthodox spirituality, such as the writings of the *Philokalia*, which he later translated into Russian. Returning to Russia he was Rector of the St. Petersburg Seminary then made a bishop and served in the cities of Tambov and Vladimir. In 1866 he retired to the small Vishensk Monastery. Until his death in 1894, he spent twenty-eight years in seclusion, hence the descriptive name "Recluse." Most of his well-known writings come from that period of time. In addition to his work on the *Philokalia*, he translated *Unseen Warfare*, authored several books on the spiritual life and wrote hundreds of letters dealing with spiritual themes, many of which have been excerpted in the useful book *The Art of Prayer*.

St. Theophan also wrote a series of lengthy commentaries on all of St. Paul's Epistles. He analyzes the epistles in the traditional verse by verse manner. Frequently he quotes classic scriptural exegetes such as St. John Chrysostom and Theophylact of Ochrid, adding little to their explanations. However, at times St. Theophan engages in personal theological reflection and here his

commentaries are especially valuable. In the substantive commentary on the Pastoral Epistles and also in his explanation of *Ephesians* St. Theophan develops a number of important pastoral insights. His devotion to the Pauline texts, his commitment to Patristic tradition and his mature spirituality make his contributions to pastoral theology very valuable.

According to St. Theophan, the Christian priesthood is directly linked to the Apostles of Christ. The unique ministry of Jesus Christ's chosen Apostles existed only once and came to an end, but the Apostolic legacy is now entrusted to priests. The Apostles "endowed the Church with all of the truth that was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit, through them the Church received the sacraments for the spiritual refreshment of the faithful, they established the priesthood, and the priests are the Apostles' direct heirs whose duty is to guard the Apostolic legacy." By priesthood we are to understand both bishops and priests, who "share an indivisible priesthood," and who are differentiated by function, quantitatively rather than qualitatively. The priests are "the bishops' eyes, hands and feet," both sharing the same organic and essential principles. In general, St. Theophan does not distinguish between bishop and priest, and when referring to the "priesthood" and to "pastoral life" he does not separate one from the other or, for that matter, black from white clergy.

Why does St. Paul claim (1 Tm. 3.1) that whoever aspires to pastoral ministry seeks a "noble task?" Because, St. Theophan responds, the



priesthood is the most noble of all human endeavors, inasmuch as pastors seek "to bring the truth to people, to help purify their reasoning, to teach correct moral behavior, to direct to spiritual achievement, to rebuke false teachings, to bring consolation to the sorrowful, to provide assistance for the needy; when one wishes to do this, he is indeed aspiring to a noble task, he desires neither glory nor fame, but to serve others, usually at the expense of his own comfort." As he undertakes to accomplish these things, the Christian priest's ministry is characterized by the most noble of virtues: love. Specifically "love that is neither self-centered or false." What is most pure and beautiful in human relations and activity is always characterized by holy love. The priest's life and work are necessarily also characterized by it. St. Theophan warns pastors about the dangers of "false love," which is a facade of love, but is only a means of self-gratification and ultimately "has no value or importance." Priests must always strive for that love that is

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conditioned by "sincere faith in God and in the dogmatic teachings of the Church," and is "complimentary with a continuous remembrance of the presence of Jesus Christ in one's life." Only this type of sublime love will serve the pastor in "inspiring, enlightening, spiritually enlarging and strengthening his flock."

In the exegesis of *Ephesians 4.11-13* St. Theophan writes about the fundamental goals of pastoral work. He sees three basic aspects: 1) building up the body of Christ, 2) leading the faithful to spiritual perfection and 3) fulfilling the responsibility of service.

In *building up the body of Christ*, pastors pursue the evangelical imperative of "making disciples of all nations" and bringing all "to the unity of faith." St. Theophan stresses the importance of this part of pastoral work, without which the body of Christ, the Church, would be destitute. All facets of evangelization are to be employed, "educating the children born to Christian families, proselytizing to non-believers in the region," which may require special training for preachers to be effective in regional catechization. This is an on-going, never-ending effort. The evangelical imperative is uncon-

ditional, *all nations, all people* are to be brought to the "unity of faith." Until this is accomplished, mission and evangelization cannot cease. In other words, St. Theophan maintains that the need for this pastoral work will never disappear.

Once they are part of the fold, the faithful must be brought to *spiritual perfection*. This has both external and inner dimensions. Externally, through wise administration, order and decorum have to be preserved, so that Christians behave and "act as is proper for them." However, the inner life requires "care for the salvation of souls" and is a much more complicated matter. Here the pastor must direct his attention to the conditions of the flock's "hearts and minds, their thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life's situations." People's external behavior always reflects their inner state so that, by addressing the latter, the priest will necessarily affect the former. Spiritual perfection is a person's awakened sense of spirituality, which is the knowledge of spiritual truths. The acquisition and maintenance of spirituality is identical for both the pastor and his flock, and this makes the matter doubly important for the

priest: his own spirituality is intertwined with that of the people whose souls are entrusted to him. Together with his faithful, the priest constantly struggles to keep his "heart and mind in humility, love, meekness, self-control, devoted to peace, selflessness, and a general love for all spiritual truths." Like evangelization, this task is on-going and never-ending. Yet "phases" of perfection are possible, and this is what it means to become "mature" to the "measure of the fullness of Christ." There can be no other perfection than to be "filled with Christ." In achieving this in any significant measure one becomes aware of the need to share that perfection with others. In the diligent and serious pursuit of spiritual truths, the priest becomes a qualified and effective pastor, leading his flock to perfection and salvation of their souls.

Finally, there is the fulfillment of *the responsibility of service*, which is the "heart of pastoral work." By "service" St. Theophan has in mind everything "that is done in the Church; all rituals, prayers, preaching and educational efforts," including "being the celebrant of the sanctifying sacraments, teaching and inspiring people to have the proper spirit of

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PASTORS TO PASTORS

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Dear Diary

Sunday pm:

Random thoughts on today's Liturgy....

Joe forgot to unlock the front door again... early confesseees were doin' the Paschal knock...

Steve read the Hours ... lost count of LHM ... (think he did 75, started late)...

Instituted liturgical dance... charcoal leaped out of censer... wife said it looked like I was doin' the hokey-pokey...

Noticed Mrs P. returned... and told visitors they were in her spot...

Pam brought all four brats kids today ... Little Andy crawled under three pews and poked his head up Mildred's dress... I'm sure to get a call tomorrow...

Looked like Barb was hitting Stan with the Lit book ... bee attack!

Why did we adopt congregational singing!!!! Tropar sounded like tone 15...

St Paul would be glad to know his letter to the Kalations survived...

Why do I bother writing sermons?...

Lew did his three-fold Anaphora sneeze... folks are beginning to expect it and then Andy tries to imitate him... wish he'd see an allergist already...

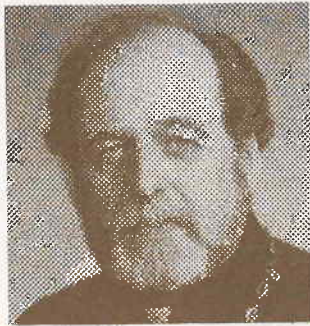
What happened to the prosphora?... altar boys looked like squirrels storing up for the Winter... bad case of big-checks...

Tim forgot my paycheck.... again... wife is NOT happy...

Coffee Hour's outa control ... Helen brought V8 for the kids... of course, Andy left a trail... then locked the bathroom door... cream cheese on knob...

Mildred just called ... couldn't even wait til Monday!

Gotta go see if Joe locked the front door...



"Thoughts and Recollections"

"Pastors to Pastors" looks to another of the "elders" of the Church for guidance and inspiration. We are pleased herein to share our interview with

Fr Arthur Liolin

Dean, St George Cathedral, Boston / Chancellor, OCA Albanian Archdiocese

Q. Would you describe the influences and events that led you to become an Orthodox priest?

A. In hindsight, a priestly vocation was implicit in our family upbringing. We sang hymns while driving in the car to church. In a word, our parents seemed to know where we were headed, even if the world did not know its way, or so it seemed. Each of us had a role: choir director, board member, altar boy, organist. More important, our parents did not shield us from controversial aspects of parish life, but included us in their opinion and deliberation. They felt we ought to know all sides of a community's governance: the sacred and the profane; and there was no dishonor in such knowledge. Inevitable church conflicts were not taken as reasons to depart, but authentic challenges to be overcome and experiences to be weathered: "like Christ" they would say. For our parents, disillusionment, self-justification or cynicism were not acceptable avenues of retreat or dealing with issues. All other events and influences are peripheral to that essential core of conduct and belief.

There were of course other factors: love of liturgy; transcendental moments along the way; being Orthodox gave a sense of wholeness and health which filled the raptures of death and illness. For me, the priesthood became the first and last Renaissance calling, bridging most areas of human endeavor. Truly, I cannot conceive of another. And I've explored several over the years.

Q. In your youth you had aspirations to be a doctor. What are your thoughts about the advancements in modern medicine and how they affect pastoral ministry?

A. I find that many physicians are believers and many priests quite interested in medicine and the theoretical sciences. It's the nature of one's essential inquiry about life, I suppose. After all,

biology, geology, psychology all sprang from the classic quest implied by theology: to reveal the source of human origins, to discover truth, to know God. Even today, as a case in point, the ethical and moral tests, not to mention ontological questions posed by genome therapies present a forceful challenge needing to be addressed. And these issues need cogent responses from the Church. Computer consciousness and noetic existence on other planets will also require answers. Science and religion are companions, both directed to self-understanding and both form our vision of life. To know something about the sciences in no way contradicts spirituality. Some thoughts on these

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matters may be found in the writings of Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin (who saw the hand of God in evolution), Martin Buber (who envisioned an existential relation between the holy and the human), Fr. Georges Florovsky (who energized our theological mind and vocabulary) and Metropolitan John Zizoulas (who examines the empirical from an Orthodox awareness).

Q. You have been pastor of St. George Cathedral in Boston for some thirty years. What were the highlights of your pastoral life?

A. It has been a roller-coaster of possibility, anticipation and rejection. Being a pastor is holy frustration, both for myself and the good folks I have served. During the first ten years, I may have

resigned once a month, in my mind. My exceptional spouse provided the necessary stamina to stick it out. "Blossom where you are planted," is a favored expression of hers.

The Cathedral, like Boston, is both cosmopolitan and provincial; a paradox which has made it engaging to be at one place for so long. It has a singular ethnic history which has been interesting to watch unfold. The breadth given by the demographically diverse flock from which the parish draws, stretching people's limits, has been a constant challenge, but never boring. They are real people who respect the priest and give privacy to his home life. The new generation of lay leaders is exceptionally astute, supportive and caring. If they have a bone to pick with me, they will bring it up privately rather than employ the old methods of public rebuke. I suppose, though, that at first I had to go through that gauntlet. It is the way a parish tests the worth of their shepherd. It is emotionally gripping and hurts at the time but, when you persevere, it passes.

Personally, there is no question that entering then atheistic Albania in 1988 was a special moment. At that time I had this thought: "In Albania there is much thirst, but no fountain. Here we have many fountains, but no thirst." Today many are doing exemplary work in that corner of the Lord's Vineyard.

Q. Tell us about some of the noteworthy priests that you have met and known.

A. That is a tough call. I will omit the living, lest they be embarrassed, but there have been several exceptional pastors I have known. *Fr. Costaq Bella*: who would scoot to St. Vladimir's Seminary to audit courses even though he had no formal education, and would take us teens along with him. *Fr. Pandeli Checho*: a gentle soul and agnostic, who was converted after his ordination by chanting the texts!

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prayer by which our minds and hearts are kept in communion with God, and leading church gatherings so that all is done in an orderly and decent manner." Pastoral service is multi-dimensional and involves actions, words, and rituals, but here too the aim is to affect the people's inner life. While activity and "busy-work" can take up a good deal of the priest's time, and even be necessary and beneficial, they are never the end in themselves. The uniqueness, and difficulty, of the priest's work is that it is *not* the fulfillment of *responsibilities*, but the *responsibility of serving others*. Specifically, the priest serves the spiritual needs of the select group of people that he has been chosen to minister to. Treating every person "with fairness and love," the priest often is the sole witness of spiritual truths and God's eternal Kingdom. If we are to speak of responsibilities, then they have to be understood "as prophetic, modeled on Jesus Christ, fulfilling the commandment of loving all, and nurturing the presence of God in the hearts of the people." The pastor's "goals" are no less than those of Our Lord, Jesus Christ Himself during His earthly ministry, to lead others so that "all become pure, free of self-gratifying passions and come to complete rest in God, making themselves worthy temples of God," and in this way "God would be in all and all would be in God." □

The Priest of Christ

by Thomas Ken (1637-1711)

Give me the priest these graces shall possess;
Of an ambassador the just address,
A Father's tenderness, a Shepherd's care,
A Leader's courage, which the cross can bear,
A Ruler's arm, a Watchman's wakeful eye,
A Pilot's skill, the helm in storms to ply,
A Fisher's patience, and a Laborer's toil,
A Guide's dexterity to disembroil,
A Prophet's inspiration from above,
A Teacher's knowledge, and a Savior's love.
Give me a priest, a light upon a hill,
Whose rays his whole circumference can fill,
In God's own Word and Sacred Learning versed,
Deep in the study of the heart immersed,
Who in such souls can the disease descry,
And wisely fair restoratives apply.

.....
(Fr Liolin, continued)

Fr. Mihal Terova: whom we called "Fr. Robin Hood," since he played poker at a coffee house, always won, and gave his earnings to the poor! His home was open to dp's of any origin. He has a lyrical voice, but when serving with other priests, he would tone down his chant rather than show off. *Fr. Christ Ellis:* "Diamond Jim," who possessed a nobility in serving others. *Bishop Fan Noli:* a multi-faceted literary savant, statesman, scholar, poet, indefatigable author and visionary; still a legend and hero for his people; an isapostolos confessor in two languages and master of most. *Frs. Alexander Schmemmann*

and *John Meyendorff:* who always found time to counsel our mundane concerns, made the routine holy and the arcane accessible; men for all seasons.

All of these were totally honest with themselves, absorbed in the life of Christ, unafraid to be revolutionary and were not false in being humble or "holy," nor were they capable of feigning it. They knew instinctively that only God is holy. That is why they seemed so genuine. They were searching for something beyond, and somehow the blessing was conferred on them by the source of their search: Our Lord, Jesus Christ. To me, at least, it seemed that way. □

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