

ALEXANDER VERONIS

ORTHODOX CONCEPTS OF EVANGELISM AND MISSION

His name was Archimandrite Chrysostomos Papasarantopoulos; born in 1902 and buried in 1972. He was short and bald with a white beard, pleasant, but not striking in appearance. He had an intensity about him that caught one's attention. He had fire in his heart, fire that kindled with faith in Jesus Christ. After meeting him, one would not easily forget Fr. Papasarantopoulos. A priest for many years, situated in the comfortable city of Athens, Greece, it was not until he was in his middle fifties that he found the opportunity to receive a theological education. He obtained a degree from the University of Athens, School of Theology, and shortly thereafter felt the call of Christ to "go...and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

At the university Fr. Papasarantopoulos met African students from Uganda, where for some years a small Orthodox mission had existed. They represented the first native Orthodox Christians from Uganda to be formally educated in the Orthodox faith. One of these fellow students, Theodore Nankyamas, would later play a prominent role and become one of the first Orthodox bishops in East Africa. Another, Demetrios Mumbale, would become the first Orthodox physician and founder of an Orthodox medical clinic in Uganda. So it was to Uganda that Fr. Papasarantopoulos went in 1960 at the age of 58 to begin his missionary work. (No official missionary society existed in Greece at the time.) Like the Apostle Paul, Fr. Papasarantopoulos ventured forth in full confidence that the God who called him would also provide for his needs and support. He was not to be disappointed. So much did Fr. Papasarantopoulos operate on faith that when an aspiring missionary wrote him years later inquiring about the health conditions, the climate, the job description of a missionary, and a host of other questions about East Africa, he replied characteristically: "My brother, since you heard an inner voice, crush your doubts, close your ears to what others tell you. Make the sign of the cross and begin your journey. As for the rest, leave all in the hands of our heavenly Father..."¹

For the next twelve years, until his death in 1972, Fr. Papasarantopoulos carried on an amazingly productive ministry among the neophyte Orthodox missions of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania (Tanganika), and Zaire. Numerous obstacles confronted him: racism, language bar-

¹ Newsletter of the metropolis of Irinoupolis in East Africa, 12 November 1967.

riers, primitive living conditions, lack of funds, limitations imposed upon him by superiors, ill health, poor diet, etc. Not one to despair easily, Fr. Papasarantopoulos looked upon each obstacle as a challenge and managed "with God's help," as he was accustomed to saying.

Slowly his perseverance and pure faith began to reap a plentiful harvest. He learned Swahili and translated portions of the Scriptures and church services into the language of his listeners. In a whirlwind of activity, he traveled incessantly from village to village, preaching, teaching, baptizing, building small churches, establishing new parishes, and bringing the holy mysteries (sacraments) of the Orthodox Church to thousands of Africans. He kept up a vigorous correspondence with his friends in Europe and the United States and regularly published an informative 'Newsletter' of the metropolis of Irinoupolis in East Africa which he addressed to Orthodox Christians everywhere in the ecumene. He urged men and women to come to Africa to help labor in the plentiful harvest he found there. And those who could not come and be missionaries (ἱεραπόστολοι) he urged to become senders of missionaries (ἱεραποστολεῖς). "I beseech you," he wrote near the end of his life, "since I have been brought to the midst of the sea, pray and implore that our 'fishing for people' may not tarry to fill nets."² His zealous ministry attracted other missionaries to East Africa from Greece and America. One month before his death he wrote a letter from Zaire, a new area where he went to spend the final two years of his life: "I love the Africans and am fully convinced that the Lord has brought me here. I hope to use the few remaining days of my old age preaching and teaching here. The place I am now located in is a large city (Kanaga) of 50,000 people near the central part of the Congo (Zaire). The people are eager to learn about Orthodox Christianity. But I am old and alone and my capacities are now limited. I don't know how I'll manage, but the Lord Jesus will show me, as he always has in the past. Remember me in your prayers."³

The missionary work of Fr. Papasarantopoulos points to some traditional concepts of Orthodox evangelism and missions.

The Gospel

Fr. Papasarantopoulos' urgent concern to preach 'the evangelion,' the good news of Jesus Christ, to all humanity stresses a basic concept of Orthodox who see this as a primary mandate of the Lord. Orthodox believe that the Lord's gospel releases captives from sin and corruption, provides understanding to the spiritually blind, sets at liberty those who in any way are oppressed, brings spiritual renewal and new life from above, provides abundant living, sanctifies believers, and leads to deification

² Letter, 28 June 1971 to Alexander Veronis.

³ Letter, 5 November 1972 to Alexander Veronis.

and salvation (Lk 4:18; 2 Cor 5:17; Jn 3:3, 16, and 10:10; Eph 5:26; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Pet 1:4). They see the Gospel as God's truth which He wants humanity to hear and accept for all to live in His eternal kingdom of agape (love) (1 Tim 2:4; Jn 14:6). A famous Greek evangelist/missionary/teacher, Kosmas Aitolos (1713-1779), exemplifies the zeal of many Orthodox missionaries in preaching the Gospel when he says:

If it were possible for me to ascend to the sky and cry with a loud voice and preach to the whole world and say that our Christ is the Son and Logos of God and true God of true God, and the life of all, I would do so. But inasmuch as I cannot do that great thing, I do this small one, and walk from place to place and teach my brethren according to my power.⁴

Social Concerns

Orthodox understand the Gospel as a message to the total person, physically as well as spiritually. They see Christ's teaching about healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the widow and orphan, uplifting the disinherited, supporting the oppressed, fighting injustice, and making life in this world hospitable for all as part of the complete Gospel message. Well known in history are the Christian examples of luminous Church Fathers, preachers, and missionaries who combined social concerns with their preaching of the Gospel. Some examples are:

John Chrysostom (347-404), considered by some as the Church's greatest preacher, was born in wealth which he renounced early in life to take up an ascetic Christian life-style of simplicity, prayer, and philanthropy. Although he reached the highest office of the Church as patriarch of Constantinople, his unceasing railings against the rich and support of the poor eventually led him to martyrdom. His moral teachings and writings are still widely read and are an inspiration for philanthropy.

Basil the Great (329-378), the Cappadocian Church Father, brought the Gospel to many and founded monasteries, orphanages, and old age homes, becoming a champion of the world's dispossessed. His description of, and appeals on behalf of, the hungry sound like a contemporary appeal against world hunger:

Hunger is the most pitiable of all ills, the worst of miseries, the most fearful of deaths. The point of the sword brings death quickly; raging fire puts an end to life suddenly; the teeth of wild beasts put an end to the miseries of men much sooner. Hunger is a long, slow punishment, an endless martyrdom. It is like a creeping disease with

⁴ Constantine Cavarnos, *Modern Orthodox Saints, St. Cosmas Aitolos* (Belmont, 1971), p. 20.

death ever imminent, but always delayed. It drains the natural moistures of the body; it chills the body heat; it consumes the flesh and gradually exhausts the strength. The flesh, all colour gone, clings to the bone like spider webs. As the blood diminishes, the skin loses its lustre and turns black and dries up; and this poor livid body is of a mingled wan and sick colour. The knees no longer support the body; they are moved only when force is used on them. The voice grows reedy. Weak eyes lie useless in hollow sockets, like nuts in dried-up shells. The hollow stomach contracts, shapeless, shrunken, cleaving to the spine.

What kind of punishment do you think is deserved by a man who passes the hungry without giving them a sign? ⁵

Sergios of Radonezh (1314-1392) lived in extreme simplicity, thus identifying with the poor peasants of Russia. He conducted a vigorous monastic ministry of evangelism, missionary work, and social welfare among pagan tribes of the forest in the northern regions of Russia. He and his disciples founded fifty Christian communities which spread as far as the White Sea and the Arctic Circle. His life and ministry introduced two centuries of Russian spirituality (1350-1550) known as a golden age in Russian Orthodox history.⁶

Twice a year, on July 1 and November 1, the Orthodox Church commemorates the healing ministry of two third-century 'holy, unmercenary' physician brothers, Kosmas and Damian, whose reputations spread throughout Cilicia in Asia Minor during the third century. They were noted for their benevolent Christian ministry in caring for the sick in the name of Christ, whom they also preached. Both died as martyrs in 303, victims of the Diocletian persecutions.

Kosmas Aitolos, the eighteenth-century preacher quoted above, whom some consider the greatest missionary of modern Greece, is credited with founding two hundred elementary schools and ten high schools in eighteenth-century Greece because "the school," he believed, "opens churches and monasteries. It is at school that we learn what God is, what the angels are, what the demons, paradise, hell, virtue, vice, the soul, and the body are."⁷

Kosmas' achievements become more amazing when one considers the historical conditions of his time. Greece was undergoing a dark age in its Christian development. The Ottoman Turks, Muslims by faith, imposed numerous religious restrictions upon the areas of the Byzantine Empire which they conquered and controlled for almost four centuries, even though they permitted Orthodox Christians to exercise their faith within

⁵ Robert Payne, *The Holy Fire* (London, 1958), p. 149.

⁶ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Baltimore, 1963), p. 94.

⁷ Cavarnos, *St. Cosmas*, pp. 13, 17.

limitations. Kosmas, for example, constantly encountered red tape from local Turkish authorities in order to receive permission to preach and teach the Gospel. Even with permission, he was warned against converting Muslims and had to confine his evangelism to the Orthodox. At the age of sixty-six his life ended in martyrdom at the hands of the Turks.

The monastic community in Orthodox history contributed significantly to both the preaching of the Gospel and to showing social concern. In a revealing study on Orthodox social welfare and philanthropy during the Byzantine Empire's illustrious era, which lasted over eleven centuries, Constantelos remarks:

As a result of the monastic philanthropy of love and service to mankind, monasteries became centers of hospitality, almsgiving, and care for the sick, the pilgrims, and the wayfarers...Basil counseled the members of his monastic city to work not only to keep the body under subjection, but to provide their institutions with sufficient goods to feed those in want.... Monasteries were usually havens for travelers, strangers, and the poor.... Charities were to be performed with compassion and love as if being offered to Christ.⁸

A contemporary Orthodox monastic, Mother Maria of Paris, supports this tradition of the social gospel when she writes:

The bodies of our fellow human beings must be treated with more care than our own. Christian love teaches us to give our brethren not only spiritual gifts, but material gifts as well. Even our last shirt, our last piece of bread must be given to them. Personal almsgiving and the most wide-ranging social work are equally justifiable and necessary.

The way to God lies through love of other people, and there is no other way. At the Last Judgment I shall not be asked if I was successful in my ascetic exercises or how many prostrations I made in the course of my prayers. I shall be asked, did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners: that is all I shall be asked.⁹

The Use of the Vernacular

Historically, Orthodox missionaries have followed the example of Fr. Papasarantopoulos and have learned first the language of the people they are trying to reach with the Gospel. In Orthodox history books Cyril

⁸ Demetrios Constantelos, *Byzantine Philanthropy and Social Welfare* (New Brunswick, 1968), pp. 89, 90.

⁹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (New York, 1979), pp. 52-53.

and Methodios, the renowned Greek brothers of the ninth century who created 'Church Slavonic' through the use of the Cyrillic alphabet, usually get credit for epitomizing this concept. Before they left Thessalonike to become 'apostles to the Slavs,' they translated the Scriptures and liturgical services of the Orthodox Church into the vernacular. In Moravia (modern Czechoslovakia), where they and their disciples preached the Gospel, Cyril and Methodios encountered overt hostility from Frankish missionaries who believed that only three sacred languages should be employed for Scripture and worship in the Christian faith: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. The persistence of Cyril and Methodios in using the vernacular eventually enabled all the Slavic nations (Bulgaria, Serbia, Russia, etc.) to read the Scriptures and to worship in a language they could understand.¹⁰

There were other prominent Orthodox missionaries who followed in this tradition. The Russian Stephen of Perm (1340-1396) translated the Gospel into the language of the Zyrians. Makary Glukharev (1792-1849) mastered the language and culture of the nomadic tribes in the Altai Mountains of Central Siberia where he translated the Bible and liturgical books into the Telengut dialect and conducted services in the vernacular. His disciples Landishev and Vladimir continued his mission, converting 25,000 of the 45,000 inhabitants of the Altai region to Christianity.¹¹ John Veniaminov (Bishop Innocent, 1797-1879), missionary to Alaska, translated and wrote for the native Alaskans (Aleuts, Tlingits, Eskimos). And Nicholas Kassatkin (1836-1912), a Russian missionary to Japan, translated the Bible and church service books into Japanese.

In Orthodox history these various missionaries have been canonized and are not only looked upon as saints, a title not easily won in the Orthodox Church, but also as individuals identified with the nations they evangelized. Thus, the Church speaks of Saints Cyril and Methodios as Apostles to the Slavs, Saint Innocent as Apostle to America, Saint Nicholas (Kassatkin) as Apostle to Japan, Saint Herman of Alaska, etc.

One example of how 'indigenization' occurred as Orthodox missionaries went to different lands is given by the account in Japan of a meeting between the famous nineteenth-century missionary, Archbishop Innocent (John Veniaminov), and Nicholas Kassatkin, a young Russian Orthodox priest who was serving as a chaplain of the Russian consulate in Tokyo at the time. Innocent saw great potential for missionary work among the Japanese and exhorted Kassatkin "to stop reading French and German books" and "to study Japanese diligently" in order to bring Christianity to the people of that country.¹² Kassatkin zealously under-

¹⁰ See Francis Dvornik *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs* (New Brunswick, 1970) for a detailed account of this point.

¹¹ Nicholas Zernov, *Eastern Christendom* (New York, 1961), p. 181.

¹² Paul D. Garrett, *St. Innocent, Apostle to America* (New York, 1979), p. 267.

took the challenge and eventually translated the Scriptures and liturgical services into Japanese. Within his lifetime, Kassatkin's Japanese mission had founded an Orthodox seminary for the training of indigenous clergy and catechists, had erected the Orthodox Cathedral of the Resurrection in Tokyo, had won many Japanese to Christianity (35,000 by the end of his life), and had trained converts to work on the translation of church books into Japanese.¹³

Ecclesiology

Orthodox perceive their church as "the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph 2:19, 20); as the original eucharistic community of faith instituted by Christ (1 Cor 10:16-27; Jn 6:53-58); as the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" (Nicene Creed); as the church of the seven ecumenical synods (325-787); and as the visible witness on earth of Christ and His Gospel with an unbroken 'sacred tradition' lasting almost 2,000 years in which the Gospel message has been preserved in its pristine state. The Church, Christ's body, has the cosmic mission of the Lord himself "to unite all things in him (Christ), things in heaven, and things on earth" (Eph 1:10). It is all inclusive because in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female" (Gal 3:28; Mt 19:13-14; Jas 2:2-7), rich or poor, adult or child. As per 'Ignatian theology,' the bishop brings unity to the visible Church in Christ's place. Ignatios, a first-century Church Father, speaks of the "one altar" behind which sits "the one bishop in the place of God," surrounded by the presbyters and deacons in the presence of the people of God (laity), all together symbolizing the unity of the Church.¹⁴ Thus, the place of the bishop in the Church becomes crucial to the maintenance of its unity and for the preservation of the faith. His authority protects the catholicity of the Church, as well, not only in its universal connotation as the body of Christ encompassing all people in all places for all time with the full Gospel, but also in its parochial setting. When the presbyter, acting in the bishop's place, unites the local people of God in the Eucharist, he is expressing the catholicity of the Church parochially. This unity is envisioned as a Christological reality. At the celebration of every eucharistic service, the whole Christ is revealed, as well as "the ultimate eschatological unity of all in Him" which this gathering implies.¹⁵ Orthodox express their unity at every liturgy with the faithful of all genera-

13 S. Bolshakoff, *Orthodox Missions Today* as quoted in C. S. Calian, *Icon and Pulpit* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 54.

14 See Ignatios of Antioch as quoted by John D. Zizioulas, "The Eucharistic Community and the Catholicity of the Church" in *The New Man* (Standard Press, 1973), pp. 115, 116.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 120 ff.

tions in a prayer of the liturgy that is read immediately following the consecration:

We offer unto Thee this reasonable service for those who have fallen asleep in the faith: forefathers, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and every righteous spirit in faith made perfect.¹⁶

There are obvious implications concerning the importance of apostolic succession in the Orthodox Church's ecclesiology. Since the bishop preserves and perpetuates the faith from one generation to another, Orthodox consider apostolic succession as part of the sacred tradition of the Church's nearly two thousand-year history.

The necessity for a clearly stated ecclesiology as a prerequisite to any type of theology of evangelism or missionary endeavor is expressed as follows by Nikos Nissiotis who compares the Orthodox viewpoint to that of conservative evangelical Protestant theology:

...there is a great difference between the Orthodox and the conservative evangelical attitude. This difference consists in that in any kind of evangelistic theology an Orthodox would begin from a sound ecclesiology, that is, from the Church as the focus, means, and sign of the regathering of the whole world into fellowship with God—the historical, visible, and institutional Church, which cannot be separated from the event in Christ. This strong ecclesial basis, which is a *sine qua non* for the Orthodox understanding and practise of evangelism, is lacking...in both the radical (pro-secularist) and the conservative evangelical theology of the non-Orthodox churches (and also in the works of certain radical Roman Catholic theologians).... It is not sufficient to preach Christ alone, lest He become the intellectual, monistic principle of an individual faith. Christ must be preached within His historical reality, His body in the Spirit, without which there is neither Christ nor the Gospel. Outside the context of the Church, evangelism remains a humanism or a temporary psychological enthusiasm.¹⁷

Nissiotis, in discussing contemporary, radical, pro-secularist trends, as well as those of the conservative evangelicals, concludes his observations with this remark: "The purpose of my observations is less to criticize the modern trends in evangelism than to contribute to them the conviction that real evangelism is impossible without an ecclesial basis."¹⁸

16 *The Divine Liturgy*, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, p. 24.

17 "An Orthodox View of Modern Trends in Evangelism," *The Ecumenical World of Orthodox Civilization*, 3 (1974), pp. 187-91.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

The Effects of a Living Mission

As with all preachers of the Gospel, the full results of Fr. Papasaran-topoulos' missionary efforts in Africa will be known only to the Lord of the Church. Orthodox history teaches that like prayer, the life of "a righteous man has great power in its effect" (Jas 5:16). However, the seemingly humble ministry of this one missionary, advanced in age before he began, has had a direct effect on the Orthodox Church in both Greece and the United States. Shortly after his departure for Africa from Athens, a new missionary movement began in Greece in 1961 called "The Inter-Orthodox Missionary Center" under the aegis of the Pan-Orthodox Youth Movement, Syndesmos. Its stated goals are: (1) revival of the missionary spirit in the Orthodox Church, (2) study of theoretical and practical problems in missionary activity, (3) preparation of workers for Orthodox missions, and support of the Orthodox in East Africa, Alaska, and Korea.¹⁹ A new journal entitled *Porefthentes (Go Ye)*, edited by Anastasios G. Yannoulatos, accompanied this movement. Through the writings and influence of Yannoulatos, now a bishop and professor at the University of Athens, and this new movement, interest in missions has greatly expanded in Greece over the past twenty years. Today there are at least three missionary societies in that country operating out of Athens, Thessalonike, and Patras, all of which publish journals on missions. There were no such official organizations existing in modern Greece prior to Fr. Papasaran-topoulos' venture of faith in Africa. It is noteworthy that all developed almost immediately after Fr. Papasaran-topoulos' correspondence from the mission field began to ignite the faith of his friends and supporters in Greece.

A similar phenomenon occurred in the United States. Although the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America was founded in 1921,²⁰ it took until 1964 for its Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress to pre-

19 *Go Ye—Porefthentes*, No. 39-39, Apr.-Sept., 10 (1968), 24.

20 George Papaioannou, *From Mars Hill to Manhattan*, (Minneapolis, 1976), p. 33. This excellent study of the Greek Orthodox Church in America shows the enormous struggles the Church underwent to establish itself in America among the waves of immigrants who arrived from Greece in the first half of the twentieth century. Squabbles over language, politics, authority, schisms, ecclesiastical procedures, ethnicity, etc. created numerous internal problems that literally consumed all the attention and energy of the Church leadership. The fruitful reign of Archbishop Athenagoras (1930-48), who finally brought unity and order to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, was actually a period of evangelism and mission. Athenagoras was establishing Greek Orthodoxy in a unique setting never encountered before by the Church. He was bringing the Gospel to a free country without a state church, already Christianized in large part by Protestants and Catholics, and had the tremendous task of organizing a poor, ill-educated, immigrant population which knew virtually nothing of American culture, custom, language, etc. The success of this mission is attested to today by the fact that sixty years later, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America under Archbishop Iakovos (1959-

sent its first official report on foreign Orthodox missions.²¹ In 1966, when the second such report was presented, part of the terminology used was that coined by Fr. Papasarantopoulos in his correspondence when he urged Orthodox Christians throughout the world to become “senders of missionaries,” especially if they could not become missionaries themselves.²² The Greek Archdiocese of North and South America, originally a mission itself to immigrants of Greece, accepted the challenge of Fr. Papasarantopoulos and in 1967, initiated an annual national Lenten Offering Card project to raise support for foreign missions. The following year Archbishop Iakovos established a Foreign Missions Office in the Archdiocese for the first time with the appointment of a bishop (Silas of Amphipolis) as its head.²³ Interest in missions has expanded since then so that today the Archdiocese supports modest foreign missions in Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Alaska, Korea, Mexico, and Latin America. Among the factors that have contributed to this progress, one must certainly mention the impact of Fr. Papasarantopoulos’ ministry in Africa.

A similar influence occurred upon the Russian Orthodox Church when in 1870 the first Orthodox Missionary Society in modern Russia was established in Moscow, following the illustrious ministry to Alaska and the Orient of the Russian missionary John Veniaminov (Bishop Innocent). The metropolitan of Moscow in 1870, under whom the Missionary Society began, was none other than John Veniaminov himself, who had attained this high position in the Russian Church during the final years of his life!

Mission through Personal Sanctity

Whereas Papasarantopoulos’ mission of incessant activity and movement represents one type of evangelism common in Orthodox history, there exists another extremely effective kind of mission which is more

present) enjoys unity, eleven bishops, 425 well-established parishes serving a thriving community of over 2,000,000 Greek Orthodox Christians, a theological school and college, and a synod of bishops guiding the Church through the traditional Orthodox synodal system of administration.

21 Bishop Athenagoras of Elaias, Dean of the Holy Cross Orthodox Theological School of Brookline during my student days, started an Orthodox Missionary Society in 1956 within the seminary. He also brought foreign students for study at Holy Cross. Our Missionary Society began correspondence with Orthodox missions. These were the seeds planted which blossomed into a fuller national outreach in foreign missions from our Archdiocese during the mid-1960s.

22 See article “Ierapostelefs” in *The Religious and Ethical Encyclopedia* 6 (Athens, 1965), 763.

23 Alexander Veronis, “Greek Orthodox Foreign Missions,” *The Orthodox Observer*, (September, 1969), 12.

passive and which attracts more people to the Gospel, rather than taking the Gospel to them. This second type of mission follows the biblical teachings of praying without ceasing and letting one's light of faith shine before men (see 1 Thess. 5:17; Mt 5:14-16). Seraphim of Sarov expresses it well when he says, "Acquire inward peace, and thousands around you will find their salvation."²⁴

Normally, passive mission means people remain in one place, trying through prayer and a simple, holy life-style to achieve advanced dimensions of discipleship and spirituality. The holy, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life which results not only attracts the attention of many, but brings observers into an acceptance of the Christian Gospel which they credit for producing such holy people. This is a common phenomenon in Orthodoxy. I shall cite several examples:

Anthony the Great (251-356) is well known as a holy ascetic and hermit. During his long pursuit of God in the Egyptian desert, Anthony attracted multitudes of disciples, who in turn brought thousands to a knowledge and acceptance of the Gospel. Athanasios the Great, the champion of Christ's divinity against Arios at the Ecumenical Synod of Nikaia (325), acknowledged the deep influence of Anthony upon his own spiritual life.²⁵ Though a contemplative monk, Anthony did not hesitate to temporarily re-enter the secular world, along with his monastic followers, to help defeat the Arian heresy in Alexandria. Anthony's example in living the Gospel continues to highly motivate contemplative monastics.

Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833) is one of the most revered holy men of modern Russia. Seraphim lived most of his life as an extreme ascetic and contemplative hermit. At one time he stood on a rock for three years praying incessantly day and night. During another period of time he maintained complete silence for thirteen years (1807-20). A monk of the monastery at Sarov for most of his life, Seraphim often remained in a nearby hermitage praying, reading, and working in his garden. He had frequent visions of the Virgin Mary Theotokos, the apostles, and Christ. In 1825, at the age of sixty-six, he finally felt led by God to become a starets (spiritual guide). During his last nine years of life, unending streams of people, sometimes thousands in one day, came to see Seraphim for spiritual guidance, healings, prophecy, and matters related to the Gospel. His influence upon people of all social classes, from the aristocracy to peasants, was immense. Austere with himself, Seraphim manifested astounding love and profound compassion towards others. People saw the radiance and joy of the Holy Spirit in him, a fact not surprising from one who taught that:

²⁴ *The Orthodox Way*, p. 118.

²⁵ See *The Life of Saint Anthony* by St. Athanasios, in the Ancient Christian Writers series (New York, 1950).

When the Spirit of God descends upon a man and overshadows him with the fulness of his outpouring, then his soul overflows with a joy not to be described, for the Holy Spirit turns to joy whatever he touches.²⁶

The numerous healings of the deaf, the blind, the lame, the mentally ill, etc., attributed to Seraphim include his cure of Nicholas Motovilov, who later wrote a book entitled *Conversation of Saint Seraphim on the Aim of Christian Life*, from which comes an often quoted teaching of Seraphim's on the Holy Spirit's centrality in the Christian life:

Prayer, fasting, vigils, and all other Christian practices, however good they may be in themselves, certainly do not constitute the aim of our Christian life; they are but the indispensable means of attaining that aim. For the true aim of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.²⁷

Paissy Velichkovsky (1722-94) was a Russian monk at Mount Athos who went to Roumania in 1763 and who became abbot of a monastery which he developed into a powerful spiritual haven with over five hundred monks. This community devoted itself to translating spiritual writings into Slavonic. Among their works were the first Slavonic edition of the *Philokalia* (1793), a massive anthology of spiritual writings from the fourth to fifteenth centuries mostly on the subject of prayer. Velichkovsky initiated a monastic revival across Roumania and Russia which brought an era of widespread spiritual revival.²⁸

Herman of Alaska (1756-1837), a Russian monk, was living in the Russian Valaam Monastery of Finland as a hermit in 1793 when he was selected by his abbot, the Elder Nazary, to go on a mission to Kodiak, Alaska, along with nine other monks. It took this missionary team 293 days of difficult traveling by land and ship over a distance of 7,327 miles to reach their Kodiak mission! Initially, the mission met with success with the conversion of several thousand native Alaskans to Christianity. Harsh conditions in Alaska, plus a fatal shipwreck carrying the mission's new bishop and his co-workers, diminished the mission until only Herman survived. The simple monk Herman, who had a limited education, spent over forty years in Alaska living in his New Valaam Heritage built with his own hands on Spruce Island. His life of holiness, simplicity, teaching, example, and kindness to the native Aleuts won many converts to Christianity. He became a protector of the Aleuts against the cruel exploitation of Russian traders, who treated the native Indians as animals. Along with the Aleuts, Herman, too, suffered persecution and mistreat-

26 Ibid., p. 118.

27 *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 131, 235.

28 Ibid., p. 130.

ment. Herman's holiness kept attracting followers not only during his lifetime, but long afterwards. His memory increased with time; and in 1867, Bishop Peter of Sitka began a formal inquiry into the life of Fr. Herman. In 1970, the Orthodox Church formally canonized him as "Saint Herman of Alaska," the first Orthodox saint of the American continent and whose life motto was: "From this day, from this hour, from this minute, let us strive to love God above all else and fulfil his holy will." ²⁹

Canonization, which all three of the above-mentioned 'passive missionaries' received, means that they are considered 'holy' men by the Orthodox Church and worthy of inclusion in the canon (list) of saints. Thus, their names are commemorated formally by the Church in services on certain days. The Orthodox Church does not make saints. It simply recognizes officially as saints certain individuals whom the faithful of the Church already regard as 'holy' men and women of the past. Orthodox ask saints, who now live in the Church triumphant, for their prayers, just as they ask friends of the Church militant to pray on their behalf. Further evidence of the effective witness to the Gospel of the passive missionaries of the Church lies in the very fact of their canonization.

Proselytism

Orthodox believe that they have preserved the Gospel message intact, without deletion or addition from the inception of the Church at Pentecost. When historical circumstances have permitted, as the evidence shows, Orthodox have conducted vigorous missions among non-Christians. Political conditions, on the other hand, created relatively arid periods of missionary activity. Such, for example, were the two and a half centuries (1240-1480) when Russia lived under the Mongol yoke, the eight centuries in which the Ottoman Empire destroyed Byzantium and subjugated the Orthodox Church in the Balkans and the Near East (thirteenth to early twentieth century), and the communist yoke of our own time which controls all the Orthodox nations of Europe except Greece, severely discriminating against religious worship and overtly persecuting Orthodox Christians.

Orthodox resist and find offensive those efforts of other Christian communities who attempt to proselytize Orthodox Christians. Traditionally, Orthodox missions have taken place among non-Christian people of the world, not among Protestant and Catholic believers. That is why missionaries of these latter two traditions are usually strenuously opposed by Orthodox when attempts of 'sheep-stealing' are made from their flocks. The hostility generated over the past five centuries between Orthodox and Roman Catholics over the 'Uniate issue' created by the

²⁹ Canonization of Saint Herman of Alaska (Sitka, 1970), pp. 32, 66.

Jesuit proselytization of Orthodox in the then kingdom of Poland through the Council of Brest-Litovsk (1596), offers but one illustration. The Orthodox Church of Greece, too, strongly opposes efforts of evangelical Protestant groups who enter Greece with attempts to evangelize Greek Orthodox Christians with the 'true Gospel' message. On the other hand, the Orthodox bishops welcome non-Orthodox Christian service groups who offer technical assistance to underdeveloped provinces of their dioceses. The Mennonites, who established a model farm in the rural diocese of Kisamou-Selinou of Crete, Greece, in the 1960s (in which they taught advanced agricultural methods to the peasants), were heartily welcomed and supported by Bishop Irenaios of that diocese. These Mennonites left a lasting impression upon the Orthodox of the island through their example of loving service. Orthodox find such missions far more illuminating and helpful than evangelists or missionaries who attempt to change their faith.

"Our presence ought to be positive, not aggressive against others," writes Bishop Yannoulatos. And Fr. Kassatkin, who worked among the non-Christians of Japan, practiced the same irenic approach to missions: "Believe, if you will, without any polemics or critique of the other confessions; and avoid attacks against others, even against Buddhism and Shintoism. Christ himself, the fulness of truth, did not win souls save in peace." ³⁰

30 Anastasios G. Yannoulatos, "Initial Thoughts toward an Orthodox Foreign Mission," *Porefthentes*, Apr.-Sept, 10 (1968), 21.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.