

**FOR A CULTURE OF
CO-SUFFERING LOVE**
**The Theo-Anthropology of
Archbishop Lazar Puhalo**
by Andrew J. Sopko

ARCHIVE PUBLICATIONS
1245 Green Oaks Dr.
Los Osos, CA. 93402

ISBN: 919672-15-9

TO MY STUDENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

Page 1

Theology of Culture.	2
North America.	7
Archbishop Lazar Puhalo's Contribution.. . . .	13
Essence, Energy, Persons.. . . .	24
Purification, Illumination, Deification.	28
Dogma, Theoria, Church.	33

II

GENDER AS PROPHECY

Page 39

From Genesis to Christ.. . . .	41
Marriage and Monasticism.	49
The Priesthood of Men and Women.. . . .	52

III.

BEYOND MORALITY AND ETHICS

Page 58

To Pray or to Sin?.. . . .	59
Fasting.. . . .	68

Social Struggle..... 70

IV.
SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY
AS EMPIRICAL QUEST

Page 80

Philosophy/Theology – Science/Technology.	81
Orthodox Theology and Modern Physics.	85
Microcosm and Macrocosm.	90

V.
THE AESTHETICS OF REALITY

Page 95

Iconographic Style.	96
Theo-Anthropology Depicted.	101
Icon Veneration.	106

VI
LAST THINGS

Page 111

Interdenominational Deism	112
Soul, Body, Death.	116
Apocalypse and Parousia.	125

Epilogue:
CHURCH AND/OR WORLD

Page 134

An Existential and Empirical Theology.	137
Kerygma, Dogma, Catholicity.	138
A Mission of Co-Suffering Love.	141

INTRODUCTION:

**ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY
AND CULTURE**

Any examination of the theological thought of the Canadian Orthodox theologian Lazar Puhalo would hopefully act as a fulcrum for the two themes found throughout his work. The first of these would be his emphasis upon the co-suffering love that emanates from nothing less than the redemption of humanity through the selfless love of God manifested in Jesus Christ.¹ It is this co-suffering love that not only has been poured out for us but that is set before each of us as the goal of our own perfection, a perfection that will manifest our own deification (*theosis*). Of course, co-suffering love implies a relationship not only with God, but with fellow humans and even with the world beyond humanity since both man and his environment are destined for salvation together (Rm.8:21).

This fact introduces us to the second theme of Lazar Puhalo's thought: culture and its theological implications. Christian faith has called man not only to perfection but also to recognition of the goodness of creation. Man, as not only the summit of biological life on earth but also as a being created in the image and likeness of God bears responsibility to both God and to his creation. This responsibility should be expressed not only through worship but through all of humanity's actions, creativity and institutions. In examining these aspects of culture, Puhalo has looked beyond the Church in the hope of "gathering all things

into Christ.” While first and foremost a theologian of the Church, he has accepted the added challenge of the contemporary world, fulfilling the responsibilities of a theologian of culture as well. Through constant analysis and synthesis of the theological and the cultural, he has patiently laid the foundations for a culture inspired by co-suffering love that will hopefully help serve the needs of the twenty-first century. Although the construction of such a theology of culture might be misconstrued by some as rather un-Orthodox, nothing could be further from the truth. Such an endeavor has its roots in Orthodox Tradition itself.

Theology of Culture

If Orthodox Christianity hopes to be synonymous not with mere religion but with the transformation of all life, both of man and his environment, then its relationship with culture cannot be ignored. In affirming the world, Christianity has the duty to direct the world to its proper end. As Richard Kroner has said, “Only in faith does culture receive its ultimate verification and sanction.”² This should not be misconstrued to mean that any one cultural manifestation could ever be final or definitive for these characteristics will belong only to the “new earth” when the old has passed away (2Pet.3:13, Rev.21:1). Georges Florovsky always liked to demonstrate this by stressing the antinomies that Christianity produced. Neither the abandonment of current culture in monasticism nor its total acceptance in the idea of Christian empires were adequate to the task.³ The expression “theology of culture” might fall rather uneasily upon Orthodox ears, generally more attuned to discussions of rites and traditions within a strictly ecclesiastical context. Despite this, it cannot be denied that everything man does, both within the Church and outside it has theological implications.

Whenever tempted to become merely a “religion,” Orthodox Christianity needs to be reminded that a theology of culture lies at its very roots. When we hear the Orthodox Church called the

Church of the Fathers, it is often forgotten that these very Fathers are our pre-eminent theologians of culture. Church Fathers such as Gregory the Theologian and Basil the Great may have “lived in Athens” but they brought about the transformation from pagan Hellenism to Christian Hellenism (as Florovsky termed it). Actively engaged with the culture of their time, they molded it into a Christian context. Nor is the age of the Fathers a past reality in the life of the Church for the appellation Church Father remains a confirmation of those individuals in all ages who successfully related the Christian faith to their contemporary culture.

The realms of the Second and Third Rome, Constantinople and Moscow, made significant contributions, especially during their final flowering as Christian civilizations. Although an uneasy tension sometimes existed in “Byzantium” between the classical and Christian elements of that society, the classical had its place, transformed through Christ.⁴ The fourteenth century was particularly rich in those individuals who aimed for a total synthesis between Christianity and life.⁵ In the life and work of the scholar-monk Joseph the Philosopher (c.1280-c.1330), we have an example of an individual who attempted to reconcile all forms of knowledge— philosophical, scientific, literary and theological in an encyclopedia. His intention was to show that the true object of all knowledge was to act as a preparation for its assessment through the “knowledge of God.”⁶ Far better known is the Church Father Gregory Palamas (1297-1359) who, while wrestling with the claims of classical philosophy, expounded what John Meyendorff has termed an existential theology.⁷

Because contemporary problems were not generally discussed in the academies and seminaries of the Church of Russia in the nineteenth century, it often fell to the laity to address these issues. The contributions of an individual such as the essayist Alexei Khomyakov (1804-1860) helped prepare the way for a rethinking of Christianity in a contemporary context. By the turn of the century, an entire group of intellectuals were devoting themselves

not only to the relationship between Orthodoxy and Russian culture but also the aspects of Western European culture that were penetrating Russia.⁸ Especially important among them was Antony Khrapovitsky (1864-1936), Metropolitan of Kiev, whose life and writings have had a profound influence upon the thought of Lazar Puhalo in more recent times. Whether analyzing Dostoevsky or Kant, Khrapovitsky provided penetrating analyses. He, and other Russian intellectuals like him, were interested in what has been termed the “churching of life” (*votzerkovlenie zhizni*).⁹ Following the October Revolution of 1917, some of these individuals continued to work in the West.

What has been termed the Orthodox “diaspora” in fact describes millions of Orthodox Christians who today must face up to the challenge of the West in the West. This does not mean that those living in traditionally Orthodox lands are not facing the same problems, for the effects of Western culture as it has developed since the late Middle Ages have become a world-wide phenomenon. It would be a total misconception to think that the Orthodox Church in its centuries of isolation was completely unaware of what was occurring in the West. Fourteenth century Byzantium once again offers vivid proof that a very real attempt was being made to understand the implications of Western scholasticism. Only the violent death of the East Roman Empire brought such a development to an end. This attraction of the West was especially great for Russia, where a complete critique of the implications of its influence upon Russian Orthodoxy has yet to be expounded.

Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike living in the West today cannot help but be aware of the malady that affects society. Even the most secular have decried the lack of a center of values. Already in the early twentieth century, philosophers and poets alike lamented this development. Walter Lippmann wrote how “man’s ideals are no longer in a hierarchy under one lordly ideal” and W.B. Yeats cried “things fall apart, the center cannot hold.”¹⁰ Gabriel Vahanian perceived all of this as a demonstration of our

living in a post-Christian era.¹¹ In recent times, the question has even been posed as to whether the West ever possessed a thoroughly Christian way of life. Even the high Middle Ages were full of tensions between church and state and philosophy and faith. Tension, however, can be interpreted as a sign of intense concern. Christopher Dawson, a Catholic historian, had great insight when he said “the process of secularization arises not from the loss of faith but from the loss of social interest in...faith.”¹² Can Orthodox theologians such as Lazar Puhalo offer help in alleviating the cultural dilemmas that we face today? Only by remaining aware of both the triumphs and the failures Orthodox theology has endured in other cultural contexts in the past.

Certainly the Christian experiment found in East Roman civilization provides a point of departure so long as its deficiencies are admitted. Because of its spiritual foundations, the empire of New Rome could be termed what Paul Tillich referred to as a “theonomous culture.” Tillich, probably the greatest Protestant theologian of culture in the twentieth century, defined theonomy as the assertion that the law (or rule) of life (*nomos*) “is at the same time, the innermost law of man himself rooted in the divine ground.”¹³ Tillich himself assigned this highest form of culture to the high Middle Ages in the West. From an Orthodox perspective, a theonomous culture would be founded upon the belief that man is created in the image and likeness of God and that he may freely attempt to live and fulfill this reality by the attainment of deification. Probably because the East Roman Empire possessed a highly centralized state when the West did not, Tillich and many others have viewed Byzantium as a closed theocracy rather than an open theonomy but this is certainly debatable in the light of more recent research. Even so, it must be admitted that the “symphony” of Church and state that supposedly mirrored the two natures of Christ was less than successful. The state, unlike individuals, cannot be deified.

Nonetheless, could the Orthodox experience as grounded in

East Roman civilization be perceived as a more successful expression of Christian culture than that of the medieval West? Such a question seems almost an invitation to indulge in the all-too-frequent triumphalism associated with Orthodoxy but if the concept of historical continuity is applied to such an inquiry, it becomes obvious that the East did not suffer the same cultural ruptures that began with the demise of the Roman Empire in the West. Ancient Greece, Hellenism, Greco-Roman civilization, Christian Hellenism and medieval “Byzantium” reflect an unbroken tradition that the West cannot match. The Middle Ages provided a new opportunity for the West to rediscover its roots. In the East, the synthesis between the classical and the Christian had been established long before the West received its new opportunity. When the attempts of the schoolmen to provide another synthesis did not completely succeed, further disruption resulted. Paradoxically, the “Byzantine” experience displays a greater continuity, yet that experience, being “eastern” has generally been judged as rather alien to anything “European,” the harbinger of today’s modern West.

Still, the blame does not lie entirely with the West that Orthodox Christianity can appear so “exotic” within the West’s own frame of reference. Both the idiosyncracies of nationalistic isolation and other influences, whether oriental, Turkish or even Marxist have affected the life of the Orthodox Church in the past and continue to nurture what only can be termed a rather “ghetto” mentality and outlook. Once an Orthodox theologian of culture such as Lazar Puhalo cleans this veneer away, the task has only begun. Dialogue with contemporary culture must consist of more than just a mere repetition of the cultural realities Orthodoxy itself has experienced and considers universal.

The dialogue is made all the more difficult by the fact that we no longer find ourselves within the milieu of a Christian West but rather that of its post-Christian successor. Because so much fragmentation has occurred, it becomes necessary to deal with not only the vestiges of Western Christian culture but also the non-

Christian. A contemporary theology of culture has no choice but to work for what might be termed an “open Orthodoxy.”¹⁴ Such an Orthodox approach examines all elements of contemporary culture, discerning in them what is both true and false from the perspective of the Orthodox Tradition. Paul Valliere has clearly stated that this can be accomplished only through a Church that tolerates and encourages involvement in contemporary culture.¹⁵ This leap must be made for a culture that can no longer be described as Christian and theonomous but as non-Christian and autonomous badly needs a point of reference.¹⁶

North America

Probably the best examples of the construction of a theology of culture from a traditional Orthodox perspective are those associated with missionary activity. Pride of place in this sphere must be held by the mission to the Slavs led by Cyril and Methodios. The mission to Alaska initiated by the Valaam Monastery under the auspices of the Church of Russia certainly holds a comparable significance. From its very inception, the thrust of that mission was to establish a native Church “respecting and employing the language and artistic culture of Alaska.”¹⁷ Especially important in bringing this challenge to fruition was the missionary work of Innocent Veniaminov. Although the conversion of native Alaskan peoples had begun before his arrival at the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, it was through his untiring work as a theologian of Aleut and Tlingit cultures that his mission succeeded.

Veniaminov’s approach was thoroughly informed by insight from the Orthodox patristic tradition.¹⁸ The Alaskan population already possessed a native spiritual milieu with its own “worldview,” so extraordinary care was necessary in applying Orthodox theology to these cultural manifestations. Veniaminov had a particular challenge in assessing the various southern Alaskan shamanistic practices but he accomplished this with great

spiritual discernment.¹⁹ Considering the success of his work as a theologian of culture in bringing the Gospel alive within the context of native life, it comes as no surprise that Veniaminiov was ultimately recognized as “Saint Innocent of Alaska, Apostle to America.”

Certainly the work of Lazar Puhalo follows in the footsteps of Veniaminiov and not merely because of the geographical proximity of Western Canada’s British Columbia where he currently resides. Puhalo himself has ministered to the Tlingit in Alaska.²⁰ Furthermore, he has taken a great interest in the work of Veniaminiov, even going so far as writing a *vita* of him.²¹ He notes especially that Veniaminiov’s “Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven” was the first piece of literature written in any North American native language.²² This creation of an indigenous “vernacular” Christianity supported by an educational system established by the missionaries was challenged not only by the incursion of United States officials after 1867 but also with the arrival of Protestant missionaries. Thus, Alaskan Orthodoxy was increasingly exposed to the “pluralism” associated with American culture. Interestingly, the native population generally found Orthodox appreciation and respect for their culture far greater than that of the newer arrivals.²³

This experience of pluralism was but a foreshadowing of what Orthodox immigrants would experience in Canada and the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. As John Romanides has reminded us, “Orthodoxy in America represents in the history of divided Christendom the largest migration of Orthodox Christians into predominantly Protestant and Catholic geographical areas.”²⁴ In other words, the social structures of this new environment had already been shaped by non-Orthodox cultural values. Nonetheless, these immigrants and their descendents have inevitably partaken of the same cultural and intellectual concerns as their fellow Christians and non-Christian neighbors.²⁵ Unfortunately, the theological schools that were established by

the Orthodox basically for the training of the clergy had no larger vision that took into consideration the growing cultural and intellectual demands of the brave new world in which the Orthodox found themselves. As William Schneirla so pithily summed up the situation, “Our Church, which has been well-represented in the coal fields of Pennsylvania through a long period of great labor agitation, evidently has conditioned no single student of social justice.”²⁶

The simple explanation for Orthodoxy’s inability to relate can be attributed to the fact that its own enculturation into an increasingly secular North American society has been a slow process. Only the expression of the Gospel through the culture “as a medium in all its aspects— linguistic, social and artistic” ultimately has value but this was no easy task in a secular, pluralistic and indeed, fragmented society.²⁷ By the mid-twentieth century, the situation had clearly begun to improve. While it was realized that Orthodox Tradition was certainly the standard of measurement, it was also realized that the failure of the Orthodox in North America to regard themselves as anything other than a part of the culture would be in complete contradiction to the preaching of the Gospel.²⁸ In other words, the time had arrived for a broader application of Orthodox theology to the current culture.

Since Orthodoxy has never possessed a philosophical theology comparable to that of Catholicism, the currents of contemporary philosophy have not always been rigorously assessed. The implications of existentialism as it developed in the twentieth century became especially pronounced in the North American culture of the 60’s particularly through the “Death of God” phenomenon.²⁹ But this in and of itself certainly did not exhaust existentialist currents. Even Florovsky, after his arrival in America, could be termed an existentialist as his 1959 article, “The Predicament of the Christian Historian” demonstrates.³⁰ It was really in the “Debate on Palamism” that Orthodox theologians began to make comparisons with the various schools

of existentialist thought. As has already been noted, John Meyendorff had referred to Palamism as an existential theology and this caused another Orthodox theologian, Maximos Aghiorgoussis, at least to dip a toe into philosophical waters by making Orthodox comparisons with some modes of existentialism.³¹ But until Lazar Puhalo accepted the challenge, there was not one Orthodox theologian in America that dared to take on the entire existentialist system and consequently, no definitive Orthodox response was forthcoming.

The “Death of God” notion in 60’s America was eclipsed as the Women’s Movement reached its zenith in the 70’s. Once again, the Orthodox were slow to respond and the first modest appraisals were not made until the early 80’s.³² A refreshing development occurred when theological observations of Orthodox women such as Deborah Belonick became part of the debate on the roles of women in Church and society.³³ Unfortunately, some of the worst Trinitarian analogies imaginable became central to the discussions. For instance, Thomas Hopko initially stated that “the proper interrelationship between the sexes...is patterned after the interrelationship between God’s Son and his Spirit.”³⁴ Later, he would say that woman actually “images the activity of the Holy Spirit.”³⁵ In contrast, other theologians such as Kenneth Wesche disagreed with any view implying that the Spirit was a prototype of the female. He, for instance, suggested that the key to understanding the differences in gender are found in the *logoi* that Maximos the Confessor associates with the Incarnation.³⁶ And so it went. In retrospect, many ideas were forthcoming in the debate but little in the way of coherent conclusions. What was being called “the mystery of gender” continued to remain a mystery.

Since “ethics” and “morality” are terms that are neither scriptural nor patristic, Orthodox theology in America has had its work cut out for it in addressing problems of individual and social behavior as the second half of the twentieth century progressed. Initially, there appeared a tendency to try and

suffocate the Orthodox approach with non-Orthodox concepts such as “natural law,” but this has thankfully abated.³⁷ The real challenge has been to show that *homo ethicus* and *homo theologicus* are one and the same. In demonstrating this, Orthodox theologians like Stanley Harakas have not shrunk from offering critiques of such phenomena as “situation ethics.”³⁸ The Orthodox rejection of legalism certainly does not dispense with the commandments since these could be considered expressions of God’s energies.³⁹ Consequently, the nature of “morality” “is not perfection as in the thinking of fundamentalism but the believer’s effort and struggle (*askesis*) to achieve it” i.e., to strive towards full participation in the divine energies (*theosis*).⁴⁰

This successful interpretation of individual behavior inevitably has led to a consideration of its social implications on the part of Orthodox thinkers. There can be no denying that “the Church must act as the conscience of society, through evangelization and moral persuasion” (John Breck).⁴¹ But how should the Church persuade? Certainly not by repeating altruistic platitudes but by demonstrating in word and deed that selfless love really can bring about the perfection of men in their social relationships. We will see in this study how Lazar Puhalo himself has permeated his own theology of culture with the proclamation of co-suffering love in such a way that its enactment means that even secular processes such as politics are open to transformation. As Vigen Guroian has observed, “Politics does not belong to the Kingdom, but love does and without the leavening presence of love... freedom and justice, which are the appropriate ends of all political activity, would not be possible.”⁴²

Although Orthodox theologians in America have dealt with the problems that science and technology have created for “bioethics,” very little attention has been paid to the challenge of pure science.⁴³ If observations have been made, these have usually been made in connection with the scientific method. John Romanides has gone a long way in demonstrating that both Orthodox theology and modern science share the same empirical

foundations in contrast to the speculative theology that eventually developed in Western Christianity.⁴⁴ Other excellent observations have been made by John Boojamra concerning the boundaries of the scientific method. According to him, scientism has run rampant in contemporary culture, trampling upon the “unobservable” claims of theology. Much like Karl Popper, Boojamra questions the reliability of experimentation, arguing that it remains quite restrictive at best.⁴⁵ Of course, as much now remains “unseen” and “believed in” in today’s science as in theology. Orthodoxy’s challenge in an America that serves as the focal point for so much scientific and technological change, lies in examining the implications of this irony and demonstrating that no real conflict exists between science and theology.

Turning from the undepictable in science to the depictable in art brings us to yet another problem that Orthodoxy has faced in North America, namely its possession of an aesthetic radically different from that which developed in Western “religious art.” Before the Renaissance and the Reformation, neither East nor West really had a concept of “art.” Images were largely for veneration, not aesthetic appreciation.⁴⁶ According to one American iconographer, secularization in Western art began only after the Middle Ages when sensuality became a component of the work of artists such as Michelangelo and da Vinci.⁴⁷ Many of the aesthetic issues that have since separated Christian East and West have been explored in the rather admirable *Sacred Art Journal* that was published in the United States under Orthodox auspices throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century. While often critical of Western sacred art, the journal also has recognized the existence of an “idolatry of good taste” in some American Orthodox circles that believes only “those pieces done in strict neo-Byzantine or austere Russian revival styles...can be true icons.” Quite to the contrary, it needs emphasizing that iconography’s “parameters are broader than most would suppose and allows for a significant range of personal expression.”⁴⁸ American art historian Arthur Pontynen feels Orthodoxy does

have a responsibility in a postmodernist culture that reduces art “to the realm of physics, psychology, sociology and the will to power.” It needs to explain how love helps manifest the true image in both art and life and how that in turn realizes true beauty.⁴⁹

Perhaps more than anything else, there is a pressing need to address the issue of the numerous religious and quasi-religious “thought-worlds” with which Orthodoxy must contend in the New World. This goes far beyond merely Protestantism and Catholicism and includes everything from the absolutism of fundamentalism to the insipidity of civil religion.⁵⁰ The cults that are so much an American phenomenon have attracted both Orthodox and non-Orthodox youth with their admixture of oriental religions with some Judaeo-Christian flavor.⁵¹ And, as if it were not enough of a tragedy that Orthodox youth have been taken in, how much more incredible that theosophical teachings have sometimes infiltrated the writings of some claiming to speak for Orthodoxy in North America today.⁵² Such is the present state of confusion as these various “thought worlds” clash with one another in America’s pluralistic paradise. Of course, Orthodoxy must have its own house in order for the criticisms of its own theologians of culture to ring true. It would be a false triumphalism indeed to think that Orthodoxy itself has not suffered negative effects from the American cultural milieu.

Archbishop Lazar Puhalo’s Contribution

Born in 1941, Lazar Puhalo’s uniqueness immediately presents itself in any discussion of the formation of a contemporary Orthodox theology of culture simply because he is the first eminent Orthodox theologian of Canadian descent. Both his Canadian citizenship and his Serbian ancestry have helped inform his theological and cultural perspective. In his youth, a reading of John Romanides’ article, “Man and His True Life” inspired the beginning of his theological journey. To this day, Puhalo credits

Romanides, together with Michael Azkoul as his chief theological mentors. Knowing that “monasticism is very much at the heart of the development of Orthodoxy in every country where the faith has flourished,” caused him to establish the first Canadian Orthodox monastery in 1969.⁵³ Much as the monasteries of his Serbian forebears molded a theology of culture in the Middle Ages for a realm that had not developed urban centers, he also believes that the monastery today holds pre-eminence as the true theological-cultural proving ground in Orthodoxy. First as deacon and priest, then later as abbot and bishop, Puhalo has succeeded in making concrete applications from his own theology of culture. These have included the translation and composition of new liturgical texts, the celebration of the first Canadian Orthodox feastday (the Feast of the Theotokos, Joy of Canada) and the founding of spiritually and culturally viable parishes. Especially important has been the establishment of Synaxis Press, which has published and disseminated not only his own works but that of other Orthodox theologians as well.⁵⁴

For Puhalo, the concept of co-suffering love serves as the basis for all of Orthodox theology.⁵⁵ According to Antony Khrapovitsky, from whom he has garnered the expression, “the co-suffering love of one who perceives the fallings of a neighbor with as much grief as if he himself were the sinner becomes a powerful force of regeneration.”⁵⁶ How does such love transcend and transform its cultural context? Puhalo is not shy about telling us:

Righteousness does not consist in correct behavior but in genuine co-suffering love...No deed has any moral value unless it proceeds from the heart motivated by love. Otherwise it is simply ethical or correct behavior according to one or another system of laws, a human work which anyone in any culture, with or without faith in God can attain to. The Old Testament Law could help to preserve society but it could not save

anyone, no matter how diligently they fulfilled it to the letter. Moreover, since it could not transform the heart, it could not even preserve the nation from falling constantly away from God. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who fulfilled righteousness was motivated solely by love, co-suffering love. And this is why our Lord Jesus Christ became our righteousness on the cross and imputed that righteousness to us through faith.⁵⁷

A theology based simply on sympathy alone would not nearly be enough for the transformation of culture. Underlining this is the fact that Orthodoxy possesses an entire category of saints called passion-bearers who, like Christ, have taken suffering upon themselves rather than passing it along. This manifestation of such absolute responsibility for the world conveys the worthiness of man and his culture. As a theologian such as Lazar Puhalo constructs a theology of culture, this feeling of responsibility also becomes evident. His passionate responsibility towards culture has resulted in a wide embrace of the many areas that American Orthodoxy has attempted to engage in the late twentieth century—philosophy, gender issues, “ethics,” science, art and even the influence of the various manifestations of “religion” on Orthodoxy itself. In other words, his work has added new insight to the various cultural problems with which Orthodoxy in North America was wrestling at the end of the twentieth century.

It is none other than Lazar Puhalo who has taken up the challenge of existentialism in its entirety, something that other Orthodox theologians in America have been unwilling to do. Since he identifies with practical solutions to problems, it will come as no surprise that existentialism has attracted him. To use Puhalo’s own words, existentialism displays “a practical approach to philosophy” rather than an abstract one, concerning itself “with the concrete realities of human experience.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, since much of existentialist philosophy emphasizes a turning

away from the self and openness to others, it will quickly become apparent why Puhalo feels at home amid its labyrinths.⁵⁹ It offers a cultural pathway to the theological theme of co-suffering love. Such an opportunity is not to be wasted and Puhalo himself is not satisfied until he has succeeded in demonstrating that there is indeed an existentialist “philosophy” *par excellence* — Orthodoxy itself.

Puhalo’s approach to gender issues also culminates in the theme of co-suffering love. Unlike other Orthodox commentators in the debate on gender, he remains quite wary of assigning different “roles” to men and women, principally because such designations are ultimately destined to have different “values” assigned to them in a fallen environment. Instead, Puhalo prefers to emphasize that both men and women share a prophetic role.⁶⁰ Thus, one gender is certainly no better than the other. In fact, the creation of man and woman as opposites occurs because of divine foreknowledge of the consequences of the fall. Consequently, this separateness provides an indication of the division in the human nature caused by sin.⁶¹ It is co-suffering love that offers the solution: First, that of Christ for the Church (i.e., humanity) and secondly, that of man and woman which mirrors such a nuptial ecclesiology. Just as the Church requires the prophetic role of men and women, so too does society.

Transcendence of mere “ethics” and “morality” lies at the heart of Puhalo’s presentation of co-suffering love. According to him, each life should become a proclamation of the Holy Gospel not merely with words but more importantly, in deeds. Such a transfiguration of the individual “transcends even the highest concept of morality.” From Puhalo’s perspective, in Western Christianity the mystery of redemption itself has gradually been reduced to a system of morality, or more properly, “appropriate behavior” regulated by legalism.⁶² Even the Orthodox have fallen prey to this and Puhalo pulls no punches in condemning the “legalistic moral fascism” of an organization such as the Zoe movement in Greece.⁶³ Neither legislation nor punishment

provide lasting solutions; only the ascetic struggle for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can heal a person's failings and manifest the co-suffering love which is the fruit of the journey to *theosis*: purification, illumination and deification.⁶⁴

The continuing emphasis on social justice in contemporary society needs careful attention from the Church. While Puhalo notes that hope in the rule (or more commonly, "kingdom") of God has often been replaced in the Western consciousness by the attainment of social justice and peace on earth, this does not make the quest for social justice wrong. Only when it is elevated to the same level as the struggle for salvation should it be condemned.⁶⁵ The political movements that cause social change also need to be monitored by the Church since they can often be motivated by communal prejudices and questionable ideologies.⁶⁶ Although he himself does not vote (as is the case with all monastics in Orthodoxy), Puhalo has had a lively participation in Canadian political discourse. He has been a strong advocate of the ethos and worldview of the Red Tory wing of the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, principally because of its support for social programs such as Health Care. While Puhalo has called the Health Care Act "a great Canadian moral accomplishment," it also provides an example of how a spirit of co-suffering love can motivate politics, providing a sense of commonweal.⁶⁷

Puhalo certainly sees no conflict between science and Orthodox Christianity. He hopes only that scientists will carry out their research with integrity and that they not tread into the realm of theology.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, such "treading" has increased in recent times, especially in the realm of physics. Modern physicists have displayed an increasing penchant for taking on the roles of cosmologists and even that of theologians. While Puhalo has not given this as a primary reason for his own attention to contemporary physics, he does feel that some of its conclusions help substantiate basic Orthodox Christian concepts.⁶⁹ Additionally, he wants to show that Orthodoxy has nothing to fear from developments in modern science. Interestingly, he feels

that 17th and 18th century romanticism and pietism have proven a far greater influence in the de-churching of the Christian West than has science. Of course, Puhalo does not mean to suggest that science and its technological accomplishments cannot cause de-humanization. Whether or not this does occur depends upon man alone.⁷⁰

In constructing a critique of the divergence in the sacred art of East and West, Puhalo goes beyond the usual chronological stylistic watersheds and maintains that the dichotomy is far more basic. Art in the West, after a period of Orthodoxy, turned to the Hellenic aesthetic of pagan Greece while Orthodox iconography continued to be rooted in a more Semitic approach.⁷¹ Thus, the more symbolic Semitic approach was rejected in favor of a realistic art that “began to conceive the passion of the moment as reality.” In contrast, the reverse perspective of Orthodox iconography erases the distinction between the “work of art” and the viewer. Since the vanishing point is placed behind the viewer, the viewer also becomes a participant in the depiction. For Puhalo, this makes iconography an invitation to all viewers to become partakers of the Gospel: We should not merely be hearers but rather doers of the word, ever progressing in co-suffering love,⁷²

The final piece of the cultural puzzle of which Puhalo tries to make sense belongs to the contending “belief-systems” that are found in autonomous, pluralistic societies such as Canada and the United States. In examining many aspects of these “thought-worlds,” particularly those inspired by aspects of Gnosticism that have evolved into a variety of New Age beliefs, he has paid particular attention to eschatology. This was done chiefly because of the need for a response to the writings of Seraphim Rose, a convert to Orthodoxy.⁷³ Rose’s views on the soul after death created quite a sensation in Orthodox circles but Puhalo found them without any patristic foundation. In fact, Puhalo accused Rose, himself a former psychologist, of indulging in a type of spiritual terrorism concerning “the last things” that was

completely contrary to Orthodox pastoral practice.⁷⁴ Without such vigilance, the cultural toll on the truth of Orthodoxy can be quite devastating.

Such then in brief outline is the vast perspective of Lazar Puhalo's theology of culture. It touches upon much that affects the lives of Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike in contemporary life. With such a "map" in mind, we can now embark upon the theological and cultural journey that lies ahead.

ENDNOTES:

1. The term "co-suffering love" is actually found in A. Khrapovitsky, *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith*, tr. V. Novakshonoff and L. Puhalo (Chilliwack, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1984), 108-114.
2. R. Kroner, *Culture and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 211.
3. See particularly G. Florovsky, "Faith and Culture" in *Christianity and Culture* (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1974), 28.
4. It is especially interesting to note the classical elements that were adopted and transformed in eastern Christian sacred art. The same observation could be made concerning the use of rhetoric in theological exposition.
5. For an overall view, see D.M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
6. D.M. Nicol, *Church and Society*, 57-58.
7. J. Meyendorff, *Study of Gregory Palamas* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1964), 185-227.
8. For a history of the movement, see N. Zernov, *Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963).
9. A. Schmemmann, "Russian Theology 1920-1972: An Introductory Survey," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 16, 4 (1972), 189.
10. W. Lippmann, *Preface to Morals* (New York: Time, 1964), 111; W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming" (poem).
11. G. Vahanian, *Death of God: The Culture of Our Post-Christian Era* (New York, G. Braziller, 1961).
12. C. Dawson, *Historic Reality of Christian Culture* (New York: Harper, 1960), 19
13. P. Tillich, *Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 56-57.
14. See especially P.R. Valliere, "The Problem of Liberal Orthodoxy in Russia," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 20, 3 (1976), 115-131.
15. P.R. Valliere, "The Problem of Liberal Orthodoxy," 119.
16. The term "autonomous" is suggested by P. Tillich, *Protestant Era*, 58.

20 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

17. *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*, ed. M. Oleksa (New York; Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 7
18. See especially S.A. Mousalimas, "Patristics in Missionary Work: An Example from the Russian Orthodox Mission in Alaska," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 33, 3 (1988), 327-334.
19. S.A. Mousalimas, "Contrasting Theological Outlooks on Ancient Kodiak Culture," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34, 4 (1989), 377.
20. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe: Orthodox Christian Existentialism* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2001), 35.
21. L. Puhalo, *Innokenty of Alaska: The Life of Saint Innocent of Alaska* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1978).
22. L. Puhalo, *Innokenty of Alaska*, 28
23. For the full story, see especially S. Kan, *Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity Through Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).
24. J. Romanides, "Orthodoxy in America" in *Theologikon Symposium* (Thessaloniki, 1967), 503.
25. A. Ugolnik, "An Orthodox Hermeneutic in the West," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27, 2 (1983), 103.
26. W.S. Schneirla, "Future of American Orthodoxy," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 5, 4 (1961), 38.
27. A. Ugolnik, "An Orthodox Hermeneutic," 113.
28. A. Ugolnik, "An Orthodox Hermeneutic," 111
29. S.M. Sophocles, "What is Philosophically Interesting about the Death of God?" *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12, 3 (1967), 303.
30. F.L. Shaw, "The Philosophical Evolution of Georges Florovsky: Philosophical Psychology and the Philosophy of History," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 36, 3 (1992), 254
31. M. Aghiorgoussis, "Christian Existentialism of the Greek Fathers: Persons, Essence, and Energies in God," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 23, 1 (1978), 15-41.
32. See especially *Women and Men in the Church* (Syosset, New York: OCA Department of Religious Education, 1980).
33. D. Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity* (Syosset, New York: OCA Department of Religious Education, 1983).
34. Quoted in D. Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity*, 24.
35. T. Hopko, "God and Gender: Articulating the Orthodox View," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37, 2&3 (1993), 170
36. K.P. Wesche, "Man and Woman in the Orthodox Tradition: The Mystery of Gender," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37, 2&3 (1993), 223.
37. S. Harakas, "Natural Law Teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 9,2 (1963-64), 215-224.

38. S. Harakas, "Orthodox Christian Approach to the New Morality," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 15, 1 (1970), 107-139.
39. S. Harakas, "Orthodox Christian Approach," 135.
40. S. Harakas, "Ethics in the Greek Orthodox Tradition," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 22, 1 (1977), 61.
41. J. Breck, "Bio-Medical Technology: Of the Kingdom or of the Cosmos?" *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 32, 1 (1988), 26.
42. V. Guroian, "Notes Toward an Eastern Orthodox Ethic," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9,2 (1981), 238.
43. See a study such as J. Breck, *Sacred Gift of Life* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998).
44. A. Sopko, *Prophet of Roman Orthodoxy: The Theology of John Romanides* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1998), 139. Although Romanides had already moved to Greece from the United States when these remarks were made, he did make them in a lecture delivered in America.
45. J. Boojamra, "On Science and Technology," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 13, 3 (1969), 131-148.
46. See especially H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
47. Anonymous, "Sacred Art and Divided Christendom," *Sacred Art Journal* 16, 2 (Nativity/Epiphany, 1995), 18.
48. Anonymous, "Sacred Art and Divided Christendom," 18, 24.
49. A. Pontynen, "Facts, Feelings and (In)Coherence vs. the Pursuit of Beauty (Kandinsky and Florensky)," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40, 3 (1996), 179.
50. A. Ugolnik, "An Orthodox Hermeneutic," 104.
51. G.C. Papademetriou, *Cults in America* (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985), 9.
52. The name of Seraphim Rose comes particularly to mind.
53. Anonymous, *Brief History of the Canadian Orthodox Monastery of All Saints of North America* (n.l., Synaxis Press, n.d.), 1.
54. D.J. Goa, "The Spirit of Sava and Lazar in a Canadian Monastery," (paper presented at a conference of the M.V. Dimic Institute at the University of Alberta, Edmonton Canada, April, 2001), 3.
55. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 73.
56. A. Khrapovitsky, *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas*, 109.
57. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 128.
58. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 1.
59. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 2.
60. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy and Revelation" in *The Mystery of Gender and Human Sexuality* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 9.

22 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

61. L. Puhalo, "The Mystery and Meaning of Love and Marriage" in *The Mystery of Gender and Human Sexuality*, 102.
62. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2000), 8.
63. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 12.
64. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1978), 13.
65. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1972), 20.
66. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 40.
67. L. Puhalo, "Foreward" in R. Dart, *Red Tory Tradition: Ancient Roots, New Routes* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1999), iii.
68. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 2.
69. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*, 24
70. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*, 4
71. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture: A Scriptural and Spiritual Understanding of Orthodox Christian Ikonography* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1997), 8-9.
72. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 18.
73. L. Puhalo, *The Soul, the Body and Death* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1980) written in response to S. Rose, *The Soul After Death* (Platina, Calif.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1980).
74. J. Goa, "The Spirit of Sava and Lazar," 2, n.3.

I.

CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISM

When Jean Paul Sarte died in 1980, he was acknowledged as the last existentialist philosopher of the twentieth century. Consequently, it might be asked reasonably whether any further attention even need be paid existentialism since its long line of proponents has come to an end. Nonetheless, existentialism, like all other important “schools” of philosophical thought throughout history continues to pose important questions concerning not only man’s existence but also “the existence of God” (as it is generally stated in Western metaphysics). Because both “existences” intersect in Orthodox anthropology and theology, there can be little doubt why Lazar Puhalo has taken the challenge of existentialism so seriously, hoping to give its questions suitable Orthodox answers.

Although Puhalo has been the only Orthodox theologian in North America to attempt a full-fledged analysis of existentialism from an Orthodox perspective, a few Orthodox thinkers in Europe have also tried their hand, most notably Christos Yannaras in Greece. Yannaras’ historical analysis, however, has proven far stronger than his theological perspective. His readings of Heidegger have made him keenly aware of the very real connection between “the death of God” and man’s predicament in existential thought. Since scholasticism, “the existence of God” has been addressed in the West through rational means. Descartes did likewise but, according to Nietzsche, such a God had no objective reality, hence the charge that the subjectivity of Descartes produced a “superman” instead of God. Luther’s theology of the cross proclaimed the hiddenness of God in the crucifixion, giving even more

impetus to a *deus absconditus* who lacked objective reality. The anti-intellectualism of the reformers consequently led to pietism and to Kant, “where natural theology and the rationalistic metaphysic were replaced by moral utilitarianism” according to Yannaras. For Kant, Christ became the personification of the moral principle and the hidden God was displaced by the categorical imperative. Finally, Hegel announced the death of the God of scholasticism, for God now required nature and the world itself to gain awareness of Himself. Should it surprise one that existentialists such as Heidegger found it impossible to arrive at any theological, ontological or axiological conclusions?

Essence, Energy, Persons

In order to better appreciate Puhalo’s own contribution, a short examination and critique of the existentialist currents in Orthodox thought that preceded him will prove beneficial. As has already been noted, John Meyendorff had designated the thought of Palamas as an “existential theology.” A truly existential theology places a judgment upon the conception of God for much of Western civilization since Plato as “being-in-itself.” Such an essentialistic theology bore little resemblance to the living God of Scripture who interacts with creation. This theology of a living God resulted in the important patristic distinction between essence and energy that Palamas did so much to champion. Through his activity (energy), God not only brings forth creation but also remains constantly present to it. Hence, not only does God “exist” but man, as he exists through his own energy has the opportunity to participate in God just as the incarnation of Jesus Christ so fully demonstrates.

Although Meyendorff possessed the terminological components for an existential theology with “essence” and “energy,” he evidently found these not quite adequate because the Trinitarian hypostasis of Father, Son and Holy Spirit also needed inclusion in some fashion. Because of the unknowability of the divine essence, he opted for what he called “theological personalism,”¹ Since the Greek term “hypostasis” could roughly but not totally accurately be translated as “person,” Meyendorff envisioned the encounter between Trinitarian hypostases and individual human hypostasis as a personal communion. Unfortun-

ately, since no analogy of being is possible between Trinitarian persons and human persons, it would be rather difficult to justify God and man as having a personal communion, especially when hypostasis more properly signifies an individual essence (or nature) with its attributes.

While “the theology of the person” may have a contemporary sound to it, especially within the context of existentialism and phenomenology, it would be hard to justify it patristically as Meyendorff attempted to do. Using Maximos the Confessor’s application of Cappadocian thought, he implied that Maximos treated the essence as more abstract, thus making the hypostasis “the concrete reality of all experience and all theology.”² In fact, Maximos did just the opposite. When treating the incarnation, he emphasized in any number of instances that a human hypostasis is the one thing that Christ did not take upon Himself. The human essence/nature is “enhypositized” by the second person of the Trinity and this has helped provide the means to our own deification. Both in the Church and especially in the life-to-come, however, the principal reality for human beings is not the diversity of hypostasis or persons but rather the fact that they all strive for and ultimately share in the same deified human nature as Christ. In Maximos’s anthropology, it is only the deterioration in the human being’s natural energy (which should lead to communion with God) into the sinful gnostic will that would give precedence to the human person over the nature.

Christos Yannaras, also attracted by theological personalism, succeeded only in weighing it down with the philosophical presuppositions that Meyendorff tried to avoid. Ontology is constantly on Yannaras’ mind for he tells us that “it is not the essence or the energy of God which constitutes *being* but his *personal* mode of existence.”³ Yet, in another place, he contradicts himself by saying that “the personal existence of God the Father constitutes His *essence* or *being*.”⁴ Here, Yannaras has erred in calling the essence “being,” thereby breaking the cardinal Orthodox patristic principle that forbids the application of any description (especially a philosophical one) to the divine essence/nature.

This emphasis upon God the Father is related to the processions of the other Trinitarian hypostases who have their “origin” in Him. But Yannaras has again erred by attempting to make this a “personal event” that occurs through “the freedom of love.”⁵ It is only because of their

consubstantiality, i.e., sharing the same essence/nature, that the Trinitarian hypostases have communion since the distinctive identity of each hypostasis is incommunicable. And, while there is no denying that these hypostasis share the energy of love, this is an expression of the shared nature, not the distinctive hypostasis.

By transferring his personalogical approach to human existence, Yannaras has also created problems for anthropology. His penchant for such an analogy of being does little to clarify humanity's existential predicament *vis a vis* the Creator. For Yannaras, "man constitutes an image of God as an ontological hypostasis free from space, time and natural necessity."⁶ Never in Orthodox patristic literature has the image of God in the human being been interpreted as the person. Not surprisingly, Yannaras carried this analogy to its "logical" conclusion by seeing the multiplicities of human personal distinctiveness as an image of Trinitarian life.⁷ Is it therefore any wonder that he could even speak of a "divine *and human* person in Christ"?⁸ Inspired by Yannaras, even Olivier Clement was so captivated as to speak of the person as "the ontology of mystery" and "the meta-ontological reality of the hypostasis."⁹ The truth of the matter is otherwise. For the purpose of an authentic Orthodox response to existentialism, both "the person" and an emphasis on "ontology" should remain beyond the discussion so to better understand the mystery of the encounter between God and man in human existence.

It must be admitted immediately that the term "hypostasis" does appear in the existential theocentric anthropology (henceforth, the term "Theo-anthropology" will be used) that Lazar Puhalo has constructed but certainly not in the same way that it is encountered in "the theology of the person" in Meyendorff and Yannaras. Most importantly, the use of hypostasis/person does not provide the foundation for the framework of his analysis. Although it might be wished that such words as "ontology" and "ontological" occurred less frequently in his writing, these are used without much damage to what he has constructed. Of course, it could be argued that Puhalo is building bridges to contemporary philosophy so surely such terminology should be expected. Nonetheless, essence as being (certainly a key concept for ontology) possesses far less importance for existentialism. In existentialism, the static, immobile character of being has been superseded by an emphasis on the activity of existence. Since, in Orthodox Theo-

anthropology, the essence/nature of both God and man remain unknowable and their hypostases incommunicable, only their respective energies can serve as the medium for their existence and communion. Puhalo certainly realizes this.

Thankfully, Puhalo does not indulge in creating an analogy of being between the Trinitarian persons and human persons but usually uses the concept of hypostasis merely to distinguish an individual nature with its attributes:

We will not be able to adequately express the difference between the general essence of man and the particular essence of an individual person without introducing the patristic ontological category of hypostasis.¹⁰

At one point, however, Puhalo does seem to confuse hypostasis with energy when he states that the hypostasis “is the existential mode...of our essence.”¹¹ Here, and in a few other places, he gives a priority to hypostasis that it just does not deserve. For instance, Puhalo seems to imply that what we become as individuals relates to the hypostasis, thus completely overlooking our nature.¹² This attitude may be attributable to the tendency to think of human nature as fallen whereas, in reality, it is the use or misuse of our energy that determines either our sanctity or our fallenness.

It is, in fact, Puhalo’s emphasis upon the essence/energy distinction that helps guarantee the success of his Orthodox Christian response to existentialism. When Kierkegaard proclaimed that “existence precedes essence, he had no inkling that Gregory Palamas had said something comparable when he as much said that there is no essence without energy.¹³ Despite his emphasis on ontology, Puhalo would rather isolate the concept of essence since “the essence of things has no existential dimension.”¹⁴ In this, he is much like Heidegger who made an absolute distinction between essence or being (*Sein*) and existence (*Dasein*). However, Puhalo knows that he cannot disregard the attribution of essence/nature to man since this distinguishes humanity in general from individual human beings. Puhalo points out that, nevertheless, the essence can be manifested only in concrete individuals since “the essence of humanity” would be an abstract *idea* with no existential content.¹⁵

If existentialism could be reduced to a single theme, it certainly would be that man possesses self-determination. The thesis that existence precedes essence really means no more than that the action (energy) that men take determines their nature (or more properly, their will).¹⁶ As Puhalo puts it,

There can be no responsibility without a free will. Existentialism deals with nothing so much as it does with responsibility for our choices in life...If we are to be free beings capable of an authentic life we must be responsible for our choices.¹⁷

That man possesses such a free will/energy means that he cannot be imprisoned by determinism or predestination.¹⁸ This, however, should not be misconstrued so to mean that “we can exercise completely free choices about every aspect of our lives.” Heredity, accidents of birth, mental illness and other circumstances can bring a curtailment to self-determination.¹⁹ These are the conditions that a fallen environment imposes upon us as human beings. Even so, the grace of God is always available to all of us in every time and every place.

Purification, Illumination, Deification

Because of their emphasis upon existence, both Orthodoxy and existentialism embody a distrust of metaphysical rationalism. All theology and anthropology that is truly Orthodox is profoundly existential, especially when compared with Western Christian scholasticism.²⁰ The essentialistic theology of scholasticism is rooted in the very fact that the essence of God is named *actus purus* (pure act or energy). This has two consequences: (1) the essence and the energy of God are identified as one and the same, and (2) this essence-energy has no action (or for that matter, interaction) outside itself. Consequently, the only possible theology describing such an unmoved deity would be a dialectical construction that depended upon ratiocination. Furthermore, a real communion in which “the existence of God” and the existence of man intersected would be impossible since God’s energy would not remain “pure” in such an encounter. For Western Christian culture, the results have been moralism and ultimately,

atheism.

From Puhalo's perspective, such a theology can have neither relevance nor effectiveness in "shaping in our daily lives who we are and what we are to become."²¹ In contrast,

Orthodox Christianity must speak in a clear coherent way to human existence and it must do so not in the dry moralistic way that scholastic thought does but in a vital way which impacts on our actual lives.²²

It is the meaning of human existence that must be dealt with and not the regulation of human behavior and the legalistic prohibition of human actions, especially when these are dogmatized as "the norm." Such slogans as "man is a moral creature" or "man was created for worship" or "this life is simply a testing ground in which we prepare for the next life" need to be discarded completely.²³

According to Puhalo, the Genesis narrative reveals the meaning of human existence, namely that man is the intentional creation of a loving and caring God. This concept of existence is something that neither science nor any school of philosophical thought can provide.²⁴ The creation of man "in the image and likeness of God" means not just that each human being possesses free will (the image) but that each also has the capacity to attain the selfless love (the likeness) God has for his own creation. In other words, man can become God (*theosis*).²⁵ Adam did not succeed in this endeavor but instead brought alienation into the symmetry of the universe through his sin. (In this context, Paul Tillich's definition of sin as existential estrangement really does ring true). This alienation subsequently results in that death which is separation from God. Since man himself could not repair this existential rupture, the God-man Jesus Christ had to interject "the principle of resurrection" in order that the symmetry of the universe could be re-established (Rm. 5:12-15).²⁶

Because of the fall of man, existential struggle has become the norm for humanity. This struggle can either take the form of an asceticism that ultimately re-establishes the existential communion between God and man or it can take another route, leading to even greater existential estrangement. Although many who call themselves Christians would like to make moral absolutism (or moralism) the guide for the first

path, this will generally prove no more successful than the moral relativism associated with the second. Puhalo explains why:

Part of the reason for the collapse of Christianity as a viable moral force in a modern pluralistic environment has been the expectation that it produced immutable absolutes in the realms of values and ethics when both science and valid experience would show that it did not. When Christianity is turned into an ideology, as the religious right does, then none of its “absolutes” can be trusted.²⁷

Moralism generally deteriorates into nothing more than a form of external conformity that becomes a tool “to persecute or degrade people whom the moralist feels are not living up to his or her standards for external proper behavior.”²⁸

Despite his vehement attack upon moralism, Puhalo does make allowance for the term “morality” but dismisses “ethics” as nothing more than “correct behavior set by rules that reflect contemporary standards.”²⁹ In contrast, morality “consists of how well we care for one another, not what sort of behavior we impose on one another.”³⁰ It would be even better to consider it a “process” of existential struggle (*askesis*) in which we purify our will/energy not only towards God but towards our neighbor as well.³¹ Of course, morality can become a heresy if it deteriorates into a “moral code” rather than remaining a process that could be identified as “a new life, in and with Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit” (Sergius Bulgakov).³² Because of our existential estrangement, we remain in bondage to the passions, that is, the misuse of our will/energy. It is only through the cooperation with the grace (the energy/will) of God, manifested in the Holy Spirit that purification or a state of dispassion can be initiated.³³

The freedom to orient oneself to Christ or contrary to him belongs to everyone.³⁴ Those who do orient themselves to Christ do not seek to end their existential estrangement through belief in only an incident in history such as the crucifixion but “by a *living* faith in an actual Life—a divine-human life and faith in all that Life has taught us.”³⁵ From Puhalo’s perspective, this faith “calls upon us to exercise our free will in cooperation with grace. It does not call upon us to act as puppets or robots to social convention or even the words of Scripture. If the

mechanical fulfillment of the ten commandments or even the whole of the law could have made us “righteous,” there would have been no need for the incarnation.”³⁶

Neither is faith a legal agreement between God and man for the mutual re-cognition of their existence.³⁷ Faith only begins the “ontological process” of salvation or redemption, i.e., full communion with God.³⁸ This vital process commences with purification, continues in illumination and finds its fulfillment in deification.³⁹

In purification, illumination and deification, we apply our energy to the struggle that overcomes our existential estrangement from both God and creation:⁴⁰

We begin the process first by guarding the mind with prayer and vigilance and then by entering into ourselves and looking after the soul itself as a garden, something like the Garden of Eden. By means of loving and careful cultivation, we make the soul a fit dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. By continually tending the temple of our bodies and the garden of our soul, we attain purity of conscience so that we are able to bear the illumination of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

Just as Heidegger believed that even the space itself where everyday life occurs can be termed existential, so too does Puhalo believe concerning the “inner space” of the human being’s life.

The prayer that guides the process of purification that makes the path of illumination possible is an absolute part of the struggle for salvation that ends our existential estrangement. Puhalo reminds us that “we do not have to pray in order to inform God [and] to let Him know something He does not know.” Prayer’s purpose is to draw us existentially closer to God. As our prayer is surrendered to the prayer of the Holy Spirit within us, we have the opportunity to learn (or more properly, experience) all the more about God through the participation of our energy in his illuminating energy.⁴² Only prayer will help us to bring ourselves into accord with the will of God “so that we no longer fall short of the mark or goal, which is to be united with God.”⁴³

The asceticism (*askesis*) that manifests purification only begins the struggle to acquire the Holy Spirit and it is prayer that always informs this regimen. Asceticism means training and for Puhalo, this is the

principal meaning and purpose in the life of the Christian.⁴⁴ In today's world, all asceticism appears basically the same to most people: Whether associated with Christian monasticism or oriental meditation, people tend to think of it as a form of detachment from reality, or even worse, they may have the misconception that asceticism means repression. Very few people understand it as a vital and even joyous means of spiritual growth and development, and an adventure in discovery that opens to us the fullness of our humanity and personhood (hypostasis) even while it helps to elevate us above it.⁴⁵

Nor should asceticism be misconstrued to mean a private endeavor that is about avoidance, especially the avoidance of others. As in Kierkegaard's existentialism, one most truly exists only in relationships with others. Asceticism is about the proper existential encounter with God and fellow man. In this vein, Puhalo reminds us how "every encounter with another human being is always an encounter with Christ who created them and loves and values them."⁴⁶

Repentance and denial also play a part in asceticism but once again, not in any negative sense that might imply self-inflicted suffering.⁴⁷ Repentance is nothing more than a heartfelt desire to make the right decisions rather than an apology or an absolution for the violation of a law.⁴⁸ The denial that accompanies it should not be seen as a denial of self but rather the denial of selfish love.⁴⁹ This selfish love can only be healed by dispassion (*apatheia*).⁵⁰ The struggle that the passions bring can only be overcome by struggling to rise above them until selfish love is replaced by unselfish love. And as illumination continues and leads to deification, this selfless love is further enhanced by a co-suffering love "which helps to heal others of such suffering or passions."⁵¹ In this respect, Orthodox Christianity differs from Buddhism and other ascetic philosophies that seek to negate the passions rather than rising above them:

Negating the feelings and emotions with meditation and mental asceticism backed by physical asceticism is a method of dealing with the human passions...by every religion and transcendental philosophy. But, in Orthodox Christian existentialism, the conquest of the passions does not lie in the blotting out of the mind or in a cold, meaningless detachment but in the healing of the entire person.⁵²

According to Puhalo, only “the grace-filled power of co-suffering love can heal a person’s failings.” He uses the story in John’s Gospel concerning the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11) as a confirmation of this fact. Not only did Jesus convince the people that she did not deserve condemnation but he himself also refused to judge her and instead empathized with her plight. And it is this very same Jesus, risen from the dead, who has become for us the source of all the purifying, illuminating and deifying energies. In the encounter with the adulteress and in so many other instances in Christ’s life, “the glory of the cross,” i.e., the selfless and indeed, co-suffering love of God for man, is presented again and again. Everyone who has sinned has fallen short of the glory of God (2 Cor. 3:18), but as we advance ever closer towards deification (*theosis*), we participate in not only the will of God but in his glory for they are one and the same.⁵³

Dogma, Theoria, Church

In presenting his Christian existentialism, Puhalo has obviously chosen the path of positive existentialism over that of the negative. In other words, man does have a place and meaning in the universe.⁵⁴ Furthermore, this positive approach also encompasses the belief that others are necessary for the understanding of ourselves in contrast to the negative view that the self stands in opposition to others.⁵⁵ That existentialism possesses these positive and negative approaches merely reflects the general existentialist “doctrine” that denies objective universal values, holding instead that “each person must create values for himself through his own experience in such a way that he lives each moment to the full.”⁵⁶ In other words, if the only justification for any belief is that the individual has chosen to believe, then that same justification is just as valid for all beliefs whether theistic or atheistic.⁵⁷

Such a “doctrine” in no way deters Puhalo from justifying not just an existential system but an existential theological system:

A system may be said to be existential when it actually helps in a creative and supportive way to shape our values and concept of life and what we become. A theological system can be said to be existential when its doctrines and precepts can not only be experienced, but be verified by the

experience of its present adherents and the lives of those who have gone before.⁵⁸

Just as the fall of man made the existential struggle of asceticism inevitable, so too has it made theology and its dogma a necessity.⁵⁹ Since, from an Orthodox perspective, asceticism is basically a struggle to acquire the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it has everything to do with theology and its dogma. Ever “ascending” by grace in the ascetic struggle, the believer “*experiences* the reality of the theology.” Thus, through asceticism, one not only struggles to live the theology but also to experience the reality of the theology.⁶⁰ For Puhalo, theology without asceticism becomes “a dead legalism” while asceticism without sound theology is “a delusion.”⁶¹ The fact that Western Christian theology as it has developed over the centuries became more and more distrustful of any connection between theology and spiritual struggle has resulted in the belief that asceticism might be even a hindrance to true theology.⁶² This disconnection between theology and asceticism resulted first in “mysticism” and more recently, in “spirituality.” From Puhalo’s perspective, neither have much to do with a “vital, living theology.”⁶³

If theology and its dogma/doctrine are not existential, they should be considered as nothing more than “burdensome rationalism and dead moralism.”⁶⁴ Those who surrender their lives to Christ ultimately experience dogma through illumination and glorification. This event occurs not through rationalization but through an existential process called *theoria* (literally, “vision”).⁶⁵

This is an existential process involving our own transformation, never a process of developing dogmas, and never a process that takes place by rationalization or reflective reasoning. It is a process of life itself. We are shaped and formed and find the fullness of meaning in the divine dogmas and living theology of Orthodoxy. It is a paradox that we discover this fullness by participating in it, and we receive it only in the process of experiencing it. This is the mystery of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶

Theology can never be reduced to a system of religious philosophy.

For Puhalo, man is first and foremost a theological creature (*homo theologicus*) and all true theology “must be as alive, vivid, creative and active as man is himself.”⁶⁷ Of course, any model of divine reality that is expressed in dogma as a result of *theoria* cannot be explained in absolute terms but only metaphorically.⁶⁸ The crisis that the dogma of the Trinity has suffered in Western Christianity has occurred from a tendency to literalize:

Since no one could possibly understand the essence of the Trinity...and since the energies of God could not be created, the failure to understand dogma as a model of reality rather than a concrete expression of an absolute has weakened the fabric of Christianity.⁶⁹

In scholasticism, such literalism led to not only a perceived necessity to define the essence of God but even to speak of God’s grace in created terms. In reality, the dogma of the Trinity tells us nothing about God’s essence and very little about the hypostasis.⁷⁰ With the dogma of the Trinity, as with all other dogmas, only so much has been revealed as is necessary for salvation, that is, the process of our own perfection.⁷¹

Although on the surface, the dogma of the Trinity appears incomprehensible, it impacts our lives “with a call to knowledge and action.”⁷² It manifests “the unity of will, a unity as a real power acting in each person” (Antony Khrapovitsky) that becomes the model for our own moral existence.⁷³ Nonetheless, the Christian is called “to ascend to a point where dogmas are no longer necessary, no longer of any use – to a point at which the experience of mutual love between God and man shows all dogma...to have been no more than a framework of truth which was but a hint and shadow of reality.”⁷⁴

This experience awaits all those who attain deification. And even those who have done so would have been unable to do so without the existence of the Church.

Puhalo stresses the pre-existence of the Church in the will of God even before creation.⁷⁵ Already with the creation of Adam and Eve, the Church is manifested on earth for neither our existence nor our salvation was meant to occur individually. This helps explain why the theology of the person remains insufficient. Only community can teach co-suffering love. Even after the fall of man, the ecclesial community

continued, especially in the life of Israel and received even greater impetus with the incarnation of Christ, who identified it with his own physical body. As such, the Church can be considered a living organism, possessing its own energy.⁷⁶ This energy exists, not to make Christ a “personal Savior” for each Christian, but to aid in a joint, communal relationship with him.⁷⁷ The life of the Christian is most truly expressed not in a hypostatic or individualistic manner but corporately, and indeed, liturgically.⁷⁸

In keeping with the truest expression of human existence, the life of systematic prayer is far more than an individual experience. Far more powerful is the corporate prayer of the Church. Puhalo likens such common prayer to “an army marching in unison.”⁷⁹ Life shared together in the Church makes it the true proving ground for the attainment of love among ourselves:

Our common, unified, systematic prayer has such power because it unites our hearts (and) draws us into a love and oneness with our neighbors.⁸⁰

Of course, those who are our neighbors include far more than merely fellow members in the body of Christ. The Church prays for everyone. All holy men and women of the Church who themselves have become “living prayer” on the road to deification throughout the ages “were struggling for the healing and redemption of the whole human nature.”⁸¹ It is their success that provides us with a foretaste of what ultimately will be a complete victory for humanity’s future existence. And it is in order to instill hope in such a victory that Lazar Puhalo has labored to create a “Christian existentialism.” Its positive, theological and ecclesial aspects demonstrate not only that God “exists” but that God exists “for us.”

ENDNOTES:

1. J. Meyendorff, *Study of Gregory Palamas* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1964), 212.
2. Ibid.
3. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 16, emphasis added.

4. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 17.
5. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 17-18.
6. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 19.
7. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 23.
8. C. Yannaras, *De L'Absence et de l'inconnaissance de Dieu*, tr. J. Touaille (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1971), 46-57, 88, 109.
9. O. Clement, Preface to C. Yannaras, *De L'Absence et de l'inconnaissance*, 28.
10. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2001), 5.
11. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 8.
12. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 9.
13. J. Meyendorff, *Study of Gregory Palamas*, 216.
14. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 5 .
15. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 7.
16. A. MacIntyre, "Existentialism," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, Co. & Free Press), 1967), vv. 3 & 4, 149.
17. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 13.
18. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 120.
19. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 13.
20. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2000), 64.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 38.
25. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1978), 14.
26. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 29.
27. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 3, n. 6.
28. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 91, n. 83.
29. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 15, n. 17.
30. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 21.
31. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 3, n. 6.
32. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 127.
33. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 29.
34. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 14.
35. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 20.
36. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 14-15.

38 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

37. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 79.
38. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 84.
39. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 11.
40. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 24, n. 24.
41. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 121.
42. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 94-95.
43. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 117.
44. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 51.
45. Ibid. Here, it needs to be noted that in this passage, Puhalo does not treat hypostasis as a static, irreducible category as it would be in a theology/anthropology of the person.
46. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 57.
47. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 8-9.
48. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 16, n. 18.
49. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 131.
50. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 29, n. 29.
51. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 131.
52. Ibid.
53. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 13, n. 21.
54. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 1.
55. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 2.
56. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 48.
57. A. MacIntyre, "Existentialism," 151.
58. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 48.
59. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 14.
60. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 13.
61. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 9.
62. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 7-8.
63. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 8.
64. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 71.
65. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 50.
66. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 65.
67. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 15.
68. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 39-40.
69. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 39.

70. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 40.
71. A. Khrapovitsky, *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith*, tr. V. Novakshonoff and L. Puhalo (Chilliwack, Canada, Synaxis Press, 1984), 7.
72. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 40-41.
73. A. Khrapovitsky, *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas*, 17.
74. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 15.
75. L. Puhalo. *Creation and Fall* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 3.
76. A. Khrapovitsky, *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas*, 83.
77. L. Puhalo, remarks in A. Khrapovitsky, *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas*, 30, n. 20.
78. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy*, 18, n. 27.
79. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 121.
80. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 122.
81. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 127.

II

GENDER AS PROPHECY

As it developed in the mid-twentieth century, the Women's Movement was often thought to have resulted from a new consciousness among women. It would probably be more accurate to see it as yet another aspect of the new way of life that had been developing for both men and women in the West since the Industrial Revolution.¹ There can be no denying that egalitarianism was a long time in coming to women and that contemporary "feminism" has played an enormous role in helping actualize it. The belief of both Augustine and Aquinas in the male's superiority because of Eve's creation after Adam passed beyond the framework of scholasticism and entered into the Western consciousness. This widespread belief in Western culture of the inferiority of women was further augmented by perceptions of creative incapacity outside of childbearing. This had nothing to do with the female "energy" as such but everything to do with unchanging sociological conditions that had lasted thousands of years. When the historical circumstances are examined, it becomes clear that these conditions for feminine participation in culture were quite limited.² Contemporary conditions have changed this and both women and men now have the opportunity to manifest their distinctive gifts within today's cultural context.

Lazar Puhalo has certainly welcomed a number of the contributions that the Women's Movement has made. Especially important to him has been the emphasis on the asymmetry of sexuality *and* the mode of communication in males and females.³ In other words, the difference in gender between women and men is more than biological. From the

Orthodox Christian perspective, the feminine and the masculine are not perceived as merely innate characteristics but even more importantly, as relational characteristics.⁴ This complementarity has as much to do with the energy of being human, the expression of sexuality in its totality, as it does with the sexual energy that is physiological.⁵ Furthermore, such a complementarity is also expected to transcend the particular cultural impositions that might be placed on any definition of femininity and masculinity.

The debate within contemporary Orthodoxy concerning issues of gender has been a confusing one. Rather than succeeding in emphasizing the unity between male and female, it instead has often deteriorated into suggesting an even greater dichotomy. Immediately dismissing the rampantly popular attempts to make ontological connections between woman and the Holy Spirit and man and Christ, a more fruitful approach would seem to lie in an emphasis on the distinctive gifts of men and women. Any viewpoint that assents to the belief that women and men possess different modes of communication obviously implies that they possess distinctive gifts. That being said, a problem does arise in distinguishing between the created gifts that men and women possess which are activated through the practice of virtue and the uncreated gifts of grace (*charismata*) they may receive through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in illumination and deification. The French Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov believed that differing uncreated gifts are distributed to women and men.⁶ In contrast, another French Orthodox theologian, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, has disagreed. She has noted that there is no mention in the writings of the Apostle Paul of feminine charisms that would be different from those given to men.⁷

It easily can be seen how a division of charisms between women and men could lead not to a perception of unity between female and male but a mystification leading instead to confusion. Consequently, the assignment of differing uncreated gifts proves not much better than the expectation that men and women will assume particular cultural “roles” in any given society. In an attempt to bypass these problems, Lazar Puhalo has emphasized principally the charism of prophecy as a gift shared by both men and women. Men as prophets and women as prophetesses prophesy concerning the relationship between male and female. In this way, the unity of men and women according to the will of God is proclaimed. It must be admitted that Puhalo depends upon

an exegesis of scriptural passages that at times may appear obscure in order to justify this viewpoint. Nonetheless, his exposition proves so fascinating that even the most abstruse text helps illuminate the truth of the matter.

From Genesis to Christ

The dividing of humanity into two genders has a prophetic intent. This realization that gender is connected to prophecy and revelation has been lost largely because man, in his arrogance, began to relate the respective roles of men and women to relative value. When “role” was identified with “value,” humanity was degraded.⁸

With these words, Lazar Puhalo introduces his discussion of gender. When they prophesy, women and men are not just revealing something about themselves but also about Christ and the Church. According to Puhalo, Christ is revealed through the male prophets while the Church is revealed through the female prophets.⁹ This prophetic vision encompasses the Old and New Testaments since both covenants concern the relationship between God and the Church as both the Old and New Israel. These covenants between God and his people were not legal contracts but more akin to a marital relationship. Despite the warnings of the prophets, the Old Israel forgot this and became unable to recognize Christ the Bridegroom seeking his Bride.¹⁰ And very often it was the least and even the worst of women and men who prophesied. In this vein, Christos Yannaras has noted, “prophetic intervention in history...is dynamically made flesh by taking up the passion of human freedom as the cross, denouncing not human weakness but confusion in the realm of truth.”¹¹

As has previously been noted, Puhalo stresses that Adam and Eve as well as the Church on earth were created simultaneously. Eden is far more than a “garden” but an actual manifestation of the Church.¹² According to Theophilus of Antioch, “God created Adam and Eve for the greatest possible love between them, thus reflecting the mystery of divine unity.”¹³ The anthropology of Genesis emphasizes that man and woman were created to complement one another psychically. While everything else in the garden was “good,” it was “not good” that Adam

should live alone.¹⁴ In addressing Eve and Adam before the fall, God always recognized “the reciprocity of their ecclesial nature” by addressing both together as “you,” never separating them.¹⁵

If Adam and Eve complemented one another psychologically in their sexuality, what is the significance of their physical complementarity? At one point, Puhalo notes that God created Eve because of divine foreknowledge of the fall (and death), thus providing a means of procreation.¹⁶ In this regard, he seems to follow the double creation *hypothesis* of Gregory of Nyssa in which gender is “added” to man so that procreation might occur.¹⁷ But such a difference in gender is manifested only after the fall in Gregory of Nyssa whereas Puhalo very clearly speaks of a difference in gender before the ancestral sin. Here, he stands closer to Maximos the Confessor who sees not gender differentiation introduced into man after the fall but rather the passions. Not only does the distinction in gender predate the fall but it also has nothing to do with procreation as we know it after the fall.

In both the Old and New Testaments (Gn. 2:24, Mt. 19:5), the passage proclaiming that “the two shall be one flesh” should not be limited to a command to procreate but also as an expression of hope for mutual fulfillment as “helpmates.”¹⁸ In like manner, the command “increase and multiply and fill the earth” (Gn. 1:22) can also transcend the meaning of procreation. Gregory of Nyssa (and others) have read the passage to mean not that the earth be filled with progeny but with the good works that occur through the practice of virtue and help lead to deification.¹⁹ While Puhalo remains less-than-convinced by Gregory’s interpretation, he also asserts that such spiritual rather than carnal interpretations certainly do not mean that sexuality in and of itself has a negative character. Puhalo himself has gone so far as to refer to it as a form of “revelation” concerning Christ and the Church.²⁰ If gender predates the fall, the sexuality that accompanies it must also be seen as “good.”

This, however, does not mean that sexual differentiation as we now know it has not been affected by the fall. If gender is considered a form of prophecy as Puhalo constantly remind us, then the differentiation between the masculine and the feminine would be not so much psychological or physiological as spiritual. Man and woman were created as opposites so that in attaining success in their own spiritual unity, they would also be providing a living, unifying principle for

uniting creation's diversities.

Some of the Fathers suggest that because of the fall, we have no clear idea of what form procreation would have taken without it. Maximos the Confessor merely states that it would be different, thereby implying that it would not occur through sexual intercourse. A little speculation on this might prove worthwhile, if only to demonstrate that any view that made sexual intercourse the foundation for the complementarity of the sexes would have to be considered a product of the fallen order. The "birth" of Eve from Adam certainly provides a clue about a more spiritual type of reproduction. After the fall, it is not until the Theotokos brings forth Christ that we have a comparable type of birth. In the first instance, a male brings forth a female while in the second, a female brings forth a male. In both instances, man's generative power became spiritually "pregnant" although in different ways. It is not so much whether reproduction is sexual or asexual that underlines "birth-giving" but rather the presence of the creative energy of God.

Consequently, the mediation and ultimate unity between male and female according to Maximos occurs not through *eros* and sexual intercourse but through the practical exercise of the virtues that aid in the attainment of illumination and deification. The full possibilities of this were cut short by the fall and as Puhalo reminds us, when Adam and Eve fell, the Church also fell and became barren.²¹ In addition to considering Eve and Adam as "members" of the Church, Puhalo also implies that they exist in a state of "marriage" prior to the fall.²² It could be argued whether such roles as husband and wife really would possess the same significance before the original sin. Since sexuality obviously had a different context, man and woman as "helpmates" can also certainly be perceived as having a significance outside of marriage, both before and even after the fall. It could just as easily be said that Adam and Eve lived together as brother and sister before the fall. Afterwards, since not all will marry in the fallen world, the relationship between male and female also has a context besides that of marriage. Even Puhalo himself must admit that Adam and Eve do not quite fit into the marital paradigm that he constructs concerning male and female prophecy about Christ and the Church. The promise to Eve that her offspring would wound Satan's head contained an obvious prophecy concerning Christ and not the Church.²³ As for Adam, it was none other than his own creation that foretold the eventual incarnation

of Christ himself.²⁴

After the fall, Adam and Eve do display all the characteristics of what might be termed a typical married couple. The introduction of the passions (hunger, fear, desire, etc.) that enable survival in the fallen world take their toll. Adam must toil for their continued existence even as Eve bears the pain of childbearing so that humanity might survive. Furthermore, the effects of the sinful environment created by the father and mother affect their offspring as well. The murder of the just Abel by the wicked Cain demonstrates not only that “the battle of the sexes” has spread beyond the attraction/repulsion of male and female but also that the grace of God remained available to all after the fall. Concerning this, Puhalo has some pertinent insights:

In Abel, the signs of God’s grace shone forth and in seeing it Cain ought to have been censured and brought to repentance... Abel [as a passion-bearer] was the first martyr of the holy Church, the first to shed his blood for righteousness’ sake...God called Cain to confession and repentance but instead of confession, Cain lied to God...Cain, the first murderer..is seen to be the beginner of human societies, of the cities of man. Man having removed himself from the society of God, from the Church of God, now begins to build his own...Man’s cities become...idols.²⁵

Thus, human culture rose in opposition to God in the fallen world signifying that not only woman and man but all they have created required redirection. Already in the early chapters of Genesis, the need for a theology of culture has become sorely evident.

The fact that Eve also bore Seth, the replacement for Cain the apostate, manifested the continuing good will of God for humanity. In chapter five of Genesis, Seth was given the first place after Adam in mankind’s genealogy even though Cain was still alive. Righteousness still remained a real possibility since the sons of Seth are referred to as sons of God while those of Cain receive the appellation sons of men.²⁶ But already by the time of Noah, even those sons of God who constituted the Church had begun to fall away.²⁷ Barrenness returned to the Church as the practical exercise of the virtues among men and women became extinct. Even the “baptism” of the great flood did not

change the course of history. In the story of the tower of Babel, we have been given yet another example of how humanity's cultural achievements only widened the breach between God and man. Only after all men and women had again fallen away from the divine will, did God reiterate his good will once again with the calling of Abraham and Sarah.

Puhalo explains the call of Abraham and Sarah rather beautifully:

God called Abraham and Sarah into the fallen Church and, through them, renewed the promise, so that in Abraham the prophecy of the Messiah, and in Sarah, the prophecy of the Church, might once more be made known. As Adam and Eve had been the apostles of God's presence, so now Abraham and Sarah became the apostles of his promise.²⁸

God's promise for all women and men was confirmed "in person" with the manifestation of the "Old Testament Trinity" to both Sarah and Abraham. The visit of the second person of the Trinity (the Angel of God) announced the advent of his incarnation as Jesus Christ and the establishment of the holy nation of Israel as much as the birth of Sarah's child, Isaac. But Sarah was only the first in the line of women prophets that spanned the Old and New Testaments. Many of them were like her—old and barren. According to Puhalo, since the Church was barren and "without the fruit of life," these prophetesses did not bear children until touched by the grace of God. Such a bearing of children in old age was a form of prophecy that Hannah, mother of Samuel, Anna, mother of the Theotokos, and Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, all would share.²⁹

Puhalo himself realizes that prophecy concerning Christ and the Church certainly transcends marriage. While it might surprise one that marriage's diametric opposite, harlotry, also shares a prophetic role, he stresses that this fact presents itself again and again in the Old Testament. The command that daughters not be prostituted (Lev. 19:29) already placed the divine proscription on such activity but also foreshadowed the fact that Israel would "go-a-whoring" with idols and demonic gods (Deu. 31:16).³⁰ Ezekiel proclaimed (Ez. 16:17) that Israel had "created images of men [idols]" for herself and had "committed whoredom with them."³¹ Probably the most striking example of Israel

as the Church denying her spousal relationship with God occurred in the time of Hosea. At this time, Israel even imagined that God had taken an earth goddess as a “wife” just as was believed in the various pagan religions of the ancient Near East.³²

Nothing in all of scripture could be more graphic concerning the union of prophet and prophetess in whoredom than the story of Hosea and Gomer. Hosea, representing God himself, was commanded by the Lord to choose a wife from among the pagan temple prostitutes (Hosea 1:2). Choosing the temple prostitute Gomer, they conceived two children together: Lorehamah (“no longer under mercy”) and Lohammi (“no longer my people”). To make things even worse, Gomer then became unfaithful and returned to her harlotry. And, as if this were not bad enough, God commanded Hosea to go and buy her back. Thus, both Gomer and Hosea prophesied concerning the relationship between Israel (the Church) and God (Christ).³³

Though she was unfaithful and betrayed the spousal covenant with Hosea, Gomer was to be redeemed and restored for no other reason than because of love. This is a prophecy of the redemption of fallen mankind through the co-suffering love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ...As the old Israel failed to grasp the meaning of the covenant as a spousal relationship and so perished in dead legalism and the formalities of an external faith, so we are called upon to comprehend the covenant.³⁴

In the Old Testament, Jewish misogyny was motivated by the fact that at the creation, woman was pulled from man (implying inferiority). Lest there be any doubt about woman’s inferiority, Leviticus called for a mother’s purification for twice as long when a girl had been born.³⁵ Of course, the constant portrayal of woman as whore in scripture could be seen as yet another form of misogyny. Nothing could be farther from the truth, however, and Puhalo posits some very pertinent proofs from the women mentioned in the genealogy of Christ’s ancestry presented at the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel.

The circumstances surrounding Thamar, Rahab, Bathsheeba (Uriah’s wife) and Ruth were associated with very positive prophecies. Thamar (Gn. 38:6-26), a childless widow whom Judah refused to marry to his

remaining son, demonstrated Judah's own lack of virtue by disguising herself as a harlot, becoming pregnant with his child and then exposing him. Judah had no choice but to admit that she was more righteous than he.³⁶ Rahab (Josh, 2:1-6:25), a pagan harlot of Jericho, nonetheless confessed the true God "having understood the signs worked among the Hebrews."³⁷ Bathsheeba (2 Sam. 2:3-1 Ki. 2:19), bore Solomon through adultery with David and was responsible neither for this sin nor the death of her husband for David provoked both. She nonetheless rekindled virtue in David by holding him to his oath concerning Solomon's kingship.³⁸ "Of Ruth," says Puhalo, "we hear no great sin(!)." Yet, it may be more for the fact that she was a gentile rather than her noble character that placed her in Christ's genealogy. Her inclusion showed that not only did Christ have gentiles as ancestors but that they would also be his brethren in the Church.³⁹

After Anna and Elizabeth, prophecy concerning the Church suddenly passed from barren old women to the very young virgin, Mary. This revealed that the Old Testament period of the Church had come to an end.

The Church had become old and barren, no longer bearing the fruit of unity with God in Eden. Now, however, the prophetic role passes to a young virgin, who gives birth to her special child solely by the grace of the Holy Spirit... The barren Anna, the Church of the Old Testament, gives birth to the Ever-Virgin One and Mary becomes the holy prophet through whom the New Testament Church, the redeemed and restored Church is revealed. The Church is renewed, redeemed, made fruitful once more.⁴⁰

The perpetual virginity of the Theotokos is proclaimed not only through her bearing of Christ but in the circumstances surrounding her betrothal to Joseph. He was an elderly relative too closely related to her for sexual intercourse to be lawful.⁴¹ Despite this, it would be erroneous to view the Theotokos as an asexual being. As Elizabeth Behr-Sigel has said, Mary "integrated the sexual polarity into the totality of her personal existence," transcending it "without (it) being abolished or denied."⁴² As the "second" or "new Eve," she not only has fulfilled the prophecy through Eve concerning the birth of Christ; she also has

become the guide for all men and women who hope to bring forth Christ in their own hearts.⁴³

While the life of Jesus Christ, the new Adam, certainly revealed his masculinity, it also showed that he was not the stereotypical male of his time and culture.⁴⁴ Since he already possessed what Evdokimov has called “the most universal couple,” namely divinity and humanity united in his own hypostasis, his masculinity could never cause alienation to the feminine.⁴⁵ His teachings on celibacy (Mt. 19:11) and the disappearance of marriage after the general resurrection (Mt. 22:30) prophesy the end of the fragmentation between male and female because of a fallen sexuality. Nonetheless, in the current age, according to the Apostle Paul (Eph.5:21-33), marriage still serves as the best example of the unity between Christ and the Church.⁴⁶ But the very same apostle also tells us that “in Christ, there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). For Puhalo, this all fits perfectly into the paradigm of marriage and gender as prophecy concerning Christ and the Church.

If human gender is given for prophecy, then when all prophecy has been fulfilled, there is no longer a need for prophets nor for the means of prophecy. When Christ and the Church have been visibly united, when all is clear and manifest, then the prophetic role of human gender will have been fulfilled and will pass away.⁴⁷

Here, Puhalo is not positing some form of androgyny, but merely emphasizing the fact that we really have no idea what the resurrected body will be like.

The belief of some feminist-minded Christians that Christ’s maleness was replaced with some sort of androgynous being after his resurrection would certainly call into question his full humanity. As it was for Christ, so it will be for us following our own resurrection. Even though there will be no marriage, this does not mean that we would cease being male and female. Nor does the fact that Christ neither married nor had biological children in this life make him any less a male. Since a hypostasis can only unite itself with another hypostasis of the same nature, there would be no other human being with whom Christ could unite in this manner. This is because, as John of Damascus has observed, “there is no other hypostasis which could be at the same

time Son of God and Son of Man.”⁴⁸ In loving the Church and giving his life for her (Eph.5:25), Christ made it possible for all of humanity to become his progeny. Our fallen state has been overcome through our recapitulation in him (Eph.1:10) and we now can become not only his sons and daughters but also his brothers and sisters.⁴⁹

Marriage and Monasticism

For Puhalo, even in contemporary culture, marriage between a man and a woman remains the greatest form of prophecy concerning the unity between Christ and the Church. The recognition in modern societies of “civil unions” between partners of the same sex cannot infringe upon this reality for these unions do not reflect the Church’s understanding of marriage. Within the boundaries of traditional marriage itself, the increasing incidence of divorce and multiple marriages can be seen as evidence of the toll the fallen order has taken in corrupting the relationship between the sexes. In the past, divorce often occurred simply by a man telling a woman that the marriage was over. Although in today’s egalitarian culture, the woman has far more “rights,” marriage has been reduced more than ever to basically a social and sexual function.⁵⁰ From Puhalo’s perspective, the belief that even Christian marriage is nothing more than some sort of “legal or magical ritual for making sexual relations moral” can only be considered disastrous. More than anything, marriage should be considered the union of a man and a woman who, as “helpmates,” work out their own salvation together.⁵¹ Even so, the “mystery of marriage” should be accepted as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Spiritually, with the help of Christ and the Holy Spirit, man must rebuild paradise in his heart or rather struggle to allow the Holy Spirit to manifest it there [in illumination and deification]. For the Kingdom must live in us now if we hope to abide in it for eternity. Thus, for the Orthodox Christian, every step, every aspect of life is a holy mystery.⁵²

Still, a committed marriage provides an especially conducive environment to work out the mystery of one’s salvation because one

is not alone but has a partner.

Committed love “bestows upon us our humanity and relates us to the Divine,” according to Puhalo.⁵³ In Orthodox Christianity, it is not said that a couple is married in the Church but that their marriage is crowned by the Church. In other words, marriage takes place first in the hearts of the two who love one another. In the Church, they ask that their commitment be crowned by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ In emphasizing commitment rather than just love at the beginning of a marriage, Puhalo has a very practical viewpoint:

Love is a “growth situation.” No one actually “falls in love.” People may like each other deeply and be strongly attracted to one another but love comes only from a longterm commitment....Love pertains not only to the things we find positive and attractive in a person but also to the negative aspects of their personality and the things we discover about them over the years that we find unattractive. That is why actual love is not instantaneous. It is a process of growth and maturity.⁵⁵

Hopefully, a couple will develop not just with one another but because of one another. When marriage is entered into, it should be realized that mutual spiritual growth and development provide a fundamental reason for the union.⁵⁶

Marriage instructs the couple concerning Christ and the Church not through abstract concepts but through “an actual living experience.”⁵⁷ Just as Christ came to redeem us and to regenerate us through the mystery of co-suffering love, so in marriage, the couple possesses the possibility of a comparable experience.⁵⁸ When marriage is called a form of martyrdom, this illuminates the fact that the marital commitment is all about the replacement of the ego and self-love with love for the other.⁵⁹ The creation of man and woman as opposites has made this all the more difficult but

When you realize that God has given you the privilege of being a living revelation and that you yourselves become living prophets through marriage, in that the woman reveals the nature of the Church and the husband reveals the

relationship of Jesus Christ with the Church, you begin to understand the mystery of human gender and the true mystery of love...A truly Christian marriage is a form of the Gospel and you become holy prophets not only to your children and to each other but to the world around you.⁶⁰

Puhalo's remark concerning children should not be misconstrued to mean that procreation is the reason for marriage. In both the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, it must be admitted that very little is said about marriage and procreation. And, while children are considered a blessing from God, not all marriages produce them. A marriage that has manifested itself as a family already has a widening channel of love for the couple. But even a childless marriage (as well as one with children) should become a vehicle for a love that extends outward. This love must go beyond the relatives as well and towards anyone who is "a neighbor."⁶¹ Of course, even marriages entered into with the best intentions sometimes break down due to the difference in the growth and development of love between the partners.⁶² Although Christ himself permitted divorce only for reasons of adultery, Puhalo demonstrates that this can be interpreted in a spiritual as well as carnal sense. In a marriage where love has vanished in at least one of the partners, a "spiritual adultery" may occur that may be as harmful as anything carnal.⁶³

Puhalo's high regard for marriage in no way implies that celibacy cannot also be sanctifying and salvific. Certainly the Apostle Paul felt this (1 Cor. 7:4-7) although he himself seemed to have an even higher regard for celibacy.⁶⁴ Of course, celibacy can be practiced even within marriage as has been the case with husbands and wives who have lived as brother and sister. Some Christian feminists have regarded the virginity of the celibate life as a form of asexuality. From the Orthodox perspective, however, it instead could be said that "sexuality is present in pure masculine and feminine forms in male and female celibates."⁶⁵ For Puhalo, the avoidance of preconceptions concerning sexuality should remain paramount.

When human sexuality becomes imprisoned in stereotypes and moralistic bonds, then it is held back from rising to its true purpose and that purpose itself is obscured in blind

negatives...It is fascinatingly simple and pure while at the same time, one of the most complex, baffling and vulnerable aspects of our inter-human relations. These contradictory qualities are the conflict between the passions of the fallen nature and the purpose of the creation of human sexuality.⁶⁶

Although Puhalo has written concerning monasticism, he fails to place the same emphasis on co-suffering love within its context, principally because he holds marriage in such high esteem. Nonetheless, he does see them as of equal value while denying that monasticism can ever be perceived as a form of anti-marriage. In actuality, the prophetic character found in the intensity of the community life of monks and nuns makes equal demands towards the attainment of co-suffering love. Within monasticism, there even exists a “helpmate” of sorts in the spiritual director (elder) who guides monastics for “God has ordained that no man climb the mountain alone.”⁶⁷ Also in the monastic life, there are those who withdraw from community life and become hermits. It legitimately might be asked how anyone living alone, monastic or not, could attain co-suffering love. As a fruit of purification, illumination and deification, co-suffering love is available even to the solitary. Often in monasticism, the hermit will return from his or her solitude and take up the life of the spiritual director, putting to practical use the fruits of co-suffering love that have been acquired in solitude.

Ultimately, the most virtuous expression of sexuality for all of us lies in the realization of co-suffering love. George S. Gabriel, a member of Lazar Puhalo’s theological circle has summed this up rather succinctly:

Every human being, married or single, monk or nun, is called to the denial of self and of self-will. Every man is commanded to “love his neighbor as himself” (Mk. 12:33). The nature of the “love that seeketh not its own” is the same in the cloister, in the community and in marriage and the family.⁶⁸

The Priesthood of Men and Women

The priesthood of all believers is found both within the Church and

in the world. Wherever it is manifested, its function and goal is to bring about the union of humanity's created energy with the uncreated divine will/energy.⁶⁹ In contrast, and in keeping with his paradigm that men and women respectively reflect the union of Christ and the Church, Puhalo maintains the traditional viewpoint that the liturgical priesthood within the Church belongs to men alone. The liturgical priesthood points to Christ rather than to the Church because the priesthood belongs to Christ alone and for this reason, women have not been admitted.⁷⁰

Puhalo is careful to emphasize that the practice of limiting ordination to males has nothing to do with caste, personal value or human worthiness.⁷¹ In fact, he has further underlined this by pointing out that the division between the clergy and the laity in the Orthodox Church "is not a sharp one." Men and women are part of the royal priesthood just as the priest is a member of the people of God. Certainly there is no special knowledge that the clergy possess that the laity cannot also acquire.⁷² Consequently, the prophetic/priestly ministry of both men and women can be carried into the world with the possibility of great success. Such a ministry should possess peacefulness and joy, a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation and a turning away from judgment and condemnation.⁷³

If it impacts at all on civil or secular society, it is because this ministry has been heeded and re-enabled the Church to minister to the world in truth—not just the truth of words but the truth of deeds and of the lives lived by the...people [of God].⁷⁴

Except for some rather general remarks, Puhalo has made no attempt to provide a theological/anthropological analysis of the roles that women and men should fulfill in contemporary culture. This can probably be attributed to the fact that he sees no reason that women should be excluded from any secular profession. There also may be a certain wisdom in avoiding such an unenviable task, especially since other Orthodox thinkers have failed when they have tried. For instance, a theologian such as Paul Evdokimov, despite his high regard for women, could speak of man creating science, philosophy and art while placing woman "at the opposite end of every objectivation for she

is in the perspective not of creation but of birth-giving.”⁷⁵ Puhalo would assert that similar attitudes have deprived humanity of a vast reservoir of scientific and cultural creativity and advancement by excluding women from these areas.

Clearly, the Women’s Movement has already carried us a long way from such reductionism. The “man’s world” that contemporary women find themselves in is more often synonymous with the “fallen world” and any positive change that women have been able to bring has been hard-won. Surely the “amazon woman” of Simone de Beauvoir was not the solution and it could only be wished that a properly articulated Orthodox Theo-anthropology could help lighten the unproductive “aggressive and wounding militancy” that has often marked the battle of the sexes in recent times.⁷⁶

In the world, woman and man together are “natural priests” principally because they were brought into existence on earth last. Their priesthood, according to Maximos the Confessor, has the goal of uniting the world and bringing it into a harmonious relationship with God. As Evdokimov has reminded us, in the catacombs of the early Church, the most frequent image was that of the woman at prayer. To become prayer “makes the world into a temple of adoration, into a cosmic liturgy.”⁷⁷ All the characteristics that Puhalo has assigned to prophecy in the world could only result from the life of prayer. And ultimately, the actions of men and women must bring eschatological hope since culture in and of itself cannot save us.⁷⁸ As Elizabeth Behr-Sigel has so eloquently stated:

According to the spirit of the *Philokalia*, every believer can celebrate an interior and invisible liturgy by associating himself with the eternal offering of Christ by purifying his heart and by offering the Lord the spiritual eucharist of his thoughts, feelings and acts. This can be done with regards to the most humble work or to the creation of art and science done in the name of Christ.⁷⁹

ENDNOTES:

1. *Women and Men in the Church* (Syosset, New York.: OCA Department of Religious Education, 1980), 52.

56 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

2. P. Evdokimov, *La Femme et le Salut du monde* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1979), 177-179.
3. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2001), 6, n. 6.
4. D. Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity* (Syosset, New York: OCA Department of Religious Education, 1983), 35.
5. P. Evdokimov, *La Femme*, 161, n. 7.
6. P. Evdokimov, *La Femme*, 24-26.
7. E. Behr-Sigel, *Ministry of Women in the Church*, tr. S. Bingham (Redondo Beach, California: Oakwood Publications, 1991), 71.
8. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy and Revelation" in *The Mystery of Gender and Human Sexuality* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 9.
9. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy." 10.
10. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 11.
11. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 105.
12. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 16.
13. P. Evdokimov, *Sacrament de l'Amour* (Paris: Editions de l'Epi, 1962), 162.
14. D. Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity*, 36.
15. P. Evdokimov, *Sacrament de l'Amour*, 160.
16. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 12.
17. The implication in Gregory of Nyssa is that the original *anthropos* contained male and female characteristics and that these were exteriorized individually with the fall.
18. G.S. Gabriel, "You Call My Words Immodest," in *The Mystery of Gender and Human Sexuality*, 69.
19. G.S. Gabriel. "You Call My Words Immodest," 80.
20. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 13. This, of course, must be considered as a bit exaggerated since all revelation is uncreated. Nonetheless, Puhalo is attempting to demonstrate that sexuality does point to a particular truth.
21. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 32-33.
22. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 12.
23. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 27.
24. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 19.
25. L. Puhalo. *Creation and Fall*, 28-30.
26. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 33.
27. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 34.
28. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 20.

29. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 21; *Creation and Fall*, 35, n. 2.
30. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 12-13.
31. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 12.
32. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 14.
33. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 14-16.
34. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 16.
35. P. Evdokimov, *La Femme*, 169-170.
36. L. Puhalo, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. Matthew* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 2.
37. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 3.
38. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 3-4.
39. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 4.
40. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 23.
41. L. Puhalo, *The Most Holy Theotokos* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1999), 67.
42. E. Behr-Sigel, *Ministry of Women*, 208.
43. E. Behr-Sigel, *Ministry of Women*, 207; P. Evdokimov, *La Femme*, 221.
44. D. Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity*, 37.
45. P. Evdokimov, *La Femme*, 231.
46. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 18.
47. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 18-19.
48. J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1969), 128.
49. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 23-24.
50. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning of Love and Marriage" in *The Mystery of Gender and Human Sexuality* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 98.
51. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 97.
52. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 99.
53. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 92.
54. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2000), 13.
55. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 94.
56. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 95.
57. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 96.
58. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 102.
59. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 97.

58 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

60. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 7.
61. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 108-9.
62. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 110.
63. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 16.
64. G.S. Gabriel, "You Call My Word Immodest," 87.
65. D. Belonick, *Feminism in Christianity*, 40, n. 66.
66. L. Puhalo, "Mystery and Meaning," 100.
67. L. Puhalo, *Scriptural Basis and Meaning of Orthodox Christian Monasticism* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 15.
68. G.S. Gabriel, "You Call My Words Immodest," 86-7.
69. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality*, 98.
70. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 27.
71. L. Puhalo, "Gender as Prophecy," 26.
72. L. Puhalo, "On Guru Cultism in the Orthodox Church," *Canadian Orthodox Missionary* 24, 3. no. 186 (May-June, 1998), 3.
73. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 67.
74. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 89.
75. P. Evdokimov, *La Nouveaute de l'Esprit* (Begrolles: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1977), 244.
76. E. Behr-Sigel, *Ministry of Women*, 130.
77. P. Evdokimov, *La Femme*, 78.
78. P. Evdokimov, *La Femme*, 113, 129.
79. E. Behr-Sigel, *Ministry of Women*, 140.

III.

BEYOND MORALITY AND ETHICS

From Puhalo's perspective, all systems of morality and ethics need to be transcended for, since the Middle Ages in the West, they have largely lost any connection with theology. This process was initiated by the schoolmen, whose philosophical theology also resulted in the ascendancy of philosophical attitudes towards human behavior. Because of this, "theology lost its existential power as a vector for the ascent of man in real spiritual transformation...and became no more than a system of religious philosophy and a school of ethics."¹ The concept of natural law that has been used in Catholicism since the Middle Ages could only be considered peripherally related to Christian theology because it was founded upon Aristotelian and Platonic philosophical principles. Since it makes the law of nature a part of the "eternal law" in the "mind of God," all that has been created, reflecting the "divine ideas," has the moral law inherent in it.² Consequently, divine energy (grace) plays no discernable role and rather than the existential process of purification, illumination and deification, human beings are commanded to follow a moral law or a moral code.³

Protestantism, in contrast, has viewed the fall as the complete loss of the natural law in man with sin providing absolute proof of this. Following the demise of natural theology (i.e., the belief that God could be discerned through the reason alone), Protestantism began to depend upon a philosophy of history as a non-theological basis for its ethical outlook.⁴ Without either natural law or natural theology as a support, the individual and communal experiences of human existence assumed more and more importance. Puhalo feels that such an emphasis

ultimately reduced morality and ethics to something more akin to “contemporary standards.”⁵ Such standards generally go in one of two directions: Either they can be transformed into an ideology (as the religious right does) where failure to meet “absolutes” demands punishment or, the opposite, where (in the most democratic societies) a complete relativism reigns.⁶ When morality and ethics become a matter of conformity or non-conformity to external rules rather than a change in the application of our wills through the transformation of the heart in cooperation with grace, such deterioration becomes inevitable.⁷

It would certainly be a misconception to think that Orthodox Christianity itself has not succumbed to philosophical presuppositions just as Catholicism and Protestantism have. From the professorships in so-called “moral theology” in the pre-revolutionary Russian seminaries and academies to a twentieth-century Greek Orthodox theologian such as Androustos, who saw little difference between philosophical ethics and Christian life, the pseudomorphoses are evident. Even in contemporary American Orthodoxy there remains openness to the possibility of some sort of philosophical component in morality and ethics while at the same time emphasizing their theological foundation. One has only to read the work of an American Orthodox theologian such as Stanley Harakas to conclude that the door has been let ajar to such a possibility.⁸ While the many positive aspects of his viewpoints cannot be denied, it does need to be asked whether Orthodoxy’s own Tradition would not be better served by an outright critique of all philosophical presuppositions. Lazar Puhalo certainly does not shrink from doing this, obviously inspired by Antony Khrapovitsky’s own criticism of Immanuel Kant’s philosophy of autonomous morality in pre-revolutionary Russia.⁹ Only as an “ontological process” (to use Puhalo’s words) can morality or ethics ever succeed. In other words, rather than following rules or regulations, the individual must discover “the good” through an existential encounter with God in purification, illumination and deification.¹⁰

To Pray or to Sin?

Although Puhalo accepts the term “morality,” he uses it in only a very narrow sense that refers to the “inner transformation” of the

human being. He makes this distinction so that morality not be confused with codes of compliance that enforce or coerce particular forms of external behavior.¹¹

Moralistic oversimplification can lead us into despair and surrender and history has demonstrated that it can lead to a sidestepping of responsibility for the struggle for internal self-control...and keeps us from advancing in skills to help deal with human moral, emotional and psychological problems—particularly our own. This is why puritans and fundamentalists in every religion (including Orthodoxy) are so bigoted and self-righteous and capable of such condemnation, persecution and repression.¹²

For Puhalo, morality is “an inner struggle to purify the heart so that our external behavior is motivated by a sincere inner love with no external show, boasting or berating of others.”¹³ External conformity is not its purpose since Christ himself has said that if you have mentally consented to a deed (even without enacting it), then you have committed it in your own heart (Mt. 5:28).¹⁴

While Puhalo agrees with Hume that good “sentiments” in humanity can be enhanced by education, choices still must be carried out subjectively by each human being.¹⁵ If there had been no free will or self-determination, there would be no possibility for love but only for bondage.¹⁶ Although a philosopher such as Yannaras has written about the “freedom of morality,” one could just as easily speak of the “freedom from morality.”¹⁷ In patristic terminology, self-determination (*autexousia*) rather than freedom (*eleutheria*) has generally been used since freedom more properly refers to the condition reached in deification when one acts in a truly human fashion, transcending all “rules and regulations.”¹⁸ As Harakas has put it, the gift of self-determination comes to us from God so that we might be free to become gods.¹⁹ Of course, self-determination in and of itself cannot be enough for the attainment of divinity in humanity for if there is no active relationship with God (grace), then neither is there any salvation. According to Maximos the Confessor, the degree of our participation in divine life will mirror to what degree we choose the good.

In the fallen world, it is not the attainment of “the Good” that

generally concerns humanity but, as John Romanides put it, “self-seeking happiness.” Puhalo evidently has been very much influenced by Romanides’ viewpoint.

Happiness is a delusion of this world, a sickness of man’s soul. To anticipate happiness in the next life is to expect to be in a condition we call “hell,” not heaven. The Church as a spiritual hospital has first and foremost to heal us of the happiness seeking sickness of mankind which holds us in a bondage of delusion and prevents us from coming to a knowledge of Truth.²⁰

Puhalo is not asking us to be miserable but rather to become more reasonable about lives that must be lived out in a fallen world. To expect happiness in every situation is not practical but perhaps to try “to be content” as the Apostle Paul did (Phil. 4:11) would be better. Indeed, Puhalo considers some of the worst crimes perpetrated among humanity as done by those who were not so much evil as they were seeking happiness for themselves.²¹

In fact, since all that God has created is good, it would be wrong to think of evil as something that exists in and of itself but it instead should be considered a condition that causes separation from that which is good. Thus, a dualism that posits the co-existence of good and evil is somewhat of an over-simplification.²² According to Gregory of Nyssa, “the most beautiful and supreme good is divinity itself” but the apophatic theology of Orthodox Christianity also proclaims that God is *beyond good (hyperagathos)*.²³ Nonetheless, since we have been created good by the Good, the only way for our goodness to be maintained and perfected is through participation in God’s divinity (energies).²⁴ This explains what *Theo-anthropology* is all about. It also helps explain why any type of morality or ethics that does not have its source in divine revelation itself cannot be accepted from an Orthodox viewpoint.

Non-revelatory morality and ethics such as those with philosophical foundations have little connection with the quest for the Good.²⁵ In this vein, Orthodox “moral theologian” Stanley Harakas’ own defense of Romans 2:14-15 as Paul’s verification of the “natural law” among the Gentiles can be seen in quite a different light within the context of the divine energies.²⁶ The “law engraved upon the heart” is not the natural

law but rather the created human inclination of the will to participate in the uncreated divine energies that reveal the good. Just as the creative and sustaining energies of God are responsible for the existence of everything whether or not this is acknowledged, so it is with virtue. It exists only because it has its origin in God. Since Harakas already has recognized the commandments as expressions of God's energies, he is only one step removed from the recognition of divine energy as unwritten (and uncreated) commandment. Even the written Old Testament Law in and of itself could not save since it was perceived as a legal code rather than the expression of an on-going relationship with God. But neither can grace be regulated even though this too was attempted in scholasticism. Puhalo notes its insistence upon transforming grace into an observable science with not only fixed laws of behavior but even categories (actual/habitual, prevenient/cooperative, created/ uncreated, etc.)²⁷ Far better to quote the Canadian philosopher George Grant (as Puhalo does) "Good [here, a synonym for God] is good which we do not measure and define but by which we are measured and defined."²⁸

How do we acquire the virtue that manifests the good? Puhalo emphasizes that this can occur only through an inner concurrence with the "heart" before it can be manifested both internally and externally.²⁹

The struggle to ascend in knowledge is accompanied by the struggle to purify our conscience and to purify our hearts (which is one and the same thing). Some people think that spiritual knowledge is emotional with no intellectual component but it is not. It is not simply intellectual but it does occur in an illumined intellect, enlightened by divine grace.

We must build a natural knowledge through the purification of our hearts, where we begin the purification of our whole mind and our whole way of thinking.³⁰

Whether the conscience/heart is perceived as an isolated faculty or as an expression of the whole psychological function of the human being (emotions, will and intellect), it needs to be noted that "heart knowledge" has nothing to do with placing the feelings and emotions above the intellect (as Rousseau taught). While the acquisition of the

knowledge of the heart does not depend upon intellectual learning, it does not bypass the intellect, purifying rather than dispensing with reason.³¹

Following Isaac the Syrian, Puhalo speaks of three levels of knowledge: natural, spiritual (noetic) and the gifts (*charismata*) associated with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.³² Natural knowledge comes through the senses alone—observation, study and education. Spiritual or noetic knowledge manifests the “spiritual life.” The use of the cognate term “noetic” is associated with the “nous,” a word that has been used throughout the history of Orthodoxy to designate mind, spirit, soul or intellect and sometimes, even a combination of all of these. That which is termed noetic knowledge is not rational knowledge but rather an apprehension that takes place in the individual through openness to God.³³ According to Puhalo, the body as an electro-chemical mechanism can conceive or do nothing without the direction of the nous, initiating and directing all the body’s actions.³⁴ So, the spiritual life that noetic knowledge manifests occurs through the purifying energies that enable the apprehension of the good/Good. The knowledge associated with the illuminating gifts of the Holy Spirit are basically those described by Paul in the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians, beginning with unceasing prayer and culminating in prophecy. At the threshold between illumination and deification there occurs the full manifestation of co-suffering love that culminates in the vision (*theoria*) of the Holy Trinity in glory.

The ascent from natural knowledge does not occur outside of the ascetic discipline of prayer, vigilance and repentance.³⁵ When it is said that the Kingdom (or more properly, rule) of God is within us, it means that we are “striving to allow God to rule and reign in our hearts [and] that we are desirous that his will be done in our heart” according to Puhalo.³⁶

When we truly desire to see God, to have his rule and reign in our being, He lovingly enters into our hearts so that we will be able to find him...He, through the Holy Spirit, continually descends into our hearts and we can find him there, near to us and not “out there” beyond the event horizon of the universe... We do not send our imagination or our minds outside of our body in order to experience him

because He reveals himself directly in our hearts. We bring our mind into our heart and pray so that we can find God.³⁷

The existential process of purification begins with what is termed “guarding the mind” by vigilance and prayer. This entails regulating the entrance of outside stimuli (especially temptations) to the greatest possible extent and training oneself to assess those that do enter.³⁸ When we struggle to purify the inner relationship with our conscience, our attitude—both within and outside ourselves—has a greater propensity to dispassion.³⁹ Puhalo provides a physiological explanation concerning this struggle for dispassion:

We are struggling to give our neo-cortex—the area of reason — control over the limbic region of the brain, the area that generates all the emotions. Our reason, informed by our moral conscience, especially needs to have ascendancy and control over the hypothalamus, the region that generates anger, fear, aggression, sexual desires, craving for food, sexual love (and parental love).⁴⁰

These passions, lodged in the hypothalamus, should be considered as forms of suffering rather than sinful in and of themselves.⁴¹

Prayer, or the memory of God, provides a “prescription” for the suffering that the passions create.⁴² For Puhalo, the reason that Orthodoxy possesses a system of prayer is self-evident. It provides a healing process, not just for the mind but for the entire individual.⁴³ Due to this potentiality, Puhalo also associates it with psychotherapy, calling it “the Orthodox Christian contribution to the psychotherapy process.”⁴⁴ In Puhalo’s view, psychotherapy holds superiority over the practice of psychology, which is often philosophical rather than empirical (i.e., scientific).⁴⁵ Prayer, with its own science, possibly can have a physiological effect upon the struggle with the passions that ultimately lead to sin.

It may even be possible, through genuine spiritual struggle, to create synapses in the brain and/or close off others, to alter the flow of neurotransmitters and revise the metabolism of glucose in areas of the brain affected. When we do not

struggle in these cases, when we accept these temptations and passions into our minds, we may actually create new synapses in the brain to facilitate the addiction or passion.⁴⁶

The memory of God through prayer helps create a continuing “link” between the human will/energy and the divine will/energy. In bringing us into accord with the will of God, it then becomes less likely for us to fall short of the “mark” or goal through sinning.⁴⁷ Reception of the purifying energies should not be misconstrued to mean only that human nature needs transformation, but rather that the will needs to have the distractions and sinful inclinations that encroach upon our relationship with God removed. Our individual (gnomic) will needs to become identical with Christ’s natural will. Human beings can do nothing good without God but neither will God do anything regarding human goodness without human cooperation. Whenever and wherever good is done, grace is present and it is the conscience, according to Puhalo, that provides the meeting place between our energy and God’s energy.⁴⁸

The concern for the “inner passions” cannot be divorced from the environment around us.⁴⁹ It is for this reason that both the eye and the tongue must be brought into full accord with the conscience according to Puhalo.⁵⁰ When we hurt each other with our eyes or tongues, this provides an existential demonstration of how little progress has been made in the purification of the heart/conscience.⁵¹ Both the “ascetic eye” and the “ascetic tongue” manifest the fruits of the dispassion that the memory of God manifests.

Our gaze can be trained in such a way that it never wounds another person. At a higher level our gaze can be trained in such a way that it serves in the healing process... The ascetic eye can automatically look at people with a kind of co-suffering that will validate their humanity and radiate the love of Christ.⁵²

As Christ said, “If your eye has integrity, then the whole body is full of light” (Mt. 6:22).⁵³ Rather dramatically, Puhalo notes that without purification, even a person who had gone blind would remember what he had seen and still feed the passions through the eyes.⁵⁴ Likewise, the

asceticism of the tongue should consist in more than just “holding it.” For instance, one who rebukes another, believing that this is done “righteously,” also demonstrates a lack of progress in purification.⁵⁵

If the life of faith were carried out only as an inner program without good works, it would no longer be faithful to God but a demonstration of faithlessness (*apistea*) according to the Fathers of the Church.⁵⁶ The practice of virtue already shows cooperation with God’s energy. As such, it would be more correct to see virtue itself (even though it is not a term found in Scripture) not as an element of human “character” but as a sign of good being done through the Good.⁵⁷ Likewise, although “the virtues” have been enumerated and categorized in various schools of thought, this has generally not been done in Orthodoxy. Instead, the virtues have been recognized not as specific deeds of a good character but as gifts of grace. Nonetheless, this should not be misconstrued to mean that we do not train ourselves to use our conscience together with our reasoning ability in all the good that we do.⁵⁸

Following the patristic tradition combined with his usual psychological and physiological emphasis, Puhalo presents an outline of how an act may be ultimately virtuous or sinful:

1. Suggestion. When a stimulus (suggestion or temptation) first enters the mind, an individual may even be unconscious of it, yet it will call forth a response. This response can only be considered a perception that is at first subconscious.
2. Acceptance. When the stimulus (suggestion or temptation) enters the mind, it may cause an immediate physical response while also entering into the reasoning process of the brain. During the reasoning process, the individual interprets the emotion or impulse and if there is an autonomic acceptance of a negative impulse, this leads to sin just as an autonomous acceptance of a positive impulse leads to virtue.
3. Agreement. At this juncture, the individual may find himself struggling either for or against his conscience. Whether he accepts or decides against, the process of reason has taken place in the cortex. If a sinful response has been chosen, the individual can struggle for repentance and cleanse the mind, restoring agreement with his good conscience.
4. Enslavement (Sinful Response). The reasoning process has reached the hippocampus region of the brain and has merged with the stream

coming from the amygdala. The individual has now come into agreement with a sinful thought and brought it into action. It can now be stored in the memory in such a way that pleasure can be taken in committing the deed in response to external stimulus as well as in remembering it.

5. Spiritual Sickness or Passion. The response has now passed into a consuming addiction.⁵⁹

As Puhalo points out, “positive training and godly impulses” can follow the very same path, culminating not in the passions but in goodness. It needs to be reiterated at this point how “guarding the mind” can help take control of our emotions and impulses at the earliest stage. Not just prayer, vigilance and repentance but also fasting (more on which will be said shortly) helps strengthen cortical control over the limbic region.⁶⁰

When we ask God’s forgiveness for falling into sin, we are actually asking the forgiveness of our conscience for turning away from the path of virtue.⁶¹ Puhalo acknowledges that very often, in the early stages of a Christian’s spiritual life, repentance will occur out of the fear of God rather than because of love for God. Even the scroll that St. Antony the Great holds in one of his icons announces, “I used to fear God but now I love him,” demonstrates that even saints have had the same experience. In fact, nothing separates us so much from God as a lack of love both for him and our neighbor.⁶² For Puhalo, Christ’s “moral imperative,” “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” and his “categorical imperative,” “love the Lord thy God and love thy neighbor as thyself” are far more practical than those of Kant.⁶³

Purification, illumination and deification constitute a *via amoris*. Only by constantly practising love can the human being attain communion with “God[who] is love” (1Jn.4:8). Antony Khrapovitsky has said that perfect holiness consists in perfect love rather than in correct behavior.⁶⁴ When we possess the constant memory of God in prayer, we are less likely to think about ourselves and thus more likely to act for the benefit of our neighbor. As Stanley Harakas has noted, to sacrifice one’s own ego for another can be a painful experience but it can also be a glory. And, it can also be the first step in advancing from glory to glory in the experience of co-suffering love.⁶⁵ But let us allow Puhalo the final word:

As one ascends this path [*theosis*], one rises above all earthly moral concepts into the certain knowledge that perfect holiness consists in nothing else but perfect love; perfect righteousness consists in the fullness of co-suffering love in Christ ...Godly love opposes the negative impulses within our fallen nature and co-suffering love in Christ causes us to see the falls and passions of others as genuine suffering in need of healing. Our hearts can then embrace their sufferings so that we might serve for their healing if by any means the opportunity is given. Our whole perspective...is so changed that we can hold no arrogance, no self-righteousness, no condemnation, but only an all-encompassing co-suffering love for humanity, indeed for the whole universe.⁶⁶

Fasting

Puhalo's detailed treatment of fasting helps unite the theme of individual struggle with that of social struggle. As Olivier Clement has pointed out, we not only struggle within ourselves, but simultaneously within society and culture to defeat all forms of slavery and degradation.⁶⁷ In Genesis, God blessed the material goods of the world and gave them to man "to eat." Thus, what the earth provided and how man partook of it should be configured with the intention of God for humanity and the world in general.⁶⁸ But even in paradise, fasting was expected of Adam and Eve. While the tree of life, that is, deification, was available to them, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was "off limits" for obvious reasons.⁶⁹ By turning away from God's grace, the passions instead drove human beings towards a concern for individual survival through continuous struggle with one another. The stomach itself represents the passions that hold us in the bondage we must overcome to regain paradise.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, "many of us," according to Puhalo, "like Esau...sell their inheritance of our rebirth for the sake of the stomach" (Gn. 25:29-34).

As with so much else, Puhalo also discovers pertinent instruction in the Old Testament concerning the meaning of fasting. Especially important for him is the seventh chapter of Joshua where the Israelites were commanded by God to sanctify themselves for there was an

“accursed thing” in their midst. Although this referred to the pagan spoils of Jericho that they had divided among themselves, it actually meant their avarice. In other words, rather than the things in and of themselves, it was their greedy attitude towards them that was the real problem. Consequently, their disobedience led them into defeat and only through prayer and fasting could they be rectified with God.⁷¹ For Puhalo, fasting itself can be considered a form of prayer when properly directed towards God.⁷² It helps us “remove the accursed thing [the passions] from our midst, and to humble ourselves before God, confessing that our victory is in him.”⁷³ And, in fasting, we should abstain not only from food but also from all the passions that separate us from God.

Fasting helps facilitate the “guarding of the mind.” Complete abstinence and even moderation in eating can aid spiritual awareness (discernment) of the temptations.⁷⁴ It also aids repentance because “it is such a complete struggle against the passions we wish to repent of.”⁷⁵ By fasting, we declare our independence from the fallen order in which we live.⁷⁶ To look upon fasting merely as an individual activity would be a mistake, however. Just as in ancient Israel where fasting reflected a communal *askesis*, so too do the times of fasting in the contemporary Orthodox Church. Rather than individualism, it encourages a corporate, social form of repentance (*metanoia*). Puhalo even encourages parents to teach their children to fast since it can provide a significant influence towards the right kind of self-determination: “If our children learn how to fast...during certain seasons, it will be easier for them to fast from marijuana and other drugs later in life.”⁷⁷ Still a ritualistic (and therefore legalistic) view of fasting needs to be avoided.

We must understand the reasons and need for fasting and teach them with love and compassion. We cannot judge people who do not actively keep the fasts, but we have no right to teach people not to fast or to have a low regard for fasting. The strictness of a person’s fast is modified by health and a person reduces his food intake according to his strength.⁷⁸

But Puhalo also reminds us that Christ did not say, *if* you fast but *when* you fast (Mt. 6:16-18).⁷⁹

Since the ecological benefits of corporate fasting would seem so self-evident, Puhalo does not dwell upon this but takes a different route, emphasizing instead fasting's political and economic implications. These are linked to the temptations that Christ encountered after his own forty-day fast for these also present a prophecy concerning Antichrist. Theatrical spiritual power, political power and the provision of food were all offered to Christ as temptations by Satan and all were rejected. Antichrist, when he appears sometime in the future, will do just the opposite and use them to his advantage.⁸⁰ The Church Fathers warn it will be because of a lack of the spiritual awareness (discernment) that results from prayer, vigilance and fasting that humanity will be "taken in" by the activities of Antichrist.⁸¹ Since we do not know when Antichrist will appear, Puhalo exhorts not only the current generation to fast but to teach each succeeding generation fasting's virtue so that Antichrist might be recognized.⁸²

It certainly is not coincidental that the annual warning concerning Antichrist in the Orthodox Church occurs on the penultimate Sundays before the beginning of the Great Fast (Lent). It needs to be emphasized that Antichrist does not mean "against Christ" but rather "in place of Christ," for many will recognize him as messiah. From Puhalo's perspective, when Antichrist appears, it will not be from the political left but from the extreme right, "when society has so collapsed and civilization (has) begun to vanish" that there will be a desperate need for law and order.⁸³ Such a decline in culture and its "values" will bring about Antichrist's political triumph (Rev. 13:7). This will be further enhanced by a great famine with food provided only to those who accept Antichrist, his government, and indeed, his "religion."⁸⁴ This again underlines the need for fasting for only those who have learned to do so will remain faithful to Christ in preparation for his second coming following the demise of Antichrist and the end of all culture not directed towards God. Their end will truly be terrible. (Lk. 17:28-30).

We read in the book of Revelation that, on the great day of the Lord, the seventh wrath of God will pour forth onto the earth...In an instant, all man's pride will crumble to rubble and vanish—his great manufacturing centers, [his centers] of culture, art and learning, all the things which man

worshipped in place of God.⁸⁵

Social Struggle

Considering the tortuous history it has suffered in various cultural contexts, it probably would be safe to say that Orthodox Christianity has found it far easier to be optimistic about the transformation of the individual through grace than about positive changes occurring in the activities of state and economy.⁸⁶ Even so, Puhalo reminds us, there can be no separation between the individual Christian's problems and the problems of humanity in general.

We believe in Jesus Christ and we struggle for the Orthodox faith but we do not cease to be human beings. We share a common nature with all of mankind. While we are striving to acquire the nature of Jesus Christ, we still are human beings and we share in the passions and sufferings and even in the happiness of the rest of humanity...We should always think within ourselves that all of us, as we struggle together are struggling for each other as well as for ourselves...So, whenever we struggle for our salvation and struggle with the spiritual darkness within us, we are also struggling for the redemption of all creation.⁸⁷

Such an attitude helps explain why the Church Fathers almost never speak of guilt (*enoché*) in either an individual or communal sense but rather about responsibility (*euthuné*) towards oneself and the community.⁸⁸

Today, the conflict between the interests of the individual and those of the group still remains the principle problem that every state must solve if it hopes to survive. While "law" and the legalism that can result from it has generally been associated with state control, almost all religions have also attempted a similar control of human behavior. As Puhalo notes, when religion is combined with law and rationalism, this can bring forth recognition of behavior "antithetical to the best interests of a given society" but without solutions for the problem of inner human suffering (the passions) that create such anti-social behavior.⁸⁹ In other words, such a "solution" is not enough. Indeed, the

Church Fathers themselves recognized that the Decalogue (the “ten commandments”) could do nothing more than attempt a basic regulation of human society.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, even the lawmakers of the most secular states will attempt to bring about group conformity “under the guise of morality” and for this reason, the Church must be ever vigilant of the political process.⁹¹ What this process needs is not morality but an injection of co-suffering love that recognizes the struggle of the individual citizen.

The chief problem lying at the root of both law-making and economic distribution in contemporary culture emanates from the meaning given to the concept of “value.” As Puhalo notes, pluralistic societies such as those in the United States and Canada generally have a relativistic usage of the word. Thus, anyone from a Protestant Christian to a moral philosopher will have no difficulty talking about “family values” although taking different viewpoints on the matter. Because there exist so many schools of thought on values, it is practically impossible to arrive at a suitable definition even though the lack of a “center” of values continues to be recognized.⁹² Despite such subjectivity, Puhalo believes that when individual human beings at least weigh alternatives and come to accept a particular view as true, they have undergone a conversion experience of sorts. The challenge, of course, lies in converting hearts and minds in the right direction.

In order to arrive at some sort of paradigm concerning values that could conceivably become socially pervasive, Puhalo builds upon the ethicist Robert Kane’s four dimensions of value that deal with values unique to sentient human beings. To these he adds a pre-first dimension to demonstrate that there are some values shared by other creatures and a fifth dimension of “transcendental value.”⁹³

1. Pre-First Dimension. This covers behavior that is based on bare survival. At this level, there are values shared by humans with other creatures, particularly mammals. A sort of “moral” tribal behavior that goes beyond cooperative hunting such as the sharing of food and defense is exhibited but so are “immoral” acts such as rape, murder and even genocide.⁹⁴ Before entering the next dimensions, Puhalo emphasizes that these apply only to human beings since they are the only creatures possessing a “conscience” enabling not only the making of informed choices but also the capacity for full communion

with God.⁹⁵

2. First Dimension: Experience. Human beings have the possibility of learning from the cumulative experience of the society to which they belong. Utilitarianism associated with the group can give a sense of both “value” and “devalue.” Thus, a *tradition* arises in each society and in the contemporary world but humanity can “assimilate values from the experience of a variety of different cultures.”⁹⁶

3. Second Dimension: Considered Behavior. In this dimension, “the appropriateness of those traditional values received from the experience of earlier generations” in a particular society or even those from other cultures are weighed.⁹⁷ Here, it is no longer group survival that dominates but the making of value choices by individuals for their own lives. At this point, Puhalo introduces virtue as the goal of the process that begins with considered behavior.⁹⁸

4. Third Dimension: Self-Defining Behavior. This dimension supercedes the particular value systems that might inform considered behavior. Here, individuals define who they are through their actions. Although the culture may impose categories such as ethical/unethical or good/bad, Puhalo suggests another route. By emphasizing “ideals” rather than “either/or,” the path from value to virtue can be initiated that bypasses right and wrong for the quest of the good.⁹⁹

5. Fourth Dimension: Universal Worth or Value. This dimension poses a difficulty since many philosophers question whether humanity can ascend to it and relativists doubt its very existence.¹⁰⁰ For Puhalo, the only real solution lies in replacing value with virtue at this level since value can have no universal application. Even if virtue is to succeed in such a context, it needs to be seen from a particular perspective:

A primary level of virtue (is) the pursuit of excellence. The pursuit of excellence is not connected with ideas of competition and “getting ahead” in any material sense. We are speaking about aspirations, not ambitions...The pursuit of excellence in our inter-human relations, in the development of our character, our personality, our particular essence (hypostasis), our moral conscience, this is the true meaning of virtue although it will take us to a higher level yet.¹⁰¹

Puhalo speaks of humans as being “imprinted with certain virtues” and also having an “inclination to virtue.”¹⁰² He makes this distinction more to show agreement with Hume’s “universal sentiments” (although John of Damascus’ view on image and likeness is brought into the discussion), hoping to demonstrate that the good we do occurs through no imposition of legal codes.¹⁰³ But since Puhalo also suggests that the desire to know God is innate in humanity, why not merely tie this with the inclination to virtue at this point?¹⁰⁴ This immediately alleviates the problem of deciding what virtues are innate and which are manifested through communion with God. It remains important to remember that the energies of God are at work even when God may not be acknowledged by human beings as they strive to do the good. In secular, pluralistic cultures, where behavior is more or less perceived as autonomous, such perspectives will be inevitable. On the other hand, those who do recognize the source of the good have the opportunity to cultivate the ability to move into the next dimension.

6. Fifth Dimension: Transcendent Value. This should be understood as the “content” of virtue itself and its full manifestation in deification (*theosis*).¹⁰⁵ Although this dimension may never be recognized by the state or society-at-large, the Church must fulfill her duty by not only proclaiming its possibility but also by helping make it possible. In a post-Christian world where theonomous cultures no longer exist, only the Church can offer this hope.

If the apprehension of value and virtue through the political processes of enacted legislation seems daunting, it appears almost impossible when placed in the realm of economics. The very existence of any state implies an economic system for the provision of its citizens’ material needs as well as for a state’s own continuing operation. Both state and economy are reciprocal and the disentanglement of politics from economic necessity almost impossible. Likewise, it certainly would be a mistake to identify Christianity with any particular political or economic system. While Max Weber may have tried to link capitalism with Protestantism, historical circumstances alone would make such a connection with Orthodox Christianity rather dubious. For that matter, neither would identification with communism as practised in the early Church or socialism as manifested in monasticism prove any

more convincing.

It is capitalism that presents the greatest challenge to just economic distribution today. Its prevalence even in formerly communist economies as well as its justification through a rather tenuous link with democracy has become a worldwide phenomenon. The capitalism of consumerism thrives by increasing human desire (i.e., the passions) while simultaneously decreasing the will to virtue. This is because capitalism does not flourish on virtue but rather through the exploitation of value, both material and non-material. Puhalo certainly believes that it was not Adam Smith who had gotten it right but Karl Marx. Smith's belief that man's good sentiments would curtail the exploitation of others has not proven accurate. Marx's belief that the economic realities "erode human behavior" seems far closer to the truth.¹⁰⁶

Individual Christians might wonder how they themselves could ever bring about any change to the inequities of contemporary economics. The burden of earning a living and paying the bills would seem to leave little time or motivation for social action. Nonetheless, Puhalo encourages us to be guided by our "first calling," to strive to live in communion with God and have his Kingdom ruling in our hearts.¹⁰⁷

One can become wealthy in a godly way...Using one's natural abilities to the fullest in an honest way, giving thanks to God, one may become wealthy. But there is a constant danger in this, for one can easily pass over into the service of "mammon." Ultimately, it is best to strive and work for the necessities of life and put the rest of your energies into your spiritual life.¹⁰⁸

Such efforts on the micro-level will not bring immediate change to macro-economics, especially in the Third World. There, according to Puhalo, "modern economic colonialism" by multi-national corporations holds control.¹⁰⁹ As far as Puhalo is concerned, all the talk about globalization in today's world has very little to do with human beings and everything to do with money.¹¹⁰

George Fedotov once wrote that the only social dogma that the Church possesses is that which coincides with the Church herself. There can be no dogma to guide political and economic systems since each system that the fallen order brings forth already contains the seeds of its own degeneration.¹¹¹ Still, the tradition of *philanthropia* by the

Church and her individual members should strike a constant note of co-suffering love. Such *philanthropia* is founded not only upon the distribution of material goods to those in need but also entails the offering of ourselves in their service. This is the only way that humanity can set things right with the natural environment that has continued to undergo suffering since the fall because of man's own exploitation. If the good is to be done, the responsibility of dealing with social issues cannot be avoided.

ENDNOTES:

1. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 10.
2. J. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 12-13.
3. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 28.
4. J. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics*, 62-64.
5. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe: Orthodox Christian Existentialism* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2001), 15, n. 17.
6. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 131.
7. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 145
8. See especially S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life: The Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1983).
9. Unfortunately, this critique, which makes up the first part of A. Khrapovitsky, *Moral Idea of the Main Dogmas of the Faith*, tr. V. Novakshonoff and L. Puhalo (Chilliwack, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1984), is not found in this current translation.
10. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 3, n. 6.
11. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 22.
12. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits and Concerning "Internal Demons"* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 34.
13. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 91, n. 83.
14. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 145.
15. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 143.
16. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 14.
17. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 13.
18. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 34.
19. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 75.

78 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

20. L. Puhalo, *On Holy Angels* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1990), 1, n. 1.
21. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2000), 2.
22. L. Puhalo, *Tale of the Elder Basil "the New" and the Theodora Myth* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1999), 4.
23. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 19.
24. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 14.
25. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 145.
26. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 120.
27. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 12, nn. 22, 23.
28. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 145.
29. *Ibid.*
30. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 90.
31. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 110; L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 53.
32. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 84.
33. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 26, n. 26.
34. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 28, n. 28.
35. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 121.
36. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 113.
37. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 115.
38. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 30.
39. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 113.
40. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 29, n. 29. According to Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 27, "The limbic region is a term variously used to identify the most primitive part of the brain (common not only to mammals but to reptiles) or the loop or circuit along which a stimulus is translated into an autonomic reaction. The idea of a limbic region...in the brain may be more conceptual than concrete because an emotional response is not the same thing as an emotional experience in humans which involves several areas of the brain.
41. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 35.
42. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 116.
43. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 102-3.

44. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 114.
45. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 84-85.
46. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 80.
47. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 117.
48. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 212, 232-233.
49. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 73
50. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 55.
51. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 70.
52. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 54-55.
53. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 69.
54. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 74.
55. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 69.
56. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 258.
57. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 129.
58. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 78.
59. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 31-33.
60. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 33.
61. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 108.
62. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 31.
63. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 140.
64. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 31.
65. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 170-171.
66. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 146.
67. O. Clement, "Orthodox Reflections on Liberation Theology," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 29, 1 (1985), 67.
68. C. Yannaras, *Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 91.
69. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 18.
70. L. Puhalo, "Spiritual and Scriptural Meaning of the Fasts," in *On Fasting* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1973), 2.
71. L. Puhalo, "Spiritual and Scriptural Meaning," 5.
72. L. Puhalo, *Sermons on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 52.
73. L. Puhalo, "Spiritual and Scriptural Meaning," 5.
74. L. Puhalo, "Spiritual and Scriptural Meaning," 10.
75. L. Puhalo, "Spiritual and Scriptural Meaning," 6.

80 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

76. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 27.
77. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 61.
78. L. Puhalo, "Spiritual and Scriptural Meaning," 13.
79. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 51.
80. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 26.
81. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 37.
82. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 26.
83. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 8.
84. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 26.
85. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 44.
86. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 93.
87. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, 97.
88. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 83.
89. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 130.
90. S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life*, 35.
91. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 130, 40.
92. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 129.
93. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 133.
94. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 133-134.
95. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 134.
96. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 135.
97. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 136. Puhalo notes particularly the act of suicide, which can be considered appropriate in some cultures.
98. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 136.
99. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 137.
100. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 139-140.
101. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 140.
102. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 142.
103. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 142-143.
104. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 144.
105. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 145-146.
106. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 143.
107. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 59.
108. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 57.
109. L. Puhalo, "Sources of Injustice," *Canadian Orthodox Missionary* (May-June, 1990).

110. L. Puhalo, *One Year After the Bombing* (videorecording. n.d.)

111. G. P. Fedotov, "The Church and Social Justice,"
Crosscurrents 14, 4 (Fall, 1964), 18-19.

IV.

SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY AS EMPIRICAL QUEST

In the medieval West, theology came to be called “the queen of the sciences” but this identification proved to be less and less accurate. Scholasticism’s speculative approach could not compete with the pursuit of knowledge by observation and experiment that the developing natural science of the late Middle Ages demanded. In more recent times, the situation has changed even more dramatically. The cultural pre-eminence of science has progressed from simply the use of the scientific method to what could be termed scientism. Bertrand Russell’s remark that “what[ever] science cannot discover, mankind cannot know” certainly sums up such an attitude.¹ Richard Kroner aptly put this phenomenon into a more theological context: “People began to adore science after science had deprived them of their proper object of adoration.”²

This sort of scientific positivism has found its most ardent believers not so much among scientists themselves as among members of the general public who have enjoyed the technological benefits that the applications of science have made possible. Those who would look to contemporary science for guidance in their lives will be disappointed, principally because scientists themselves have not banded together into an actual group for humanity’s betterment. As Lazar Puhalo remind us, science must remain a “values-neutral” process for it to be true to its vocation.³ C.P. Snow’s own dichotomy between what he called “the two cultures” helps underline the polarization that has occurred between science and society.⁴ The aura that has developed around scientific research has not only made it often inconceivable to the “man-

in-the-street,” but often beyond his questioning analysis.

Nonetheless, because the scientific method has brought not only the good but also the bad, its bright position has been somewhat darkened, especially in the shadow of the threat of total annihilation which it has helped create. More often now, science is also accused of undermining humanity. This attitude has been long in coming and has by no means eradicated the elements of scientism that are found in contemporary society. Still, the debate concerning biotechnology and genetic engineering in particular has helped accelerate negative attitudes towards research. From Puhalo’s perspective, science certainly can be a vehicle for de-humanization but this does not mean that it should be rejected outright.⁵ His own empirical approach concerning the psychology and physiology of the spiritual life already has provided a hint of how he feels science can complement theology.

Philosophy/Theology – Science/Technology

John Meyendorff blamed Western Christianity’s attempt to impose authoritarian control upon science as the actual reason for scientism and Puhalo expands upon this viewpoint.⁶ From his perspective, both Catholicism and Protestantism have shackled science with their own respective preconceptions. In Catholicism, this can be identified with the Thomistic system of scholasticism and in Protestantism, with the *sola scriptura* principle itself, which can claim the text of the Bible to be both historical and scientific truth.⁷ Such preconceptions have caused both scholastics and fundamentalists to “require that science compromise its integrity in an effort to conform its findings artificially to their own religio-political doctrines and philosophical viewpoints.” The trial of Galileo and more recently, the attempted imposition of “scientific creationism” perhaps provide the two best examples of such demands for compromise.⁸ For science truly to be itself, it cannot be imprisoned by preconceptions that might distort its task from the very outset.⁹

As they developed within the framework of scholasticism, Western theology and science became extensions of both Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy.¹⁰ Rather than a theology and science founded upon experience and observation, these were based upon so-called abstract philosophical “first principles” and even analogy. According to

Puhalo, this approach "deprives us of the world itself. It replaces regard for creation with a set of artificial facts about nature and history, facts which historically are shown to be grounded in ideology and philosophical theories, not in the empirical regard for nature, which science may deepen our appreciation of."¹¹

From a contemporary perspective, it might seem that the proximity of theology and science in the Middle Ages of the West would make them strange bedfellows. But it is not so much their close relationship that should surprise but rather that ancient philosophy was the parent to both of them.¹² It is not difficult to see how the Thomistic attempt to systematize theology within a philosophical framework can remove it from the real experience of a faith-filled life. For Puhalo (and the Orthodox Tradition), such a reflective theology is a debased theology.¹³ Both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas rationalized every Christian teaching through the use of logic, defining them in the greatest detail. Unfortunately, such a methodology tries to explain more than it can.

At first, Western medieval science followed the same pattern. Incorporating Aristotelian principles, "every theory was thought to have a one-on-one correspondence in physical reality." Such a view was possible principally because Aristotle's cosmology was one of static determinism. In other words, the sheer inertia of physical reality made very precise explanations possible since there was no discernable physical change.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Platonic (and Augustinian) conception that every aspect of reality was merely a reflection of universals or divine ideas (*analogia entis*) also contributed to the belief in the constant form of reality.¹⁵ When Roscelin, at the end of the eleventh century, started a centuries-long controversy through his refutation of these universals that eventually involved Abelard, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, the exit from Aristotelian and Platonic rigidity was finally provided.¹⁶ Individual, material objects took on importance in and of themselves and thereby invited observation.¹⁷ In addition, as this new type of science advanced, so did its applications in technology. Development of telescopes and microscopes, as Puhalo succinctly puts it, "made it possible to actually look at things rather than speculate about them."¹⁸ And, as technology developed, it became the "convincing test of the truth of science."¹⁹ Technological momentum intensified until, according to Werner Heisenberg, natural science

became technical science—individuals were no longer so interested in nature as it was but in what they could do with it.²⁰ Only the shaking of the foundations through the theories of evolution and quantum physics would help reclaim natural science's primary vocation.

Although science in the Byzantine context also stayed close to its ancient roots, developments in the East did not quite parallel those in the West. For instance, although Aristotle's theories held sway, Platonic principles such as the divine ideas were rejected. While scientific study cannot be claimed as one of the great cultural achievements of East Rome, this cannot be blamed on any prohibitions imposed by the Orthodox Church. Rather than scholastic reductionism, there was a greater emphasis on a holistic viewpoint. When a need arose for an understanding of the natural world, the eastern Christian generally turned to patristic literature such as St. Basil's *Hexaemeron* (a treatise on the six days of creation) rather than scientific observation.²¹ Even so, this should not be misconstrued to mean that scientific analysis did not occur. Already in the sixth century the scientist-philosopher Philoponos had critiqued Aristotle's theories concerning motion, emphasizing impetus instead of inertia.²² Interestingly, Maximos the Confessor was probably a student of Philoponos, so his own emphasis on creation's movement (*kinesis*) as a natural consequence of creation by God should not come as a surprise. For Maximos, the ultimate goal of this movement is nothing less than union with God. Consequently, Puhalo sees Orthodox theology as sharing a closer relationship with the science exemplified by modern physics than either scholasticism or fundamentalism can claim.

The advent of sounder knowledge and truer concepts of motion abolished...metaphysical and superstitious notions and doubtless caused anguish among scholastic and fundamentalist theological philosophers. Modern science would view the universe (as with all nature) as in the process of developing. I would suggest that Orthodox Christian theology sees the universe simply as unfolding according to the eternal will and plan of God. The processes involved in this are not matters of philosophical or even theological speculation, which might come into active conflict with scientific discovery. Rather the process is accepted as a matter of faith and trust in God, and

made more comprehensible by means of science.²³

Movement implies change and in the realm of natural science, it would be remiss not to say something about the theory of evolution in an Orthodox context. From an eastern patristic perspective, the energy expended on the evolution controversy of the last century and a half seems rather wasteful. Already in Gregory of Nyssa's writings, the creative energies of God are presented as taking a gradually ascending course.²⁴ According to Puhalo, the problem with evolution is not so much the theory itself but "the theorists who have sought to displace divine providence with their renditions of the theory."²⁵ Of course, equal care must be taken when giving an Orthodox view so that a concept of theistic evolution does not deteriorate into dogma as "creation science" does. A statement such as that made by the Orthodox biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky saying that evolution itself is "a struggle for the gradual emergence of freedom" has a theo-anthropological overtone that may cross the line.²⁶ "Survival of the fittest" and "freedom" certainly do not share an equivalency from a patristic perspective. Still, since Genesis says nothing about death within non-human creation before the fall, there would be no reason to surmise, as Puhalo tells us, that other living things did not die prior to man's sin.²⁷

The Russian theologian Sergius Bulgakov considered science a "fruit" of the incarnation whenever it sought the improvement of man and his environment.²⁸ While such a statement may seem somewhat exaggerated, it does invite examination of a scientific development such as genetic engineering. Could its use still be considered good, even if bringing change to man's own evolution? Biotechnology in and of itself, like any other technology, must be considered as neutral, having the potential for good or evil. Should its application in the eradication of disease and disability bring prolongation to the quality of life, it could be considered a contribution to man's own continuing quest for the good. Puhalo himself has written about the close relationship that existed between medical science and early eastern Christianity, a relationship generally forgotten today. He has even gone so far as to call the holy unmercenary physicians Hermione, Zenaida and Philonella "the mothers of modern medicine." From the perspective of Orthodox theo-anthropology, the longer an individual human life

exists, the greater the possibility for a true participation in the existential process of purification, illumination and deification. As Puhalo puts it, this struggle “restore(s) our deep presence to God’s creation in a life of communion and co-suffering love.”²⁹ Should science enable us to do this to an ever-greater degree, it would be hard to object to it.

Orthodox Theology and Modern Physics

It has been lamented that Christian theologians generally do not know much about science even though it, together with technology, controls our world today. According to John Meyendorff, the difficulties of natural science generally have not been embraced by theologians since they find the so-called “social sciences” far easier to deal with.³⁰ Puhalo, with his usual astuteness, does just the opposite. He does not even discuss the social sciences, not just because they are heavily influenced by philosophy but because they are “subject to fad thinking and fashion” and “unremittingly doctrinaire,” and thus not genuine science.³¹ Puhalo finds it much more fruitful to dialogue with natural science.

Science is the most appropriate method we have for understanding the world of nature. It has the great benefit, and one that I think is in full agreement with Christianity, of exposing superstition. The ability of science to demystify the natural world is itself a wonderful gift. It frees us to observe and understand the real marvel of creation without constantly projecting onto the natural world our own unresolved fears and desires.³²

Puhalo chooses modern physics as a partner in dialogue with Orthodox theology principally because he feels that it receives the greatest attention of all the pure sciences (i.e., those whose primary aims are not technological applications) today. In addition, it deserves fresh attention since it (along with biology) often causes fundamentalist Christians to “paint themselves into corners.”³³ From Puhalo’s perspective, both Orthodox theology and modern physics can be

considered as comparable empirical processes.³⁴ Even so, they are not to be considered as bound together since they manifest different levels of knowledge.³⁵ Here, Vladimir Lossky's distinction of knowledge as *gnosis* and *epistome* might aid in understanding these different "levels." *Gnosis* refers to divine knowledge while *epistome* designates physical knowledge. Theology presents an ascent in Truth that only God can make possible while modern physics yields a picture of physical reality that only observation and experimentation can provide. In the first instance, the existential process of purification, illumination and deification remains a necessity while in the second, the scientific method that provides dependable data without any form of manipulation underlines its foundation.³⁶

While this distinction makes perfect sense, Puhalo's allowance in modern physics for noetic experience, that is knowledge not acquired through reason alone but through *theoria* might seem somewhat surprising. Just as the vision of *theoria* in theology implies more than sense knowledge, so too in modern physics, not everything is observable at the micro level.

Noetic experience is in another dimension, not another universe...Those noetic experiences which are available to those who struggle may include the uncreated light [of illumination and deification] but those experiences are also psycho-physical, experienced by the whole person, experienced within the confines of the created universe — a universe which will be transfigured, not destroyed.³⁷ The two kinds of *theoria*...pertain to the ascertaining of dogma ...and the more ordinary kind which is innate in the processes of modern physics...In the Orthodox context, *theoria* presupposes the action of divine grace. In physics, the process is experimental, and *theoria* is informed contemplation of the results of experiments. Its guidelines are quantum and relativity theory. In Orthodoxy, the process is experiential...Its guidelines are Scripture and the sacred tradition of the faith.³⁸

In Orthodoxy, there has always existed a distinction between kerygma and dogma. While kerygma represents a general preaching or exposition of the faith, dogma implies an empirical "knowledge" of

God through experience.³⁹ It is not defined rationally nor is it comprehended logically. Puhalo refers to dogma as merely the “framework” of the experience and thus, “there is no one-on-one correspondence between every point of theology and spiritual reality.”⁴⁰ This paradoxical aspect aids in maintaining a proper perspective through metaphorical and allegorical language and in saying no more than is proper.⁴¹ Likewise, in microphysics (the study of the fundamental relationships of physical reality), what is presented are *models* of reality. It is not so much the observation of physical entities that occurs at the micro-level as the attempt to describe the interaction among the entities where observation is impossible.⁴² At this level, the physicist cannot be an observer and must interject himself into the process. Also, because of Bohr’s complementarity principle and Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, it cannot exactly be determined when matter will be transformed into energy or energy into matter at the sub-atomic level. Even when the physicist comprehends what is going on, he cannot explain it.⁴³ In this instance, rather than metaphorically or allegorically, the reality can be described symbolically through mathematical formulae.⁴⁴

Neither true theology nor modern physics can occur without the interaction of the Christian or the physicist. But as this interaction occurs, a certain tension is also present, as Puhalo notes:

We have a certain tension between the micro and the macro levels of reality in physics and between the created and uncreated, the noetic and the sensually visible in theological experience. The created universe we experience is reality — macro-level reality and we see it and verbalize it in language... Nevertheless, the macro-world is composed of the micro.⁴⁵ ... Whenever we visualize or visually interpret in the quantum [i.e., micro] level, we distort and perhaps even falsify reality. Precisely the same thing occurs when we visualize the uncreated in terms of our created macro level reality which is the only frame in which we can visualize or linguistically interpret.⁴⁶

This tension explains why Heisenberg warned that in microphysics, there was no way to correlate its mathematical symbols with language.⁴⁷ In much the same way, it remains difficult to “theologize”

about God in language, so even when we revert to the use of language, we are limited by Orthodoxy's apophatic or negative theology. Because of this, we cannot visualize or describe the essence of God.⁴⁸ Extraordinarily enough, Niels Bohr said something comparable concerning physics: "It is wrong to surmise that the task of physics is to find out the essence of nature. Physics concerns only what we can discern about nature."⁴⁹

Having noted the parallels between the "technique" of Orthodox theology and that of a modern physics that has discarded the constraints of the philosophical presuppositions of classical physics, Puhalo ultimately asks if the two can ever intersect. The question is obvious since he feels that contemporary physics "is an intriguing and fascinating extension of our knowledge which could only substantiate basic Orthodox concepts." Although Puhalo never claims that physics could give us a direct "proof of God's existence," his use of a passage from Paul's Epistle to the Romans implies that physics could reveal something of the divine attributes (energies), albeit indirectly. In that passage (Rm. 1:20), Paul tells us "since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen, being understood from the things that were created."⁵⁰ While Puhalo remains quite adamant that the created realm cannot reveal the Creator, he does feel that it can testify to God since He created it.⁵¹ Thus, presumably, at the very least, the creative and sustaining energies of God could be linked with the origin of the universe (the so-called "big bang" theory) as well as its evolution without extinction through the exchange of energy and matter (the principle of complementarity). Surely beyond these energies or attributes, it would be difficult to say more.

In Orthodox theology, as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed states, it is Christ "through whom all things were made." Puhalo emphasizes how this view of Christ as the Wisdom and Power of God creating and sustaining all things differs from that of the Thomistic system. In scholasticism, it is God the Father, as First Cause, who creates and governs the universe through secondary causes. And, since the essence-energy of God must remain pure potentiality (*actus purus*), these secondary causes are not uncreated but created energies.⁵² In contradistinction, from the Orthodox perspective, since Christ as Logos is the Wisdom and Power of God, all the uncreated divine energies that sustain creation, also manifest through Him, according to

Maximos the Confessor, the *logoi* or the divine intentions for all created things. When any created entity fulfills its own *logos*, it is in communion with God. For man, the divine intention is obvious: to become like the incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ. But how can the rest of creation attain its *logos*? Only through the help of man, created in the image and likeness of God. According to Puhalo, this remains man's chief duty, especially since creation itself has been affected by man's fall.⁵³

Such a conclusion certainly turns the accusation of egocentrism in the so-called "anthropic principle" (i.e., the belief that the main thing about the universe is that man is in it) on its head.⁵⁴ In other words, it is not so much that we live in a harmonious, ordered universe that offers "proof" of God's existence with man as the pinnacle of creation as that we live in a chaotic universe that humanity itself has helped put into disarray. As Paul proclaims in his Epistle to the Romans (Rm. 8:20-23): "The whole creation is in a state of infirmity, not by its own fault...We are aware that the whole of creation is groaning and toiling together until now and that creation itself will be set free of its bondage to corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children."

[The] Apostle Paul tells us that the universe is in a fallen state together with man. Thus, at the macro-level of the universe, we are not surprised to learn of the Heisenberg Principle of Uncertainty, of the principles of Hamiltonian and Dissipative Chaos [here, chaos=random order], or that there is much stochasticity [dissipation of harmony] in the universe. Black holes, the stochastic orbits of elliptical galaxies, etc. are all perfectly scriptural. The imaginary concentric circle "perfect order" in the universe is based on a preoccupation with Plato and Aristotle (and other Hellenistic philosophers). Moreover, if as [the physicist] Subha Mangalampalli suggests, entropy is the "universe's quest for freedom," then it is a self-willed quest, because entropy is the tendency toward less and less order. To me, entropy is the testimony of a universe in need of redemption.⁵⁵

Puhalo finds an explanation for the universe's fall into corruptibility reflected in the non-locality theory of modern physics.⁵⁶ According to

this theory, anything that occurs in one field of the universe necessarily has an effect on every other field. Our own fall has affected the world around us and this, in turn, has an influence upon our interconnected universe. This is because, as Puhalo puts it, the “parts” that make up the elements of our universe can be neither isolated nor independent in their actions. Thus, the actions of humanity are bound together with the destiny of the universe just as atomic and subatomic particles behave, not independently, but as integral parts of the whole.⁵⁷ So, just as the universe fell with man, so too will it be transformed because of man. The second person of the Trinity “through whom all things were made” as God-man will bring the anthropic principle to its positive fulfillment. This has already been initiated, first in the incarnation, then in the resurrection and will be consummated with Christ’s second coming.⁵⁸ Because of this, He is the Redeemer of our currently mutable universe. And, just as our universe had a beginning, so too shall it have an end, not in annihilation but in transfiguration.⁵⁹

Microcosm and Macrocosm

Christ’s second coming in glory hardly excuses humanity from responsibility for creation until that time. The eastern patristic tradition has never made a distinction between man and nature. Rather, the distinction to be made is between “He who truly is” and “all things” (*ta panta*), the uncreated and the created.⁶⁰ Man is not set apart from the universe but instead called upon to be a mediator between God and creation.⁶¹ This theme has been particularly emphasized in the writings of Maximos the Confessor, who gave new significance to the classical concept of man as microcosm. Through purification, illumination and deification, we can set ourselves right with the universe without any threat of exploiting it. But can we truly have a co-suffering love for the entire universe or macrocosm as Puhalo admonishes us?⁶² Only by progressing in *theosis*, for only through deification can we look upon the universe as God does.

Through works of technology there has been a tendency not only to dehumanize ourselves but also to sin against the natural environment rather than “humanizing” it in the best sense of the term. When man interacts with creation, he extends the human body, incorporating it with nature. This is why the application of technology must always

conform to the divine will for the universe. While Orthodox theology would not claim, as process theology does, that every technological creation is an “event” in God, all technology should be in keeping with God’s *logoi* for the created universe. As technology is a creative thing, so it should not violate what God has created. This explains why, in the Orthodox Tradition, rites of blessing are prescribed for the sanctification of technology. This is done in the hope that it will be put to the best possible use.⁶³

The more complex and powerful technology becomes, the more it takes on a life of its own apart from man.⁶⁴ As an application such as the so-called information technology continues to fill the world, the dehumanization that it brings with it also needs to be addressed. The rigid, impersonal character that it can spread throughout our planet needs to serve as a warning as technology also takes us beyond our own planet. Because of our own physical limitations, technology provides the only means that man possesses for extending the human body into the universe and embracing it. From Puhalo’s perspective, that there might one day be encounters with extra-terrestrial life in such circumstances really poses no problem for Orthodox Theanthropology. Just as for John Romanides, “all planets [are] the same” for him within such a context: All life is called to selfless love in emulation of the Creator.⁶⁵ While the story deals more with science fiction than science fact, Puhalo’s own Orthodox interpretation of the story for the film, *Star Wars* helps underline this. Progress in co-suffering love can occur anywhere in the universe.⁶⁶

At present, it certainly can be safely stated that man possesses no overall image or plan as to what his relationship with the macrocosm should be. Man has not even accomplished this on our own planet. Puhalo presents the architecture and iconography of the Byzantine-style church building as the key. The image of the Pantokrator in the central dome proclaims that Christ is the point of unity for all things (Col. 1:15-20) which he has recapitulated in Himself (Eph. 1:10).⁶⁷

Inasmuch as the Church is a type of the redeemed cosmos, the Fullness of the reign and rule of God, the icon of the Pantokrator (the All-Sustainer, the One who governs all) is enthroned in its proper place. We are surrounded in church by icons of Christ, the bodiless angels and the saints as a revelation of the

universality of the holy Church for, in the Church, the universe is united—the heavenly and the earthly Church are one. We are, however, talking about the transfigured universe of the future, which is being revealed and foretold by our Orthodox church architecture.⁶⁸ ...The universe will be transfigured in the fullness of time. Then, ...iconography and liturgical architecture will vanish, because they will have been fulfilled.⁶⁹

So, it remains for man, as a “co-worker with God” (1Cor.3:9) to cooperate in this great work, using science and technology as a means of writing the icon and offering the universe to God in a fit state. As Olivier Clement so aptly put it:

Man is the universe’s hope to receive grace and be united with mankind. Man is also the possibility of failure and loss for the universe.⁷⁰

ENDNOTES:

1. B. Russell, *Religion and Science* (New York: H.Holt, 1935), 26-27.
2. R. Kroner, *Culture and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1966), 111.
3. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 39.
4. C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
5. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 4
6. J. Meyendorff, “Catholicity of the Church” in *Living Tradition* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 95
7. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 19.
8. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 2.
9. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 39.
10. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 17
11. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 20.
12. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 17.
13. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 12-14.

14. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 15.
15. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 34.
166. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 14-15.
17. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 15.
18. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 18.
19. J.L. Adams, *Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Culture, Science and Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 98.
20. W. Heisenberg, extract from *Physics and Philosophy in Science, Faith and Man*, ed. W.W. Wagar (New York: Walker, 1968), 24.
21. J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (English ed.: Oxford, 1975), 133
22. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 15.
23. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 15-16.
24. P. Gregorios, *The Human Presence* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978), 64.
25. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 24, n. 57.
26. See T. Dobzhansky, *Biology of Ultimate Concern* (New York: New American Library, 1967).
27. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 54.
28. N. Zernov, *Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1963), 306.
29. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 20. For more on his views on medicine, see L Puhalo, *The Impact of Byzantine Christian Thought on Medicine* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.).
30. J. Meyendorff, "Catholicity of the Church," 95.
31. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 21, n. 49.
32. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 39, n. 92.
33. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 21, n. 49.
34. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 20, n. 47.
35. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 24.
36. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 39.
37. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 22.
38. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 43.
39. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 10, n. 15.
40. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 41.
41. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 13, n. 27.

96 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

42. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 24, n. 58; 26. Puhalo prefers to use the term microphysics rather than quantum physics because current developments have merged quantum and relativity theory.
43. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 24, n. 58.
44. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 35.
45. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 35.
46. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 35-36.
47. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 36.
48. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 36-37.
49. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 26, n. 61.
50. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 24-25.
51. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 26.
52. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 45.
53. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 48
54. On this, see J.D. Barrow and F.J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
55. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 46-47.
56. In physics, locality actually means that the causal influence of one entity upon another cannot propagate faster than the speed of light. Non-locality means that it can, thus calling into question the absolute in Einstein's special theory of relativity.
57. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 48-49.
58. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 50.
59. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 26.
60. P. Gregorios, *The Human Presence*, 26.
61. P. Gregorios, *The Human Presence*, 80.
62. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe: Orthodox Christian Existentialism* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2001), 146.
63. J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 135.
64. J.L. Adams, *Paul Tillich's Philosophy*, 108.
65. J. Romanides, "All Planets the Same," *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1965: 18.
66. L. Puhalo, "Star Wars: Another Point of View," *Canadian Orthodox Missionary*, 1984.
67. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 44-45.
68. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 45.
69. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things*, 48.
70. O. Clement, "L'Homme dans le monde," *Verbum Caro* Xii, 45 (1948), 11-12.

V.**THE AESTHETICS
OF REALITY**

One of the paradoxes of art history must be the convergence of the rediscovery of the authentic Orthodox icon and the emergence of modern art. After centuries of captivity to Western ideals of post-Renaissance sacred art, the cleaning of medieval Russian icons in the early twentieth century brought a renewed awareness of a very vivid “theology of color” to Orthodox Christianity.¹ Almost simultaneously, artists such as Matisse and Kandinsky, who had seen these icons, launched themselves upon their own aesthetic journeys in expressionism and abstract expressionism. Kandinsky himself testified that Byzantine art had certainly influenced the development of modern art.² It was almost as if Western art had come full circle, heavy laden and weary from the succession of styles through which it had passed over the centuries. In the West, there had been no distinction between the styles of sacred and other art since at least the middle ages and Orthodox iconography itself eventually fell victim to this lack of distinction through Western influence.

While the rediscovery of traditional iconographic style led to a “renaissance” in Orthodox sacred art, the secular artists who had experienced the Orthodox icon and attempted to convey “the spiritual in art” produced a very different end-product. From Vladimir Malevich’s placement of his painting “Black Square” in the traditional “icon corner” of his Petrograd exhibit in 1915 to the opening in 1971 in Houston of a “chapel” filled with Mark Rothko’s abstractions, the results have been anti-representational.³ And, although a representa-

tional “style” plays an important role in the creation of the icon, it is not so much the icon’s style that makes a painting an Orthodox icon, according to Lazar Puhalo, but the fact that it remains “scripturally and doctrinally correct.”⁴ If a painted icon fails to convey Orthodox Theanthropology, it is pretty much useless whatever its style or medium.

The great twentieth-century Russian philosopher-scientist Pavel Florensky made a rather interesting comparison of the icon, the oil painting and the engraving as respectively representing Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant culture. While the icon manifests color, it does so in a rather austere manner. Oil painting, in comparison, while also colorful, displays sensuality through its texture. And the engraving, while lacking both color and sensuality, possesses its own type of austerity.⁵ It could immediately be charged that such comparisons might be somewhat of an oversimplification, especially since Protestantism could just as easily be identified with outright iconoclasm because of its *sola scriptura* emphasis. Nonetheless, Florensky’s comparisons do demonstrate that even though Western culture had largely lost any distinction between a style of sacred art and other artistic manifestations, the creation of “art for art’s sake” never totally prevailed. Consequently, the possibility of the re-establishment of a sacred style in Western art may not be that remote.

The aestheticism associated with *l’art pour l’art* generally hastens the rejection of reality rather than its depiction, and this might help explain what has happened in contemporary art.⁶ More than anything else, the aesthetic goal of the Theo-anthropological implications of the icon underlines the depiction of a reality transformed in Christ. Art certainly can depict reality in a more immediate and direct way than either philosophy or science has ever been able to do.⁷ For this reason, Orthodox iconography provides the foundation for a Christian realism rooted in the incarnation of Christ. Although the iconographer cannot create from nothing as God has, he possesses the important task of demonstrating that all reality is rooted in God.

Iconographic Style

From Puhalo’s perspective, the re-introduction of the Orthodox icon into the artistic mainstream has been difficult, not because of a lack of need for it but because aesthetic apprehension has fallen to such a low

level in contemporary culture:

Not too many decades ago, even in public schools, the idea of training the eye was part of the curriculum. Art appreciation classes were considered necessary because the eye had to be trained for discernment. In the course of the materialistic days of the 50's and 60's, art and music appreciation classes began to be viewed as "unnecessary frills." They did nothing to enhance one's economic prospects so they were a waste of time and money.⁸

So, without any education in aesthetic principles:

Most people do not like correct and strict ikons because their eyes have not been trained. Not only do they not have spiritual discernment, but they do not even have the means of making careful aesthetic judgments.⁹

Paradoxically, iconographic style has been problematic not only for the viewer but also for contemporary icon painters themselves. After such a long hiatus, the return to traditional models often has resulted in a somewhat archaeological product rather than a living work of art. In the early years of the re-adoption of authentic iconographic style, inspired work such as that of the Greek iconographer Photios Kontoglou was the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰ And, although the situation has improved in recent decades, new icons can still look more like historical exercises rather than inspired creations. A work designed to portray new life can instead sometimes display very little vitality. More than a question of individuality, such icons pose the problem of how much creativity can be allowed within the context of the aesthetics of traditional iconographic style.

As Puhalo observes, an icon must be scripturally and dogmatically correct (which explains why they are said to be "written" rather than painted) but from a contemporary perspective, the question must certainly be asked as to why a distinct style remains so important even when secondary to scriptural and dogmatic concerns? Leonid Ouspensky probably gives the best answer to such a question. By placing the Gospel lectionary, the Cross, relics *and* icons all in the same category,

the Seventh Ecumenical Council has shown that the sacred image must be considered far more than a product of culture. As Ouspensky puts it, “the icon is a sacred inheritance arising out of the depths of the catholic consciousness of the Church.”¹¹ In other words, the content and message of the icon does not depend upon any particular culture, for the Church can never be reduced to just another “cultural value” among others. Since, as Puhalo says, “iconography is a form of scripture,” the Church decides upon its “canon” just as with scripture. More than a product of culture, the icon presents “the image of an existentially integrated revelation.”¹²

In separating the icon from what he calls, “mere religious art,” Puhalo uses a distinction made by the art historian Helen Gardner. In the history of Western art as it developed in the Mediterranean basin:

...it became apparent that two distinct ways of looking at man and his universe were struggling for supremacy. One predominantly Hellenic in origin, sought to represent visual experience of natural forms in space and the actuality of man’s experience. The other, basically Semitic in origin, sought the abstract representation of ideas, through symbols and the direct, simple narration of events which were given form by rhythmic ornamental surface designs.¹³

Thus, Puhalo concludes that

Iconography developed on the basis of Semitic principles, such as those demonstrated in the Dura-Europos synagogue paintings, namely showing things in a perspective which clearly placed God over all, and which related every thing to God, elevating every thing toward God and using powerful symbolism in the rhythmic flow of design to link the ikon to the Holy Scripture and, indeed, make it a visual form of the written Scripture. Into this structure, deeply symbolic tomb art from various cultures was adapted. These principles were not compromised by the enhancement of the forms with a certain grace and beauty in Byzantium.¹⁴

For Puhalo, the Old Testament itself provides an explanation for the

origin of iconographic style. The fact that God commanded “idolatrous images of that which is in heaven” be forbidden (Ex. 20:4) while at the same time commissioning images of holy angels for the tabernacle (Ex. 25) has a special significance. As well as confirming the Semitic origin of iconographic style, this posits a difference between images considered idolatrous or heretical and those accepted as theologically sound.¹⁵ That iconography was considered acceptable within the tabernacle and temple showed that “heaven had truly come down to earth and that God would commune and fellowship with his people.”¹⁶ As iconographic style passed from the Old Testament context to that of the New Testament, the tomb art especially from the Egyptian and Roman cultures was used to decorate the first churches—the catacombs.¹⁷

Gardner’s distinction between Semitic and Hellenic style that Puhalo uses should not be misconstrued to mean that Hellenic elements never entered Orthodox iconography. As Gervase Mathew put it, there was always “a taste for classical reminiscence” in Byzantine art.¹⁸ In many ways, this adoption of classical elements clearly manifests Christian Hellenism as much as does the theological terminology of the Cappadocian Fathers. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to consider this adaptation of Hellenic elements into sacred art as philosophically inspired. The charge that Byzantine sacred art with its reverse perspective, radiating composition and disregard for scale and depth was inspired by neo-Platonism receives no textual support.¹⁹ To the contrary, East Roman writers constantly praised the life-like quality of the art of their time. While this may seem rather perplexing when looking at Byzantine art with modern eyes, it must be remembered that levels of expectation in this regard were different than ours today.²⁰

Very early in its history, the reduction of iconographic style to a minimum of details and a maximum of expression imitated “the laconic and sober character of scripture” according to Ouspensky.²¹ But “abstraction” can only be carried so far and this was borne out by the now famous Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council in the late seventh century that forbade the depiction of Christ as a lamb. Within the context of the incarnation, the Christian faith and its art provide no possibility for either abstractions or metaphysical conceptions.²² Just as with their interpretation of scripture, so too were the Church Fathers considered the ultimate interpreters of the content of the icon.

According to the Seventh Ecumenical Council, “only the technical part of icon painting belongs to the artist; the determination of the icon itself plainly belongs to the holy Fathers.”²³ Just as with other aspects of the Church’s life, the iconographic canons appointed by the Fathers provide a “map” that conveys the corporate experience of the Church rather than the autonomous viewpoint of the individual artist.²⁴

In contrast, the eventual victory of Hellenic influence in the sacred art of the West caused its deterioration, according to Puhalo, as it “began to develop on the principles of pagan Greece, in which everything related to the physical, carnal man “rather than the reality of the incarnation.”²⁵ Without the guidance of iconographic canons, the painting of images occurred more and more according to the painter’s imagination.²⁶ Ultimately, all semblance of sacred art as an expression of the corporate experience of the Church vanished and rather than submission to the iconographic canons, artists submitted themselves “to [artistic] periods and trends.” In the end, it was cultural attitudes that were instead canonized within Catholicism. According to the recent *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*:

The [Catholic] Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her very own, she has admitted fashions from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of people and the needs of the various rites.²⁷

So, just as during the Renaissance, Catholicism has continued “to adapt itself to the fashions of an autonomous culture” rather than the catholic consciousness of the Church.²⁸

Today, paradoxically, just as Western art influenced Orthodox iconography in the past, it is the icon that today has been winning acceptance in Catholicism and even in Protestantism. Even though a theologian such as Ouspensky can rejoice that the introduction of the icon into the Western confessions might help overcome an obstacle such as created grace, Puhalo remains far more cautious. His reluctance is shaped by a mixture of aesthetic and spiritual reasons. First, the acceptance of icons outside of Orthodoxy does not necessarily mean that Western eyes have been trained to appreciate them, let alone understand what they are conveying. Lacking both aesthetic and spiritual discernment, non-Orthodox viewers may apprehend icono-

graphy more as a New Age phenomenon than an expression of genuine Orthodox Theo-anthropology.²⁹ Be that as it may, Orthodoxy needs to proclaim its faith in words and images so that those who have ears and eyes may hear and see with them.

Theo-Anthropology Depicted

The depiction of the historical reality of the incarnation that mandated the prohibition of the depiction of Christ as a lamb helps explain why the icon is based on the aesthetics of reality. Christ's incarnation presents "the true nature of things." Thus, the Church's understanding of art has always been as a vehicle for the manifestation of this truth.³⁰ Consequently, aesthetics in Orthodoxy remains almost indistinguishable from theology.³¹ And, if aesthetics must be regarded as an independent "discipline," it should be interpreted as "the science of the wholeness and perfection" of existence.³² Needless to say, this perfection is presented by Christ alone and that is why, according to Puhalo, all icons are christocentric.

All ikons deal with Christ, no matter who is portrayed in the ikon. An ikon always speaks the truth of the incarnation: of the virgin birth (as when the Virgin is shown); of the person and divinity of Christ (as in the ikons of the twelve great feast days); his victory over death and his transforming power (as when the saints are shown).³³

Of course, there can be no denying that the very conception of man's true vocation also affects his conception of "reality." In Orthodox Theo-anthropology, "the acquisition of resemblance to God is believed to be manifested existentially." In contrast, in Western Christianity, even though it may be confessed that man is created in the image of God, his autonomy implies that he "is not really related to his prototype."³⁴ The inadmissibility of the communion of the created and the uncreated in scholasticism only strengthens this implication. In Protestantism, the *sola scriptura* principle that confines grace to the

words of “the Bible” also reduces the real presence of God in man and in the world. Such a fixation with words has taken its toll on not only Western art but on humanity’s very perception of reality according to Puhalo.

Our visualization of words reduces our world to a picture and already beginning with the movement from symbolic to realistic art during the rise of humanism, man began to conceive the passion of the moment to be reality. Ivan Illich... expresses the modern visual conceptualization as “show” and suggests that “show” absorbs us and makes us passive in that we are not really in the picture but manipulated by it. Our concepts of reality may now exclude us from it and make us only passive observers.³⁵

Although he considers iconography a form of scripture, Puhalo would certainly agree with John Romanides who spoke of art as more concrete than words in conveying “the ascetic and heroic orientation” necessary for the realization of deification in man.³⁶ The icon surpasses the need for all analogies of being or of faith. In the icon of Christ, we are not presented with an image of the divine nature but with the reality of deified humanity. All of the analogies that have been suggested concerning the meaning of our creation “in the image and likeness of God” have also been eclipsed by the icon of Christ. Through his icon, we ourselves see that the only way that we can become the image and likeness of God is to become like Christ, the only incarnate image of God.³⁷

Even the visual analogy of depth perspective is turned inside out in the icon so that our own passivity as observers can be brought to an end. Not only does the icon ask us “to reverse our perspective” from that shaped by the fallen order, it also summons us to enter into the image itself by going and doing likewise.³⁸ Within such a context, it will come as no surprise that Puhalo particularly fulminates against the pietistic and New Age portraits of Christ that have been created by Protestantism. It seems not a little ironic that Protestantism generally became iconoclastic through use of the second commandment but now presents what Puhalo terms “idolatrous” depictions of Christ that can be considered “Arian” in their implication and even a preparation for

Antichrist.³⁹

For Puhalo, “all ikons are dogmatic statements” and each one presents “a sermon.”⁴⁰ In this vein, he succeeds in presenting special insight into the image of Christ in its various manifestations. Already in the icon that depicts the creation of Adam and Eve in which Christ is shown as Creator, Puhalo notes the “family resemblance” among Christ, Adam and Eve. More than just a portrayal of the account from Genesis, the icon also presents a prophecy of the incarnation of Christ.⁴¹ To the non-Orthodox observer, the inclusion of the image of Christ might be viewed as erroneous but nothing could be further from the truth according to Puhalo.

All the Old Testament theophanies (appearances of God) were appearances of the Son (Jesus Christ). Dogmatically, this is extremely important. In Western art, there is complete confusion about the Old Testament theophanies, and idolatrous portrayals of “God the Father” in a human form are frequent, as are the heretical representations of “the Lord of Hosts” and “the Ancient of Days” as God the Father, rather than as Old Testament revelations of God the Word, Jesus Christ. Moreover, in this erroneous art, there is no indication of the activity of the Word in the Old Testament, yet he was the active person of the Trinity at every moment in the history of Israel and the unfolding of the prophecy.⁴²

Although most iconographical depictions of Old Testament theophanies show Christ in a divine-human form, an exception is made when the event is not a direct prophecy about the incarnation. This is the case in the icon that depicts the appearance of the so-called Old Testament Trinity to Abraham. Here, the revelation is not about the incarnation but about the Trinity.⁴³

Even the icons of the Theotokos extend the theme of the incarnation according to Puhalo. Christ’s depiction is not even a necessity in such icons for the incarnation is implied. Nor should the icons in which the Virgin is shown with her young child be considered the eastern counterpart of the Western “Madonna and Child.” Puhalo insists that no such icon exists in Orthodoxy. Instead, the Ever-Virgin Mary holding her Son presents us with the image of the incarnation *par*

excellence. It is the icon of the first coming of Christ and for this reason, it is placed in an Orthodox church immediately to the left of the entrance to the sanctuary, itself a type of paradise.⁴⁴ Its counterpart, the image of Christ enthroned, more correctly called the icon of the second coming of Christ, always is found to the right of the entrance to the sanctuary.⁴⁵ During the time between these two events, we are given the opportunity to work out our own salvation and enter into “paradise” through purification, illumination and deification.

For Puhalo, the icons of the crucifixion and resurrection present not only the climactic events of Christ’s incarnation but also all the grief and joy that are inevitable elements of the path of co-suffering love that the Lord himself has trod and asks us to follow. The depiction of the crucifixion in Orthodox iconography takes on a totally different character than the depictions of a helpless man in Western religious art. Puhalo credits this deterioration not only to a misinformed realism but also to the influence of a theory of juridical atonement that developed in Western theology, making Christ a “victim” who appeases the divine wrath of God the Father.⁴⁶ The icon of the crucifixion departs radically from such a “theology of justification.”

In the ikon of the crucifixion, we behold the King of Glory...*enthroned* on the cross. We clearly see the marks of his suffering, even his exhaustion, but we see just as clearly that he is truly the Messiah “*who shall not see corruption.*” This is the scriptural Messiah fulfilling the prophecy and sealing the Gospel with his great act of saving, co-suffering love. There is here no hint of hopelessness or despair, for Christ is God, even on the cross, and he is still in charge, still fulfilling his will—the eternal will of the Father. Even the grief and hope of death—the anticipation of the resurrection of Christ, and of all the faithful—permeates the Orthodox ikon of the crucifixion.⁴⁷

The depiction of the events surrounding the crucifixion and the resurrection presents yet another aspect of Theo-anthropology, namely that non-human nature participates in and is affected by humanity’s activity. Just as man’s sin has corrupted nature, so too does divine grace through the God-man and all who follow the divine path transform it. Matter can be Spirit-bearing (Rom. 8:18-24) and iconographic landscape

remains faithful to this fact.⁴⁸ To show this, Puhalo compares the landscape of the lamentation scene following the crucifixion with that of the resurrection (the descent into Sheol). In the first, the mountains in the background reflect the expression of grief and pain in Mary Magdalen's upwardly stretched arms, while in the second, the mountains "are cast up in a cosmic rejoicing" that mirrors the joy of Adam and Eve and all the redeemed saints in the scene (Rom. 9:24, Ps. 97 in the LXX).⁴⁹

It is none other than the redeemed saints of every age in the apostolic succession of holy men and women who continue to manifest what Evdokimov calls "a theology of beauty":⁵⁰ "Everything is beautiful in a person when he turns towards God, and everything is ugly when he is turned away from God" (Florensky).⁵¹ In other words, this beauty has nothing to do with physical characteristics but this should not be misconstrued to mean that it cannot be seen. All who have experienced the asceticism of purification, illumination and deification have become "connoisseurs" of true beauty.⁵² Florensky, for all the Platonic and sophiological elements that can be found in his writings, certainly had some correct insight:

The ascetic comes to bear witness and prove the truth of authentic reality. Such a circumstance is written in the ascetic's face: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father that is in heaven." (Mt. 5:16)⁵³

This beauty should never be reduced to knowledge or morality and this is especially shown in the ascetical writings that are called not *philosophia* (love of wisdom) but *Philokalia* (love of beauty).⁵⁴

But the icon of the saint is more than just a work of beauty since, as Puhalo reminds us, it also teaches dogma concerning Theanthropology in a profoundly direct way.

Many important dogmatic concepts of Orthodox Christianity receive scriptural illumination in the ikons of saints: the dogma of redemption and the general resurrection, the doctrines of *theosis*, of the nature of the human person and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are among those made clear in the ikon.⁵⁵

The saint is holy because God is holy. All holiness resides in God and only because it is a divine attribute can man participate in it.⁵⁶ This participation occurs with the purification from the passions that lays the foundation for illumination and deification. In this way, likeness to the God-man can be attained since the body of Christ is now the source of all purifying, illuminating and deifying energies.⁵⁷ Since *theosis* is clearly taught in scripture (Jn. 10:34, Jn. 17:22-23), Puhalo insists that if this is not conveyed in the icon of a saint, it is not an icon but only a painting.⁵⁸

The transfiguration that is depicted in the icon of the saint conveys the beauty of the radiance of the Holy Spirit. For Puhalo, this illumination presents an image far different from that found in a painting or a statue.

It is sufficient in Western religious art, dominated by Protestant Gnosticism and Latin legalism, to portray as a saint someone who has attained merit by good works and faith. The ikon, however, is scriptural: the saint portrayed in the ikon attains his position through the process of illumination and finally, glorification. He is not, however, alone in this, for those “ordinary” saints, the congregation of the faithful, likewise attain their position by the same process.

In the icon of the saint, "the highest promises of the Gospel have been fulfilled...In the ikon we see the absolute faithfulness to the scripture which declares: "We who behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are transformed into the same image, from glory unto glory, by the Spirit of the Lord" (1Cor.3:18).⁵⁹

Icon Veneration

Although it stands above culture as an illustrated form of scripture, the icon still has cultural connections just as do the various translations of scripture. Since its perception in a modern cultural context generally occurs first as “art” and only secondarily as a “holy image,” any real understanding of icon veneration in Orthodoxy escapes most. Puhalo feels that most explanations of the icon have been “too esoteric” and this helps explain his persistent emphasis on its scriptural connections.⁶⁰

In North America, with its basically Protestant cultural milieu that has further deteriorated into various forms of “civil religion,” “religious art” might be tolerated on the cultural periphery but the veneration of sacred images smacks of idolatry in the minds of the uninformed.

Even within Catholicism itself, there now exists precious little understanding of icon veneration and this can by no means be considered as just a recent development. The Roman papacy had defended icons even as the East slid into iconoclasm in the early middle ages. Although Rome remained a staunch defender of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, this was no longer the case after the Franks took over the papacy in the eleventh century. The Frankish *Libri Carolini* of the late eighth century, misunderstanding the decrees of the Seventh Council actually accused that synod of idolatry, claiming that it had permitted the *worship* of images. Subsequent Frankish synods proclaimed that images might serve as “ornaments” but that it was not important whether Christians used them or not.⁶¹ This attitude entered mainstream Catholicism and has continued to this day, causing Louis Bouyer to lament, “Everything admirably points to the fact that religious art in the West is not incorporated into the liturgy and people do not even think it could or should be.”⁶²

Bouyer’s point is well taken for, from an Orthodox perspective, the only way to understand the implications of icon veneration in a wider cultural context is from the inside out, by first examining its place in the liturgical life of the Church. According to Florensky, liturgy can be viewed as an aspect of culture only when seen as man’s chief cultural activity, having the perennial goal of uniting the spiritual and the material.⁶³ And it is this very union that is proclaimed within the liturgical space of the Orthodox church building according to Puhalo:

...the walls of Orthodox Christian churches are covered with ikons of those who have been fully glorified and become partakers of the rule and reign of God (the “kingdom” of heaven). When we enter an Orthodox church and see the ikons of the saints and angels on the walls, we receive exactly the same message that the priests received when they entered the tabernacle [and saw the walls of the temple covered with inwoven ikons of the cherubim]: Here, God has manifested himself. Here, heaven has come down to earth, for God, who

is always with us, who is “everywhere present,” has uniquely manifested himself in his Church.⁶⁴

In recognition of this divine-human reality, however the Christian does not just look at the icons; he or she interacts with them. As Puhalo notes, when we enter the church, the very first thing we do is reverence and kiss the icons.⁶⁵ During the liturgical celebrations, the serving clergy also cense the icons in the very same way that they do the people of God, demonstrating that both share the same vocation. The very word “icon” implies an essential difference between the image and its prototype, hence, it is certainly not the material that is venerated but the one portrayed. We venerate not only the image of Christ but those of the saints because Christ is ultimately the source of their holiness.⁶⁶ And since not only the saints but each and every human being is created in the image of God and has the potential to attain God’s likeness through deification, this means that the veneration of the icon ultimately teaches us not only what our relationship with our neighbor should be, according to Puhalo, but even more.

Are we not taught by our reverence of ikons that the way in which we treat any other human being is the manner in which we are treating God? And if we have love and reverence for another person, does that love and reverence not pass over to the prototype—to God? And if we have hatred, malice and disdain for another person, does that not also reflect to the prototype—to God? This is just what Jesus Christ told us when he said, “As you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me” (Mt. 25:40).⁶⁷

With one final exhortation, Puhalo teaches us how best “to love and serve the Lord” after we have departed the church: “We are taught by our reverencing of the ikon to carefully guard ourselves against hatred, malice and disdain of our neighbor (for) every human being, regardless of race, gender or even religion, is created in God’s image.”⁶⁸ The human icon already awaits our attention in the world even as the painted icon also awaits its de-mystification within the context of contemporary culture. If co-suffering love were more widely practiced in society-at-large, the meaning of the icon would become self-evident.

ENDNOTES:

1. See especially, E.N. Trubetskoi, *Icons: Theology in Color*, tr. G. Vokar (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973).
2. H. Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 28 (1978), 13.
3. R. Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 216.
4. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture: A Scriptural and Spiritual Understanding of Orthodox Christian Iconography* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1997), 2.
5. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face of Being: Art in the Theology of Pavel Florensky*, tr. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 53-54.
6. R. Kroner, *Culture and Faith* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 132-136.
7. J.L. Adams, *Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Culture, Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 66
8. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe: Orthodox Christian Existentialism* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2001), 52.
9. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 52-53.
10. C. Yannaras, "Theology in Present-Day Greece," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 16,4 (1972), 212.
11. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 2, tr. A. Gythiel (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 469.
12. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 1; L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 2, 471.
13. H. Gardner, *Art Through the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), 18, quoted in L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 8.
14. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 9.
15. L. Puhalo, *Point of Faith Handbook* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 51.
16. L. Puhalo, *Understanding the Divine Liturgy* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 1.
17. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 13.
18. G. Mathew, *Byzantine Aesthetics* (New York, Harper and Row, 1963), 1.
19. C. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Era, 312-1453* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), xiv.
20. H. Maguire, "Truth and Convention," 130, citing a discussion of the "horizon of expectation" in art in E. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (London: Phaidon, 1968), 53.

112SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

21. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 1, 97.
22. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 1, 117.
23. P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, tr. D. Sheehan and O. Andrejev (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 67.
24. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 2, 503.
25. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 9-10.
26. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 1, 165.
27. Quoted in L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 2, 489.
28. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 2, 490.
29. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 52-53.
30. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face*, 82, 82.
31. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face*, 26.
32. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face*, 15.
33. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 27.
34. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 2, 487.
35. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 38-39.
36. A.J. Sopko, *Prophet of Roman Orthodoxy: The Theology of John Romanides* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1998), 4.
37. A.J. Sopko, *Prophet of Roman Orthodoxy*, 142.
38. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 18.
39. L. Puhalo, *Point of Faith Handbook*, 49; *Ikon as Scripture*, 36-38.
40. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 27.
41. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 32.
42. *Ibid.*
43. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 35-36.
44. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 45.
45. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 47-48.
46. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 40.
47. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 42-43.
48. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 24.
49. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 24-24.
50. P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Redondo Beach, Calif.: Oakwood, 1990).
51. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face*, 26.

52. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face*, 33.
53. P. Florensky, *Iconostasis*, 56.
54. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face*, 32.
55. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 53.
56. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 54.
57. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 55.
58. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 58.
59. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 56, 58.
60. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 1.
61. P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 167.
62. P. Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, 75.
63. V. Bychkov, *The Aesthetic Face*, 48, 65.
64. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 1.
65. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 5.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*

VI

LAST THINGS

The growing pluralism found within Western societies presents an amalgam of contrasting belief systems and in no place does this prove truer than North America. Although the contemporary ecumenical movement had its origin in the embarrassment over conflicting missionary efforts in the Third World, it is in a multi-faith society such as the United States that ecumenism's fruits become most evident. Lazar Puhalo himself has strongly criticized Orthodox involvement in ecumenism, even when the pretext has been a witness to the truth of Orthodoxy. From his perspective, Christian ecumenism has possessed a syncretistic attitude from the very beginning and such an agenda was already on the way to fulfillment when the Orthodox Church started taking part in ecumenical discussions.¹ Such syncretism and dogmatic relativism fit perfectly into an American culture where spiritual confusion oscillates all the way between civil religion and fundamentalism. What Puhalo fears most stems from the possibility that Orthodoxy ultimately will be contaminated with the same spirit of minimalism and reductionism that has been injected into ecumenism by liberal Protestantism.²

While Puhalo may have overstated the matter somewhat by accusing Orthodox participation in ecumenism as the principle reason for "disunity and disharmony" in Orthodoxy today, he certainly cannot be faulted in his prediction as to where ecumenism is headed.³ What was previously merely a form of Christian syncretism now finds itself contextualized more and more within non-Christian influences.

Instead of an accord with the “reason of religion,” there is an almost daily appearance of sects with the darkest of teachings — Freemasonry, Theosophy, the New Age movement, open Satan worship and witchcraft cults, to name only a few.⁴

As these influences take their toll upon the already diluted Christian content of ecumenism, it too will become another so-called ‘humanitarian movement’ [especially] if it gains sufficient political power (as it will when it helps form Anti-Christ’s one world church).⁵

If Puhalo’s prophecy seems far-fetched, the observer need only return to the current state of spiritual confusion found in American culture. Constantly extolled as a “religious society,” with Judaeo-Christian foundations, the most basic traditional teachings concerning God and man have become lost in a plethora of conflicting and often incredible beliefs. An examination of attitudes towards death alone reveals that American society could hardly be considered a Christian culture by any stretch of the imagination. Without any real understanding of Christ’s resurrection, death has come to be feared and this helps explain why America has been termed a death-denying culture. The “cult of youth” presents only the most obvious evidence of this attitude. Far less evident are the conflicting ideas concerning the “last things” that inhabit the popular mentality. Because the resurrection of Christ remains absolutely central to Orthodox Theo-anthropology, Puhalo has made it his business to investigate all of the erroneous beliefs that have arisen concerning the “last things.” For him, they provide the best proof of the spiritual malaise that contemporary culture in the United States and Canada suffer. Even so, these beliefs betray not just a manifestation of New Age influences but the very roots of the United States’ especially confused religious past.

Interdenominational Deism

In many ways, the tradition of a common interdenominational deism in American religion parallels the “unity without union” in contemporary ecumenism.⁶ From its very beginnings, the refuge that America provided to sectarians from the interference of European state churches inevitably made it into a sort of “promised land” if not a “paradise.” Such a legacy certainly has had both positive and negative results. While

it meant that a state church could never be established on American soil, it also led to the complete “privatization” of faith. Although Puhalo would be the first to condemn the very concept of a state church, especially in light of its recent failures when wedded with nationalism in Orthodox circumstances, he also knows that something else inevitably will fill the cultural vacuum.

There can be no authentic faith without freedom...The catastrophe of “state churches” is sufficient to inform us that religion, faith and belief can be cultural affectations. Even without an official state church, religion can become a cultural affectation, as we see in the mythology of the American religious right which teaches that America is somehow a “holy nation,” a “new Israel.”⁷

Despite the absence of any actual theological foundations, American society can almost be said to function as “a religion.” The constant association between God and country “divinizes” national life in the absence of a state church (or any other type of church for that matter). Indeed, from the deistic viewpoint of many of the Founding Fathers, nothing could be considered a greater threat to democracy than the corporate beliefs of a church. Consequently, this challenge was addressed by “privatizing” the differences inherent in denominationalism under the deistic umbrella of “freedom of religion.” Also, in the absence of dogma, a social emphasis needed to be placed upon morality instead.⁸ Still, for “civil religion” to function, some of the trappings of “traditional religion” needed to be retained, especially the recitation of public prayers. Puhalo notes, however, that such public prayer should not be confused with the Church’s corporate prayer.

Often people pray because it is a cultural exercise. In America, many people pray because it is a cultural exercise, the proper thing to do like singing “God Save the Queen” or the “Star Spangled Banner.”⁹

Under the veneer of American civil religion, the array of competing churches, denominations, sects and cults grows ever greater with each passing year. From the revivalist movement of the late 1800’s that made

Christ a Christian's "personal Savior" without the need for any ecclesial context to the New Age infusions of the present, an endless parade of faith healers, televangelists and gurus have added to the general confusion of competing "belief-systems."¹⁰ For Puhalo, today's faith-healers are no more than magicians. In fact, it would not be too strong a parallel to compare them with those magicians motivated by Satan who are mentioned in scripture (see, for instance, Acts 13:10).¹¹ As for American televangelists, it is far more the religion of American materialism than traditional Christianity that motivates them.

Televangelist prayer systems are designed with the promise that they will attract material well-being, health and happiness—the acquisition of some worldly state without the process of purification—while the systematic prayer of the Orthodox Church has a definite and clear-cut spiritual goal and destination.¹²

The numberless gurus of the various forms of New Age spirituality in North America may seem less materialistically-oriented but their individual agendas are no less pernicious. In the interest of ecological propriety, some have identified creation with divinity itself, insisting that the environment will ultimately take revenge against humanity for our misuse of it. According to Puhalo, while such pantheism is bad enough, such an emphasis on the revolt of nature against the human population obscures the fact that "the end of this earthly world comes to us personally and individually."¹³ Each of us should soberly prepare ourselves for this rather than be frightened into inactivity by cataclysmic prophecies.

The admixture of Orthodoxy into the North American religious melting pot has had its own tensions associated with it. Since the collapse of the American Missionary District under the aegis of the Patriarchate of Moscow following the Bolshevik Revolution, "an articulate witness about Orthodoxy" in North America "always conflicts with the observable facts in the concrete reality of the Orthodox Church" (John Meyendorff).¹⁴ North American Orthodoxy has itself deteriorated into its own cluster of "denominations" (although referred to as "jurisdictions" by the Orthodox themselves). That most of these jurisdictions retain an ethnic identity as well as Old World ties

seems to imply that Orthodoxy remains incompatible with North American culture and should continue to exist as a sectarian phenomenon as have so many other groups in the United States and Canada.¹⁵

From Puhalo's perspective, Orthodoxy has an important message for societies such as those in the United States and Canada, precisely because it should not be identified with the so-called "Judaeo-Christian tradition" as it is presently understood in these cultures:

The Orthodox Christian Church is, I would suggest, *not* a part of the post-patristic *Western* Judaeo-Christian tradition. Indeed, there are sufficient differences between Orthodox Christianity and the myriad contemporary versions of the "Judaeo-Christian tradition" of Western societies that comparisons between the teachings, theology, life, spiritual concepts and psychology of the two are useful in building greater understanding between the different religions and traditions of the world.¹⁶

In spite of this, Orthodoxy faces the same threat of syncretism that other faith systems have when submerged into the currents of American interdenominational deism. Puhalo has already detected the incursion of New Age spirituality into several Orthodox jurisdictions in the United States. Especially noticeable has been the influence of the "centering prayer cult" that has displaced the traditional practice of Orthodox Christian prayer in some circumstances.¹⁷ Equally disturbing has been the transformation of the role of the Orthodox spiritual director (usually a monastic) into a "guru" who controls all aspects of his spiritual children's lives.¹⁸ From Puhalo's perspective, such behavior bears more resemblance to the control associated with cults rather than with Orthodox Christianity, where monastics do not form a special, higher caste in the Church but merely a category of the laity.

Orthodox Christianity continues the struggle for its voice to be heard within North American culture, certainly a difficult task for a social group that makes up barely one percent of the population. The task is a formidable one and many have already fallen short in the attempt to relate Orthodoxy to North American culture. Ideally, Orthodoxy must be related to culture in a christological fashion: "Between the fanaticism

that separates and the syncretism that confounds, is situated the mystery of Christ which distinguishes without separation and unites without confusion” (Paul Evdokimov).¹⁹ What ultimately polarizes in materialistic North America is not so much a conflict between the spiritual and the material but between opposing spiritual powers, those representing Truth and those that can be termed false prophets. While the destructive power of such spiritual warfare may not be so immediately obvious, it nonetheless destroys cultural foundations and will ultimately cause a cultural disintegration that will be both spiritual and material.

Soul, Body, Death

According to an often-quoted American dictum, two things remain inevitable in life: death and taxes. And, while Americans cannot escape taxation except at their own peril, they generally disregard the *momento mori* with much greater success. This death-forgetting and even death-denying attitude emanates from both a negative view of the body and its mortality as well as a rather dubious yet long-held belief that each person’s death manifests a direct punishment from God. In addressing from an Orthodox perspective the perplexities of eschatology as “lived out” in North American society, Puhalo certainly has had his work cut out for him. Except for a brief passage in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, there are no dogmatic formulations concerning eschatology.²⁰ Yet Puhalo has found in scriptural, patristic and liturgical texts a great number of insights to help combat the innumerable eschatological misunderstandings that have arisen in contemporary culture.

Eschatology should be as much about life as it should be about death. Christian faith has given a meaning to history, providing it with a goal, an *eschaton*.²¹ There could be no better example of a “realized eschatology” than that which Orthodoxy’s regimen of purification, illumination and deification affords. Just as Maximos the Confessor reminds us that both body and soul are deified together in this life, so does Puhalo.

You have to already be wearing the wedding garment when you depart this life and that garment is the indwelling Holy

Spirit, the presence of heaven already in your heart²²...When we repent and get rid of passion from our heart, that is like a heavy burden being taken off our shoulders. That is because the Kingdom of God has begun to reappear in our heart. If you think about it, what we are really struggling for in this life is to create the Kingdom of God in our hearts and drive out hell.²³

The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in history present the best confirmation that “humanity is the most precious, vital, imperishable creation of God” and thus destined for new life despite death.²⁴ Because of Christ’s resurrection, death can now even be considered a good thing: “Thy tomb, O Christ, is more fruitful than paradise” sings the Church during the paschal celebration.²⁵ It would be difficult to deny that we already are living in the “last days” prior to Christ’s second coming when all the dead will be resurrected. This is confirmed by the utter confusion caused by the many false prophets who today claim special insight about eschatology.²⁶ While some of these viewpoints do have their roots in aberrations of Christianity, others have their origin in atheistic humanism and especially in the aspects of Gnostic dualism found in New Age spiritualism.

Beginning with the belief that death not only fulfills the will of God but manifests “punishment” from God (an attitude that can be traced to Augustine), Puhalo has this to say:

Man was not created for death; death was not a part of his nature and is by no means “natural.” Man was created to live through unity with the Creator. Why then, does God warn Adam and Eve that if they turn from Him in disobedience and learn the conflict between good and evil, they will “surely die”[?] ...This was no threat of punishment...rather it was a simple statement of reality. Immortality is a property of God alone. Man cannot possess it. He can only share in it by grace.²⁷

The deicide and suicide that atheistic humanism commends transforms man into a god without God, having power over his own life and death as well a self-determination to do as he pleases.

At first, Satan convinced man that he would be as a god for he

would not die but now Satan convinces man that he is a god because he will die,²⁸ ... We are referring here to the humanist atheist dictum that man is the measure of all things and all the moral-philosophical deification of the passions which is concatenate with it.²⁹

Concerning the Gnostic dualism that is found in the New Age movement and its influence upon eschatology, Puhalo notes that this is a mistake repeated from the past.

All that God created is good...Evil therefore is not an existing thing but a condition of separation from good. Somehow this simple reality escaped the mind of Gnostic thinkers as it did many Greek philosophers including Plato, and those who merged Gnosticism and Platonism such as Augustine of Hippo and his later disciples. This quandary arrived at by the Gnostic and Platonic philosophers...is the subject that interests us here. Their erroneous solution to the problem of the imagined co-existence of good and evil is called “dualism.”³⁰ ...[Thus,] in all Gnostic sects, the only redemption is death, when the soul is liberated from the body. This is why [traditional] Gnosticism... or its weak and shallow New Age version, is so fond of the delusion of “out-of-body experiences.”³¹

Disavowal of dualism should not be misconstrued to mean that evil does not have a personalized “presence” in creation. The American Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff himself lamented that “disbelief in Satan is one of the saddest and unnecessary results of demythologization” in contemporary theology.³² Puhalo reiterates again and again that the Lord’s Prayer ends not “deliver us from evil” but rather “deliver us from the evil one.”³³ Until the second coming of Christ, Good and Evil continue to meet on the battlefield of life, but not in the realm of death, where only God now has dominion. If it were not still possible to fall subject to the influence of Satan even after Christ’s resurrection, we would not possess the free-will to progress in co-suffering love and we would be in bondage to God without even the choice of bondage to Satan.³⁴ Nonetheless, we should not be too quick to blame Satan for our own foibles, for if we struggle “against our own

passions and vices, we deprive him of the material weapons necessary for him to defeat us.”³⁵ Having no power over us in death, even in life Satan and his followers cannot know our souls but can “only judge from our deeds, actions and inclinations what the condition of the soul is.”³⁶

Gnostic Dualism itself offers several variations on the relationship between good and evil. For Gnostics, matter was either inherently eternally evil or they believed in the existence of a demiurge, a “divine emanation” whose nature was corrupted but who created the material world apart from a “good God.” This good God created spirit, meaning that there were in fact two opposing deities—one evil and one good. According to the Gnostic view of creation, although the soul pre-exists the body, the demiurge tempts spirit into matter, imprisoning the soul in the body, using all possible means to prevent it from escaping to its formerly heavenly home. By associating Satan with the demiurge, the tendency grew in thinking of him as equal to God.³⁷

While it might initially be assumed that Puhalo’s own examination of Gnostic dualism occurred because of the cultural shift towards New Age beliefs in North America, it actually was more the incursion of these ideas into Orthodox circumstances that led him to action. Seraphim Rose, an American convert to Orthodoxy (whom Puhalo rather unflatteringly calls a “neo-gnostic philosopher”) wrote a book on the soul after death that incorporated a number of Gnostic beliefs.³⁸ He had found these in the so-called *Tale of the Elder Basil the New*, a Bogomil medieval text that at some point unfortunately had been incorporated into some Russian collections of the lives of the saints. Having discovered it in such a collection, Rose presumed it “Orthodox” and thus incorporated its viewpoints into his eschatology.³⁹

According to Puhalo, Rose’s first mistake was to assume that the lives of the saints could be used as a source of sacred Tradition for Church teaching.⁴⁰ While such texts can serve as inspirational reading, they cannot be used indiscriminately, especially when they may contradict scripture and the Church’s Tradition. What Puhalo found as particularly pernicious was Rose’s account of imaginary “toll houses” (*telonia*). Not only is the soul supposedly tortured by demons as it passes through these *telonia* but it must also pay for passage with “works” performed in the present life in order to attain salvation.⁴¹ More broadly, the errors expressed in the *Tale* (which Rose accepts

without question) can be categorized thusly: (1) the belief in a radical dualism between body and soul, (2) the belief that a soul can wander after it has departed the body, (3) the belief that souls are already in hell, suffering in its “fire,” and finally, (4) the belief that an individual or the soul of an individual could stand before God, worship Him in his heavenly Kingdom and afterwards, be sent to hell.⁴² Why must these ideas be condemned? Principally because, “in the clear theological statements of the Fathers, we encounter no descriptions of the existence beyond death nor details of the soul’s ‘journey into rest.’ There is no real mention of any judgments, demonic gauntlets, soul stations, pathways or places of repose.”⁴³

Puhalo wrestles with providing a clear definition of the soul (as have so many others) principally because it proves so easy to fall into Platonism unintentionally in doing so.⁴⁴ Since Plato associated the mind with the highest function of the soul, care must be taken. It would probably be best to accept John Romanides’ view that the soul represents that component of man that survives death, not because it itself has been created immortal but because it awaits reunion with its resurrected body.⁴⁵ Puhalo himself goes a long way in solving the dilemma by contrasting the scriptural and the Hellenic view concerning the soul as shown in the Greek reaction to Paul’s preaching to them concerning the resurrection (Acts 17:16-34): They were astonished by the belief in a bodily resurrection! Already in the Old Testament, it was believed that that which survived death maintained a continuity of identity, being neither dead nor devoid of spiritual perception, even though Christ had not yet appeared to those in repose (the descent into Sheol) (Job 14:14, 17:13, 19:25-26, Eccl. 17:7, I Kings 25:29, Wis. 2:23-24).⁴⁶ The very notion of souls “in Abraham’s bosom” reveals their good situation, just as “the patriarch exchanged the enjoyment of the present for the hope of the future.”⁴⁷

Neither is it an easy task to explain how the soul departs the body yet perceives after death but Puhalo does so rather successfully.

The soul...cannot function on its own but only by means of the body. Thus, when the body’s functions break down and cease, God, in his mercy, calls the soul forth and preserves it in existence. The soul is the life-force of the body, and so the body dies at the moment the soul is called forth from it. The body

does not die until the soul departs from it. This is why persons whose heartbeat has ceased and whose brains no longer emit even the slightest sign of life, have been found, nevertheless, to be alive⁴⁸ ...[The soul] continues to be alive when the person falls asleep [i.e., dies] because God wills it so. It is alive and therefore it perceives. It cannot perceive as the person perceives, for it no longer has use of bodily or carnal senses...What it perceives we cannot know, but it perceives evidently, according to revelation, by grace, and not according to any carnal sensation...At death, we are “freed from sin” (Rm 6:7)...for the soul is tempted or tempts itself, through the sensual faculties, and in partnership with the body, it sins.⁴⁹

Despite his insistence that little can be said about the soul after death, Puhalo himself indulges in some speculation about the so-called “particular judgment” that occurs immediately after death according to some commentators.⁵⁰ To be acceptable, this should not be misconstrued to mean that the soul is actually judged by God but that “the soul immediately enters the state proper to itself” as it awaits the general resurrection.⁵¹ But even this interpretation seems rather speculative. If anything can be said with any certainty, surely it concerns those who go forth from their bodies “already possessed of the Holy Spirit and of grace.” These are already “gods by grace” as they leave this life so, according to Puhalo, it would be inconceivable that they would not enter into their destiny.⁵² Puhalo’s attention to the particular judgment may be explained as a corrective not only to the Gnostic emphasis on the soul’s adventures as it travels through the various toll houses but also as a reaction to Catholicism’s concept of purgatory.⁵³

From Puhalo’s perspective, both the toll houses of Gnosticism and the purgatory of Catholicism share the same premise.

When one penetrates to the essence of such mythologies as purgatory, toll houses, etc., one finds a basic presupposition that God cannot or will not forgive sins but that He must obtain some sort of satisfaction for them. This self-pleasing passion may take the form of physical torment or mental and physical torture (toll houses). In the Latin doctrine of the saving merits

of Christ, God does not forgive anyone of anything but only agrees to be satisfied by Christ's suffering [that is] appropriated to a sinner for the sinner's having fulfilled some legal obligation. These teachings of dualism are nearly always bound together with a variation of the satisfaction theory of redemption.⁵⁴

Since purification needs to occur in this life, its postponement until after death in purgatory makes little sense from the Orthodox perspective. Both Symeon the New Theologian and Mark of Ephesus note that the will becomes inactive after death, thus making its improvement, let alone its perfection, an impossibility.⁵⁵ Even from the Latin perspective, since the will is inoperative after death and "works" can occur only in the present life, it needs to be questioned how the prayers of the faithful actually bring any change in the condition of those in purgatory.⁵⁶ And such a question will legitimately lead likewise to asking the Orthodox concerning the efficacy of their own prayers for the dead.

Why do Orthodox Christians pray for the dead? Most obviously, they offer these prayers as a confession of faith in Christ's victory over death and as a declaration of hope in the resurrection of the dead.⁵⁷ Puhalo emphasizes especially the fact that the reposed members of the Church are not separated from her living members because of death. The life of co-suffering love, founded upon the corporate liturgical life, "extends to all alike and penetrates the grave."⁵⁸ Yet, just as the Church prays for all the living, including even those who may not yet have been "gathered into Christ," so too does she pray for all who have died. An examination of the hymnography commemorating the dead that is appointed for the Memorial Saturdays occurring at the beginning and the end of the paschal cycle confirms this.⁵⁹

Since prayers on behalf of the dead represent a mutual "exchange of co-suffering love," it would be a mistake to consider them a form of bribery or appeasement towards God.⁶⁰ While the condition of those in repose is certainly not changed through prayer, the prayer that they be "granted rest" implies that they exist in an unnatural state since their souls have been separated from the body. In the realm of grace, they perceive our prayers and are comforted by them. Finally, prayers for the deceased provide the faithful with their own *momento mori*,

“reminding us of our own mortality and the day of our own death.”⁶¹

It still remains to examine the “out of body experiences” that supposedly occur on this side of death and have created such a sensation in American New Age spiritualism, especially those under the name of “near-death experiences.” Puhalo notes that belief in these “events” can be found not only in the various New Age “schools” of Gnostic dualism but also have been a permanent fixture in Shamanism and Hinduism.

The idea that an “out-of-body experience” might occur presupposes the radical dualism of Origen’s teaching concerning the soul and the body (or that of Manicheanism) and diametrically contradicts the teachings of the Fathers on the relationship of the soul and body, the condition of the soul without a body and the teachings concerning the nature of prayer.⁶²

And while it might be supposed that belief in such experiences has challenged only contemporary Christianity, Puhalo reminds us that this idea has already been condemned during the Palamite controversies in fourteenth-century Constantinople.

The idea that revelations could be given to the soul outside the body or that the soul would leave the body in order to obtain enlightenment or revelation is simply the heretical spirituality of Barlaam the Calabrian and his milieu, opposed to the whole body of the teachings of the hesychastic Fathers.⁶³

As far as the Orthodox Church is concerned, out-of-the-body and near-death experiences can never be real. Already in the fourth century, John Chrysostom expounded that because of the possibility of spiritual delusion, God does not permit that anyone should return from the dead and speak to the living about the things beyond. But as Puhalo notes, every wicked and adulterous generation seeks after signs (Mt. 16:4) and this age proves no different than those in the past.⁶⁴ Because the Kingdom of God is within us, all of the true spiritual experience that can be identified with illumination takes place within the body.⁶⁵ And in deification, the vision of the Divine Glory occurs face-to-face with

the incarnate Christ. Strangely, the very experiences of those such as the Apostle Paul that have been interpreted as out-of-body experiences are, according to Puhalo, just the opposite—noetic experiences that have occurred in the very depths of their being.⁶⁶

“Near-death experiences” also make absolutely no sense within the context of Orthodox Theo-anthropology. Since the soul exists after death only through God’s providential energy, the exit and return of the soul in a near-death experience would seem to imply that the soul had been accidentally summoned by God and then returned to the body.⁶⁷ Puhalo stresses that empirical observation has proven these experiences false.

Clinically, it can be demonstrated by sound scientific method that these so-called “near-death” experiences, and similar hallucinations take place in the hippocampus and amygdala regions of the brain, and not “outside the body.” Moreover, these experiences can be easily induced in the laboratory with well-placed electrodes. One does not have to experience a severe medical trauma to have these hallucinations, rather they can be induced by any number of non-spiritual means. They can be induced by such drugs as L.S.D. Within the range of medical “near-death” experiences...the cause and mechanism is known. Under medical stress, when there is an oxygen deprivation of the brain, the atmosphere for such hallucinations is ideal. Minor seizures in the hippocampus and/or amygdala regions of the brain induce not only the now popular form of “near-death” experiences but a range of other hallucinations such as “out-of-the body” experiences in other circumstances.⁶⁸

Much like dreams, near-death experiences “are not and cannot be sources of theology.”⁶⁹ In fact, some of the aspects of near-death experiences can have a demonic character attributed to them. According to Puhalo, when an individual deteriorates into a near-death condition, he or she is more prone to spiritual delusion.⁷⁰ Especially suspicious is the bright physical light that patients report “seeing” and “moving towards.” Once again, this was a phenomenon that was condemned in the Palamite controversies of the fourteenth century. Because the divine light is uncreated, it does not stand outside of man

as does created light and Palamas warned that any such vision outside the human being should be considered demonic.⁷¹

Those who “return” from these demonically contrived experiences, played out upon either medically induced hallucinations or hallucinations induced by the workings of deluded minds, have stories to tell which instill in mankind either a belief that at death everyone will enter into the same glory, both the good and the evil, the believer and the atheist, the chaste and the lecherous, the pious and the blasphemer (the Kuebler-Ross syndrome), or with tales of horror well-calculated to cast the soul into despair and disbelief (such as purgatories of various kinds).⁷²

In the end, it would be far better for society to listen to “the pure, simple and profoundly Christian explanations of the Apostles and Fathers” concerning the body, the soul and death.⁷³

Apocalypse and Parousia

One of the most long-lived “types” found in North American “religious culture,” enduring to this day especially in cartoon form is the religious fanatic bearing a sign with the message, “The End is Near.” In today’s supposedly sophisticated culture, no reasonable person would really be expected to believe that the end of the world was at hand, except perhaps through nuclear annihilation. Even the most devout Christians who speculate about the end seem confused about it: Should they be glad or sad? Should they even be speculating? Puhalo offers this observation:

A lot of people are starting to speculate about the end of the world because of the loss of faith around them. They think that if they terrify people by talking about the end of the world then people will start to believe again, and perhaps it will even shore up their own weak faith. In fact this speculation about the end of the world has taken on the form of the New Age Movement.⁷⁴

From Puhalo's perspective, it would be far better to teach people to look forward to Christ's second coming as the culmination of God's plan.

It cannot be denied that a very real tension exists between the cataclysmic apocalypse described in the Book of Revelation and the glory shared by those "in Christ" at his second coming. Even so, according to Puhalo, "the end of the world is not a catastrophe but it is the fulfillment of all joy because the end of this earthly world is the presence of Jesus Christ."⁷⁵ Still, when we give too much attention to the second coming of Christ, we can lose sight of the fact that the present presents us with many real opportunities for bringing Christ to contemporary culture.⁷⁶ Yet, on the other hand, as Evdokimov reminds us, culture cannot develop infinitely.⁷⁷ Its problems will be solved ultimately only when there is a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). Nonetheless, the shepherd always seeks the lost sheep, so the limitations of culture should not be used as an excuse to disregard evangelization, even as the end times approach.

If we read the words of our Lord recorded in Matthew 24:14, we can see that the completion of the evangelization of the whole world is the sign nearest to the end of the ages and the second and glorious coming of Christ. In spite of this, the majority of mankind will remain deaf and dumb to the preaching of the Gospel and will not listen to the truth but will refuse it, listening instead to the voice of their own passions.⁷⁸

Because of the often abstruse descriptions about the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, the Book of Revelation itself has had a rather mixed reception within the Orthodox Church. While indisputably a part of the New Testament canon, it has never been read liturgically. Puhalo himself seems torn between giving an actual "worldly" interpretation of the events mentioned in Revelation and a more "spiritual" reading. He attributes his own change of heart to a lessening of the influence of Russian apocalypticism upon his own eschatological outlook. Because of the "most startling and unbelievable" character of the events of our own day, he initially felt justified in drawing parallels between these occurrences and those described in Revelation. Whether Puhalo has succeeded in these comparisons falls

outside the focus of this study and must be left up to each individual who reads his work. For instance, the fact that the Slavonic word for the “wormwood” cast into the waters at Revelation 8:10 is *chernobyl* leads him to associate this event with the contemporary nuclear disaster in Ukraine.⁷⁹ Whether such events do show that the “great tribulation” will occur in the near future remains open to debate. In this vein, Puhalo notes that even the most materialistic thinkers feel that the cause for the destruction of civilization as we know it will be a humanity that has fallen into evil.⁸⁰

In contrast (and more recently), Puhalo also says that “Orthodox [Christians] do not have to resort to speculation about the book of Revelation because we have the Divine Liturgy.”⁸¹ He tells us this because he himself prefers to understand the Book of Revelation as an actual description of the church and the eucharistic liturgy taking place within it. So, at least in this context, instead of apocalyptic demise, Puhalo has turned to the *parousia*, in this case, the presence of Christ in the liturgy. Puhalo ascribes this idea to the American Orthodox theologian Thomas Hopko, who was giving lectures on the concept in the 80’s. More recently, this theme has been “making the rounds” in contemporary Catholicism through a book that the popular American theologian Scott Hahn has written, also ascribing a description of the Mass to the Book of Revelation.⁸² From the perspective of a theology of culture, this emphasis upon *parousia* rather than apocalyptic destruction reasserts Puhalo’s emphasis on the possibilities of the present. When it is realized that eschatology has as much to do with the present as the future, this makes perfect sense.

While we know that sooner or later, culture is destined to perish “in the flames,” its best hope in the present, according to Paul Evdokimov, resides in the recovery of its liturgical origins.⁸³ Unfortunately, the culture of the West today has become so completely secularized that such a recovery must seem a remote possibility. Alexander Schmemmann brilliantly defined secularism as the negation of worship rather than either a denial of God or the possibility of transcendence through some form of “religion.” What secularism really denies is that man remains first and foremost a worshipping creature.⁸⁴

The rather insipid trappings of civil religion certainly bear little resemblance to “true worship,” so it would be a false hope to expect these to provide liturgical inspiration. And although art, music and

literature in recent decades have increasingly been inspired by theological themes, a renaissance in worship will not come from these either. The only place where worship can be expected to manifest the presence of God and infuse it into culture emanates from the Church's liturgical tradition as described in the Book of Revelation. Puhalo notes that "worship of God is for our own sake, because it brings us together with God and gives us the possibility of receiving the Holy Spirit together as a community...If you read the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian and look carefully at the Divine Liturgy, you will see that they are one and the same thing. When we participate in the Divine Liturgy, we are also participating in the Apocalypse because when the revelation was given to John, he said 'I was in the Spirit of the Lord's Day.'"⁸⁵

The ascension of Christ presupposes the parousia or presence of our Lord because, through it, his actual presence is no longer limited to any one time or place. It cannot be considered coincidental that the eucharistic anaphora (canon) *remembers* the second coming of Christ following the commemoration of the ascension: the parousia has already been realized through the liturgy. For those communities in a state of glorification, Christ himself comes to dine with the co-glorified while those congregations still undergoing purification and illumination continue to "wait upon the Lord" even as they receive the eucharist.

The very context of all liturgical celebrations, while informed by culture through sacred art, music and language, also transcends culture according to Puhalo. Even so, this does not mean that liturgy should be so full of symbolic mystification that it prevents "true worship" of the Holy Trinity on the part of Christians. People must be able to participate in the liturgy just as they participate in culture.

All linear conceptions of time and space collapse in the divine services. In the divine services, we enter a dimension in which time and space are one, the moment becomes immeasurable and the finite is enveloped by the infinite. The past, the present and the future are all present in this moment and we lose every concept of linearity as we become present to eternity, present to paradise, present to life, present to the Trinity.⁸⁶

Even in the absence of the physical presence of Christ, the Church

still endeavors to make Christ “present” to the congregation of the faithful and through them, to the rest of creation.

The Orthodox Church is a living organism and also has its own rhythm of life. Since the Church is the Body of Christ, its rhythm and cycles are geared to the life of Christ and designed to bring spiritual harmony to all creation, for the whole universe is being redeemed together with man, as the Apostle Paul says (Rm. 8:18-24).⁸⁷

In every time and every place, the Church’s liturgy strives to fulfill Christ’s promise that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18:20).

Christ also proclaims that he is with us “until the end of the ages” (Mt. 28:20). Even during the reign of Antichrist over culture, that promise remains. But once the last cataclysmic events of history have been left behind, can optimism be shown as the ultimate parousia of Christ is manifested in the last judgment? Puhalo answers most affirmatively. If an individual has participated in frequent examination of conscience and rectified his or her failings, there remains nothing to fear before the judgment seat of Christ. Even at the second coming of Christ, the particular judgment of the living and the resurrected will not be rendered by Christ but by our very own consciences. Christ, however, will reward each according to his works and this will ultimately lead to heaven or hell, which are one and the same reality.⁸⁸ Those who have taken pleasure in God’s will are already “in heaven” since heaven is “wherever God’s will is done” (Maximos the Confessor). But after the final judgment, those who have taken no pleasure in God’s will “be in hell.”

Until the last judgment, hell stands empty. Those who imagine it as a place where the wicked are constantly being sent by God have been influenced more by a cultural stereotype created by Western literature than Orthodox Theo-anthropology. While the accounts of Dante and Milton provide fascinating reading, they really bear no resemblance to Orthodoxy’s conception of hell. Puhalo emphasizes that:

“Hell” (gehenna) is not an instrument of punishment created by God. That fire which is spoken of at the Last Judgment

represents the love of God [i.e., a divine energy] and we are taught that it is the radiance of God's love that both warms and radiates and gives joy to the faithful and burns and torments the wicked.⁸⁹

The traditional icon of the last judgment shows a river of fire flowing from the feet of Christ and very little else — certainly no toll houses, no demonic serpents and no soul weighing.⁹⁰ That later, corrupted versions of this icon began to include these elements has helped obscure a clear conception of our own judgment to heaven/ hell.⁹¹ When even the Church's own tradition concerning the "last things" can become so confused, it should come as no surprise that society-at-large has decided to "pick and choose" from among the numerous eschatological viewpoints that have become available.

The Church's task entails not only setting the record straight concerning eschatology but in continuing to proclaim the practice of co-suffering love as a sign of the parousia. Through this love, we forget about ourselves in the service of others, much as Moses did when he asked that his own name be blotted from the Book of Life so that the Israelites might be spared. Such love overcomes all fear, especially the fear of death. It provides the best preparation for the end because after death there can be no reprieve. Without any recourse to a purgatory, there remains only hell for the loveless. And "in hell, there is no confession or repentance" (John of Damascus).⁹² That explains why "now is the time for action (for) judgment is at the door."⁹³

ENDNOTES:

1. L. Puhalo, *Sermons on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 61.
2. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe: Orthodox Christian Existentialism* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2001), 87.
3. L. Puhalo, *Sermons*, 61.
4. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 6.
5. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 20.
6. J. Meyendorff, "The Orthodox Church and Mission," in *Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 159.

134 SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

7. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 19.
8. For more detailed explanations of many of these observations, see especially *American Civil Religion*, ed. R.E. Richey and D.E. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).
9. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 94.
10. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 98.
11. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits and Concerning "Internal Demons"* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 12.
12. L. Puhalo, *Freedom to Believe*, 93-94.
13. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 23.
14. J. Meyendorff, "The Catholicity of the Church," in *Living Tradition*, 90. While the intention of Meyendorff's remark was not limited to just America, it is still applicable.
15. J. Meyendorff, "The Orthodox Church and Mission," 159.
16. L. Puhalo, *Living Theology of Orthodoxy* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1978), 1.
17. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 6-7.
18. L. Puhalo, "On Guru Cultism in the Orthodox Church," *Canadian Orthodox Missionary* 24, 3, no.186 (May-June, 1998), 3.
19. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1979), 320.
20. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, 324.
21. J. Meyendorff, "The Christian Gospel and Social Responsibility" in *Living Tradition*, 188.
22. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 124
23. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 124-125.
24. J. Meyendorff, "Orthodox Theology Today" in *Living Tradition*, 173.
25. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, 326-327.
26. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, 307.
27. L. Puhalo, *The Soul, the Body and Death* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1980), 6.
28. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 22.
29. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 23, n. 24.
30. L. Puhalo, *Tale of the Elder Basil "the New" and the Theodora Myth* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1992), 4.

31. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 6.
32. J. Meyendorff, "The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Mankind" in *Living Tradition*, 141.
33. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 5.
34. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 14.
35. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 75-76.
36. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirits*, 7
37. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 4-5.
38. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 10.
39. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 68-69.
40. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 19, n.35.
41. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 11
42. L. Puhalo, *Commemoration of the Dead* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1994), 20.
43. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 95.
44. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 20, 36, 64.
45. J. Romanides, "Man and His True Life According to the Greek Orthodox Service Books," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 1 (1955), 69.
46. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 13.
47. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 73.
48. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 9
49. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 20.
50. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 66.
51. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 23.
52. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 26.
53. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 21.
54. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 15, n. 7.
55. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 130; *Tale*, 54.
56. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 54.
57. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 81.
58. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 90.
59. See the *Pentecostarion* (Boston: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1990), 383-401.
60. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 82
61. *Ibid.*
62. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 33.
63. *Ibid.*
64. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 58.

136SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love

65. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 34.
66. *Ibid.*
67. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 53.
68. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 55
69. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 95.
70. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 56.
71. J. Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics II," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 9 (1963-64), 243-244.
72. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 56-57.
73. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 93.
74. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 22.
75. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 21.
76. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 23.
77. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, 308.
78. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 22
79. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 2.
80. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 3.
81. L. Puhalo, *Understanding the Divine Liturgy* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1972), 6.
82. S. Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).
83. P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, 307, 314.
84. A. Schmemmann, "Worship in a Secular Age" in idem., *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 118.
85. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 46.
86. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 54.
87. L. Puhalo, *The Spiritual and Scriptural Meaning of the Cycle of Orthodox Divine Services* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1973), 2.
88. L. Puhalo, *The Beginning and the End*, 45.
89. L. Puhalo, *The Soul*, 77.
90. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture: A Scriptural and Spiritual Understanding of Orthodox Christian Iconography* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1997), 66.
91. L. Puhalo, *Ikon as Scripture*, 79-81.
92. L. Puhalo, *Tale*, 54.

93. *Kontakion*, Second Sunday of Lent.

Epilogue:

CHURCH AND/OR WORLD

The construction of any theology of culture inevitably encounters the tension existing between the Church and a world preoccupied with sin and Lazar Puhalo's efforts have proven no different in this regard. How can Christianity relate to culture when Christians are supposedly "in the world but not of the world"? Certainly the dismissal of any ecclesiastical attitude towards humanity that might emanate from an "us" versus "them" mentality would be a step in the right direction. Puhalo's entire theology of culture rests upon the premise that Christ did not come to create barriers but to remove them. Co-suffering love knows no boundaries and this very fact alone demonstrates that the Gospel "is about the fate of all mankind (and) not just about Christians and their institutions."¹ That the Son of God took on an earthly life and interacted with the world around him means that this is the only possible path for the Orthodox Church as well. According to Leonid Ouspensky, Christ's own example to the Church means that "the Church will continue until the consummation of the ages to collect all authentic realities outside of itself, even those which are incomplete and imperfect, in order to integrate them into the fullness of the revelation and allow them to participate in the divine life."²

In the North American context, this has been demonstrated best through the Orthodox encounter with native cultures.

Puhalo's own emphasis on the pre-existence of the Church in the pre-eternal will of God must certainly mean that it would be inconceivable

to think of the Church as a reality existing only on the periphery of humanity.³ According to Maximos the Confessor, since man's very creation implies salvation, the very possession of the human nature also implies incorporation of man and his activities into God's plan, i.e., his Church. The road for mankind to deification can only pass through life on this earth and all of the struggles that accompany that life.⁴ Creation in God's image already signifies an ecclesial identity. As Puhalo puts it, "All mankind is born with the grace to know that God exists and also, with the grace to know that one must seek God."⁵

Furthermore, the incarnation of Christ in history presents not just a witness to God's intention for man in attaining the divine likeness but continues to act as a "leaven working secretly within the whole body of mankind" (Dumitru Staniloe). The theandric energy/will of Christ is directed towards all of his fellow human beings, including non-Christians and even those who do not have any particular faith.⁶

Unfortunately, the Orthodox themselves do not seem to understand that the post-Christian West is itself "the fruit of a secularized eschatology," principally because when living in the West, they often lead their own schizophrenic existence.⁷ Rather than accept that a Christian culture no longer exists and attempt to engage its debased replacement, they prefer to live in an "Orthodox world" of their own construction, having more to do with their own dreams of Byzantium and Holy Russia than with current reality. Even those who live in the traditional Orthodox homelands today have been tempted to repeat the mistakes of the past. For them, a continuing bondage to the vanished realities of Byzantium and Holy Russia appears difficult to escape. The zealous concern of the Church of Russia that its privileged position be reasserted in contemporary Russian society seems to indicate that if it cannot attain the status of a state church, it still feels that it deserves to be treated as such. When a Church is tempted to become a cultural fixture rather than the sieve through which culture passes, Puhalo himself predicts that this already portends the beginning of the end for a living faith. It will be only a matter of time before its church buildings themselves become museums.⁸

Even in North America, where Orthodoxy lives and operates fairly freely, it has yet to change the general perception of itself (paraphrasing John Romanides) as a Church of "long beards, long robes and long services." In other words, not only does Orthodoxy present a

somewhat exotic image but also one that seemingly implies no participation in the culture-at-large as it instead cultivates its own “introspective spirituality.” According to Puhalo, the ethnic clannishness that persists among the Orthodox long after immigration only intensifies the perception of remoteness and needs to be discarded.

Those who have the mind of the Church — the mind of the holy fathers and mothers, the mind of Christ — will forsake, even if sorrowfully, their ethnic group and linguistic community for the sake of the community in truth. Thus, they will give their spiritual nationality (Orthodox Christianity) precedence over their perishable, earthly nationality.⁹

Despite such ethnic “baggage,” Puhalo’s own contribution obviously shows that the creation of a viable Orthodox theology of culture in North America remains a very real possibility. If “the eschatological nature of the Church is not the negation of the world but its affirmation and acceptance as the object of divine love,” the local Church has no other choice.¹⁰ Likewise, the cultivation of its spiritual life must be directed outwardly as much as inwardly. According to the Romanian theologian Dumitru Staniloae, advancement in the spiritual life “does not mean the accumulation of the experiences of a refined spirit, [and] an undisturbed enjoyment of certain insights which cannot be cherished without reference to the community,” but quite the opposite.¹¹ For Puhalo, only this type of spiritual life, speaking to the here-and-now, can inform a theology of culture.

The most urgent need for us in our time is to develop an Orthodox way of life in North America which is uncompromising in our faith and path of life but which is in touch with reality. Our Orthodox Christian life must be practical. The practical function of our spiritual life is our salvation.¹²

While Puhalo’s emphasis on practicality may seem surprising, considering the breadth and depth of his own theology of culture, it in fact expresses the realistic and sober approach that can be identified with Orthodox spiritual life. In opening itself to the contemporary world, Orthodoxy needs such a spirit of sobriety in assessing all the

social, scientific, technical and aesthetic pursuits that man undertakes in today's world. This must be done fearlessly and without defensiveness and Puhalo himself has largely succeeded in doing this. His preaching of the Gospel in various cultural contexts has occurred without emotionalism and unnecessary histrionics but with the directness and clarity that the Church Fathers enjoin.¹³

An Existential and Empirical Theology

Probably the most important reason for the success of Lazar Puhalo's theology of culture resides in his presentation of a non-speculative theology. Since Orthodox theology is based upon existential and empirical foundations, it possesses far less of an inclination to slip into abstraction. Consequently, it also can expect a greater probability of success in addressing the contemporary world because of this fact. Puhalo's own engagement with existentialism occurs not so much because it is a school of philosophical thought but rather because existentialism has provided an "anti-philosophy" as a response to contemporary disillusionment with philosophical thought. Likewise, in a world infused with science and technology, only a theology that shares a comparable empirical methodology can ever hope to succeed in such an environment. For Puhalo, the perennial equation of Orthodoxy with "mysticism" has had an especially pernicious effect upon its message. According to him, "mysticism" generally connotes a type of utopian nostalgia that makes it rather difficult to address the world when one has instead "checked out" from it.

What the existential and the empirical both share is their common basis in human experience. In similar fashion, Orthodox theology emanates from the human experience of purification, illumination and deification. Thus, it cannot be classified as an "intellectual theology." Since the Christian West in previous centuries has been subjected mainly to a speculative theology, it should come as no surprise today that theologians are looked upon as "non-scientific mystics."¹⁴ But from an Orthodox perspective, true theologians are not necessarily intellectuals or "mystics" but only those who have experienced God in illumination and deification. Such an empirical theology should certainly have a far better chance in converting modern man and Puhalo has put it to full advantage.

In facing the world in which men live, Staniloae felt that the most pressing problem facing Orthodox theology today is “to reconcile the cosmic vision of the Fathers with a vision which grows out of the natural sciences.”¹⁵ Lazar Puhalo has done just that, not just through his own engagement with various aspects of modern science but through a constant application of empirical principles in relating Orthodox theology to the world of contemporary culture. Whether providing physiological explanations of the various aspects of the spiritual life or citing medical observations that disprove the claims of New Age eschatology, he demonstrates a certain consistency in offering empirical analyses. Nevertheless, this should not be misconstrued to mean that Puhalo has solved every problem. For instance, in the area of gender issues, he has yet to rid the Orthodox themselves of some of their misinformed attitudes concerning sexuality. That he must address the recurring misconception of menstruation as a sign of uncleanness reveals how “backward” individual Christians can sometime be.¹⁶ Still, Puhalo cannot be faulted for his valiant efforts in leaving no cultural stone unturned in the hope of bringing forth the fullest illumination possible from Orthodox Theo-anthropology.

Kerygma, Dogma, Catholicity

If there is any aspect of Puhalo’s viewpoint that possesses an inherent weakness, it could be found in those aspects of his ecclesiology where the existential/empirical thrust does not fully penetrate. Although he has rightly given dogma an *a posteriori* existential/empirical character through the individual’s experience of illumination and deification, this existential character is not successfully sustained in the Church’s corporate life. Puhalo has a tendency to isolate the Church’s dogmas and rites into something comparable to Catholicism’s “deposit of faith,” implying that they can have a separate identity beyond the reality of the Body of Christ corporately experienced in illumination and deification. This comes as a bit of a surprise, particularly since Puhalo clearly emphasizes that the lack of a sense of ecclesial community is the very thing that keeps people from struggling towards illumination and deification. Empirically, the ecclesiastical assembly’s attainment of “right worship” and “true glory” really does not *exist* apart from the experience of the true Body of Christ. Among Orthodox

commentators, Puhalo is certainly not alone in sometimes “hypostasizing Orthodoxy” (to use Thomas Hopko’s expression). Such hypostasizations have generally carried polemical and triumphalistic overtones with them and although Puhalo tells us to “fight for the Orthodox faith,” his message can also be more irenic.

If we have Orthodoxy in the heart, then we hold the faith in peace and love; we do not become fanatical and we do not become hard and arrogant. On the other hand, neither do we participate in a betrayal of Orthodoxy, because we truly and clearly realize that any betrayal of Orthodoxy is a betrayal of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

Preaching to the world about the glory of Orthodoxy certainly makes a poor substitute for preaching the Gospel of Christ yet this is the message many Orthodox carry.¹⁸ In this respect, Puhalo is correct in at least making a distinction between kerygma and dogma. The first denotes the general preaching of faith in Christ and the second, the empirical knowledge of God gained through illumination and deification, both individually *and corporately*.¹⁹ Thus, to be absolutely consistent with a Christian existentialism, the mere promulgation of “orthodox dogmas and rites” by the Church cannot be a true empirical “proof” of the Church’s catholicity, or fullness of the experience of God. Only illumination and deification experienced corporately can demonstrate this. In illumination, the gathered community becomes the Body of Christ while in deification, Christ himself appears in its midst. Thus, the true Church is present in all times and places throughout the world in those congregations where the Body of Christ has truly been revealed.

The rarefication of illumination and glorification in the Church’s individual and corporate experience helps explain the appearance of arguments concerning Christian maximalism and minimalism. That the path of Orthodoxy proves a narrow one has nothing to do with enduring an ecclesiastical obstacle course that makes it into a “religion,” but everything to do with the ascetic life of purification that makes illumination and deification possible. Those Orthodox who shudder at the very thought of what they term “Christian minimalism” need to be reminded that the simple profession of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan

Creed admits an individual to the Church at baptism. Baptism only begins the Christian's journey in purification, illumination and deification but this still hopefully makes the point.

Rightfully, the Orthodox Church has refused to subscribe to Catholicism's belief that a "development of doctrine" occurs throughout the Church's history for nothing can be added to the experienced reality of the resurrected and glorified Body of Christ. Unfortunately, such a belief in a "development" has been paralleled by those Orthodox who, in emphasizing a maximalist viewpoint, see all liturgical, canonical and other developments as a revelation by the Holy Spirit that are binding not only upon the Orthodox but upon all others who might eventually wish to be incorporated within the Orthodox Church. Puhalo himself appears to take this maximalist viewpoint concerning such developments. For instance, in his discussion of the evolution of the icon screen (*iconostasis*) in Orthodox churches, he clearly feels that this has occurred through divine revelation and should not be attributed to historical and cultural factors. Consequently, any who might wish to have a contemporary church building without the icon screen would be basing their view upon an archaeological emphasis on those church buildings in the past that possessed no icon screen rather than the continuing revelation of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ Admittedly, the separation of the sanctuary already presented in the Old Testament could also create a convenient premise for an argument that such a partition has always been in accordance with the divine will. Conversely, however, it could just as easily be argued from the New Testament that the temple sanctuary veil (or partition) has now been torn away. In a somewhat similarly conservative vein, Puhalo has this to say about liturgy:

If we will obey God and fulfill what the Holy Spirit has set before us, then we have the image of Eden which God made. But if we irreverently and arbitrarily change the structure of the services...in even the smallest ways, then we have only a most wretched garden choked with the weeds of fallen man's vain imagination.²¹

Neither is Puhalo receptive to the incorporation of "Western rites" within the Orthodox Church.²²

Puhalo's somewhat rigid attitudes about ecclesiastical change may come as a bit of a surprise when compared with his rather open attitude towards secular culture. To a certain degree, this can be explained as a safeguard against the encroachment of the world (in the worst possible sense of the word) upon the Church. From Puhalo's perspective, "the practices of the Church are aimed at developing in us spiritual self-discipline and self-control."²³ Still, the concern that legalism and even ritualism might develop from such zealousness cannot be dismissed. Also, it might be wished that Puhalo would examine Western Christianity a bit more open-mindedly and dispassionately. While there is undoubtedly much to criticize from the Orthodox perspective, Orthodoxy needs to seriously evaluate all that is "good, true, and beautiful" in Western sacred culture perhaps even more than in its secular culture. As Alexander Schmemmann has noted, "Orthodox mission to the West is impossible without some degree of love for the West and the many authentically Christian values of its culture."²⁴

A Mission of Co-Suffering Love

Lazar Puhalo constantly reiterates that the chief fruit produced through purification, illumination and deification always remains co-suffering love: The existential experience of God, who is love (1 John 4:16) can only manifest itself as love. Once again, however, this manifestation of love cannot be limited to individual efforts but must be corporately experienced by the assembly (*ekklesia*). A Church that merely promulgates dogmas and rites and demonstrates no love for those around it has become "a booming gong" and "a clashing cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). Only the grace of God can transfigure mere love into co-suffering love and it falls to the Church to make this its mission. Missionary effort on the part of the Church means not only conversion but also charity and self-giving.²⁵ In other words, human society needs not just the Church's keryma but also the revelation of a community's co-suffering love that provides the empirical evidence of the truth of the Gospel. Outside of the Church, what else could have a more profound existential impact?

As a bishop of the Orthodox Church, Puhalo knows that witness to the world implies not just words but deeds of service "to the least" of men. Consequently, his dialogue with culture attains its greatest

practicality especially in its mission to those who have suffered most from the consequences of its fallenness. Puhalo's ministry has not been limited to engaging just philosophers and scientists but also has included his own personal ministry to those who have lost all self-esteem: drug addicts, the mentally ill, the homeless. Thus, the creation of a culture of co-suffering love means far more than merely bringing social institutions, science, technology or art into God's plan for the world. It is about making individual human beings capable of co-suffering love through their own existential reception of such love.

The words of Antony Khrapovitsky, Metropolitan of Kiev in the early twentieth century, whose own conception of co-suffering love has had such a profound influence upon Lazar Puhalo, an archbishop of the twenty-first century, provide the perfect conclusion to the theme of the interpenetration of human culture by co-suffering love. In fact, they provide almost a prophecy of the mission of Puhalo himself:

The kind of co-suffering we are talking about is... precisely in the ability to understand man, fathom the good qualities he possesses, and to appreciate him, freeing him from the admixture of falsehood. What is required for this—in addition to humble love—are a power and broadness of mind. Thus, co-suffering is the ability to come to an inner self-identification with a person, a joyous blending with all that is good in him, and sorrow about all that is negative. This is precisely where a “fisher of men” is revealed. Such people somehow manage to penetrate a person completely, to appropriate all his thoughts, to become linked to his very heart and soul, to raise his whole being to truth and love. All this requires spiritual knowledge, sincere love and the ability to know the innermost thoughts of a person without reacting in a negative manner. The prerequisite of this influence of one will upon another may be stated thus: *By humbling oneself, loving and learning about people, a human being ascends or returns to a primordial mysterious union with everyone* and, in pouring the holy content (acquired through communion with God) of his soul into the soul of his neighbor, he transfigures the inner nature of the latter in such a way that merely by the consent of his will, the difficult path of his rebirth is almost accomplished.²⁶

ENDNOTES:

1. J. Meyendorff, "The Unity of The Church and the Unity of Mankind," in *Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 130.
2. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, v. 1 (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 109.
3. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 3.
4. D. Staniloae, "The Orthodox Doctrine of Salvation and its Implications for Christian Diakonia in the World," in idem., *Theology and the Church*, tr. R. Barringer (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 207.
5. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1996), 65.
6. D. Staniloae, "The Orthodox Doctrine," 191, 187.
7. A. Schmemmann, "The World in Orthodox Thought and Experience," in idem, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 82.
8. L. Puhalo, *Meleti (Spiritual Talks)*, (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 2000), 111.
9. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 51.
10. A. Schmemmann, "The Missionary Imperative," in *Church, World, Mission*, 212.
11. D. Staniloae, "The Problems and Perspectives of Orthodox Theology," in *Theology and the Church*, 218.
12. L. Puhalo, "Nativity Epistle," *Canadian Orthodox Missionary* 23, 6, no. 183 (November-December, 1997)..
13. L. Puhalo, *Understanding the Divine Liturgy* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1972), 31.
14. A. Schmemmann, "The Task of Orthodox Theology Today," in *Church, World, Mission*, 120.
15. D. Staniloae, "The Problems," 224.
16. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 17-18.
17. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 45.
18. A. Schmemmann, "Problems of Orthodoxy in America, III. The Spiritual Problem," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 9, 4 (1965), 165.
19. L. Puhalo, *Evidence of Things Not Seen*, 10, n. 15.
20. L. Puhalo, *Understanding the Divine Liturgy* (videorecording).
21. L. Puhalo, *Creation and Fall*, 17.
22. L. Puhalo, *Meleti*, 51.
23. L. Puhalo, *Concerning Evil Spirit and Concerning "Internal Demons"* (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, n.d.), 26.

148 *SOPKO: For a Culture of Co-suffering Love*

24. A. Schmemmann, "The Task of Orthodox Theology Today," in *Church, World, Mission*, 124.
25. *Ibid.*
26. A. Khrapovitsky, *Dostoevsky's Concept of Spiritual Rebirth*, tr. L. Koehler (Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1978), 37-38.

INDEX

- Abel. 44
- Abraham and Sarah. 45
- actus purus*. 28, 88
- Adam and Eve. 35, 41-43, 45, 68, 102, 104, 117
- adultery. 32, 47, 51
- Albertus Magnus. 82
- ancestral sin. 42
- androgynous. 48
- Antichrist. 69, 70, 102, 129
- apisteia*. 65
- Apocalypse. 125, 127, 128
- Augustine of Hippo. 39, 117, 118
- autexousia*. 60
- Barlaam the Calabrian. 123
- Basil The Great, St. 3, 83
- Basil the New, Fable of. 119
- Behr-Sigel, Elisabeth. 40, 47, 54
- beyond good. 61
- biotechnology. 81, 84
- Bohr, N. 87
- Bouyer, Louis. 107
- Bulgakov, Serge. 30, 84
- Cain. 44
- celibacy. 48, 51
- charismata*. 40, 62
- civil religion. 12, 106, 111, 113, 127
- Clement, Olivier. 26, 68, 91
- complementarity. 40, 42, 43, 87, 88
- David, Prophet King. 47
- de Beauvoir, Simone. 53
- Decalogue. 71
- deification. 1, 5, 16, 25, 28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 40, 42, 43, 52, 58-60,
63, 67, 68, 74, 84, 85, 90, 102, 103, 105, 108, 116, 118, 123, 135,
137-139, 141
- Deism. 112, 115
- determinism. 28, 82

discernment.	7, 69, 70, 97, 100
Dissipative Chaos.	89
Dobzhansky, Th.	84
Dura-Europos.	98
elder.	52, 61, 118, 119
<i>eleutheria</i>	60
empirical.	vii, 11, 64, 80-82, 85, 86, 124, 137-139, 141
energies.	v, 9-11, 26, 32, 34, 61-63, 65, 73, 75, 84, 88, 105
<i>enoche</i>	71
Enslavement.	66
<i>epistome</i>	85
Esau.	68
eschatology.	18, 116-119, 127, 130, 135, 138
essence-energy.	28, 88
<i>euthune</i>	71
Evdokimov, Paul.	39-42, 46-48, 53, 54, 104, 107, 116-117, 126, 127
Ezekiel, Prophet.	45
fallen Church.	45
Fasting.	67-70
Fedotov, George.	75
feminine.	39, 40, 42, 48, 51
feminist.	48
Florensky, Pavel.	12, 96, 99, 104, 105, 107
four dimensions of value.	72
Franks (Germano-French tribe).	106
Freemasonry.	112
Gabriel, Dr. George.	4, 42, 51, 52
Galileo.	81
Genesis.	29, 41, 44, 68, 84, 102
<i>gnomic</i>	25, 65
<i>gnosis</i>	85
Gnostic Dualism.	117-119, 122
grace.	28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 40, 44, 45, 47, 58-60, 62, 65, 66, 68, 70, 86, 91, 98, 100, 101, 104, 117, 121, 122, 135, 141
Grant, George.	62
Great Fast.	70
Gregory of Nyssa, St.	42
Hahn, Scott.	127

Hamiltonian Principle.	89
Harakas, Dr. Stylianos (Stanley)..	10, 11, 59-62, 65, 67, 70, 71
Heisenberg, W.	82, 87, 89
helpmates.	42, 43, 49
<i>Hexaameron</i>	83
Hopko, Fr. Thomas.	10, 127, 138
Hosea, Prophet.	45, 46
<i>hyperagathos</i>	61
hypothalamus.	64
Israel.	35, 41, 45, 46, 69, 103, 113
Jericho.	46, 68
John of Damascus, St.	48, 73, 130
Judaeo-Christian.	13, 112, 115
Kandinsky.	12, 95
Kane, Robert.	72
Kontoglou, Fotios.	97
Kroner, Richard.	2, 80, 96
Lent.	70, 130
<i>Libri Carolini</i>	106
<i>logoi</i>	10, 88, 90
<i>logos</i>	88
Lossky, Vladimir.	85
Malevich, Vladimir.	95
Mangalampalli, Dr. Subha.	89
marriage.	16, 43, 45, 48-52
Marx, K.	74
masculine.	40, 42, 51
Mathew, Gervase.	99
Matisse.	95
<i>metanoia</i>	69
Meyendorff, Fr. John.	3, 9, 24-27, 48, 81, 83, 85, 90, 112, 114-118, 134
<i>momento mori</i>	116, 122
monasticism.	2, 13, 31, 49, 51, 52, 74
moral conscience.	64, 73
Near East.	45
neo-cortex.	64
New Age.	18, 100, 102, 112, 114, 115, 117-119, 122, 125, 138

New Israel.	41, 113
New Testament.	47, 99, 126, 140
Noah.	44
Ockham, Wm..	82
Old Testament Trinity..	45, 103
ontological process..	30, 59
Ouspensky, Leonid.	97-101, 134
<i>parousia</i>	125, 127-130
Passion.	15, 17, 41, 44, 64, 66, 101, 116, 121
Pauline Epistles..	51
philanthropia.	75
Philokalia.	54, 105
prophetic.	16, 41, 45, 47, 48, 52, 53
Quinisext Council.	99
Rahab.	46
reductionism..	53, 83, 111
regenerate(ion).	50
repentance.	32, 44, 63, 66, 67, 69, 130
Rose, Fr. Seraphim..	13, 18, 44, 119
Rousseau..	62
Russell, Bertrand.	80
Russian seminaries.	59
Ruth, Prophetess.	46, 47
Satan.	43, 69, 112, 114, 117-119
Schmemmann, Fr. Alexander.	4, 127, 135-137, 139, 141
self-determination..	27, 28, 60, 69, 117
Seth..	44
Seventh Ecumenical Council.	97, 99, 106
sexual function.	49
sexuality.	16, 39-43, 48, 49, 51, 52, 138
Smith, Adam.	74
Snow, C.P..	80
Social Struggle.	68, 70
<i>sola scriptura</i>	81, 96, 101
Solomon, Prophet.	47
Spiritual Sickness.	66
Staniloe, Dumitru..	135, 136
Suggestion (Power of)..	66

Symeon the New Theologian, St...	122
Tale of the Elder Basil the New, Fable of..	119
Televangelist..	114
<i>telonia</i>	119
Thamar.....	46
Theo-anthropology. v, 26, 53, 61, 84, 91, 96, 100, 101, 104, 105 112, 123, 129, 138	
theonomous cultures.	74
Theophilus of Antioch.....	41
Theosophy.	112
Thomistic.....	81, 82, 88
toll houses.....	119, 121, 129
unmercenary physicians.....	84
Uriah the Hittite.	46
values-neutral.	80
<i>via amoris</i>	67
Weber, Max.	74