This nineteenth-century Russian icon presents the first chapters of Genesis, combining elements of the stories in chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4. The story of creation begins in the upper left corner and is presented in “cells.” The text at the top of each cell is a summary of the biblical text from Genesis 1. In the center row, we see the Father creating the animals, and just below that, we see Adam naming them (Genesis 2:19–20). In the center on the right, we see the creation of Adam (Genesis 2:7). The lower left corner shows Adam in Paradise and Eve being created from his side (Genesis 2:21). The corner on the right compresses a number of scenes into one: the expulsion from the garden (Genesis 3) and the Cain and Abel story (Genesis 4).
Science: 1. the state of knowing : knowledge as distinguished from ignorance or misunderstanding

– Merriam-Webster

Faith: 2(b). firm belief in something for which there is no proof : complete trust

– Merriam-Webster

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

– Hebrews 11:1,3

A miracle does not happen contrary to nature, but contrary to what we know about nature.

– St. Augustine

When I consider Y our heavens, the work of Y our fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that Y ou are mindful of him,
And the son of man that Y ou visit him?

– Psalm 8:3–4

O Lord, how manifold are Y our works!
In wisdom You have made them all...

– Psalm 104:24

For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements; the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars, the natures of animals and the tempers of wild animals, the powers of spirits and the thoughts of human beings, the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots; I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.

– Wisdom of Solomon 7:17–22

In Questions to Thalassios, 59, St. Maximos explains that reason is not only useful but also indispensable, and that it must be used in relation to the intellect and in synergy with grace:

It is not legitimate to say that grace alone produces in and of itself in the saints the knowledge of the mysteries without the help of the natural faculties that can open us up to knowledge...Neither, certainly, is it true that, without the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, can the saints, using only their natural faculty, receive true knowledge of reality...Thus the grace of the All-Holy Spirit does not produce in the saints either wisdom without the intellect to receive it or knowledge without the faculty of reason capable of receiving it...And the reverse as well is true: man will not acquire [such knowledge] with just his natural faculty, without the divine power which dispenses them.

– St. Maximos the Confessor, Questions to Thalassios, 59
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We welcome this new issue of PRAXIS and its theme of “Science and Religion,” as this is a very timely topic in a day and age when we are continuously presented with new discoveries, technological advancements and the ongoing quest for scientific solutions to many contemporary challenges. Because these aspects of our modern world influence our lives in so many ways, we must be mindful of how we engage with science as Orthodox Christians and people of faith. We also must be mindful of the fact that frequently science is presented as hostile to faith, or even faith as hostile to science.

We affirm that science and faith are not exclusive of each other. Our Creator has blessed us with a beautiful and complex world and universe. In creating us in His image and likeness, He has given us great intellectual potential and the ability to explore, discover, learn and create. In addition, as Orthodox Christians, we are blessed with a heritage of faith and learning as shown in the lives and writings of many of our saints. This heritage is not characterized by a fear of the unknown or an unwillingness to accept new discoveries, but by amazement and wonder in what God has made, by respect for life and human potential, and by a willingness to engage with challenging questions and choices that confront us.

These characteristics of the life of faith in relation to science should be communicated and demonstrated through our ministry of religious education. This is essential for several reasons. First, although science may offer illuminating answers, great discoveries and beneficial advancements, faith helps us to understand the created order and the nature of life by providing meaning and purpose. Second, it is evident that science has helped us to know much in answer to the question, “How?” Our faith guides in understanding the answer to the question, “Why?” Finally, science has and will continue to give us great tools and amazing solutions that will enhance the quality of life, expand our knowledge of our world, connect us with each other and, yes, aid our ministry in the service of Christ. However, the use of scientific discovery and technology must be guided by a discerning faith in the Creator of all things, a faith that affirms the power of grace, the necessity of justice, and the priority of life.

This is a significant challenge to us as teachers of our Orthodox faith. It means that we must strive to show how faith is not just relevant to life, but it is also our manner of life. As we live in communion with Him, believing in the revelation of His grace through Christ, we are guided by His presence and wisdom. We can marvel at the magnificence of creation, and we can encourage our youth to explore and discover. We can hope and labor for advancements that will bring healing and comfort, while we offer the hope and peace that comes from above. As we live by faith in God, we do not have to fear what He has made, but our faith should also give us the boldness to challenge abuse, greed and the lust for power at any cost, related to the exploitation of the amazing progress in several areas of scientific research and achievements.

As you read the pages of this issue, I encourage you to consider how you are addressing issues of science and faith and to contemplate the connections that should be made in addressing questions and challenges that arise among all age groups in our parishes. We need to be prepared to offer guidance in the life of faith. Within our communities, we need to engage with current issues and applications that are having a tremendous impact on our lives and our world. Throughout our Holy Archdiocese, we also need to encourage more dialogue on the relationship of science and faith among experts in scientific fields, theologians, clergy and laity, and by developing resources for our work in religious education.

May the blessings of our Lord continue to be with you as you fulfill your calling to teach His ways in truth and love.

With paternal love in Christ,
Dear Readers of PRAXIS,

This issue of PRAXIS magazine presents us with something integral to our spiritual and historical identity as Greek Orthodox Christians and as Hellenes: the mutually sustaining and complementary relationship between faith and science.

The panoply of great scientists and scientific achievements in our heritage spans and influences the major epochs of human history. They range from pre-Socratic philosophers/scientists/mathematicians in the sixth century BC, such as Thales, Pythagoras and the Atomists, to Socrates and Plato in the fourth and fifth centuries BC, whose systematic discussions of natural philosophy through deductive reasoning laid the groundwork for modern scientific inquiry. Then we have Aristotle himself (fourth century BC) introducing an empiric approach, the method of observation and induction through which knowledge can be organized and expanded—the birth of the scientific method. The flowering of scientific inquiry, especially in mathematics, continued in the Hellenistic period with Ptolemy, Euclid and Archimedes, among others. Science and the keen observation of the laws of nature are one of the most significant legacies of Hellenism to the world.

One of the enduring and essential characteristics of the approach to science in ancient times was its attempt to understand the fundamental realities that sustain existence and the cosmos as a whole. Science was truly a vehicle within which one could understand, admire and marvel at the beauty and complexity of creation. Indeed one can say that science was an attempt to discover and orient oneself toward ultimate truth.

The next epoch of our history, that of the Church, answered that question of ultimate truth in the person of Christ Himself. Christ is the pre-eternal Word, the organizing principle of the universe and the archetype of all that is good and true. When one reads a masterpiece like St. Basil's reflection on the creation story, the Hexameron (On the Six Days of Creation), one sees his prose transform into poetry. In his detailed exegesis, St. Basil exults in the knowledge of how the universe was formed and Who formed it. Although today we dismiss many of his understandings of the natural world as terribly flawed, we cannot dismiss his real point: that we must continually offer a doxology to the Creator and His artistry.

This is true of all the Fathers of the Church. They were not opposed to science, but saw it as a gift of God for the help of humanity, whether through the medical arts or an increased understanding of the workings of the cosmos. They relied on the scientific understandings of their age and in them saw the hand of God Himself. Science then becomes a reflection of Him Who is the Truth. It is a beautiful twist on the scientific method where the examination of the world around us becomes a form of humble worship, a form of thanksgiving for all that He has given us.

We certainly see this ethos in the humble service so many of our faithful who work in the sciences. We are all served by their dual vocation as scientists and as Christians.

With paternal blessings in the Lord,

† METHODIOS
Metropolitan of Boston
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words in length and directly discuss education in the theology and tradition of the Orthodox Christian churches. Lesson aids or graphic enhancements may accompany the articles submitted. We also encourage the submission of photographs relevant to parish life (praxis). Please also provide a biographical sketch of the author not exceeding fifty words.

PRAXIS Magazine is seeking submissions of lesson plans based on articles from previous or current issues of PRAXIS. Submissions should use the article as the text/background of the lesson plan. Lesson plans are welcome for any or several age groups. Please send submissions in a Word document with a length of 1,000–2,000 words to tvrame@goarch.org.

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    Your Works Are Marvelous, O Lord, Including Science
    Anton C. Vrame
Christianity and science have interacted in a number of ways over the centuries, from cooperation and dialogue to conflict and suspicion. This relationship has been complex and often dependent on things having little to do with either science or religion, but rather with political, social and personal issues. However, the notion that religion and science have been locked in mortal combat is considered historically false. What is known as the “conflict theory” has been repudiated by historians who trace the development of this idea to two influential deeply flawed books written at the end of the nineteenth century.¹

Modern science emerged from the Christian culture of the west with founders like Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Descartes and others. The early “fathers” of modern science were people of faith. Some held Church offices. The great majority of what Isaac Newton wrote was theological, not scientific. The Galileo affair stands out more as an anomaly than as a representation of the norm, the outcome of a complex amalgamation of events involving personality clashes, politics and the pressures brought on the Roman Catholic Church by the Protestant Reformation.

The Darwin–Wallace model of evolution by natural selection marks a change in the tone between religion and science that was more problematic than in the past, though that issue is also complex and greatly oversimplified. For one thing, some prominent Church leaders of the time did not have a problem with evolution and saw it as the mode of creation. Many arguments against evolution by natural selection were raised by scientists, not theologians, and were scientific in content rather than theological. Prominent figures of the early Church did not view the Genesis account as a historical-scientific document. Those that accepted the six days did not empathize its historical and geographical elements.² They...
were concerned with the meaning in the text. Whether the text was descriptive of six real days or ages was not vital to them. Genesis was a narrative about restoration and redemption, not science.

Approaching the Bible as if it were a book concerned with natural science puts the Bible in the business of discerning what Catholic scholar John Haught refers to as “God’s Technology” where the focus shifts to the least important aspects of theology. How old is the universe, when was it made, how long have people been on earth, and similar questions distract from the message and purpose of Scripture. Another problem is that the nature of science is one of constant modification and revision, so at what point of scientific advancement is the Bible supposed to correspond? Science is a dynamic and ever-changing endeavor. That is its strength but it is also a reason to avoid viewing it dogmatically as if models being taught today (or elements of them) will always be there in the future. The history of science shows the exact otherwise. This makes it very difficult to attempt to have the Bible speak to us about scientific subjects.

The Nature of Science and Knowledge

To the extent that there is or has been conflict with science and religion, at least at the surface level, it is usually related to the philosophy of materialism, the misuse of science by government and industry, or the secularization and idolization of science. However, there are certain qualities about science that need to be recognized when considering the relationship between science and Orthodox Christianity. The first is that science is a human construct and not something infallible that came down from the mountain. We made it up. What constitutes the scientific method and what it is that science tells us about the natural world remain areas of dispute and are not self-evident. Physicist turned historian of science Thomas Kuhn demonstrated that the history of science reveals that scientific progress is not linear or even necessarily rational. Many great thinkers and scientists have seriously questioned whether science is capable of unveiling Reality in the ultimate sense. The logical positivism of the twentieth century failed and most philosophers and historians of science today accept that science gives a reliable description of our experience of the world, but does not get to the underlying objective reality behind it. The latter is something that humans, in their capacity as finite creatures, are simply incapable of.

Modern science is aimed at that portion of the creation that can be made known to us as creatures, and as such it provides a correspondence of our sense experience with physical events around us. It is successful in explaining the relationships between physical things, which allow it to display high degrees of predictability. Therefore we say it works and are impressed by its capabilities. In the process however, many people mistakenly endow science with attributes it does not have. Borrowing from the language of philosopher Jacob Needleman, this is a science of the desert: it is one that enables us to live more efficiently and better in the desert, but it does not tell us how to get out of the desert. One of the dangers is that it can, along with many other activities, distract from the search and the desire for a way out, that is, for transformation of the self.

The distinction between science and knowledge of God is explained by modern elder Sophrony Sakharov in this manner:

The experience of the great ascetics…passed before them but in conditions radically dissimilar to those in which scientific activity operates. The human spirit.
is led by the Spirit of Christ to **knowledge of God, existential knowledge** [emphasis mine], so that the very word “knowledge” denotes not abstract assimilation, not rational understanding, but entry into divine being, communion in being. (St. Silouan the Athonite, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991, page 217)

Perhaps the most critical problem in the relationship of science to Orthodox Christianity, aside from fundamentalism and Biblical literalism, was the idolization of science that raised it from a methodological tool, to the savior of humanity and the only source of authentic knowledge. This is known as imperial science (scientism), and like fundamentalism in Christianity, is a more recent phenomenon. Obviously this kind of attitude will cause tension with religion. Science can be respected and utilized without endowing it with transcendental qualities. Society must stop treating science as if it is infallible or universal. The highly respected philosopher of science Mary Midgley, incidentally also an atheist (but not anti-theist), says that one of the major myths of our age is that science is omni-competent in all areas.

Science is supposed to use reductionism as a method, a convenience, and not as a metaphysical statement about reality, but in practice this demarcation often breaks down so that the scientific description becomes the ontological one. As a result everything including the human person is seen from a perspective that is congruent with reductionism and naturalism. The physical things that are most reproducible and testable (the hard data) become what the thing is. On this basis it is not only inevitable but also logical that leading scientists begin to describe the human person as a “walking bag of chemicals,” “a mere collection of particles,” or an “aberrant species.” They are making the scientific description (which is reductive and physical because that is how science works) correspond with a philosophical or ideological one, and they do so because they are committed materialists and not because they are scientists.

It has also been argued that the Judeo-Christian belief in the reality and goodness of the material creation was fundamental to the rise of science. It provided motivation and a reasoned foundation for scientific inquiry. Ironically, these foundations, which are being eroded by atheistic materialism, may also undermine the assurances that science is really providing true knowledge about creation. I have heard it expressed that the continued degradation of the Judeo-Christian underpinnings by atheistic materialism could threaten the future of science, if it has not already begun.

**Final Thoughts**

We live in the age of science and that makes it imperative that we communicate to a society that is reliant on this method of knowledge. We must also learn to distinguish science from the philosophies that surround it. The natural sciences inform us about creation while Orthodox Christianity through the Holy Spirit informs us about the one who made creation. St. Silouan expresses it in this manner: “With the mere mind we can only come to know the things of this earth, and then only in part, while God and all that is of heaven are known through the Holy Spirit.”

Elder Sophrony (pictured below) reminds us about a critical aspect of any discussion that concerns itself with the nature and content of truth. Science and Orthodoxy (and philosophy) all ascribe to a search for truth, at least at some level and in some form. Sophrony addresses this question in the following manner:

The Lord said to Pontius Pilate, “I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth,” to which Pilate replied skeptically, “What is truth?” and convinced that there could be no answer to the query, did not look for one, even from Christ, but went out to the Jews. Pilate was right. There is no answer to the question “What is truth?” if we have in mind the ultimate truth at the root of the whole existence of the world.

But if Pilate, meaning Primal or Axiomatic Truth, had phrased his question as it should have been phrased—if he had asked “Who is truth?”—he would have received the answer that, a little while previously, Christ, foreseeing Pilate’s query, gave at the Last Supper to His beloved disciples, and through them to the whole world: “I am the truth.” Science and philosophy set themselves the “What is truth?” question, whereas Christian religious perception always considers truth as **Who.**
Scientists and philosophers not infrequently look upon Christians as unsound daydreamers, whereas they see themselves as standing on firm ground and so label themselves positivists. In a curious way they do not realize all the negativeness of truth as What. They do not understand that authentic Truth, absolute Truth, can be only Who, never What, since Truth is not some abstract formula, some abstract idea, but life itself.

…They reason that if they can arrive at the truth they seek as What, they will be possessed of magic power and become unrestrained masters of being.

…Truth as Who is never arrived at through reason. God as Who can be known only through communion in being—that is, only by the Holy Spirit. Starets Silouan constantly emphasized this. (St. Silouan, pages 111–112)

Here a distinction is attempted. Truth in science is about the (causal) relationships between things, usually or exclusively physical in quality, and external to that which underlies physical existence, that is, it describes the surface of them not their meaning or their essence. In Orthodoxy, Truth is a state of being, a communion with the ultimate Truth underlying all existence. Its truths permeate all things. A science of nature can never be in conflict with this Truth, because science reveals only aspects of the creation and never leaves it. Viewed in this light, there is no conflict with the truths of science and the Truth of Orthodoxy. How we use science and our attitudes toward it determine whether it is for the good of humankind or something less.

I wish to thank Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Dr. Thomas Mether for taking the time to review this manuscript and provide valuable suggestions. Any errors that remain are my own.

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3. Among those are Pierre Duhem, Joseph Fourier, Max Planck, Ernst Mach, Werner Heisenberg, Niels Bohr, Michael Polanyi, Ludwig Fleck, Norwood Russell Hanson, John Dewey, Henri Poincare, Percy William Bridgman, and others.

The goal of this article is to consider the current science–religion dialogue in the United States today and determine what the role of the Orthodox Church has and should have in that dialogue. It is probably useful at the outset for me to describe the overarching themes relevant when one considers the impact of science on humanity, in order to establish the importance of this area of discussion.

One of the most important ways in which science affects humanity is through education—helping individuals to better understand the world around them. This is particularly important to the science–religion interface because all people must reconcile science with their daily lives. Sometimes this reconciliation is easy and meaningful, but other times it is difficult, complex and confusing. Science also affects us through medicine—medical discoveries that aid in diagnosis, treatment, quality of life and end of life issues. The cost of medical care, limited health benefits to the poor, and the high cost of medical care associated with the last few months of life are issues that concern each person. The ecological movement has long been an area of interest to society, but recent news about the safety of genetically engineered food products, long-term damage to the environment by oil spills and other disasters have brought these concerns more into the public eye. Finally, technology is increasing at a rapid pace, making some discussion of risk–benefit considerations to new scientific endeavors essential. These include such broad-ranging issues as cloning of humans, genome science, genetic counseling and beginning of life technologies. Newly evolving nanotechnology has brought up concerns about safe workplaces and how best to regulate new projects. Because science affects human beings in such profound and personal ways, discussing science and religion together provides an important bridge between the ethical and practical.
There are a number of ongoing intra-Orthodox dialogues related to both general and specific topics of science and religion in the United States. The Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration has focused on ecological issues, and the Orthodox Christian Association of Medicine, Psychology and Religion (OCAMPR) has focused on medical matters. The Greek Archdiocesan Advisory Committee on Science and Technology has been in existence for many years and has sponsored numerous discussion groups and lectures at the Greek Orthodox Clergy–Laity Congress and other similar meetings; this group has tackled a broad range of topics and has tried to bring the discussion into the Church in many types of venues. Recently several additional groups have formed to deal with science–religion issues for Orthodox, but these have not yet had the opportunity to make major contributions. Nevertheless, most of these discussions have been positive and have generated new and meaningful ideas. There have been a number of intra-Orthodox consultations on specific scientific issues, particularly the environment, but also genetic engineering and bioethics, many of which have been organized through the World Council of Churches, SYNDESMOS and other organizations. Most of these have involved one-time meetings with discussion and have been remarkably productive.

Despite these positive contributions, some limitations have hampered progress and will be likely to adversely affect the working of the aforementioned and other intra-Orthodox groups unless changes are made. The list of topics to be considered is really almost limitless (above I have touched on only some of the most widely discussed topics), and because the discussion is complex and involves groups from different disciplines, achieving the adequate rigor of expertise is difficult. Often, the tangible fruits of this discussion (publications, proceedings and books), which might be useful to all people are not available at all or if so not in a manner that would permit them to assist any decision-making bodies considering ethical issues.

Most of the scientific matters for consideration are complex, often with a detailed background in a variety of disciplines including a mix of people who are actively involved in the field and those who are only tangentially associated with it to permit broad views and optimal discussions. Failure to include scientists in these discussions has led to scientifically inaccurate documents that are therefore irrelevant to the question at hand. In many cases, it is difficult to find scientists with the appropriate expertise to present the questions and concerns in a way that can be understood by theologians and other non-science professionals. Because the jargon, priorities and perspectives are very different among the groups involved in the conversations, long-term committees must be established so that continued interaction is possible, eventually resulting in honest communication.

Scientific advances themselves often affect the ethics of scientific questions, so up-to-date knowledge is required to define the ethical questions. HIV/AIDS can serve as an example. In the early days of discovering that HIV was the cause of AIDS, public and private calls were made for quarantining patients, preventing AIDS patients from being able to keep their jobs, etc. As the science demonstrated that the route of transmission is predominantly through bodily fluids, quarantine was no longer considered an ethical consideration. The inclusion of relevant scientists and medical practitioners in discussions of these issues is therefore essential in producing meaningful and relevant positions.

The net result of these limitations on science–religion issues for the Orthodox faithful (and perhaps for the nation as a whole) is that decisions related to the science–religion interface are relegated to the secular world. This is perhaps necessary because we live in a secular society, but often the Orthodox view is not expressed until long after policy decisions have been made. For example, the President’s Council on Bioethics has published its findings on cloning and beginning of life technology, but few Orthodox views were part of that decision-making process. Other results of these limitations are that our youth are confused (and “primed” to become fearful) because they are...
receiving mixed messages—one from the secular world and often a very different one from their Church. The faithful are generally disillusioned because their Church has so little impact on these issues in contemporary society. Orthodox views on these issues, if they are actually formulated and expressed, are rarely available outside the community of the faithful.


The participants in the broad science–religion dialogue in the United States and some countries of the European Union today include clergy and laity from most faiths, although Christians and Jews are perhaps best represented. Theologians, practicing clergy, philosophers, scientists from all disciplines (astronomers, physicists, materials scientists, chemists, biologists, geologists and others), physicians, psychologists, historians, students and a variety of other interested people are all part of this discussion, and they bring to the table their unique skills, talents and biases.

In general, few Orthodox actually participate in such discussions. The Orthodox view is truly needed and is considered essential by most scholars involved in the science–religion dialogue; in fact, at some conferences, participants have specifically asked what the Orthodox attitude is on questions of stem cells and cloning. In addition, there are a variety of difficulties in reflecting an Orthodox view, especially because it is not often clear where we Orthodox stand, and different positions can be found within the Orthodox community. The result of this is that Orthodox are not at the table for most of the science–religion interfaith dialogues, and therefore contribute little to the discussion, and consequently do not have the opportunity to participate in decision-making and policy development.

As a whole, the science–religion interfaith dialogue is remarkably beneficial and should be well supported by Orthodox. The science–religion interfaith dialogue needs Orthodox participation, and we Orthodox are neither fulfilling our responsibility to our broad American community nor fulfilling our responsibility to ourselves as Orthodox Christians. We would come away from this dialogue enriched as well, learning more about the questions that are relevant to us, and the result will be a better-informed Orthodox community prepared to address the problems and questions facing our parishes and faithful.

What Should Be Done?

Orthodox dialogue on science–religion can occur at any level—in a parish community, in a Church school class, in an archdiocese. The key is to include professionals from different disciplines who will be true to their beliefs. The Orthodox dialogue, no matter at what level, must be faithful to the “real truth” as the word “Orthodox” implies—reflective of truth and not mired in faint-heartedness or lack of knowledge. Truth is difficult to achieve, but in the strictest academic sense possible, science too strives to present facts that are devoid of personal prejudices. It should be possible for a science–religion dialogue that is Orthodox to free itself from personal agendas, prejudices and other biased notions, and instead devote itself to discerning the truth.

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When I was growing up in Pittsburgh, one of my favorite rainy-day activities was visiting the Hall of Dinosaurs at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. It was always exciting to gaze in wonder at the huge fossil skeletons of these monstrous beasts, and to speculate about what it must have been like when they walked the earth. I was surprised to learn early on that I didn’t have to worry about running into one in the woods because they had gone extinct millions of years ago. The world had changed many times, in fact, and different plant and animals had come and gone, with each new species developing from what came before. That meant that all life on earth is related, through a process that scientists call “evolution.” “How wonderful God is,” I thought, “who created such a world for us to live in!”

During this same period, I was a member of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral, which happens to sit across the street from the very same museum. My Sunday school lessons talked about how God created the heavens and the earth, and made a garden for the first people to live in—until they disobeyed Him and had to leave. That was why people sin and die, and why Jesus had to come to save us.

At no time did I encounter an Orthodox priest or a Church school teacher who argued that the truth of the one story precluded the truth of the other. Science discovers what the stars and the earth and living creatures are made of and how they work, as well as the laws of physics that make all this possible, from the largest (macro) level to the smallest (micro) subatomic level. It finds ways to tell us how old everything is and how everything is connected. For those scientists and philosophers that reject belief in God, this is enough to justify their (often militant) atheism. But for people who view science through the eyes of faith (including many scientists), learning about these things helps us to understand better the One who brought all this into being, established universal and dependable laws of nature, and continues to sustain the universe by His will. It gives us some insight, in other words, into the mind of God.

The Bible, on the other hand, reveals the truth to us about who the Creator is and all that He has done in order to make us His own. It speaks of the beginning and of what is to come at the end. It teaches us...
about morality, distinguishing right from wrong through both story and commandment. It shows us God’s Word, His only Son, in whose image we all are made, and who sacrificed everything in order to save us. It speaks of God’s plan, conceived from the creation of the world for our salvation and redemption. It opens our minds and our hearts to God’s Holy Spirit, who calls us into union with our Father in heaven. It gives our lives meaning and purpose. What it does not do, however, is function as a science textbook.

There are those who do not agree with the last sentence, and who have developed an alternative way of using the Bible to explain the world: “creation science.” This school of thought is the logical end result of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy proclaimed as a part of the fundamentalist movement within Protestantism about a hundred years ago. This movement strove to purge Christianity of all modernist influences—including those from science and especially Darwinism. Biblical inerrancy states that the Holy Scriptures are totally accurate and free from all error in every respect. Therefore, when a scientific finding or theory contradicts something found in the Bible (as it is understood by those who read it in this literalist manner), it must always be the case that the science is wrong.

Creation science (or scientific creationism), then, attempts to come up with an alternative explanation, based on what is written in Genesis and other parts of the Bible. Generally speaking, it posits that the earth and the universe are no more than 6,000 years old, that fossil deposits and geologic strata reflect the results of the cataclysmic flood of Noah, and that there is no genetic relationship between any species and any other (other than that implied by the description of different “kinds” being created on the six days of creation described in Genesis 1).

Creation science has become increasingly popular among clergy and faithful from various Christian communions, including our own. Unfortunately, its assertions defy all logic and fly in the face of everything we have learned about geology, physics, astronomy and chemistry, as well as biology, over recent centuries. Skepticism about such fundamentalist ideas can easily progress to a total rejection of the entirety of Christian teaching, and such skepticism is purported to be a major factor in the current exodus of young people from every sort of organized religion. The Orthodox Church is not immune to this trend. Sometimes, it is just easier to walk away. It is our job as religious educators to prevent this from happening.

What is tragic is that this is not our fight. The argument over biblical inerrancy reflects conflicts in the West between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and among Protestants themselves, that go back for centuries. How can we best understand these issues, as Orthodox Christians? Let us consider:

It is common to hear Protestant preachers refer to the Holy Bible as “God’s Word.” This is not totally inappropriate, because the Bible is indeed the “inspired word of God,” in the sense that God speaks to humankind and reveals Himself to us through its pages. But we must never forget that the Word of God, ultimately, is not a written text, but a person—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (see John 1). In each book of the Bible, God spoke truth to a human heart, and the prophet or scribe faithfully reported it—but always filtered through his or her own imperfect mind, and reflecting his or her own thought-world and limited knowledge. Later generations would sometimes alter or combine texts, resulting in the Bible as we know it today. Ancient biblical commentators, including the Greek fathers, recognized that each text could be understood and interpreted in a variety of ways, and that inconsistencies or contradictions could sometimes be identified. None of this was a problem, however, because they understood that what is most important when we read the Bible is not the literal meaning of every word, but rather the opportunity that it presents us to encounter the living God.

Furthermore, although God speaks through the words of the Bible, He is not circumscribed by it. Remember what the Evangelist John wrote at the end of his Gospel (John 21:25): “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” This claim makes perfect sense, assuming that the Word of God is the One through whom God the Father created the entire universe. Why, then, must we assume that the writings of ancient authors from a prescientific culture describe, with scientific exactitude, all that God did, in order to bring the world into existence? The Bible speaks truth—but does it tell the complete story?

As Peter Bouteneff writes in his excellent study, Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives (page 183):

None of the fathers’ strictly theological or moral conclusions—about creation, or about humanity and its redemption, and the coherence of everything in Christ—has anything to do with the datable chronology of the creation of the universe or with the physical existence of Adam and Eve. They read the creation narratives as Holy Scripture, and therefore as “true.” But they did not see them as lessons in history or science as such, even as they revealed in the overlaps they observed between the scriptural narrative
and the observable world...That being the case, those of us who seek fidelity to the fathers should likewise refrain from overly conflating Scripture with science, in order to bring realistic expectations to each.

In our day, a number of prominent scientists and thinkers have published diatribes attacking all religious faith as a hopeless delusion. These hostile efforts can sometimes have the opposite effect, leading people to reject modern learning rather than religion. But we must recognize that such individuals do not speak for all scientists, nor do their assertions necessarily emerge from the theories or findings of science. Therefore, the fact that they speak out against religion does not delegitimize the entire scientific enterprise.

The truth is that neither the existence of God nor the degree to which He is active in the world can be proven or disproven by science. God is totally other, because He is the Creator, and we are His creatures. There is no instrument that can detect or measure or analyze God’s grace; nor is there any experiment that can compel God to act and thus reveal Himself. It is through the eyes of faith that we come to see God at work in the world and in our lives. This perception is real, but it is not subject to any sort of scientific verification.

The opinion of certain scientists and philosophers notwithstanding, God is also totally free—free to act, or not to act; free to create or destroy; free to stabilize or transform. He is not contained by the laws of nature, although He did create them, and thereby fashioned a universe in which all the conditions were exactly right to bring us humans into existence (the “anthropic principle”). Nor is He contained by the limited worldview of those who seek to confute Scripture with science, to the detriment of both. God, after all, is also Mystery—beyond all human comprehension.

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding,” God said to Job (Job 38:4). Where, indeed? How little we know, how little we can say, about the Infinite. In the end, perhaps, doxology is more appropriate: What wondrous love is this, overflowing with creativity, that has sustained life on this earth, not for a mere 6,000 years, but for billions of years, ever changing, adapting, evolving, until it led to us, made in God’s very image, for whom Christ died, so that we might live with Him forever as His children!

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SCIENCE OF THE TIMES

St. Basil the Great’s Homilies on the Hexaemeron

Around 370 AD, St. Basil the Great delivered a series of nine homilies on the Hexaemeron—Greek for the “six days” of creation. St. Basil was clearly abreast of contemporary scientific ideas. Overall, St. Basil’s Hexaemeron demonstrates that although human beings cannot directly comprehend God, we can see His power through creation.

It is thus that Scripture depicts to us the Supreme Artist, praising each one of His works; soon. When His work is complete, He will accord well-deserved praise to the whole together.

– Homily III on the Hexaemeron

I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator.

– Homily V on the Hexaemeron

“Let the waters,” it is said “bring forth abundantly moving creature that hath life and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. Why do the waters give birth also to birds? Because there is, so to say, a family link between the creatures that fly and those that swim. In the same way that fish cut the waters, using their fins to carry them forward and their tails to direct their movements round and round and straightforward, so we see birds float in the air by the help of their wings. Both endowed with the property of swimming, their common derivation from the waters has made them of one family.

– Homily VIII on the Hexaemeron

See how the discoveries of geometry are mere bywords to the wise bee! The rows of honeycomb are all hexagonal with equal sides. They do not bear on each other in straight lines, lest the supports should press on empty spaces between and give way; but the angles of the lower hexagons serve as foundations and bases to those which rise above, so as to furnish a sure support to the lower mass, and so that each cell may securely keep the liquid honey.

– Homily VIII on the Hexaemeron
TRUTH OR FICTION?

SHANNON SAKELLARIOU

One of the biggest questions people have about Scripture is, “Is it all true?” The ways people answer that question lead to some big debates and disagreements! For instance, look up Deuteronomy 33–34. What do these chapters describe? How could Moses have written the story of his own death? Sadly, some people lose confidence in the truth of the Bible—or even Christianity—when they become convinced of an “error” or “fiction” in the text. This is not a danger, however, if we follow the Orthodox Church’s teachings about Scripture.

Because of passages like Deuteronomy 33–34, scholars study the Bible very carefully. They ask questions about who wrote the text, when it was written, how it describes events or people, and how it compares with other stories from both within and outside the Bible. In this way, they are able to identify reliable information and discern the ways in which the text adds to our understanding of God’s relationship with the world.

We know that many people wrote and edited the texts of the Bible over a long period of time. That means there are human elements in the writing: style, culture and historical perspective. For example, slavery is seen as acceptable in the letters of St. Paul, but today we believe that slavery is an inhuman practice and is not something that God would want. But just as Christ united two natures within Himself—human and divine—we can also look for the divine elements of Scripture alongside the human. We may consider certain historical or cultural details as less important while concentrating on parts and aspects

“The record of revealed truths becomes a living testimony of actual truths today as the Holy Spirit makes them come alive in the heart of the believer who reads the Bible attentively and prayerfully.”

– Rev. Dr. Theodore Stylianopoulos
“Truth or Fiction?” discusses Scripture and how we as Orthodox Christians should interpret and understand Scripture in light of the culture, history and environment in which it was written. This aspect is especially important when we consider the texts in the Old Testament about creation and our modern understanding of evolution. Many people think that an acceptance of evolution cannot be reconciled with Biblical texts. This is a very narrow view of Scripture, and it is not consistent with the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church, which understands the creation stories as theology and not as scientific fact.

First of all, there are multiple creation stories throughout the Old Testament. In Genesis 1 and 2 we have two such stories, but there are others, such as Job 38, Psalm 104, Proverbs 8:22–31, and more. Which of these is the creation story? They are often contradictory, if one examines them as if they were fact. The only way to resolve all of these stories is to conclude that they are not meant as scientific treatises but rather tell us something about the theology of creation: the world was created to be good; humans came and creation became “very good”; humans were intended for communion with God and with each other; God is the Creator; and so much more.

A literal interpretation of the text of the Bible has never really been part of Orthodox thinking. St. Maximos the Confessor (580–662 ad) warned that a literal interpretation of Scripture can be dangerous for the spiritual life: “A person who seeks God with true devotion must not be dominated by the literal text, lest he unwittingly receives things pertaining to God, but not God, that is, lest he feel a dangerous affection for the words of Scripture instead of for the Logos” (Philokalia, vol. 2). Similarly, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov wrote that “to assert that the stories [of Genesis] are ‘history’ in the very same sense as empirical history is to do violence to their direct meaning, to subject them to critical mutilation…” (Bride of the Lamb, Eerdmans, 2002, page 170)

This spiritual danger of missing the point of the Biblical text as explained by the Church Fathers and also some modern scholars is a real concern when examining the Genesis stories. These texts are rich in meaning at the theological level, pointing out that creation is good and describing a proper relationship between God and humans. A literal way to deal with this text is to believe that creation was made in six days; a contemplative way to use this text is to, for example, ponder creation of the good and how this relates to evil in the world, or to consider the difference between good and very good, etc. Ignoring the theological meaning of the text in favor of a literal meaning undermines our spiritual development.

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Imagine a world in which superstitions are powerful forces dominating the thinking of people who see the struggle with demonic forces as commonplace and the hand of God in everyday life determining course of this life and the next. This is the world of late Byzantium, as reflected in writings known as canonical responses, which were the pastoral manuals of that age. One of the most important of these manuals was written by Ioasaph of Ephesos, a relatively little considered but important bishop, who was an expert in the civil and Church law during his time. He died in 1437 and was succeeded in his position by St. Mark Eugenikos, the famous defender of Orthodoxy.

This series of fifty-seven questions and answers was written for the use of clergy to address the common problems of the average diocese and parish. Because Ioasaph was asked to address these concerns, we can assume that these were not unusual questions, but commonplace. In addition to containing instructions on how to celebrate services properly, there are a number of answers concerning demonic activity and superstitions. Examples include amulets, satanic incantations, repeated exorcisms, apparitions, animated corpses (which today we call zombies), and female vampires (evidently male vampires were not a concern). At the same time, a large proportion of the answers (thirteen in number) deal with death and burial. Answers are given on how to conduct funeral rites, where to bury the dead, who is buried, how to pray for the deceased, and who among the dead is commemorated. Questions on handling corpses and resulting contamination involved in celebrating and receiving the Eucharist are treated.

Demonic activity was seen in many behaviors. For example, excessive crying in children was seen as potentially demonic and that the exorcisms of baptism “hadn’t worked” and needed to be repeated.

24. Whether the priest ought to say the exorcisms a second time, whenever he baptized the child?
If he has time, saying these three times is not wrong, except the order permits them to be said once.

If a child cries a lot, one might say that the priest did not perform the exorcisms well, should they or not perhaps be performed again?
The saying of the exorcisms once, twice, even many times, is not forbidden. Saying that the priest performed them badly and because of this is compelled to say them, this is evil, for it seems that he wishes in turn to perform rebaptisms, which is most evil.

Exorcisms normally said once during baptisms were being repeated. The crying of children was viewed as evidence of a need to protect against the devil. The response of the Church was to regulate practice to protect its teachings, in this case, allowing for the repetition of prayers, but defending the doctrine of one baptism for the remission of sins (notice how strongly he condemns rebaptism as “most evil”).

The Byzantines were concerned about the “living dead,” which were what we might call zombies. According to Ioasaph, there was a common superstition that the bodies of certain persons became revivified after death and lived in the grave. Question 42 and its answer read as follows:

If a corpse might be found, which among us is called “grave dweller,” what ought to be done concerning it?

This does not exist. However, the devil who when wishing to deceive men to do something unseemly for the provocation and wrath of God makes such signs and often deludes men during the night. As one whom they knew earlier, he comes and speaks with them. Sometimes he foretells something. Other times, they appear to see him in a street or standing or walking, who has been deceased years ago. He disturbs them and they exhume the grave, that they might see the corpse, and because they do not have firm faith, the devil changes form and enters the dead body, and the long dead for many days or years appears to be fresh, and has flesh, blood, nails and hair. Thereupon, the wretches start a fire and gathering wood burn the corpse, and they obliterate him through the fire, and sink themselves into that eternal fire, that they might burn, as they themselves burned the corpse. The corpse already burned was destroyed during the present, but will arise on the day of the resurrection, and will be judged...
with them, and if they might sincerely repent in so much as they sinned, and weep bitterly, the ones being punished will also not be sent to the eternal fire. For this reason, make haste, with all possible strength, that you might persuade men no longer to consider a thing to exist, for it does not.

One of the main theological points made in this description was that such persons holding these superstitions were demonically possessed themselves. Under this demonic influence, they are described as exhuming corpses that have an appearance of incorruption through satanic deception. They then burn the corpse in order to rid themselves of the "grave dweller." In reality, according to Ioasaph, these persons engage in an act condemned by the canons in desecrating graves and bodies, which results in their condemnation to eternal punishment.

Another common superstition reflected in Ioasaph's pastoral manual concerns gilouδai, female vampires. The term is thought to come from an ancient Babylonian word, gallou, meaning "demon." Many Byzantine writers describe gilouδai including St. John of Damascus (seventh–eighth century). One famous Byzantine writer, Michael Psellus (eleventh century), describes the main elements of this superstition as involving a female demon that preyed on children especially in their first year of life, drinking their blood, causing death or illness, and consuming them entirely, or stealing them. Psellus called such children gillobrota, roughly "food for vampires," and believed the gilouδai to have the appearance of old hags.

Ioasaph's treatment is brief and concentrated in question 53, "If indeed there are women, who are called gilouδai, who suck the blood of infants and kill them?" The answer attributes this belief about such vampires to "a confusion of the devil" and directs the parish priest or diocesan bishop to completely reject it. He continues in question 54 to say:

For just as he [Satan] creates confusion regarding the dead, who they call "grave dwellers," so also here he aroused some women to suspect evil things concerning humanity. For which reason with as much force as possible prohibit the ones saying any such things.

One of the most interesting points made by Ioasaph concerning this superstition centers on the connection between the female vampires and their need for blood. In the late Byzantine mind, blood is often thought to be a woman's chief contribution to human birth. As St. Basil (fourth century) said in a famous writing, "the seed which is sown in the mother, first is changed into blood, then becomes formless flesh, and then is fully shaped and formed into limbs and parts." Consequently, a female vampire that actually consumed rather than produced blood to become a source of death as opposed to life would have an inverse role and existence compared to that of other women.

The taking of blood and cause of death by the vampire is exactly opposed to motherhood and her contribution of blood and life. The fertility of younger women is in direct contrast to these old hags who live on the deaths of infants. The Byzantines also often associated blood when not contributed to birthing as being excreted from a woman to purify herself. In just consuming blood, female vampires were most likely viewed as engaging in completely the opposite of purification and extremely repellent.

Although the use of amulets to ward off vampires is attested in other Byzantine sources, Ioasaph only mentions their use in connection with the healing of wounds and diseases. However, he condemns them in general as an invocation of Satan, "For even if they call upon the names of the saints in the spell...the devil discovered this, little by little carrying off from God those who make use of spells and removing them to himself. At any rate, the laws punish without mercy those who do such things, similarly also those who use amulets..."

In comparing the two superstitions, the common element is demonic influence or "confusion" (in Greek known as plani, πλάνη). Both superstitions are presented as a theological problem involving the demonic possession of the believers in the superstition, rather than the treatment of an animated corpse and a female vampire. Their lack of true belief leads to susceptibility to satanic delusions and results in the desecration of graves and false explanations for the death of children that attribute a dominant power to Satan. Satanic activity is viewed as concentrated in the minds and actions of those less than faithful, rather than in actual apparitions, animated corpses or vampires.

Through Ioasaph's pastoral manual, the Church instructed its clergy to emphasize proper attribution of power to the Divinity rather than to demonic forces. This message remains as fresh today as during Byzantine times, when the Church was faced with a popular culture obviously preoccupied by demonology and necromancy. For today as then, the Church instructs us not to be confused regarding the true nature of the power and authority of Christ our God, who is risen from the dead trampling down death by death and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

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Marianna Diveris

It’s about that time…the time for New Year’s resolutions: new beginnings, new goals and new inspiration. I am not talking about watching the ball drop in Times Square or counting down to midnight with your friends and family. I am talking about the Ecclesiastical New Year we just celebrated on September 1. Even though the official date may have passed, it is never too late to foster the theme of renewal and transformation in our hearts. It is often easier to talk about the things we want to change than it is to act upon them. Luckily, renewal and transformation are organically illustrated for us throughout this beautiful autumn season. There is no better time than now and no better way to try and change our spiritual life than with a friend, a group or a parish community to lean on.

Why does the church celebrate the New Year in September? In Roman times, the calendar year began on September 1, and after the First Ecumenical Council, Christians also began to observe September 1 as New Year’s Day. Throughout history, the completion of each year has taken place with the harvest and the gathering of crops. After a year of preparing the soil, sowing the seeds, and tending the crop with ardent care, the fruit finally ripens. The crops are then harvested to prepare for the long winter ahead, wherein the cycle begins again with the “sowing of seed in the earth for the production of future crops” (reading for September 1 from Holy Transfiguration Monastery).

The Church celebrates this day, asking God for “fair weather, seasonable rains, and an abundance of the fruits of the earth.”

Throughout the centuries, men and women have seen the harvest season as a time of coming together in celebration for the hard work that has finally finished. It was common for great feasts to be held and bonfires lit to celebrate the fact that the community would have enough food to survive another winter together.

In many ways the harvest season can be compared to our spiritual life. Fr. Evan Armatas states:

Over the past year we too have cast our spiritual seeds upon the earth of our souls...as the year comes to a close we may find that our spiritual harvest is either bountiful or
meager. No matter the outcome, the Ecclesiastical New Year provides us with an opportunity to begin again. ("The Ecclesiastical New Year," August 30, 2011, www.stspyridons.org/ecclesiastical-new-year/)

The beauty of a new year is a clean slate and a fresh start. However, finding the inspiration to change is not always easy. As we watch as the leaves turn colors, breathe the crisp, clean air deep into our lungs, and as the earth closes up summer in preparation for winter, feel the change in the air. Look to the natural world as a muse for changing our hearts, and look to the people of the past as an example for how we should cling to our Orthodox Christian community for support in the coming year.

For most of us, January 1 serves as an inspiration to take better care of our bodies in the new year. We are often inspired to set new goals for overall health and fitness. In the same way, September 1 should serve as the inspiration and reminder to take better care of our souls. Now is the time to shake yourself up! Look in the mirror and decide if you are satisfied with the Christian you see looking back. Do you see someone who is actively seeking God in every aspect of life? Or do you see someone who is simply going through the motions? Do you see someone who says morning and evening prayers and reads the Bible? Or do you see someone who is too rushed in the morning and too tired in the evening, while the Bible collects dust on the nightstand? St. John Climacus calls this state of mind “tedium”: “Tedium is a paralysis of the soul, a slackness of the mind, a neglect of religious exercises...It is an approval of worldly things...It is a laziness in the singing of the psalms, a weakness in prayer” (The Ladder of Divine Ascent, “Step 13: Overcoming Despondency,” translated by Norman Russell and Colm Luibheid, Paulist Press, 1982). In other words, it means our spiritual lives are seriously out of shape.

Many of us struggle with living an active spiritual life. It is not uncommon to come home and relax on the couch watching TV instead of reading about the saint of the day. It is easy to spend hours on social media and the Internet but for some reason it is difficult to spend five to ten minutes in prayer twice a day. Fr. Thomas Hopko states in a lecture on Ancient Faith Radio, “The Work of God’s People” (December 9, 2011), that the work of Christians—participating in Liturgy, saying our daily prayers, etc.—is hard work! That statement, though simple, should be encouraging to all Orthodox Christians who find keeping up with their daily spiritual life difficult. The world we live in sets impossible standards of wealth, fame, fortune and glory, and it is easy to get swept up, forgetting what we are really on this earth for. But this fact should not be discouraging. It should be inspiring. What a mission! We are called for a different purpose, to be in the world but not of it.

When we feel as if we are isolated in our struggles, we must remember that most of our fellow Orthodox Christians are experiencing similar trials. We are not alone! We cannot forget to use the greatest tool that God gave us: our Orthodox Christian community.

Fr. Hopko states in a talk he gave at Wheaton College (IL) in 2012: “We are the Body of Christ...and we have to be the living Bread to other people and give our life in the way that Christ did. Otherwise, we participate unto condemnation and judgment.” Mentoring, sponsoring, leaning on each other, or whatever you want to call it...this is not something we should do, it’s something we must do. We are meant to lean on our brothers and sisters on our journey to salvation. As St. Paul tells us in Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Of course we need the guidance of our parish priest, but it is also important to find a peer or peers that can hold us accountable to the goals we set on our journey to sanctification. If you persevere, overcome the tedium, and truly change your habits and routines, you will reap a bountiful spiritual harvest!

Just like anything, your spiritual life will have its ups and downs, and some days you will feel more motivated than others. However, during this harvest season as we reflect on the freshness of the new year and the changing environment, let us use our community to help us channel the change we want to see in our spiritual lives. As stated in Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” Let us strive toward this renewal together, and together we may rejoice in the beautiful harvest.

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Look to the natural world as a muse for changing our hearts...
Spiritual But Not Religious

REV. DR. DANIEL M. ROGICH

THE CONVERSATION

"Hi! Timothy," says Fr. Paul, "I haven’t seen you in church for awhile. What’s up?"

"Really, Father, I work hard all week on my job, and on Saturday I spend time working around the house; on Sunday, you know, your day of rest, I recharge myself spiritually—usually a walk in the woods, or listening to uplifting music on my iPod. But truthfully, Fr. Paul, I believe in 'open-source spirituality.' I don’t think I need to go to a church to find the Spirit in my life. I can do it in my own way. In fact I consider myself an SBNR, ‘Spiritual but not Religious.’ You ought to check out the Web site sometime, Father."

WHAT IS SBNR?

In April 2010, the front page of USA Today reported that 72 percent of millennials (18–29 year-olds) agree with what Timothy said in conversation with Fr. Paul, that they feel "more spiritual than religious." A 2009 study by LifeWay Christian Resources summarized the ethos of the group of people who are unchurched, spiritually eclectic, unaffiliated, spiritual atheists, freethinkers as simply "Spiritual but not Religious." Their Web site, SBNR.org, informs us that over fifty million Americans are SBNR. They do not adhere to any one faith or religious tradition. They simply use ideas and practices that most appeal to them spiritually and personally, but make no commitment to any one denomination or religious tradition.

ROOTS & CAUSES OF THE MOVEMENT

In the 1960s, Michael Murphy and Richard Price, both from Stanford University, traveled to India searching for spiritual truth, as well as to develop spiritual ways to alleviate the suffering of people with mental illness. Subsequently in their writings and among friends and followers they initiated the use of the term "spiritual" to indicate the private realm of thought and experience, the word "religious" came to be connected with public membership in a religious institution with official doctrines. It was a "zero-sum game," meaning one could not be spiritual and belong to a church at the same time. Thus SBNR was born! From that time onward SBNRs began simply to leave churches in droves.

Among the many causes they cite for this exodus are the following most important ones:

- Religions are the number one reason for war.
- Authoritarianism is rampant among organized religion, and it oppresses women.
- Differing doctrines divide people more than they bring them together.
- So-called religious people do not practice real care for the poor.
- Religious leaders are money-hungry and often immoral sexually.
- The hellfire-and-brimstone fundamentalist preachers behave in hate-filled ways.
- Megachurches with millions of dollars invest in property and sound equipment but care only about numbers in the seats; televangelists preach the “gospel of prosperity” and come across as bloated and out of touch with the average person.
- Religions claim an absolute authority on truth, which is an impossibility.
- In many ways science has outstripped religion.
- In our materialist and consumerist society, change and the latest should be valued over the old and outdated.

ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY & RELIGION: CHALLENGES & MISSION

Orthodoxy may indeed deem that the SBNR movement is an attack on and
challenge to “the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth,” as Apostle Paul explains to his disciple Timothy (1 Timothy 3:15). Yet in response to every attack lies a hidden opportunity to address challenges that can even renew the very fabric of the Church—that is, not to change the Church, but to enhance and bring forth all her splendor, so that SBNRs may be invited once again to dialogue with the Church, to review what she offers, a chance for each believer “to be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). Therefore, Orthodox Christians must renew within themselves the truth that the Church is always on a mission: to dialogue with the spiritualities of today, to address these challenges, and, in the end, to once again offer the Church as the sacred place to experience God’s kingdom, for the life and salvation of the world.

How then, should Fr. Paul, in the above conversation, proceed to give a proper Orthodox response to Timothy? He must make it clear, first of all, that in Orthodox experience, spirituality and religion are not diametrically opposed to one another. One can and must be spiritual and religious. This dialogue is an opportunity for Fr. Paul to explain what Orthodoxy really is, to try to address Timothy’s spiritual yearnings.

What then is Orthodox spirituality and religion? To explain this, four innate spiritual desires found in human nature, given by God, must be defined. They are:

1. Worship in Community/Church
   Every person has a desire to worship God and to express and share that need in a religious faith community. For Orthodox this means to be baptized into the Church, to participate in her sacraments and liturgical life, and to be led by the hierarchy, which includes bishops, presbyters and deacons.

2. Doctrine
   Every person has a desire to know the Truth, who is Jesus Christ, and that means to study the teachings of Christ, the Scriptures and the great fathers of the Church—teachings that have passed the test of time and are still relevant for today. This entails learning from current theologians, clergy and religious and spiritual teachers.

3. Personal Prayer
   Every person has a desire to come in spiritual and personal contact with God. Developing personal rules of prayer as well as practicing the Jesus Prayer are two contemplative ways to satisfy this yearning.

4. Service to Others
   Every person has a desire to serve others, in order to alleviate others’ suffering and to fight for causes of peace, justice and truth.

These four dimensions of the religious/spiritual life are not easy to accomplish. Yet that is the mission: to preach and to live out these four aspects of Orthodoxy so as to attract SBNRs who are spiritually thirsty and searching for the truth, to find Jesus Christ in their life, shared in a religious community: the Church.

ORTHODOXY & SBNR: SOLUTIONS

The causes listed above of the SBNR movement must be addressed then in a way that is sensitive to their spiritual thirst as well as to their religious disappointments. Orthodoxy must stand always on the side of peace and insist that the use of religion in any way as a basis for war is unacceptable. Also, there is authority in the Church, but authoritarianism, particularly exhibited by the hierarchy, should be challenged at every turn. Jesus came to serve and not be served. There are times when leaders in the journey of guiding others to salvation fail miserably, make mistakes, or are just plain lazy; yet that does not mean that the entire existence of the Church is at stake or must be eschewed. It is the spiritually mature person who can adhere to the Orthodox faith, even in spite of poor leadership at times.

To the SBNR, the perennial doctrines of the faith must be presented as paths of
spiritual experience, as they were composed, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, for the Church, not as a means to “divide and conquer,” nor to decide who is in or not in the Church, nor who is making it to heaven. Yet never will the Church disavow her teachings, for example, on the Holy Trinity or on the personal identity of Jesus Christ. Doctrines are invitations to fuller experience of the Divine, “tasted” in God’s kingdom, the Church. And this brings up an important point: education. There is a great need today for religious teachers, theologians and clergy to learn not only their faith on a continuing education basis, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to learn the modern spiritualities for the

are not asked and challenged enough to consider that shaping their life to fit the life of the Church may contain some important but hard truths about God and themselves. Self-criticism is almost wholly absent here. And why should one criticize oneself? If everything is relative, then anything that I think is true or good is true or good for me alone. In this sense SBNRs appear to be selfish

But spiritual thirst is good. It can help rekindle the faith of Orthodox Christians and bring about renewal in the Orthodox Church. Here are some suggestions:

• Explore seriously the role of the deaconess (female deacon) in the liturgical life of the local parish.

purposes of dialogue and conversion. We should explore them, think, study and experience, so that paradoxically adherents to the Orthodox Faith can be renewed themselves and in turn become better equipped to converse with SBNRs.

Viewed in this way, SBNR represents a positive response to modern meaninglessness. Yet is there a real commitment here, or a real seriousness to finding ultimate Truth? The Church should know the “spirits of today” so as to challenge them as well. Doctrines deal with Truth, and not some type of “good fi “ for one’s personal spiritual goals or needs; doctrines cannot be accepted whether they make one feel good about oneself; or whether they are personally “empowering.” It is not wrong to suggest to SBNRs that their values might be radically wrong. They

• Get involved politically, when it is necessary, particularly with issues of justice and peace for humankind.

• Make mandatory continuing education for clergy as well as updated performance evaluations relative to the needs of their communities.

• Offer adult personal prayer services, e.g., the Jesus Prayer Service, written by Fr. Silouan of Essex, England.

• Create ongoing community service projects as a permanent feature of the local parish, particularly for the youth, as a form of diakonia, representative of Orthodox Christian values—especially on ecological and environmental issues.

In conclusion, although the SBNR movement is a phenomenon that reflects the fragmentation of modern society, despite its many flaws, I believe it points to a deeper yearning on the part of the youth of today who are responding to so much negativity in the world. Perhaps we are in a time of global transition. Spiritual life in the Orthodox Church can be a potential alternative to help many (lost) souls find meaning in life with others like themselves in communities bound together by shared history, worship, values and, most importantly, ultimate Truth, who is Jesus Christ, to Him be glory forever. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Daniel Rogich is the parish priest of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Canton, OH. A graduate of St. Vladimir’s Seminary, he obtained his D.Th. from Duquesne University. Fr. Daniel has authored five books and numerous articles, and he is a translator of Greek texts. He has taught courses at St. Vladimir’s and St. Sava Serbian Seminary, and he is currently teaching at Walsh University. Fr. Daniel and his wife, Dr. Maria Pappas-Rogich, are the parents of two adult children.
For hundreds of years, Orthodox Christians have experienced a liturgical year of feasts and fasts celebrating events in the life of Christ, the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, as well as very popular saints, such as St. Nicholas of Myra. These holidays and cycles have become the rhythm of ecclesiastical life. We participate in them largely by attending the divine services, mainly the Divine Liturgy—the Eucharist—and partaking of Holy Communion.

According to author and Temple University scholar Vasiliki Limberis, in the fourth century, the basic celebrations were the Sunday Eucharist, the Resurrection of Christ and Great Lent. All of these feasts were likely far simpler and shorter than we are accustomed to. The rest of the liturgical year (to use our term) didn’t come about for many years to come. For example, Limberis reminds us that Christmas didn’t become widely celebrated until the 390s.

So what did Christians do in the very early centuries of Christianity, before the cycles and feasts were established? This is the question that Limberis answers in Architects of Piety. According to the author, the pious life of believers, especially in Cappadocia (in the eastern center of Asia Minor), were centered on the festivals of the martyrs. She explores how the Cappadocian Fathers—Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and Gregory of Nyssa—and their families encouraged the Christians of Cappadocia to honor the martyrs of the Church, to venerate their relics (often after the Cappadocians had procured them from other parts of the Church), to visit their shrines (which the Cappadocians and their families eagerly built), to travel on pilgrimages from town to town and to hear the stories of the martyrs’ lives, which they related in their sermons—all for the purpose of learning to imitate the martyrs’ devotion to Christ in one’s own life.

As Limberis explains, the Cappadocians expanded the concept of martyrdom. Because the threat of persecution had left the Church by this time, the Cappadocians began to include the ascetics and those who had not followed the usual path of adults to married life and family. These men and women—including their own family members—had created a new kind of martyr, someone witnessing to the power of the Gospel over one’s life, without having to sacrifice one’s life in a martyr’s death. The goal of these martyrs—transformation and transcendence—is achieved through ascetic life. As a result, all Christians can strive to imitate their examples.

Limberis’s book is very well researched and goes into this world in great depth. We see drawings and photos of the shrines to the martyrs, often built by the Church under the leadership of these Fathers and their family members (recall that these were wealthy and large families). We can imagine that these shrines were filled with visitors, spending a few days there, partaking of the “marketplace” around them for meals, sheltering in the shrine or nearby, and attending to the prayers, listening to the sermons and venerating the relics of the martyrs. There are detailed examples from the homilies that were delivered, although I would have liked more of that (one more reason to seek out the original homilies). While some readers will find themselves in the “deep end” of patristic study, many readers will gain a great deal of information about these true giants of Christian Faith and their influence over the Church.

Anton C. Vrame, PhD, is Director of the Department of Religious Education.

BOOK REVIEWS
REVIEWER: ANESTIS JORDANOGLOU

Speaking to God
Archbishop Demetrios of America

His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios (Trakatellis), in his book Speaking to God, makes a unique and elegant contribution to the distinctive corpus that defines our Orthodox Faith: its life of prayer. Writing any book of or about prayer is daunting because it will inevitably be compared to the classics of our Tradition. Speaking to God is certainly a worthy addition. It has the same insight into the human heart as you find in the psalms; the same sincerity, clarity and devotion found in works of Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton; and a sense of movement, an earnest searching, a feeling of being on a journey. This movement is internal, the conversation of the heart as it wrestles with and rests upon God Himself.

The book is divided into five cycles. Each is a series of what His Eminence states are “not exactly prayers” but rather “attempts at prayer, topics of prayer and thoughts in prayer.” Nevertheless, they function beautifully as prayers. All one needs to do is to pray them to see.

Archbishop Demetrios writes with a unique voice. It is contemporary and self-reflective, capturing the full spectrum of modern life with all of its challenges and advantages. This is all the more remarkable when one considers that the book was written in 1960 and has only recently been translated into English.

We hear this voice immediately in the first, introductory prayer cycle. This cycle focuses on an inability to pray, beseeching God to help in the context of an honest, self-indicting self-assessment. The prayers themselves are a whirlwind progression upward and inward. They begin with the author’s realization of aloneness and the thirst for God that this engenders. The prayers progress into hope, into recognition of the possibility of experiencing the presence of God, instead of disappointment that so many years have been allowed to pass without that experience. This fascinating group of prayers teaches one how to pray, and it has a sense of urgency meant to shake one out of spiritual stupor and paralysis.

The second cycle builds on the first. Our problems, both personal and societal, are placed into sharper relief. The alternating patterns of despair and hope; desire for and trust in God in the face of doubt; and the desire for redemption and forgiveness are all there—again, reminiscent of the psalms. There are beautiful reflections here, requesting self-knowledge, the ability to forgive, a more righteous society and the ability to handle the challenges of the everyday. These prayers are best kept nearby, as they are prayers of occasion.

The third cycle is resplendent in thanksgiving and sincere appreciation for some things often taken for granted, such as silence, freedom, light and the beginning of a new day.

The fourth cycle consists of prayers for others. These prayers are the most contextual. They place us among our family, our friends, our neighborhoods and our workplaces, presenting us with their problems and with our own. Through the author’s assuredness of God’s benevolent response to these prayers, we ourselves are reassured.

The final cycle of prayers is a bridge that moves us from prayer to the application of the fundamental tenets of the Gospel. It is a call to repent and truly believe in the Good News, to be as children in a world where childhood is sacrificed at the altar of experience, and to love our enemies. It ends with the prayer “Seek first the Kingdom of God,” a fitting conclusion to this elegant book, and a fitting invocation for a deeper life in Christ.

Speaking to God does exactly that, with an insightful, rich and urgent faith that carries its readers into a conversation with God.

Anestis Jordanoglou is Managing Editor of PRAXIS. He holds an MDiv from Holy Cross, and he teaches the teen Sunday school class at Sts. Constantine and Helen Church in Webster, MA. Anestis and his wife, Evis, have two young children: Harrison, 6, and Maria, 4.

Archbishop Demetrios of America, Speaking to God (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2013), 164 pages.
Navigating the New School Year

JEANETTE AYDLETTE

There are several areas of concern for the returning student at any age. First and foremost is the fear of not having any friends or not fitting in. Secondly, being teased or bullied is a common concern. Third, students worry about what their teacher(s) will be like. Lastly, students worry about the amount of work that will come with a new grade and especially if they will be able to keep up with the new level.

There are many strategies recommended in various parenting books. But as Orthodox Christian parents we have a wonderful opportunity to share with our children the richness of our Faith. In times of change, when our children may experience significant worries or fears, we can teach our children about prayer and stillness. Children need to learn that they can rely on God and their own inner strength to meet the challenges that life presents. We can use Bible stories as examples and model for our children how we look for the positive in our daily struggles.

Discussing the passage in Psalm 118:24—“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”—is a wonderful way to set the tone as you wake up your child on the first day of his or her new school year.

Jeanette Aydlette has been an elementary school teacher and counselor since 1977. She has also taught undergraduate and graduate courses on child development and group counseling. She attends St. Katherine Greek Orthodox Church in Falls Church, VA. Jeanette and her husband, Mitch, are the parents of two young men. She is the cowriter of “The Silent Way” series, which includes Peter Clashes with Anger and Eleni’s Look at Jealousy. For more information about the series, visit www.sites.google.com/site/silentwayseries

Parent TO Parent

1. About two weeks before school begins, initiate a more structured schedule for bedtimes, meals and even wake-up times. It is also appropriate to set aside some time to read the Bible together.

2. Talk about the highlights of summer and even generate some ideas about what next summer might bring.

3. Talk about some of the changes that will come as school begins. It is also a good time for a family meeting to discuss rules about screen time, homework hours, hanging out with friends or sleepovers, after-school activities, and so on. (Be careful not to over-schedule.)

4. About one week before school starts, visit the school’s playground if possible. Set up a few play-dates with classmates.

5. Spend some time talking with your children about what they are looking forward to with school starting again and what concerns they might have. It is important to give them time to vent and for us as parents to validate their feelings and worries.
On the evening of Friday, June 7, a group of teens, ranging from seventh to twelfth grade, and their families from all over the country gathered for fried catfish, sweet tea and live soul music in a church hall in Memphis, TN. What had brought them together other than the traditional food and music of the South? The thirtieth annual Archdiocese St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival! With the Metropolis of Detroit and the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church as their hosts, nine junior division and nine senior division participants, representing each metropolis, came prepared to step up to the podium and proclaim the Orthodox Christian Faith. After an evening of icebreakers, fellowship and some good ol’ Southern hospitality, everyone headed back to the hotel to get ready for the next day.

Saturday morning, the participants gathered in the sanctuary and got ready to speak. Nervous excitement filled the air as the participants tested the microphone and drew their numbers for the speaking order. As they waited for the festival to
begin, they chatted with one another, sometimes fidgeting with their printed speeches on their laps. Then it was time. After months of writing, practice, festivals, and more practice, the final level of the Oratorical Festival began.

Nine incredible junior division and nine incredible senior division speeches were given, each of them capturing the beauty of the theology and tradition of the Orthodox Faith in today’s world. Following Christ’s example of being a servant-leader. The struggle of waking up for Church on the Sunday morning after prom night. Martyrydom and religious freedom. The Light of the World and the Dark Side in Star Wars.

The judges weighed the speeches’ merits, and top speakers were announced. And then there were the prizes...

The rest of the weekend was a whirlwind of fellowship, laughter, barbecued ribs, more sweet tea, a beautiful river boat ride on the Mississippi, all culminating on Sunday, as we worshipped as one Orthodox Christian family in the Divine Liturgy.

In addition to the participants and their families, sharing in the incredible weekend were His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas, Fr. John and Presvytera Margaret Orfanakos, Fr. James Berends, Fr. Nicholas Vieron, Dr. Anton Vrame, Angeliki Constantine, Eva Kokinos, the Memphis host committee and the entire parish of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church.

At the farewell luncheon, the teenagers said goodbye to their friends as they left with their families. This was not a weekend about who had delivered the best speech—this was a weekend about sharing the Orthodox Christian Faith, learning from one another, and connecting with new friends.

– Angeliki Constantine, Project Coordinator

What is the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival?
The first St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival took place in 1983, and it has been held every year since. Each year, the Department of Religious Education provides the youth of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese with several topics to choose from, giving them an opportunity to research, write and speak about an aspect of their faith. The program begins at the parish festival, with top speakers moving on to district and/or metropolis festivals, and finally to the Archdiocese festival. Each year, a different metropolis hosts the Archdiocese Festival.

SJCOF by Numbers
- In 30 years more than 500 speakers have participated at the Archdiocese level.
- In the past 15 years we have awarded more than $100,000 in college scholarships.
- In 2013, more than 200 parishes held festivals.
- In an average year, 50 donors give an average of $100 each.

Why Do the Festival?
- Throughout the different levels, the finalists have the opportunity to learn from one another about their faith.
- Participants get to visit new parishes and meet other Orthodox teens.

“The parish is where the Oratorical Festival thought process begins and the ideas are developed into a speech, which is delivered before the congregation who is inspired by what they hear.”
– Presvytera Margaret Orfanakos

- On a parish level, participants get explore their faith in a different way, from Sunday Church school, GOYA, basketball, etc.
- Participants get to take the Orthodox Faith on a personal level and make it theirs.
- The participants not only learn to speak about their Faith to their peers and other Orthodox Christians, but they also find the courage to speak about their Faith to everyone.

What’s New?
Exciting changes are in the works for this year’s St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival! The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese’s Department of Religious Education is adding new categories in addition to the speech category. To learn more and keep up-to-date on the Oratorical Festival, go to our Web page, www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/religioused/sjcof, and “like” our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/SJCOF
It’s Sunday morning and the alarm clock goes off. I ignore it for a while, and then get up even though I don’t feel like it. (Nikolai Khamari. Tongue cut out and murdered.) I get ready, head out the door, and put on some quiet music in the car, not really focused on anything specific. (Irene. Burnt alive in a clay cask.) I get to church, walk inside, light my candle, and make my way over to the choir. (Justin. Exiled in Serbia.) I’ll sing, and maybe make a few side comments about my week with a friend or two. (Vladimir. Tortured and shot.) I go up for communion, and when I am reminded of others throughout the world who do not have the luxury to worship freely, and still fight to their death for what they believe, my practice is insubstantial. Our Orthodox faith teaches us that we live in this world, but we are not part of this world.

In 1999, the first mass school shooting was reported in Littleton, CO, where two students entered Columbine High School and murdered many innocent people, one of them being Cassie Bernall. A gun was placed at her forehead, and then she was asked if she believed in Christ. She said yes, and at that moment her life ended. The killing of innocent children and teachers in the thirty-one mass school shootings that have followed Columbine is directly correlated with the lack of love that continues to seep into our world. Perhaps we are partially responsible for these actions because our society is becoming more and more Godless. We live in a society where God loves us so much we can choose not to believe in Him. We can choose to sleep in on Sunday mornings, like I have allowed myself to do many times this past year; we can choose to be apathetic. My point is not that we don’t need freedom of religion. It’s that we need to take advantage of it as the Orthodox Christians we are all called to be. Perhaps my martyrdom will never be standing up for Christ while a gun is pointed at my head, but rather it may be living with so many luxuries around me and the freedom to have faith, or to discard it. These very well may be the demonic forces, the executioners, at work in our part of the world. People like Cassie Bernall give me strength and courage to love God, to love my faith, and to try to be more actively involved in the life of the Church.

St. Nilus the Myrrh-streamer had a prophecy, circa 1550 AD, predicting what our lives would be like over half a millennium in the future. His accuracy is almost frightening:

After the year 1900, toward the middle of the twentieth century, the people of the time will become unrecognizable. People’s minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will become unrecognizable. These people will be cruel and will be like wild animals because of the temptations of the Antichrist. There will be no respect for parents and elders, [and] love will disappear.

We need to be the love in the world that Christ has shown us so that his light will shine even in the darkness that is this world today.

St. Paul is convinced that "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is Christ Jesus our Lord." As I conclude with these words, bear in mind it has been five minutes, and another Christian has just been martyred.
Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. God saw the light; it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:3–4). At the very beginning of the Bible we see that God pays particular attention to light, and finds it “good.” But what does “light” mean? Light could be the element that makes things visible, the natural agent that stimulates. Light has found its way into literature as a common symbol of all that is good; in *Star Wars*, the Light Side is good and the Dark Side is evil. So maybe that is what light means. Well, light does not just equal good in the Orthodox Christian Faith. It is that, but it is also much, much more. It is something that resides in all of us, something that we should strive to share with others. Jesus tells us that “[He] is the light of the world” (John 8:12) and “He who follows [Jesus] shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life” (John 8:12). During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs us to “Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). But how can we actually let our light shine?

During the Resurrection service on Pascha, the priest proclaims, “Come, receive the light” while holding the only light in the church. The priest lights the candles held by the front row, and they share the light to all around, spreading it to every corner of the church. This is the light, the joy, the pure good of Jesus’s resurrection. It has been given to us by God, just as the priest lights our candles, and we are meant to share it with all to bring them and ourselves closer to God.

Again I ask, how can we let our light shine? The answer is simple but layered: devotion to God, devotion to others, and finally finding our path in accordance with Scripture. The only way to let our light shine through devotion to God is to practice His ways, living the Scripture every hour of every day. We can’t pick and choose. “I don’t feel like being devoted today. I’m not going to pray before lunch, and I guess I’ll cheat on my math test.” No. Our devotion to God is lived out each and every day.

The best image of devotion to others letting someone’s light shine in literature is, in my opinion, from *The Lord of the Rings*. Samwise Gamgee has stuck with Frodo through thick and thin. Now Sam thinks Frodo has abandoned him, but Sam does not give up. He confronts Shelob, a massive spider-like monster, using only a knife and a vial of pure light to save his friend, literally letting a light shine in the process. The light Sam was carrying with him, the Light of Earendil, was to be “their light when all other lights go out.” Just as Sam does not give up and holds onto this undying light to confront the darkness, we also should devote ourselves and persist when it seems everything is at its lowest point, carrying our undying light, which is Jesus, the Light of the World.

There are always fictional characters to look at for examples just like Sam, but the best examples are in the real world. One such person is Fr. Jacob Meyers from the St. John the Wonderworker Orthodox Church in Atlanta, who recently fell asleep in the Lord. One of the things he did was feed the homeless in the area. Not once a week. Every day. Not once a day. Twice a day. The light of God poured out of him, illuminating those around him because of his quiet work ethic as he helped those who could not help themselves. He did just as Jesus instructed: he let his light shine, but not only that, he let it shine where others could see.

So, how can you let your light shine to help others see God? Devote yourself to His ways through service and heeding the Scripture. Remember the Resurrection service, and how even as Jesus shared His light with us, we must share our given light to the world. Light is a crucial part of the Orthodox Faith, full of symbolism, but at its heart it is a gift. A gift we should all strive to learn of and share. A gift of life, learning, but most of all, a gift of love.
Your Works Are Marvelous, O Lord, Including Science

Dear Readers,

The list of the impact of science on our lives can go many pages, from DNA to nuclear energy, from space exploration to medical diagnosis and treatment. Science not only fills headlines of our daily real life, but it also fills our entertainment life. Crime dramas love showing investigators using super-sophisticated techniques to find the suspect. Documentaries use the latest advances to prove that an ancient pharaoh was related to someone’s third cousin.

We are in awe of science and what it can tell us about our world and lives, both in the past and in the present. The “mysteries” of our world seem to be fewer and fewer with each year. Questions thought to be unsolvable are answered when a new discovery opens up a door that no one knew existed just a short while ago. Questions that previously would have been answered in religious terms are now answered in scientific terms. Because of the impact and the sheer amazement that scientific discovery elicits, we can just as easily make an idol out of science (scientism) as we can of wealth, glamor, or power. Perhaps this is the origin of the “science versus religion” question that many have made into an either/or issue. Perhaps we have made them mutually exclusive: one is true, so the other must be false.

As Orthodox Christians, our approach is seldom either/or. It is usually both/and. Jesus is both divine and human, not either. Reading the contributors in this issue of PRAXIS should help us realize that the “science—religion debate” is one of those both/and discussions. Science and religion are ways of looking at the same event and understanding them through different prisms, with different intents and outcomes. In this issue of PRAXIS, we hope we have added to your knowledge and thinking about these questions and how one can be both a person of deep religious faith and be a person of science.

This both/and approach can be hard to wrestle with in a discussion, especially with young people. Living with the tensions is not easy. We want resolution to the questions in our lives, just as we want to know who committed the crime on a television show or film. Would you watch the show if the crime was never solved?

We have two tasks. First, keep asking the questions, keeping the dialogue going and encouraging the critical thinking that goes with hard topics. The questions “Why do you think that? What evidence do you have (a scientific question if there ever was one)? What experience convinces you of your idea?” can push a learner to consider a statement more deeply, look at sources more carefully, and study them. For example, when someone says, “The Bible says…,” the response should probably be, “Where in the Bible is that? Let’s find it and look at it together.” Second, present Orthodox teachings accurately. “You can’t teach what you don’t know” is still wise advice. This means being a student ourselves, deepening our knowledge of Orthodox Christianity to the fullest extent possible and continually. Don’t put words in the mouth of the Church if you’re not sure that the Church didn’t say it.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur argued that each of us must experience a second naïveté. I’ve taken that to mean that at some point in our development, we can take apart an experience and explain it down to its basic parts, and when we are finished we can say, “Wow. Isn’t that amazing?” and not see any contradiction in our amazement before and after we took it apart. Science may be one of those areas, where after we come to see the subatomic particles or the genetic structure, we can still say, “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psalm 118/119:23), and not see any contradiction.

Anton C. Vrame, PhD
Director
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Got a question about the Orthodox Faith or the Church? Ask PRAXIS!

This year, PRAXIS magazine is starting a new column, “Ask PRAXIS.” Send us your questions about the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Faith. We’ll submit them to our panel of scholars, and print your questions and their answers in the magazine.

Send your questions to:
askpraxis@goarch.org

Our Panel of Scholars

Rev. Dr. Stanley S. Harakas
Honorary Chair and creator of “Religious Question Box”

Peter Bouteneff
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