St. Iakovos, the Brother of Our Lord (died 62 AD), was the first bishop or patriarch of Jerusalem. According to the *Protevangelion of James*, Iakovos was the son of Joseph—along with the other “brethren of the Lord,” including Judas, Simon and Joseph, mentioned in Scripture (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3 and Galatians 1:19)—from a marriage prior to his betrothal to Mary. St. Iakovos wrote an epistle, which is part of the New Testament. He is commemorated on October 23.

This exquisite icon of St. Iakovos pictures him on a patriarchal throne holding his epistle open in his left hand. His right hand begins to give a blessing, but in doing so points toward the upper left side of the icon. There, we see Christ in His mother’s arms, holding out a scroll and reaching to bless the saint. On the upper right side, we see St. Iakovos’s father, St. Joseph the Betrothed, looking from the heavens.
The Lord is on my side;  
I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?  

– Psalm 118:6

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

– Romans 5:3–5

Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

– James 1:12

We, in the Americas, strengthened by the martyrdom and martyrria of the Great Church of Constantinople and the ancient churches of the East, as well, will continue to grow in the truth and beauty of the Christian spirit, as truly ecumenically minded, being concerned and committed to peace with all religions and to the eradication of bigotry, discrimination, injustice, violence and racial hatred.

The march in Selma, Alabama, will continue to pave the way from which we shall never deviate along with the frontiers of unity and social justice. Ours is a commitment to true Christianity, to true justice, to the liberation of people still oppressed, and to true peace, the one founded upon respect of life and of each other, as we declare in our Pledge of Allegiance.

– Archbishop Iakovos, farewell remarks upon his retirement

Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies” sermon, 1957

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality...I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.

– Martin Luther King, Jr., Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, 1964
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This issue of PRAXIS is dedicated to the memory and blessed work of His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos, who led the Greek Orthodox Church in America from 1959 to 1996. It is difficult in one page to offer a fitting tribute to his lifetime of service to Christ and the Church. However, this issue provides a glimpse of his ministry and the impact of his leadership and vision on many communities, programs and institutions of our Holy Archdiocese. In relation to the focus of this publication and the ministry of religious education, His Eminence was a teacher who guided the faithful in many ways.

As a pastor and a shepherd of the Church in America, Archbishop Iakovos led the Church and the Greek American community in offering the beauty and strength of our faith and heritage. He emphasized worship and education as the primary mission of every community. He affirmed the importance of the celebrations and commemorations that connect our beliefs, culture and traditions with the events and challenges of our contemporary world. He recognized the need for a strong and vibrant witness of the Gospel so that all may encounter Christ and His love.

Archbishop Iakovos was also a leader and a teacher through his love and support of our Ecumenical Patriarchate. For His Eminence, the history of the Orthodox Church and the future of the Church in America and our Orthodox witness around the world were connected to the ministries and leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. His tireless work to support the work of the sacred see of Constantinople provided the foundation we continue to build upon today.

By means of this support, Archbishop Iakovos taught by example, as he did in so many other ways. His compassion for children and youth and their spiritual well-being is remembered by many. He was a constant advocate for the oppressed and those in need, especially during crises in Greece, Cyprus and Turkey. He was also a champion of civil rights in this country during a very tumultuous period. March 15 of this year was the fiftieth anniversary of the march in Selma, AL, when Archbishop Iakovos marched with Martin Luther King. Following the violence of March 7 known as “Bloody Sunday” and the death of Rev. James Reeb from Boston, His Eminence was among the national religious leaders and people from across the nation who went to Selma to show their support for the families who lost loved ones, for African Americans and for civil rights activists.

In his statement following the trip to Selma, Archbishop Iakovos said, “I came to this memorial service because I believe this is an appropriate occasion not only to dedicate myself as well as our Greek Orthodox Communicants to the noble cause for which our friend, the Reverend James Reeb gave his life; but also in order to show our willingness to continue this fight against prejudice, bias and persecution. In this God-given cause, I feel sure that I have the full and understanding support of our Greek Orthodox faithful of America. For our Greek Orthodox Church and our people fully understand from our heritage and our tradition such sacrificial involvements. Our Church has never hesitated to fight, when it felt it must, for the rights of mankind; and many of our Churchmen have been in the forefront of these battles time and time again.”

These words offered by His Eminence and the actions that preceded them are one of many examples from the life of Archbishop Iakovos that inspire us as educators to live our faith, share the Gospel and our cherished heritage, and teach through both word and praxis. As you read this issue, I hope you are inspired by the witness and legacy of our beloved Archbishop Iakovos of blessed memory. Your commitment to Christ and your calling as religious educators is strengthened by the example of this great leader of our Church. St. Paul, the great Apostle of Christ, speaks about people in the Church endowed with various charismata. He mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). Archbishop Iakovos simply was all of the above.

With paternal love in Christ,

† DEMETRIOS
Archbishop of America
Beloved in the Lord,

I was eleven years old when I first saw the black and white glossy photo of that man: black hat and long flowing black robes. And yes, in his hand was a black wooden stick with a metal top. His eyes were clear and intense—and his focus could see through to your core. He was a man of purpose.

Fifty years have passed since my first glimpse of that man, the beloved Archbishop Iakovos. And to this day I continue to be challenged by him and his unique contribution to this American world.

The images of my youth come to my mind as the ebb and flow of the ocean: I can see my grandparents in the Sugar Bowl, their candy and ice cream store in Glens Falls, NY. They came as immigrants to this land of opportunity believing that hard work and the honor of their Greek identity, coupled with their good name, would be enough to make a difference in their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren.

But in Glens Falls, we were still “Greeks.” We somehow were unique—and our parents and grandparents always emphasized the importance of the Greek world that we were part of, its history, philosophy, art, architecture and above all its Church. We were always reminded that we were not an accidental culture; and so, even in our little city, we were still a little different.

That is why I remember so vividly Archbishop Iakovos. He was the person who propelled our immigrant Church into the spotlight of equality. While Archbishop Iakovos may have marched specifically for black civil rights in this land, he also marched for our civil rights. We were no longer those people who spoke a different language at home. No. We were now part of the national conscience with a historic and universal witness of freedom and justice for all. The man in the black hat and the flowing robes dared his own people to join him on the March to Selma. He reminded us that the philosophy and wisdom of our ancient Greek forbears was wisdom for the world. And he forced us out of our protective cultural enclaves.

And so the great cultural bastions of philosophy, history and thought that we carried as our ancestral heritage were now being shared with the American reality. This Archbishop—this Iakovos—is the unique individual who dared to march for freedom and justice in the very land that welcomed him and us as strangers and immigrants and now as its own citizens.

Of course Archbishop Iakovos spoke Greek, but he also spoke English. And he spoke with a particular accent and emphasis in his voice. Whatever he said sounded as if it came from Mount Sinai by way of Mount Olympus. He spoke with a sense of ultimate truth and wisdom that one would never dare to disagree with.

Archbishop Iakovos was a man who fulfilled the need of the times for us as Greek Orthodox Christians and Greek Americans. And even more so, he became the standard against which we would even measure our own actions. He began a foundational change for our Greek Orthodox Church as well as Greek Americans. He emphasized our need to be part of the American dream; we were no longer to sit on the sidelines and watch the world go by. Archbishop Iakovos marched in Selma—and we marched with him.

Fifty years ago America learned to ask, “What would Archbishop Iakovos think about this?” And today, because of Selma, we know what he would think: stand up, be counted, do your best, do what is right, and trust in God.

In the Service of Our Lord,

† Nicholas
Metropolitan of Detroit
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.

Material previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere will not be considered without prior consent of the editor. We reserve the right to edit for usage and style; all accepted manuscripts are subject to editorial modification. Articles sent by mail should be accompanied by an electronic version on CD-ROM in Microsoft Word for Windows or for Macintosh. Articles in Microsoft Word may also be e-mailed as an attachment to tvrame@goarch.org.

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Selma, 1965: When Racism Gazed Upon the Face of Orthodoxy

REV. FR. MICHAEL VARLAMOS

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Archbishop Iakovos’s civil rights march with Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama. Many of us may have seen the famous photo of Archbishop Iakovos with Dr. King that graced the cover of the March 26, 1965, issue of LIFE magazine. I remember the first time I saw that photo and feeling rather surprised that our Archbishop marched arm-in-arm and stood with a man who literally sacrificed his life for a noble cause that was not very popular with many Americans at the time. But what impressed me most was the fearlessness in Archbishop Iakovos’s eyes and the sheer determination on his face that made him stand out more than his black robes and insignia of his high ecclesiastical office. That photo and the look on the Archbishop’s face prompted a host of questions and the curiosity to learn more about the event surrounding it.
So why did Archbishop Iakovos march with Martin Luther King, Jr., on March 15, 1965? Why interrupt a very busy schedule to fly from New York City to a remote southern city where he had no parishes? Why would the leader of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Americas attend a memorial service for a minister who was neither Orthodox nor Greek? After all, Selma would be the last place one would expect to find the national leader of the Greek Orthodox Church. And for what, to attend a memorial service for a young minister, who was murdered while in Selma protesting the injustices inflicted upon African Americans?

Moreover, in 1965, many areas of the South were hostile to civil rights activists, black and white. African Americans and white sympathizers (like Rev. James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo, murdered within days of the Archbishop's march) lived in an environment of threats, intimidation, lynchings, bombings, beatings and murder by virulent racists. Why would the Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Western Hemisphere and the Ethnarch of the Greek American community in the United States leave the comfort and security of his ecclesiastical and ethnic enclave to travel to what was at that moment one of the most volatile and hostile towns in the world? Why did he not send a bishop or priest to represent him, as did other denominations? Why did he ignore the pleas of his advisors and staff at the Archdiocese not to put his life in serious danger for a cause that did not appear to affect the Greek Orthodox community? Simply put, why did Archbishop Iakovos risk life and limb to march with Dr. King?

Historians would respond that he came to attend the memorial service for the Rev. James Reeb—a white Unitarian minister, murdered by suspected members of the KKK. Social and religious activists would answer that he was always committed to human and civil rights. Those who knew the Archbishop would say that he was courageous, a man of principle and a leader who sacrificially gave of himself to help those in need. Those who knew about Archbishop Iakovos knew that he himself experienced the threats and intimidation of discrimination growing up as a Greek Christian in Islamic Turkey, and that he could relate to the plight of African Americans in the United States. Undoubtedly, these are all true, but we must not overlook the role his Orthodox Christian faith played in influencing him to join Dr. King in Selma.

In agreement with the Bible, the Church Fathers and the Sacred Tradition of the Orthodox Church, Archbishop Iakovos believed that God created all human beings in His “image and likeness.” Despite our many individual and collective differences, we all share a common humanity. The Archbishop’s decision to march with Martin Luther King was not just a political statement for the civil rights of African Americans. Southern African Americans mobilized, boycotted, marched and protested to end racism, which manifested itself as discrimination at the workplace and as segregation in neighborhoods, schools and public areas. Racism prevented them from voting, giving them no political voice or power. They were American citizens, but it was a citizenship on paper only. In essence, this was the fundamental meaning of the civil rights movement: the recognition, protection and exercise of African Americans’ rights and privileges of American citizenship guaranteed to them by the U.S. Constitution.

Archbishop Iakovos understood this, but the reasons for his participation in the civil rights movement ran much deeper. He believed that before we could discuss civil rights, we must first accept the principles of human rights. Civil rights have to do with the rights of the citizens of a nation with their government. Civil rights presuppose human rights, as these recognize the natural and legal rights we enjoy as human beings, God’s children made “in His image and likeness.” Archbishop Iakovos believed that we must recognize our common humanity with African Americans and all peoples before we can recognize the civil rights we enjoy as citizens. Moreover, once we recognize the common humanity we share with all “races” of people, only then can we begin to erase the evils of racism, bigotry and the injustices of discrimination and segregation.

Thus Archbishop Iakovos went to Selma not only to support African Americans’ assertion of civil rights, but also to confirm their human rights: that they too are children of God made “in His image and likeness” and therefore deserve the respect and dignity as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. In
this belief, Archbishop Iakovos stood firmly with the great witnesses of Orthodox Christianity, such as St. Paul, who wrote, “And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26), or St. Gregory the Theologian, who wrote, “For us humanity is one, namely the entire human race” (Oration 31.15).

In the same vein, the pan-Orthodox Synod of Constantinople of 1872 proclaimed, “In the Christian Church, which is a spiritual communion, predestined by its Leader and Founder to contain all nations in one brotherhood in Christ, racism is alien and quite unthinkable.” In 1986, the pan-Orthodox Conference that took place in Chambésy, Switzerland, stated that, “Orthodoxy condemns in an irrevocable manner the inhuman system of racial discrimination... Orthodoxy confesses that each human being—indeed, independently of color, religion, race, nationality or language—is a bearer of the image of God, is our brother or sister, an equal member of the human family.” And more recently, in 1994, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew wrote, “Man was created in the image and likeness of God—and there can be no different standard of treatment for those human beings who happen to be in Asia, another for Africans, and yet another for Europeans. Culture may be relative—humanity is not.”

In the 1960s, Archbishop Iakovos held fast to the ancient Orthodox Christian belief about the dignity of our shared humanity, and, equipped with the teachings of Orthodoxy, condemned the prejudice and bigotry of modern racism in his time. It is true that many went to Selma for the civil and voting rights of African Americans. But I believe that Archbishop Iakovos also went to bear witness to the ancient Orthodox Christian teaching that all people share the inherent, God-given dignity of humanity.

On July 27, 2014, I preached a sermon on the human, social construction of race and ethnicity. In that sermon, I indicated that God created human beings. He did not create Greeks, Germans, Italians or whatever ethnic identity one may claim; God created people. Though we are each individuals with respect to our personality (or personhood), we all share a common humanity. God did not create ethnicities or races; we did! Ethnicity and race are social, cultural constructions or identities whose definitions—or our understanding of them—have changed historically and continue to change.

Yes, culturally we may identify as Greek, African American, Latino or Lebanese, but biologically we are all human. No one can draw blood, examine it, and identify a person as white, Native American or Asian because these identifiers are cultural, not biological. They may possess some common external features, which we often equate with race, but race like ethnicity is a social construction; it is not biological. Biologically, science has proved that race is unreal, but history and current events reveal that racism is very real, and the Orthodox Church and its champions—past and present—have condemned it in all its manifestations.

So for me the Selma marches were much more than demonstrations for civil rights. Selma was an epic event in human history where peoples of many colors and religious persuasions stood arm-in-arm as children of God and stared down the ugly face of racism and bigotry in order to proclaim their common God-given humanity as well as their civil rights. And there in the forefront with Dr. King, what did racism behold but the determined face and ageless witness of the Orthodox faith encapsulated in the resolute and fearless gaze of Archbishop Iakovos?

Rev. Fr. Michael Varlamos is proistamenos of Assumption Greek Orthodox Church in St. Clair Shores, MI.
During the mid-1960s, I became deeply committed to the cause of civil rights. As a result, I got involved in the marches and protests that condemned segregation and pushed for protective rights legislation.

During this period, some people regarded me as a mindless liberal. Others, including some members of my own church, labeled me a traitor because they believed I had betrayed the people of the South.

But I went ahead with the marches and with the political activism because I believed then—and I still believe—that a Christian must do what his conscience tells him to do. If I feel God moving me in a certain direction and I fail to respond, I become a “clanging cymbal,” as St. Paul puts it in his First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Today, after several decades of being involved in activist causes and dealing extensively with social and political leaders, I still believe in fighting for justice and equality among all peoples. I also believe in promoting peace, both on the domestic scene and in broader global arenas, where nations rattle their sabers, display their missiles, and threaten mutual annihilation.

But at the same time, I think I’ve become somewhat more realistic about the possibilities for activism, both now and in the future. I know that in all forms of activism, I must, as Jesus said, do the will of the Father. And what is the will of the Father? St. Paul defines it very clearly in 1 Timothy 2:4, where he says that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (KJV).

God, in other words, has a deeply personal concern for each one of us. It’s his will that you and I and every other individual man and woman on earth should know him and be saved by him. As a result, all of our activism should be directed toward the ultimate end of bringing individuals into contact with the saving power of Christ.

So when I’m presented with an opportunity to be an activist, I often ask myself a series of questions, which help me focus on whether the planned action will be a channel for the realization of God’s will in the world. I’ll ask:

- What inspires this activism?
- Is it an abstract philosophy, or real compassion for men and women?
- What motives lie behind the demonstrations that are planned?
- When we plan our parades, will we parade as we do on Easter, to proclaim the Resurrection?
- Will we parade so that social justice will prevail, or so that individual, selfish interests of the demonstrators can be served?
- Will we parade so that human dignity may be restored, or so that the leaders and organizers of the demonstration can feed their egos?
- Will we parade enthusiastically, even if no one notices us? Or will we only be satisfied if—God forbid—we get stories in the newspapers and on TV so that everyone will notice us?

The more public and open we get with our political activism, the greater the danger that our motives will be marred by our own self-interest.
Statement by His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos on the occasion of the Memorial Service for Rev. James Reeb in Selma, on March 15, 1965,

I came to this memorial service because I believe this is an appropriate occasion not only to dedicate myself as well as our Greek Orthodox communicants to the noble cause for which our friend, the Reverend James Reeb, gave his life; but also in order to show our willingness to continue this fight against prejudice, bias and persecution.

In the God-given cause, I feel sure that I have the full and understanding support of our Greek Orthodox faithful of America. For our Greek Orthodox Church and our people fully understand from our heritage and our tradition such sacrificial involvements. Our Church has never hesitated to fight, when it felt it must, for the rights of mankind; and many of our Churchmen have been in the forefront of these battles time and time again.

The great poet John Milton said in the closing lines of “Samson Agonistes,”

All is best, though oft we doubt,
What the invisible dispose of highest wisdom about.

I would like to believe that these words have deep relevance to the meaning of the tragic and violent death of the Reverend James Reeb. The ways of God are not always revealed to us, but certainly His choice of this dedicated minister to be the victim of racial hatred and the hero of this struggle to gain unalienable constitutional rights for those American brethren of ours who are denied them, and to die, so to speak, on the battlefield for human dignity and equality, was not accidental or haphazard.

Let us seek out in the tragedy a divine lesson for all of us. The Reverend Reeb felt he could not be outside the arena of this bitter struggle, and we, too, must feel that we cannot. Let his martyrdom be an inspiration and a reminder to us that there are times when we must risk everything, including life itself, for those basic American ideals of freedom, justice and equality, without which this land cannot survive.

Our hope and prayer, then, is that we may be given strength to let God know by our acts and deeds, and not only by our words, that like the late Reverend James Reeb, we, too, are the espousers and the fighters in a struggle for which we must be prepared to risk our all.

From His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “Statement to the UN Durban World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance, March 17, 2001,”

From an Orthodox Christian perspective, the virtues of diversity and tolerance provide the fundamentals for a Christian life, much as sunlight and water nurture a plant. Without either of these virtues, nourishment is lacking and spiritual death is inevitable.

An Orthodox Christian celebrates the diversity of the entirety of God’s creation, rejoicing in the infinite multitude of beauty and meaning which only diversity can truly manifest. We recognize that diversity is fundamentally necessary for the achievement and sustenance of unity among all the members of the Church in the very same Body of Christ. Whenever human beings fail to recognize the value of diversity, they deeply diminish the glory of God’s creation. Following the example of the three persons of the Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—all human beings are called to exist relationally to one another, united in the bond of love, as different and unique persons, each endowed with specific characteristics, each created in the image and likeness of God. All human beings—regardless of religion, race, national origin, color, creed or gender—are living icons of God, intrinsically worthy of such respect and dignity. Whenever human beings fail to treat others with this respect, they insult God, the Creator, as is explained through the teachings of the Christian Scriptures.
**From the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America**

Text of the original document as passed by the Archdiocesan Council and His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos, Primate

**September 28, 1963**

The Greek Orthodox Church is against racial segregation, and believes in the full equality of all races and peoples. Our Church believes, moreover, that all Americans, regardless of faith or color, should be granted equal opportunities for public education and for employment in all fields of endeavor, consistent with the best of their abilities and qualifications; and that all should enjoy equal advantages and be the beneficiaries of equal public accommodations and facilities.

In this spirit we call upon our fellow citizens of all faiths, and upon all those who cherish truth and justice, to oppose every expression and demonstration of bigotry. We also urge all our fellow citizens to desist, in word and action, from whatever might seem to further the circulation of false reports, rumors or representations that distort our mutual relations and the progress of our common welfare.

But the Christians of America should feel that they have a special mandate to work for equal rights for all. We are challenged to prove that the legions of Christ can, in His name, uphold these rights wherever and whenever they are endangered. Christian love is not a semantic symbol. It is a commandment to which we must conform our actions as Christians and strive in every way to make a reality, consistent with the will of God, which was expressed by His Son Jesus Christ when He said, “Love ye one another.”

The whole question of integration and equal rights for all races, and humane understanding among them, has an ethical basis linked not only with our own national security but also with our relationships with half the nations of the earth. Justice, peace and equality are not meant to be merely noble words; they are meant to be the basic and workable concepts of humanity, which will teach us to help and respect each other.

The present integration conflict is wasteful and unproductive. The American Negro has great talents that he should be given every opportunity to develop for the further cultural enrichment of America, to which he has already contributed so much. Wherever the Negro has been given real opportunities, or has had the initiative to seize them himself, he has excelled. We see this perhaps most dramatically in the fields of music, the performing arts and athletics; but in a less spectacular way, it is true of all fields of endeavor, none of which should be closed to or made difficult for the Negro.

We must point out, however, that in the heat of the integration problem, the great gains that have been made over the years toward equal opportunities for Negroes may tend to be overlooked or minimized. We therefore urge patience and forbearance upon all concerned. Violence breeds bitterness, and bitterness only serves to retard the ultimate achievement of human equality that our democratic processes dictate. These processes must survive the anguish of the times and remains the basis of the American will and government.
ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS AND SELMA

A Personal Remembrance

METROPOLITAN GERASIMOS
OF SAN FRANCISCO

As many readers of PRAXIS may remember, I served as deacon to Archbishop Iakovos for nearly two decades. Naturally, working and traveling alongside someone for so many years, we had many times for conversation about the Church in America and our place within what we now call the American religious landscape. His recollections about his involvement with the Civil Rights Movement were always special because I was given access to the perspectives of someone who was present when history was being made. Just asking him who he would talk to during those days was to receive a who’s who of great American religious leaders: Martin Luther King, Jr., of course, but also Abraham Joshua Heschel, the great Jewish thinker, Cardinal Spellman of New York, Cardinal Cushing of Boston, and many others.

Archbishop Iakovos led our Church at a time when it was emerging from the “ethnic ghettos” and its members were entering significant positions in American life. He was among those who had begun the push during World War II, while he was still a priest, to have Orthodox Christianity named a “major religion” in the United States, firstly so that military personnel could have Eastern Orthodoxy listed on their dog tags and receive the support of chaplains; Archbishop Iakovos also knew that this step could place the Church on a larger stage in our society.

One thing he often told me was that he knew he would be criticized for his bold stances on social and moral issues and for his constant urging of the Church to move forward in its life. As anyone who knew him can attest, Archbishop Iakovos was never satisfied with the status quo. He was always challenging the people around him to study an issue carefully and to be unafraid to act decisively, especially when they believed it would improve the life of the Church and her people. He would often say to people, “Squeeze your brains.” When a new idea or program was presented, he would ask whether this would help advance our Church and our people.

In 1964, more than a decade before I ever met him, he said to the Clergy–Laity Congress in Denver, “Our Church in America must remove itself from the sidelines and place itself in the center of American life. It must labor and struggle to develop its spiritual life, and thus assume its place among the other churches as a living, thriving, courageous church, ready to accept responsibilities and eager to submit to sacrifice.”

Archbishop Iakovos could see the signs of the times in America, and he responded. His participation in the March on Selma in March 1965 reflected the vision he had articulated just a year earlier. But he knew that participating in the Civil Rights Movement was more than just a “political move” by the Church for greater visibility; freedom and justice are core principles of the Gospel. He also knew the pain of being denied basic human rights first hand from his life in Turkey. He spoke of how difficult life could be on Imvros, his home island. He told the story of being called before Turkish authorities who questioned his preaching and tried to silence him. He spoke about the freedom that Americans have, especially the freedom of speech and the freedom of worship. So he knew that standing alongside Martin Luther King, Jr., to honor the memory of a fellow Bostonian, the slain Rev. James Reeb, was the right thing to do. But he also knew that it would be unpopular with some members of his own community.

He was always very proud of that moment when he marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. He knew he would be remembered for it, not only because he landed on the cover of an important magazine, but also because it would associate the Greek Orthodox Church with one of the defining events of American history and we would always be known for being “on the right side of the issue.”
Now fifty years later, we celebrate the decisive vision and action of Archbishop Iakovos, and rightly so. I am grateful that the Archdiocese is reminding us of a significant moment in our recent Church history. I hope that the readers of PRAXIS will study carefully the events of March 1965 because they are more than mere photo ops. I am grateful that Archbishop Iakovos put the Greek Orthodox Church “on the map” in American life. I am grateful that he didn’t stop with that one moment, but continued to be actively involved in the issues of the day in both American life and international life. His leadership during the Cyprus crisis of 1974 would be another such example of bold action in his ministry.

In that same speech in 1964, Archbishop Iakovos also said, “Our Church in America must not look backward when God invites us to go forward. Its roots are deeply embedded in its long history. It is our task, therefore, to add new centuries to its life.” My hope and prayer for the people of our Church to heed his words and creatively meet the demands of our times.

Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco was Archdeacon to Archbishop Iakovos from 1979 to 1996. During that period he also held administrative positions at Hellenic College–Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. In 2002, he was ordained Bishop of Kratiea and served as the Secretary of the Eparchial Synod until his election as Metropolitan of San Francisco in 2005.
In 1907, a black Episcopalian deacon from Jamaica traveled to Constantinople, where he was ordained an Orthodox priest by a bishop of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. He was then sent to Philadelphia with the mission to “carry the light of the Orthodox faith among his racial brothers.”

This pioneering black clergyman was Robert Josias Morgan, who took the name “Father Raphael” after his ordination. Morgan was born in Jamaica in the 1860s. As a young man, he traveled throughout Latin America, Europe and Africa. In 1895, he was ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church in Delaware. (The Episcopal Church in the United States is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion.) He was part of a small and interesting group of black Episcopalian clergy at the turn of the twentieth century.

At some point—and for reasons that remain unclear—Morgan began to doubt his Anglican faith. He embarked on a sweeping three-year study of Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy. He seemed to lean toward Orthodoxy from the start. In 1904, he toured Russia, Turkey, Cyprus and the Holy Land. Everywhere he went, the Orthodox leaders welcomed him as an honored guest. After that, Morgan returned to Philadelphia. He was still technically an Episcopalian, but he started attending Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, where he became close to the priest, Fr. Demetrios Petrides.

In 1907, Morgan traveled to Constantinople with two letters of recommendation. One, from Fr. Demetrios, recommended that Morgan be received into Orthodoxy and ordained a priest. The other, from the Annunciation parish, seconded Fr. Demetrios’s recommendation and further said that if Morgan was unsuccessful in establishing a black Orthodox parish, he was welcome to serve as the assistant priest at Annunciation.

After being interviewed extensively by one of the English-speaking bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Morgan was chrismated into the Orthodox Church. On the Feast of Dormition (the repose of the Mother of God), he was ordained a priest in the presence of 3,000 people.

Morgan returned to Philadelphia to bring the Orthodox faith to other Americans of African descent. Unfortunately, he appears to have been unsuccessful in his mission—there’s no evidence that he received any converts, other than his wife and children. He remained in Philadelphia into the late 1910s and died sometime between 1916 and 1924 (the exact date is unknown).

Although Fr. Raphael never did establish a black Orthodox parish, the fact that the Ecumenical Patriarchate ordained a black priest and commissioned a mission to black Americans in 1907 is remarkable in its own right. Fr. Raphael’s story stands as a reminder that Orthodoxy is for all people, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Matthew Namee is a founding director of the Society for Orthodox Christian History in the Americas (SOCHA). He manages SOCHA’s website and blog, www.orthodoxhistory.org
October 5, 1988, just one month before the fifty-first presidential election contest between Republican George H. W. Bush and Democrat Michael Dukakis, the Bush campaign aired a thirty-second political ad named “Revolving Door.”

The ad focused on William Horton, an African-American convicted for first-degree murder, who during a weekend furlough in April 1986, escaped and ended up in Maryland. The following year he was rearrested for rape and attempted murder.

The ad was striking. It portrayed a variety of threatening inmates walking in and out of prison through a revolving door. One prisoner briefly looks into the camera, fierce and menacing as he comes out of prison. He’s African-American. Democrats decried the ad as racist, as playing on negative stereotypes, a charge denied by Republicans.

Almost twenty years have passed. Race, prejudice and bias are still hot-button topics. Heartbreaking events such as the recent death of Michael Brown, the demonstrations in Ferguson, MO, and a retaliatory assault of two police officers there several weeks later have fueled the passions surrounding the issue of race.

Many people deny the existence of racial bias in numerous situations and institutions, yet many credible studies explore the issue. Some of the more interesting studies come from a team led by Joshua Correll, a psychology professor from the University of Chicago who studies implicit racial biases—basically, feelings that we all have about race that we may not be aware of. One study involved a video game called “Shoot or Don’t Shoot” in which black and white individuals pop up on the screen holding various items, some innocuous (wallets, soda cans, etc.) and some lethal (guns, knives). The studies revealed that both men and women—white and black—perceived young black men as most threatening. Those subjects least apt to act on these impulses and biases were largely police officers.

However, bias can beget more bias in response, in the other direction. Studies show that disadvantaged communities can be negatively biased against the police officers that serve them, hindering the officers’ ability to protect and serve the communities.

These studies have borne fruit in the form of strategies offered in implicit bias and reality based training seminars, presently participated in by police departments across the country. These departments are seeing success in their interaction with the communities they serve.

Part of the training is to clarify the difference between bias and racism. Bias is the incorrect attribution of traits to someone who reminds them of another individual or experience. Bias devolves into racism when a person attributes negative traits to all people of a particular race. Obviously, it’s a slippery slope.

Whether it was the Samaritan woman, the harlot or the tax collector, Christ loved the other and affirmed the inherent image of God in those discriminated against by society. It would seem to me that this underlying spiritual instinct is what empowered His Eminence Iakovos to make his stand. Perhaps it is time to make our own.

Anestis Jordanoglou is Managing Editor of PRAXIS magazine.
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Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation...

– Hebrews 6:1
God the Creator ensured a special design in creating the cosmos. As Lord of unfathomable and eternal love, the absolute and ever existing Source of Life, God created man and woman in His image with a plan. From God flows a profound relationship of love and life. At the core of their purpose, man and woman were created in the image of this God of loving relationship. And, at the heart of this plan was the Theotokos, who pledged her woman-ness in total trust to what God wanted for humanity.

VIRGINIA M. KIMBALL
The relationship between man and woman is found in the image of God’s bonded, covenantal love between God and humanity. It is one of giving and receiving, as helpmates to one another. Man and woman as helpmates to God further the building of a nation of faithful. God clearly demonstrates that man and woman are to conceive, nurture and support an emerging “people of God.” They are the spouse of God in creation, the mothers and fathers of the generations.

God created man and woman to be fruitful. Sadly, Adam and Eve rejected God’s call to life and joy. The Theotokos, whom we love and revere, is a woman who answered God’s invitation, realizing the fullness of God’s design and commission to be fruitful. She accepted the message to be the mother of God’s Son as birth-giver, lifelong mother and nurturer. As seen in the tradition of the Theotokos tes Peges (Theotokos of the Fountain), we know she continues to nurture all the faithful who are united to her Son. The most important question for Orthodox women to ask themselves is: “Shouldn’t women’s ministry strive most of all to be like the Theotokos in cooperating with God and partnering with the ministry of men in the ecclesia?” Isn’t women’s ministry in the Church a motherhood?

The image of God’s loving relationship with humanity is revealed as a “bridal union.” In order to love, one needs another. God, who is love, loves the creation and calls himself the “Bridegroom” of mankind. We encounter Christ the Bridegroom in Holy Week. The image of God as Bridegroom is biblical, as God speaks in Isaiah:

> For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isaiah 65:5)

Fundamental to salvation is humanity’s relationship with God. When thinking of ministry, it is vital always to remember that it is a discipleship that renders a relationship with the Bridegroom.

God’s plan brought forth a man...and a woman. They were meant to join as companions. Each man and woman grows in the likeness of God, by partnering with God and one other. This partnership is the plan from the beginning: God is the Author of all human life, the man gives the seed of life to the woman, and the woman receives the seed to bear and nurture the child. These are more than roles, more than tasks, more than responsibilities or archaic demands of subservience. It is God’s design of life, fatherhood and motherhood.

Christ was born of a woman, born under the law, where “law” is Torah—the story of God’s saving acts recorded in the Pentateuch. The following statement that Paul makes means that Christ was sent to save and provide life to humanity as found in the very beginning of the Torah. The purpose is clear—to create the children of God. The words are few but carry tremendous meaning:

> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. (Galatians 4:4–5)

The Theotokos, a woman who received God’s Son in trust and obedience, conceived, bore and nurtured Him, and nurtures the mystical body of faithful Christians as mother now and into eternity. The Theotokos, the new Eve, fully accepts God’s design for creation. She is willing to give birth to and nurture “the new creation.” This is a discipleship of womanhood, distinctly designed by God for every woman. Every woman should aspire as much as they can to be like a new Eve.

The ministry of the Theotokos in God’s kingdom is clear. She accepted God’s invitation by giving her womanhood to be mother and nurturer of God’s Son. She was and is a mother like all mothers. Her body swelled with pregnancy, delivered an infant with labor, and nurtured him with the warm milk of her breasts. She hid the child from Herod’s murderous plan, and suf-
fered arduous travel with a precious newborn across the desert in the flight to Egypt. She hid like a displaced refugee until Joseph could bring the family home to Galilee. She watched her child grow, teaching him to reverence the scripture’s prophecies. She traveled the long roads of ministry with him. She saw him arrested. She watched his death. She persisted in faith. She comforted the believers in the Upper Room at Pentecost. She did not wonder why he ascended but walked to meet all of us, as seen in the icon. Hers was a ministry of birthing, nurturing and sustaining her Son and the people of the believing community who became her Son now in the world. She waits to hear our pleas and takes these prayers to her Son. Her work as a mother continues. It is a discipleship of motherhood.

Like the Theotokos, all women of the Church are designed by God’s gifts to be birth-givers of God’s community, to nurture and to sustain the community as spiritual mothers. This *diaconia*, this service to the ecclesia and to God’s people, is realized existentially in the life and continuing mediation of the mother of Christ. All women as ministers in the church give birth to members. They invite, instruct, love and welcome people to God’s house. In the life of the Theotokos, women find their purpose in the Church. It is not a role of power, or a station of leadership. It is a mystical, deeply spiritual call to witnessing (*martyria*), to praying and working in the community (*leitourgia*), and to nurturing (*diaconia*). It is a ministry of joy and remarkable renown. It is what prompts us to sing *Axion Estin*:

*It is truly right to bless you, Theotokos, ever blessed, most pure, and mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, without corruption you gave birth to God the Word. We magnify you, the true Theotokos.*

This age-old hymn is deep and mystical. We sing, as a profession of our faith, and truly praise theotokos as “worthy,” a woman who is filled with joy (blessed) and is holy (pure) because she is mother of Christ. This, we acknowledge, raises her higher than the angels, for in her total holiness she birthed Jesus. The word “magnify” means that we regard her worthy from the depths of our heart and faith, just as she sang to her cousin Elizabeth with the words “my soul magnifies the Lord.” If her motherhood lifts her to the worthiness of likeness to God, she must be the one that all Orthodox women want to emulate.

Succinctly, let us look at the ministries of women as “mothers.” It is not only a motherhood of bearing children. It is to be a “mother of the Church.” All women can be “birth-givers” of Church members. They witness (*martyria*) with their lives and their invitations of hospitality. They teach Sunday school, adult education, newcomers and converts. They study and write theology. They participate in the liturgy (*leitourgia*) by being greeters, preparing the prothesis, reading the epistle, singing in the choir or being cantor. They teach their children the hymns of the Church and bring them to liturgy on time. They serve the poor, the unfortunate, the sick and hurrying (*diaconia*). Members of Philoptochos are mothers. Presbyters stand at the priest’s side with love and nurture the community with faith and sustenance. In these ways, women serving in the Church grow to theosis in fulfilling God’s plan.

Women who realize that ministry in the Church is not a position of power or privilege will find the fullest of joy in being birth-givers and nurturers. Their true ministry in the Orthodox Church will be to discover a feminine integrity in sharing woman-ness with the Theotokos. They are disciples like Mary, the mother of our Lord. There is no greater honor. There is no greater joy. These women will be praised and we will call them “blessed.”

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We seem to live in a world that promotes—and maybe even values—stress. A frenetic pace, multitasking and a jam-packed calendar are considered signs of success or status. Stress now extends beyond occasional traumatic events (such as the death of a loved one or loss of a job) and certain times of year (tax season, for example) to be a constant in our lives. Too much stress, though, is fraught with risk. Think of a piece of string being pulled tightly, and you can imagine what will happen without eventually easing the tension.

Because we live in a stress-oriented society, we often minimize its effects on our health. We may be prone to thinking that when a condition is prevalent—even when it is harmful—it must be normal and therefore acceptable. It is critical to objectively gauge the tension in our lives. There is inherent danger from neglecting excessive stress.

Dr. Trent Orfanos, a cardiologist from Crown Point, IN, shared the following alarming facts at a forum last summer at the 42nd Archdiocesan Clergy–Laity Congress:

• Chronic job-related stress is every bit as bad for you as smoking and high cholesterol.
• Eighty percent of visits to the doctor are stress related.
• One third of Americans say they live with extreme stress.
• Stress increases your risk for heart attack, depression and cancer.

What is the healthy response to stress? The answer is resilience. Dr. Georgette Constantinou, Administrative Director of Pediatric Psychiatry and Psychology at Akron Children’s Hospital, offered a working definition of “resilience” from an Orthodox Christian perspective at the aforementioned forum. She said it is “a God-given inner capacity that when nurtured, facilitated and supported by others—especially in the community of faith—by the grace of God, empowers all members of the family and the family unit to successfully meet life’s challenges with faith and hope.”

Very often, when life becomes particularly difficult, we try to hide our struggles. There are various reasons for this. We may fear being perceived as weak or not being good enough, and this can bring about feelings of shame. And despite an internal plea for help, we may suppress that instinct, telling ourselves we can go it alone and just push through. In a culture that overemphasizes individualism and productivity, asking for help is not always easy. This often results in more stress and breaks down our capacity to be resilient.

Although resilience is a God-given ability, it is best realized within a community—especially a community of faith. We should look to our parishes to find healing during both extraordinary and mundane stresses. It can be difficult to seek healing from our communities if we are not able to admit our limitations. Fr. Jerry Hall, priest at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Akron, OH, and forum panel member said, “We don’t go to the doctor without describing our symptoms, but somehow when it comes to the parish or the church, we believe we can only show up when we have it all together or we pretend that we do.”

It is imperative for our respective parishes to become the places of support they are meant to be. Our parishes should be havens of unconditional love and understanding. Even if there are no formal support groups established within the parish, the priest should be able to refer persons experiencing inordinate stress to qualified sources for assistance. In addition to the corporate prayer and grace of the sacraments for Orthodox Christians, a parish should offer a nurturing community that cares for its members in the most needful of times.
St. Basil said we must pray for an hour each day, unless we are really busy; then, we must pray for two hours! St. Basil’s wisdom appears paradoxical, but is especially relevant. At times when we are most strained, we unfortunately tend to turn inward and not outward. Regardless of the amount of time each of us is able to offer in prayer each day, it is especially needful to connect with God in times of stress.

When we are overwhelmed by stress due to the frantic nature of life, it is difficult to think clearly. We might tell ourselves, “As soon as I finish this project…as soon as our festival is over…as soon as the weekend rolls around, I’ll be at peace.” The problem with this thinking is there will be, almost inevitably, something that will keep us busy and—likely—stressed just around the corner. Unfortunately, we allow life’s “business” to distract us from our spiritual focus. St. Anthony of Optina writes:

The affairs of the world are so numerous that they could hardly be completed in a hundred years, and so important that they will not allow any kind of delay. To our misfortune, only God-pleasing works can be set aside without fear, some until morning, some until next year, and some even until old age, for which reason it often happens that they remain unfulfilled.

Faithfully following Christ as Orthodox Christians will not make the stress in our lives disappear. It will, however, conform our wills to align with God’s will—giving us resilience in all circumstances.

On July 8, 2014, at the 42nd Biennial Clergy–Laity Congress in Philadelphia, the Center for Family Care of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese presented two forums, “Stress and Resilience in the Family” and “Family and Faith: Building Generations of Faith.” The sessions dealt with compelling topics the Orthodox Church faces in contemporary society through a combination of individual presentations from distinguished panel members and audience interaction.

The first forum focused upon the pervasive subject of stress and how families might best approach its potential effects from spiritual, mental and physical perspectives. Its panel consisted of Fr. Jerry Hall, Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Akron, Ohio; Dr. Georgette Constantinou, Administrative Director of Pediatric Psychiatry and Psychology of Akron Children’s Hospital; Dr. Trent Orfanos, a cardiologist from Crown Point, IN; and Dr. George Stavros, Director of the Danielsen Institute of Boston University—a mental health clinic.

Each forum concluded with the understanding that the complications corresponding to the respective topics are not expected to ever be entirely solved. The primary benefit of the forums derives from the conversations they have brought to light. To begin conversations with your parish family, you can view the videos at www.family.goarch.org. By giving these topics a forum to be addressed, we hope to promote healing and growth through our parish communities.

The Center for Family Care of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America strives to “affirm the importance of the family as a blessed gift of God and to address the specific needs of families as they try to live in a very challenging culture and world” (Archbishop Demetrios). For more information on their ministry, visit www.family.goarch.org
While coaching my daughter’s soccer team a few years back, I invited Katherine, an accomplished high school soccer player, to work with my ten-year-old girls for one practice. After teaching them a trap-and-kick exercise, she gathered the team together and told the girls, “You have to keep practicing this drill, but you must realize that practice doesn’t make perfect.” Several kids raised their hands and replied, “My mom said if I practice my violin, I’ll play my piece perfectly,” or “If I practice my dance steps, I will become perfect…”

Katherine looked at them and said that what they have been told was a lie. I held my breath waiting for this sixteen-year-old girl’s explanation. She boldly said, “Practice doesn’t make perfect, practice makes permanent.” That bit of wisdom resonated within my heart and is an important model for our spiritual lives. Practice makes permanent! Indeed, our patterns and behavior will set into motion the direction of our lives. The way we pray and prioritize our spiritual life, the way we speak, the way we love, the way we respond to conflict; all have been consciously or unconsciously practiced over the years and have become a permanent part of our life.

We often find ourselves practicing what the world tells us is important, as found with the daily bombardment of commercials, music, news, self-help books, fad diets, products and ideas that can present a treasury of empty promises. We are told we will be happy, sexy, rich or successful if we simply purchase a certain product, take an energy supplement, read a particular book, subscribe to a tested financial plan or try the next exciting “special offer.”

Our life then becomes a continuous search for the next thing that will fulfill us—the next thing that will bring us happiness. What are we practicing and making permanent? Is it a
cycle of false hopes, wishes and worries? Or are we practicing patience, compassion and love?

Jesus tells us that the eye is the lamp of the body and our body will be full of light if our eye is clear (Matthew 6:22). Our eyes and ears are the gateway to the soul. Just as the practice of eating healthy food helps nourish a healthy body, what we practice receiving with our eyes and ears affects the health of our souls. How are we engaging with our family? What are we watching? What music are we listening to? What conversations are we having that help strengthen our relationship with God and one another?

The information we digest will impact and shape us, whether we know it or not. As Orthodox Christians, we must be vigilant and watchful of the messages we receive and careful of the words that we speak to one another. All have a vital influence upon our souls. We must be intentionally mindful of what actually feeds the soul—resisting words, images and conversations that distract us from living a life of true holiness.

The Church implores us to be selective about what we see, hear and do, as we strive to make choices that edify our souls. We are invited to examine what we practice in our lives, to see where we devote our time, energy and thoughts. We need to take a hard look at our daily schedule. Are we spending enough uninterrupted time with our families? Are we eating meals on the run? Are we taking time in prayer to be still with God? Are we reaching out to others who are in need?

St. Paul encourages us to wake up! He says, “Now it is high time to awake out of sleep...The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:11–12).

To wake up is to turn off the TV and have a conversation with your spouse and children. To wake up may prompt you to hand an apple and a smile to a homeless person. To wake up will motivate you to attend Divine Liturgy on time and with full awareness that you are in the presence of God. To wake up is to re-examine your life and seek confession and forgiveness.

Let us not go through life asleep, falling into habits of laziness and complacency. Rather, let us live intentionally seeking Christ and all that is holy and good. Every day, we are given the chance to be transformed and made anew.

This week, make it a point to notice what you look at, what you listen to, what you read and what you say. St. Basil says, “We should not be deceived by the corrupting delights of this world, but rather become strengthened in the desire to attain the treasures of the world to come.” Consider practicing and making permanent the action of love, the gift of compassion and the practice of being truly alive.

Our Lord constantly reminds us that He wants to help us write a new story of life centered in His love, His will and His purpose. God transforms our relationships and He promises to restore us and help redirect our path to a new way of living. Jesus says, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

He is speaking to each one of us. He offers us transformation from old to new, from broken to whole, from sorrow to joy, and from death to life. May we “show up” and “wake up” so we can become renewed people living out this promise as we practice loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27).

Mother Maria of Paris said, “No amount of thought will ever result in any greater formulation than the three words, ‘Love one another,’ so long as it is love to the end and without exceptions. And then the whole of life is illumined...” (Essential Writings, page 19).

Remember: Practice makes permanent!

Rev. Fr. Tom Tsagalakis serves as the priest of Holy Apostles Orthodox Greek Orthodox Church in Shoreline, WA. He is also an adjunct professor at Seattle Pacific University and maintains a private practice as a Marriage and Family Therapist in Seattle. Fr. Tom is an iconographer who learned from Kosta Tsiltsividis of blessed memory from Thessalonike, Greece. He and his wife, Presvytera Pat, have two adult children, Nicholas and Maria Sophia. This article is adapted from its original, which appeared in the July/August 2007 Orthodox Observer.
From the Director

Standing Up, Speaking Out

Dear Readers,

When Archbishop Iakovos appeared on the cover of LIFE fifty years ago, he put Orthodox Christianity on the map of American life in a way that it had not been before. For the twenty years before that, the Orthodox Churches in the United States had been pursuing recognition as the fourth “major religion” in the United States, mainly so that Orthodox military personnel could be recognized as “Eastern Orthodox” instead of “Other” on their dog tags. That effort was successful, but still left the Orthodox Church as an unknown community in American life.

Appearing on the cover of a major national publication was, therefore, a very big deal for the Church, providing it an unprecedented visibility. LIFE was as ubiquitous then as the Internet or CNN is today. At a time when there was only a handful of national news sources, appearing on the cover alongside Martin Luther King, Jr., meant that the face of Archbishop Iakovos and the Greek Orthodox Church was in the homes of countless Americans and distributed throughout the world (LIFE was read internationally). Even now, fifty years after the event, many of us have a copy of that magazine cover and display it proudly.

Perhaps even more significantly, Archbishop Iakovos entered into the most important political issue of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement. As we can see from his own writings and the statement of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese on racism reproduced in this issue of PRAXIS, Iakovos announced that the Church in America had something to say on the topic and that it stood in solidarity with the African-American population in the United States because Orthodox Christian teaching required it to do so.

Iakovos’s actions should not have been completely unexpected. He knew Martin Luther King, Jr., from his activity with the World Council of Churches in Geneva in the 1950s and his involvement and leadership within the National Council of Churches in the United States. Both organizations were very active with the Civil Rights Movement, so Iakovos was very aware of what was happening and how mainstream Christian churches were actively involved.

Iakovos’s involvement, though, was controversial, as some Orthodox Christians did not agree with his views on civil rights. But in 1965 the issue was controversial throughout the United States. Even today, fifty years later, issues about race, racism and civil rights still cause debate, heated opinions, protests and even rioting.

In many respects, Iakovos’s actions in 1965 inaugurated a long period of Greek Orthodox Archdiocese involvement with social and moral issues. For the next thirty years or so, Clergy–Laity Congresses often heard from speakers on various issues and developed statements, usually in the form of resolutions, for the general public. On a few issues the Archdiocese filed amicus briefs with the U.S. Supreme Court to express its theological understanding of a case, usually a moral issue, to the Court. I believe it’s important to note that even when the discussion was controversial, the Church did not shy away from it. I was personally fortunate to attend many Clergy–Laity Congresses back then and recall the vocal debate (yes, people argued loudly!) as these issues were being discussed. But in the end, the Church worked out its thoughts and made a statement. Today the Archdiocese has retreated from this level of activity. Fortunately, the Assembly of Bishops is now taking a more active role.

Speaking out on issues today is much harder than it was then—or at least it seems more intimidating. Issues are more polarizing. We are not as homogenous as we once might have been. Everyone has a blog and a Facebook page or a publishing company, claiming to pronounce what Orthodox Christianity teaches about an issue. For every pronouncement, even from a Church body, there are dozens of responses criticizing it from every angle possible.

Ten years ago, on April 10, 2005, Archbishop Iakovos fell asleep in the Lord. His thirty-seven-year tenure as Archbishop of North and South America (1959–1996) will be studied (and should be studied) whenever someone deals with the history of Orthodox Christianity in the Americas. One moment that will be included in that history will be the day in 1965 when Archbishop Iakovos marched at Selma with Martin Luther King, Jr., and then appeared on the cover of LIFE.

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