



**Archbishop Lazar Puhalo**

## **Approaching The Educated Person in the Post-Christian Era**

Paper for a conference on the Post-Christian Era,  
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The late Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia, Count Ignatieff always attended divine services at the small Russian Orthodox Church in Belgrade. His secretary told us this story. Ambassador Ignatieff once excused himself from a reception at President Tito's residence in order to attend the vigil on the eve of a feast day. President Tito asked Mr. Ignatieff, "You are an intelligent man, Mr. Ignatieff. Why do you attend church?" Mr. Ignatieff replied, "Because I am an intelligent man."

### **Prologue**

*In causal terms, the presence of oxygen is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for fire. Oxygen plus combustibles plus the striking of a match would illustrate a sufficient condition for fire. (William L. Reese)<sup>1</sup>*

The general subject of this conference is "The Cultured (or Educated) Person in the Age of De-Christianisation."

The process of de-Christianisation in Western nations did not begin just recently; nor is it the product of any single era, movement or influence. In part, the disintegration of a unified Christian entity in Western Europe was the result of the degeneracy and corruption of the clergy, from the very highest levels to the lowest. This disintegration laid the groundwork for the mistrust of the Christian

faith that slowly grew in the more educated classes of Western society. If one could place a single incident at the root of actual de-Christianisation, it would likely be the trial of Galileo. The condemnation of Galileo by fundamentalist forces in the Latin Church set off a chain reaction throughout Europe that powered the original process of de-Christianisation. Giordano Bruno had been burned at the stake a short while earlier for the "crime" of Copernicanism: he asserted that the earth moves around the sun, and that the heavens are not mobile, translucent solid rings pulled by spiritual entities. Galileo confirmed the ideas of both Copernicus and Bruno, and was threatened with death if he did not renounce the truth. Since his works, banned in Italy, were nevertheless published in Northern Europe, educated and cultured people throughout the West would see these incidents as a Christian war against truth.

There was no immediate tidal wave of de-Christianisation, but the glacier had begun to melt and the trickle of doubt would soon become a torrent. Christianity was so deeply engrained in the cultures of Europe that it would take another three centuries for something like a general de-Christianisation to become obvious.

With the trial of Galileo, a process of deconstruction began. At first this process was slow and related only to doubts about cosmological doctrines. It began to pick

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Genesis, Homily 13:4.

up speed, however, and accelerated, like the ball which Galileo had rolled down an incline whose velocity accelerated at  $\text{ft}/\text{sec}^2$ .<sup>2</sup> With each century, this deconstruction increased like the squaring of the seconds in the acceleration in Galileo's experiment.

The Protestant Reformation, which had made the dissemination of Galileo's works possible, was the greatest process of deconstructionism in history. For centuries since the great schism, doubt had arisen about many of the teachings which developed in the Western Church. These doubts were greatly increased by the avarice and degenerate lifestyle of the clergy, especially the bishops and the highest ranking clergy of all. The deconstruction of the Latin Church had already begun by the thirteen hundreds. In that era, the various Gnostic movements had gathered strength in Western Europe as they had earlier in the East. Much of the strength of the Gnostic movements lay in their protest against the degenerate living and the remoteness of the clergy in both the Byzantine and Latin Churches. After the sixteen hundreds, however, much deeper doubts arose. The accusations which Martin Luther had nailed to the door of All Saints Cathedral in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517 concerned only ecclesiastical matters. The doubts which were given birth by the burning of Giordano Bruno and the condemnation of Galileo on 21 June 1633 (both were deemed guilty of "Copernicanism") were of a more all-encompassing nature. When Luther expressed doubts about the theology, life and worthiness of the Latin Church, he was only giving voice to doubts that had been arising regularly for centuries. With Luther, the Western Church became engulfed in a flood of deconstructionism that we call the Reformation. It was inevitable that both streams of deconstruction should merge.

The deconstruction ushered in by the Galileo affair pertained not only to the Western Christian Church, but to Christianity itself. The Protestant Reformation led to the deconstruction of Christian Church history and tradition. It would ultimately undermine the very concepts of tradition and hierarchical structure. At first this affected only the Church. As this deconstruction gathered force, however, regard for all tradition and hierarchical structure in society would be undermined. This would have enormous consequences which are still being dealt with in the twenty-first century. The undermining of the traditional family paradigm would be one of the most notable casualties of Protestant deconstructionism.

That other form of deconstruction, for which we take the trial of Galileo as being the first milestone, formed a direct challenge to the whole of Christianity and to religion

itself. It was not that the emerging scientific revolution was in opposition to Christianity. Science did not create this deconstruction; rather it was the overbearing reaction of Christian leaders and intellectuals that created this process. It was Christian leaders themselves who created the greatest doubts in the minds of ordinary people about Christianity. The Reformation was the beginning of liberalism and liberal democracy. It ultimately made it possible for people to deny all forms of authority. Not only was tradition abandoned in the understanding of faith and of the Scripture, but now each individual became his own personal authority in the interpretation of Scripture and of the Christian faith itself. The nearly hysterical reaction on the part of some Christian leaders to the writings of Charles Darwin only fed the flames of this deconstruction of Christianity. It is not that Darwin could not be read critically and not that one could not disagree with his conclusion, but the panic with which the response had been carried out has had a profoundly negative affect. Worse still has been the clearly dishonest response on the part of many Fundamentalist Christians, not least of which is the fraudulent "scientific creationism," which is enough to make many educated people leery of Christianity.

Thus we must in all honesty assert that the process of de-Christianisation was really inaugurated by Christian leaders and apologists. Fundamentalism, coupled with the undermining of regard for authority and tradition, could only result in the undermining of the institution itself. If fundamentalist Christians were confused and led into hysteria by the truth itself, and if, as the Protestants taught, sacred tradition and hierarchical structure are evil, then there is essentially nothing left of the movement founded by Jesus Christ and His apostles. There is no foundation left in a Christianity which has no living sacred tradition or authority by which it interprets the Scripture and symbols of the faith. Without a foundation there is left only a structure which will collapse when struck by a flood and an earthquake. The flood began slowly with the trial of Galileo and reached its peak with the debates about Darwin. The earthquake was unleashed earlier by the Protestant Reformation which itself destroyed the foundation and caused the structure to begin to crumble.

This is why I have chosen to speak about the manner in which many of our contemporary clergy and Church leaders continue to undermine the possibility of faith and loyalty to the Church in our younger and more educated generations. We ourselves are a great part of the movement of the deconstruction of the Christian Church and faith. I wish to suggest that this conference will be of little value if we do not discuss this aspect of the condi-

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<sup>2</sup> The expression is from a lecture of David Goa.

tion which we are calling "the age of de-Christianisation." The term "de-Christianisation" now seems to us in the West to be a bit obsolete. For the past fifty years, we have been speaking of our "post-Christian era." Let me begin by illustrating what we mean by the "post-Christian era."

The focus of this term has been on

- (1) the pulling back of church institutions from direct attempts to control public life,
- (2) the aspiration of those who preach the Gospel to be free to do so without having to do it within state influenced frameworks which threaten the political independence of the church,<sup>3</sup> the increased recognition that the people of God are not the majority much less the moral majority, but may always be leaven in the bread of our common life.

Let us approach the specific subject of "de-Christianisation" from a point of view that is all too often ignored. I would like to discuss briefly the manner in which some Christian leaders support and advance the process of the de-Christianisation of society.

I teach and lecture regularly at a number of universities in both Canada and America; including two or three Protestant institutions. I am also director of the Orthodox Christian Clubs at two universities in Vancouver, Canada. During any given year, I will have an opportunity to speak to thousands of students, and to actually have conversations with hundreds of them. The doubts which are aroused in students at civil universities are not always different than the ones expressed by students in Christian colleges and universities. Both will mention Christian bigotry and hypocrisy, but the anti-science bias of fundamentalists will be mentioned more often in civil institutions. The factors that push students in both types of universities or colleges away from Christianity are often the same, although Christian students are more likely to raise genuinely theological questions. There is a tragic variation in these factors among the Orthodox Christian young people that I speak with, but these particular factors are not limited to the educated youth. While we have many educated Protestants converting to Orthodox Christianity, we also have more and more people born in the faith failing to attend divine services. Please allow me to offer some observations about these matters.

Educated young people are not less spiritual than previous generations. If anything, they are more spiritually inclined, and are seeking some spiritual foundation more than those who took religion for granted in earlier gen-

erations. Why, then, is Christianity less often the spiritual vehicle of choice and why are so many people who were reared in one or another of the Christian religions opting to find spiritual sustenance in other philosophical or religious movements? In the brief time that I have, I would like to share some of the conclusions of my own rather extensive experience in confronting these very questions "on the front line," to borrow a military expression. I would also like to aim my remarks primarily at those of our own tradition, the leaders of the Orthodox Christian Church. There are four particular areas that I wish to touch upon today. Some of them may not yet be so obvious in Romania, but they will be, and they are quite important to our subject:

- (1) Foremost among the afflictions which drive people away from Christianity is the spiritual illness called "fundamentalism." It includes both a hyper-literalist interpretation of Scripture and a dry, dead moralism.
- (2) Clergy arrogance and remoteness. This includes the failure of many priests and hierarchs to interact with the faithful in a meaningful and personal way. It also includes the failure of clergy to continue to educate themselves so that they can give meaningful and convincing answers to the questions raised by educated and cultured people.  
Moreover, far too many priests, even those ill-equipped for it, declare themselves "spiritual fathers" in order to exercise power and manipulative control over their flocks, while not understanding the real meaning of parenthood (which is the true pattern for the spiritual father).
- (3) Folk superstitions being taught as if they were doctrines of the faith, rather than the teaching of sound theology. This is often done by clergy who wish to manipulate and wrongfully control the faithful through fear. This problem affects Orthodox Christians more than any other Christian body, and occurs most frequently among monastics. It forms the most salient distraction from a Christ-centred spiritual life in the Orthodox Church. Often these superstitions completely distract one from an awareness of the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- (4) Among educated people raised in the so-called "evangelical" denominations of Protestantism, the most common complaint I hear is called "spiritual abuse." This is one of the more common reasons given by converts for leaving

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<sup>3</sup> In an informal symposium.

those denominations and becoming Orthodox Christians. This "spiritual abuse" includes the enormous unhealed guilt complexes that are heaped on people for even the most basic aspects of their humanity.

Evangelical fundamentalism, along with our own scholastics and fundamentalists, are more responsible for the de-Christianisation of society than any other force in the world.

## 1. Fundamentalism and Moralism

*The mass rally is so valuable because it is there that people abandon reason and accept oversimplified solutions (Adolf Hitler).*

The abandonment of reason and the cruelty and evil of oversimplification is a hallmark of the new "religious right" movement in both Canada and America. While, on the surface, it appears to be a restoration of Christian influence, it is in reality a new Gnosticism fed and nourished by the New Age Movement. Not only is it cruel, attempting to force dictatorial oversimplification on very complex matters of human existence and social life, it is also divisive. Each individual in this fundamentalist movement interprets one of 100 or more conflicting translations of Scripture as he or she "sees fit." It is an almost demonically prideful and arrogant movement. The common thread, apart from its New Age Gnosticism is a fear of, and war against, sound and solid modern science. The "religious right" has come into a spiritual bondage to a mythological understanding of the Old Testament and of the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse). Many of its adherents are openly in favour of provoking their version of the "battle of Armageddon," arrogantly supposing that they can thus hasten the return of Christ. Most of them adhere to the internally contradictory doctrines of "rapture" and at the same time, a purely Gnostic radical dualism in the nature of man. In the end, this movement with its cold moral fascism, is spawning a deep and lasting disillusionment with Christianity; perhaps with religion in general.

The twin malignancies, as I consider them to be, of Fundamentalism and moralism are the foremost causes of the de-Christianisation of society in Canada and America and, I am certain, in Europe as well. They are harboured also in elements within the Orthodox Church, especially in the monasteries and "lay brotherhoods." For that reason, I want to address them first.

As I mentioned before, I speak at several universities and colleges in both Canada and America every year. Some of these institutions are Protestant and Roman Catholic seminaries or Evangelical Protestant universities and

schools. You may be startled at what I have to say, but I have asked literally thousands of students over the years, "How many of you were born and raised in Christian homes, but have rejected or turned away from Christianity?" When I have counted the hands, it is often the majority of the students in the class or auditorium. I ask some of the students if they will share with us the reasons for their decisions. The overwhelming majority of the answers are the same, and they are touched upon even in Christian institutions where the students have not completely rejected Christianity. Let me summarize them:

### A. Dead Moralism

*Morality consists far more in how well we care for one another than in what sort of behaviour we demand of others. (Deacon Lev Puhalo, 1973)*

It turns out that the Greek iconographer and philosopher Photios Kontaglou was correct when he said that the Western Christian concept of God is a primary cause of atheism in the West. Perhaps more clearly, the novel Western doctrine of redemption called "atonement" is the real culprit. Aside from the fact that the doctrine leaves one with the impression that God has a personality that is at best a divine fascism, it is contrary to the doctrine and teaching of the ancient Christian Church, and was invented only in early medieval times. The fact that I have heard such sentiments expressed literally thousands of times by students, and often by deeply believing Evangelical Protestant youth, as well as those who have already given up Christianity altogether, gives it profound meaning to our subject. Indeed, the second American President, John Adams, raised precisely this point in his correspondence with the third President of America, the Masonic deist Thomas Jefferson. I do not have time here to speak about this doctrine and how it opposes the Orthodox Christian doctrine of redemption, except to say that the Doctrine of Atonement really teaches us that Christ died to save us from God. What the doctrine has done to Western Christianity has been to reduce the Christian faith to a legal code of correct behaviour which is void of the element of internal struggle (*askesis; podvig*) for inner transformation and the transfiguration of the heart and mind of the believer. This legal code is expressed, not in genuine morality, but in a self-righteous and arrogant system of dead moralism. Christianity has been reduced to an ideologically based programme of "correct behaviour." It is lifeless and meaningless, and has had to be shored up by turning churches into centres for shallow entertainment, self-centred hymns that reinforce self-righteousness and abolish the idea of struggling for the transformation of the inner person into a living pattern of true morality. It

is clear beyond contradiction that this self-righteous moralism is used as a weapon to persecute and harass others who might not share the Pharisaic interpretation of external moralistic behaviour. However, it does not provide the spiritual means of attaining to a truly moral life in Christ. Even many Orthodox clergy in North America now reject, either tacitly or openly, the concept of spiritual struggle for the transformation of the heart, especially degrading the fasts of the Orthodox Church and discouraging people from observing the fasts.

One of the greatest forces in de-Christianising cultured and educated society is one of the major focuses of fundamentalist political activism. A primary thrust of this activism is a war against modern science. This war, which has been joined by some Orthodox clergy, undermines the Christian witness concerning authentic social problems. Even in these valid and urgent social issues, arguments are offered from a moralistic, ideological system rather than from some reasonable Christian perspective. This has driven many people to question the entire Christian message. It has helped to undermine our objections to open abortion and our efforts to preserve marriage and encourage young couples to make a firm commitment in marriage rather than simply living together. In part, this is because dead moralism speaks in terms of absolute "black and white," and fails to relate its version of morality to the reality of life and to authentic spiritual struggle. It is perfectly obvious to any thoughtful observer that there is no such thing as absolute "black and white" in the human condition; everything should be seen rather in shades of grey. Everyone is in transit; none of us has yet arrived at the destination to which Christ has called us. Moreover, morality cannot successfully be taught in overly simplistic concrete terms of "good and bad." We must give meaning to morality and teach it in terms of its actual ramifications in the life of society and of the individual. Constantly asserting morality in terms of "God will do something terrible to you if you do not do as we tell you to do" is not only ineffective, but it holds God up to derision. Moral law is not simply some arbitrary preference on the part of God; true morality is given to protect us from immediate negative consequences in this present life, and to make civilised society possible. God has given us moral instruction as an act of love and concern for our well being, not simply as an expression of divine fetishes and pique, as it is so often taught.

I am certain that this is a "hard saying" (John 6:60) for many, but I respectfully ask that you open your minds and think about it seriously and with prayer, because we have far too many scholastic moralists in the Orthodox Church who are also destroying the Christian faith in the

minds of educated and cultured young people. In every conversation I have had with students who are Evangelical Protestants, both in their own institutions and in civil universities, a number of them will always remark that the Christian teaching they have received leaves them with nothing but a heavy burden of guilt with no way to work it out, and that attempts are made to cover over this darkness with shallow, light-minded hymnology, various entertainments and trance inducing emotionalism (which is an invitation to delusion) in place of authentic worship. This is, as I mentioned, a common story that we hear from the thousands of converts from Evangelicalism to Orthodoxy in both Canada and America.

Moralism is a kind of religiosity which seeks to label and condemn external behaviour. It demands an abandonment of what it has labelled "bad," without a deep analysis of its roots and causes and without offering a constructive programme of spiritual struggle. What it almost always accomplishes is merely to drive the behaviour into hidden fulfilment. It often hides real wickedness under a cloak of religiosity and consistently confirms our dictum that moral outrage is a form of involuntary confession. Just as patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, so moralism is the last refuge of the corrupt and devious man.

This same emotionalistic, but dry and lifeless, scholastic moralism is a cancer in many places in the Orthodox Church as well. We need to speak about this at some length on an occasion when there is time to do so. For the moment, let us allow St. John Chrysostom to speak to us with a brief word of instruction. "It is of no avail to hold right doctrine but neglect life; nor does it contribute to our salvation to gain virtue but neglect true doctrine."

## **B. Fundamentalism**

*Henceforth I spread confident wings to space:*

*I fear no barrier of crystal or of glass:*

*I cleave the heavens and soar to the infinite.*

*(Giordano Bruno, 1591)*

The moralism I have just described is a part of all the fundamentalisms in the world: Christian, Islamic, philosophical, political: all of them have some form of dry, dead moralism that they put forth as part of their *raison d'être*. The other kind of fundamentalism we need to address here is the bible-literalism aspect of it. We have touched upon it briefly above. When fundamentalist Christians insist on absolute literalism in biblical interpretation, they make atheism inevitable among a substantial portion of educated and cultured people. At the root of this travesty is the demand that people must believe things that have clearly been proved false in or-

der to be “good Christians.” Fundamentalist Christians who insist that we must believe that dinosaurs and humans existed at the same time, or that the earth, even the universe, are no more than 10,000 years old, and that no form of evolution took place in God’s plan and direction of creation: these people and their ideology are the real force behind the growth of atheism in our society. Indeed, fundamentalist Christians are the foremost cause and moving force behind the de-Christianisation of Western Society, and they will be the primary cause for this same de-Christianisation in Orthodox Christian societies as well. Not only do they teach that Christ died to save us from God (rather than the Orthodox Christian doctrine of redemption from the power of death and bondage to Satan, and theosis), but they demand that we must choose between God and truth, but cannot have both.

Fundamentalism can thrive only in an atmosphere and culture of ignorance. In America today, we see the tragic spectacle of fundamentalists forming political movements in an attempt to force public schools to stop teaching modern science and physics because it contradicts their religious ideology and egoistic models of reality. Yet, I have met thousands of deeply believing and faithful highly educated young people whose faith has not been shaken at all by the discovery that dinosaurs were extinct millions of years before humans appeared, that the earth is four billion years old, that the time frame and chronology of the first few chapters in Genesis is not literally accurate, and that there is irrefutable evidence of some form of evolution taking place as God’s eternal will and plan has unfolded in our universe. These young people have a vital, living faith in God and in Jesus Christ, while fundamentalists actually do not have faith but can only take refuge in their lifeless ideology, which is racing toward an empty *cul de sac*. It is a catastrophe when people think in terms of “absolutes,” especially when they think they possess “absolute truth,” or absolute reality. For one thing, if you think that way, you become incapable of growth, development or even of adventure. For another, you will be inclined to persecute other people, never realising that you yourself have become an emotional, intellectual and moral cripple.

Truth is never harmed by reality. Falsehood and error can never substantiate the truth of the Gospel. While our fundamentalists are busy creating conflicts where none actually exist and raising doubts in young people where none need be found, they appear unaware that faith is ultimately a matter of orientation rather than of ideological indoctrination with false information. This is why so many believing, educated people are not the least bit troubled by the ideas of modern science, and their belief

in God and their profound faith in Jesus Christ are sure and deeply founded. This is because they have a living faith in God, rather than a crippled dependency on an ideology that passes for faith.

Among the other tragedies of literalist fundamentalists, is the fact that so much of the actual meaning of the Creation Narrative in the Bible is lost to them. They are so busy arguing for the literal, scientific accuracy of their own interpretation of the narrative that they completely neglect the rich and powerful spiritual meaning of the narrative, a message and meaning which cultured and educated people can appreciate and accept, and come to have faith in.

Just as truth is never harmed by reality, so truth can never be served by a lie.

## 2. Interaction and Education

*It is of no avail to hold right doctrine but neglect life; nor does it contribute to our salvation to gain virtue but neglect true doctrine. (St. John Chrysostom)*

This brings me to the subject of clergy interaction and Christian education, and particularly the education of seminarians who are going to be the priests, ministers and teachers in the Christian world.

### A. Clergy Interaction

When I speak of the failure of many priests and bishops to engage themselves with the people, the world and the great civil dialogue, I am not speaking specifically about “giving answers.” Later in this paper I will address the matter of clergy continuing to educate themselves so they can give “meaningful and convincing answers.” I am not speaking particularly about the priest as “a giver of answers,” however, and I want to frame this part of our discussion in another way. “Answers” are like giving sound-bits or offering what we call “pop-ups” on the computer monitor, while “engaging” seekers in the meaningful questions in their lives is an act of spiritually and conversationally walking with them in this life, leading them and, when necessary, commending them to others who can lead them into the landscape of meaning and the sources of meaning that is the lifelong work of Christian formation and dialogue. What I wish we could expect from clergy is that they have a grip on the important questions of life. Only this could enable them to open up the conversation with their flocks, especially the youth, bringing together the particular currents of our contemporary life (personally, socially and culturally). Only in this way can they frame these pressing questions and express how the landscape of the Church Tradition provides us with context, sign-posts, sensibilities and teaching so we can think clearly and deeply about our

life and the life of the world. Only by fully understanding this connection between the Sacred Tradition and the real life of the world can one become illumined and speak with wisdom about the authentic life of people in the world— not with ideology, but with real knowledge and wisdom. Truth opens our eyes, makes our hearts elastic and makes it possible for us, the clergy, to speak healing words rather than engendering emotional and moral bondage.

The lack of meaningful interaction with the faithful outside of the liturgical services is a serious problem. It leaves people to seek outside the faith for answers and guidance in many pressing questions. Some will turn to superstitions, others to non-Christian sources, most to the New Age Movement. It is true that many of our priests have too narrow an education to be able to frame discussions and offer guidance in ways that are meaningful and useful to the more educated young people of our era, or to cultured older people. In fact, this does not matter much when the priest is open, warm and loving in his interactions with his flock, so long as he does not attempt to answer questions that he is not equipped to answer. The sincere care and love that the priest or bishop gives to his people is actually more powerful than any ability he may have to dialogue and answer broader questions.

The clergy are not called upon to be oracles, experts with all the answers. None of us, clergy or laity, are called to be ultimate experts. We are called to engage the world and the culture around us without flinching, seeking what is in the heart, not just what is said. We are called upon to learn to understand the gravity of the enquiries placed before us and cultivate for ourselves a refined way of asking important questions. Then we are, to the extent that we are able, to open up the Gospel and Tradition as landscapes of meaning that help us learn how to engage the spiritual longing coming to greet us in the questions and enquiries we encounter. We must do this without fear and prejudice, taking delight in the opening up of the person with whom we are talking and his or her desire for knowledge.

However, all the love and care that a person may have by nature cannot offset the damage that can be done by the clergyman who does not acknowledge his own limitations and understand the necessity of sometimes referring people to other professions.

## **B. Teaching and Education**

### **(1) An approach to teaching philosophy**

We need to carefully re-examine our seminary programmes. Let us ask ourselves if perhaps too much time

is spent teaching Western philosophy, and too little time is spent on in depth study of the holy fathers. It is important to examine philosophy, but actually, most of the noted philosophers are utterly irrelevant to anything taking place in the world around us. I understand the value of teaching philosophy when it is taught as an engagement in the great human dialogue, and for the purpose of a development of critical thinking among the students. When one teaches these various philosophers in place of contemporary studies, however, or teaches them in the same context as the holy fathers, then we are actually crippling these future clergy in the kind of pastoral impact they need to have on contemporary educated and cultured people— particularly the younger generation. Too often, when patristic studies are tied together with philosophy, we end up corrupting the dynamic spiritual teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, St. Symeon the New Theologian and other of the great holy fathers, with neo-Platonism or Aristotelian rationalism.

The theories of epistemology, general learning, the way the brain and mind function, etc., which have been advanced by the philosophers have been disproved by medical and scientific research, and far more attention needs to be paid to the more accurate discoveries of modern science. In the end, we corrupt the grid through which theology should be understood. We teach students how non-Orthodox thought developed, but do not teach them the development of Orthodox Christian thought. We teach them Hellenistic, Latin and German rationalism, but do not teach them about the existential encounter with mystery that constitutes the source of true Orthodox Christian theology.

Modern Western philosophy was developed by non-Orthodox theorists, many of them deist thinkers. Moreover, it was all done within the grid, and the vocabulary, of medieval scholasticism, which has the very opposite texture to Orthodox Christian theology. This has proved to be, as Canadian philosopher David J. Goa phrases it, “a dead-end but we must realise that it is an important dead-end that continues to reverberate in our public culture; and thus it must be understood.” The question is how and in what context we can understand it. When it is taught as a continuing tradition of learning it simply continues the historic problems and errors which permeate the Scholastic system— that is, the radical break from the Orthodox Christian holy fathers and the living Tradition of the faith. It informs religion with merely human rationalistic traditions rather than the living Tradition of the faith which Apostle Paul enjoined us to hold fast to. The tragedy of Western philosophical theology is not that they read Plato and Aristotle but that they did not read the Church fathers in their own context. Cer-

tainly they have not read Plato and Aristotle in the way that the holy fathers read them, "turning them on their heads [giving radically different meanings to the words and concepts which they expressed] while using their vocabulary to make sense of the world and of the human nature." To read these great philosophers in any other context is to advance the cause of anti-Christian culture. I offer as a cautionary note that one of the responses to this misreading is that philosophical constraint was jettisoned in the development of a curious kind of scientism, which has been ushered in to replace it. And with all this, we still fail to read the Church fathers and fail once more to turn the philosophers' quest for meaning around, reverse it, turn it upside down and thus recover the life of the world.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle did establish the groundwork for laying superstition to rest but their disciples ushered superstition in by the back door as we know so well from the works of Plotinus, Origen and others.

I suggest that we need a short course included in our philosophy classes, in Western thought that would unveil this foundational disease and map its patterns through the Reformation thinkers, through Kant to the present day. But here is the issue. Philosophy must be studied but not as it is done in many seminaries where the first academic degree is in philosophy. We must begin with the Gospels and the fathers and, having laid this proper foundation, we would then be able to engage the Western philosophical tradition for what it is: an enormous lost weekend shaping the mind of the modern world through the patterns of heretical dualism and distorted dialectical thinking.

## **(2) Approaching life sciences**

What is perhaps more important to our present era is that in seminaries, all dry, scholastic philosophy classes should be limited and more emphasis placed on life sciences, basic physics and above all, on the holy and God-bearing fathers. We lose credibility with educated people when we are unable to engage in even the most basic and simple conversations that include these subjects, or when we respond to them with some sort of fundamentalism or condescension. In February of this year, I was engaged with a group of university students during the agape at St. Nicholas Parish near Vancouver. Over the agape meal, one of them wanted to discuss the pros and cons of cosmic string theory. The discussion lasted for over an hour and was quite intense. Through it, these students increased in their sense of security in the Orthodox Christian faith. Naturally, no one expects every clergyman to be able to engage in that type of discussion, but one should expect the clergy not to respond to

it with some kind of condescension, fear or retreat. It is far more effective to say honestly, "I am not versed in that subject, so I cannot discuss it adequately." Moreover, when young people in our area raise such issues, many of the Orthodox clergy, and a few Protestants ministers recommend that these people come to our monastery for such discussions because we can provide someone from among the clergy who can discuss it with them. Giving modern seminarians a basic vocabulary in physics and life sciences is a great help. It is also advisable that there be enough interaction among the clergy themselves so that they know which one to refer people to for more specialized questions. For example, we have a Romanian priest in Vancouver who is a neurobiologist. As you all are aware, however, sometimes petty jealousy and envy prevent this. Some priests in our era have a feeling of "proprietorship" over their parishioners and, as Patriarch Alexei of Moscow recently pointed out, this sometimes goes so far as to include cultish control and manipulation of the people by a priest or bishop. This tragedy, too, is part of the stream of forces that are helping to de-Christianize our society.

## **C. Education in General**

Teaching students "by rote" or mere memorization, simply reading to them or lecturing at them is not education; it is sheer indoctrination, the creating of ideologies, not the forming of sound knowledge and vital faith. Education involves interaction and dialogue; the formation of the ability for critical thinking and reasoning. It sometimes involves a professor frankly and honestly admitting that he or she is not able to give a satisfactory or meaningful answer to a question and suggesting where a student might go to find that answer. A professor who seeks to present himself as an oracle rather than a human teacher is quite unconvincing and soon loses the trust of his or her students.

We truly need to give time in our seminaries and schools to subjects that will equip our seminarians to engage in meaningful dialogue with the contemporary world. We can do this without puffing them up so that they cannot also minister to less educated and simpler people. To the extent that we do spend time in the study of the philosophers, we need to make the subjects more vital than is usually the case. The study of philosophy should always be viewed as participation in the great human dialogue, the unfolding of the process of critical thinking and the mastering of organised and systematic thought. In this respect, we should be giving as much attention and credence to non-Western philosophers as to Western ones.

Let us also remember that modern science developed out of the philosophical process, and moved beyond the

speculations of philosophy to testable and provable discoveries. The speculations of antique philosophers about the way the human brain works, the way we learn and about knowledge (epistemology) is no substitute for teaching the truth about these subjects. The reality about the way the brain operates, thinks and learns is to be gained from hard science, not from philosophers. The study of the philosophers, when not offset by a careful study of the holy fathers also leads to heretical thinking. For example, Plato and most of the Western philosophers were dualists, whereas almost all of the holy fathers make a point of refuting dualism and condemning it as heresy. Emanuel Kant, although he was a dry, scholastic moralist, taught that true morality is attained without resort to God, and he negated altogether the need for a life in Christ.

I would like to add that when professors and teachers sit on a stage, behind a table and talk down to the students, they appear like petty bureaucrats or automated statues. One can hardly make a class an exciting learning experience with any real relevance while teaching in this medieval manner. It is especially crippling and empty when the professor does not engage in dialogue with the students and encourage their critical thinking. Before the Soviet revolution, Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky of Russia had warned leaders in the Russian educational system that if they did not teach the students active critical thinking, the students would all end up as socialists. They would not be able to think critically about the promises and egalitarian philosophy of socialism and many would (and did) accept it uncritically. He proved to be correct. We, in our time, if we do not teach critical thinking and have active dialogue with our students, will drive some students away from the Church, and equip our seminarians to help de-Christianize our society when they become clergymen.

Philosophy and all the most brilliant philosophers put together have never, and could never give any real meaning to life, to the world, to the universe. Nor have they any capacity to form a convincing goal for life or for the world itself. The *raison d'être*, the goal, the destiny of life of mankind and of the world lies outside this world. It can be approached through worship and prayer, but not by philosophy and worldly knowledge. But, and I wish to stress this strongly, this in no way negates the quest for knowledge and understanding in this world by means outside the Church and the faith. Our task is to participate in this quest for knowledge in the world without condescension or condemnation, and add to it the final conclusions, opening the door to ultimate meaning and creating a world of meaning that ultimately fulfills the worldly knowledge gained through science and thought.

What we have to add to the knowledge gained in the world is the knowledge of God and the pursuit of a life in Jesus Christ.

### 3. The Divine Services; Hyperclericalism

*"The offering of thanksgiving again is common: for neither doth he give thanks alone, but also all the people. For having first heard their voices, when they assent that it is 'meet and right' to do so, then he begins the Eucharist." (St John Chrysostom, Homily 18, on 2nd Corinthians, 4th century.)*

*"When all make their profession of the divine faith together, they anticipate the mystical Eucharist...In making that thanksgiving, the worthy confirm their gratitude for God's kindness, having no other way to reciprocate God's infinite blessings." (St Maximos the Confessor, The Mystagogia, 34:31 7th century.)*

*"The priest says: 'Let us give thanks unto the Lord.' The people affirm: 'It is meet and right' to send up hymns of thanksgiving." (St Germanos of Constantinople, Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, 41. 8th century.)*

*"The celebrant addresses to God this act of thanksgiving: 'Let us give thanks unto the Lord.' The faithful give their consent, saying, 'It is meet and right'." (Nicholas Kavasilas, Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, Ch.26. 14th century.)*

"Ah, the power and prejudice of custom," laments St. John Chrysostom in his homily condemning the practice of not receiving Communion every Sunday. It is the power of custom rather than the Sacred Tradition of the Church that holds many of our Church leaders under its sway. Part of this stifling custom is based in a certain elitism and arrogance of our clergy. Whatever its basis, the power of custom prevents us from making adjustments and changes to practices in the Church, which are necessary in order to address and hold the faithful in the Church in the long term. We are not talking about some sort of "renovationism," or altering of Sacred Tradition and liturgical integrity. We are indicating a need to reassess various customs that may in themselves contradict the essence of liturgical worship. The continued exclusion of the faithful from a full participation in the divine services is a problem that all of us must come to grips with sooner or later. In America and Canada, this has gone so far that we find some priests and hierarchs even discouraging the faithful from keeping the canonical fasts of the Church. A more immediate problem is that the faithful are not permitted in many places to join the singing of the responses in the divine services, when in fact, we should be encouraging them to do so. In the Greek Church in Canada and America, the bishops have

introduced, sometimes by force, organs and pianos into the churches. Often, the antiphons are replaced by organ recital music, but the faithful still do not participate in singing or chanting in what is left of the Liturgy. Apostle Peter refers to the faithful as a "royal priesthood," and the word "laity" is an abbreviation of the Greek "laos to theou" "the people of God." How is it that we clergy are so enamoured of ourselves, so arrogant, that we desire to exclude the "people of God" from participation in the services as much as possible, primarily in order to uphold our own exaggerated high opinion of ourselves?

This problem includes not only the failure to encourage the faithful to join the singing of the Divine Liturgy (and "liturgy" is understood in the Orthodox Church as "the work of the people"), but also our failure to encourage regular and frequent Communion of the Holy Mysteries. Stop and think about it without the prejudice of custom for a moment. The obnoxious and meaningless custom of opening and closing the royal doors and curtains during the Divine Liturgy is based on nothing else except the rank of the clergyman serving that day. We once read in the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate of a priest in Moscow who had been given, as an award, the right to serve the first part of the Liturgy with the curtain half open. Meanwhile, it is likely that very few of the faithful were approaching for Communion. The only argument I have ever heard for allowing priests of different rank to have the doors and curtains open for different portions of the Liturgy was that "it teaches the lower ranking clergy humility!"

As David Goa has stated, "The Liturgy is the highest form of the human story, and its most concrete expression."<sup>(3)</sup> The purpose of the Divine Liturgy is to bring the faithful to Holy Communion, not to teach some clergy humility and others pride! Whatever the origins of the custom of some clergy opening and closing the doors and curtains at differing times, depending upon rank and privilege, it is distracting and forms just another way of closing the faithful out of full participation in the Liturgy. In spite of unclever sophisms, no one has ever proposed an explanation of this custom that has the slightest real meaning. Meanwhile, the faithful are seldom if ever taught the actual meaning of the actions and words which they see and hear during the Liturgy. How, then, do we expect educated and cultured younger generations to continue to attend the divine services? Protestantism at least offers participation in the services, as well as a great deal of shallow and empty entertainment; but this shallow entertainment is a big attraction for the "television generation."

When we cling so fervently to meaningless customs based in vanity and self-importance, it ultimately be-

comes more difficult for us to hold fast to those things which do have meaning and which are needful.

The greatest thing we can offer to the world and culture in which we live is our common prayer with that great cloud of witnesses with whom we pray in the Divine Liturgy. Our prayer together, our common worship "with one heart and one mind" is our primary spiritual offering and work for the life of the world. It is our common work, not the work of the clergy and the choir or chanter: it is the work of God's people together with the saints and angels.

#### 4. Epilogue

Brethren, there would be nothing more unjust than our faith if it were only the sum of demonstrations which are wise and intellectual and abounding in words, for in that case simple people would remain without the acquisition of faith. (Saint Gregory of Nyssa).

There is a danger in reading the gifts of the secular simply as the loss of church power. While the secular is indeed a loss of religious power (and well it ought to be), the secular is a gift from the Christian tradition to both the life of the world and the life of the Church. To the Church, it provides the freedom from the corruption of worldly power so that it can regain authentic spiritual authority. To the world, it gives the freedom necessary to claim the Gospel and accept willingly its pathway to freedom and fullness of life. Moreover, to the Church, the secular makes it possible for it to re-establish its vocation as "leaven" so that the faithful may once more minister on all the margins present in the lives of people and in civil life. We have nothing to fear from an emerging secular society since "perfect love casts out fear."

What it does require of us is a deep engagement, through our faith formation, in the suffering of the world. It does require of us that we live out our vocation modelled by the Holy Theotokos to be birth-givers of Divine love in the world and to do so without constraint, particularly the constraints that arise when the Church shares power with the State or sees itself as a power broker within society. The Christian Church is never going to hold such a position again in society, but we should not feel threatened by this; rather we should feel challenged to rise to and meet the new situation head on. We need to move into a post-Christian age with confidence, the confidence that comes from the recovery of the holy tradition and learning its sources and deepening the stance it gives us as the people of God instead of the arrogant stance shaped by the idea of being a people of the "dominant Christian culture" with all its requirements for self-interest and institutional interests, and the possibility of using the civil authority as a means

to persecute others. Our gift is to witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not to govern the world or dictate the behaviour of others. Our gift is to join that great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us and seek to nurture the world, society and culture, and offer the healing of Christ's words and presence to a world which we love and cherish, not one which we consider to be an enemy or adversary.

If we can accomplish this, then we may glimpse the energy of creation with an increased capacity to love God and minister in co-suffering love to His creation. We may then be able to heal the wounds of perception, the broken images of life which skew our regard for creation and for each other. Reality does not consist in abstract, disembodied ideas, but in that which we experience and the people whom we encounter. What we ultimately experience is that creation is good, even if man often does bad things with it, and that we, if we pursue the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, may serve in some small way to help in the healing of our society and of the humanity around us, so dearly loved by God. Only then can we ever hope to turn back the tide of the de-Christianisation of culture and society.

*Let everyone remember that the destiny of mankind is incomparable. Let him above all never forget that the divine image is in him, and in him alone, and that he is free to disregard it, to obliterate it, or to come closer to God by demonstrating his eagerness to work with Him and for Him. (LeComte Du Nouy, 1947).*

Archbishop Lazar Puhalo is a retired hierarch of the Orthodox Church in America. He is Abbott of New Ostrog Monastery in Dewdney, British Columbia, Canada. This paper was written for a symposium in Romania.

## **Comment added by a reader at the website**

This piece is a real gem of an essay! It addresses some things that have bothered me in the Orthodox church I now attend since I started going to services there, namely, the pastor's almost incredible ignorance of "how things are" in the modern world and the generally anti-modern, anti-democratic, anti-science attitudes which he clearly displays in his frequent rants both in and out of the pulpit!

While I respect the man's overall decency and concern for people, I have also come to realize that I would not bring my 11-year-old niece to this church because I would not want any child for whom I have a responsibility to be taught some of the things that are preached here!

I would NOT want any child in my care to be taught creationism, for instance, or this pastor's garbled understanding of Darwin's theories. Seriously entertaining beliefs that have been almost universally discredited by the scientific community and most educated people would close a lot of career doors to her, not to mention making her a laughing stock at school!

I would NOT want any female child told that she can't serve at the altar simply because she is female, or that she must defer to males in certain other matters: I believe such ideas are wrong, unchristian, and derive from a misreading and misunderstanding of the scriptural texts resulting from failure to see them in their proper cultural context. I know too many women, particularly young university women, who reject and even despise Christianity because they see it as a "men's club." Or because they see Christianity as merely a vestige of primitivism and very unhealthy "antique" attitudes toward sexuality— an anachronism that has nothing of value to offer them for their own lives.

I would NOT want any child to pick up the prejudices and anti-ecumenical attitudes I frequently hear directed against other Christian denominations and other faith communities. In North America and all the Western nations, populations have become very diverse. We today live and work with all sorts of people. In most situations, our differences are an asset because they provide a variety of perspectives and "takes" on problem solving. I would want children to learn early to appreciate individual and cultural differences and to develop the ability to see colleagues' as sharing the common ground of humanity. I would NOT want any child to develop the "us-and-them" attitudes that have proven so disastrous in many societies throughout history.

Christianity still has much to offer this world and individuals but it must be encountered in ways that make sense to modern, educated, scientifically sophisticated people. I have met a number of clergy in the Orthodox church who are themselves still close to their Greek, Balkan, Russian or Eastern European roots. Much of what they preach comes across as "granny tales," folk superstition from another time and place. Mature, worldly parishioners who are not recent immigrants from any of the above-named cultures no doubt shrug off this quaint nonsense. There's a real gap, I have discovered, between much of what the priest preaches and what many adults in the congregation have privately told me they believe. But there are some very different considerations when it comes to bringing an impressionable child into the church.

This is an aspect of orthodoxy I wish were otherwise. But things change slowly. Until all clergy and the church's hierarchy realizes that most of the people who attend services are NOT babushkas or recently emigrated peasants from the former Communist bloc, there will continue to be a "disconnect" between some aspects of the church's traditional positions and the real-world lives of its increasingly better educated laity, especially those who are of Western, rather than Eastern, derivation and citizenship. The exotica that attracts some, and the focus on liturgy that attracted me and probably many others, will not likely be a strong enough attraction to hold us if we become concerned about the negative attitudes or erroneous information our children may be learning in Sunday School!

I was delighted to see these issues addressed here by Archbishop Puhalo.

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Grazingbear