

Essays and Notes

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Dear Friends,

Father Frank Miloro graciously gave us permission to use “A Holy Kiss” the sermon he preached last September at St. Michael’s Church, Binghamton, NY during the American Carpatho Russian Youth Convention. It speaks of the safe and healthy relationships that should and thankfully most often do characterize the Church. **Mother Raphaela** thanks everyone who encouraged her to keep going with our second article, “Spiritual Parenthood in the Church.” She says it is the most difficult essay she has ever had to write and she apologizes in advance if it is also difficult to read.

We follow this with a brief review of *The Eucharist*, the book **Father Alexander Schmemmann** wrote as his last gift to all of us who are his spiritual children.

A picture essay on the ongoing life of our monastery starts on page 18. Finally, we feature listings of our catalog items, including our best-selling, *The Kathisma Psalter and Nine Canticles*. We carry all of our items in our online catalog found at www.holymyrrbearers.com. We hope those of you without internet access will be inspired to phone us or look us up, perhaps at a friend’s computer or at your local library. Since a printed catalog is just too costly for our budget right now, if you would rather not order by credit card, just mail us a check or money order.

We are most grateful to the friends who have underwritten the printing and mailing of this issue of our small magazine. We are also grateful to all of you who continue to support us with donations, and especially pledges.

As we enjoy the quiet days of summer when many individuals and families take advantage of our guest house for personal retreats and pilgrimages, we also look forward to our **Fall Pilgrimage**, the **second Saturday in October** which we set aside each year for extra services and fellowship. Some details of scheduling and local accommodations are on the facing page – we hope to see you then!

With love in Christ,
The Mothers and Sisters

Spiritual Parenthood in the Church Family: An Essay on Power and Maturity

I write this essay to share my belief that a responsible model for spiritual parenthood exists in the Church and that it can be replicated to the glory of God and for the building of His Kingdom even here on earth.

I begin with St. Paul who spoke strongly about parenthood. He looked to Christ for his authority, knowing that Christ in turn looked to His Father. We learn from St. Paul that we may imitate him as he imitated Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, 2 Timothy 1:13); that parents are to provide for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14); that those few who “are called father” in the Church (1 Corinthians 4:15), who are entrusted with authority and responsibility, are to “become all things for all men” and be ready to give the same witness and example as their Lord (1 Corinthians 9: 19-22), when necessary laying down their lives for those men, women and children who have become part of their flock (John 10:15, 15:13).

There have been many, many mature Christians, including contemporary saints and martyrs who continue to give their lives for Christ throughout the world. The

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first Russian missionaries to America, for example, took St. Paul’s vision of parenthood to heart, translating the Scriptures and the liturgy into the language the people could understand, and later, when the Church moved beyond Alaska, insisting that missionary clergy indeed “become all things for all men,” dressing like other American clergy by wearing clerical suits rather than robes and, again following St. Paul, by having their hair cut short (1 Corinthians 11:14, 14:11). The new-martyr Elizabeth, grand duchess of Russia, exercised great spiritual motherhood on the eve of the Russian Revolution, fighting for the right to gather and lead a group of women deaconesses who in turn cared for the afflicted, the destitute, the poor and the homeless throughout the city of Moscow.

The last half of this essay speaks of my own experience of positive parenting and the ways this parenting is being exercised in the Church. Sadly however, I now move to the abuse of parenting: I say sadly first of all because I have come to realize how hard it can be for any of us, clergy or lay, together members of Christ’s Body the Church, to have the eyes to see and take seriously the abuse of power that exists within our own portions of Christ’s Vineyard. I see that we can be unaware of the

sometimes astonishing lack of maturity that such abuse implies in those entrusted with shepherding souls of infinite value, and that all of us at times will misunderstand our own need to be adult children and healthy spiritual parents.

The real disease is dysfunctional spiritual parenthood.

My sadness comes also because I know that some of God's people may prefer not to learn

about this aspect of our Church life or may be disillusioned to learn that some spiritual parents commit serious sins and continue to function in the Church. The fact of such betrayal is not such a disillusioning shock, however, if we remember Christ's betrayal by Judas, his own hand-picked disciple. We are to leave both judgment and salvation in the hand of God.

Some wounds heal best when they are left alone. Many of us with spiritual accountability in the Church today however, both men and women, have come to believe that other wounds are not superficial, but deep and rotting ones that will find healing only as they are exposed, lanced and cleansed.

I write now of an event that directly sparked this essay. During a women's retreat, I was a bit puzzled when I was asked if I would field anonymous written questions from the floor. To my dismay, a surprising and alarming number of the notes asked what a person should do when their unnamed spiritual father, who in one case might be a parish priest, in another a monk, in another an abbot, had sexually abused them. While I know that such allegations can be false, other women, visitors to our monastery, have asked me this question before. Especially when the question is asked in an honest attempt by the person to get on with her life rather than to expose her abuser, I find myself unwilling to doubt her. Forgiveness and redemption always remain the goal for Christians. Nevertheless, for the abuser, these are predicated on the acknowledgment of sin and on repentance. I will continue to honor the confidentiality of any such conversations and to trust that as the climate of our Church life becomes healthier, at least some of those who have been abused will be given the support they need to confront the perpetrators in safety.

My initial response to the notes at that retreat was to say that if they had been sexually abused by a monastic or member of the clergy, they should go to their bishop. One after another, white-faced women stood up and replied that they did and that the bishop either blew them off or told them that being raped was their fault. I was aghast and replied very seriously that if they have tried and been unsuccessful in finding help through their Church administration, they should call their local crisis center.

Incest, I believe, is the most damaging form of rape because it violates trust between a parent and child, the most basic of human bonds. And what is true in biological families is even more true in the spiritual family of the Church.

That retreat has led me gradually to the realization, however, that horrific as it is, sexual abuse in the Church is only a symptom. The real disease is dysfunctional spiritual parenthood. A related symptom, just as damaging in its own way, is denial about the use and the abuse of power.

There are those who for whatever reason have avoided growing up; who don't understand the ramifications of being adult parents both in their families and in the Church. I know of men and women with spiritual authority, who may avoid gross physical sins and yet, for example, make free use of Church funds or take on themselves decisions that are meant rather to be made by bishops together with their clergy in the context of their diocesan family – serious decisions that fracture the Body of Christ, such as questions about rebaptism and proper conjugal relations. I have heard of some who threaten their spiritual children with excommunication or other punishment if they expose the teaching or actions of their “spiritual parents.”

While this dysfunction might reflect poorly on parishes in America, giving the impression that American Orthodox Christians are not mature; that the Church in this country is not really anything other than a childish diaspora, it has been my experience that both “New World” and also “Old World” clergy have succumbed to models of poor spiritual parenthood by concentrating on the husk rather than on the living kernel of the Christian faith.

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This husk, these externals, may include hunger for ecclesial authority, obsession with the externals of Church behavior; concentration upon tradition, history and the Church canons – with disregard for the Gospel message of the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus Christ, St. Paul, and other early Christian disciples. Most damaging to the Church is the predilection by “spiritual parents” to cover up, conceal, and leave unpunished (and therefore unresolved) the sins of those in positions of Church authority. More horrific still is the damage caused to the Church when spiritual parents cannot hold accountable and correct others in positions of spiritual authority with the consequences of their deeds and behavior because of threats of retaliation and blackmail.

Indeed, in an environment where cover-ups, secrecy and an unwillingness to share or delegate authority becomes normative, those who are healthy are unwilling to take part in the structures of authority. They see that those who would become their peers are neither healthy nor trustworthy and further are unwilling to accept the change and growth that are necessary for health. It seems to me that when the Church operates in this manner, she becomes simply another human organization caught in a downward spiral. Functional people stay away from such a

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culture, sometimes even as members of a congregation or monastic community, seeking instead to associate with organizations requiring trust, delegation and accountability at every level from every person. As a result, we may find whole

areas today in the life of the Church where she no longer recognizes herself as the Body of Christ; where the clerical ranks can no longer serve rightly and with divine power as leaders and teachers of Christ's royal priesthood, called together with all the men and women of the Church to give witness with their very lives to the saving and redeeming works of His death and resurrection – before the world and, and as we learn also from St. Paul, the entire creation (cf. Romans 8:19-23).

I have found that some sharp discussions about both godly and dysfunctional parenthood are based on the differences in perception between men and women, sometimes giving the appearance of clerical-lay dichotomy. A book titled *The Male Factor*, written for the workplace by Shaunti Feldhahn, helped me to understand this. Feldhahn did her homework for this book with the help of a large number of people, researching scientific specifics about topics I had learned of through general reading elsewhere. She writes of the differing hormones generated in the womb as a fetus develops, which in turn create differences in the structures of male and female brains. With these differences on a spectrum, some men and women being at the respective far ends and others so close together that they can cross over, we are indeed “hard-wired” to think differently.

Feldhahn explains that men are capable of in-depth concentration on one task, whether that task be focusing on a mastodon hunt to bring meat to their starving village or on the warehouse inventory sales needed to keep their job. While they can focus as well on family, they will tend to do

that when they can close down their attention to work. Because most men feel instinctively that they should be focused on their task in order to be good providers for their mates and their families, they tend not to be happy on the job with the distractions that reminders of family and social life bring. Most men cannot focus simultaneously on both, leading a female who dresses literally in an attractive way to be puzzled by the annoyance or even outright anger she generates at the work place – and I would add, at church during worship or liturgy, which by definition is a form of work. (I will note here Shaunti Feldhahn’s studies done for the corporate workplace which demonstrate that there are forms of dress for women which are contemporary and becoming, yet do not attract that sort of response.)

Women, on the other hand, are usually best at multi-tasking. While men often believe we have a feather-brained approach to life, juggling so many different interests and responsibilities at one time that from their perspective no one can really be able to do a good job, this is in fact how most women function at their best. We can go crazy if we don’t have our knitting on our desk ready to pick up at a moment’s notice; we can do some of our best work typing, writing etc. while listening seriously to a child’s complaints.

We women are also very prone to ask the “Why?” questions. We can listen to children – and our friends – when they come to us with, “Why did God make butterflies have to start out as caterpillars?” “Why are you so mean?” “Why did you put all the stuff for recycling in the kitchen right now when you know we’re getting ready for that OCF group to come visit?”

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Almost unanimously, when asked confidentially about the word “Why,” Feldhahn learned from men that it makes them feel as if they are not really being asked for reasons – rather their very person is being attacked; the person asking them “Why” is saying they do not and cannot trust them as persons. It turns out that we women will most probably start a fight when we begin a discussion with a man by asking him: “Why?”

Returning to my topic, I realized that for me in effect to ask a general audience in the Church (which includes men) why some abuses of parenthood are allowed to continue in the Church, is to ask for trouble. Nevertheless, as I have worked on this essay, I have been heartened by the personal support I have received from friends, from both men and women throughout the Church, including hierarchs and other clergy.

I go on now to offer a very brief theological and historical survey to help bridge the differing, gender specific approaches to the subject of parenthood I have experienced, using the most basic, general approach I would hope all Orthodox Christians can share:

Together with Jews and Moslems – indeed together with most non-

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Oriental or New Age religions – we believe in One God. Unlike Jews or Moslems, however, we believe this one God is the Father Almighty, the eternal Parent who expresses his one Essence in the eternal Son, begotten by him with a personal love before all time began.

Our common creedal faith in this

God, who as Father and Son is the model both for parenthood and for its resulting family, was hammered out in the fourth century. St. Basil, who once said that his grandmother Macrina taught him everything he knew, was one of those who worked to express and explain the unexplainable belief of men and women of the first century who had known a man – who had heard him with their ears, seen him with their own eyes, touched him with their own hands – and who could not deny from that experience that he was also their Lord and their God (1 John 1: 1-5). Our creedal belief is further that this experience of theirs was the direct expression of the Holy Spirit of the same Lord and God (Acts 15:28).

In my own experience, I continue to find parental abuse within the Church forced into my consciousness during retreats I am asked to lead throughout North America. I tell those who gather, men and women, both clerical and lay, that I don't have answers to the fact of this abuse, and that answers won't come until the hard questions are asked. I also tell them I don't want to be angry and that I do not in any way minimize the powerful ministry I see of hierarchs and clergy who are mature men in Christ, true fathers in God. Rather than being abusive or neglectful, these men delegate tasks to their adult children and take counsel with those who are affected by their decisions so that the Body of Christ not only functions, but also continues to be built up under their ministry. I tell them I am incredibly grateful for those men who mediate the mercy and love of God to me personally as well as to their people.

At the same time, I am personally most indebted to my spiritual mothers, both in the monastery and in those parishes where I have been blessed to participate. I remind myself and those who listen to me that to be a parent means to be a co-creator with God, who creates each of us to grow into an eternally unique possibility which includes our sex, our

time, our place and our circumstances; that St. Paul tells us nothing in all of creation can come between any one of us and the love of Christ (Romans 8:37-39). Nevertheless, I know that as a child both of God and of my biological and spiritual mothers and fathers, I am given the freedom not to prefer that love of Christ, that I am free to create an illusory reality of my own in place of God's. On judgment day, he has said that he will not condemn me; only I will condemn myself by my own choices; my own abuse of the freedom he has given me.

I have also come to realize that many of us share in a similar, although far from world-wide culture, both inside and outside the Church. Unlike other cultures, here women are increasingly empowered both within families and relationships, in the work place and in parishes. Indeed, we are encouraged to create an environment where men, women and children all have voices. Many of us believe that while there are fallen tendencies in this empowerment, the best of it is inspired by the attitude of both of the New Testament and the early Church. The Lord showed great respect for women (cf. for example Matthew 26:10); He felt a child could be our best example (Matthew 18: 2-4).

It is indeed possible to see in the history of the Church how cultures have been built up from legalistic, canon-obsessed forms of "religion," blatantly contradicting the teachings and example of both our God made Man and His first apostles. Yet we know from both Scripture and tradition that all baptized Christians, hierarchs, clergy, monastics and the lay men, women and children of our parishes, form one Body, functioning organically as Christ's Body on earth, with the power of Christ as fully present in the toe of the Body as in the head, as St. Athanasius so aptly put it in his treatise, *On the Incarnation*¹. We learn as we read these Scriptures and study this tradition that we are to treat our leaders, our fathers and mothers in God and the heads of our churches with respect, not challenging their authority but encouraging them in the holiness and righteousness that alone can lead to its godly exercise. We learn that they in turn are to treat us with respect and love insofar as they desire to be living members of the Body of Christ, not spiritually severed heads.

**...the power of Christ
as fully present in
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Coming from this understanding, I find myself believing with many members of Christ's Body that we have a responsibility to dialogue with our fellow members, with our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters in Christ, in order to experience conciliarity, *sobornost*, as the normal mode

of Church life. This can work well when those of us in authority follow the directives of monastic guides such as St. Benedict who spelled out

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that the abbot (and I would add the abbess or the father or mother, the bishop or priest, etc.) is to do nothing without taking counsel. In monasteries, this assumes a council of the elder members; elsewhere it would mean, for example, the parish council or its equivalent.

St. Benedict is clear in chapters 3 and 64 of his *Rule*, that while the

responsibility of decisions does lie with the abbot, he must, like Moses, delegate wherever he can (*cf.* Deuteronomy 1:12-18). Like Moses, the abbot must learn to recognize responsible people and give them authority, so that while keeping him informed, they make most of the decisions that come up in the daily functioning of a family. These men and women bring delegated matters to the abbot or abbess for a decision only when they find they cannot make such a decision on their own. St. Benedict is explicit, however, that when decisions will substantially affect the life or future of the monastery, the abbot must make them himself, after consulting with every member of the monastery including the newest postulant.

I believe that this principle of delegation is further affirmed in the Gospel story when Christ saw that the Centurion understood the Father had given all authority to Him so that He had only to speak and the servant would be healed (Matthew 8:5-13). Thus the Trinity is the example not only of the ideal family but also of the delegation of authority that allows that family to function.

This approach seems normal and healthy to me, and I have personally known and spoken with hierarchs and clergy who have agreed with me that this is the normal, healthy way for Orthodox Christians to live. Yet as they have begun to travel, I hear of some who have changed, adopting some or all of the attitudes of their peers around the world where cultures have been formed by centuries of non-Christian domination. In some cases, it seems they simply become more comfortable with women who limit their activities to things like sewing and with Christians in general who only show up in Church for Pascha, as long as they contribute to the Church budget.

I know from experience how profoundly alienating it is to witness this attitude change and how damaging it is to the bonds of love that are meant to characterize Christian fellowship. When those who have been friends,

parents and mentors become unapproachable and begin to act on the assumption that they have the right to make decisions affecting the lives of others – our lives – without consulting us, agape fellowship disintegrates. That which is to accompany worship and give ordinary Christians the support and courage literally and figuratively to go out and meet lions in the arena, becomes the superficial, vestigial coffee hour.

And yet here, perhaps, is the key to a place where the Lord can again stand openly with us. However superficial and vestigial Orthodox agape fellowship has become, it does continue to exist as coffee hour throughout the world. I know numbers of parishes from my visits throughout North America where the faithful travel for well over an hour to attend services. Perhaps especially when the only realistic chance to gather is the Eucharistic celebration on the Lord's Day, coffee hour has once again become a true agape.

I have witnessed the forming of true families in large and small parishes when the parish priest, as father of the family, presides over the parish agape as well as over the Eucharistic Assembly. I would even say from what I see, that if a parish is growing, the priest is indeed present at the coffee hour in this way. I see no substitute for his not only blessing the meal, but also entering into normal family conversations, perhaps explaining parts of his sermon to those with questions, bringing up topics that may be important but were not part of that day's liturgical proclamation of the Word and last but not least, with the help of his wife if appropriate, supporting his adult children in their own roles as parents while helping to foster lasting Christian friendships among his parishioners.

**...we get the leaders
we deserve.**

Surrounded by a world that no longer provides guidance or support for social and family norms, ethics or even the basic morality of curbing our animal instincts and passions, I believe the kind of family support that can be given by the priest and by other adults during coffee hour is as necessary as preaching, confession and one-on-one counseling. Where this support is lacking within our corporate Church society, growth in moral, ethical and spiritual maturity is lacking. When the heads of the Body of Christ who can only come from our parishes lack this maturity, how can they lead as disciples of Christ or find those who will journey with them?

For I also see another side to this: I have seen members of parishes and monastics who do not want to grow up, who want to pay their priest to be the one and only "full time" Christian in the church or who want their abbot or abbess to take on all responsibility for them. It is a very

common saying that we get the leaders we deserve. If we as adult children insist that our ecclesiastical parents be the only ones to exercise power, we are guilty of leading them into temptation and feeding the fallen human lust for power. If adults who are not members of the ordained ranks fail as adult children lovingly to hold these heads of the Body of Christ accountable, then we will indeed have parents in the Church who are either absent or abusive.

In a context of spiritual immaturity, monastic guides to obedience such as St. John Climacus would not approve of adults enabling their leaders in the lust for power, even insisting on it in order to shirk their own responsibilities for life decisions. That model of a spiritual family turns parishes and monasteries into cults rather than microcosms of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

In the context of these coffee hours, in retreats and in further discussions on parenthood in the Church, I have been asked again and again if I believe women should be ordained to the priesthood. I answer that in spite of the current failings of some aspects of our clerical, hierarchical Church, I find myself believing in the ordained male priesthood in large part because I believe men and women are very different and that their roles as parents likewise differ. I believe every parish and every family needs a father, not only to lead the parish in its liturgy, which is to say its job of worship, and to be a role model for young men and boys but also to have the single-minded devotion towards God that comes more easily to a man along with that same devotion towards his two main tasks of both fishing for and then tending the gathered faithful of his parish.

A friend pointed out to me when I was discussing this with her, that when men have jobs to do in church, they will show up faithfully. Serving in the altar tends to be much more important for them than it will ever be for most of us women. I think this may be one reason why deaconesses, who traditionally have had the role of spiritual mothers, mentoring other women in the church, rarely had much of a liturgical role: most of them weren't interested in such things. We do want to take our rightful part in the assembly of the worshipping Church, to get together for Bible Study, to help out with the many other meaningful activities that make a difference for people and keep the church running. We women know the church can't run without us and that we are hard-wired to be the present parent even while, like Martha, we may be busy about many things. We do have to make sure that we in turn respect the roles which allow men to serve; that we understand their unique contribution to our lives as fathers. I do not understand this to mean that we women are simply to follow. The writers of Genesis (2:18) tell us that we are to be helpmates. Sometimes

our best role as wives, mothers and spiritual mothers can be to stand in our own right, to work beside others and to support them.

The Church is always caught in cycles. Sainly and loving parents, communities and parishes have brought forth generations of saintly and loving children who in turn become adults and spread this Christian culture. However when Christians come of age under absent or abusive bishops, parish priests, as well as male and female monastic elders or parents, it can be very difficult to grow up into the maturity, freedom and fullness of life in Christ. God in His providence raises up individuals to change such patterns of neglect and abuse. When He raises up these men, women and children during godless periods in the world and in the Church, they shine all the more brightly like diamonds set against black cloth.

My hope and prayer is that each one of us will accept his or her own God-given responsibilities both as children of God and, insofar as we are his adult children, our responsibilities as parents. I hope and pray that we will see these responsibilities in the light of our own personal need for God and for His salvation. Only in and through each person's acceptance does God will to make a difference in our families, our communities, our parishes, dioceses, national churches and the Church on earth as a whole. Only in this acceptance can each of us be open to having a life based on the truth and the love of God the Father in His communion of love with His not only adult, but also eternal Son and the All Holy Spirit who enlivens and sustains each and every one of us in His creation. Amen.

1. Athanasius, *On the incarnation*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY 1996, p. 77