

OF WHAT LIFE DO WE SPEAK?

*Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the
Apostolic Work of the Church*

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STUDY GUIDE

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Pages 6 through 9.

Words of Life & Living Bread

Something to think about.



In the opening paragraph of this chapter, Metropolitan Tikhon notes that “the words of our Lord Jesus Christ are found throughout the Scripture... yet, our hearts often fail to grasp the deep meaning of these words and to recognize the transformative impact they could have in our life.”

Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God, as we read in the opening chapter of the Gospel of Saint John 1:1-18. The Living Word is revealed in the divinely inspired written words of Scripture. Many of Jesus’ contemporaries were well versed in the words found in Scripture, yet they remained oblivious to the spirit of these words, and ultimately failed to recognize the Living Word that the written words were intended to reveal. As we read in John 5:39-41, “You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” They were most proficient with regard to *knowing the text*, but they did not *know God*.

Points to Ponder.

1. Read James 1:22. What does Saint James say here about the word of God? Beyond reading the text of Scripture, what is essential for Christians in this regard?
2. What does Metropolitan Tikhon say concerning “the Christian experience?” How do we enter into “this life-giving experience” of our Lord?
3. According to Metropolitan Tikhon, what does it mean to be “a communicant of the Church?” How is this reflected in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church?
4. In addressing the meaning of “the Christian world-view in the face of secularism,” what does Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann propose in his classic work, *For The Life Of The World?* What challenge does Father Alexander place before us?
5. In assessing your own conviction in the faith and commitment to Christ, how would you answer the question, “Are we willing to eat the flesh of the Son of Man and to drink His blood so that we might receive His Life and share that life with the world?” How might all of us, clergy and laity, “engage in an authentic Apostolic witness in North America, as individuals, as communities, and as a local Church?”
6. How might you, as an individual, and the parish community to which you belong offer “an authentic Apostolic witness” in proclaiming the Living Word of God?

Coming to Terms.

Ascetical efforts. In Matthew 5–7, our Lord reveals the essentials of virtuous and godly living, specifically mentioning the three primary *ascetical efforts* expected of His People – prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Our Lord is clear that these are not “options” that one may or may not choose to follow; rather, they are the primary means by which we put our faith into action in our lives.

Apostolic Witness. The Apostles and Disciples who surrounded our Lord literally witnessed His life, death, resurrection, and ascension and proclaimed the Good News of the risen Lord and the Kingdom yet to be fully revealed, but already fully present in the life of His Body, the Church, to all who would receive it. Just as they proclaimed and witnessed to the Gospel, so too God’s People, some 2000 years later, are called to bear witness to the same Good News of eternal life – “for the life of the world” – with the same zeal that drove the Apostles to share that which they had witnessed “to the ends of the universe.”

Will Ye Also Go Away?

Something to think about.

In this chapter, Metropolitan Tikhon poses an important question, first asked by Father Alexander in his classic work, *For The Life Of The World*: “Of what life do we speak, what life do we preach, proclaim and announce when as Christians we confess that Christ died for the life of the world? What life is both motivation, and the beginning and the goal of Christian mission?” Father Alexander’s question, according to Metropolitan Tikhon, indeed sums up all the questions our Lord posed to His disciples: “What would you that I do for you? Who do men say that I am? Can you drink the cup which I drink? Could you not watch for one hour?” Ultimately, our Lord asks, “Will ye also go away?”

The Apostle Peter – himself often conflicted between belief and doubt – provides an answer as he confesses that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Peter’s confession of faith in the person of Jesus Christ should also be our confession of faith as we embrace, as Metropolitan Tikhon notes in the opening paragraph of this chapter, “life through death, in which both the beginning and ending reality come together in an incomprehensible, yet ultimately life-giving, manner.”

Points to Ponder.

1. What does Metropolitan Tikhon mean when he writes, “the whole drama of human existence often unfolds between these two realities of life and death?” How does encountering “life through death” factor into *acquiring God*, rather than merely *finding Him*, according to Archimandrite Aemilianos?
2. How does Saint Peter respond to our Lord’s challenge – “Will ye also go away?” What turmoil did Peter experience? How do we experience that same turmoil – and what should be our response to it? How do we sometimes “take up our Cross and follow Christ,” while at other times we are tempted to “go away?”
3. Metropolitan Tikhon points out that there are “thousands of factors” at work in our lives – “our human intelligence and wisdom, organization and planning” – with regard to Christian life. Beyond these, what is the primary factor that should define us as Christians? What, according to Father Alexander, is essential, in embracing the Church as “the sacrament of the Kingdom?”
4. Describe the world’s view of human life. Why is it considered “a false criterion” by which to judge our lives? What does it fail to take into account with regard to the true “worth of a human life?”
5. In what ways can we, like Saint Silouan, become “a true image” of our Lord? How can we experience “the fullness and timelessness of Christ’s love, life, and light... even as we draw closer to our own death?” How does our Lord’s Passion, Crucifixion, Burial and Resurrection “transfigure time” – and us?
6. What, as Metropolitan Tikhon notes in the concluding paragraph of this chapter, should we do to “actively pursue the Lord” instead of merely “going away?” What must we “lay aside” in pursuing God’s divine grace as individuals, as families, and as parish communities? How should we understand the fact that “we are already dead? What two insights does Father Sophrony offer as “a higher criterion for valuing the worth of human beings?” How might we begin to acquire these gifts?

Coming to Terms.

Secularism. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *secularism* is defined as “indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations.” A secularist world-view, then, embraces the notion that there is nothing beyond this physical world, that the deity – if indeed there is one – plays no part in human lives. At the outset of this chapter, Metropolitan Tikhon offers Father Alexander’s definition of secularism as “an ‘explanation’ of death in terms of life. The only world we know is this world, the only life given to us is this life – so thinks a secularist – and it is up to us men to make it as meaningful, as rich, as happy as possible. Life ends with death.”

The Four Pillars of Our Healing

Something to think about.

In one of the hymns chanted during the Orthodox Christian Rite of Burial, we sing, “Beholding the sea of life surging with the storm of temptation, and taking refuge in Thy calm haven I cry unto Thee: Raise up my life from corruption, O greatly merciful One.” The Church, Metropolitan Tikhon observes, is often depicted as a ship or ark – a sturdy vessel in which the People of God encounter safety and solace as they traverse life’s countless challenges, “not merely [as] passengers ‘along for the ride,’” but as members of the living organism known as “The Church.” Just as our Lord pulled Saint Peter into the boat, preventing him from drowning in the choppy waters of the Sea of Galilee, so too the People of God are drawn into the ark of the *one, holy, catholic and apostolic* Church. So important is entering into communion with our Lord and His People that Metropolitan Tikhon quotes Saint Cyprian of Carthage, who wrote: “You cannot have God as your Father if you no longer have the Church for your Mother.”

The Church is not an “organization,” nor is it a “place” to which we “go” to satisfy our spiritual or other needs. To the contrary, the Church is a living organism, the very Body and Bridegroom of Christ, made up of saints and sinners who struggle daily to embrace her as the fullness of the Kingdom of God, yet to be fully revealed, but already fully present in the life of the Church. As such, the Church is indeed one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and is firmly built upon four “pillars” that “provide some concrete expressions of, and reflections on, our mission as the Orthodox Church in America.”

Points to Ponder.


1. What, according to Metropolitan Tikhon, is the “radical transformation” offered to us as “living participants” in the life of the Church? To what does this transformation call us? How do “we truly become members, not of an *organization*, but of a *body*: the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, whose head is Christ?”
2. What are the “eternal and unchanging marks of the Church?” What does it mean to say that the Church is “*one* and ‘breathes with one breath?’” In addition to our Lord, with whom are we called to commune? How do we make Christ “the beginning, the middle, and the end of our existence?”
3. The Church is *holy*, offering those who respond to her invitation to “come and see” the “path to sanctification” and holiness. How is this sanctification imparted by Christ? What role do the holy mysteries play in our sanctification? What is required of us as we pursue holiness? And how does our transformation assist in the transfiguration of creation and the world?
4. How does the Church, which is *catholic*, reflect the unity of the Holy Trinity? How do we manifest this catholicity in a personal way? What implications does this have in living a “genuine life in communion with our neighbors in a spirit of truth and love?”
5. What does it mean to say that the Church is *apostolic*? How do we share in the Apostles’ ministry today? What is essential if we are to participate in this ministry? How might we pursue becoming “images of Christ and vessels of the Holy Spirit” in our personal and community lives?
6. What is Metropolitan Tikhon proposing in his “Four Pillars?” How does the Church pursue the “healing of broken human beings?” What is meant by saying that “Christ alone, by becoming man while remaining God,” is the “Physician of souls and bodies?” By what means do we participate in this healing? How can we employ the “Four Pillars” as a framework for our Apostolic work today?

Coming to Terms.

Church. The word “church” in Greek is *ekklesia*, which means “a gathering or assembly” or “called-out ones.” Hence, the Church is the *gathering of those who have been called* into union with Christ and with one another and who seek and embrace repentance while striving to live a godly life. The Church is *People – God’s People* – who gather for worship and fellowship while affirming their common faith in the risen Lord.

Pillar One: The Spiritual Life

Something to think about.

 The spiritual life, writes Metropolitan Tikhon, “is for everyone, at every time and in every place.” While modern “spirituality” focuses on “inner wholeness,” “oneness with the universe,” and “transcendent love” – concepts not unknown in the Orthodox ascetical tradition – they find their “legitimate expression” only within a relationship with our Lord, within the community of His Body, the Church.

Metropolitan Tikhon goes on to observe that “the spiritual life is the foundation of our Christian experience.” Just as Saint Seraphim of Sarov observed that the goal of the spiritual life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, genuine spirituality “is the effort we make to prepare a small space in our hearts for the Holy Spirit to dwell... to make our own hearts receptacles for the Holy Spirit.” While in many ways this is an individual pursuit, it is only within the experience of the faith community that our lives must be rooted as the spiritual life is cultivated. And it is within the Church that we discover the tools necessary in this cultivation: the liturgical and sacramental life, by which we grow closer to God by participating in the Holy Mysteries; concern for promoting vocations to the ordained ministry and for the health and well-being of our clergy; prayer, both liturgical and private, which brings our hearts into closer relation with Christ; and the importance of theological education and formation for those who minister, whose words and actions are guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Points to Ponder.

1. How does the Church’s understanding of spirituality differ from the modern, worldly concept? In what do wholeness, unity, and love find their “legitimate expression?” Who is called to pursue the spiritual life?
2. Why did Saint Onuphrius the Egyptian “return to the world... to live among men?” How is every Christian called to “live as angels in this world?” What does it mean to “put on Christ” in every aspect of our lives?
3. Metropolitan Tikhon defines “community,” not as a forest of individual trees, but as “a single tree of which we are all a part.” What do the roots and trunk represent? What is the importance of the branches, as well as the leaves, fruit, and seeds?

Liturgical and Sacramental Life.

4. Among the “many tools” at our disposal in cultivating the spiritual life, what “movements” do we encounter in the Church’s ascetical, liturgical, and sacramental life? Why is it “important for the Orthodox Church in America to maintain her identity liturgically,” and how is this being accomplished?
5. How is “beautiful Church music” a “powerful tool” in cultivating and sharing the spiritual life? How do the words and concepts expressed in the Church’s hymnography prepare others “to receive the things of God without their even realizing it?” What steps has the Orthodox Church in America taken to enhance the role of liturgical music? What additional steps might be further considered?

Vocations and Clergy Health.

6. While “we must always have before us the example of Christ,” we must likewise recognize that pastoral ministry today “has been made more difficult by the many burdens and requirements” placed upon our clergy. How – and why – has the pastoral oversight of a community become “more difficult than ever?” Why

Coming to Terms.

Spirituality. Spirituality, according to the late Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko, is the “everyday activity of life in communion with God.” The term *spirituality* refers not merely to the activity of one’s spirit alone – mind, heart and soul – but it refers as well to the whole of one’s life as inspired and guided by the Spirit of God. Every act of a Christian – every thought, word, deed, activity of the body, and action – must be spiritual. This means that all that a person thinks, says and does must be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit so that the will of God the Father, as revealed and taught by Jesus Christ His Son, might be accomplished.

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is caring for the spiritual health of our clergy and their families increasingly important in our time?

7. What is our Lord's "priestly work?" How, and for whom, is it accomplished? What is the "common journey" upon which clergy and laity embark? How does fostering clergy health – physical, spiritual and emotional – impact the life of the faith community?

8. What steps has the Orthodox Church in America taken to respond to the need for encouraging vocations and maintaining clergy health? What additional steps might be further considered?

Prayer.

9. While a variety of practical approaches to involving the faithful in the life of the Church have proven to be fruitful, why must the inner work of prayer in the heart be promoted and fostered? How does this "promote a true and healthy understanding of the holy priesthood?"

10. In what ways is the monastic life "a model for all of us?" How does the life and witness of our monasteries inspire us in searching into our own hearts and in developing therein a genuine life of prayer?

Theological Formation and Education.

11. What is the difference between "those whose minds are filled within consequential thoughts and ramblings, on the one hand, and those whose words and actions are guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit?"

12. What is the "sacred task" of theological education? Where does theological education take place? What inspiration does it provide in our lives?

13. How do our seminaries approach this "sacred task?" What burdens do our seminaries face in fulfilling their mission? Beyond the spheres of theology and liturgy, what "skills" do they strive to impart? Beyond the seminaries, who is responsible for "the sacred enterprise of theological education?"

14. When should theological education begin? Why is theological education "a necessary component of the spiritual development of all Orthodox Christians that must be cultivated in the parishes" as well as theological schools?

15. In what ways is theological education and formation promoted in our seminaries? How might the faithful further nourish the work of our seminaries and monasteries? ■

Enduring Goals.

On page 29 of *Of What Life Do We Speak*, Metropolitan Tikhon proposes four areas of the spiritual life that deserve our close attention:

■ Establishing and sustaining Christ-centered parishes and communities that reveal the beauty of God's Kingdom liturgically, sacramentally and ascetically while encouraging training in and the application of the sacred arts.

■ Nurturing vocations to the ordained ministry while fostering the spiritual, emotional, physical and financial health of our clergy and their families.

■ Inspiring monastic vocations and encouraging, supporting, and fostering an appreciation of the cenobitic life.


■ Forming a comprehensive, unified North American system of Orthodox Christian theological education as the "backbone" of our Church schools, seminaries, and adult education programs.

Prayerfully consider each of these goals. How might you contribute to their pursuit and fulfillment? How might your parish focus more intensely on promoting these important aspects of the spiritual life?

Participants in study groups or classes may be divided into four smaller groups, each of which may explore one of the goals. After collective reflection and discussion, each group should be asked to share its findings and recommendations with the entire class.

Pillar Two: Stewardship

Something to think about.

 When we think of “stewardship,” we often focus our attention on matters of finance. Indeed, stewardship involves the wise use of our treasures, in addition to our time and our talents. But Metropolitan Tikhon offers a far broader definition, one by which he proposes that the very “foundation of genuine stewardship” is found in “caring for our broken and hurting fellows, all of whom, like us, are made in the image and likeness of [God’s] glory.”

Stewardship, as Father Alexander Schmemmann observed, involves the “act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God.” As such, we pray before the *Epiklesis* during the Divine Liturgy – “Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all” – which reminds us of our calling as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” [1 Corinthians 4:1]. As stewards, we are more than mere “managers” of God’s manifold gifts; rather, we are challenged to reach out to those who are broken, broken down, and wounded and, in so doing, giving value to their existence in our effort to tend “as a garden planted by God Himself,” as Metropolitan Tikhon notes.

Points to Ponder.

1. Metropolitan Tikhon observes that “stewardship is the application of our spiritual life to the realities of the fallen world” in the quest to heal all of creation, including ourselves. How do we become “true human beings and, by God’s grace, saints?” How is it that we can consider the Church as a “hospital for the souls of all who are broken, beaten down, or wounded?”
2. As stewards, how do we bring healing and transfiguration into the world? What, especially, is our “duty” to others with regard to giving “value to their existence?” In so doing, how do we authenticate our own humanity? In what ways did the saints of North America exhibit this in their lives and ministry, and why is it essential that we, as stewards, accept responsibility as “guardians of this witness” and patrimony?

The Human Person and the Family.

3. How does Metropolitan Tikhon characterize human life in our time? What does he mean when he writes that “the human person has been reduced to an avatar?” How have today’s “movements and causes” failed to address the “deeper longing for genuine personhood” and the “recognition that the purpose of the incarnation and the economy of Christ is for all human beings to find healing in Christ and to become truly human?”
4. Metropolitan Tikhon observes that in today’s climate, we struggle with an ever-growing number of addictions, distractions, and temptations. How do these make it difficult to know who we are as persons? How do public debates on these and related issues impact our communities, and especially our families?
5. How does Metropolitan Tikhon define “salvation?” How have “acceptance and examination” been inspired by Christ through the Holy Spirit? How is this nurtured in the life of the Church?

Creation and the Environment.

6. What characterizes the relationship of humans to the creation? What was the “primary task” of the first created man? How, according to Saint Symeon the New Theologian, did creation respond to man’s fall?

Coming to Terms.

Stewardship. In Psalm 24:1-2 we sing, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.” Herein we find the key to the meaning of *stewardship*.

Everything that exists, everything with which we have been blessed by God, is a gift to us. While these gifts belong to the Lord, they are given to us as *stewards* to manage and, ultimately to offer back to Him in thanksgiving. “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace,” we read in 1 Peter 4:10.

Hence, *stewardship* typically is defined as the wise management and use of that which we have received from God “in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ [1 Peter 4:11].”

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7. How do the hymns of the liturgical year reflect creation in relation to the Creator and humanity? How is “the renewal of creation” dependent on the “renewal of mankind?” Why is the healing of our own bodies and souls essential before we can properly steward creation? What is the relationship between the renewal of creation and the renewal of mankind?

The Saints and the History of the Orthodox Church in America.

8. Who are the “greatest benefactors of the Orthodox Church in America?” How does the witness of the saints provide inspiration to us today?

9. Why is “community” essential in realizing unity in Christ? What does it mean to say that “to become more fully in the image of God means to strive for sanctity?” In addition to accepting our call as stewards, how should we accept our call to become “real saints?”

10. What can we learn from our parishes’ histories? How do they relate to the broader “story” of the Church and salvation?

Financial Stewardship.

11. What needs do we address through our wise use of the treasures with which God has blessed us? How is wise financial stewardship essential on all levels – parish, diocese and beyond? What do we express through “sacrificial giving?” How can we, as individuals and parishes, strengthen our commitment to financial stewardship? ■

Enduring Goals.

On page 39 of *Of What Life Do We Speak*, Metropolitan Tikhon proposes four areas with regard to stewardship that deserve our close attention:

- Addressing human brokenness by assisting in the healing of the human person, the strengthening of the family, and the alleviation of human suffering.
- Caring for the environment by recognizing the beauty and importance of God’s creation; embracing the needs in our neighborhood, parishes, and dioceses; and deriving inspiration from our monastic communities.
- Learning our history and patrimony as the Orthodox Church in America, the witness of the many saints who labored on this continent, and the sacrificial efforts and legacy left by our ancestors.
- Nurturing a healthy culture of financial stewardship on multiple levels to enhance pastoral ministries in transfiguring the world.

Prayerfully consider each of these goals. How might you contribute to a better understanding and practice of stewardship? How might your parish focus more intensely the various aspects of stewardship noted by Metropolitan Tikhon?

Participants in study groups or classes may be divided into four smaller groups, each of which may explore one of the goals. After collective reflection and discussion, each group should be asked to share its findings and recommendations with the entire class.

Pages 40 through 46.

Pillar Three: Relations with Others

Something to think about.

As noted earlier, one of the Church’s most beloved hymns, sung at funeral and memorial services, compares our earthly life to a ship facing treacherous waters. “Beholding the sea of life,” we sing, “surging with the storm of temptation....” We live in a fallen world, one in which the “sea of life” is indeed quite choppy, filled with an endless array of temptations that challenge us to look beyond life’s tragedies, travesties, and injustices while seeking refuge in the “ark of salvation” – the Body of Christ, the Church. This is especially the case in our time, in which hardly a day passes without reports of yet another killing, beating, overdose, attack, or potential global conflict. At the heart of such dissonance is the difficulty often endured in maintaining loving and godly relationships with one another – a “storm” mankind has faced since Cain, in his jealousy, committed the first murder.

Many have grown numb to life’s stormy waters, preferring to wall themselves off from tragedies and the real fears that accompany them. In so doing, they wall themselves off from others, isolating themselves from their “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” But, as Metropolitan Tikhon writes, humility is essential “to navigate the stormy sea of this life” without embracing “the negative spirit of this age” or its opposite – “a superficial quest for love and peace in the world” – neither of which can restore, much less maintain and strengthen, the “right relationship” with our Creator and, through Him, one another.

Points to Ponder.

1. Metropolitan Tikhon notes that in recent decades, popular expressions of the need for unity abound, but have failed to produce any real results. What obstacles to love and unity do we encounter today? What does our Lord say about unity in His great high priestly prayer in John 13-17? How are unity and love central to the Kingdom of God and in the lives of God’s People?
2. How is the Cross central in ordering our relations with others? In what must we be rooted if we aim at reaching out to those who have yet to embrace Christ? Where, according to the Encyclical of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, does one discover “genuine Christian unity?”

Culture and Society.

3. In what ways has the Church always been in “an ambiguous relationship with the cultures and societies within which she sojourns?” What tensions are inherent in this relationship? What does Metropolitan Tikhon mean when he writes that “every stand that we take as a Church carries political implications?” Why is it crucial for the Church to participate in public debate and discourse? In what spirit must such discourse and debate take place?

World-wide Orthodoxy.

4. How does the Orthodox Church in America understand herself as she approaches the 50th Anniversary of the reception of the Tomos of Autocephaly in 1970? What characterizes the OCA’s status as an autocephalous Church?

Coming to Terms.

Relationship. It is often said that one cannot be a Christian in isolation from others. If we are condemned, we are told, it is as individuals; if we are saved, it is within a community, the Church. And, as a “community,” the People of God are called to embrace and maintain the “common unity” of faith in love shared by every member of His Body, the Church. Christ took on our human nature in its entirety for one purpose: to restore the “right relationship” with our Creator, tainted through the sin of our first parents, while restoring that same relationship with one another. As Saint Paul reveals in Romans 12:5, “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

Whereas the nature of our fallen world divides and isolates, our Lord unites, revealing His plan for those who once were “no people,” but now have been called to become “God’s People” [1 Peter 2:10]. Just as the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity are perfectly united into one Godhead through their supreme love for one another, so too we are called to love one another, even as God loves us.

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How has the OCA committed herself to realize the goal of Orthodox Church unity in North America? How does the late Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas describe the autocephaly of the OCA and her purpose?

5. How does the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America view the ultimate resolution to the current situation of Orthodox Christianity in North America? Why is this important not only on this continent, but globally? How does the Primate of the OCA maintain the unity of the faith with the other Local Orthodox Churches, and why is this a priority?

Orthodoxy in North America.

6. What, from its inception, has been the “desire and vision” of the Orthodox Church in America? How has the Holy Synod of Bishops participated in the work of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America and the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in Canada?

7. What steps is the Holy Synod of Bishops prepared to undertake in promoting the unity of the Church? How can pan-Orthodox cooperation be fostered and strengthened through inter-jurisdictional co-operation on the parish and broader levels?

Ecumenical Interfaith, and Civic Relations.

8. What does Father Alexander Schmemmann see as “a surrender to secularism?” What tensions are present in considering the degree to which Orthodox Christians should participate in ecumenical and inter-faith dialogues? What in part is the cause of the weakness of the present state of ecumenical dialogue? What must be the character of our participation in such gatherings, well beyond mere “superficial participation” and presence, in firmly proclaiming the authentic faith of our fathers?

9. What does Archimandrite Vasileios say concerning “progressives” and “conservatives,” and what truly decides the authenticity of our faith? How do we preserve and proclaim the truth beyond the walls of our communities? How does this relate to our interactions with civil authorities, institutions, and the governments of the nations in which we sojourn and minister? ■

Enduring Goals.

On page 46 of *Of What Life Do We Speak*, Metropolitan Tikhon proposes three areas with regard to the Church’s relations with others:

■ Radiating the humility, peace, and love of Christ to our surrounding culture on the international, nation, local, and personal levels while addressing every issue that faces our communities with patience, truth, and compassion.

■ Upholding, with steadfast humility, the vision of the Orthodox Church in America for the canonical structure of the Church on this continent, strengthening our relations with other Local Orthodox Churches around the world, and participating actively in pan-Orthodox endeavors such as the Assembly of Bishops process.

■ Prioritizing our participation in ecumenical bodies while maintaining faithfulness to Orthodox Christianity by presenting a worthy witness to the Gospel in religious and civil/governmental arenas.

Prayerfully consider each of these goals. How might you and your parish contribute to their realization? What pan-Orthodox opportunities exist in your area and how can they be used to proclaim the fullness of faith?

Participants in study groups or classes may be divided into three smaller groups, each of which may explore one of the goals. After collective reflection and discussion, each group should be asked to share its findings and recommendations with the entire class.

Pillar Four: Outreach & Evangelism

Something to think about.

In Proverbs 29:18 we read, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” As Metropolitan Tikhon notes, the final Pillar – Outreach and Evangelism – is impossible to implement without effort in the preceding three Pillars, which indeed provide the “vision” for the fulfillment of the Apostolic work of the Church in North America. And, at the heart of our vision of this evangelistic work stands the Gospel of the risen Christ, the “Good News” that every member of the Body of Christ is called to proclaim to and share with any and all who would receive it.

Metropolitan Tikhon notes that since 1794, Orthodox Christianity in North America has experienced “positive development and growth,” especially in recent times. Yet continuously evolving challenges, spanning major demographic shifts to changing attitudes with regard to religious faith and practice, have emerged, leaving us to wonder precisely how we should implement the evangelistic vision and proclamation. Relying on programs, often inspired by non-Orthodox Christian confessions as a means of bringing about numerical growth – sometimes at the expense of a clear vision of spiritual growth – is insufficient. As Metropolitan Tikhon points out, “none of those strategies and programs will be effective if they are divorced from the spiritual and liturgical life, and if they do not serve to convey and share the reality of the healing that we have received in Christ.” Ultimately, outreach and evangelism can only keep us from perishing if we become genuine persons in the image of Christ, if we exercise good stewardship of God’s gifts and blessings, and if we live as brothers and sisters in Christ in community.

Points to Ponder.

1. Why is the Fourth Pillar the final Pillar? How are the Four Pillars interdependent? How is the “vision” offered by the first three Pillars implemented and fulfilled through outreach and evangelism?

Philanthropy and Social Responsibility.

2. Why must we not confine our Apostolic work to mere recruitment and expansion? Why is the often heard sentiment to “make North America Orthodox” self-serving, negative and almost violent? Why must embracing the fullness of the faith be “voluntary?”

3. Why is spiritual growth “the key to numerical growth?” In what ways does this involve “a sacrificial effort?” How does prayer relate to “concrete action” in proclaiming the Gospel? What concrete actions are enumerated in Matthew 25:31-46? Who is responsible for implementing these actions? And how might the ministries implied in Matthew 25 best be addressed through local community outreach and pan-Orthodox efforts?

Youth and Young Adults.

4. While there are those who would define the Church’s younger members as “the future of our Church,” Metropolitan Tikhon states that they are “in the forefront of the realities of a changing world,” very much a part of the Church’s “present” experience. What do we need to hear from them? How have we failed to provide our youth with the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual nourishment necessary “to face the world, let alone find life within the world?” Why is it crucial for adult Church members “to grasp fully what it means to be a person in the image and likeness of Christ” in order to help our youth find healing and salvation?

Coming to Terms.

Evangelism. The very heart of our faith in the Living Word of God is revealed in the written words of Holy Scripture, and specifically in the Gospel, or “Good News.” The Gospel is not something that we “keep to ourselves,” in a quest to “preserve” that which, in reality, “preserves us.” As such, proclaiming the Good News – in a word, *evangelism* – is not simply an “option” for Orthodox Christians; rather, it is how we fulfill our Lord’s injunction to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” [Matthew 28:19-20].

It is God “Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” [1 Timothy 2:4]. And it is God Who has equipped us to carry out this mission to one and all who would embrace the Living Word of God and the salvation He freely offers to “all mankind.”

Pages 47 through 53 continued.

5. Where does outreach and evangelism begin? What does Metropolitan Tikhon mean when he writes, “education in the Faith is part of the life-long process of theosis?” In what ways can our youth – and faithful of all ages – strengthen their personal faith? How is “being anchored in the faith” vital to remaining in the Church, “the ark of salvation” in which we seek refuge in the midst of life’s storms?

6. In what experience is the entire historical existence of the Church founded? How does the witness of the saints, martyrs, confessors, and ascetics instruct and inspire us, and why do we often “become paralyzed” when we attempt to emulate them? How might we introduce our youth to this experience? What is our “collective goal” in this regard? And how might the development of local youth ministries enhance the evangelization of our youth?

Communications.

7. What does Metropolitan Tikhon mean when he writes, “communications is one of the mysteries of our human condition?” How does missionary work intersect with communications? Rather than relegating communications to “modern technology,” what must we reflect in our evangelistic efforts? What is it that we seek to convey? And to whom?

8. In what must the Church “invest” order to effect good communication? How might we serve as “conduits for the truths of the Gospel” in order to “fill all the space with Orthodoxy,” to quote His Holiness, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow?

Mission Planting and Parish Revitalization.

9. To what are mission communities, as well as established parishes, called to do with regard to outreach and evangelism? Rather than “give up on growth,” what must established parishes – as well as recently planted communities – do to evangelize, both within their own walls and beyond? What results should *not* be expected from “plans and programs,” essential as they may be? Ultimately, who is responsible for evangelizing, and how does it reflect our “responsibility to live our life in Christ to the fullest within the beauty of our faith? ■

Enduring Goals.

On page 53 of *Of What Life Do We Speak*, Metropolitan Tikhon offers four areas with regard to the Church’s outreach and evangelism efforts:

- Reaching out to those in need, within and outside our parishes, through the effective ministries offered by Christ and the Holy Gospel.
- Calling upon our young people to be examples of missionary zeal and apostolic ministry.
- Effectively communicating the Gospel by our words, deeds, and silence while managing our internal and external communications to reflect the truth and compassion of Christ.
- Planting and preserving communities of all sizes and ages as havens in which human beings might blossom.


Prayerfully consider each of these goals. How might you and your parish establish and expand its outreach and evangelism ministries? How might this be especially pursued in ministering to youth and young adults in your community?

Participants in study groups or classes may be divided into four smaller groups, each of which may explore one of the goals. After collective reflection and discussion, each group should be asked to share its findings and recommendations with the entire class.

Pages 54 through 56.

Conclusion: The Prophetic Way of the Church

Something to think about.

 he “vision” to which we are called in Proverbs 29:18 is a prophetic one. While often revealing events yet to be fulfilled, the prophets were intent of calling God’s People to faithfulness – to God, to His plan of salvation, to living a life in which the creature mirrors and reflects the Creator in Whose image all were made. Pursuing “the Prophetic Way” is synonymous with pursuing our Apostolic work to bring people “into the presence of Christ.” And in order to realize this goal, we first must “live a life of communion with Christ, in sanctity of life, with love towards our neighbor, and with zeal for the mission of the Gospel.” Without this vision, “we the people” indeed will “perish.”

Points to Ponder.

1. How did Father Alexander Schmemmann characterize the life and ministry of His Eminence, the late Metropolitan Leonty? What “polarizing tendencies” did Metropolitan Leonty find “alien?” How might we exercise a prophetic witness to one another, as well as to those who have yet to hear the fullness of the Gospel?
2. How do Archimandrite Zacharias and Saint Gregory the Great understand “prophecy?” How are these understandings reflected in the life of Metropolitan Leonty? Why may we consider him “a true prophet?”
3. Why is it that we cannot contribute to the life of the Church if we have not “grafted ourselves” to her? What is crucial with regard to living “a life of communion with Christ, in sanctity of life, with love towards our neighbor, and with zeal for the mission of the Gospel?”
4. What, according to Metropolitan Tikhon, is seen as the importance of Father Alexander Schmemmann’s classic work, *For the Life of the World?* What is the “middle way” he traces? How can we, “through a deep abiding with Christ in our hearts,” stand on the firm rock of faith in order to “make a small contribution to the questions and problems of the world?” ■