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The Monthly Newsletter of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
119 S. Sparks Street, State College, PA 16801 814-231-2855
September 2008 Volume 13, Number 9

NATIONALISM, MAN AND ORTHODOXY

by Fr. Gibran Ramlaoui

An ancient problem, yet still fresh and relevant, stands as an insurmountable wall in the face of the process of Orthodoxy in America. This problem is ethnic nationalism.

Nationalism is not an empty word. It is as true as the individual who is seeking himself outside himself. There is nothing authentic outside man, who is the image of God. However, the individual—wrapped up in his limited self—has the illusion that he might find his self where there is no real self; in the nation or the mass to which he belongs. The nationalistic man might be honest in putting his hope in his nation, because he is trying to establish his identity and find security for himself. Nevertheless, his point of departure is erroneous. Whenever we build the roof before the foundation, then the house is liable to fall. And the eyes cannot be placed in the back of our head, if we expect to move ahead and reach forward. Therefore, when we discuss nationalism, we ought to pose the real problem, in order to find the real answer: The problem is the meaning of Man. And any attempt to solve this problem outside this man-perspective is condemned in advance to failure.

Then, let us put the picture within its real frame. We shall essay in this short paper to establish the fact that man is not only more important than nationalism; but we shall state with assurance and certainty that Man is both the source of every meaning, and the end of all ends.

When God created Man in His image, He gave him both meaning and the force to grant meaning to every thing that is in existence. On one hand, man is not complete in himself; on the other, the world has no meaning without him. He is not complete because he receives his fullness in God; and the world was created for him, consequently, he is the meaning and the purpose of the world.

And Christ did not come to save the world, nor the nation (what did His own nation do to Him?), but rather He came to save the Man. Thus He

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confirmed that which was already established by His Father: Man is the king of all creations. Not only is Man preferred to things, but also he is above even his own social ideas and political concepts. [This] means he is preferred to Nationalism.

Man, as he is the meaning of the world, does not however create his own image, nor his own value. He receives it from God. Therefore, when he (Man) rejects God, he is, at the same time, rejecting his own meaning and superiority to all other creations. If Man is the meaning of the world, still God is the meaning of Man. In this perspective, Nationalism is a false shelter under which Man tries to take refuge in order wrongly to secure his being.

In Nationalism, Man loses Christ. Or rather, Christ ceases to be the prototype after which we are to become [b]ecause in baptism we put on Christ. And then we become the dwelling-place of the Trinity. And this gives us our meaning as human beings; consequently, if we search for meaning outside ourselves we would be denying the existence of God in us. Rather we feel the dreadful emptiness from which we try to escape [and] then we fall into the hades of Nationalism. Man can never be empty. If God does not fill us, then something else has to make us feel full. But are we really full when we replace Christ with Nationalism? Are we not then doing exactly that which the atheists do by denying God directly and completely? Are not we then denying our real self? What is left of us if our real Self is gone? And what is our self without Christ? Therefore, the danger of Nationalism is far more destructive to our Faith than what we normally think it can be.

One might think that I am eliminating the loyalty that one has to have for his country or nation. God forbid! I am not treating here the relationship of Christ to the State or Country. This is a topic that can be handled from another scope. All that I am saying here is that Christ comes first and before my Nationalistic feelings. The matter is one of order or preference and not of exclusion: ... which one is *first*, not which one should eliminate the other (*emphasis added*). What is a Nation? It is—in a very simple expression—a group of human beings. Now, what is a human being? He is the image or the temple of God. Hence, God is first, not the Nation or the national structure.

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FROM THE DESK OF DN. ALEXANDER

It has been a joy and pleasure to work with the new board of our Orthodox Christian Fellowship for 2008-09. I want to take an opportunity now to formerly introduce you to these students that God has raised up to lead and minister to the Penn State campus.

Daniel McNulty (*dsm5054@psu.edu*) is a junior majoring in Hotel Restaurant and Institutional Management. Before coming to Penn State, he was a member of St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in North Philadelphia and excelled at many sports including swimming, diving, and lacrosse. This summer he had an opportunity to complete a unique internship at a Marriott Courtyard that enabled him to try nearly every aspect of how a hotel runs. He is also a tonsured reader and sings bass in our choir.



Daniel, President



Lara, Vice-President

Lara Haruszczak (*loh5038@psu.edu*) is beginning her sophomore year and is majoring in Geoscience with a focus on Hydrogeology. She has been actively involved on the local and national boards of the Jr. Ukrainian Orthodox League through her home parish, St. Vladimir's in the South Side of Pittsburgh. In her free time she enjoys playing the piano, watching movies, and eating ice cream. She looks forward to getting more involved in OCF this year and making many new friends on campus.

Lincoln (James) Barnard (*lfb121@psu.edu*) is a senior at Penn State majoring in Information Sciences and Technology. He is also enrolled in the Navy Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) which trains future officers of the United States Navy. This past summer, he spent a month serving on the USS Lake Champlain (CG-57), a *Ticonderoga* class cruiser. Baptized and chrismated into Orthodoxy last Pascha, he likes to spend time at Willard Building with Gary Cattell ministering to the students that hang out there.



Lincoln (James), Treasurer



Sam, Secretary

Samuel Leathers (*sb15007@psu.edu*) originally came to the State College area in 2002 to start a band, but ended up working in the computer repair business instead. He started taking classes in the Fall of 2004 and also works at Penn State as an Assistant System Administrator. He was introduced to Orthodoxy through members of OCF in the Spring of 2007 and was baptized and chrismated on Pascha the next year. He sings tenor in the choir and has been involved in numerous service projects, retreats, and conferences.

SEPTEMBER SCHEDULES

Coffee Hour

September 7 — Karen Cattell and Melody Thompson
September 14 — Anne-Therese Pelikan and Lina Eid-Saleeby
September 21 — Russian Ladies
September 28 — Julianne Vaughan and Elaine Stewart

Greeters

September 7 — Melody Thompson and Mark Fedkin
September 14 — Anne and David Swisher
September 21 — Beth Roberts and Ed Miranda
September 28 — Mark and Leslyn Radomsky

HOLY DAYS DURING SEPTEMBER

Nativity of the Theotokos

Vespers, September 7, 7:00pm
Liturgy, September 8, 9:00am

Elevation of the Holy Cross

Vespers, September 13, 6:00pm
Liturgy, September 14, 10:00am

EXCITING NEWS ON THIS YEAR'S SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES

Sunday School Begins on September 21 with a new class for 3- and 4-year-olds. They will be using Gigi Shadid's curriculum, *Fruits of the Spirit—Teaching God's Children*. The teachers for this class will be Jill Finke, Sheena Sands, and Ksenia Nemtsov. Teachers will be asking parents to sign up for weekly supervision.

The **INTERMEDIATE CLASS** will begin the semester with a class on *Preparation for Confession*. This class is open to all students from 6 years and up. Some of the questions we will be discussing are “What is confession?”, “Why do we go?”, and “Who do we confess to?” Matushka will lead this group. Later in the semester Katie Radomsky will lead a class on The Old Testament with Rebekah Cattell as her assistant.

Finally Gary Cattell will lead the **HIGH SCHOOL CLASS** in a study of the Old Testament book of *Exodus*. Participants will follow the children of Israel as they leave Egypt and begin their journey to the Promised Land.

To what am I leading? To this question, I answer: I am a Christian Orthodox. Ultimately, Christ only is the meaning of my being. Therefore, I [first] say I am Orthodox, [and] then I mention my nationality as a frame, a social structure, no more. I can be without a country, without nationality, [but] I can never be without being. And in being, I am the image of God, not of a nation. I am the temple of God, not of a nation. I, with other beings, form a nation. So the nation acquires its existence and identity by me...not from itself. A nation does not exist in itself, for itself. I give the nation meaning. And I draw my own meaning from God. Therefore, God and I...come before Nation, and we are more important than Nation.

If we, Orthodox, want to be really Orthodox, we have inevitably to consider Orthodoxy in its authentic context: Jesus the Christ. Then, you are Russian and speak Russian, I am Lebanese and I speak Arabic, but, we are both Orthodox. Then no language, no nationality, no customs, no traditions can divide the one Faith that you and I have in Christ.

When Jesus sent out His Disciples to preach the Gospel, He did not limit them to any nation, or race, or language, or country: “Go ye to *all* nations, preach to them and baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*Matthew 28:19, emphasis added*). This is Christianity that Christ wants. And this is the Orthodoxy that we ought to establish all over the world, especially in America. We Orthodox in this great land are scattered and dispersed like sheep without a shepherd, like lost little children in the wilderness. Empty we are of Christ, because we do not adopt Him as our unifying power. We do not want to be Christian first, and Americans second. As a matter of fact, we could not yet become Americans, because we are still hanging and clinging to our former nationality. Two things are required of the Orthodox people in America: 1) to integrate ourselves totally and integrally in the American Nation, and 2), to give up, consequently, our former concept of nationalism. But, and before these two requirements are fulfilled, we have to be...aware that we are Orthodox. Because, to be a good American one has to be a good Orthodox (I am speaking as an Orthodox): but the reciprocal is not necessarily true.

What Orthodoxy, in America, needs now and right now, is that all the Orthodox become Orthodox. Who is going to do it, and how to do it? I leave the answer to our faithful and to our spiritual leaders. Are they willing to perform this magnificent task?

Editor's note: This article first appeared in the June 1969 issue of Word Magazine. It is reprinted from Orthodoxy.org (Copyright © 2001-2008) with permission.

