

A Gift from Holy Russia

Stephen Muse, Ph.D
4409 Bentwood Dr.
Columbus, GA 31907
706-561-9926

drjsmuse@aol.com (h)
stephenm@pilink.org (w)

England is the source of both mine and my wife Claudia's ancestors. My father's side has been identified as far back as the 1500's to my great-xn grandfather who is recorded among the faithful of Souldrop parish in Lancashire, Great Britain a few hundred miles north of London. So what am I doing here in the United States, four centuries later as a Greek Orthodox Christian living near the buckle of the Bible Belt in Columbus, Georgia with a Russian Orthodox icon of St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess calmly looking out from a corner of our living room? I had it painted for my wife Claudia, years before we even thought of going to Russia and visiting the convent she founded.

Elizabeth was also of European descent—granddaughter of Queen Victoria, and a product of the political marriage between Hapsburg Germany and England. Deeply moved by Orthodox Christian Tradition she found in "Holy Russia," she converted to Orthodoxy after her marriage to Grand Duke Sergei, the uncle of the future Tsar Nicholas II whom her sister, Alexandra later married. I know that journey as well. It was like coming home.

By virtue of being an American, I am a very wealthy and privileged man. My personal bank account would contradict that, but the luxury, wealth and possibilities I enjoy as a middle class citizen of the United States, like it or not, puts me in the class of the aristocracy with all the responsibilities that entails; responsibilities arising from the fact that the aristocracy's privilege always depends on a lot of other people. In America that includes possessing lands taken by deceit and broken promises from the original inhabitants who have subsequently been treated worse than any other persons in the country. (Wonder why?) And even though our ancestors couldn't find room enough for the Native Americans to cohabit their own country, they began stealing people from a continent five thousand miles away and bringing them to America where they were used and similarly abused and treated with contempt simply for not being *like us* in their customs, politics, religion and social norms.

Two-hundred and fifty years later, we still don't seem to have enough and last count were utilizing 14:1 as many resources per capita as the rest of the oikonomia. Hopefully that is because we are giving back to the world a great deal as well, but that is as it should be because our American "aristocracy" entails some serious responsibilities. *Much is asked of those to whom much is given.*

Because we are strong and value freedom, Americans have a history of protecting our shores and going over seas to help other countries protect theirs. Even though there are 25% more casualties (75,000) ⁱ in one year in

America from gun-related violence than occurred throughout our entire involvement in Viet Nam (about 52,000) and even though 2,936,000 children in U.S. were reported abused and/or neglected in 1992,ⁱⁱ I am still a good bit safer than persons in the third world who suffer all sorts of traumatic events at a ratio of 166:1 times greater than those of us in developed countries.ⁱⁱⁱ

Wealth, safety, education and privilege in a world where millions do not have any of these, is a situation of aristocracy and we all know the dangers of having power without a continually repentant, self-confronting heart that acknowledges the inter-relatedness of all beings.

Elizabeth, a.k.a. the “Grand Duchess” and later “Saint” was born into the aristocracy and privilege of European royalty at its height in the late 19th century. Through no choice or fault or merit of one’s own we are each born into existence in certain conditions over which we have no control. Responsibility begins only as a person reaches a certain maturity capable of making conscious choices about how to respond to the conditions in which we find ourselves. Motivation for this emerges from deep within the heart amidst many inclinations as each of us searches, more or less intentionally, for answers to the questions “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?”

Conscious choice is what makes us different from robots. Love is only possible for one who *does not have to love* and thus can *freely choose to love*. A lifetime of choices defines us as persons as clearly as do the prints on our fingers and the genes in our DNA. How we come to terms with this responsibility for choosing how to respond to the sense and purpose of human life on earth from moment to moment is the subject of what the Eastern hesychastic fathers of the *Philokalia* speak of as “spiritual warfare.” Freedom of choice requires a special kind of attention or watchfulness which is the sine qua non for achieving mental sobriety that enables us to respond to God, the world, and each other in the way that human beings were intended too. In other words, an aristocracy which doesn’t engage in the Christian formation of continual repentance is an aristocracy that will not give back as much or more than it has received. It is an aristocracy whose choices *God cannot bless* because they are contrary to God’s will. This is what we must understand clearly as Americans before we say and sing “God bless America!”

There are two forces in constant tension within us: consumption and contribution. Left on our own without repentance, that is, without seeking to respond to something greater than our own unchecked appetites, daydreams (whether personal or cultural) and philosophizing, we are mere consumers; vampires sucking the blood out of life for our own individualistic and privatistic whims, whatever outward form this may take. Struggling against the forces of consumption without repentance merely leads to becoming a zealot; Pharisees, activists or beaurocratic civil servants whose unexamined “shadows” conceal suppressed forms of the very things such persons are fighting against on the surface and these eventually emerge, often with a vengeance.^{iv} This is why the early desert fathers like St. Anthony proclaimed, “Whoever does not know himself cannot know God.” and St. Isaac the Syrian,

“He who knows himself is greater than him who raises the dead!” And as the Lord himself observed, “Blessed are you who mourn for you shall be comforted.”

Psychotherapists observe on a daily basis, the damage done in the world to ourselves and others, stemming from unexamined (and undeveloped) conscience. It is not enough to will to do good. One must also be aware of how forces existing within in a kind of homeostasis cannot be alchemically changed without the admixture of a third or reconciling force that is not within human control to supply. This is the condition for spiritual mourning, for yearning and praying for aid from above which every addict in a 12 step program is familiar with. Recognition of one’s helplessness to overcome an addiction or compulsion apart seeking help from a “higher power” is a sine qua non for healing.

This reconciling force of Grace received from God brings disparate forces into harmony, making it possible to creatively participate in giving back to life a return on the Creator’s investment in each of us which as the Gospels remind us, is not without tremendous price. It is as simple as offering a glass of water to another “in Christ’s name” – that is purely and from this unified place, or as complex as the Passion of Jesus Christ which is an activity on a scale beyond what we can intellectually comprehend. And yet, the one is in the other if they are both genuine and as Mother Theresa notes, “It is not possible to do great things, only small things with great love.” Small things may become great things according to God’s purposes over time.

From this vantage point, with our struggle to make conscious choices within the conditions in which we find ourselves, we are at every given moment developing a likeness that becomes clear gradually over a lifetime, either as disciples of Christ Who, as the Orthodox say, “is ever in our midst!” doing this, or as enemies of Him whose Body is the light and life of all humanity. There is no in between place. We will go in one direction or the other.

From a Patristic standpoint, it can be said that though made in the *Image* of God with the potential to develop accordingly, I do not necessarily fulfill this calling to develop in his *likeness*. The Divine Image I am *given* includes a potential *likeness*, but to fulfill this potential *requires something of me*. God’s Grace acts in concert with my conscious responsive choice from my unique vantage point in the world through the being that I am, again and again and yet again until the last breath. Everything hinges on these small moments of choice, hardly even visible outwardly, made over and over. It is a synergistic process and as Bonhoeffer might say, one in which *there can be no cheap Grace*.

So we can say that spiritual growth
is a function of the grace of God and the effort of human beings in
response to that Grace over a lifetime. Attempting to pray without
attempting to struggle with personal passions in order to obey the
Gospel commandments of love in all arenas is naïve, if not blasphemous.
Christianity is not a belief system or a warm, fuzzy feeling. It is, according

to the book of Acts, an ongoing Way to eternal life that requires an integrated response from the whole person: mind, body, heart, and soul. Treating it as anything less than that dilutes it to the point of non-interest. As the abbot of one of the great monasteries on the Holy Mountain of Athos observed, "A God who does not deify man; such a God can have no interest for us, whether he exists or not."^v

In this struggle to walk the Christian path, St. Elizabeth is a valuable co-pilgrim and encouraging example, affording hope and eliciting gratitude in a variety of ways. That's what God's saints do. They show us the love of Christ in both their life's example and through their prayers for the world, inviting us to respond until we too can say "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me and I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever."

Evil happens in the world. It has from the beginning. It is one of the conditions in which we find ourselves without knowing why. The problem is not eradicating evil, for we too easily become the evil we fight. Evil has already been defeated by God in Jesus Christ. If we could have done it, there would be no need for Christ's passion. Our hope, rather is in what God has done. Thus our response to evil must always be one of returning to the continual repentance, prayer and solidarity that constitute the Christian path.

For a Christian there are no answers to be found in looking for who is responsible for evil: it lives in every human heart. There will always be evil on the earth. Christ said, *In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33)*. The question to ask ourselves in times of peril or sorrow is whether in the suffering that comes upon us we draw closer to God, strengthened in faith."^{vi}

Following the murder of her husband, Elizabeth's life suddenly shifted depths. After visiting her husband's murderer in jail and forgiving him, she began a series of choices that led to her relinquishing her former interest in beauty and fine clothes, and she began using the privilege and power of the monarchy to serve the people, eventually becoming a nun and establishing the first social service oriented monastic order in Russia devoted to ministry to the poor and sick in body and heart. Her temperament was consistently peaceful in the midst of increasingly desperate conditions, showing mercy and lifting others up around her, finding ways to celebrate life and bring a touch of beauty into the midst of great degradation.

At the time Elizabeth lived, Moscow was called the city of a thousand churches. When my wife Claudia and I visited there recently, hundreds of churches had been returned to the church by the government and they were slowly rising from the ashes of their desecration and disuse.

During Stalinist times we were told, some of the great churches, existing centuries before there were Europeans on American soil, had their doors removed and were flooded with water so "the people" could ice skate in them." At Optina monastery, the Mt Athos of Russia, where Dostoevsky visited the Holy St. Ambrose after whom he modeled the Staretz depicted in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Communists put pig sties over the Holy Elders' graves and turned the monastery into a retreat for the Communist elite.

We attended several services and had supper with two of the nuns who serve meals to pilgrims. There have been only one or two other occasions, Matuskha Evgenia knew of in the past two years when Americans had made the four hour trip outside Moscow to visit the monastery. There is a naturalness and genuine essence quality that pervades Matuskha's face as she speaks. No sense of affected "personality." It is very refreshing, and when the tears fall from her eyes as she shows us the tiny room in the skete formerly occupied by the Holy Staretz, St. Ambrose, it is a witness of love and faith more eloquent in its simplicity and genuineness than a month of sermons.

While we are eating simple black bread and drinking tea with scoops of preserves made at the monastery to sweeten it, Matuskha tells us some of its recent history. The monastery was returned to them by the government a few years ago. On the day they received word of its return, the icon of the Holy Theotokos with Christ in her arms, in the main church where we had worshipped (packed together like sardines for five and a half hours the evening before!) began to stream myrrh from her eyes. There have been many tears in Holy Russia, of joy and sorrow. Russia is raw, elemental, sublime, secular, profane and holy all woven together, like the state of each of our hearts in this world.

Unlike, Optina, St. Elizabeth's monastery, "Sts Martha and Mary," was in disrepair when we visited and it has not been fully returned to the Church. The Sanctuary was occupied by workers seeking to restore it and the few nuns who were on the grounds were anxiously awaiting the time when they might receive it back. But for now they were worshipping in a very small chapel in an adjacent building amidst huge holes in the ground exposing pipes, broken out windows and crumbling mortar in the formerly occupied monastic cells.

Over the door to the entrance to the Church was a powerful mosaic of the head of Christ in the form of the icon called the "Image not made with human hands." Most icons of Christ have eyes that look straight forward. This icon had striking green eyes that looked to the left with an expression that contained both gravity and sorrow. What were they looking at now? Above the icon were words written in old Slavonic. Our friend Lisa (for Elizabeth!), said she couldn't quite make it out – something like "I AM THE DOOR. WHOEVER ENTERS, MUST ENTER BY ME."

I felt a great sense of pathos in the cold air amidst the semi-deserted ruins around us, as I listened to the impassioned and anguished voice tones and facial expression of the nun as she spoke at length in Russian to our interpreter, about the situation at the monastery. A vague somber sense of grief hung in my heart as the intuitive lens of my imagination lingered over a time some 83 years before when the Bolsheviki ascended to power by descending upon the Church like locusts, ravaging it. It was as if it had just recently happened. The history I have read and poured over many times, hoping each time that it won't happen again the way I know it must, seemed as if to include me, helplessly standing by unable to do anything about *then*,

but strengthening the yearning to do something *now*, with my life *where I am able*, so that they may not have perished in vain. The present can change not only the future but the past if the past serves as a motivation for us to struggle to awaken NOW.

Every week in the Divine Liturgy, just before he enters the Royal Doors to call upon the Holy Spirit to sanctify the elements, the priest lifts up the Chalice and Paten holding the bread and wine that is the body and Blood of Christ given for us all, and making the sign of Christ over the people with it, he intones, "For those who love us and those who hate us" and the people respond in one voice "Amen!" The Grace of God, like the rain, falls on the just and the unjust alike. All receive it, but not all consume it worthily, so to speak, in a manner that transforms us into persons through whom God works such that it is true to say "*It is no longer I but Christ who lives in me.*"

Here I was, standing on ground where a soul given increasingly to God and the good of humanity had walked, quietly seeking to heal the wounds of pre-revolutionary Russia and then doing the same afterwards among her enemies, until some brutal, stupid, demonic force that could not see and value goodness since it was associated with Him, intervened. In killing Elizabeth, and countless others like her, the forces unleashed by the Russian Revolution cut off part of its own body as it continued to do under Lenin and Stalin who were responsible for the deaths of some 60 million Russian citizens. Those who had any clear and independent association with Christ and the Church who were seen as the true power behind the Monarchy were at the top of the list of enemies of the new "people's" state. Whatever may be said about the state of the Church and the value of a Theocratic monarchy, the fact that the Atheistic regime saw the Church as so great a threat and went to such lengths to try and eradicate it from Russian soil and psyche is perhaps the greatest testimony to its importance to "Holy Russia." Alexander Solzhenitsyn observes,

"If I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat what I heard as a small child: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.'

What is more, the events of the Russian revolution can only be understood now, at the end of the century, against a backdrop of what has since occurred in the rest of the world. What emerges here is a process of universal significance. And if I were called upon to identify briefly the principal trait of the *entire* twentieth century, here too, I would be unable to find anything more precise and pithy than to repeat once again: 'Men have forgotten God.' The failings of human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimension, have been a determining factor in all the major crimes of this century."^{vii}

Fr. Anatoly, a Russian Orthodox Priest in his fifties, with whom we had dinner during our trip, told us of a copy of a letter written by Lenin, which he'd seen with his own eyes. It had been circulated among Lenin's followers a few years after the coup^{viii} in which Lenin writes that it is necessary to weaken the

Orthodox Church by stealing its wealth and executing the priests, hierarchy and leaders in whatever manner needed to accomplish the goal of destroying its power. He wrote in his calculating cowardice and secrecy that this letter should be destroyed after being read.

One of the leaders of the church who had two strikes against her – for being a member of the Romanov aristocracy by marriage, and for being regarded by the people as a saint for her work among the poor and the sick in her hospitals, food banks and shelters, was Elizabeth the Grand Duchess, Russia's own Mother Theresa. People would line the streets and bow on their knees when she walked by, she was so loved and highly regarded. And this was so even in a time when her sister the Tsarina was hated for her German background, for her reclusiveness and her compete unreasonableness when it came to her support of the so-called "monk," Rasputin, who alone seemed able to stop the bleeding of her hemophiliac son.

Elizabeth was removed from the convent and taken by train with her nuns to a place outside Moscow where she was held for a month until being taken for a short walk where she was thrown down a forty-foot mine shaft along with the others in her company, followed by two hand grenades. The next day, amazingly, singing was heard in the mine shaft and when the White Army eventually recaptured the area and dug the people out, it was discovered that Elizabeth had used her clothing to bandage the wounds of her comrades who had remained alive from some time. She was found part way up the mine shaft with her rosary in her hand in the attitude of prayer. Her body was taken to China and then finally to Jerusalem where she is buried at the Church that she had earlier built there in honor of St. Mary Magdalene, after a deeply moving visit to the Holy Land.

According to Sr. Maria whom we met while she was dusting and cleaning in the small Chapel currently serving as the church for Sts. Martha and Mary Convent, "Elizabeth was always busy. Somehow in the midst of helping others constantly, she found time to embroider and make the environment beautiful. Sr. Maria eagerly told us that Elizabeth loved plants and placed so many around the altar (as is customary during the fest of Pentecost) that when Tsar Nicholas II visited the convent he would say "Elizabeth, for you it is always Pentecost!"

I gave Sr. Maria some incense from Mt Athos as a gift for use in the Sanctuary and we told her we would pray for the speedy return of the Church to the convent. Her lined face bloomed into a gracious and broad snaggle-toothed smile and then she turned back to her meticulous dusting.

We made our way down the street after our visit to St. Elizabeth's convent, to join Archimandrite Zaccheus, the priest of the OCA representation church in Moscow for tea and as it turned out, several toasts with Russian "wine" (vodka). He said "If you are cold (It was about 9 degrees outside.) this will warm you. And if you are warm, it will cool you!"

Fr. Zaccheus showed us the bell that he had in his office, which was to be delivered eventually to the newly rebuilt St. Nicholas Church in the U.S. which had been destroyed in the World Trade Center Bombing. We told Fr.

Zaccheus about the condition of Sts Martha and Mary's convent. He said this was true for many of the churches, but a great activity was going on in rebuilding and restoring them all over the city. I asked him about the difficulty with the Slavonic over the icon on the Church Entrance. He responded immediately with the correct translation, "I am the door and whoever enters here enters through me."

Later that evening, during the Vigil for St. Nicholas which we attended in the Church in which Fr. Zaccheus serves, I was standing very still in the Sanctuary among sixty or seventy others. My back and neck hurt and not knowing the language or the typikon I am never sure how long services will last in Russian churches. During my time there I joked that if I am told the service is to be a half hour I should expect an hour and a half. If I am told it will last an hour and a half I should expect three hours. At Optina monastery when I had been expecting three and a half hours, it lasted five and one-half hours! The Russians were concerned that the Americans were too soft (and spoiled?) for this!

As I stood there in the midst of the Orthodox service touched by the strange and beautiful Slavonic tongue, I began to be very aware of the struggle of forces at play in me. These forces are always present, but much more rarely seen, because I tend to be unconsciously reactive, identified with one or the other of them, instead of simultaneously remaining present to the tension between like and dislike, will and imagination. To *choose*, one must remain awake to the possibility that emerges when holding oneself apart from identifying and surrendering to one or other of these inner promptings.

There are two streams flowing through us. One carries us along the path of the "old man of the flesh." It "happens" to us without our really having to be present. It is pleasure-seeking, self-calming and anthropocentric, seeking a faux security through increased privilege, power, possessions and prestige. The other path involves intentional watchfulness of the forces that become visible when we struggle to maintain ascetical^x boundaries. This is the road to becoming fully human, the "new man in Christ." The path is triune in contrast to the dualistic tensions that dominate carnal man, with surrender to Grace bringing a state of being *in* this world, but not entirely *of* it. If nations become what the critical mass of its citizenry are, then perhaps where there are not enough of those who truly seek the way that leads to "Thy will being done on earth," then nations can take a wrong path, led forward by projections onto a leader who personifies the forces that hold the nation in obedience and such forces can bring a nation to ruinous calamity.

As Fr. Zaccheus reminded us, "There are two Russias. One is Holy. One is secular." Both seek to prevail. The same is true for each of us. There is both sinner and potential saint, depending on our choices in cooperation with the Grace of God over a lifetime. As the Lord enjoins, in this life we must "Keep awake and watch for you know not when the Master will arrive, lest you be found sleeping." We cannot enter the Bridegroom's chamber just because we want to, motivated by acquisitive egoistic passions or for any other impulses less than pure love of the Bridegroom. Such pure love is a function

of the quality of attention that is shaped by the heart's deepest longing fanned into flame by a thousand moments of choosing to be present to the invitation of Grace knocking at the door of our hearts every second of our lives. Am I at any given moment, receiving this Grace "worthily" that is, according to God's blessing, for its own sake, with all my heart, mind and body and evidencing this in love for my neighbor as for myself? These are extraordinary conditions that rarely prevail, and never apart from the reconciling action of the Holy Spirit. As St. Isaac the Syrian asks, *Can these things be truly known from ink? Does the taste of honey pass over the palate from books? Therefore: Who will read these things and yearn?* This does not just *happen* on its own without me having to do anything. I must repeatedly see how I fail...and repent. "A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, you will not despise." From this ruin, prayer rises like a phoenix and I get up again, like a child, learning eventually to walk the path God sets before me.

My back is beginning to hurt along with my legs and shoulders. Little complaints arise from somewhere and are delivered to the central switchboard of my attention, hoping to attract some feeling of sympathy and enlist my will to find a way to "stop to the pain of standing" or "ease the suffering of not being in control of when this will end" and other such forms of what, if accepted, would amount to self-indulgence and self-calming rather than wakefulness and prayer. I see once again that I am having trouble *being obedient to something greater than my own self-will*. How much of my life is built on shutting my inner eye and giving in to this impulse? Or as Peter once found himself doing and saying, "Jesus of Nazareth? Never heard of the man. Don't know what you're talking about! Leave me alone. I have no part of any of that. I am just a man warming himself by the fire confound it!"

Watching these forces turning like snakes in my mind, the words "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me!" keeps sweeping through with each turn of another knot on the prayer rope in my hand. I subvocalize the words of the prayer, trying to bring them down into the heart where my yearning is buried amidst the clamor. Somewhere within me there is a longing to be touched deeply by God. How to find this in the midst of all this distraction? There is a fear that I might have come 4000 miles for nothing, and then again, a gentle returning to awareness of "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner" like a slow drip, a spiritual IV to eliminate foreign invaders from infecting the heart.

"Can we stop now?" the little child in me whines, while another part calmly reassures, "Be still and continue making the effort to be present." The body is obedient, but the emotionality in me wants to bolt, taking the body with it. The melodious chanting is not enough. Something more important calling to me holds me in place, *waiting for God*. Although the pain is felt in the body, the *suffering* is experienced in the *imagination* where self-will has its throne. It doesn't matter from this place what the suffering is for or what it makes possible. This "I" is not in control at this moment. A deeper yearning has deputized a group of other "I's" to mind the inner house, such as it is. Nevertheless something else is needed to reconcile these disparate parts of will and desire which appear to be in battle with each other.

I had come to Russia to teach a course on sin and psychopathology to counseling students in the only program in Russia that unites Christianity and Psychology. Previous discussions with them were in and out of my mind as I stood there. We had been talking about relational healing and I had surprised them by suggesting that the person of the therapist in conjunction with the faith of the client was a key variable, especially in terms of whether the therapist was a person of prayer, who went to Confession regularly and who was rooted in Orthodox Christian tradition. This was difficult idea for some of the students to grasp, reared as they were in an atheistic environment in a culture whose government for 70 years tried to twist, deny or eradicate every particle of its former religious understanding.

On the other hand, it isn't so different from my own culture where all too often, Christianity, the Bible and the words of Christ often serve as little more than an adornment for the belt buckle of the ego and its interests, securing and justifying social prestige, privilege and the right to wield power and uncritically judge others in the name of our own culturally and racially embedded "righteousness." The line between the evil of war unleashed by a democratic nation to prevent the worse evil of a totalitarian nation from prevailing is sometimes difficult to discern. All war is evil and enlarging territory for one nation at the expense of others is as much the wrong path for a nation as it is for an individual. No house divided can stand forever. No political or economic solution that secures peace and security only for part of humanity, can ever last. "Progress which is not aimed at the resurrection of all would be merely a succession of murders."^x Repentance and self-examination that ultimately lead to justice and mercy are critical to our long-term well being, both personally and collectively as a nation.

Having met Fr. Zaccheus in a relaxed personal setting and now seeing him here leading the service, I was reflecting on how he, like other monks and priests I have known, in doing the Liturgical services, fulfills a certain role and is caught up in a web of much greater meaning. I am struck again by the silence that envelops the priest like a shroud as he quietly moves through the prescribed patterns. Emptying themselves of their own "personality" as they perform the Liturgy invites me toward a deeper prayerfulness as well. Personality invites personality and prayer invites prayer.

It suddenly occurs to me how the person of the therapist, the therapeutic alliance and the faith and hope of the client(s) in pastoral psychotherapy are all rooted in Christ as hypostasis, the ontological ground of being. This relationship is the unifying element of psychotherapy just as it is for our personal lives. All healing occurs *dia-Logos*. Christ stands between the self and other as well as being the ground of being that unites the two in one embrace which allows for separate persons in dialogue. The ego-personality of the therapist is left aside as the priest leaves aside his "small" self to be Christ's representative with and for others, just as St. Paul who in his ministry of preaching, "decided to know nothing but Christ crucified."

The Liturgy or dance of the therapist is different than the priest and may involve a variety of forms of human interaction from playfulness, to quiet

empathy, confrontation or instruction, but the critical variable is the *person of Christ* in whom our own and every other personhood adheres and from which we receive life and meaning and value. The source is not, as St. John the Theologian reminds, “that we love but that Christ first loved us.” It is this which guides and sustains the healing ministry of pastoral care and counseling whatever its context. Human value begins with belovedness to God which is a pure gift offered to each of us. I sometimes ask married couples “If you were in a special courtroom where your spouse was on trial and you had to prove his or her existence in order to save them from death and the only evidence you could offer that would suffice for this, was that you or someone else had done something for him or her that had nothing whatsoever to do with meeting one’s own needs, could you do it?”

It’s a very difficult question. Only God is capable of such pure unselfish love and thus we *exist* not because we can think or feel or know or do or have or any other power under the sun, but solely because *God unselfishly loves us*. If God is not *person*, then neither are we, for we obtain value as persons only by faith in Him who first loved us and not by empirical validation of our existence from any other source.

The essence of an Orthodox Christian anthropology was becoming palpable during the worship experience as I took in what was happening around me through my eyes and within me through my heart. At *just this moment* as I am attending to the “appearing” of this new apprehension of hypostasis in relation to my thinking about psychotherapy, Claudia whispers in my ear that Lisa just told her that the Gospel reading for the day which Fr. Zaccheus is reading, is the words of Jesus from the Apostle John that have been the subject of our wonderings all day, *I am the door...*

Quietly the heart wells up and breaks open like a ripe pomegranate with a sense of Eucharistic presence spilling over my thoughts, warming them with the joy of a personal encounter, making the words flesh. Quiet tears flow as the heart implodes with grateful sorrow at the message that “I am deep within you in the depths of your own heart, the true Image in which you are made and outside of you in the likeness to which you are called and all around you in the one Body of many parts to which you belong. I am in the time of your becoming and the eternity of your being. I am the Alpha and the Omega. I am the crucified and Risen Lord. Whoever knows me in the humblest of forms: as the beggar outside the monastery gate or as the Anointed Tsar; among the forsaken and bereft in the Gulag or in the beauty of the Divine Liturgy celebrated amidst the splendor of the most beautiful churches in the world, knows the One who sent me. It is through me that all healing occurs.”

The worshippers move forward now, converging from all directions like a Moscow traffic jam, to receive the sign of the cross made by the priest on each forehead, personally, one at a time, representing Him through Whom each of us is uniquely and personally created capable of dwelling together just as Father, Son and Holy Spirit are uniquely one and three in love. The fragrance of the oil is breathed in and it’s like a grace that begins to spread

throughout the body and mind. My heart is full and I am aware that even at that moment, my mind is trying to snatch pieces of the experience to enlarge the ever burgeoning United States or Soviet Union of my Ego, thinking “You are having a spiritual experience.” or “Does this mean God is touching you specially?” This happens in a second along with the awareness of letting all this go, realizing it is secondary to the experience which may not even leave a trace that can be captured and built into any sort of “tent” to “house the glory” of the moment. Like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, the point is not to succumb to any deviation from ortho-doxy (literally *correct glory*) trying to enlarge the separate reality of one’s own individual ego, even for the best of intentions, but simply to return to the Word coming from above: “Listen to my Beloved Son” *now at this moment. And the next.* For God is at every instance creating something new. In obedience to this, for a moment, I *become myself* without even knowing how. Why is it so difficult to lose my man-making-self in order to find in Christ a self not made with human will? God esteem is prior to and the ground for Self-esteem. Whoever settles for the latter, will lose it, but whoever surrenders to Divine Love, will find the latter as well and it will remain with the soul forever, as God originally intended.

As I leave the church, I realize strangely, my body no longer aches...or maybe it does, but it no longer matters, because there is no *suffering*. Leaving the church here in this strange land among strange people I am strangely at peace as if among my very closest kin.

Jesus said, “If I be lifted up I will draw all people to me.” So there is nothing strange at all in the fact that another scion of the English branch of humanity, a.k.a an American, has found his way home to the Orthodox Christian faith which embraces all cultures and all races in all times in places without diminishing the uniqueness of any one person or nation, but rather completing and uniting them in one Body. For truly “In Christ there is no East nor West, no Greek nor Jew, no slave nor free, but Christ is all in all.”

Lord Jesus Christ, by the prayers of the Holy Theotokos, and the holy martyr St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess and all the saints both known and unknown who have loved You and in so doing, loved us all, pray for us sinners who set our hope in Thee!

ⁱ Center for Disease Control – Atlanta, cited in Brenner, J.D. (2002) *Does Stress Damage the Brain?* New York: W.W. Norton & CO. p169

ⁱⁱ National Victim Center (1993) *Crime and Victimization in America: Statistical overview.* Arlington, VA, cited in van der Kolk, BA, McFarlane, AC, and Weisaeth, L., Eds. *Traumatic Stress* New York: Guilford Press. p31

ⁱⁱⁱ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (1993) *World Disaster report, 1993.* Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

^{iv} As for example in Adolf Hitler who had Jewish ancestors that came to represent that in himself which was despised and hated and must be eliminated as his abusive father had succeeded in eliminating in his poor son, the possibility of remaining in contact with his own conscience which

is rooted in a child's own heart. Cf. Alice Miller's powerful work *For Your Own Good* which closely examines this phenomenon in Russia from a psychodynamic perspective.

^v Muse, S. (2000) *Beside Still Waters: Resources for Shepherds in the Market Place*. Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys.

^{vi} Abbess Michaela (1999) "Hope in the Fields of Kosovo" *The Orthodox Word*. No. 205, p57.

^{vii} Solzhenitsyn, A. (1988) *The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion" 1978-1987*: Scottish Academic Press Ltd., pp116-117.

^{viii} Unlike the French and American revolutions, one of the enigmas of the so-called Russian "revolution" is that so few people were initially involved. Why did the Bolsheviks win? According to noted Russian historian Richard Pipes, eyewitnesses at the time and for decades later viewed it as a coup d'etat rather than a people's revolution. In his short essay *Three "Whys" of the Russian Revolution*, Pipes, R. (1995) New York: Random House, pp.32-33 points out "only slightly more than 5 percent of Russia's industrial workers belonged to the Communist Party in a country which industrial workers represented 1 or 1.5 per cent of the population." That Lenin's methods were ruthless and pre-emptive is confirmed by documents released recently by the Central Party Archive's such as a letter handwritten by Lenin which calls for "urgent" unleashing of terror" and "confirms that the "Red Terror" was not a reluctant response to the actions of others, but a prophylactic measure designed to nip in the bud any thought of resistance to the dictatorship." P41

^{ix} asceticism rightly understood is the struggle to become free of lesser forces in order to be responsive to the greater force of Grace. Thus asceticism is part of the conditions freely accepted which provide a context for struggle or inner separation from identifying with suggestions as they arise without discrimination. Cf. Tito Colliander's classic work *Way of the Ascetics* and Bishop Theophan the Recluse's *Turning the Heart Toward God*

^x Clement, O. (2000) *On Human Being: A Spiritual Anthropology*. London: New City Press. p124