

“DO YOU WANT TO DIE?”
TOWARDS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL VISION OF CATECHESIS

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Abstract

In this study we endeavour to explore the presence and effects of death-denying culture within the context of Orthodox Christian catechism, with a specific emphasis on the preparation and training of adult catechumens. It is our premise that the lack of a proper emphasis on the acceptance of death during catechism results in not the creation of true "disciples," but rather the conversion of "non-Orthodox secularists" into "Orthodox secularists." Furthermore, we posit that current Church teaching models lack this eschatological vision that was especially prevalent among the Christian fathers of the first three centuries.

In this study we have endeavoured to survey a wide range of Orthodox priests, catechists and converts who have experienced a variety of different catechumenate programs within the spiritual milieu of the Greek Orthodox Church in Canada. The empirical evidence has enabled us to assess the stated hypothesis that under current models, converts are really not "converting" in the truest sense. In most cases there is no meaningful change in the individual's vision of life and relationship to God, a situation that is exacerbated by Orthodox clergy actively avoiding the topic of death during the catechism process.

This evidence, coupled with a cursory, yet sufficient, survey of modern society's death-denying culture, and a detailed analysis of the eschatological vision of a selection of apostolic fathers of the first three centuries, has allowed us to put forth a possible blueprint for creating a modern methodology for Orthodox catechesis that is rooted in not the denial of death, but rather its embrace – allowing us to openly ask the question, "Do you want to die?"

Glory to God for all things.

For

+ Prof. Richard Schneider
+ My grandfather Lymberios
Mr. Peter Anadranistakis:
for his patronage, love and friendship

With abundant thanks to:

Archbishop Sotirios of Canada
My wife Joanna & My Children George, Katerina & Angelo
My parents, siblings and extended family
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The surveyed and venerable Archpriests and Priests
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Chapter 1. Introduction: The Death of Death

Western culture commonly distresses over thoughts of death. From the individual level up to larger institutions, reflection and acknowledgement of mortality is often shied away from. Religions and cultural systems often emphasize the idea of reward and punishment for the afterlife and that is, in itself, a virtual disfavour of death. From the moment of birth, Westerners are exposed to stories, media, and conversations that avoid celebrating death as part of the life cycle. Instead, death is positioned as a tragedy and phenomenon that should be prepared for, but never anticipated. Funerary traditions are often centred around “saying goodbye,” rather than celebrating a life and allowing the space to publicly grieve the loss of a loved one. Barna outlines this phenomenon effectively when he says,

“Mourning faded away in a community disconnected from the death of its own members. Any sense of solidarity among the members of the community was replaced by a mass of dispersed individuals competing their way to the top. In a society based on competitiveness, winning and the accumulation of ‘stuff,’ the wasting death of disease an even old age is the final shame of ultimate defeat.”¹

On a higher level, institutions are deeply rooted in the avoidance of death. Hospitals are tasked with the responsibility of saving lives and therapeutic conversations often contain phrases like “hoping and expecting for a recovery,” regardless of the medical prognosis. In such a way, the medical system contributes to and perpetuates the idea that mortality does not have to always be accepted. Scientists strive for a “fountain of youth,” a nearly mythical idea of perpetual life. Instead of teaching that life is beautiful, and death is deeply meaningful, Western culture instills in its members the fear of mortality, creating its widespread denial.

In contrast the Orthodox Christian Church has a unique approach to death and dying, holding a strong belief in eternal life and in the communion of the saints with God. This perspective involves understanding the transition from one life to the next. Thus, eternal life is not seen as something to be feared, but instead something to be embraced and

¹ Barna, Mark & Elizabeth. *A Christian Ending*. Pg. 23.

viewed with hope and joy. As Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall never die.”²

Western society, while largely denying death, prefers to view it as a negative, irreversible experience. In attempts to search for something that will outlast it, many people seek out quick escape routes, such as modern medicine and flashy promises of eternal physical beauty. In the face of this attitude, the Orthodox Church reminds people that life on earth is transient and eternal life is something for which we must strive. In death, there is a hope for something more, as all will one day be reunited with God in the resurrection.

Orthodox spirituality considers the acceptance of death as central to an individual’s journey towards holiness. It is a recognition of the reality of mortality, and an acceptance that death is a part of life. This acceptance also means being prepared to face our end with courage and faith in the faithfulness of God. When the faithful accept death, they turn towards prayer and love of God, recognizing Him as the one who will take them home and the only one who can bring peace and comfort in their time of need.

The significance of death for an Orthodox Christian starts with recognizing the ramifications of the fall. As described in Genesis, the fall of man introduced the presence of sin and suffering into the world, leading to humans struggling with mortality as the consequence of separation from God. As such, death is seen as necessary for repentance, cleansing, and re-connection with God, creating a beautiful cycle of mortality, struggle and redemption. This cycle involves death and suffering, being embraced by Orthodox Christians as a gift of eternal hope and assurance. Without understanding the effect of the fall and the implications of one’s mortality, Orthodox Christians would be unable to reconcile the difficulty of perishing in order to be brought closer to God. This knowledge provides insight into the sacrificial aspects of the faith and the necessity of accepting mortality as a means of more deeply understanding the divine.

² John 11:25

Another core teaching of Orthodox Christianity is the belief in the transformative power of baptism, whereby an individual dies to their old self and is reborn in Christ. However, in a death-denying culture, discussions about confronting one's mortality are often dismissed (as we shall see in Chapter 2), rendering it difficult for Orthodox Christians to fully grasp the profound symbolism of baptism. Without acknowledging the reality of death, individuals may fail to comprehend the importance of leaving behind their old life and embracing the new one offered through membership in the Church. This denial may lead to a superficial understanding of baptism, detracting from the overall transformative experience it can provide.

Moreover, a death-denying culture can minimize the significance of baptism as a spiritual journey that requires serious personal preparation. Confronting the inevitability of physical death prompts individuals to reflect on their own mortality and the state of their souls. However, when death is avoided or downplayed, individuals may lack the motivation to sincerely engage in the necessary acts of self-reflection, repentance, and growth in preparation for baptism. This denial can undermine the transformative potential of the sacrament, as individuals may not fully grasp the depth of commitment required to lead a faithful and vibrant Christian life after baptism (evidence of which one can see in the survey data presented in chapter 2).

This study endeavours to explore three main areas of death-denying culture: 1. The phenomenon of the denial of death infiltrating and influencing the modern Orthodox Christian Church - most specifically the avoidance of death in the formal preparation of catechumens. 2. A historical-theological survey of the origins of death-denying culture. 3. What can be done to remedy the situation and re-emphasize the importance of death acceptance within the process of Christian formation.

The importance of death for Orthodoxy transcends the individual and becomes a communal issue. As Orthodox Christians are united in their faith and their shared cycle of mortality and redemption, death becomes a shared experience and means of strengthening one another in their faith. This collective understanding of death and its sacred purpose

allows Orthodox Christians to come together and prioritize collective salvation, reinforcing their bond with God through their communal solidarity. Understanding this journey, and the many obstacles along the way, is the purpose of this study.

Chapter 2. The State of the Catechumenate Today

i. Evangelical Apathy

Many in the Orthodox Church, especially clergy, complain about the lack of spiritual understanding and religious participation among the laity. While this study focuses particularly on the experience of those individuals who have converted to the Orthodox faith as adults, it is logical to infer that any identified deficiencies in current catechetical methods may also apply to those who have been raised in the Church from infancy. While complaints abound, both from clergy and laity alike, prior to this study, there has been little to no statistical evidence available to aid in the task of pinpointing the causes of such a spiritual malaise.

There is a general perception in the Church that people are “born Orthodox” and that the few religious obligations that are expected of them are intertwined with one’s ethnic identity. A bias for ethnicity is often present³ over the spreading of the Gospel. There is a type of nationalistic entitlement that stands in direct opposition to the evangelical spirit of Christianity. This mode of thinking makes most individuals oblivious to the reality of the presence, and catechetical preparation of adult converts who choose to enter Orthodoxy of their own free will. Such a bias is strongly present amongst older clergy, who were not born in North America, and is often passed down to subsequent generations of younger clergy and lay catechists who have learned from their elders. It is biases such as these that can be identified in the data collected for this study and which will be presented in the following pages. While it is not our opinion that such biases are the sole source of the overarching problem (the problem

³ Kizilos, Tolly. *Tradition and Change: Concerns for Today’s Greek Orthodox Church in America*. Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life Pub. 2000. Pg. 69.

of death denial), it can definitely be considered as a contributing factor. The apathy among many clergy and lay catechists, to properly convey the Orthodox faith in an effective manner and to not avoid the more “disconcerting” topics of suffering and death, may be exacerbated by a conscious, or even unconscious, bias towards those not of the same ethnicity; the so-called “ξένοι” or “strangers.”

This evangelical apathy usually drives clergy to rarely examine the methods by which they catechize. Even in the rare instances in which the method has been actively crafted by the priest or catechist, the lack of *gravitas* given to the proper preparation of catechumens often inhibits most catechists from identifying possible weaknesses in their method and therefore seeking new ways to remedy any or all deficiencies present.

ii. The Purpose of the Surveys

It is this lack of introspection, on behalf of our catechists, that inspired the use of surveys in this study. Having already posited our hypothesis (that the lack of eschatological vision is the main obstacle to true and authentic conversion), this study embarked on the execution of two online surveys that sought to gather information never before compiled in the Orthodox world. The first survey focused on a wide range of Orthodox converts who had experienced a variety of different catechetical programs. The second survey focused on the priests and lay catechists who were preparing the same individuals to enter the Orthodox Church. This research was carried out with the hope that the empirical evidence would serve as a proper assessment of the stated hypothesis, revealing a lack of emphasis on eschatology in the current catechetical approaches surveyed. The following surveys were administered online via the website www.surveymonkey.com.

iii. Subject Identities and Security

The subjects questioned in this study are all Orthodox Christians who attend parishes under the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada. There was a random sampling of individuals who had been both catechized by the author and by other clergy in the

country. The sampling endeavored to poll individuals from multiple cities, socio-economic conditions, parish sizes, and ethnicities.

The identities of the subjects have remained anonymous as to ensure their privacy. The identities are only known to the author of this study for purposes of initially contacting them for consent. Any personal data has been stored on an encrypted computer and backed up on an encrypted external hard drive. The actual online questionnaires did not allow the subject to input their name, making the data completely anonymous. None of the subjects were minors therefore parental consent was not needed. None of the subjects were members of vulnerable populations.

iv. A Note on the Sampling

This study focused on research limited specifically to the Greek Orthodox Church in Canada. We realize that such an approach has its limitations. While the data gathered reflects a unique sample of Orthodox Christian converts, we believe that such a sampling has the following advantages:

1. The sample, while limited, is consistent.
2. The sample maintains consistency from a unified liturgical and jurisdictional milieu.
3. The sample maintains consistency from a population sharing a common history, evolution and ethos.
4. Although limited in scope, the method of sampling can be theoretically applied to other Orthodox jurisdictions in the future, eventually comparing and contrasting results between jurisdictional, cultural and liturgical milieus.
5. Regardless of demographic limitations, the nature of this study is not affected by the choice of sampling. If it is found that the data gathered supports the overarching hypothesis, whether this applies to one, or all Orthodox jurisdictions, is immaterial as to the usefulness and relevance of the study.

v. Size of the Sample

It was very difficult to determine what size of sample would ensure the effectiveness of the research, since every parish under the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada is different. Some parishes have up to 5 converts a year while others have none. There are approximately 45 full- time Greek Orthodox parishes in Canada, 29 smaller chapels⁴and 2 monasteries. These communities are serviced by a total of 65 priests, of which 50 are active and 15 are retired. The average rate of converts per year is not higher than 2 converts per parish. To ensure a faithful representation from every region of the country and every size of parish, requests were made to the parish priests to either provide contact information for converts in their parishes, or to pass on the link to the online survey themselves. As stated above, each parish priest/catechist also received an online survey to complete. The final numbers of participants in the online surveys were 44 priests/catechists (88% of active clergy in Canada) and 42 converts (approx. 47% of total converts per year).

vi. A Note on Methodology: What Was Asked

As stated above, both surveys were distributed online via the website “SurveyMonkey.” This allowed us to easily reach clergy/catechists and converts who were situated in different locations across the country. While our interest in both groups was the same, the questions asked varied depending on the group.

Questions posed to those who had converted focused primarily on two main areas:

1. Their experience of the catechumenate.
2. Their experience of life after conversion.

In the first area, most questions focused on exploring how the subject came to know about the Orthodox Church and by what process did they enter: Who catechized them? How long was the catechism process? What material was covered (subjects, themes, issues)? Was the topic of death or eschatology ever discussed? What

⁴ In this context the word “Chapel” means smaller communities that do not have a full-time parish priest. These parishes only have services once every few months and rarely ever have converts. Priests in nearby cities service these 29 communities.

expectations did the Church have of the catechumen (church attendance, readings, volunteer work, etc.)? What were the subject's age, ethnicity, education, marital status and religious background at the time of conversion? In summation, this section sought to discover with whom we were speaking and the quality of the religious education they received before conversion.⁵

In the second area of inquiry, questions focused on the current life of the subject after conversion. These questions delved into the basic understanding of the faith and how it has (or has not) affected the subject's life: How active is the subject in their local parish? How much charity does one perform? Is daily prayer essential to one's life? How often does the subject receive Holy Communion or participate in the sacraments? Does the subject understand the liturgical services? What does the subject think about death and eschatology? Does the subject understand martyrdom? What are the subject's attitudes toward Christian witness, suffering, funeral rituals, sacrifice, etc.? Does the subject perceive that they are living a different life now that they have become Orthodox?⁶

It is important to note that the ultimate purpose of these questions is to compare and contrast the catechism experience to the so-called effects it has on peoples' lives after they have gone through the process. For example, is there a correlation between the quality of the catechism and the level of involvement after conversion? Furthermore (as we shall examine with the Priest/Catechist survey) can we cross-reference these results with those of the priests/catechist survey in order to identify trends and even deficiencies in the catechetical approach? Most importantly, it is the subject's understanding of death and eschatology that is our primary focus. Is it possible to truly become a disciple of Christ without holding these themes as central to changing one's life?

⁵ There are many more questions that have been asked in the survey. In the interest of brevity, these will be synthesized into coherent trends and themes in the following pages.

⁶ The complete data from the survey results are provided in the appendix.

The second survey presents questions posed to those priests/catechists who have been carrying out the catechetical process. This survey focused primarily on two main areas:

1. The identity of the priest/catechist.
2. The method and content of the catechesis being offered.

The first, and briefest, set of questions established the backgrounds of the priests/catechists: What is their age, gender, years of ministry? How many people have they catechized in their lifetime?

The second area of questions focused entirely on the content the subject provided in their respective catechism program: How long does the catechism last? What types of materials are used (readings, audio, video, in-person meetings, etc.)? What theological fields are covered (scripture, patristics, liturgy, etc.)? What expectations does the priest/catechist have of the catechumen (church attendance, volunteerism, etc.)? Are the concepts of death, eschatology and martyrdom explored? What is the priest/catechist's perceived retention rate of those who convert (5%, 10%, 50%, etc.)?

As was the case with the convert survey, the main purpose of this survey was to ascertain the level of quality of the catechetical approach as well as to identify any deficiencies. Do the priests/catechists place emphasis on the same aspects of the faith as those that were perceived by the converts in their survey? Does the perceived "success" of the current catechetical approaches espoused by the priests/catechists agree with the perceptions of those who have been catechized? Is there a lack of eschatological vision present in one or both surveys? And, if so, how does one interpret the effects of such data?

What will follow is a detailed analysis of the data from both surveys. For the sake of brevity and coherence the data has been synthesized into interpreted statements. We realize that all data is subject to interpretation and that multiple conclusions can be drawn from simple numbers. We have done our best to provide, when necessary, the

raw data, while at other times extrapolating averages from multiple questions in order to effectively compare and contrast the results between surveys. It is important to note that caveats have been provided throughout the analysis, when the data is vague, inconclusive or lacks nuance. In any case, the raw data of this study is available to anyone who requests it in an effort to provide transparency and to invite peer review of the research.

vii. Presenting the Data: The Convert Survey

Demographics

The first area the survey explores is that of demographics. In any study involving surveys, it is important to acquire a sample that is as diverse and as non-bias as possible. Therefore, it was our goal that the sample would represent a diversity of sex, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. In this, we feel that we were successful. The sample of converts surveyed consisted of 42 individuals (approx. 47% of total converts per year).⁷ Of these, 24 were females and 18 were males (see Figure: 1).

Figure: 1



Of the total amount of individuals surveyed, the majority seem to have converted to the Orthodox faith in early to mid-adulthood. A total of 85% of all individuals surveyed were between the ages of 20 – 40 (see Figure: 2). This is in contrast to the

⁷ This percentage is an approximation based on the total convert averages Canada-wide provided by the Registry Department of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Canada.

relatively small numbers of individuals found in the older age ranges: 40-50 years only 10% and 50-60 years a mere 2% (see Figure: 2). This suggests a tendency for younger individuals to be more likely to seek out conversion to a new faith. While the reasons for this are not conclusive, the data shows that a major contributing factor could be mixed marriage (see Figure: 3). Only 12% of individuals surveyed were single and never married at the time of conversion. In contrast 83% were either married,⁸ in a civil union or cohabitating.

Figure: 2

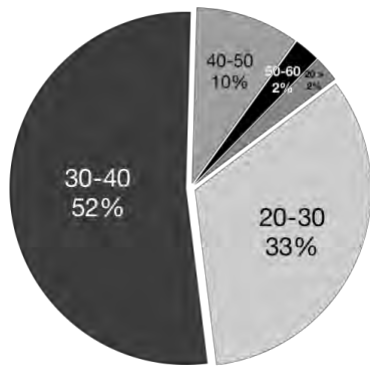
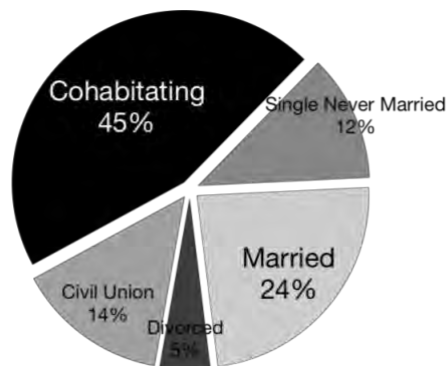
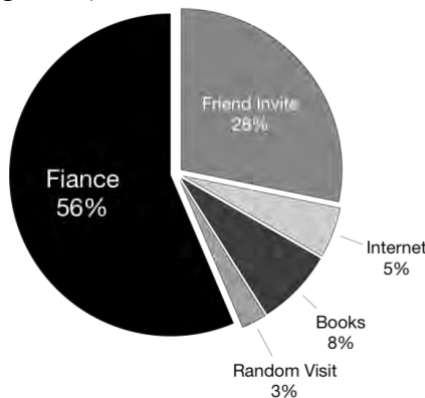


Figure: 3



Of the 45% of individuals who were cohabitating, all represented relationships in which a non-Orthodox Christian was engaged to an Orthodox Christian and were preparing for marriage in the Orthodox Church. This can be further verified by fact that 56% of all individuals surveyed stated that their first point of contact with the Orthodox Church was through their fiancé (see Figure: 4).

Figure: 4



⁸ Note: “Married” refers to individuals who are not Orthodox but have been married either to an Orthodox spouse in an Orthodox service as part of a mixed marriage or married in another religious ceremony not recognized by the Orthodox Church. “Civil Union” refers to those individuals who have been married either at city hall or another civil, non-religious ceremony.

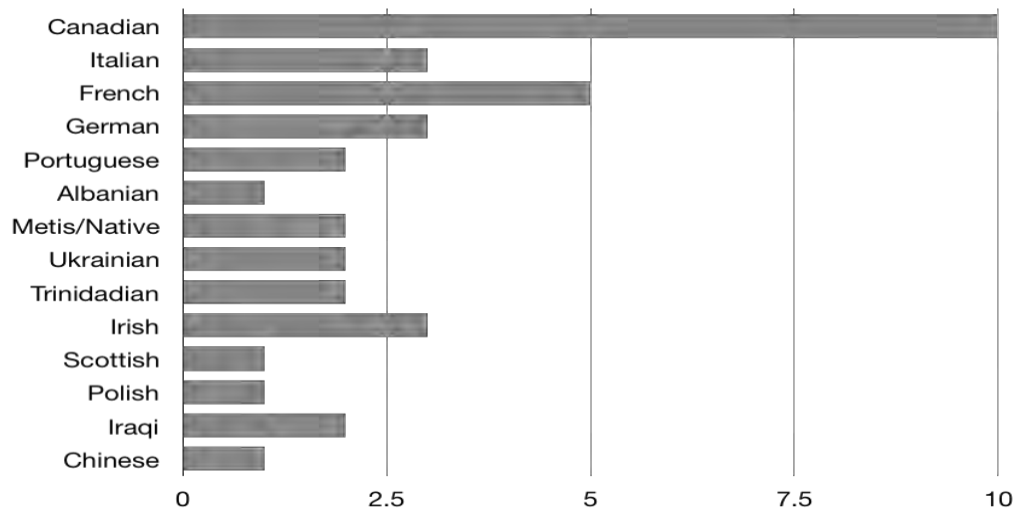
While there is a large minority present in the sample (44%) that seem to be converting for reasons other than marriage (see Figure: 4) the data still suggests that the main impetus for conversion is marriage to an Orthodox Christian. Since it is the common practice of the Greek Orthodox Church in Canada to only impose baptism on those individuals who are not baptized in water under a trinitarian formula, it is reasonable to conclude that the majority of the individuals surveyed chose to convert to Orthodoxy not because of a personal religious conviction, but rather out of necessity. Under such conditions, the probability of such individuals ever becoming true and active Orthodox Christians is somewhat low. We will explore this question later on in this study.

Ethnic and Religious Backgrounds

In addition to diversity in sex, age and socio-economic status, the surveyed individuals also represent a healthy cross section of the Canadian multi-ethnic and multi-religious milieu. As seen in Figures 5 and 6, a variety of ethnicities and religious backgrounds are represented in the sample.⁹ When comparing these two sets of data, it is interesting to note a possible correlation between ethnicity and religion. The “Canadian” category (33%) represents perhaps the most generic and obscure expression of culture since Canada is a country made up of immigrants. Much like the United States, Canada has very little national cultural of its own, except for the native and aboriginal cultures, which are usually considered independent of, and pre-date, so-called “Canadian” culture. As such, most individuals in Canada, although would proudly say they are Canadian, usually identify ethnically with the country from which their family emigrated (Greek Canadian, Irish Canadian, French Canadian, etc.). Those individuals who identify ethnically as Canadian through and through usually do not have many cultural ties to any particular country or tradition.

⁹ Note: In Figure 3, the ethnic category “Canadian” simply refers to individuals of mixed ethnic origin who have been living in Canada for at least 3 family generations. “Canadian” is not to be confused with aboriginal peoples native to Canada before colonization who are represented under the category “Metis/Native.”

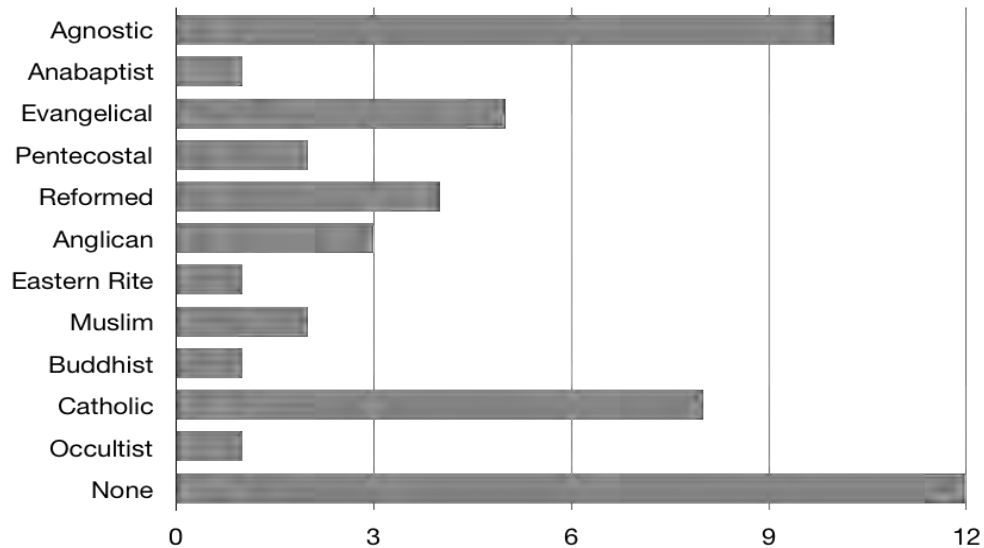
Figure: 5



In the same way, when analyzing the multi-religious landscape of the sample (see Figure: 6) one can observe that the largest religious grouping is the “Nones” ¹⁰(28%), followed by “Agnostics” (26%). This means that the majority of individuals (54%) seeking entrance into the Church are both uncultured and unchurched. Is there a correlation between lack of culture and lack of religion? While there is not enough evidence to support this statement, it is clear that there is some type of parallel between the two. One possible explanation could be the reality of integrating into North American society that is mostly secular. As one dispenses with one’s ethnic traditions and language, it is logical to speculate that one would also begin to shed the religious beliefs associated with that culture. Regardless of the causal factors, the data clearly shows that the majority of individuals entering the Orthodox faith (approx. 54%) exhibit a lack of religious and ethnic association, the effects of which cannot be understated when one applies it to individuals seeking entrance into a religious body, such as Orthodoxy, that is steeped in high ritual and born out of multiple cultural milieus.

¹⁰ Note: “Nones” usually refers to individuals who claim they believe in God, sometimes very strongly, but refuse to associate themselves with any type of organized religious group. This is on contrast to “Agnostics” who often claim that they do not know whether or not God exists.

Figure: 6



Assessment of Catechetical Process

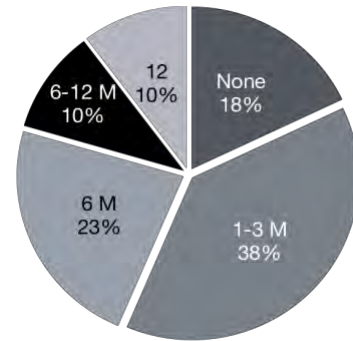
Having established the basic cultural, religious and socioeconomic identity of those surveyed, let us now turn our attention to the main focus of this particular survey: the assessment and quality of the catechetical processes currently in use in the Greek Orthodox Church of Canada. This sequence of questions was loosely grouped into four main sections or themes:

1. The amount of time an individual was catechized.
2. The mention of death in catechism and all its subsets (funerals, mortality, eschatology, end of life decisions, suffering and martyrdom).
3. Change of lifestyle after conversion.
4. A series of association questions to draw out liturgical understanding.
5. A self-assessment of one's own persona and spiritual state.

Figure: 7

1. Amount of Time Spent on Catechism

This first inquiry consisted of only one question: “How long did your catechism last before you were baptized?” As seen in Figure: 7, the largest majority (38%) reported that their catechism/preparation period lasted only 1-3 months. The second largest group reported 3-6 months. This means that 61% of all converts had spent less than half a year preparing to enter the Orthodox Church. This is in stark contrast to the those who experienced 6-12 months (10%) and those who were catechised for a year or more (10%).



At this point there is a need to qualify what we mean by “preparation.” In follow up phone calls with both converts and priests/lay catechists, the question was asked: “How often did you meet with the priest/lay catechist during your catechism process?” The overwhelming majority reported that meetings/discussions/sessions would happen approximately once every two weeks and would last about 1-2 hours. Extrapolating from this data, we can make an educated guess that about half of all converts surveyed only spent about 2-4 hours a month being catechised on the Orthodox faith and traditions. While catechetical sessions are not the only part of spiritual formation (as we shall explore in the following pages), this data does give us a good indication of how much time and effort is expended by an individual preparing for baptism.

The final number that is significant, and somewhat shocking, is that of those surveyed who reported not receiving any catechism at all (see Figure: 7). A total of 18% of total individuals surveyed stated that they received little to no preparation. When asked in follow-up phone calls what this meant, the vast majority reported that they only met with the local priest once, usually to book their wedding, identify that they were not baptized (therefore needed to be baptized in order to be married in the Church), and to book their baptismal date. After this initial encounter, only 13% of this group received a basic catechism book to read, while 87% simply spoke with the priest once and then saw him

on the day of their baptism. Such data seems to support the conclusions made in the previous section when discussing motivations for individuals to become Orthodox Christians (see Figure: 4). However, taking into consideration the motivations seen in Figure 4, coupled with the apparent lack of time and effort dedicated to catechising these individuals (see Figure: 7) one might question the enthusiasm of the priest/catechists who seem to lack zeal to teach those individuals that they might deem as not possessing “pure” motives for conversion.¹¹

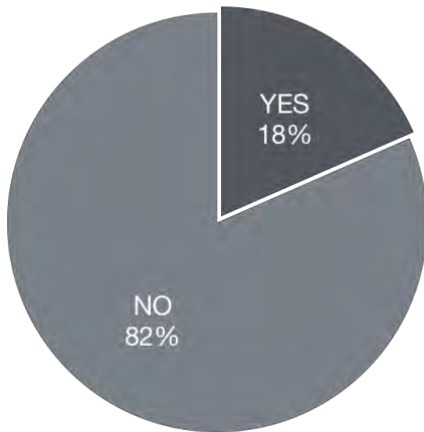
2. The Avoidance of “Death”

The concept of "death," the main impetus of our study, was the next topic that was addressed in a series of questions. While we will be presenting data extrapolated from a series of more nuanced questions exploring death, eschatology, end of life decisions, funerals, and martyrdom, we first asked the most basic and broad question: " During your catechism, was the concept of death ever explored as a mode of Christian life?" We recognize that the question is intentionally broad and somewhat vague, however, our intention was to allow this particular response to lay the groundwork for our further study - to put things into perspective. As can be seen in Figure: 8, the response was a resounding "no." 82% of those surveyed reported that the topic of death was either avoided completely or rarely discussed. A mere 18% reported that the topic was openly engaged with meaningful discussion and contemplation.

¹¹ While this statement is strictly an interpretation of the author (one cannot know what motives are behind every priest/lay catechist’s choice of catechism), we do believe that the current data does support such a possible conclusion.

The following data is drawn from a series of questions, both specific and broad, that sought to ascertain the subject's engagement with the topic of "death" as it was presented

Figure: 8

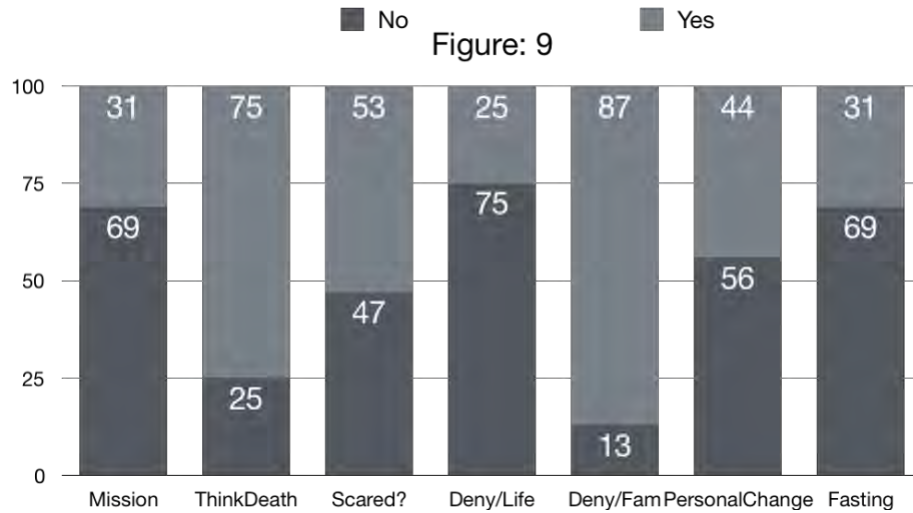


in their catechism experience. The broader, more vague questions are intentionally placed in order to identify the subject's self-understanding of death and how it affects their daily life. Let us now look at the specific questions and how they might contribute to the overall assessment of the subjects' attitudes towards death.

Of the seven questions specific to how death is perceived in the subject's life (see Figure: 9), the first question, which provides a valuable framework within which to interpret all subsequent responses, was: "Are you the same person you were before you became Orthodox?" To this question 44% responded, "yes," while 56% responded, "no." We do acknowledge that this question is extremely vague and can mean many different things to different people. How does one define "change"? Who has the right to define such change? What does such change look like? While this initial question does raise all these ambiguities, it also establishes the subjective view of the individual being surveyed. Whether the types of "change" can be identified or not, what is important is that the subject perceives a change (or not) in their life and associates this change (or lack of) with the conversion experience. Understanding this fundamental point allows us to glean some of the pre-conceived notions and attitudes towards conversion that the subject may hold. If the individual already believes that they have changed through the process of conversion, then their answers to all subsequent questions referring to conversion will be coloured by this belief.

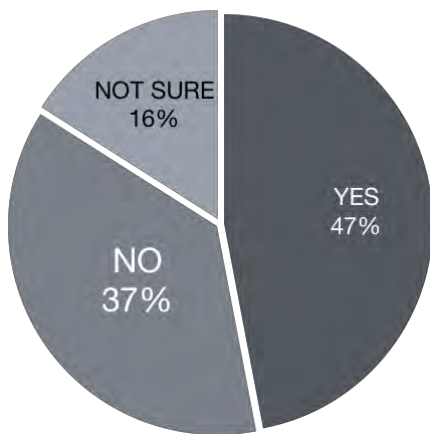
Keeping this in mind, that about half of the subjects surveyed felt a change in their self-understanding as a human being as a result of conversion, we can now take a look at three of the most telling questions we asked about death. The first question asked: "Do you ever think about your own death?" To this 75% responded, "yes" while 25% said "no" (see Figure: 9). The second question was: "Does the concept of your own death scare

you?” The response to this was a much more even split, 47% responding, “no,” while 53% responding, “yes.” Then we asked a third qualifying question: “Has becoming Orthodox changed the way you think about death?” Only 47% responded, “yes,” while 53% said “no” or that they were “not sure” (see Figure: 10).



At first glance, these results may seem typical. While many people often think about their death, only about half are scared of it. What is telling is the result of the third qualifying question, which strongly correlates with the first question we asked about the individual changing as a person. When asked if the individual had changed as a result of conversion,

Figure: 10

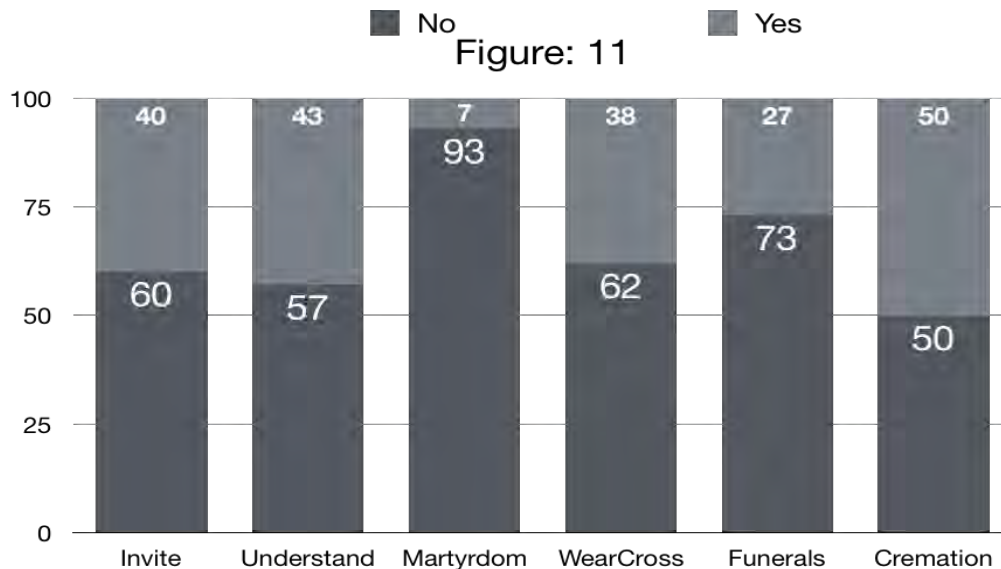


44% said “yes” while 56% said “no.” In the same way, when asked if the subject’s understanding of death has been changed by the conversion experience, again we see similar numbers. 47% said “yes” while 53% said “no” (see Figure: 10). While the questions posed about “thought of death” and “fear of death” can be accepted as general views held by most people, based on the data, we believe that there can be an argument made for a strong correlation between one’s view of the self and one’s view of death as it pertains to the conversion

experience. How profound is this change and to what extent does it affect the subject’s life can perhaps be gleaned from the subsequent questions posed.

3. Evidence of Change – Post Conversion

Beyond the initial questions focusing on the individual’s perception of death, the rest of questions focused on the practical expression of such beliefs in the individual’s life. As stated above, approximately half of those surveyed believed that they had changed while the other half did not. It was the same with their perception of death. Following these results, it would be logical to conclude that one would receive the same type of split when referring to other areas of life that require sacrifice, suffering or martyrdom. However, as we shall see, it was not so. When subjects were asked if they fasted on a regular basis 69% said “no” while only 31% said “yes.” When asked if they would ever consider going on a mission trip, again 69% said: “no” while 31% said, “yes” (see Figure: 9). When asked the more extreme question of whether one would “deny their faith to save their lives,” an admirable 75% said they would not. However, when the question was augmented to involve the subject’s family, the results were the opposite. When asked, “Would you deny your faith to save your family’s life?” 87% of those surveyed responded that “yes,” they would indeed deny their faith if it meant saving their families from death.



The final qualifying question in this section was in reference to martyrdom. The question was posed in two parts. The first asked: “Is martyrdom essential for Christian life?” Only 32% said, “yes,” while the rest of the 68% said, “not sure” (see Figure: 12). The second

question asked was: “Do you consider yourself to be a martyr?” In which the overwhelming majority (72%) said, “no” while 22% were “not sure” and only 6% said, “yes” (see Figure: 13).

Figure: 12

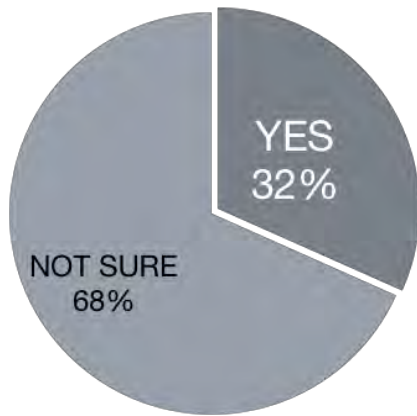
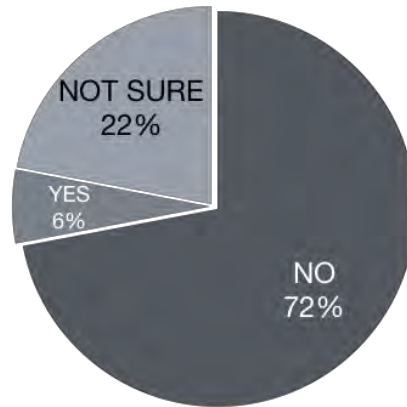
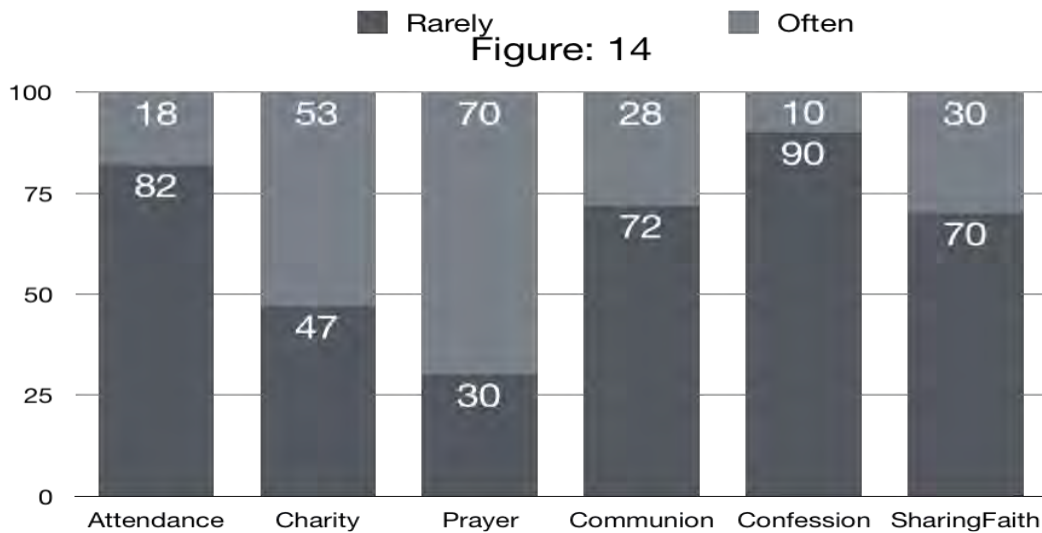


Figure: 13



The data gathered so far points to an interesting correlation between the experience of conversion, whether real or perceived, and the actual practical applications of such a perception in one’s life. As these initial questions dealt with the concept of death, it is interesting to point out that one’s thinking on the subject does not always translate into action. As we have seen, while the majority of those surveyed claimed they did not fear death, the reasons for this are unclear, since the same individuals responded adversely to events in one’s life that would either threaten death or, at the very least, impose some kind of suffering. The results do not align. This begs the question: “Is the concept of death, as it is understood by the individuals surveyed, radically different from the Church’s understanding?” The data would appear to support such a claim. However, it is prudent to look at the rest of the results before drawing any conclusions.

As mentioned above, the third theme on which our survey questions focused was that of practical change in one’s life. Did the individuals surveyed change the way they lived their lives as a result of conversion? Referencing Figure 11 above and Figure 14 below, we can observe the results of questions asked having to do with the observance of Christian traditions in everyday life.



As we can see in Figure: 11, when individuals were asked if they ever invited non-Orthodox to their Church the majority (60%) said, “no.” When asked about their understanding of the liturgical services, again the majority (57%) said, “no.” In the same vein most individuals rarely wore their cross (62%), never went or actively avoided funerals (73%), 50% were even in favour of cremating the dead and even 10% were in favour of doctor assisted suicide. Following up in Figure 14, the data shows that most (82%) rarely or never went to Church, most rarely received Holy Communion (72%), almost none every participated in Holy Confession (90%) and about 70% were not very comfortable sharing their faith with others. Indeed, the only areas where the data showed an increase, post conversion, were in the area of charity (53% reported an increase) and prayer, in which 70% claimed that prayer was very important to their daily life. Furthermore, when individuals were asked, “Would you support your child becoming a monk?” the majority (45%) were not sure what the question meant while 13% openly disagreed and only 42% agreed.

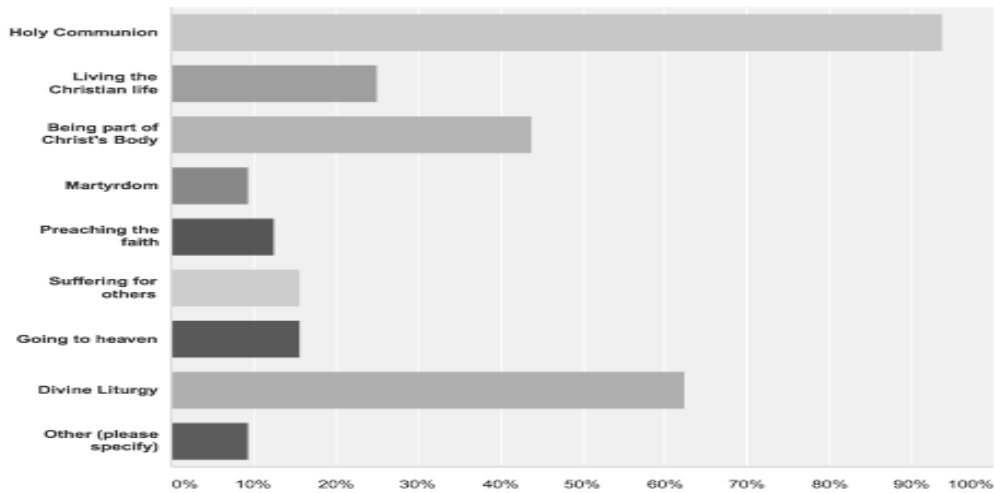
4. Liturgical Association Questions

In addition to these questions, we also asked some association questions. These were administered in the form of liturgical quotes that were posed to the subject in order to

assess if they could associate it with relevant theological themes. All of the quotes had a theme of self-denial, eucharist and martyrdom.

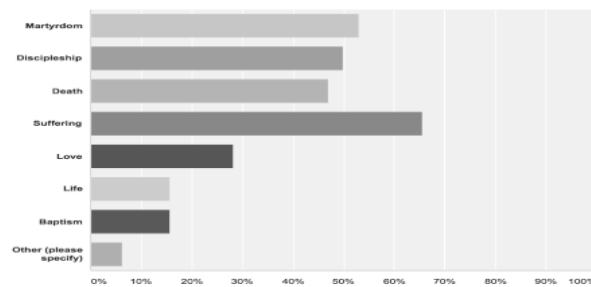
The first quote was: “We participate in the Lord’s table.” 94% associated it with Holy Communion, 63% with the Divine Liturgy and 44% as being part of Christ’s body. However, the least favourable results focused on Martyrdom (9%), Suffering for Others (15%) and Preaching the Faith (12%)¹²(see Figure: 15).

Figure: 15



The second quote was: “Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” The predictable results are present. Suffering received 66%, Martyrdom 51%, Discipleship 50% and Death 47%. Interestingly enough people did not identify this quote with Baptism (16%), Love (28%) or Life (16%) (see Figure: 16).

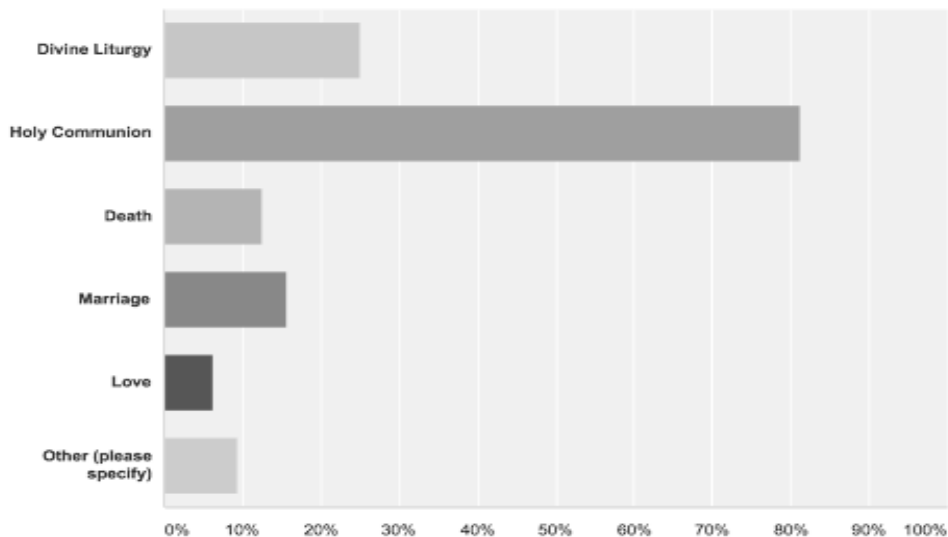
Figure: 16



¹² Please see appendices to view full survey questions.

The final quote presented was: “I will take the cup of salvation and I will call on the name of the Lord.” Here the top associations were Holy Communion (81%) and Divine Liturgy (25%). To a much lesser degree were Marriage (16%), Death (13%) and Love (6%) (see Figure: 17).

Figure: 17



While the answers to these association questions hardly provide a “smoking gun” in the area of death denial, what they do provide are predictable responses to the literal meaning of the texts provided. This in turn shows a lack of theological nuance on the part of the individual being surveyed. While connections to the obvious theme are present, the deeper understanding of the spiritual implications of such statements is lacking. While one can easily connect “participating in the Lord’s table” with Holy Communion, few would extend such participation into the Lord’s sufferings and even death (see Figure: 15). While it is easy to see clear parallels between the cross of Christ and the theme of martyrdom, few extend the idea of martyrdom to include the active Christian life, beginning in baptism and continually expressed through the love for the neighbour (see Figure: 16). While it may be easy to call to mind the image of the communion cup when hearing the words, “I will take the cup of salvation...” it is ironic that very few actually recognized that these words come from the Orthodox marriage service. All of the aforementioned examples serve as an indication that the great majority of individuals surveyed lack a deeper knowledge of the faith and how it applies to all aspects of life. It

is our opinion that such interconnections should gradually become evident when an individual is not only catechized properly but has been properly formed in the living tradition of Orthodox Christianity. One who participates in all aspects of Church life should, in theory, experience how the words of scripture, liturgy and fathers of the Church, permeate all aspects of the spiritual life. When such nuanced understanding is obviously lacking, it may be an indicator that meaningful enculturation into the worshipping community has not yet occurred. It is for this reason that we considered these three questions as important and able to provide greater clarity to the question of catechetical quality.

5. Self-Assessment

The final two questions that were asked were questions of self-assessment. We purposefully split the questions into two distinct themes. The first focused on the individual's view of him or herself in a generic sense: "Are you a good person?" The second focused on their view of him or herself within the context of Christianity: "Are you a good Christian?" At this point, we acknowledge that asking the question in this deliberate way is, in fact, setting up a false dichotomy between "secular life" and "religious life." However, judging from the rest of the data gathered, and the experience of most people in western society, we felt that such a dichotomy often does exist in most peoples' minds, thus justifying the asking of the question. The responses furthered this conviction, revealing the existence of a worldview that is predominantly secular – one that sees a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane.

Figure: 18

Are you a good person?

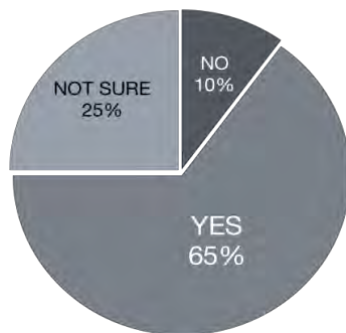
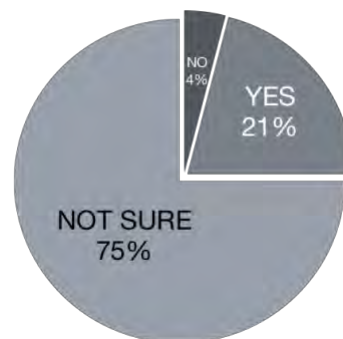


Figure: 19

Are you a good Christian?



As seen in Figure: 18, an overwhelming majority of the individuals surveyed (65%) consider themselves “good people” while those who are unsure make up 25% of the total. Only 10% of those surveyed opening admitted to being a bad person. While these responses may seem typical, when compared to the same questions posed about religion, the results become very interesting. When individuals were asked, “Are you a good Christian?” the number of “yes” responses was significantly lower (only 21%) whereas the greatest majority (even larger than those who considered themselves good people in the first question) of responses was “Not sure” which made up 75% of the total. Only 4% of individuals said that they were not good Christians.

Although these final two questions seem to be the most subjective, they nevertheless reveal one of the most poignant truths about the current sample of individuals surveyed: There is a clear tendency to separate what it means to be a “good person” from what it means to be a “good Christian” or a “religious person.” Such a dichotomy exists due to the fact that most people seem to compartmentalize their lives into these two ways of being/living. Furthermore, while we cannot be certain of how each individual defines what a “good person” is, it is clear that more people are comfortable with that label as opposed to the label of “good Christian.” The term “good Christian” seems to pose a problem for most individuals surveyed. The fact that 75% responded with a resounding “not sure” reveals that the concept of living a Christian life is ambiguous to them, or worse yet, irrelevant. In either case, the data clearly reflects a lack of understanding of what a true Christian life entails.

How Christians live, pray, interact with others, raise their children, choose their careers, help those in need, deal with life challenges, and especially approach sickness and death, are all concepts that predominantly elude the majority of the individuals surveyed for this study. Barring exceptions, the data does point to a general population of people who, although have converted to the Orthodox faith during adulthood, neither live very active Orthodox lifestyles nor possess even the basic understandings of the teachings of Christianity. The reasons for this may be many. The avoidance of suffering and death can definitely be identified as a major causal factor. However, let us now examine the other

side of the proverbial coin, the data provided from the priests and lay catechists who carried out the training of these individuals. Perhaps we may find further clues to help identify the problems that continue to plague the catechism of modern day converts.

viii. Presenting the Data: The Priest/Catechist Survey

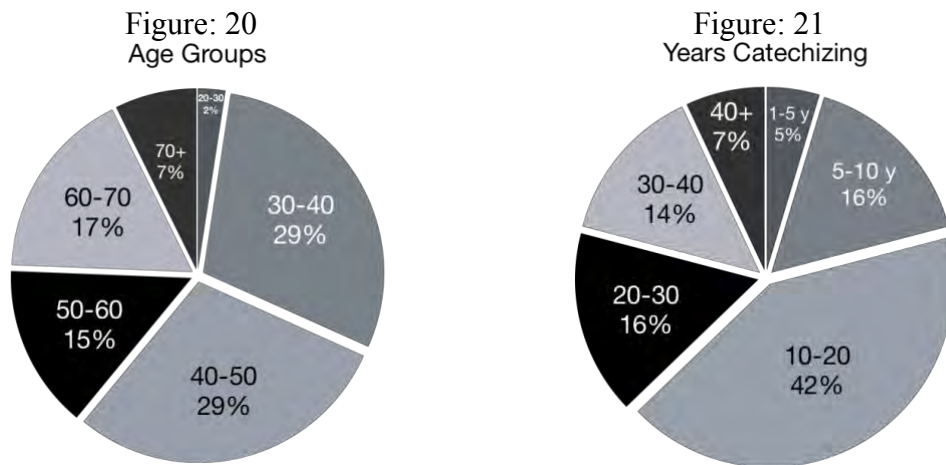
Demographics

As with our previous survey analysis, let us begin with establishing some basic information. Much smaller in length to its convert counterpart, this survey focused on clergy/lay catechists and explored the methods by which they catechize those interested in entering the Orthodox Church. This questionnaire focused on two main groups of questions, spread over a total of 21 questions:

Part 1: Pertaining to the catechist and their experience in the field.

Part 2: Pertaining to the content of the catechism.

The total number of individuals who participated in this online survey were 44. Since the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada currently employs 61 full-time clergy, our study represents a healthy 72% for the total clergy/catechist population. Of this total number, the average age of those surveyed was 30-40 years of age (58%) (see Figure: 20).



At this point it is important to note that the clergy/catechist demographics in this study represent a younger generation of individuals, an unusual oddity among most

Orthodox clergy populations. This is due to the recent increase in younger, home-grown priests who have been ordained over the past 20 years, during which time the Church has also experienced a sharp decline in the population of older clergy who were born in Europe. This key demographic greatly affects the results of this survey since the data will represent, to a greater degree, individuals who have been born and raised in North American society and therefore represent the cultural and social mentality of this society to a greater extent than that of their elderly European counterparts.

Conversely, a younger demographic majority also reveals a certain lack of experience. As can be seen in Figure 21, the greater majority of those individuals surveyed (42%) have between 10-20 years of catechizing experience. The second largest group is a tie between those with only 5-10 years of experience (16%) and those with 20-30 years of experience (also 16%). Those who have field experience beyond 30 years make up only 26% of the whole. This means that while the sample does faithfully represent a more North American mentality, the overall experience of catechizing individuals is not as extensive as among those priest/lay catechists who have greater experience and yet possess a more European mentality indicative of being raised in Greece or elsewhere in the European basin. However, despite the diversity in background and societal influences, we will see that the data continues to remain remarkably consistent across all age groups.

Assessment of the Catechetical Process

In order to properly assess the effectiveness of the catechism process deployed by the individuals surveyed in the current sample, this second part of the online survey focused on four main themes:

1. The length and content of the catechism.
2. The level of enculturation into the worshipping community expected of the catechumen.
3. The mention of death in catechism and all its subsets (funerals, mortality, eschatology, end of life decisions, suffering and martyrdom).

4. A self-assessment of one's own effectiveness in catechizing individuals.

1. Length and Content of Catechism

Perhaps the most obvious question with which to begin is the length of time that catechism sessions last. This was our first question posed in the second part of this survey. The results, as can be seen in Figure: 22, do not much differ from the data we received from the convert survey, with one major exception. While both groups reported similar catechism times in relation to one another (see Figures 22 and 23), the great exception was in the category of “None” or “No Catechism received.” This category is only present in the convert survey and is altogether absent from the priest/catechist survey. As can be seen in Figure: 22, the priests reported that 63% of all their converts were catechized between 1-3 months. However, in the convert survey (see Figure: 23) we notice that that bottom range is split between those catechized 1-3 months (38%) and those who received little to no catechism (18%). The absence of the “none” category from the priests/lay catechists survey is telling. Why is there such a significant discrepancy? How is it possible that the priest/lay catechists could overlook 18% of the convert population or consider them effectively catechized?

Figure: 22

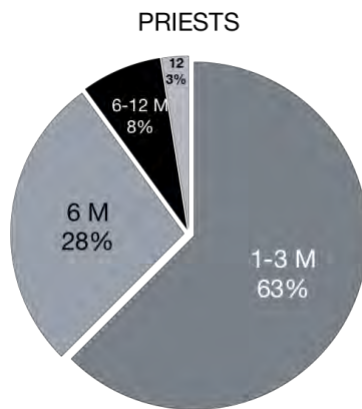
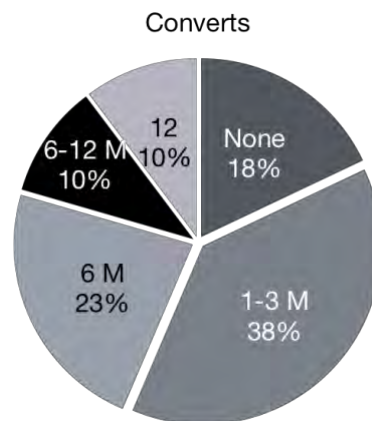


Figure: 23



Drawing from a limited number of follow-up telephone interviews, questioning members from both groups, the answer seems to be found in one's understanding of what it means to be “effectively catechized.” Many individuals reporting in the convert survey that they received “little to no catechism” usually describing their experience as meeting with the priest only once prior to baptism. In rare instances the individual was given a catechism

book to read as a preparation. In most cases, the individuals did not consider this a proper catechism or preparation for baptism and often expressed sadness or disdain for the way they were treated during the process. In contrast, individuals who took the priest/lay catechist survey, while sometimes admitting meeting with some catechumens only once, still considered this approach “better than nothing” and therefore lumped such individuals into the 1–3-month demographic (see Figure: 22). Therefore, it is our belief that the 18% discrepancy between the two surveys can be explained by a difference in definition of what is effective catechism. The data suggests that there is a lower standard held among the priest/lay catechists, in regard to catechism, than there is among those seeking to be catechized.¹³

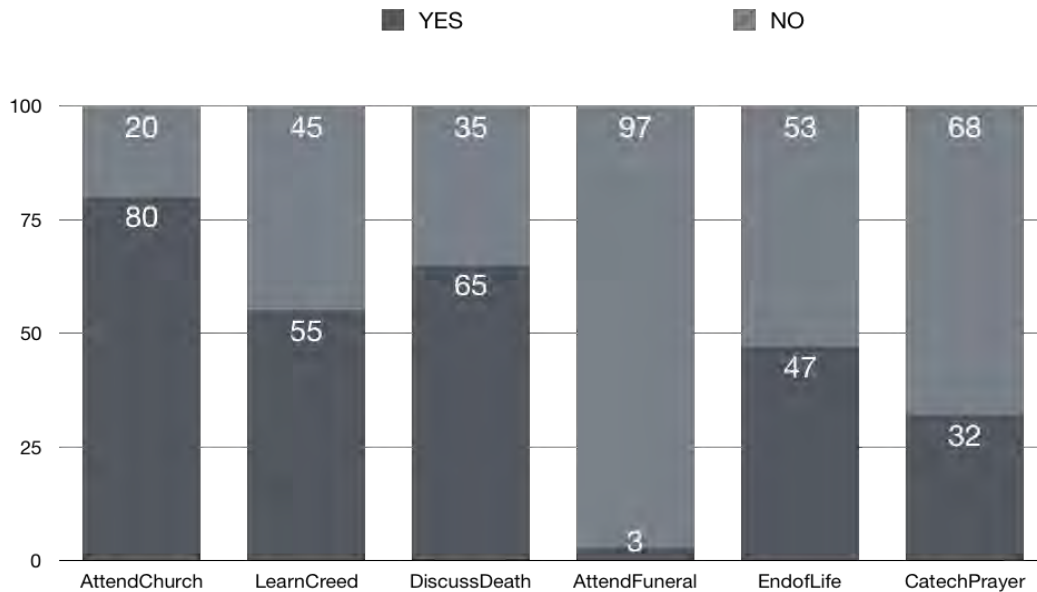
Beyond the issue of demographic discrepancies, the data seems to indicate that the greater majority of individuals catechized received minimal preparation (1-3 months). In both the priest/lay catechists and convert surveys those individuals who received instruction for more than 6 months did not exceed 35% (see Figures: 22 and 23) and those who received instruction for a year or more did not exceed 10%.

2. Level of Enculturation Expected

Beyond the catechetical time frame, we also examined the types of expectations that the priest/lay catechists had while conducting their sessions. By “expectations” we mean the types of commitments (if any) that were imposed on catechumens during the catechetical period. Whether the catechumens complied with any or all expectations was not asked in any of the surveys. The main rationale for asking these particular questions was twofold: Firstly, to establish if there are any correlations between a lack of expectation from the catechist and a lack of active participation in the spiritual life of the Church by the individual, post-conversion. Secondly, to verify if the priest/lay catechist has failed to call the catechumen to a deeper commitment to the Christian life through mandatory participation in the life of the Church.

¹³Note: It seems evident, through telephone follow-up calls, that converts, not only in the 18% “none” demographic, but also those in the 1–3-month range, were not very positive about their catechism experience. Those who did not express negative feelings were indifferent to the process altogether.

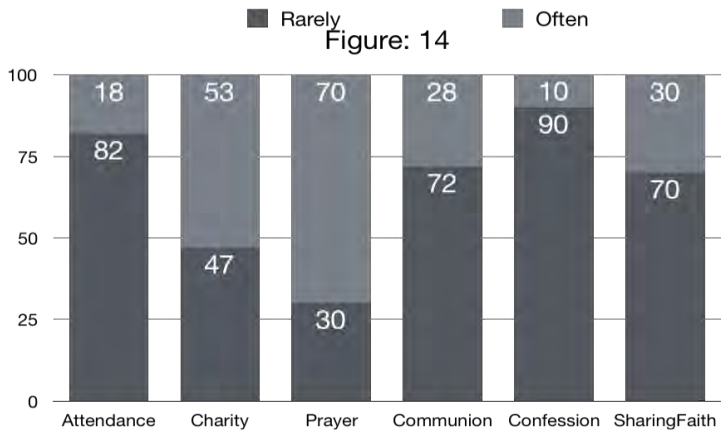
Figure: 24



This series consisted of three main questions having to do with “expectations.” The first asked if the priest/lay catechist expected the catechumen to attend Church on a regular basis.¹⁴ To this an overwhelming majority answered “yes” (80%) (see Figure: 24). While this initial response is very positive, the second question revealed that such expectations may not go much further than a casual trip to the Church a couple of times a month. The second question asked was whether the priest/lay catechist expected the catechumen to learn the Nicene Creed and the Lord’s Prayer off by heart before their baptism. To this a much smaller percentage required it as a mandatory prerequisite (only 55%). It should be noted that in a limited number of follow up phone interviews, those priests/lay catechists who did not require the learning of the Nicene Creed or Lord’s Prayer, often stated that “expecting catechumens to learn these off by heart is asking too much from people with busy lives.”

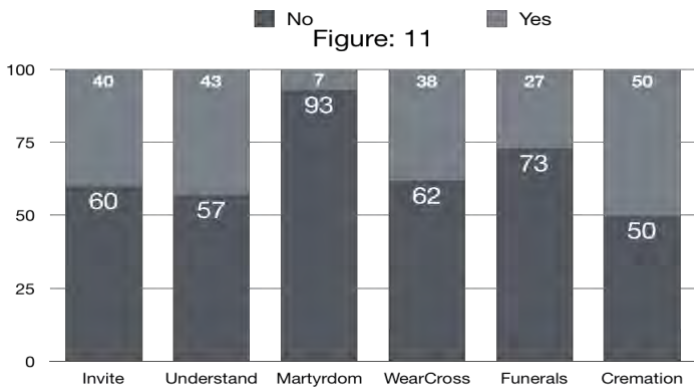
¹⁴ In this case “regular basis” means at least two Sundays a month.

At this point it should also be noted that the apparent lack of expectation on the part of the priests/lay catechists can be directly correlated to parallel results from the “Convert Survey” in which individuals were specifically asked about their participation in liturgical life post-conversion. Two examples of this can be found in Church attendance



and liturgical understanding. Even though 80% of priests/lay catechists expected their catechumens to attend Church on a regular basis, we can see in Figure: 14 that only 18% of total converts surveyed actually attended Church on

a regular basis post-conversion. It was the same when analyzing general participation in the sacramental life: 72% did not receive frequent Communion and 90% never confessed. The same can be seen with the lack of emphasis on learning the Nicene Creed and the Lord’s Prayer (general liturgical and theological understanding). When asked, 57% of converts claimed they did not understand what was happening in the Divine Liturgy (Figure: 11). Furthermore 70% did not feel comfortable sharing their faith with non-Orthodox (Figure: 14) and 60% would never invite anyone to their Church (Figure: 11).



The same sentiment is echoed in the responses to the third question that was asked of the priest/lay catechists: “Do you require your catechumens to attend an Orthodox funeral before their baptism.”¹⁵ The

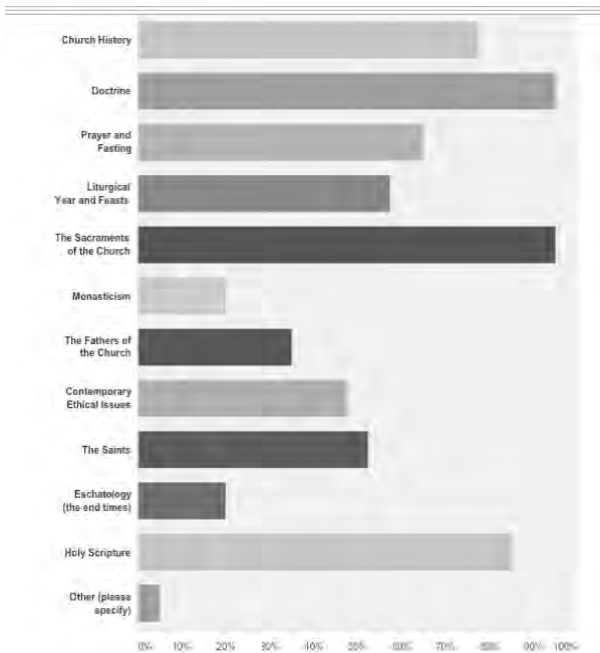
¹⁵ It should be noted that although this particular question was deliberately pointed toward funerals, in follow up phone interviews this question was extended to the expectation of catechumens attending other sacraments of the church. To this question, the responses were identical.

posing of this particular question, and its response, functioned as a transition into the next theme in the question series: the “avoidance of death.” The fact that 97% (see Figure: 24) of all priests/lay catechists did not expect their catechumens to attend a funeral is very telling. Not only does it reveal that almost all priests/lay catechists do not feel it necessary for their catechumens to attend Orthodox services before baptism, but the following responses will also reveal a deliberate avoidance of those services and discussion topics that deal specifically with death.

3. The Avoidance of Death

As mentioned above, the question of funeral attendance served as the transition point between the theme of “catechist expectations” and that of “the avoidance of death.” In addition to this, we asked two more questions that specifically targeted the topic of death in the catechetical process. The first question was very generic: “Do you discuss the topic of death and the afterlife during the training of your catechumens?” To this a remarkable 65% responded “yes,” while 35%

Figure: 25



responded, “no” (see Figure: 24). While this number is higher than expected (judging from the previous data) it should be noted that the 65% responding, “yes” does not necessarily constitute an in-depth conversation about death and the afterlife. Rather, when asked in follow up phone interviews, those who responded “yes” stated that their discussions on death were very limited and focused more on the standard Orthodox positions on the soul’s existence after death and the general resurrection at the second coming. This position is further

supported by the responses to the third question we asked: “Do you discuss end of life decisions with your catechumens?” in which the majority (53%) responded “no” (see

Figure: 24). In addition to these questions, we also asked the priests/lay catechists to indicate the areas of Orthodox theology on which they focus during catechism. As can be seen in Figure 25, while there is a strong emphasis on doctrine (95%), the sacraments (95%), church history (78%) and scripture (85%), the least emphasized are those topics associated with death and suffering: monasticism (20%) and eschatology (20%).

When one compares the data, we begin to see the formation of a picture in which the catechetical experience, as it has been revealed in the “priest/lay catechist survey,” directly correlates to the corresponding themes found in the “convert survey.” Lack of emphasis on liturgical and theological understanding, inactive attendance at Church and in the sacraments, and the deliberate avoidance of in-depth discussions on suffering, death and the afterlife, can be seen to have direct effect on the post-conversion lives of the converts that were surveyed. The final questions in this survey remain: Are the priests/lay catechists aware of these correlations? Do they perceive any inherent problems to the catechetical approach they have espoused? And do they acknowledge the need for change?

4. Self-Assessment

As in the “Converts Survey,” we concluded the present questionnaire with two questions that asked the priests/lay catechists to self-assess their catechetical ministry. We will begin with the question that is most problematic - the question of retention. We asked the individuals surveyed, “What percentage of people, that you have converted to Orthodoxy, have stayed involved in the Church?” As in the previous survey, we would like to acknowledge that this is a very ambiguous and broad question, needing further definition and nuance. What do we mean by “stay involved?” How does one estimate a percentage? Does not each priest/lay catechist have a different perception of what it means for an individual to be “active” in his or her respective community? These are all valid questions and ones that we have not endeavoured to answer. We acknowledge that the answers to this particular question will be highly subjective and that the question, in its present form, cannot provide accurate data as to how many people are actually involved in these respective communities. However, we did not ask the question for the purpose of

establishing metrics for convert involvement in parish life. Rather, it was asked as a precursor to the secondary, and yet more primary question of self-assessment: “Do you believe you are doing a god job of preparing catechumens for their entrance into the Orthodox Church?” We believe that this first question, while admittedly broad and ambiguous, nevertheless reveals how the individuals surveyed assess “success” in their ministry. In other words, this question is one of the catechist’s self-perception rather than one of actual parish demographics. As we shall see, this question will also inform and lend nuance to the results of the question that follows. Keeping this in mind while we look at the data.

Figure 26

What % of people stay involved in your parish?

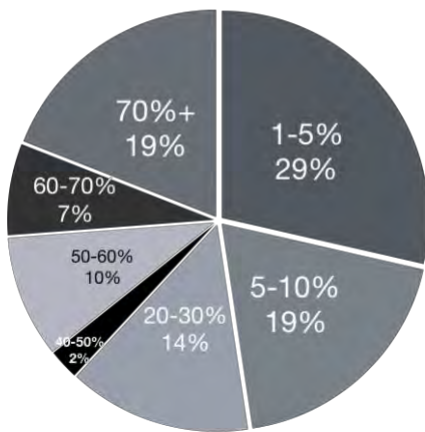
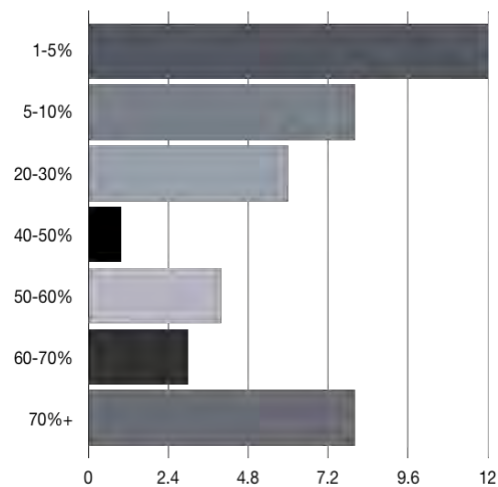


Figure: 27



As Figures 26 and 27 show, the greatest majority of converts (29%) fall into the 1-5% range of retention.¹⁶ The second largest group (19%) is 5-10% of retention. The subsequent ranges decrease, as is to be expected. The one oddity can be seen at the bottom of Figure 27, where the 70%+ range jumps back up to 19%. This is strange since the predictable trend is to show the lowest levels of retention in the higher percentages. While this number may skew the overall results, it is our belief, as was the case with previous anomalies in this study that the aberration can be attributed to a difference in

¹⁶ It should be noted that in follow up phone interviews most priests/lay catechists considered “being involved” as attending church at least twice a month. Therefore, the numbers reflected in this particular question are already based on a very low bar of parish participation.

understanding of what constitutes “retention.” For example, in follow up phone interviews the majority of priests/lay catechists considered an individual “active” if they attended Church at least twice a month. However, there was a small minority that considered it enough for one to attend Church only once a month or even less. It is quite possible that the 19% of those surveyed who reported a retention rate of 70% or higher were simply applying a much lower standard of active parish participation than the rest of those surveyed. Regardless of the reason for the 70%+ category aberration, the overall data clearly establishes a predominantly downward trend in retention numbers of converts. It seems evident the self-perceived retention rates reflect a low-quality output in the number of converts who stay involved in the Church after baptism. This data becomes very interesting when compared and contrasted to the results of the second, and final self-assessment question we asked: “Are you doing a good job catechizing people?”

Figure: 28

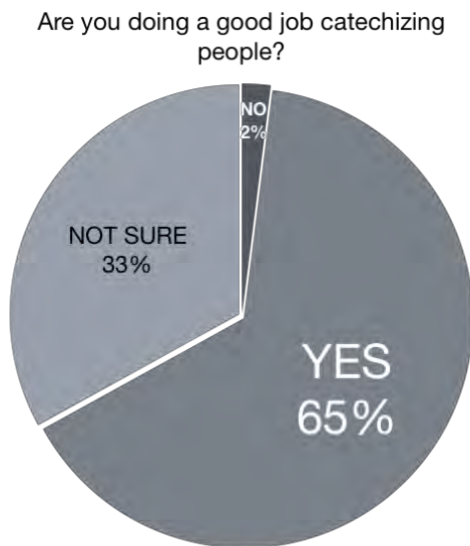
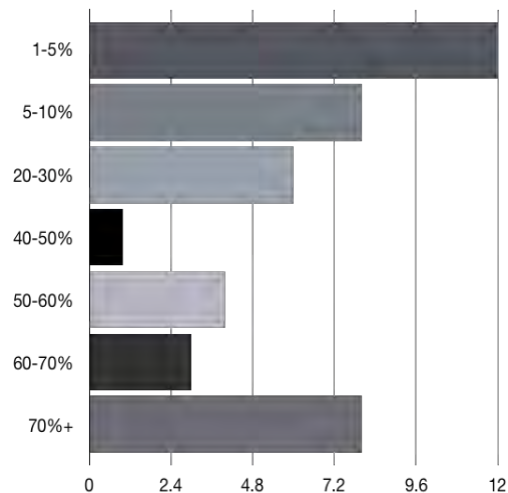


Figure: 27



It is intriguing that the overwhelming majority of priests/ lay catechists (65%) responded positively to the question posed. 33% were not sure and only 2% said they were not doing a good enough job at catechizing (see Figure: 28). What is puzzling about this data is that it stands in stark contrast to the previous admission that more than half of those surveyed (62%) reported less than 30% retention rate of converts with 19% of that below the 5% mark. Therefore, the question remains: “How can one consider themselves a good

catechist when only 5% of those they catechized stay involved in the Church?” It is a question that we are not able to answer in this study. We can only observe that there is some type of disconnect between the perception of convert involvement and the perception of one’s personal efforts during the catechism process. Perhaps the priests/lay catechists consider 5% retention a successful reflection of their work? Perhaps their expectations from those who convert to the Orthodox faith are very low? Perhaps they believe that they are doing “the best they can” under the circumstances.¹⁷ In any case, this disconnect inhibits the priests/lay catechists from fully appreciating, or even identifying, that a problem may exist with the current catechetical methodology. If the problem cannot be identified, then it cannot be rectified. It is this problem that has provided the main impetus for this study.

ix. Conclusions: What Have We Learned So Far?

We have endeavoured to present a large amount of data, spanning two online surveys, in an intelligible and coherent presentation. Acknowledging that all data is subject to interpretation, we have attempted to weigh the results in a fair and unbiased way. The premise of our study is to firstly identify that there is a problem in the current catechetical approach espoused by the priests/lay catechists who serve the Greek Orthodox Church of Canada and then to offer concrete solutions in the form of a new methodology – a new way of catechizing. Drawing on the data provided, we begin to form a “bird’s eye view” of the current state of the catechumenate across the country. Here are the conclusions which we feel can be gleaned from the online surveys:

- a) For a large majority of converts, their mode of existence (the way they live their lives) has not changed following the process of conversion.
- b) It is evident that most converts do not possess a firm grasp of the Orthodox faith, especially in the areas of eschatology, death and the afterlife.
- c) Generally speaking, active participation in one’s home parish life is low.
- d) Priests/lay catechists do not spend a sufficient amount of time (mostly less than 3 months) catechizing converts about the Orthodox faith and lifestyle.

¹⁷ This is a common saying among many clergy serving under the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Canada.

- e) There is a clear avoidance of the topic of “death” in the current catechetical approaches surveyed.
- f) Topics such as “end of life decisions,” “martyrdom,” “funeral and burial practices,” “asceticism,” and “suffering” are not often discussed with catechumens or are a major part of baptismal preparation.
- g) Most converts are not sure what it means to be a “good Christian.”
- h) For the most part, converts do not feel a strong call to “take up one’s cross and follow Christ.”
- i) Most priest/lay catechists do not report a large number of converts staying involved in the Church post baptism.
- j) Most priest/lay catechists do not identify a problem with the way in which they currently catechize.

The data illustrates the problem that we have outlined in our introduction. The current process of catechism is not producing the desired effect. If it is true, as the data suggests, that most converts neither understand nor live the faith, which they have professed through baptism, the question that must be asked is: “Are such individuals really converting?” The answer to this must be a resounding “no.”

Christian formation involves not only the conveying of information, but also the enculturation of the neophyte into the worshipping community. Modern day catechism, as was the case with catechism in late antiquity, should be aimed at forming in the individual a broad and deep faith that is solidly anchored in Christian dogma while at the same time imbuing them with a profoundly existential and spiritual outlook.¹⁸ Such a catechism takes time, patience and effort, requiring an immense amount of energy on behalf of the catechist and the Church. In contrast, the data presented in our surveys suggests that the opposite is happening. Little time, effort and care are being exerted in order to bring modern day converts into the worshipping body of Christ. If one studies the pre-baptismal rites of the early byzantine era, those of the fourth and fifth centuries, there can be found a myriad of catechetical approaches. However, the one common

¹⁸ Mazza, Enrico. *Mystagogy*. New York, NY: Pueblo Pub. Co. 1989. Pg. 49.

thread linking all is that the overall purpose of catechism appears to be the formation in Christian living, the creation of true Christian disciples, rather than simple training in doctrinal content.¹⁹ Our modern-day approach betrays a tendency to move in the opposite direction. It is as if we have adopted a more Evangelical protestant approach to formation, where information and academic learning are placed at the pinnacle of the catechetical experience. At the bottom of the proverbial totem pole is the mystical experience of Christ and His cross. The great invitation to “take up one’s cross and follow Him” is decidedly absent from the catechisms we have surveyed. The understanding of death and suffering, the martyrdom required of all Christians, is more often than not avoided in discussion, relegated to those undesirable topics that might “turn off” those who might seek the kingdom of God. However, it is precisely this call, this martyrdom, this death that is at the heart of Christian discipleship. The willingness to suffer and sacrifice for one’s neighbour, one’s community, one’s God, is at the crux of the early Christian experience. Today’s death-denying, secular culture seeks to deny this central truth of Christianity rendering the Gospel of Christ essentially lifeless. Under the weight of secular society, the heart of the gospel is experiencing cardiac arrest. The physicians, those called priests, seem to be accepting the diagnosis, lowering the standards of Christian formation into a grave made for those who reject the life-giving light that shines from the tomb.

¹⁹ Johnson, Maxwell E. *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989. Pg. 87.

Chapter 3. What is Death?

“In this world, nothing can be certain, except death and taxes.” Benjamin Franklin uttered these words in 1789, in a letter addressed to his friend Jean-Baptiste Leroy.²⁰ Although originally referencing the Constitution of the United States of America, the phrase has become somewhat of a modern-day proverb, used to express a cynical yet poignant frustration with those things in life that are beyond human control. People love life. They love to be alive, to live, to exist, to be. In contrast, no one likes to think about death. This is because death brings to mind the possibility of non-existence. And, since we all exist in a reality in which living is necessary for all experience, contemplation and understanding, the thought of non-existence is terrifying.

For most, the fear of death is the ultimate problem of human existence. The fact that we will all die is paradoxically what we both obsess about and avoid. As the ultimate enemy, death defines our entire existence. While some tend to overly dwell on it, others pretend it doesn't bother them. While loathed and despised as the ultimate injustice, it is simultaneously used as a way to mark the sacredness of life. The familiar idiom, “It is a matter of life and death,” is usually applied to those things which we deem most important. The concept of fulfilment can also be found in death. The proverbial “bucket list” of one's life must be completed before our time is up and we “kick the bucket.”

Webster's online dictionary defines death as, “a permanent cessation of all vital functions; the end of life.”²¹ This biological, and by extension secular view of death (and by extension life) is limited to the physical dimension and does not approach the much deeper and holistic understanding found in the scriptures and the fathers of the Church. Whether one is or is not religious, the end of one's life is often seen as something beyond the simple ceasing of biological function. The metaphysical contemplation of life is not limited to the Christian faith, but is one that spans all religions, philosophies and cultures. The manner in which one lives, contributes to society, interacts with family and friends,

²⁰ Smyth. *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin, Vol. X, Pg. 69.*

²¹ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/death>> September 22, 2017.

all constitute the idea of one's personal legacy – what one leaves behind. Whether in the Christian hope of life eternal or the secular need to perpetuate one's own genetic lineage, death continues to stand at the core of human existential angst and contemplation.

This study posits that the understanding of death, in a uniquely Christian context, is the primary necessity for true Christian discipleship. Without the acceptance of the cross and the willingness to die with Christ, one cannot encounter Him in the resurrection. However, this embrace of death, and its subsequent use for our spiritual benefit, has radically disappeared in modern times. Current society neither accepts death as a natural part of life (as was the case in the Old Testament) nor does it embrace it as the path to salvation (as in the New Testament). Rather, it seeks to avoid it at all cost – to somehow diminish its power over us by relegating it to the collective subconscious. In the quest to make death irrelevant, we have inadvertently placed life in the same category.

i) Biblical Foundations

The Old Testament – The Naturalness of Death

To understand the Christian approach to death, one must first examine the root of the problem. Why does death exist? Who is responsible? How does it affect our lives and how have individuals, found throughout the Holy Scripture, understood it?

And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’²²

The above quote, taken from the first book of the Torah, pinpoints the pivotal point in humanity's infancy where man experiences his first separation from God. This separation, a direct result of disobedience, is what ushers in the current “fallen” state of humanity. Adam and Eve are made in the image and likeness of God²³ and are endowed with free will. This free will man was to use in the cultivation of himself

²² Genesis 2:15

²³ Genesis 1:27

into the living created image of God.²⁴ However, man misused his free will in order to rebel against the will of God. He is seduced by the serpent who tempts him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. While the tree is merely the symbol of disobedience, the sin itself, is man's attempt to grasp that for which he is not ready.²⁵ He believed that by circumventing the guidance of God, he could seize knowledge for himself. While there are multiple patristic interpretations of this event, the general consensus of Christian Orthodoxy is that man failed in his ultimate vocation to become the living image of God through obedience to the divine Word. By setting his sights on his own desires and not the will of God, man sinned, "missing the mark," as the Greek word *αμαρτια* implies.

This "missing of the mark" ushered in an era for humanity in which decay, disease, suffering and death become commonplace.

To the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children'... and to the man he said, 'cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.'²⁶

From the point of view of modern Christian theology, it is generally agreed that the introduction of suffering and death is a consequence of the misuse of human free will – the turning away from the source of life. One could liken this event to the analogy of a potted flower being placed in the sunlight. As long as the flower absorbs the rays of the sun it will continue to bloom and grow. However, if that same flower is removed from the sunlight and placed in the darkness, then it will inevitably wilt and die. In the same way, if God can be likened to the sun and mankind to the flower, as long as man's orientation toward the sun is maintained, man enjoys life. In contrast, turning away from the sun invites corruption and death.

²⁴ Hopko. *The Orthodox Faith Vol 1: Doctrine & Scripture*. Pg. 61.

²⁵ Ibid. Pg. 62.

²⁶ Genesis 3:16-19

At this point we must take a moment to examine some of our theological presuppositions about the emergence of physical death, as a consequence of the fall, and how early man in the Old Testament interpreted it. Is all this theology that we have stated above truly present in the Old Testament? Can one derive such eschatological conclusions from the creation narrative simply by reading the text as is? Or is there something else going on?

It is clear that one can notice a significant difference between the Old and New Testament approach to the understanding of death: the latter providing a rich theological foundation for the afterlife, while the former almost intentionally steering clear of it. Hebrew scripture does not hide the sense of death or the acknowledgment of its power over human life.²⁷ However, there is a clear avoidance of any cult of the dead or nuanced theology of the afterlife. Indeed, instances where the afterlife is mentioned are usually occasions to illustrate the dangers of the demonic. Such is the case in 1 Samuel 28:8-14 in which King Saul attempts to contact the spirit of the prophet Samuel via a local witch. What appears is revealed not to be the prophet but rather a demon in disguise. It must be noted that our current, and more fully developed theology of sin and death does not stem from the Old Testament itself but rather from Paul's retrospective theology found in his epistles. If we take the Genesis narrative at face value, these theological truths are not self-evident at all. In fact, one could argue that early man's concept of death was radically different from that of Paul and the New Testament Church.

Adam and Eve Fall?

There are three commonly held theological beliefs about the transgression of Adam and Eve that we will examine in this chapter: 1. Ancestral sin created a break in communion with God, 2. Adam and Eve were created immortal, 3. Death was a consequence of ancestral sin. While these concepts are fleshed out by Paul in the New Testament, it is important to clarify that these were not widely held beliefs in the Old Testament period and are, in fact, quite unique to Paul and his epistles.

²⁷ Freedman. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2. Pg. 109.

Let us first look at the concept of the “fall” in which Adam and Eve are believed to have, through their disobedience to God, fallen from a type of “pristine” condition of holiness – a type of perfect relationship and communion with God. If one examines the Genesis narrative, one finds no mention of such a break in communion. God speaks to Adam both before and after the eating of the fruit. God continues to interact with Adam and Eve both before and after their disobedience, even going as far as to provide them with “garments of skin”²⁸ so that they may be able to live under the new conditions they have created for themselves. God continues to guide Adam, Eve and even his sons,²⁹ even after they are expelled from paradise. Even the terms “sin” “transgression” “rebellion” and “guilt” are not found in the garden story. The story is all about action and consequence; eat this, this will happen, etc.³⁰ There is no clear break in communication between man and God. Only the consequences of the disobedience are stated, not any type of long-lasting effect on the relationship between man and God.

In the same way the claim that Adam and Eve were created immortal is an assumption that is not directly supported by the text. James Barr states, “In the Hebrew context, nowhere does the story of the garden claim that Adam and Eve, before the fall, were immortal. In fact, culturally, the opposite assumption would most likely be true. To grow old and die, surrounded by one’s family, was considered a good death.”³¹ Death and immortality are not mentioned in the creation narrative until the disobedience occurs. Quite the contrary, it seems that God expels Adam and Eve from the garden in order to stop them from achieving immortality. In Genesis 3:22 God says, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever.” The reason why God did not want man to live forever is not revealed. Was man too young? Was he too immature? Was he not yet ready for immortality? Whatever the case, this passage strongly indicates that man was not created immortal. The idea of the immortality of man, or rather more specifically the immortality of the soul, has its roots not in ancient Semitic

²⁸ Genesis 3:21

²⁹ Genesis 4

³⁰ Barr. *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*. Pg. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.* Pg. 6.

religion but rather in Platonic philosophy³² that influenced Jewish wisdom literature during the much later Hellenistic period. Such a concept was completely foreign to the ancient Semitic peoples of the Old Testament. Therefore, the story of the fall, taken by itself, seems to be a story about mankind almost achieving immortality but losing it by disobedience. It is not explicitly a story about losing communion with God, nor losing immortality. This, as we shall examine later, is an exclusively Pauline concept and is absent from the Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament.³³

The last presupposition that is often assumed to be self-evident in the garden narrative is the link between sin and death. Is death the direct result of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden? Having established that there is no substantial evidence that man was created immortal, it is logical to also conclude that death always would have existed for man, at least initially. If this is true, then death could not be the punishment for the disobedience of Adam and Eve. It is interesting that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is the story of the fall cited as the reason for sin or death in the world. It is not clear that the Old Testament is even interested in finding out the root cause of sin and death in the world. Rather it accepts them as common aspects of life.³⁴ The actions of Adam and Eve in the garden do not necessarily precipitate death, as they do not instantly die when they disobey, but rather consequences of suffering are emphasized. To Eve God says, "*I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.*"³⁵ And to Adam, "*Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you... In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*"³⁶ Therefore, it is not the death of man that is introduced, but rather the consequences of sin, which is suffering leading to death. "Do this and you will die" does not imply that they would not have died anyway. It simply reminds them that this path leads to death.³⁷

³² Ibid. Pg. 3.

³³ Ibid. Pg. 4-5.

³⁴ Ibid. Pg. 6.

³⁵ Genesis 3:16

³⁶ Genesis 3:17-19

³⁷ Behr. *The Mystery of Christ*. Pg. 81.

In the Old Testament, death is seen as a natural part of life, not a consequence of sin, but rather as the culmination of one's life. What was important was to have a good death and to be placed to rest in an appropriate way. In the Old Testament God is the author of all things. And, while God does not create death, he often brings it (Deut. 32:39, 1 Samuel 2:6, Psalm 104:29). God bringing life to an end is the normal process of life. Israel's teleology was clear, as found in Genesis 2-3, and discussion on the question of "why" was not often explored. Death was simply seen as a part of nature – the normal ending to life.³⁸ All people will come to death, whether righteous or sinners (Isaiah 57:1-2, Ezekiel 18:4, 18:20, Ecclesiastes 3:2, Psalm 49:10, 82:7). The goal of one's life was to have a "good" death. This meant dying at an old age with many offspring (Genesis 25:8, 46:30).³⁹ Death was never a problem except when it came prematurely. The source of all life and death was YHWH himself, and not some other external force. In such a conceptualisation, whether one experienced a "good" death or not, was solely up to the will of God who gave both death and life (2 Kings 20:1-11). The key to this dynamic was the individual's relationship with God. In a sense, life and death were both consequences of keeping or breaking one's covenant with God. Faithfulness meant a long and righteous life, while infidelity meant a cruel and miserable death. As we shall explore later, this punitive approach to human-divine relations is one that stands in stark contrast to the intimate relationship forged in the loving sacrifice of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

In contrast with such an intimate communion, the Old Testament is much more akin to that of a king and his subjects. YHWH is God and Israel is his people. Life consists of keeping the commandments of God as Moses delivered them. Following this theological vein, true life is associated with the different gifts and attributes associated with God. For example, the praise God is a sign of life (Psalms 30:9-11, Isaiah 38:16-20). Such praise denotes a filial, even loving relationship with the creator, the opposite of which is distance from God. In this, the example of Sheol/ the Pit is often used to denote a place away from the presence of God (Proverbs 5:5, 7:27, Psalms 16:10, 30:3, 49:9, 69:15). In

³⁸ Freedman. *Anchor Bible vol. 2*, Pg. 109.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

the wisdom literature, the possession of wisdom is a sign of a good life since wisdom comes from God. In the same way, having many offspring is a sign of a righteous and good life since this is in step with the covenant YHWH made with Abraham (Genesis 15:5, 17:7-9).

In addition to ancient Israel's understanding of a good life and a good death, there is also the understanding of death as more than simply the moment of biological cessation. Death (and life) is a culmination of the whole of human existence. Bailey outlines this in his three-fold sense of death in the Old Testament. For him, death is:

- a) A metaphor for those things which detract from life as YHWH intends it,
- b) As a power in opposition to the intended order,
- c) Biological death⁴⁰

If one were to extrapolate from Bailey's approach, one could conclude that death, while seen as a natural end to life, extends beyond simply "dying" at one point, but rather applies to the whole mode of life as either part of the process of "living" or the process of "dying." A sinful and disobedient life is a "life of death," while a righteous life, spent in obedience to the commandments of God, is the "true life."⁴¹ While the concept of a "second death" or "spiritual death," as found in Revelation (Rev. 2:11, 20:6,14, 21:8), is notably absent from the Old Testament, it is clear that the Hebrew people were not devoid of metaphysical interpretations of death. However, it seems that any discussion on the effects of death were always focused on this life and not on the next.

The New Testament – The Problem and Solution Revealed

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.' And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.⁴²

⁴⁰ Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives*, Pg. 97-101.

⁴¹ In this respect, the idea of "death" as a process that begins in "this life," is congruent with the later Christian interpretation of scripture found in the fathers. In the absence of a nuanced eschatology in the Old Testament, one can still identify the groundwork for the later development of the understanding of death as a metaphysical reality as much as a biological one.

⁴² John 22:31-33

These words of Jesus mark a departure from the Old Testament view on death. The debates that had become prevalent between the Sadducees and the Pharisees had come to a head, the former denying the resurrection while the latter affirming it. Coming to Christ the Sadducees sought to re-affirm the traditional understanding of death. The fact that the passage ends with the words, “they were all astonished at His teaching,” is telling. While some would interpret Christ’s wisdom, in regard to the question about the widow, as the source of astonishment, perhaps His departure from classic scriptural hermeneutic was equally astonishing.

To the chagrin of the Sadducees, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the pivotal moment in the New Testament by which the whole of the Old Testament begins to be re-interpreted. The resurrection is at the epicentre of the Christian understanding of reality. St. Paul emphasizes this foundational belief in 1 Corinthians 15:14, “*If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*” One might view the resurrection as the stone that is tossed into the pond of salvation history. The ripples move in all directions, re-interpreting the past as well as the future. Keeping this in mind, the whole of the New Testament is not only a narrative of the events of Christ’s life, but a re-engagement of traditional Jewish scriptural hermeneutic as read through the new lens of the resurrection. Paul begins this by contrasting Christ with Adam, calling the latter “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). The early Christians had already recognized the connection between Christ and Adam, and Paul himself apparently inherited this contrast between them from the hymnography of early Christian worship.⁴³ In making this statement St. Paul implies that Christ in some way redeems, renews, or corrects that which Adam could not achieve. One sees this clearly in St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans in which he contrasts Adam’s and Christ’s contribution to the problem of death. Along with the early Christians, Paul continued to discover further points of corresponding opposition between the two men. He perceived that each defect of man’s fallen existence was matched by a specific remedy introduced into human experience by the life of Jesus,

⁴³ Reardon. *Reclaiming the Atonement: Volume I*. Pg. 148.

who is the incarnate Word.⁴⁴ In Romans 5 one can see the use of rhetorical antithesis in order to emphasize the nullification of death through Christ. Just as Adam's sin brought condemnation (Rom. 5:16) so Christ's voluntary acceptance of death brings life for all (Rom. 5:18). The one act of the second Adam (Christ) cancelled the results of the one act of the first Adam (Rom. 5:10).⁴⁵ Christ's voluntary submission to the will of the Father, resulting in His physical death, paradoxically destroyed the power of death, since He entered into it by His own free will (Heb. 2:14). At this point the importance of the incarnation cannot be overstated. The coming of the Word of God in the flesh marks a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The new Adam represents a new humanity, a new mode of being – one that transcends physical death. Therefore, the statement that Christ has “abolished death” (2 Tim. 1:10) holds true and becomes the rallying cry for all those who sought to free themselves from the effects of sin. The main problem in the Old Testament was not that death existed, but rather that it was unpredictable, being visited upon people without justification. Not everyone was blessed with offspring and a long life - even those who were perceived to be “righteous.” Death was an object of fear because it could not be transcended. The fallen state of humanity was accepted as a given and the focus was on a transient, earthly life.

At this point we should mention that the Adam-Christ typology, although having become perhaps one of the most prevalent theologies in Orthodox biblical hermeneutic, is distinctly a Pauline creation. Indeed, this is not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament, limited only to Romans 5:1, 1 Cor. 15 & 1 Tim. Here is where the claim that through Adam sin enters into the world. Jesus Himself makes no mention and shows no interest in the story of Adam and Eve, nor do the other apostles or evangelists.⁴⁶ This is interesting as it clarifies the common confusion and outright aversion that both the crowds, Jewish leaders and even apostles often experienced when faced with Jesus' claims that He was the Messiah. This was especially true after witnessing the crucifixion in which the scandal of the cross revealed the flaw in their basic presuppositions about

⁴⁴ Ibid. Pg. 153.

⁴⁵ Freedman. *Anchor Bible vol. 2*, Pg. 110.

⁴⁶ Barr. *The Garden of Eden*. Pg. 5.

the meaning of scripture. If death in the Old Testament were not a “problem to be solved,” then why would any of the Jewish people be expecting a deliverance from it? Even the Apostle Paul, before his “conversion,” would have had no reason to accept Christ as the Messiah based on the scripture. Fr. John Behr reminds us that as Saul, Paul was not waiting for a messiah to deliver him from sin and death. Neither were the apostles waiting for such a messiah. There was no reason to expect such a person since the Old Testament did not connect sin with death. This is why most of the disciples expected a political deliverer.⁴⁷ Therefore, according to Paul, Christ offers something completely new, completely unheard of. He offers a solution to a problem that no one even knew existed. Or rather, as Behr puts it, “The solution (the cross and resurrection) comes first and then we begin to understand the problem.”⁴⁸ Or better yet, “Christ provides the diagnosis of our condition and simultaneously provides the remedy.”⁴⁹

In this new hermeneutic, death is qualified - its meaning expanded while its power curtailed. Death is no longer the physical cessation of biological life but the spiritual cessation of communion with God. One can observe this in the Gospel of Matthew 10:28 where Christ warns, “*do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*” Here Christ references the bodily resurrection while at the same time introducing the concept of the soul as being subject to death. This clearly links to the “second death” referenced in Revelation 20:14-15. A predominately Greek concept, the distinction between body and soul is not often found in the Old Testament. However, in the New Testament, it is used to emphasize not so much a distinction between the two but rather to reveal a holistic approach to life, which includes both the physical and spiritual aspects of man. With a new emphasis on the bodily resurrection, it was necessary to offer explanation for how the body could die and yet the individual was not lost. While Christ never detailed this process, statements on death, such as John 5:25-29, emphasize that the bodily resurrection will occur:

Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those were here will live.

⁴⁷ Behr. *The Mystery of Christ*. Pg. 84.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Pg. 92.

For as the Father has life in Himself, so he has granted the son also to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming with all who are in the tombs, will hear His voice and come forth, those who were done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who were done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

This hope in the resurrection re-defined the understanding of death. This is especially prevalent in the New Testament. The term νεκρός (dead) is found seventy-five times in the New Testament and in all cases, it is associated with the Greek words ἐγείρω (to awaken) or ἀνάστασις (to rise) (Matt. 11:5, Mark 12:26, Lk. 7:22, 1 Cor. 15:16, 2 Cor. 1:9). This pairs with the concept of death being compared to “falling asleep.” Christ, when learning of the death of Lazarus, refers to him as having “fallen asleep” (John 11:11). Furthermore, the martyrdom of Stephen the deacon is also described as “falling asleep” (Acts 7:60) and Paul constantly refers to those who have died, both in the New and Old Testaments, as sleeping (1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 1 Thess. 4:13-15, 2 Peter 3:4). The concept of sleep implies the eventual waking of an individual. Such a concept is not wholly absent from the Old Testament. References to the dead sleeping and eventually rising can be found in 2 Kgs. 13:21, Isa. 26:19, Job 14:12, Dan. 12:2, 1 Kgs. 17:22, Ezek. 37:5-14.⁵⁰ However, such references are obscure, often poetic in nature and lack nuance. It is not until the coming of Christ, in His death and resurrection that these passages come into focus and begin to be re-interpreted in the light of Christian revelation.

Therefore, one encounters in the New Testament a radical shift in biblical hermeneutic, from the apostles onwards. It was a difficult shift in perception, especially for the apostles who knew (or rather thought they knew) Christ intimately. It required them to come face to face with their own weaknesses and prejudices. What did a crucified Messiah mean? Indeed, the world must have seemed upside down. “It was through the encounter with the risen Christ, the one that they had betrayed, persecuted and loved that the apostles were able to begin to understand the scope of salvation history - that they are falling, but also offered forgiveness and resurrected life.”⁵¹ It required an acceptance of personal

⁵⁰ Freedman. *Anchor Bible vol. 5*, Pg. 684.

⁵¹ Ibid.

responsibility for sin but also a cultivation of hope in God that He will deliver them from such sin.

This shift in perception is not limited only to death, but also to life. Christ, being the new Adam, re-creates man in God's image, yet again. As such, human beings are called into an intimate relationship with God as children and friends of the Father (John 15:13-15). Death is no longer an unpredictable enemy but rather the means by which one re-establishes true communion with God. By the passion of Christ, death has been transformed. It now only bears the name of death. It is now a rest while awaiting Christ's return and our own bodily resurrection.⁵² Through Christ's resurrection, mankind is in the process of being resurrected - both metaphorically now and physically in the end.⁵³ This can be likened to our own process of death that begins with baptism and culminates in our physical death, our sleep, and our hope for the physical resurrection. While it is true that in the New Testament death still remains a tragedy, by the power of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, Christians can transform their deaths into acts of life. Christ's obedience unto death teaches that those who follow him, if guided by faith, can transform the tragedy of their death into victory.⁵⁴ In this sense, death no longer is the enemy of old. Its power has been overthrown. The problem has a solution.

ii) Patristic Foundations

When one usually refers to "the early church fathers," one is usually speaking about those patristic writings that are found in the first two to three centuries of Christian history. This age is also commonly referred to as "the age of martyrdom." Because death is inextricably bound up with the concept of martyrdom, this era is especially important for our study. While it is a widely held myth that Christianity was an illegal religion in the empire, constantly opposed by the Roman emperors, in point of fact, it was never declared illegal by an emperor until the middle of the 3rd century (Decius 249-51). Oppression was sporadic and intermittent. When it did happen, however, it was often

⁵² Barna. *A Christian Ending*. Pg. 49.

⁵³ Behr. *The Mystery of Christ*. Pg. 98.

⁵⁴ Hopko. *The Orthodox Faith Vol 4*. Pg. 172.

severe and brutal. In addition the painful partition between Judaism and Christianity, starting during the Jewish-Roman wars (completed in 135AD), eventually expelling Jewish Christians from their synagogues, meant that the early Christian sect lost any privileges it enjoyed under the Jewish exemption under Roman rule.⁵⁵ Such oppression was not due to the Christian belief in Jesus as God. The problem was not whom the Christians worshipped, but whom they refused to worship: the Roman gods and the Roman emperor. The imperial cult was one of the most vital features of Greco Roman paganism in the first two centuries of the Christian era.⁵⁶ To refuse to participate in the pagan emperor–cult was a political as well as religious act, and could easily be construed as dangerous disaffection. The Roman government was in practice tolerant of any cult provided that it did not encourage sedition or weaken morality.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is logical that the Christian population’s ultimate allegiance would come into question.

This opened the community up to situations where it was considered perfectly acceptable to Roman aristocracy to use the Christians as scapegoats. This was case with Emperor Nero (56 AD – 68 AD). His persecution was not directly related to Christian religious beliefs. Rather, the Christians were singled out as a scapegoat for Nero who is reported to have started a major fire in Rome to make way for his civic improvements. The fire had not touched the Jewish quarters, thus making the Jews also a viable scapegoat. However, the Jewish community comprised a sizeable population in Rome and so the smaller sect of Christians was targeted instead. However, it is important to note that the Christians were condemned for being arsonists, not for being Christians.⁵⁸ Christians continued to be persecuted under subsequent emperors.

For the purposes of this study, we will focus on a few specific writings from this early era – namely the era of martyrdom. The writings examined will be those of:

- a) The Didache
- b) St. Ignatius of Antioch

⁵⁵ Kesich. *The Church in History Vol. 1.* Pg. 139.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Chadwick. *The Early Church.* Pg. 24-25.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Pg. 25-26.

c) St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Although by no means exhaustive, this selection of writings has been chosen because it effectively represents the eschatological view of early Christian life that is the hallmark of the Johannine school. When one examines this era of Church history, one will encounter a view of the coming kingdom that is altogether powerful and immanent. From the “two way” decision-based theology found in the Didache, to the imitation of theopaschism found in St. Ignatius, to the Christological anthropology of St. Irenaeus, the writings of this era are rife with images of life through death, through imitation, through love of the One who gave all for His creation. It begins with a choice, is followed by action and culminates in the vision of the glory of God personified in every living human being (Irenaeus, AH Book 4:20:7).⁵⁹ The pursuit of the “one thing that is needful”⁶⁰ is more prevalent among these writers than perhaps any other patristic writings in existence. Such a message is paramount when approaching the issue of catechism and conversion. One cannot truly be a Christian if one cannot first reject all worldly commitments for Christ’s sake. When it comes to seeking truth, modern society tends to present individuals with a grey spectrum of choices. On the other hand, the martyric and apologetic writings of the first three centuries present us with not a plethora of ways, but rather two distinct ways – an “either / or” scenario. It seems that when it comes to God, the choice is black and white.

a) The Didache

There are two ways, the one of life and the one of death; the difference between the ways is great.⁶¹

Although the exact date is hotly debated, this work was most probably written between the years 80 AD – 100AD, although some have argued for its origins as early as 40 AD – 60 AD.⁶² The final form of the book may have been put together as late as 150 AD, though considerably closer to the end of the first century seems more probable. The

⁵⁹ “For the glory of God is a living man.” - Irenaeus of Lyons. *Against Heresies*.

⁶⁰ Luke 10:42

⁶¹ Stewart. *On the Two Ways*. Pg. 35.

⁶² Quasten. *Patrology Vol 1*. Pg. 29-30.

materials from which it was composed, however, reflect the state of the Church at an even earlier time.⁶³ Due to the proposed dating, it is not believed that the apostles actually authored the piece. Therefore, the title “*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*” does not necessarily imply authorship but rather points toward the apostolic teaching that was traditioned over to their first spiritual descendants. It is the earliest collection of writings in existence concerning what Christians should believe. The teaching is employed as a means by which gentiles might enter the covenant and participate, through baptism, in the community.⁶⁴ The “two ways” theology presented is linked almost exclusively to baptism, making this extremely relevant to our study.

The work can be roughly divided into two main parts. The first half (chapters 1-6.2) concerns itself with Christian living – what it means to be a Christian. This is exemplified in the “two ways” theology that opens the text. This section can be further divided into two parts: the way of life (chapters 1-4) and the way of death (chapters 5-6). Main themes found here are love of the neighbour, giving to the poor, major sins to avoid, Christian exhortations, false teachers and worldliness. The second half (chapter 6.3-16.8) is concerned with maintaining proper Church order. This part can also be broken down into major topics: Baptism (chapter 7), Fasting (chapter 8), Eucharist and Thanksgiving (chapters 9-10), Teachers and Prophets (chapters 11-13), Being Pure (chapter 14, Ordination (chapter 15) and Life Teachings (chapter 16).

The two-fold structure of the Didache parallels the conversion experience of individuals entering the Church. The first half deals with what a Christian should be, while the second deals with proper Church governance. This closely follows the experience of catechumens who, at least before their baptism, would only receive instruction on the main dogmatic teachings of the faith, but would not have experiential knowledge of the sacramental life until after their baptism. It is for this reason that the instructions on proper baptism inaugurate the second section of the book. One could even draw parallels

⁶³ Holmes. *The Apostolic Fathers*. Pg. 247.

⁶⁴ Stewart. *On the Two Ways*, Pg. 35.

with the current structure of the Divine Liturgy in which the “liturgy of the word” and the “liturgy of the faithful” clearly distinguishes the unbaptised from the baptised.

In the case of the contemporary catechumenate, this structure contrasting life and death is foundational. As noted in our statistical research, the majority of present-day converts do not perceive their conversion to Orthodoxy as a true change in life - a change in being. The notion that one’s choice to become a Christian is predicated on the conviction that the Christian path is the one of life, all others leading to an alternative destination, is largely absent from most contemporary converts. The Didache offers a stark contrast between the two lifestyles:

Yet the way of death is this. First of all, it is evil and beset by cursing. Murders, adulteries, lusts, fornication, thefts, charms, sorceries, magic, robberies, falsities of witness, hypocrisies, double hardness, trickery, arrogance, malice, selfishness, greed, base speech, jealousy, insolence, haughtiness and pretense, persecutors of the good, haters of the truth, lovers of falsity, unaware of the reward for righteousness, not associating with the good or with just judgment.⁶⁵

And again,

Beware lest anyone make you wonder from this way of instruction, since they are instructing you apart from God.⁶⁶

In contrast to this warning, the Didache often places the second coming of Christ as an imminent event in the life of the Christian. This realized eschatology is most perfectly found in the works of St. John the Evangelist, who in both his Gospel and the Book of Revelation, places the already glorified messiah as the cornerstone of his theology. Christians are called to recognize Christ as the coming messiah who is ushering in the kingdom of God today. One can observe this in a number of ways throughout John’s gospel, not the least of which are the names attributed to Christ. Regarding such Johannine titles for Jesus Christ as "savior of the world," "Messiah," "Son of God," and "Son of Man" he states, "What is expressed by all these titles is that Jesus is the

⁶⁵ Ibid. Pg. 38.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Pg. 39.

eschatological salvation bringer, that His coming is the eschatological event." ⁶⁷ It should also be noted that John's emphasis on eschatology is not merely theoretical in character but rather practical for everyday life. ⁶⁸ This is what makes it fundamental for effective Christian catechesis. "The possession of eternal life transforms this life and the life to come from mere existence to ultimate meaning and significance."⁶⁹ Even in the harrowing events found in revelation, the coming of Christ is presented as the antidote to the chaos and destruction wrought by the Antichrist. In this, Christ's return offers hope and a relief to the troubled and weak of faith. In the same way the Didache offers the same hope. The "way of life" is not contrasted to the "way of death" in order to produce fear in the reader, but rather to offer an alternative way of living – a vision of hope. The way of life is the antidote to sin and corruption in the same way that Christ is the antidote to the fall, being the "new Adam" who redeems us from the ancient curse. In the same way the Didache places a strong emphasis on the end of this life and the coming of the next with its deliberate inclusion of Eucharistic prayers, "may Grace come, and this will pass away," and its final conclusion "maranatha - Lord come!"⁷⁰ In this the ending of the Didache mirrors that of Revelation- the ultimate hope of Christ's imminent return and the rectification of all that has gone awry in the world.

b) St. Ignatius of Antioch

Around the same time that the Didache was being composed another equally gifted preacher was composing letters to multiple communities throughout the Mediterranean basin. St. Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch (found in modern day Syria). Serving from somewhere in the mid first century to the beginning of the second, scholars generally agree that his episcopacy ended between 98AD and 117A.D.⁷¹ Ignatius was the third official bishop of Antioch, the apostle Peter being considered the first (approx. 37A.D. - 53A.D.), followed by St. Evodius (53A.D. – 69A.D.). In the year 69 A.D. Evodius

⁶⁷ Cook. "Eschatology in John's Gospel." Pg. 82.

⁶⁸ This point cannot be overemphasized. In the modern era where atheism and despondency are rampant, John's eschatological vision of hope and eternal remedy of the world's ills can serve as a potent antidote to our modern existential crisis.

⁶⁹ Cook. "Eschatology in John's Gospel." Pg. 99.

⁷⁰ Quasten. *Patrology Vol 1*. Pg. 35.

⁷¹ *Ibid*. Pg. 63.

probably died of natural causes (as was attested by the Church historian Eusebius) and thus was succeeded by Ignatius.⁷²

St. Ignatius is famously remembered for his memorable martyrdom in Rome at the hands of the Emperor Trajan around the year 117 A.D. Having been arrested in Antioch and shipped off to face judgment in Rome, Ignatius took this time in transit to write seven letters. The first five were written to different Christian communities situated throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). These were to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Philadelphians and Smyrnaeans. In addition, his travels would have most likely carried him through, or close to, their areas, and he, wanting to encourage them, wrote to strengthen their resolve in the face of his upcoming martyrdom. Whatever the motivation, his letters reflect a type of “final word” about the Christian life – his advice to those who would have him escape his upcoming torment.

The communities in Asia Minor only represent five of the seven letters that Ignatius wrote. The sixth was to his friend, and future co-martyr, St. Polycarp of Smyrna. To him he felt it necessary to write a separate letter from that which he addressed to his flock in Smyrna. It seems almost prophetic that Ignatius would choose to strengthen his friend Polycarp, as if he already knew that his colleague would also face the Roman coliseum. With such admonishments as, “Stand firm like an anvil being struck with a hammer.”⁷³ And again, “It is the mark of a great athlete to be bruised, yet still conquer.”⁷⁴ We observe Ignatius echoing the athletic themes of Paul, as he attempts to convey strength and hope to his fellow bishop who may also be anticipating in a fate similar to his.

The final letter that Ignatius wrote was addressed to the city to which he was traveling: the community in Rome. He must have assumed that the Christians there were already perturbed at his arrest and ready to do anything to save his life. He attempts to calm their trepidations with perhaps his most masterful work to date. The idea of divine economy in

⁷² Damick. *Bearing God*. Pg. 18.

⁷³ Holmes, Michael W. *The Apostolic Fathers*. Pg. 197.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the universe is the core of Ignatius' theology. God wishes to deliver the world and humanity from the despotism of the prince of this world.⁷⁵ Keeping with this theme, Ignatius places great emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as the ultimate mode of Christian living. Dying for Christ is the ultimate goal, the beginning of the true life. "It is good for me to sink to God from the world, so that I may rise up to him" (*Rom. 2:2*). Perhaps no author of early Christian times is so eloquent in his description of the imitation of Christ. If we wish to live the life of Christ and of God, then we must adopt the principles and virtues of God and of Christ. Indeed, martyrdom is the imitation of Christ *par excellence*.⁷⁶ As a martyr in waiting, Ignatius sees his own suffering as an offering joined to that of Christ himself. This is the means by which he gains unity with God through Christ, namely by literally participating in his death.⁷⁷ In this, the foundation of Ignatius' Christology is St. Paul, but influenced and enriched by the eschatology of St. John.⁷⁸ To be a Christian is to die with Christ so that one can rise with Him. Here the words of Scripture ring true, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it" (*Mat. 16:25*). Speaking of life and death... John Behr outlines Ignatius theology in the following way,

This is one of the strongest affirmations, from the early centuries, of the real involvement of one who is God in the affairs of this world, to the point of suffering and death, the theopaschite affirmation that the one who underwent the passion is indeed God. Yet the one so confessed is at the same time a human being, of a stature that can only be attained by following the example of Christ.⁷⁹

Such a message would undoubtedly come across as absurd and illogical, even to the Christians in Rome. For they would have seen in Ignatius a beloved bishop, a saintly man, a competent preacher, a leader of the Church. Such men were valuable to the Christian community, especially under Roman persecution. Therefore, it would be quite natural that they would conspire to save him from a fate they considered to be unjust. However, it is Ignatius who exhorts them not to act. At least not to act according to their worldly nature – according to the wisdom of this world. Instead, he asks them to remain

⁷⁵ Quasten. *Patrology Vol 1*. Pg. 65.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Pg. 70.

⁷⁷ Stewart. *The Letters*. Pg. 12.

⁷⁸ Quasten. *Patrology Vol 1*. Pg. 66.

⁷⁹ Behr. *The Way to Nicaea*. Pg. 92.

silent and to allow whatever is to come. "...for if you keep silent about me, I shall be a word of God, but if you are deeply concerned about my flesh I shall once again simply be a voice."(Rom. 2:1)⁸⁰ Behr interprets this by saying, "By undergoing the same martyr's death as Christ, the suffering God, he hopes to attain to the true light, to true manhood after the stature of Christ, and so, to be a word of God, rather than only an inarticulate cry."⁸¹

Where the surrounding world only sees torture and death, Ignatius sees hope and life. Perhaps the greatest moment in which Ignatius stresses this antithesis is in his letter to the Romans Chapter 6:2. Here one can observe the brilliance with which Ignatius turns the wisdom of this world on its head, comparing death to birth, dying to living, darkness to light, humanity to inhumanity:

The birth pangs are upon me. Grant me this, brothers: do not hinder me from living, do not wish that I should die. Do not give the world the one who wishes to be God's, nor charm him with the material. Allow me to receive the pure light. When I have arrived there, I will truly be human."(Rom. 6:2)⁸²

In one brilliant paragraph Ignatius makes a number of radical statements. To go through a martyr's death is to be truly born into eternity. This life is but the preparation for the true life. Furthermore, he is telling the Christians in Rome that by wanting to save his life, they are in fact planning his death! He makes it clear that martyrdom is the path to life. Escape constitutes betrayal of Christ, a failure to take up one's cross and follow Him. For Ignatius, this would undoubtedly lead to death. We must be clear that at this point, Ignatius is not referring to a type of "spiritual" or "metaphorical" death. He makes no distinction between this life and the next, between the physical and the spiritual. Ignatius is clear in his proclamation that life in Christ IS life in its totality, and being away from Christ IS death in all its totality. To follow Christ to the cross is to become a true human being, a process that begins in this life and culminates in the next. Both the earthly life and the afterlife are part of one continuum, or journey, upon which all human beings are

⁸⁰ Stewart. *The Letters*. Pg. 67.

⁸¹ Behr. *The Way to Nicaea*. Pg. 92.

⁸² Stewart. *The Letters*. Pg. 71.

traveling towards a destination. The analogy of birth, for Ignatius, is one through which all human beings must pass. The question is whether one is to be born into eternity alive in Christ or stillborn in sin. Therefore, he asks the Romans not to tempt him with the idea of escape, with the pleasures of this life. In this, we may describe Ignatius attitude as counter-cultural, in that he adopts the norms of the prevailing and surrounding culture and inverts them in such a way that they may come to have reference to Christ and His Church.⁸³ As the Apostle Paul so eloquently said to his beloved Corinthians, “*Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?*”⁸⁴

If one is to take the words of St. Ignatius to heart, some conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, it becomes clear that the eschatological vision of life through death, as presented by our courageous bishop, is one that clearly permeates the Christian ethos of the first few centuries. Secondly, for Ignatius, one cannot be a true Christian if they do not accept at least the possibility of martyrdom. Indeed, the use of one’s death for one’s salvation is at the epicentre of Ignatian theology. This will become relevant later on in this study when we explore the death-denying culture of the post-modern era. Finally, Ignatius’ vision of the future is one where this currently life has passed away and all mankind has been united to Christ through the cross and resurrection. To arrive at this destination, one must be part of the Church, which Ignatius calls the place of sacrifice (Eph 5:2; Trall 7:2, Phil 4) just as the Eucharist, being at the heart of the Christian experience, is called *θυσία* (sacrifice). Ignatius calls the Eucharist “the medicine of mortality, the antidote against death, and everlasting life in Jesus Christ.” (Eph 20:2)⁸⁵ To participate in this sacrifice is to become truly Christ-like. Ignatius follows the words of St. Paul, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who loves in me.*”⁸⁶ Therefore, he calls fellow Christians God-bearers and temple-bearers and Christ-bearers (Eph 9:2)⁸⁷ This is the goal of all Christians; as he says in the letter to the Romans, “to become human.” (Rom. 6:2)⁸⁸

⁸³ Ibid. Pg. 19.

⁸⁴ I Corinthians 1:20

⁸⁵ Stewart. *The Letters*. Pg. 41

⁸⁶ Galatians 2:20

⁸⁷ Ibid. Pg. 35.

⁸⁸ Stewart. *The Letters*. Pg. 71

c) St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus of Lyons is perhaps the most important of the theologians of the second century. He makes a point of stating that in his early youth he had met St. Polycarp of Smyrna, an important method by which he established his credentials as one being in line with the apostolic preaching. As Polycarp was martyred sometime in the late 150's, Irenaeus would have been born in the latter part of the first half of the second century.⁸⁹ He would've traveled westward, at some point in his mid-adult life, stopping in Rome and learning from teachers such as St. Justin the martyr, and then continuing on to Gaul (modern day France), where around the year one 177 A.D. the Christian communities of Lyons and Vienne were subject to a violent persecution.⁹⁰ It is in Lyons that Irenaeus eventually became more involved in Church politics, especially in the refutation of heresies. Irenaeus has two works that have survived to our day: *The Demonstration on the Apostolic Preaching* and his polemic work *Against Heresies*. While Irenaeus seems to be remembered mostly for his anti-heretical writings, it is his theology that is quoted by such fathers as St. Basil the Great, St. Maximus the Confessor and St. John of Damascus.⁹¹

There are two important aspects to Irenaeus' theology that link directly to our study of death: 1. The theology of the divine economy (or recapitulation), and 2. The "seed" theology found in his famous work "Against Heresies." Both of these theologies are essential to understanding Irenaeus' view of salvation through death and resurrection. How God has prepared man's spiritual education, through the centuries, and what are the fruits of such teaching are the focus of our study at this point. What are the final effects of God's divine economy on man? What is the culmination of all that has been done through Christ? Irenaeus attempts to outline this plan, mapping out man's journey from infancy, through adulthood, through physical death and finally resurrection as a new creation. Let us examine this journey.

⁸⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Pg. 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. Pg. 4-5.

The Divine Economy

In referring to the divine economy Vasilin Kesich says of Irenaeus, "...at the heart of his theology is the doctrine of recapitulation. God created all things through His Word, His Son, the same Word that became flesh; recapitulation begins with incarnation and is completed by the glorification of Christ's body."⁹² This theme is found most prevalent in his work *On the Apostolic Preaching*. In this Irenaeus takes a primarily typological approach. He sets up this typology in two parts; from chapter 4-30 he tells the story of all of creation, starting from Genesis and continuing through the flood, Moses, the Prophets, and finally up to the incarnation. The second part starts at chapter 31 and extends to the end of the work. In the second section, Irenaeus takes the opportunity to point out how in every instance in the Old Testament, Christ was foretold. For him, this foretelling is more than a mere foreshadowing. It is Christ who is truly present in all aspects of the Old Testament. When Abraham speaks to the three angels Irenaeus says, "Now two of three were angels, but one was the Son of God, with whom Abraham spoke..." and further down he says, "So, Abraham was a prophet and saw things of the future, which were come to pass, the Son of God in human form-that He was to speak with men and eat food with them..." (Ch. 44).⁹³ It is also interesting that Irenaeus also emphasizes the rectifying of past wrongs in the person on Christ. He likes to contrast the mistakes made in the Old Testament with the successes Christ made in the new. This is shown in chapter 33 when he says, "For it was necessary for Adam to be recapitulated in Christ, that 'mortality might be swallowed up in immortality'; and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate for a virgin, might undo and destroy the virginal disobedience by virginal obedience."⁹⁴ In the same chapter this contrast is continued in reference to the crucifixion; "And the transgression which occurred through the tree was undone by the obedience of the tree-which [was shown when] the Son of Man, obeying God, was nailed to the tree, destroying the knowledge of evil, and introducing and providing the knowledge of the good: and evil is to disobey God, just as to obey God is good."⁹⁵

⁹² Kesich. *Church in History vol. 1*. Pg. 182.

⁹³ Irenaeus of Lyons. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Pg. 69.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Pg. 61.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

It is important to note here that Irenaeus' theology is always pointing forward toward a particular end. Looking back to the Garden of Eden as some type of idyllic state for mankind is notably absent from his theology. The ultimate goal is the fulfillment of God's economy in Christ. The purpose of the use of typology is not to draw parallels between the Old and New Testaments but rather to emphasize that the whole of Scripture focuses on the unchanging and eternal identity of the Word of God as the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.⁹⁶ This emphasis on the crucified and risen Lord is very much in line with the theology of St. Ignatius. For Irenaeus, the person of the messiah cannot be divorced from the cross. It is through the cross that the Word is revealed, and this means that the Word of God is always related to the cross.⁹⁷

In his third book of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus delves deeper into the divine economy. Contrary to established western theology of the fall, Irenaeus takes a different approach in explaining the events of the garden narrative in Genesis. Building upon Paul's words that Adam is a type of the one to come, Irenaeus states, "For, since He who saves already existed, it was necessary that he who would be saved should come into existence, that the One who exists should not exist in vain."⁹⁸ It is important to clarify here that Irenaeus is not saying that mankind was created to fall for the sake of the Saviour. Instead, the fall was a natural progression of man towards his deification, not away from it. In essence, the fall was pedagogical, not disciplinary. Irenaeus emphasizes this divine pedagogy when he states,

This, therefore, was the long-suffering of God, that man, passing through all things, and acquiring the knowledge of moral discipline, then attaining to the resurrection from the dead, and learning by experience what is the source of his deliverance, may always live in a state of gratitude toward the lord, having obtained from Him the gift of incorruptibility, that he might love Him the more.⁹⁹

It is clear that the knowledge of good and evil that came from the tree was both a tragic and pedagogical step for mankind. While at the same time man acquired death and sin by

⁹⁶ Behr. *The Way to Nicaea*. Pg. 116.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Pg. 120.

⁹⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons. AH 3:22:3

⁹⁹ Ibid. AH 3:20:2

his disobedience, he also acquired the capacity to know the difference between good and evil and to love God all the more, understanding his dependence on Him. Furthermore, Irenaeus also states, “For by no other means could we participate in incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been joined to incorruptibility and immortality.”¹⁰⁰ Hence, even before the fall, man did not yet possess the ability to be united with God because this could only be achieved by God uniting Himself with mankind. Irenaeus emphasizes the inability of man at creation to receive the uncreated without first growing. On this he explains,

Because, as these things are of later date, so are they infantile; so are they unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline. For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also, it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.¹⁰¹

This pedagogical process of growth Irenaeus likens to the example of the Prophet Jonah. For him, it is no mistake that Christ Himself refers to the prophet when tested by the Pharisees:

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.’ He answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:38-41)

The process, through which man comes to know God, and love Him, is that of death and resurrection. For Irenaeus, it is necessary for man to have a tangible and practical experience of loss in order to appreciate the great gift of life that God has given him. As part of the divine economy, God knew that man would fall, knowing that such a fall was necessary for growth. As Jonah needed to be swallowed by the whale in order to come to his senses and turn back to the will of God, so man must also go through this process.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. AH 3:19:1

¹⁰¹ Ibid. AH 4:38:1

Irenaeus writes in the following extensive, yet necessary quote:

For as He patiently suffered Jonah to be swallowed up by the whale, not that he should be swallowed up and perish altogether, but that, having been cast out again, he might be more subject to God, and might glorify Him the more who had conferred upon him such an unhoped-for deliverance... So also, from the beginning, did God permit man to be swallowed up by the great whale, who was the author of transgression, not that he should perish altogether when so engulfed; but, arranging and preparing the plan of salvation, which was accomplished by the Word, through the sign of Jonah.¹⁰²

All of this is done, according to Irenaeus, in order to create a grateful disposition in man toward God. In the depths of despair and isolation, brought on by man's sinfulness and pride, God comes to him, as he did to Jonah in the belly of the whale. It is this unexpected grace, given by God, at man's most dire state, that creates in him the realisation that true life and joy come only from obedience to his creator. "This was done that man, receiving an unhoped-for salvation from God, might rise from the dead, and glorify God."¹⁰³ Gratefulness is the great disposition that leads to salvation.

Having outlined the entire economy of salvation (mainly in books 3 and 4 of *Against Heresies*) Irenaeus concludes his theology of salvation, in book 5 of *Against Heresies*, with the image of the martyrs as the ultimate imitators of Christ. He does this mainly through the example of the seed which, when placed in the ground and dies, creates new life. Here one observes Irenaeus building on the work of his predecessor Ignatius. To die like Christ is to truly live. Here Irenaeus introduces two distinct concepts: that of the seed and that of the vine. Building on Christ's words in the Gospel of John, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it's bears much fruit.*"¹⁰⁴ Irenaeus develops his theology of martyrdom along the same lines of death and resurrection. He says,

But what is that which, like a grain of wheat, is sown in the earth and decays, unless it be the bodies which are laid in the earth, into which seeds are also cast... It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.' in its own weakness certainty, because since it is earth it goes to the earth; but

¹⁰² Ibid. AH 3:20:1

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ John 12:24

it is quickened by the power of God, who raises it from the dead.¹⁰⁵

Irenaeus is drawing parallels between the example of the wheat in the Gospel of John and also Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, "It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power,"¹⁰⁶ identifying the contrast between the worldly life and the life in Christ. Although man die in sin and corruption, it is the Spirit of God, through Christ's sacrifice, that will raise him in Glory, as Christ was also raised in glory. Furthermore, it is not enough to acknowledge Christ's death and resurrection as man's ultimate hope. Man must not simply die, but rather die in imitation of Christ. Man must die as part of the vine that is Christ – His Church. Only then can he be the right type of seed that goes into the ground. And, being part of the Church, he is to be an active participant in the Eucharistic assembly. In receiving Holy Communion, human beings begin to participate in the great mystery of death and resurrection, even in this life. Since the Eucharist is literally the Body and Blood of Christ, participation in it allows man to enter into the death and resurrection of Christ Himself – to be grafted into the true living vine. In essence, it means to become the good seed even before one's physical death. If one does this, they will be prepared for the time when they enter into their own death as they will do so bearing Christ. Irenaeus explains this process in this way:

And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of God, becomes the Eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption.¹⁰⁷

Fr. John Behr comments, "If it is the crucified and exalted Christ who is the starting point for expounding the economy of God... Then it is the martyrs, who have followed Christ on this path, who witness and manifest the power of God and are therefore the

¹⁰⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons. AH 5:8:2

¹⁰⁶ I Corinthians 15:43

¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons. AH 5:8:3

combination of his creative work.”¹⁰⁸ The entire purpose of the divine economy is to divinize man – to move him from corruption to incorruption – from death to life. Inasmuch as man responds to this call, the willingness to take up his cross and follow Christ, man has the ability to become that which God intended – a true human being. The process by which God saves His creation is reflected in the life of every human being. “Just as the physician is proved by his patients, so is God also revealed through men.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, Irenaeus concludes that, “the glory of God is a living human being; and the life of man consists in beholding God.”¹¹⁰ This glory is only visible when man is fulfilling his role as imitator of Christ.

It is this point that concerns us most in our current study. Can an individual truly become a Christian, a true human being, without the willingness to suffer with Christ? Can martyrdom be eliminated from the Christian equation or is it rather the solution itself? Irenaeus is emphatic that the cross of Christ is the same as that which His disciples must be ready to undergo.¹¹¹ It is the means by which human beings achieve true life. Through active and meaningful suffering, the Christian manifests the Glory of God in the world. These words harken back to the healing of the blind man in the Gospel of John. When Christ is questioned by the disciples whether the man was born blind due to his own sins or his parents, Christ answers, “*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.*”¹¹² The words of Jesus give meaning to the blind man’s suffering, giving his life purpose. In the same way Christ’s own voluntary suffering gives meaning to the suffering of the martyrs who enter into the ordeal of their own accord, wanting to be nothing more than the image of God in the world. Or rather, to use the words of St. Ignatius, to be a “word of God” instead of an “inarticulate cry.”

¹⁰⁸ Behr, John. *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2015. Pg. 198.

¹⁰⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons. AH 3:20:2

¹¹⁰ Ibid. AH 4:20:7

¹¹¹ Behr, John. *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*. Pg. 199.

¹¹² John 9:3

Chapter 4. Death in the Modern Era

i) The Death of Death

In the first section of this study, the data presented from our field research clearly demonstrates a clear avoidance of the topic of death and suffering by both converts to the Orthodox faith and clergy alike. The topic of “death-denying culture” is one that is extremely relevant to our study as it provides an understanding of how such a mentality came into existence and how it affects the modern Orthodox psyche. It is for this reason that we shall now briefly explore the evolution of the concept of “death denial” with a special emphasis on the development of the funeral industry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

ii) Enlightenment, Science, and the Devaluation of Death

In the same way that martyrdom was largely removed from the Christian experience by the fourth century, so the removal of belief in the afterlife during the enlightenment deeply affected mankind’s appreciation, and acceptance of death. Until the age of scientific progress, human beings accepted the idea of a continued existence after death.¹¹³ This belief helped mitigate the fear of death and influenced the way in which Christians approached the rituals for burial and mourning. The deceased body was not seen as something to be feared but rather a temple to be honored. This honour can be observed in the burial practices of both East and West. In the early Middle Ages, in the West, after death, the body was laid out either on a piece of precious cloth or dyed fabric and was visible in the house. Later it was transported to the place of burial and placed in a sarcophagus. Thus, the body, including the face, remained visible until the final closing of the sarcophagus, appearing on the bier, above the grave, just as it had appeared on the bed at the moment of death.¹¹⁴ Christians of the early Church continue the burial traditions of the Jews. However, for Christians death was now overcome. The human body, bearing the image and likeness of God, was not tainted, but

¹¹³ Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. Pg. 95

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* Pg. 168

sanctified by the body and blood of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁵ Therefore, even in death, the body remains an icon that is to be venerated, incensed, and most importantly viewed.

Even when the practice of hiding the body began to take root in the western Church, around the thirteenth century, in the East no such tradition existed until modern times.¹¹⁶ While it is true that the Mediterranean countries accepted the use of the wooden coffin, they refused to conceal the face, leaving the coffin open until the moment of burial, allowing the mourning family and relatives the ability to literally stare death in the face and, by doing so, contemplate their own departure from this life.¹¹⁷

Before the Enlightenment death was a communal experience – it involved the whole family and indeed, the whole community. The individual was cared for by his loved ones. Illness and death were seen as natural parts of life, the care for those leaving this life the responsibility of those around them. The end of life was a sacred event during which one was able to prepare themselves through confession, prayer, and participating in the sacraments and by this method, face the great enemy of death with courage and faith. Through suffering, one found meaning and those at their bedside, through their own co-suffering, received insight into their own mortality. Ultimately it was love that was expressed through the care of the dying.

However, during the enlightenment there was a movement towards the devaluation of the hour of death. There was a type of a desacralization of the event – a type of dualistic psychology that began to permeate society. Death was no longer the person lying in the sickbed, sweating, suffering, and praying. It had become something that that is expressed by a metaphor: the separation of the soul

¹¹⁵ Barna, Mark & Elizabeth. *A Christian Ending*. Pg. 15.

¹¹⁶ Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. Pg. 168.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* Pg. 170.

in the body, which is like the separation of man and wife. The pain of that is seen not as real suffering but as something comparable to the sorrow of a broken friendship.¹¹⁸ The metaphysical angst stemming from the possibility of eternal damnation was mitigated by a cold atheism in which death became a rest, a sleep, and a simple end to a hopefully good and long life.

The absence of belief in an afterlife also led to the desacralization of the body itself. The Pauline teaching of the body being the temple of Holy Spirit gave way to the view of the body as simply an object devoid of life - a machine to be understood. The mid-fifteenth century gave rise to the common practice of dissecting dead bodies for the purpose of scientific research and of studying death. This was not limited to the medical profession. Indeed, the practice became so popular that many wealthy private citizens in the West, such as philosophers, teachers, authors, and many others, often built dissecting rooms in their homes. The dissecting of human corpses became a hobby for many who wanted to not only understand biology but also life in general. There were even reports of rampant thefts of corpses for such purposes.¹¹⁹ It is clear that such developments were the natural outgrowth of a shift in the general public's view of death and of the body. The objectification of the body as a "corpse" and not as a holy temple, an image of God, contributed to the secularization of death in general. This mentality paved the way for the rise of the modern funeral industry and the disastrous effect it would have on human contemplation of the afterlife.

iii) The Modern Funeral Industry

Death used to be an intimate, beautiful process, hearkening back to the customs and traditions of Christian communities for 2,000 years. It is still the way death and burial is handled in most of the rest of the world. However, in North America, and in many other parts of the world, a very different type of burial tradition has been gradually adopted over the past 150 years. By the start of the 20th century

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Pg. 299-300.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Pg. 361.

the relationship between the living and the dead in America had begun to dramatically change. A gaping social divide was gradually supplanting the intimacy that had connected the physical remains with a community of faithful and friends. In large part the divide was produced by three social factors:

1. Changes and demographic patterns.
2. The rise of hospitals as places of dying.
3. The growth of modern funeral homes.¹²⁰

Due to the industrial revolution poverty began to drastically decrease. In addition, populations began to gravitate from a rural to a more cosmopolitan setting as most began to work in factories. The decrease in poverty and elevation of living standards and personal wealth also increased the average life expectancy. Subsequently a longer life expectancy meant that less and less people were experiencing death in their every day lives. In addition, the proliferation of hospitals and the availability of cheaper health care also shifted the locus of illness away from the home. Causes of death changed as well due to the Industrial Revolution. Industrial diseases and accidents became major factors along with sanitation problems in big cities. Diseases lasted longer. Cancer and heart disease became the leading cause of death. This fear of disease made death itself repellent. And prolonged disease also made the hospital the new place where death would usually occur.¹²¹ Whereas in the late 1800's doctors used to make house calls, visiting their patients at home, by the early 1900's patients were visiting doctors at the hospital and were quite often admitted for treatment.¹²² During this time the medical profession enjoyed a heightened prestige with the Church, and her clergy, once an integral part of the healing process, were relegated to the periphery of the treatment of illness. This "medicalization" of death not only established the doctor as the crucial professional figure in charge of the dying process, but also shaped public attitudes about the meaning of death.¹²³

¹²⁰ Laderman, Gary. *Rest in Peace*. Pg. 1.

¹²¹ Barna, Mark & Elizabeth. *A Christian Ending*. Pg. 22.

¹²² Laderman, Gary. *Rest in Peace*. Pg. 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

In colonial America, death was treated as a familiar part of everyday life, just as it had once been in Europe. Adults died young and the death of children was a regular occurrence. Early settlers in America buried their dead on their farms. From colonial days until the 19th century, the American funeral was almost exclusively a family affair.¹²⁴ Generations of family lived in the same house or on the same farm. The family and close friends performed most of the duties in connection with the funeral. The corpse lay in the family parlor. Houses were designed with a room having doors wide enough to permit holders to enter and exit carrying a coffin. In this we can observe that even house architecture took death at home into account.¹²⁵ However, with the shift from death in home to death in the hospital, death was effectively removed from the public consciousness. As Laderman states,

Cultural implications of this environmental shift from death in the home to death in the hospital were profound and contributed to the literal displacement of the dead from the everyday social world of the living. Dying in the isolated space of the hospital room institutionalized the experience as a passage requiring scientific, and increasingly technological intervention, rather than prayers and the presence of the community.¹²⁶

The responsibility of caring for the dead was removed from the immediate family and community and placed in the hands of the “death professionals.” During this time funeral directors achieved an air of authority in mortal matters and became the primary managers of the corpse in the ceremonies to dispose of it.¹²⁷ Embalming, although having been practiced to some degree as early as the 14th century, became more sophisticated and frequent. In the past the bodies of important people and royalty had been embalmed so that they could be transported to distant locations for burial or for veneration by the masses. Likewise, by the 15th century the embalming of most royal families in Europe had become a standard practice in order to allow the body to keep for extended periods of veneration.¹²⁸ In the 20th century embalming had become an effective way to preserve

¹²⁴ Barna, Mark & Elizabeth. *A Christian Ending*. Pg. 18.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Pg 19.

¹²⁶ Laderman, Gary. *Rest in Peace*. Pg. 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Towards Death*. Pg. 361.

soldiers who had died overseas in the first and second world wars. Families wanted their loved ones transported back home for burial and this necessitated the preservation of the body. Eventually this practice was extended to the general population who preferred to view their dead not as dead, but rather as those asleep. It should be noted that the practice of chemical embalming of the dead is directly related to our adversarial relationship with matter and nature. It grew directly out of the mindset of man *against* nature that was prevalent during the Industrial Revolution. In a sense, embalming became yet another rebellion against the natural order of creation. Instead of confronting the effects of death, society attempted to mask them.

The shift in public consciousness concerning death is perhaps one of the most profound paradigm shifts in human history. In less than two hundred years, the Western world has successfully transformed the way in which human beings die into something that never existed in the past. Philippe Aries outlines two main factors that describe this paradigm shift:

1. The contrariness to everything that preceded it. Except for the death of statesman, society has banished death. In the towns, there is no way of knowing that something is happened. The old silver hearse has become an ordinary black limousine indistinguishable from the flow of traffic. Society no longer observes a pause, and the disappearance of an individual no longer affects continuity.
2. The speed of which the change has happened is unprecedented. Today, a complete reversal of customs seems to have occurred in one generation.¹²⁹

The effects of such a shift cannot be overstated or ignored. Most of the following consequences listed have shaped the consciousness of the North American population. It is in this is population that the Church finds itself and is attempting to evangelize. To understand these factors is to understand the root of the death-denying culture in which we find ourselves.

¹²⁹ Ibid. Pg. 560.

The main effects of the modern funeral industry on the church and the general population include:

1. The Church relegated the responsibility of heralding death to the doctor. Family members refuse to take responsibility of telling someone they are going to die.
2. There's a need to prolong one's happiness in life by not speaking about impending death. Everyone becomes an accomplice to a lie born of this moment which later goes to such proportions that death is driven to secrecy.
3. The concealment of death by illness. Doctors and families giving false hope so that one will not have to deal with the fact they are dying. And in doing so, they cheat people out of the preparation for their own deaths.
4. Death becomes dirty. In the second half of the 19th century, death ceases to be always seen as beautiful and is sometimes even depicted as disgusting. Death no longer inspires fear and awe, but rather turns the stomach like a nauseating spectacle. It becomes improper, and indecent to let someone die in public. It is no longer acceptable for strangers to come into a room that smells of urine, sweat and gangrene and where the sheets are soiled. Such things would remind us of our own mortality. A new image of death is forming - an image that is ugly and hidden.
5. The transfer to the hospital: Death is discreetly transferred to the hospital in the 1930s and 40s and became widespread in the 1950s. Death in the home becomes unbearable. Our senses can no longer tolerate the sights and smells that in the early 19th century were part of daily life, along with suffering and illness. The burden of care, that had once been shared by the whole little society of neighbors and friends, now has been relegated to the hospital professionals.
6. The rejection and elimination of mourning: A limited amount of people were allowed at the deathbed. Funerals became private and by invitation only. Children were not allowed to attend funerals, even the funerals of their parents. Children were not informed about death but were rather told fairytales that their parents have gone on trips with Jesus.
7. By the 1970s cremation overtakes traditional burial as the preferred method of disposing of one's dead. It is cheaper and contributes to the already existing "out

of sight, out of mind” mentality regarding death.

8. Indecency of mourning: The pain of loss may continue to exist in the secret heart of the survivor, but the rule today, almost throughout the West, is that it must never been shown in public.
9. The triumph of medicalization: As soon as an illness seems serious, the doctor usually sends his patient to the hospital. Advances in surgery have brought parallel advances in resuscitation and in the reduction or elimination of pain and sensation. It's all about relieving pain. By a swift and imperceptible transition, someone who was dying came to be treated like someone recovering from major surgery.¹³⁰

After such developments, where does one find death in modern day? It would be difficult to say. The current experience of death in North America can be summed up with a word that describes a clean, professional disposal of our loved ones involving the least amount of trauma to the immediate family. This word used could be “sanitized.” Death has become largely “sanitized.” Barring accidental death, the majority of deaths happen in hospitals or hospices where the individual is often placed on pain medications in order to “make them comfortable” and to “ease their pain.” Often such “pain management” has the adverse effect of placing the individual into a coma where they are robbed of the final moments of their lives where confession, seeing friends and family, communion and prayer are not possible. When death does occur, families are usually afforded less than an hour with the “body” before they sign the appropriate paperwork and leave the hospital, not to see their loved one until two to three days later at the viewing. Between the time of death and the time of viewing, the body is picked up, transported and prepared by the funeral directors; Professionals who undertake not only the embalming, dressing and beautifying of the individual for viewing, but also take care of all other aspects of the funeral so that the family will not be “overwhelmed” in their time of grieving. Even in the Orthodox Christian circles, the traditional actions of making the *kolyva* (boiled wheat), anointing and dressing the dead, baking a *prosforo* (offering bread) and even contacting the priest, have all been relegated to the funeral home, local Church, or even

¹³⁰ Ibid. Pg. 560-584.

the local Orthodox bakery (for *kolyva* and *prosforo* bread) so as not to “overwhelm” the family who is in distress. All this serves to effectively shield people from the reality of death. The consequence is the loss of an eschatological vision of life. As Barna so eloquently states,

Our society has lost its capacity to face the darkness of death. Instead, we attempt simply to banish it from our consciousness. We could ignore the scandal of death and force the bereaved into silence, or we can pretend indifference and called death merely a natural event, either a dissolution into nothingness or natural transition into some larger cosmos. The result, for individuals and communities, is that we have lost of the emotional, social, logical and spiritual resources we need to face death directly.¹³¹

¹³¹ Barna, Mark & Elizabeth. *A Christian Ending*. Pg. 22-23.

Chapter 5. A Failure to Die

i. When Pandemics Strike (Covid-19 Case Study)

The COVID-19 pandemic began in December 2019, in Wuhan, China. While the origin of the outbreak is still unclear, it is believed that the first cases were linked to a local food market, where live animals were sold. The initial cases were reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. It was initially thought to be caused by a new strain of the coronavirus, which posed a novel risk to humans. The virus quickly spread throughout China and then to other parts of the world. By March 2020, the WHO declared it a pandemic, governments around the world responding with measures such as lockdowns, social distancing, and travel restrictions. The pandemic had a profound impact, with millions of lives lost and enormous economic and social disruption. It sent out global shockwaves, with countries around the world facing a health, economic and social crisis unlike any seen before. In less than a year, the virus had infected over 28 million people and resulted in over 900,000 deaths in 212 countries, disrupting normal life and causing profound social and economic devastation in its wake.¹³²

a) Lockdowns

In response, countries put in place a raft of unprecedented measures to limit the spread of the virus and to help sustain their citizens and economies, including imposing travel restrictions, closing schools, businesses, places of worship, enforcing quarantine obligations and many other mitigation efforts. This had an enormous impact on people's lives in many different ways.

The pandemic equally had a significantly negative effect on Church attendance across the world. With the proliferation of lockdowns, social distancing rules, and bans on large gatherings, religious institutions had to shutter their doors in order to help prevent the spread of the virus. This had a tremendous impact on the way that many

¹³² Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. < <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html>>, March 15, 2023.

people practiced their faith, as attendance to churches and other places of worship was considered, by many, to be an integral part of the spiritual experience.

One of the most substantial negative impacts of Covid lockdowns was the physical isolation that people had to endure. For many, being able to attend weekly religious services and events was an essential way to remain rooted and connected to their faith. With physical distancing rules in place, attending Church services, even with masks and other protective measures, had become problematic for many. This loss of connection had been incredibly difficult for those, who had to rely solely on digital services to interact with their Church community - a situation that only deepened a sense of loneliness and bereavement.

Additionally, for many churches, the disruption caused by the lockdowns caused a significant dip in their financial resources. Without outside donations from those attending services and events, and with most of their expected donations coming from membership fees, many churches were forced to limit their programming and lay off staff to offset the deficits caused by the lack of attendance. This put a strain on religious entities, often forcing them to focus their scarce resources on digital and remote services, rather than activities and gatherings that foster in-person connection and spiritual growth.

The response of Orthodox Christians to the lockdowns was largely negative due to the disruption to their usual worship services, which have always been seen as central to Orthodox Christian life. Orthodox worship services are especially formal and lengthy, with frequent congregational singing and participation in the sacraments. This made it extremely challenging for Orthodox Christians to adhere to restrictions as they effectively diminished the Orthodox lifestyle to private prayer in the home. Many Orthodox Church leaders acted with caution, taking a defensive approach, trying to protect their churches and communities, many advocating for a complete ban on services in some cases. Other churches offered online services, implemented safety protocols, such as wearing masks and social distancing, and virtual Bible

studies. However, such measures had little positive effect on most of the faithful due to the religious importance that the Orthodox place on attending services and receiving Holy Communion.

The Church Fathers place a great deal of importance on the communal aspect of worship, and the physical presence of believers in the Divine Liturgy. St. John Chrysostom, one of the most celebrated of the Church fathers, emphasizes the importance of communal worship when he says, *"It is impossible to be saved alone, isolated from the assembly of the Church and from the communion of the mysteries."*¹³³ Here, Chrysostom argues that participation in the mysteries (the sacraments of the Church) is only possible when one is present in the assembly of the Church. In other words, the experience of the Mysteries is not something that can be achieved in isolation, or remotely, but rather requires the physical presence of believers.

St. Basil the Great also emphasizes the importance of communal worship. In one of his letters, he writes, *"It is necessary for each one of the faithful to be present at the assembly of the Church, not to absent himself for any reason whatever."*¹³⁴ Here, Basil argues that the physical presence of believers in the assembly of the Church is necessary and that there should be no excuse for absence.

Furthermore, in-person worship is regarded as essential because it fosters a sense of unity and mutual support among believers. St. Cyril of Jerusalem insists that, *"We are one body in Christ, and we receive the one and same body."*¹³⁵ Cyril emphasizes that, through the Eucharist, believers are united as one body in Christ. This unity is reinforced through the physical presence of believers, as they participate in the Eucharist and other sacraments together. Understanding this dynamic helps one

¹³³ St. John Chrysostom, "Homily 8 on Hebrews," <<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/240208.htm>>, 2021.

¹³⁴ St. Basil of Caesarea, "Letter 234," <<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202234.htm>>, 2021.

¹³⁵ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechesis 23," <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310123.htm>, 2021.

understand that the Covid-19 lockdowns presented one of the most significant pastoral challenges for the Orthodox Church in the past century.

b) Sick Inside the Church?

As a form of protest, there were certain portions of the Orthodox Christian population who began to espouse the novel belief that one “could not get sick inside an Orthodox Church building.” While not part of official Orthodox dogma, various religious websites began to spring up on the Internet, attempting to defend the sanctity of Orthodox worship, and claiming that one could not, if they had sufficient faith, get sick inside the Church, while attending religious services. It was believed that the Holy Spirit would protect such individuals from contracting the virus, thus bolstering the opinion that churches should have never been closed during the pandemic.

This belief was based on the Orthodox Church’s long tradition of upholding the sacraments, which include communion, confession, and prayer. These practices are considered to be essential to the spiritual health of the faithful, and many believe that they provide a form of protection against physical illness. Furthermore, the use of incense, holy water, and other sacramentals was believed to cleanse the environment of harmful spiritual forces, including diseases such as COVID-19.

While it is understandable that such a position would emerge during a time when a significant portion of the population felt that their religious freedoms were being attacked, nevertheless, this teaching was both novel, misleading and contrary to the official positions of almost all Orthodox churches across the world. Historically, it has never been the case that Orthodox Christians have taught that one cannot get sick within an Orthodox Church. Indeed, one can see this phenomenon every day. For example, if someone is suffering from the common cold, they often spread it to other congregants if they attend Church on a Sunday. This was never seen as a theological problem in the past, and yet during the Covid pandemic, it became a point of contention amongst the faithful. In an effort to defend Orthodox worship, some individuals inadvertently created a type of superstitious approach to liturgical life, one

that is absent from mainstream Orthodox theology, and interestingly enough, one that avoids the cross and the acceptance of death as a cornerstone of Orthodox spirituality.

As this belief was spearheaded predominantly among lay people, many chose to ignore the official communiques of their parent churches, who often advised and encouraged adherence to public health measures such as mask-wearing, practicing social distancing, and the use of hand sanitizer. The Orthodox Church recognizes that faith and science are not mutually exclusive and that protecting the health and well-being of their members is of the utmost importance.

c) Communal Spoons

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Orthodox Church also received criticism over its use of a single communal spoon during the distribution of Holy Communion. This criticism came from both public health officials and members of the Orthodox community. The communal spoon, which is used to administer sanctified wine and bread to all members of the Church, was viewed as a potential source of spreading the virus. Many members of the community questioned why the Church was not taking more precautions to protect their congregants during this public health crisis.

Some critics pointed out that other religious denominations had made significant changes to their practices during the pandemic. For example, many Catholic churches switched to administering pre-packaged communion wafers. Some Protestant churches stopped serving communion altogether. Critics argued that the Orthodox Church should also change their practices to align with public health guidelines and protect their members from potential exposure.

However, defenders of the Orthodox practice of using a single communal spoon pointed out that it is the Church's belief that the bread and wine used during Holy Communion represent the real and mystical physical body and blood of Christ, thus negating the possibility of transmitting disease. Therefore, changing the way

Communion is administered would fundamentally alter the meaning of the practice and imply a lack of faith in the sanctity and effectiveness of the sacrament.

Different Orthodox jurisdictions responded to these pressures in different ways. While the overwhelming majority of Orthodox churches refused to acquiesce to external pressures, continuing to administer Holy Communion in the traditional way, with one communal spoon, there were some that augmented the reception of Holy Communion by introducing the use of multiple spoons, while others used alcohol as a sanitizer for the liturgical spoon, dipping it in, between communicants. The general response to such augmentations was negative among parishioners. While some were relieved and embraced the Church's willingness to work with public health authorities, the majority saw it as the Church giving in to pressures and not holding true the belief in the sanctity of Holy Communion. This caused many parishioners to leave their home parishes and seek out other Orthodox communities that were still maintaining the traditional way of administering the Eucharist.

Regardless of the method that was adopted by each individual Orthodox Christian jurisdiction, what became abundantly clear was that there was a deep divide within the Orthodox world over this issue and on how to both respond to external (and internal) criticisms in a meaningful and constructive way. As criticisms mounted there was little discussion or dialogue between Orthodox jurisdictions, each adopting an individualistic posture, which aimed at prescribing certain procedures and positions to their own congregations irrespective of how these would affect their fellow Christians throughout the world. The result was not a unified Orthodox witness during a most trying time, but rather a cacophony of different religious leaders, each offering varying and opposing opinions, and all claiming that theirs was the "true Orthodox" approach.

d) Vaccines

Orthodox Christian vaccine hesitancy also became commonplace during the pandemic. There are several reasons behind this reluctance, which can be attributed to

increased mistrust in the government, religious beliefs and the proliferation of misinformation online. Firstly, many Orthodox Christians grew increasingly distrustful of the government and pharmaceutical industries. This mistrust had been augmented by the rapid introduction of Covid-19 vaccines, as some people viewed their accelerated development and rollout as a potential strategy to control the population by enhancing surveillance, or as an irresponsible way for pharmaceutical companies to make profit.

Secondly, religious beliefs may have also formed a significant portion of reluctance towards vaccination. This is because vaccines are derived from uncertain sources (e.g., fetal cell lines), and some may contain substances that are in conflict with religious teachings. These ethical and moral convictions are deeply rooted and often extend to other common vaccines, such as the annual flu shot. As such, many Orthodox Christians may have believed that vaccines are a form of interference with the natural process, a violation of human dignity through fetal experimentation, and/or exploitation of the vulnerable - all of which are unacceptable in the Orthodox faith.

Thirdly, misinformation and conspiracy theories also played a significant role in influencing the opinions of Orthodox Christians about Covid-19 vaccines. Misinformation tends to spread unrestrained over social media, and many people believed that these vaccines were causing serious adverse effects such as infertility, autism, and even death. Such beliefs instilled fear and mistrust in the general public, potentially hindering the uptake of vaccination.

It should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this study to comment on the above mentioned medical/ethical objections. The ethical and moral implications of the research involved in developing vaccines is a topic to be explored by Orthodox ethicists. What interests us here is the increase in vaccine hesitancy during the pandemic — an increase that was notable — did not exist in such a large portion of

the Orthodox population pre-pandemic and was exacerbated by the weaponization of fear amongst the general population.

ii. The Modern Orthodox Response

a) The Weaponization of Fear

As has been demonstrated in the earlier chapters of this study, the avoidance of death, as an ultimate reality of human existence, has consequences. One of the main consequences is the creation of persistent and chronic fear within human beings. When one is ignorant of the process by which human life ends, then one will do everything in their power to avoid encountering it. This existential fear drives human beings towards all sorts of different behavior. As was seen during the pandemic, the lack of embracing death, as both a normal part of life, and, for Orthodox Christians, the process by which one truly becomes human (Ignatius of Antioch), greatly influenced people's decisions. Most of these decisions were influenced by a need to preserve biological life, even at the expense of what Orthodox Christians would consider to be more important things: faith, freedom, sacrifice and martyrdom.

Often cited in this study, St. Ignatius of Antioch believed that death was not something to be feared, but rather that which should be accepted as a natural part of life. Ignatius believed that by accepting death one could let go of the fear that often grips us and prevents us from fully enjoying life. Furthermore, accepting death is crucial for one's emotional and mental wellbeing. When one fears death, one becomes preoccupied with it and often avoids situations that may put one at risk. This fear can limit one's experiences and prevent one from living their life to the fullest. In times of heightened fear and anxiety, as was the case in the Covid 19 pandemic, this fear can also affect decision making. This was certainly the case for many Orthodox Christians, attempting to navigate the new world in which the Church found herself.

By accepting death, one can find hope in the present moment and live their life with purpose and intention. Conversely, when one avoids the reality of death, one can lose sight of many important things that transcend the physicality of life. For Orthodox Christians, these, of course, include spiritual well-being, participation in the sacraments, helping one's neighbor, and ultimate salvation in the coming kingdom of God. Moreover, accepting death can also lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. When one is no longer afraid of death, one can confront their own mortality and reflect on the legacy they want to leave behind. This can be a powerful motivation to live a meaningful life and make a positive impact on those around. By embracing death, one can find the courage to face life's challenges and truly make a difference in the world. A difference that is not based on selfish desires, but in a genuine motivation to help others, and to better the world in which we live.

In reality, the opposite was shown to be the case throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in the data presented earlier in this study, the lack of emphasis on the cross and the acceptance of death has created within the general Orthodox population a lack of understanding when it comes to basic human mortality. When one compares current-day Orthodoxy to the past one can draw some stark contrasts. Early Christians differed significantly from pagans in their acceptance of death and hope in the resurrection of Christ. Pagan religions often viewed death as a natural and inevitable part of life, with no hope for a meaningful afterlife. This belief often led to a focus on earthly pleasures and a lack of concern for the moral consequences of their actions – in essence a hedonistic lifestyle. In contrast, early Christians, holding a deep belief in an eternal afterlife, placed great emphasis on living righteously in preparation for it. Additionally, they believed in the resurrection of Christ and that their own resurrection was made possible through His sacrifice. This hope brought comfort in the face of death and strengthened their faith in the face of persecution.

b) Ancient Pandemics

During pandemics in ancient times, Christians actively demonstrated their compassion towards pagan citizens by taking care of them. Historian Kyle Harper, in his book "The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire," explains that during the Antonine Plague of AD 165, Christians were known for providing care to both fellow believers and non-believers.¹³⁶ According to Christian historian Dionysius of Alexandria, who wrote a letter stating that during the 3rd-century plague in Egypt, Christians "showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another."¹³⁷ These historical sources point to the fact that early Christians cared for their fellow pagan citizens during pandemics by providing medical assistance and attending to their burial needs. There is no historical evidence that Christians abandoned their fellow citizens out of self-preservation. Indeed, in such cases, they often sacrificed their own health, and often their lives, in the service of others. This stood in stark contrast to their pagan counterparts, who were often known to abandon their loved ones and flee the major city centres, leaving family members to die alone. Dionysius saw this as 'the equal of martyrdom' and contrasted the behaviour of the Christians with the heathen who threw out their family members onto the roads even before they were dead.¹³⁸ It was the Christians that stayed behind to minister to those who were suffering. They did so out of love for their neighbour, as is exemplified in the gospels. Additionally, they did not do so under the misguided belief that God would protect them from the disease of which they ministered. Many of them died while ministering to the infected, leaving a legacy of love, compassion, and self-sacrifice that inspired generations of human beings to take up the cross, and be baptized into the Christian faith.

¹³⁶ Harper, Kyle. "The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire." *Princeton University Press*. (2017): 65.

¹³⁷ Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. G. A. Williamson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 7.22, 305.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 7.22, 305-305.

c) The Apostle to the Plains: Fr. Nicola Yanney

In addition to the behavior of ancient Christians, one can draw their attention to a more specific (and more modern) example of such sacrifice. The actions of many (albeit not all) Orthodox clergy often exemplified this calling to martyrdom. Their willingness to continue to minister in the face of both mounting societal criticism and at great risk to themselves, and their families, remains a beacon of light in an otherwise dark world, bereft of hope in the resurrection.

The last comparable pandemic in recent history was the Spanish Flu. Also known as the H1N1 virus, it began in the United States in the spring of 1918. The virus was highly contagious and spread quickly, especially among crowded military camps during World War I. The first cases were identified in Kansas in March 1918, and within weeks, the virus had spread throughout the country. Unlike previous strains of the flu, the Spanish Flu was particularly deadly to young adults, with many dying within days of showing symptoms. The initial response to the epidemic was slow, public health officials underestimating its severity. The virus eventually spread to become a worldwide pandemic, infecting an estimated 500 million people and killing as many as 50 million worldwide by its end in 1920.¹³⁹

During this time one can also witness the inspiring example of Fr. Nicola Yanney, a remarkable man who lived a life of selfless sacrifice during one of the most challenging periods in modern human history. Born in Syria in 1861, he migrated to America in 1892, and after much struggle, became a priest in 1904. During his years of service, Fr. Nicola worked tirelessly to build communities, educate his congregation, and provide comfort to those in need. However, it was his work during the Spanish Flu pandemic that truly set him apart as a hero of his time.

When the pandemic struck the United States in 1918, Fr. Nicola knew that he could not stand idly by while so many of his people suffered. Despite the risk to his own

¹³⁹ World Health Organization. < <https://www.who.int/teams/health-product-policy-and-standards/standards-and-specifications/vaccines-quality/influenza>>, May 25, 2023.

health, he went from house to house throughout his community, ministering to the sick and dying. He worked tirelessly, offering prayers and comfort to all those stricken by the disease, regardless of their faith or background. He even ventured beyond his own community, traveling to neighboring towns to attend to those who had been abandoned by their local religious leaders.¹⁴⁰

Fr. Nicola's compassion and bravery did not go unnoticed. Even if he was not a medical doctor, he did everything he could to help the sick. His dedication and selflessness inspired many, and he became a symbol of hope and resilience in the face of hardship. His efforts were noted in the local papers, and he was lauded by many prominent people, including the then-governor of Nebraska, Samuel McKelvie.

Sadly, Fr. Nicola's work also came at a great cost. In the course of his ministry, he too became infected with the Spanish Flu and, despite his best efforts, it claimed his life on January 23, 1919.¹⁴¹ However, even in death, Fr. Nicola continued to inspire others to follow in his footsteps. His legacy of sacrifice and service to others live on to this day, and he remains a shining example of what it means to be a true humanitarian and Orthodox Christian. During the pandemic, he went above and beyond the call of duty, risking his own health to minister to those who needed it most. His selflessness and compassion remain a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, the ultimate hope in the resurrection of Christ and His sacrifice on the cross.

Following in his example, many Orthodox Christian priests acted in the same admirable way during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Even during the first months of the outbreak, when information was scarce and there was great uncertainty, many Orthodox priests continued to visit their parishioners, both at

¹⁴⁰ Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese. < <http://ww1.antiochian.org/node/25571>>, Jan. 1, 2020.

¹⁴¹ The Saint Raphael Clergy Brotherhood, "Apostle to the Plains: The Life of Father Nicola Yanney," *Ancient Faith Publications*. (2019): 247.

home, and in the hospitals. Their ministry did not cease simply because there was a pandemic. This, of course, placed these clergy in danger, not knowing the severity of the infection, and not yet having access to vaccination. Many of them were urged, by their parish councils, not to engage with their parishioners. Many were criticized for not adhering to social distancing when visiting the faithful, opting rather to both visit and stay with those who were suffering. This does not mean that they did not take necessary precautions in order to protect both themselves and those around them who were not yet infected. However, a balance had to be found between personal protection, and the obligation one had to their fellow human beings. While there was always a danger of both sickness and death, the alternative would have been to abandon their parishioners to face death alone in the hospitals, without receiving prayer or the sacraments. This, to many clergy, was unacceptable, and contrary to the Orthodox calling to love one's neighbor as themselves.

To be sure, the opposite reality also existed. There were the unfortunate instances where some Orthodox clergy refused to visit those who were sick, out of fear of contracting the virus. Others refused to become vaccinated, again out of personal fear of side effects and health concerns. And, while this decision, in many instances, hindered them from effectively performing their priestly duties, it was rarely criticized by anyone. Indeed, the normal reaction of most was to praise such individuals as, "taking care of themselves, and their families," and, "being prudent, not to spread the virus to those who are healthy."

One might ask the question, "What would Christianity have looked like if historical Christians had acted in the same way? Would anyone have noticed? Would anyone have been inspired to take up the cross?" Throughout history, Christian sacrifice has been an inspiring force for many individuals to adopt Christianity. The concept of sacrifice is woven into the very fabric of Christian beliefs, from the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross to the daily sacrifice of living a life dedicated to God. The stories of early Christian martyrs, who were willing to give up their lives rather than renounce their faith, are particularly inspiring. These stories have

demonstrated a level of conviction and commitment that many find admirable and compelling. Individuals like Fr. Nicola Yanney, and many like him, have inspired many to adopt Christianity. These acts of selflessness have demonstrated the power of Christ's teachings to change lives and have helped to attract people to the faith.

Such examples are no more poignant than during times of persecution, wars and pandemics, precisely because it is at these times that human life is threatened. Human life, depending on how it is defined, is at the epicenter of society's concern in times of calamity. The definition of this life is what differs from person to person. Most definitely, the Orthodox Christian approach would be to view human life in relation to God. "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent"¹⁴² When God is removed from the equation, the human outlook changes drastically. In the absence of the metaphysical, one cannot help but place greater emphasis on the physical. In such times, the example of true Christian martyrdom often perplexes society, as the martyrs' lives stand in stark contrast to the status quo. As Fr. John Behr brilliantly states, "The witness of the martyrs, and the theology of those who reflected on their witness, provides a stark challenge to us today, on a number of levels: it consistently, and coherently, reverses our usual, understanding of life and death, creation, and what it is to be truly human."¹⁴³

iii. Unable to Witness

In contrast to the great Christian examples of the past, during the COVID-19 pandemic the majority of the Orthodox Christian population acted in the opposite way. While most people fell into two camps — usually on the extremes of the left or right — it is interesting to observe that both acted out of the fear of death, not from its acceptance. Those on the left wholeheartedly espoused governmental measures of lockdowns, social distancing, mask wearing, hand sanitizing, shuttering of churches, and avoidance of Holy Communion. Those on the right advocated for a complete refusal to accept any such

¹⁴² John 17:3

¹⁴³ John Behr & Connor Cunningham. "The Role of Death in Life." *Cascade Books*. (2015): 93.

restrictions, not out of a deep sense of faith and acceptance of death, but rather (as mentioned before) out of a misguided belief that God would protect them from any physical consequence of contracting the disease — a strange type of “prosperity gospel” so prevalent in the evangelical protestant world. One would be hard-pressed to find bishops, priests, or lay people, that espoused a middle of the ground approach, based on both faith and science, but more importantly, on the acceptance of the cross and death.

The acceptance of consequences and the belief in the transcendent nature of Orthodox Christianity, became a taboo in most conversations. One could not openly say that they were in favor of going to Church during the pandemic, while at the same time, believing that such an act might lead to their subsequent infection and death. Indeed, making such a statement has come to be increasingly viewed as crazy. When influenced by secular ideology, it is quite normal that Orthodox Christians would like to both maintain their faith and also not have to sacrifice for it. In other words, they would like to have their cake and eat it too. The idea of placing oneself at risk in order to participate in the sacramental life of the Church has become a foreign concept in modern times.

In the past, Christians did not remain in the cities during pandemics or refuse to shutter their churches because they did not believe that they would get ill. They remained and offered their services to the population, despite the imminent danger, since they believed that there were more important things than the preservation of biological life. They had internalized, like St. Ignatius, the call to martyrdom as the ultimate expression of Christian life. They did not feel the need to justify this to the world, nor to invent novel theologies to explain such behavior. For them, the cross was the only justification needed. If one understood that Christ, and union with Him, was the pearl of great price, then one should be willing to sacrifice everything for that goal.

Orthodox Christians hold the cross, death and resurrection as central symbols of their faith, and these symbols are imbued with strong theological significance. The importance of bearing witness to modern society through the acceptance of the cross and death cannot be overstated. The cross represents sacrifice, love, and redemption, all vital

aspects of the Christian faith. Embracing these eschatological symbols in daily life conveys a deep commitment to the selflessness and love that Christ embodies, providing a powerful testimony to the transformative power of faith in the overcoming of the world. By demonstrating the power and relevance of the cross and death in modern society, Orthodox Christians are able to impact and reach those who may not otherwise engage in discussions about faith and spirituality, helping them face and overcome calamities such as pandemics.

Furthermore, the cross and death stand in opposition to many of the values and beliefs that are prevalent in modern society. Individualism, consumerism, and materialism are all antithetical to the selfless love and sacrifice embodied by Christian life. By bearing witness to the importance of self-sacrifice, Orthodox Christians are able to challenge the dominant narratives that surround them and offer a counter-cultural vision of what it means to live a virtuous life. Through this witness, the Orthodox can play an important role in shaping the moral landscape of society and restoring a focus on love and compassion. However, to do this, current generations must actively seek out examples from the past, in order to rediscover the importance of death in modern times.

The rediscovery of death, as the ultimate birth into eternity, must not only be embraced and internalized by modern Orthodox Christians, but should also be actively taught to those who seek to enter Orthodoxy through the catechumenate. As this study has repeatedly demonstrated, such an education is sorely lacking. Contrary to its ancient roots, the modern Orthodox Church has all but abandoned this eschatological emphasis in its educational models. Whether from the indomitable creep of secularism into modern Church life, the dominance of the funeral industry that has removed death from daily life, or simply the age-old fear that seems to grip individuals when coming face-to-face with their mortality, the contemplation of death and its eradication from everyday life forms a pivotal obstacle to Orthodox Christian salvation in our modern age.

Chapter 6. Reclaiming Death: A New Methodology

i. The Dangers of Ignoring Death

In Chapter 1 this study has outlined, through the various surveys administered, how the acceptance of death through the cross has become largely absent from the preparatory process by which modern-day catechumens enter into the Holy Orthodox Church. The data clearly shows that both clergy and lay people could not often recall delving into the topic of death during their preparation for baptism. Indeed, the topic was often avoided as not to “frighten” or “discourage” those seeking to enter Christianity. Preparing individuals for Christian Baptism is one of the most crucial aspects of catechesis. During this journey, catechumens are introduced to the core beliefs and teachings of Christianity. One integral aspect of this preparation is providing a deep understanding of the cross and death. Understanding this importance equips catechumens with invaluable knowledge and insight into the central message of Christianity, encouraging a profound commitment to their faith. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”¹⁴⁴

The cross stands as the symbol of Christ's sacrificial love and redemption for humanity. Teaching catechumens about the cross allows them to grasp the gravity of Christ's ultimate act of selflessness and forgiveness. It helps them comprehend the depth of God's love and the enormous price paid for their salvation. This understanding deepens their awareness of the true meaning of discipleship and inspires them to embrace the call to self-sacrifice and service to others.

Physical death, as a fundamental part of the human experience, is another crucial topic to explore with catechumens. Teaching about death not only highlights the temporary nature of earthly existence but also emphasizes the hope of eternal life through Christ. By understanding death in the Christian context, catechumens are encouraged to embrace a life focused on preparing for the hereafter, seeking the path of righteousness and avoiding the perils of sin. Recognizing that death is not the end but rather a gateway to the promised eternal communion with God instills in catechumens a profound sense of

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 16:24

purpose and hope, guiding their actions and decisions in all aspects of life. As Fr. John Behr emphasizes, “The disciples... always stand in the shadow of the cross: We stand stretching ahead towards the coming Christ, looking back to the cross as the last publicly visible image in this world... the ‘Passion,’ understood ‘in accordance with the scriptures,’ is the catalyst for reading scripture, and the whole of human existence in history, in a new manner, making everything new.”¹⁴⁵

Chapter 2 effectively outlines the evolution and growth of death-denying culture over the course of recent centuries, and its effects on Christianity. As a faith rooted in the belief of eternal life and salvation, Christianity has grappled with the challenges posed by this culture. In an era where death is often hidden, denied, and even feared, the effects of such a culture on the Church — particularly in terms of distorting the theological understanding of death and impacting believers' spiritual growth and preparation for eternity — are profound.

First and foremost, modern death-denying culture perpetuates a distorted understanding of morality, which conflicts with the core teachings and beliefs of Christianity. By avoiding discussions and reflections on death, the notion of mortality becomes obscured, hindering the ability to fully appreciate the power and significance of Christ's resurrection. Consequently, this leads to a diminished understanding of the hope and assurance that Christianity offers believers in the face of death.

Secondly one can observe an increasingly fragmented spiritual evolution. Christianity places significant emphasis on spirituality and maturity, including preparing believers for eternal life. However, in a death-denying culture, individuals may be shielded from facing and reflecting upon the inevitability of death. This avoidance can result in a stunted spiritual growth, as crucial elements of faith, such as contemplating the afterlife and the need for repentance, may be marginalized or completely overlooked. As a consequence, believers may struggle to fully engage with the transformative power of Christ's message and fail to cultivate a deep and meaningful relationship with God. To

¹⁴⁵ Behr. *The Mystery of Christ*. Pg. 177.

fail to realize that “death... is a defining moment: not the end, but the beginning, not disappearance but revelation.”¹⁴⁶

Thirdly one can observe a weakening of hope and resilience. Christianity offers hope in the face of death and provides solace to those grieving the loss of loved ones. However, a death-denying culture can undermine this hope and resilience. By sidelining discussions on death and perceiving it as a taboo, individuals may struggle to find comfort and understanding when confronted with mortality. This reduced capacity to process grief can have a detrimental impact on mental and emotional well-being, as well as hindering the Church's ability to extend support and pastoral care to those in need.

Lastly one can observe a neglect of eternal preparation. Christianity emphasizes the urgency of living a life aligned with God's will and preparing for eternity. However, a death-denying culture often encourages prioritizing the present over the eternal, the imminent over the eschatological. Focus shifts away from investing in a relationship with God and towards a materialistic and self-centred lifestyle. Consequently, the essential awareness of one's limited time on earth and the need to strive for righteousness can be diminished, leading to a lack of spiritual motivation and a dilution of the teachings central to Christianity. All of these effects lead to a secular lifestyle, a type of neo-hedonism, in which one lives for the imminent, avoiding the ultimate questions of life: meaning, salvation and eternal life.

This final chapter will explore some possible avenues by which one can re-emphasize the importance of death in the catechism process by using the already-existing sacramental life of the Church as a template. Everything one needs can be found within the Church. The sacraments, rituals, prayer rules, and traditions have all grown out of the foundational *kerygma* of the cross and resurrection. The early Church (especially the earlier centuries of Christian persecution) instinctively did this, as it faced constant existential threat from both civil authorities and internal strife. Indeed, one could argue that the Church finds herself again in a social environment hostile to the basic tenets of

¹⁴⁶ Behr & Cunningham. *The Role of Death in Life*. Pg. 80.

Christianity. Our role is not to combat this age, but rather to educate the members of the body of Christ on how to effectively navigate such a world while maintaining their spiritual beliefs and identity.

Note: While there are many liturgical examples from which one could draw, this author has chosen to limit the focus to only a few of the main sacraments of the church that are most relevant.

ii. Baptism: The Beginning is the End

“It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ than to rule over the ends of the earth.”¹⁴⁷ This statement holds profound significance in the context of Orthodox Christian baptism. Even more so does it hold power for those who are preparing themselves to enter the Holy Orthodox Church. Perhaps the greatest emphasis, that a catechist can place, is on the rites of initiation. Orthodox Christianity views baptism as the essential sacrament that holds the power to initiate believers into a transformative journey of faith. Baptism, as Ignatius indicates, represents a willingness to die to the secular world and be reborn into the redeeming embrace of Christ. Through the submergence in water and the invocation of the Holy Trinity, the baptized embarks on a journey of spiritual growth and transformation.

Just as Christ died and was resurrected, Orthodox Christian baptism symbolizes believers' identification with His death and resurrection. In Romans, Paul writes, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried, therefore, with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life "¹⁴⁸ Baptism leads believers to experience the transformative power of Christ's victory over death, enabling them to embrace mortality with hope and faith.

Orthodox baptism is also accompanied by the rite of Chrismation, wherein the believer receives the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This anointing brings about the enlightenment

¹⁴⁷ St. Ignatius of Antioch. *Romans*. Chapter 6.

¹⁴⁸ Romans 6:3-4

of spiritual sight, allowing believers to perceive the eternal nature of life beyond the constraints of physical existence. The priest prays, “Guard them with your sanctification, confirm them in the Orthodox faith; deliver them from the evil one and all his machinations, and through your saving fear, keep their soul in purity and justice.”¹⁴⁹ Through this heightened awareness of the spiritual realm, Orthodox Christians gain a deeper understanding of the temporary nature of earthly life, and their perspective on death undergoes a profound shift.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus states, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."¹⁵⁰ The Orthodox believe that baptism marks the beginning of an eternal relationship with God, and that through this sacrament, they become members of His Church. This assurance can cultivate a profound sense of peace and acceptance when facing the inevitable reality of death, as it is at one's baptism that this process of “death” begins, ultimately culminating in one's physical death at the end of life. As it was for Ignatius, the end is the beginning, and the beginning is the end. The journey towards death begins at the point of entry into the Church. Here, one begins to die to the old man and begins to live as a new creation.

It is also important to remember that baptism is not an individualistic act, but rather a communal celebration within the faith community. The prayers, blessings, and participation of the community in the sacrament emphasize that the journey of faith and acceptance of death go hand in hand with the support and encouragement of fellow believers. The faith community stands united in prayer and provides spiritual guidance, offering solace and strength during moments of grief and bereavement.

Within the Church, baptism offers a unique opportunity in the acceptance of death, as it signifies a profound transformation and rebirth in Christ. Through this sacrament, believers are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, gaining a new perspective on mortality. Baptism illuminates the path toward acceptance of death, providing

¹⁴⁹ Constantinides. *The Priest's Service Book*. Pg. 73.

¹⁵⁰ John 3:5

reassurance of salvation, a profound understanding of life's temporary nature, and the embrace of community support. It is through this transformative rite of initiation that believers are empowered to echo the sentiments of Ignatius, declaring that to die in Christ is far better than any earthly life.¹⁵¹

iii. Confession: Dying to the Self

Whether preceding or following the rite of baptism, it is usually customary for catechumens to complete what has often come to be called the “life confession.” This is essential in both preparing the individual for spiritual rebirth by purging one’s sins from their previous life, so as to “start fresh” with a “clean slate.” Most often this occurs shortly before the baptism date, however, in some cases, it may happen immediately after.

According to the teachings of the early Church Fathers, confession is understood as an act of penitence and reconciliation with God. Saint John Chrysostom, in his writing "On the Priesthood," states, "Confession is the soul's medicine, healing and expelling all sins; it is an unassailable wall between the soul and the enemy."¹⁵² This practice allows believers to cleanse their souls and seek forgiveness for their transgressions before departing this earthly life.

In addition, confession holds tremendous significance in the Orthodox Christian's preparation for death. St. John Climacus affirms, "Confession will conceive the hope of the resurrection in you."¹⁵³ By acknowledging one's shortcomings and sins before God, confession enables believers to confront their mortality and find solace in the hope of resurrection and eternal life. By openly confessing their sins, Orthodox Christians can seek guidance, receive spiritual advice, and experience the healing power of God's grace, all of which contribute to an authentic acceptance of death.

¹⁵¹ St. Ignatius. *Romans*. Chapter 6.

¹⁵² Chrysostom. *On The Priesthood* 3:5

¹⁵³ John Climacus. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent: Step 4*. Pg. 114.

During the Byzantine era, especially in the midst of pandemics and political unrest, Orthodox Christians faced death more acutely. The writings of Saint Symeon the New Theologian reveal the significance of confession in such times. He writes, "Wisdom and confession are death-born twins, and together they cleave the air like eagles for your soul."¹⁵⁴ Here, confession is portrayed as a means to attain spiritual wisdom and strengthen one's soul in preparation for the final journey.

These patristic sources underscore the immense significance of confession in the acceptance of death within Orthodox Christianity. They establish confession as a transformative process that facilitates spiritual growth, provides solace, and assists individuals in preparing for the inevitable journey towards eternity. By partaking in this sacrament, believers can find peace, forgiveness, and the courage to embrace mortality with hope and trust in God's eternal love and mercy. By leaving behind their "old life" and embracing the new life in Christ, catechumens often experience a type of "death" through the catharsis of the "life confession." It is this author's opinion that this aspect of the conversion process, although often ignored, should never be overlooked, but rather emphasized and utilized as yet another potent tool for effective Christian conversion.

iv. Marriage: Dying for the Other

In Orthodox Christian tradition, the sacrament of marriage holds great significance, as it signifies the union of two individuals in the eyes of God. Symbolic elements are woven into the ceremony, one of which is the crowning of the couple. This section will explore the significance of crowns in Orthodox Christian marriage, linking them to the wider idea of accepting death.

In the Church, marriage is not merely a legal contract, but a sacred sacrament blessed by God. Holy Matrimony unites two individuals in a union where they strive to mirror the love and selflessness demonstrated by Christ and His Church. The Orthodox marriage service emphasizes the eternal nature of this bond and the commitment to journey

¹⁵⁴ St. Symeon, *Ethical Discourses*, Letter 1 (http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts2/1022_sym-nt/03_sym-let1_conf.htm)

together in both joy and sorrow. As such, this bond extends beyond earthly existence and, in the face of death, retains its spiritual unity.

In the sacrament of marriage, Orthodox couples are united in this hope, reminding them that death is not the finality but a transformative journey towards a higher existence. This shared belief empowers them to face death with faith, seeking solace in the promise of reunion beyond the temporal realm.

Central to the marriage service are the crowns, which serve as tangible symbols of the eternal bond between the spouses and their relationship with God. The Significance of crowns is threefold:

- a. **Heavenly Crowns:** The crowns used in the Orthodox marriage ceremony represent the celestial crowns awaiting the faithful in the afterlife. They symbolize the couple's willingness to embark on a journey together, supported by their faith, in the pursuit of eternal salvation.
- b. **Royal Nuptials:** The crowns worn by the couple during the ceremony evoke the imagery of a royal wedding. In this context, the bride and groom are seen as king and queen of their own home, responsible for governing their household with wisdom, humility, and love. The crowns thus emphasize the sacredness and divine order within the marital union.
- c. **Martyrdom and Sacrifice:** In Orthodox theology, marriage is often compared to martyrdom, as it demands selflessness and sacrifice. By wearing the crowns, the couple acknowledges their readiness to lay down their individual desires and embrace their joint responsibilities in serving God and each other. This self-sacrifice is integral to the success and longevity of the marriage.

Duality exists between the crowning of the couple during marriage and the acknowledgment of death, as the acceptance of death plays an essential role in

understanding the significance of the crowns as martyrdom. This understanding of this duality is also threefold:

- a. **Transcending Death:** Death is not viewed as an end but as a doorway to eternal life. By accepting death, individuals are reminded of their ultimate goal: to depart from this world and be united with God. The crowns, while symbolizing the temporal union of the spouses, also remind them of this ultimate spiritual journey.
- b. **Embracing Eternity:** Through the crowning ritual, the couple is reminded that their married life is part of a larger spiritual journey to attain eternal life. This realization encourages the spouses to prioritize their spiritual well-being, humility, and selflessness as they navigate the challenges of married life.
- c. **Fruitful Legacy:** Accepting death also serves as a reminder to be conscious of leaving a faithful legacy for future generations. The crowns symbolize the couples' sacred duty to raise and nurture their children in the ways of the Orthodox faith, ensuring the continuation of their spiritual heritage.

Keeping all of the above in mind, it is clear that catechists would do well to lay ample emphasis on the theology of marriage during the catechism process. Conveying the significance of crowns as the representation of heavenly crowns, the imagery of a royal wedding, and the call to martyrdom, is essential. These symbols reflect the couple's commitment to a life of self-sacrifice, governed by their shared faith and love for one another — all elements of Orthodox spirituality that extend to all of Christian life. Furthermore, the connection between the crowns and the acceptance of death underscores the eternal dimension of their union and the importance of living in anticipation of the resurrection. Along with baptism and confession, these profound symbols help equip Orthodox Christians with the spiritual tools necessary to forge a strong and enduring spiritual journey.

v. Funerals: The End is the Beginning

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.¹⁵⁵

Lastly the Orthodox funeral service, which serves as the crucial transitional ritual in the face of loss, plays a vital role in helping followers accept and come to terms with death. This final section explores the significance of Orthodox Christianity in funeral services and its role in fostering the acceptance of death, providing a deeper understanding of the rituals and beliefs that guide this transformative process.

Orthodox Christianity views death not as an end but as an inevitable part of the human journey towards eternal life. The acceptance of death is deeply rooted in the Orthodox tradition, emphasizing the hopeful belief in the resurrection of the deceased. The funeral service, therefore, serves as a means to navigate and embrace this acceptance in six significant ways:

- a. **Rituals Symbolizing the Journey:** Orthodox funeral services feature a series of rituals that symbolize the journey of the soul after death. The primary purpose is to guide the loved ones of the deceased through the mourning process while reminding them of the deceased's transition into eternity. The use of incense, icons, candles, and liturgical hymns create a reverent atmosphere that encourages contemplation and acceptance, allowing mourners to find solace in the eternal nature of the soul.
- b. **Grieving as a Communal Experience:** In Orthodox Christianity, grieving is considered a communal process. Funerals bring together family, friends, and the broader church community to collectively mourn the loss and console one another. The gathering of the faithful reinforces the belief in the unity of the Body of Christ, reminding mourners that they are not alone in their grief and providing a support system to help process the acceptance of death.

¹⁵⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:13

- c. Prayers for the Departed: The Orthodox funeral service incorporates fervent prayers for the repose of the departed soul. These prayers affirm faith in God's mercy and compassion, seeking His forgiveness for the sins committed by the deceased and beseeching His loving embrace for the soul's journey to the afterlife. This act of prayer demonstrates the belief in an interconnectedness between the living and the dead, fostering a sense of hope and acceptance within the grieving process.
- d. Commemorating the Resurrection: Orthodox Christianity places great emphasis on the belief in the resurrection, wherein the departed soul will be reunited with their transformed body in eternal life. This belief is the cornerstone of the faith and permeates every aspect of the funeral service. The reading of scriptural passages that speak of the resurrection and the recitation of resurrectional hymns amplify the message of hope, allowing mourners to find courage and acceptance in the face of death.
- e. The Wearing of White: Although most mourners have become a custom to wearing black at funeral services, it is significant to point out that both the priest and the deceased are mandated to wear white during set services. Orthodox priests are required to wear white or golden colors, in order to emphasize the light of the resurrection. In addition to this, the deceased is covered with the “savano” or “burial shroud,” which is always white linen, and sometimes has the icon of the resurrection printed on it. At the end of the Orthodox, Funeral Service, the deceased is covered with this shroud, in order to emphasize the individual's entrance into the uncreated light of God-their birth into eternity.
- f. *Kolyva* (Boiled Wheat): Perhaps the most iconic tradition within the Orthodox Funeral Services is the use of “Kolyva” (boiled wheat), which is prepared and sprinkled over the body of the deceased, over the gravesite and even passed out during memorials for people to consume. This tradition, rooted in the words of

Christ, in the gospel of John, “Truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only one seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds,”¹⁵⁶ emphasizes the individual’s hope in the resurrection. As Christ refers to himself being buried, and through death, bearing much fruit, in the same way Christians associate themselves with “the good seed” that is placed in the ground so that it may grow in the resurrection.¹⁵⁷

The Orthodox Christian funeral service stands as a profound example of how religious rituals can assist individuals in accepting death as an inevitable part of life's journey. By providing a framework of spiritual guidance, Orthodox Christianity offers mourners a means to navigate their grief with a sense of hope, solace, and the assurance of eternal life. Similarly, through the attendance and study of these symbolic rituals, this ancient tradition can help form future converts to the Orthodox faith by introducing them to death, as it is experienced by the worshipping body of Christ in this life.

¹⁵⁶ John 12:24

¹⁵⁷ See the Parable of the Weeds in Matthew 13:24-43

Chapter 7. Conclusion: Accepting Death Through Life

The importance of catechumens accepting death through the study of the sacraments of the Church cannot be overstated. For centuries, the Christian faith has held death as an inevitable part of life, a transition into the eternal realm. By studying the sacraments, particularly those of Baptism, Confession, Marriage and the Funeral service, individuals gain a deeper understanding and acceptance of this reality, fostering a transformative perspective on death.

A sacramental approach to catechism provides Christian converts with a profound awareness of the power of community as a conduit by which they can receive God's grace. Through this, individuals are united in their faith with a family of believers spanning generations and cultures. Understanding this connection strengthens the belief that death is not the end, but merely a passage to join the countless believers who have gone before. This knowledge offers solace and reassurance, allowing converts to face the inevitability of death with courage and hope.

This study has endeavoured to explore the experiences of both the individuals who have taken the journey toward the Orthodox faith as well as those clergy and laypeople who have offered themselves as their guides. It is the author's belief that the data presented in these pages clearly delineates the essential problem with the modern Orthodox Church's approach to catechesis: namely the avoidance and, in ever-increasing frequency, outright denial of death as a cornerstone of Christian doctrine.

In response, we have put forth a possible solution to this fundamental dilemma – a method by which one can utilize not a novel theory, but rather the centuries old Holy Tradition itself as a path forward. The study of the sacraments encourages Christian converts to prioritize spiritual growth and the nurturing of their relationship with God. Such a unique contemplation awakens within the believer the transformative power of God's grace and the promise of eternal life. It instills a sense of purpose, motivating them to live their lives in accordance with their faith and to face death not with fear, but with a

sense of peace and serenity. Embracing it as a way to enter into a closer communion with God, and to find solace in the belief that death is not an end, but a doorway to eternal love and fulfillment.

Orthodox clergy engaged in catechizing future Orthodox Christians would do well to heed the warnings outlined in this research. The task of the catechist is to help form the individual into an image of Christ – one that is willing to “*take up his cross and follow Him.*”¹⁵⁸ Most assuredly this is not a message that one finds easy to advertise. If one were to use advertising language, one could even call it a “tough sell.” However, this is the one and only path that has been bequeathed to mankind by the Saviour. “*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*”¹⁵⁹ If the results of this study point to a truth, it is that more often than not the cross of Christ is emptied of its power,¹⁶⁰ not for lack of effort but rather a lack of courage to preach that which seems foolish to those who are perishing. Nonetheless, for those who deign to lift their own cross, it becomes the power of God.¹⁶¹

“Death was accepted by Christ when he surrendered His whole person to it and thereby transformed the emptiness of death into the plenitude of life.”¹⁶² Therefore, dying is not only a physical reality but rather a mystical one. In dying with Christ, death becomes a salvific event.¹⁶³ This transformative understanding enables catechumens to move beyond the fear and uncertainty surrounding their current lives, while embracing the Church as a gateway to eternal life through communion with their Creator. It is the path by which one can perhaps, in their final hours, echo the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch who said, “that I may not merely be called a Christian, but really found to be one.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ Matthew 16:24

¹⁵⁹ Matthew 16:25

¹⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:17

¹⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁶² Rahner. *On the Theology of Death*. Pg. 71.

¹⁶³ Rahner. *Christian Dying*. Pg. 252.

¹⁶⁴ St. Ignatius of Antioch. *Romans*. Chapter 3.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent From

Researcher: Rev. Fr. Theodore Paraskevopoulos
Doctoral Candidate
Doctorate of Ministry Program – St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary

Email: fr.ted@mac.com

Phone: 647-278-0058

Study Name: “Do You Want to Die? Towards An Eschatological Vision of Catechesis”

Purpose of research: This study aims to explore current methods of catechesis in the Orthodox Church today and the effectiveness of such a catechesis on creating true disciples of Jesus Christ. It also endeavours to explore the concept of death as the cornerstone of the Christian eschatological vision and how such a vision is or is not incorporated into the aforementioned catechetical methods.

What you will be asked to do in this research: You will be asked to fill out an online survey that will be sent to you via email. The survey/questionnaire will only require about 15-20 min to complete.

Risks and discomforts: As all the online surveys/questionnaires are anonymous, the risk to you is extremely low. Your personal experiences, although academically documented, can in no way be connected to your identity or personal confidential information.

Benefits of the research and benefits to you: This research aims to create new and more effective methods of preparing individuals to enter the Orthodox faith. This will benefit not only you (through retrospection of past experiences and analysis of one’s own faith journey) but also future generations of potential Orthodox Christians.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or the nature of your relationship with St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions about the research?

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Independent Review Board (IRB) of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Directorate of Ministry Director Fr. Sergius Halvorsen at shalvorsen@svots.edu.

Legal rights and signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in the study, "*Do You Want to Die? Towards An Eschatological Vision of Catechesis*," conducted by **Rev. Fr. Theodore Paraskevopoulos**. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____ **Date** _____
Participant

Signature  _____
Principle Investigator

Date April 24, 2017

Appendix 2: Convert Survey



Catechism & Conversion

Informed Consent Form

Consent for Participation in DMin Research Project

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Fr Theodore Paraskevopoulos from St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about Catechesis.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, Fr Theodore Paraskevopoulos will keep this information confidential.
2. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during survey, I have the right to decline to answer any question.
3. Participation involves taking an online survey of basic parochial (metrical type) information as well as narratives of catechetical content and processes. The survey itself will take approximately 10 minutes.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name with regard to metrical data, but that he may, with my consent here and in the survey, quote me on method and content of catechesis. This same consent will carry forward to any reports or future talks or workshops or the like, using information obtained from this study. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Theological Studies at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through Fr Theodore's program director, V. Rev. J Sergius Halvorsen [shalvorsen@svots.edu].

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Please click below to authorize your consent or not. Thank you!

For further information please contact: Fr Theodore Paraskevopoulos at 647-278-0058 or fr.ted@mac.com

1. Do you give your consent to participate in this survey?

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I decline to participate.

Catechism & Conversion

Section 1: Background

2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

3. What was your age at the time you converted to Orthodoxy?

- 20 or younger
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-60
- 60-70
- 70 +

4. Which of the following best describes your relationship status at the time you converted to Orthodoxy?

- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- In a domestic partnership or civil union
- Single, but cohabiting with a significant other
- Single, never married

5. What is your ethnic background?

6. What was your religious background at the time you converted to Orthodoxy?

7. What was the highest level of school you had completed or the highest degree you had received at the time you converted to Orthodoxy?

- Less than high school diploma
- High school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

Catechism & Conversion

Section 2: Conversion Experience

8. What was your first point of contact with the Orthodox Church?

- Through a friend (invitation)
- Through the internet (website or podcast)
- Through reading Orthodox books
- Random visit to an Orthodox Church
- Orthodox promotional material (pamphlets, emails, etc)
- Through a priest
- Other experience (please specify)

9. How long did your catechism (religious preparation) last before you were baptized?

- No Catechism
- 1-3 Months
- 6 Months
- 6-12 Months
- 1 Year

If more than a year, please specify how long.

10. Of which elements of education did your catechism consist?

- Readings (paper, digital)
- Audio Podcasts
- Online Videos (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)
- Group Classes
- Individual Sessions with Priest
- Individual Sessions with Lay Catechist
- Other (please specify)

11. What was your first feeling when entering into an Orthodox Church for the first time?

- Awe Inspiring
- Fear
- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Curiosity
- Inviting

12. During your catechism, was the concept of death ever explored as a mode of Christian life?

- Yes
- No
- If "Yes," please expand (optional):

Catechism & Conversion

Section 3: Current Life (Post Conversion)

13. How active are you currently in your local parish?

Never Attend	Rarely Attend (once or twice a year)	Somewhat Attend (once or twice a month)	Frequently Attend (every week)	More than once a week
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. There has been a significant change in the amount of charity work you perform since you became Orthodox.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Daily prayer is essential to your life.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. How often do you receive Holy Communion?

Never	Once or twice a year	Every few months	Every month	Every week
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. Do you have a spiritual father/confessor?

Yes
 No

18. How often do you go to confession?

Never	Once or twice a year	Every few months	Every month	Every week
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. You enjoy sharing your faith with strangers.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. Have you ever invited a non-Orthodox to visit your Church?

Yes
 No

21. You understand what is happening in the Divine Liturgy.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Not Sure Agree Strongly Agree

22. Martyrdom is essential to Christian life.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Not Sure Agree Strongly Agree

23. You consider yourself to be a martyr.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Not Sure Agree Strongly Agree

24. Do you wear a cross?

Never Sometimes Only when it matches my fashion choice Always

25. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, "We participate at the Lord's table."?
(Choose all that are applicable)

- Holy Communion
- Living the Christian life
- Being part of Christ's Body
- Martyrdom
- Preaching the faith
- Suffering for others
- Going to heaven
- Divine Liturgy
- Other (please specify)

26. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, "Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."?

(Choose all that are applicable)

- Martyrdom
- Discipleship
- Death
- Suffering
- Love
- Life
- Baptism
- Other (please specify)

27. When you hear the phrase, "I will take the cup of salvation and I will call upon the name of the Lord." What comes to mind?
(Choose all that are applicable)

- Divine Liturgy
- Holy Communion
- Death
- Marriage
- Love
- Other (please specify)

28. Are you familiar with Orthodox burial practices?

- Yes
- No

29. You agree with doctor assisted suicide.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

30. It is acceptable to cremate the dead.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31. Becoming Orthodox changed the way you think about death.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32. What is more important to you?

- A successful career
- Living your faith openly

33. You would support one of your children if they wanted to become a monk or nun.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

34. Have you ever considered going on a mission trip?

- Yes
- No

35. You would give food to a hungry person if it meant you would have nothing left to eat.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

36. Do you ever think about your own death?

- Yes
- No

37. Does the concept of your own death scare you?

- Yes
- No

38. Would you deny your faith to save your life?

- Yes
- No

39. Would you deny your faith to save your family's life.

- Yes
- No

40. Do you predominantly associate baptism with death or with life?

- Death
- Life
- Both

41. Are you the same person as you were before you became Orthodox?

- Yes
- No

42. Since you became Orthodox, have you had the chance to see/venerate relics?

- Yes
- No

43. What are your feelings toward relics?

- They are holy
- They are disgusting
- They are strange to me
- They inspire me
- I am indifferent to them
- Other (please specify)

44. Do you fast according to the rules of the church?

- Never
- Sometimes (when I want to take Communion)
- Sometimes on Wednesdays and Fridays
- Always on Wednesday and Fridays
- Wednesdays, Fridays and the Great Fasts (Advent, Lent, Dormition, Apostles)
- I fast according to the guidance of my spiritual father

45. You have a clear vision of what God wants from you.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

46. You feel that your life has meaning.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

47. You are a good person.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

48. You are a good Christian.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix 3: Priest/Catechist Survey



Priest / Catechist Survey

Section 1: Background

2. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

3. What is your age?

- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-60
- 60-70
- 70 +

4. How many years have you been a priest/lay catechist?

- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- 20-30 years
- 30+ years

5. How many individuals have you prepared for conversion through catechism?

- 1-10
- 10-20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-60
- 60-70
- 70-100
- 100 +



Priest / Catechist Survey

Section 2: Conversion Process

6. How long does your training of catechumens last?

- 1-3 months
- 6 months
- 6-12 months
- 1 year
- More than a year

7. What educational tools do you use to train catechumens?

- Readings (paper, digital)
- Audio podcasts
- Online videos (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.)
- Group classes
- Individual one-on-one sessions

Other (please specify):

8. Please indicate which areas of Orthodox Tradition you cover in your training of catechumens (check all that are applicable):

- Church History
- Doctrine
- Prayer and Fasting
- Liturgical Year and Feasts
- The Sacraments of the Church
- Monasticism
- The Fathers of the Church
- Contemporary Ethical Issues
- The Saints
- Eschatology (the end times)
- Holy Scripture
- Other (please specify)

9. I expect require my catechumens to attend Church on a regular basis during their catechism period.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. I am easily accessible to my catechumens if they wish to ask follow-up clarification questions about what they are learning.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. I require my catechumens to learn the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer off by heart.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. I discuss the concept of death and the afterlife during the training of my catechumens.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. I expect my catechumens to attend Orthodox funerals before they convert.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. I discuss end of life decisions with my catechumens.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 15. Do you read the petitions for the catechumens at every Divine Liturgy?

Yes
 No

16. I believe I am doing a good job of preparing catechumens for their entrance into the Church.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. What percentage of people, that you have converted to Orthodoxy, have stayed involved in the Church?

1%-5%
 5%-10%
 20%-30%
 40%-50%
 50%-60%
 60%-70%
 70% +

18. I am in favour of cremation.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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