



LITERATURE AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

by Father Robert Arida

"We are all falling.
This hand's falling too -
All have this falling sickness
none withstands.
And yet there's always One
whose gentle hands
this universal falling can't fall
through."

-- Rainer Maria Rilke



As with all true artists, the writer of fiction enables us to peer into realities -- including those about ourselves -- that we forget exist. Like scales falling from our eyes, good literature opens the mind and heart to perceive the activity of God through people and events that would ordinarily evoke reproach and condemnation. Through the pen of the inspired writer, good literature helps to raise the veil of ignorance -- often woven by fear and prejudice -- and allows us to enter and abide in the reality of God's kingdom. Yet, to enter this reality the reader or listener must be willing to engage the text and discern not only the voice of the author but the voice of God.

Graham Greene, perhaps best known for writing *The Power and The Glory* is one 20th century writer who can simultaneously draw one into the complexities and darkness of hell while revealing the presence and victory of God. This divine victory requires discernment since light overcoming darkness is not always obvious and is not always described in the context of happy endings. In part this is so because Greene and others refused to trap God in the categories and contexts that best suit the narrow and stifling conceptions many ascribe to life, death, darkness and illumination. Struggling in the

present with the living and sovereign God, Greene forces the reader to discover the divine presence every where and in every one. And it is this divine omnipresence that throws each character into an internal struggle with himself, his neighbor and with God. This struggle draws the reader to a point of crisis where he is to decide to either draw near or away from new and transfigured life.

In his book, *The Heart of The Matter*, Greene presents a minor character -- a parish priest -- whose words and ministry should be disturbing to all Christians, particularly the clergy. In a conversation with a parishioner, who has for the time being concealed his adulterous affair, Greene's priest, Father Rank (a name which describes his spiritual condition) confesses his worthlessness in relationship to his flock: "The dying ... that's what I'm here for. They send for me when they are dying... I've never been any good to the living."

These words of a fictional priest with a diminished character and bankrupt ministry point to a reality many clerics would refuse to see, let alone confess. These words of conversation begin a confession unbecoming a man who for years shrouded himself and his ministry with the veil of deception. They are words which for only a few moments enable Rank to see himself as he truly is. For a few moments he is stripped of the camouflage of his priestly ministry.

With an insight comparable to that of Dostoyevsky, Greene presents the reader with cacophonous realities that defy the conventional. In the case of Father Rank, his desire to help others

is reduced to burying the dead. His desire to be with and to serve the living is never fulfilled. And so, in a conversation with an adulterer, Father Rank confesses what many of his peers would never acknowledge. His ministry has no link to the living. In part this is due to the painful recognition that Christians -- i.e. his parishioners -- believe in the form of Christianity but not in its power (cf. 2 Timothy 3:5). Life in Christ is replaced by habits and gestures that parallel the person of Jesus and therefore are incapable of establishing or expressing authentic union and communion with the God-Man.

The beginning of Rank's confession reveals a reality that is easily ignored or denied. For the Orthodox Christian this reality lurks beneath the correct words, the correct form of worship and the correct appearances. Rank's confession brings to the surface the horror that Christians seek life and therefore salvation apart from Christ even though they may be deeply engaged in the business of religion -- in the business of maintaining the form of Christianity.

Continuing to speak to his parishioner -- a police commissioner of a South African colony -- Father Rank exposes another horror about his ministry: "When I was a novice, I thought that people talked to their priests, and I thought God somehow gave the right words... God doesn't give the right words... If people are in trouble they'd go to you... not to me. They ask me to dinner to hear the gossip." A ministry of form, a ministry linked to death, has replaced the vivifying ministry of Christ.

(over)

Up to this point Father Rank, in speaking about his parish, has disclosed the perception many Christians have about God and his ministers. But there is something more that gnaws at the heart's conscience of this lonely priest. That something is his own relationship with God. Christianity has been reduced to form and Father Rank now confesses his participation in this distortion. Laced with a heavy dose of maudlin Rank confesses his own perversion -- his own separation from Life: "I never had much talent for loving God as some people do. I wanted to be of use, that's all." He acknowledges that he has chosen to be a religious functionary -- a utilitarian -- who has no concern or desire for the transcendent. Ministering to his flock is void of the Pneumatic dynamism that frees the Christian from the form and idolatry that prevents union and communion with God.

Rank concludes his confession. Yet, there is no apparent absolution. There is nothing to indicate his reconciliation to God or his flock. He ends as he began -- a lonely man. He is a priest who wants love but cannot love, who wants to believe but cannot believe. In a text that amounts to little more than one page Greene brings the

reader into the dark corner of Father Rank's life and ministry. But in this darkness a ray of saving and transcending light can be detected. For the failures and sins of Father Rank are met with the silent presence of God. It is this dynamic presence that will forever beckon Rank to repentance and transfiguration. It is this presence that Greene uses to draw the reader into a fuller reality -- a reality in which the healing and saving voice of God proceeds from silence. From this silent voice is generated the Word that transcends our conclusions and biases. In this dark corner, penetrated by a single ray of light, the reader is urged to still the mind so it may discern -- perhaps for the first time -- the Word of silence which takes us beyond the veil. □

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Encouraging Words from St Basil the Great to a Newly-consecrated Bishop (374 AD)



Blessed be God, who from every generation chooses those who please Him, Who distinguishes the choice vessels and uses them for the service of the holy things. It is He who caught you in the inescapable net of His grace and led you, in order that you may catch men for the Lord, and drag from the abyss to light those whom the devil has caught. Act like a man and be strong; march in front of the people which have been entrusted to you by the right hand of the Most High. Steer you ship prudently, stand above the tempests raised by heretical winds, keep your vessel from sinking in the briny and bitter waves of perverse doctrine, and wait for the stillness which the Lord shall give when a voice is found worthy to wake Him up, so that He rebukes the winds and the sea.

Do not complain that the burden is above your strength. Supposing that you were alone to bear the load, it still would not be too heavy but quite bearable if the Lord carries it together with you, for the Psalm says, "cast your burden unto the Lord, and He will make good for it." Only let us exhort you to be watchful in all things, lest you yield to wicked practices. Rather amend previous abuses through the prudence that God gave you; for Christ has sent you, not to follow others, but to be yourself the leader of those who are to be saved. And we pray you to intercede for us, so that if we are still in this life, we may be found worthy to see you in your Church; but should we die first, we shall meet with you in the Lord.

-- From *THE FATHERS SPEAK*
by George Barrois



PASTORS TO PASTORS

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"Thoughts and Recollections"

"Pastors to Pastors" looks to another of the "elders" of the Church for guidance and inspiration. We are pleased herein to share our interview with

Protopresbyter Daniel Hubiak

St Catherine OCA Church, Moscow Russia

Q. Fr. Daniel, what recollections do you have about growing up as a child of an Orthodox priest; what were some of the challenges that your father faced and how do those times compare with the present?

A. I was the middle of five siblings: two older sisters and two younger brothers. Growing up in the family of a priest during the years of recovery after the Great Depression had its difficulties and its rewards. The difficulties were mostly in the realm of living in near poverty and the total dependence on the good will and kindness of parishioners, who were themselves in an economic struggle for survival. This struggle, however, gave us a deep appreciation for nature and our connection to it, and for each other. Our relationship with each other was simple. We studied, prayed and played together. During the school year, we would gather for Church School every day on our way home from Public School. At that time English was only beginning to make its way into liturgical life and our religious classes were in Russian (according to the local dialect) and in Church Slavonic. During the summer vacation, we would attend Church School daily. Although there were several classes, my father was the only teacher. He was able to instill a camaraderie between the several age groups so that lasting bonds were established, some of which continue to this day. Boys served in the altar and took turns reading the Epistle in Church Slavonic on Sundays, for which we had to prepare well. When I meet one of my childhood friends today, we spontaneously recite from memory certain passages from the Epistle readings in Church Slavonic.

I was eighteen years old when my father died, just before his fifty-first birthday in 1945. My recollection about his ministry is that it was not easy. It was difficult not only because of the aftermath of the Great Depression, but more so because of the sharp political divisions that occurred after the Russian

Revolution. For example, a group of parishioners formed a "Russian Citizens Club" which had a negative effect on parish life because of their unfavorable disposition to church leadership. He had to confront this group in debates in order to keep the parish intact. I recall that he would return from these encounters thoroughly exhausted. This was a major pastoral challenge which, I am sure, was not unique to my father. Another challenge was due to the Second World War. It was incumbent upon the parish priest to be a teacher, friend and advocate for the youth. He had to encourage them as they went to serve in the armed forces and also be a comfort to the parents. It was especially painful to minister to families of servicemen who lost their lives in the war.

I would say that the pastoral challenges faced by the clergy in the 1920s, 30s and 40s was that of maintaining continuity and parochial unity in the face of the Russian Revolution. On the one hand, it was not a good time for boasting of one's "Russian" roots. On the other hand, our "Russian" boys were going off to war. The pastor had to guide his flock as they strove to be fully American, yet remain loyal to their Orthodox Christianity.

Today's pastor has different challenges. He does not usually have such close and regular contacts with the parish's youth. Religious education today is less consistent in comparison to what it was during my father's time. Then, youth activities were centered around the church. Unfortunately, activities for today's youth are, more likely than not, in conflict with church services and religious education programs. This presents a formidable pastoral task, one that still needs to be solved.

Q. What factors shaped your personal life and led you to become a priest?

A. Our home was a little church. The family prayed together, both morning and evening, and of course, before each meal.

At an early age, I began serving as an altar boy. By watching and listening, I learned by heart, in Church Slavonic, the Entrance Prayers, the Office of Oblation and many of the "silent prayers" of the Liturgy. This obviously played a role in my becoming a priest. However, I honestly don't know how I made the decision to enter the Seminary. I can only say that it was not a calculated decision -- it had to be a divine prompting, a calling.

Q. You were chancellor of the OCA for ten years and worked in the central church administration for twenty-five years during what was a very important period in our church. What were some of the highlights?

A. I was privileged to witness and participate in many changes in the administration and life of our church. My appointment as Treasurer at the Eleventh All-American Council in 1963 was the beginning of many notable moments. I was part of the entourage for the first visit of the head of our church (Metropolitan Ireney) to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, being part of the delegation headed by Bishop Theodosius (now Metropolitan) which received the Tomos of Autocephaly was truly an unforgettable highlight. The most memorable event, however, has to be participation in the first canonization of a saint, St. Herman of Alaska, on the American continent.

Q. For the past eight years you have been the OCA's representative in Moscow. Why is it important for the OCA to maintain close ties with the Russian Orthodox Church? Are there pastoral implications in this?

A. We owe our very existence to the Russian Orthodox Church. It was her missionaries that brought the Orthodox faith to this continent, established an Orthodox presence here and nurtured

(continued, page 4)

OCA Institutes New Program in Pastoral Formation

It will now be possible for young seminarians and new seminary graduates to obtain on-the-job training at a parish. One of the major highlights of the Twelfth All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America, held in Pittsburgh, PA in July, 1999, was the approval of the **Seminarian Internship Program**. This program was selected from the several Church Wide Initiatives (CWI) proposed to the Council. Significantly, it received the most enthusiastic response from members of the Council. There has long been a need for seminarians, and new seminary graduates, to have some experience at a parish. This CWI Program will now make it possible for the OCA to actually sponsor young men for pastoral internships at selected parishes.

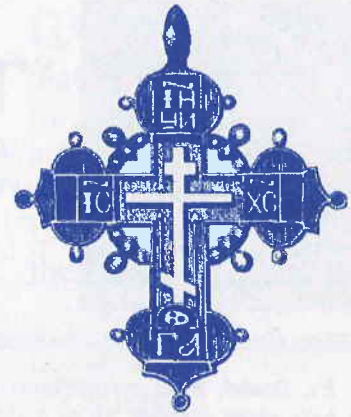
His Beatitude, Metropolitan THEODOSIUS, has charged the Pastoral Life Ministries (PLM) Unit to formulate the details of the Internship Program and to oversee its operation. With His Beatitude's blessing, a Special Task Force has been actively involved in the implementation of the Program. With God's help, several seminarians will be placed this coming summer. All OCA seminarians, at all three of our seminaries, are eligible to apply for internship positions.

Applicants must have successfully completed at least the second year of a seminary's M.Div. program. Third year students and recent graduates are also eligible. The internship is to last three months -- June, July, August. For graduates who have some flexible time, the program can be designed to begin in August or September. Applicants must obtain a Recommendation from the Seminary Dean or from a Seminary official approved by the Dean. Another name should be submitted as well, which the PLM Unit may utilize.

OCA parishes have been invited to participate in this exciting and beneficial Program. The outstanding response of financial support at the All-American Council was undoubtedly an indication of the high hopes that the Church has for the Internship Program. Gratitude is expressed to those supporters, as well as to those who have offered donations subsequent to the All-American Council.

Information about the Internship Program can be obtained by writing to:

**Seminarian Internship Program
Orthodox Church in America
PO Box 675
Syosset, NY 11791**



Fr Daniel Hubiak, continued

Orthodox life until the arrest of St. Patriarch Tikhon. It was the Russian Orthodox Church that in 1970 gave us our independence. Our close ties give us historical continuity as well as mutual support. There has been an exchange of professors and students between the seminaries of the two churches. OCA clergy are invited to lecture at various theological institutes of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Through our representation church we participate in many of the major events in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church. One example is the finding of the relics of St. Patriarch Tikhon. Also significant is the fact that our representation church provides a witness to, and an example of, the kind of parish life that was formulated at the Council of 1917 but was denied to the Russian Orthodox Church during the Communist regime. □

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