

## Assembly of Bishops issues Statement on the Sanctity of Life

On Thursday, January 31, 2019, the [Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America](#) released a Statement on the Sanctity of Life.

The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America fully embraces the Statement of the Assembly of Bishops, of which it is a member, and takes this opportunity to reiterate its position on the Sanctity of Life, links to which may be found below.

### Statement on the Sanctity of Life January 31, 2019

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America affirms the sanctity of life based on the firm conviction that life begins at the moment of conception. The Assembly remains steadfast in its conviction that any interference in the development of life is a serious issue, and therefore it regularly participates in a variety of relevant events and also releases pertinent statements on the topic.

While recognizing that there are rare but serious medical instances where mother and child may require extraordinary actions, the Assembly of Bishops is deeply concerned that the taking of innocent life through abortion has become an acceptable cultural norm. This phenomenon – increasingly prevalent throughout contemporary societies – was exacerbated by a recent law of the New York State Senate (Bill S.240). The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America categorically denounces these adverse developments that allow for abortion, under certain unjustifiable circumstances, even within the third trimester of existence.

The Assembly of Bishops further reminds the faithful that Christ is a beacon of hope in this challenging world. Accordingly, the Church is always prepared and willing to support women who are considering abortion to find alternative avenues to alleviate any burden, physical and spiritual. The Church is ever a mother – loving, understanding, nurturing, praying, and protecting all human life.

## Parents who end up going at it alone

Anyone who joins the Church does so as a broken person. We come to the Church as if it were a hospital. We seek healing and rest for our souls and bodies. One of the major changes we have seen in the Church over the last 35 years deals with the question, “What is a family?” The idea of an intact family, in which father and mother come together in their only marriage — and both of whom are Orthodox Christians with their own children — is not as common as we would think.

More and more, Orthodox parishes and their priests are dealing with a variety of issues in this regard.

- Single parent families as a result of divorce or having children out of wedlock. As a bishop I know I am not doing what needs to be done to see that the needs of single parent families are being addressed.
- Families in which both parents are not Orthodox Christians, which is quite common in all Orthodox Churches in this country.
- Reconstituted families, in which previously divorced couples re-marry, bringing into the marriage their own children. The couple may be either Orthodox. Or in some instances, only one of them is Orthodox, while the other comes from another Christian faith background. Thus the children may have been baptized in a different faith tradition.

Today, I would like to speak about the single parent family. Of this group there may be some parents that do well financially with good-paying jobs. Some may receive generous monthly child support from their ex-spouses. Thus, they may have the financial means to seek necessary support for such services as house cleaning or live-in caretakers/daycare to help tend to the children. My guess is that this group would be in the minority. I think many single parents have full time jobs that may not pay as well, making it necessary to live check to check. Whether single parents are divorced or have had children out of wedlock, they may not receive appropriate financial support from their ex-spouses or the other parents of the children born out of wedlock. They may not have the means to pay for domestic support services. Single parents then face the demands of daily home life without the support of a spouse. Besides working 40 hours a week, *Con't Pg 12*

an outdoor scene [verses 1-5] and an indoor scene [verses 6-10]. Outdoors, and in full view of the gathered inhabitants of ancient Jericho, the despised “chief tax collector,” the rich Zacchaeus, risks the humiliation of being laughed at because he makes the socially unconventional choice of climbing up into a “sycamore tree” in order “see who Jesus was.” What may have been acceptable behavior among children, would only have drawn the surprised and scornful stares of Zacchaeus’ over-taxed neighbors. I always remember that in a meditation on Zacchaeus, the late Metropolitan Anthony Bloom wrote that the equivalent act today would be that of a renowned corporate executive scrambling up a light pole in a downtown area in order to see someone passing by. (For those with a “boss” that you may not be too fond of, perhaps there may be minor consolation in fantasizing such a scenario and its reaction in your own mind). There then occurs that life-changing encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus. For Jesus looks up at the strange figure of this man “small of stature” eagerly looking down upon Him, and says to him in response: “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today” [verse 5].

The transition to the indoor setting is now made when Zacchaeus “made haste and came down, and received him joyfully” [verse 6]. Yet one can sense the oriental custom of a crowd hovering at the entrance or even coming and going with a certain freedom. The raised eyebrows and clucking tongues of an undescribed “they” who look on and articulate their stern disapproval—“He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner” [verse 7]—is a reaction encountered elsewhere in the Gospels when Jesus freely chose to sit at table with sinners and tax collectors [cf. Mark 3:15-17]. This disapprobation on the part of the scribes and Pharisees then evoked his memorable (and ironic?) Saying: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” [Mark 3:17]. The Messiah is not bound by religiously sanctioned social convention that divides people into the convenient categories of the “righteous” and “sinners,” “saved” and “lost,” the “pure” and “impure.” Or rather, by making clear that He has come to bring salvation to everyone, beginning with the marginalized and distressed members of His own society, Jesus reveals the inclusive love of God that tears down all such former barriers. Zacchaeus is a striking and personalized example of this inclusive love of God for “**the lost.**”

Never a distributor of “cheap grace” though, Jesus demands repentance and conversion. And this comes dramatically from Zacchaeus when he publicly declares: “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold” [verse 8]. In this, Zacchaeus goes beyond what the Law required for such an act of restitution [Exodus 21:37; Numbers 5:5-7]. The Lord then signifies or “seals” the truth of this conversion when He solemnly pronounces the joyful declaration: “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” [verses 9-10]. It is interesting to note that the blessing of Jesus is given to the entire household. The household of Zacchaeus, in turn, becomes a microcosm of the entire design of salvation: The Son of Man came to seek and save the entire cosmos groaning inwardly and subject to futility as it awaits redemption [cf. Romans 8:19-23]. In this, we and our households resemble that of Zacchaeus, regardless of how “righteous” we may consider ourselves, as we will hear in two weeks in the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee!

We can never afford to allow our supposed familiarity with a Gospel passage to blunt its sharp edge. It is that sharp edge that cuts through our many defensive layers of evasions and self-deception. Otherwise, the passage “softens” into a didactic story about a bad man changing his life and becoming “nice.” However, I believe that no matter how well we know the story about Zacchaeus, the only familiarity that we could claim with him is the familiarity of having an equally profound “*Zacchaeus moment*” in our own lives. Such a “moment” would initially be characterized by an equal desire to “see Jesus”—above all else. Then we would need to be willing to overcome our own “smallness of stature” by perhaps first overcoming the tyranny of social convention and respectability before we get to our actual sinfulness. This may mean going beyond our own conventional patterns of church going and the “safety” of keeping the demanding call of Christ at a safe distance so that it cannot overly impinge upon our lives. There may yet be a sycamore tree that we need to climb.

## In the Beginning: Lessons from Genesis

By Fr. Lawrence Farley

The first thing one must do before reading a book is to recognize from which library shelf it came—that is, its literary genre. For example, if one is reading a satire one will misunderstand its contents if one takes it for history or politics. (Thus Swift’s *A Modest Proposal For preventing the Children of Poor People From being a Burden to Their Parents or Country*, which proposed that poor Irish peasants might ease their lot if they sold their children as food for the rich, and which was intended as a satire, was misunderstood when taken as a serious political proposal.) The Book of Genesis was not written as a scientific textbook or even as an historical chronicle. In the words of one person, it was not written to tell us how the heavens go, but how to go to heaven. It provides the theological backstory to the narrative of the patriarchs and the People of Israel, since the Genesis story flows seamlessly into that of Exodus and the rest of the Pentateuch.

A verse-by-verse commentary of those chapters of Genesis is beyond the scope of a blog. For that commentary you are invited to buy my book on the topic, assuming you can find it. But I would like to mention three basic lessons from the first chapter of Genesis.

The first lesson may easily be missed since our culture takes the concept of a universal Creator for granted. Not everyone is a theist, of course, but the concept of creation is tied to that of monotheism, and it is understood that the Creator (if such exists) is not a specific and named deity like Marduk, Molech, or Horus, but a single, universal deity, usually going by the generic name “God.” It was otherwise in the culture in which Genesis was written. A quick comparison with other creation stories reveals that deities such as Marduk figured prominently in creation. Genesis, on the other hand, makes a point of not mentioning other deities at all, demoting them to effective idolatrous non-existence by refusing to utter their names. It declares that Elohim, the God of the Hebrews, is alone the creator of heaven and earth. He sometimes goes by the name “Yahweh” (e.g. Genesis 4:1) and sometimes by the compound name “Yahweh Elohim” (e.g. Genesis 2:4). But by whatever name, the narrative clearly identifies Him with the God of the Hebrews, the descendants of Abraham, and with the God of Moses whose presence was accessed at the Ark of the Covenant and (later) in the Temple at Jerusalem. The deities of the other stronger nations surrounding and threatening Israel are not in the picture. Thus Genesis is not only theology, but theological polemic. It declares in its first sentence that

the Hebrew God in the heavens does whatever He pleases, whereas the gods of the nations are mere silver and gold, incapable to thought, speech, reaction, or power (Psalm 115:3-7), and should be dismissed like the non-entities they are.

This polemic is part of our inheritance as Christians. Like Israel of old, we also declare that the God of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of the consubstantial Trinity, is the only God who exists, and that all other deities are idols and phantoms. That is, we confess a radical inequality between our religion and all other religions. This confession is tremendously unpopular and will result, if made publicly, in the confessor being treated as a kind of theological pariah. A more popular confession is that Christianity is but one way to God among many, and that all religions have more or less the same value and will yield the same fruits. Or, in the words of Patriarch Bartholomew (in his book *Encountering the Mystery*), the goal of the Christian Faith is “to promote a peaceful resolution of disagreement about how to live in this world, about how to share and use the resources of our planet.” This is a worthy goal, but it is not the mandate of the Church. We have found the true faith, and we call all people everywhere to come and find it as well, turning from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18). Marduk, Molech, Horus, and all their modern counterparts can be dismissed from consideration. They did not make the world, and cannot save it.

The second lesson found between the lines of the sacred text is that the same God who manifested His power in making the world also manifested His power in speaking to us in the Law and the Gospel. In the pagan creation stories, the pagan gods exerted an immense amount of sweat, strain, and even warfare in creating the world. Not so our Elohim. Like the true sovereign He is, He merely had to speak a word of command and life sprang obediently into existence. He merely said two words (in the Hebrew), “Light—exist!” and immediately there was daylight and time began. When one adds up the number of times He spoke in creating the world, we find that He spoke ten such words of command. This foreshadowed the Ten Commandments (literally the “Ten Words”, Hebrew *dabarim*, Greek *logous*). The message, hidden in the text, was that acknowledgment of God as Creator also involved loyalty to Him as Lawgiver and Lord. Acknowledging **Con’t Pg 10**

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His power in creating the world counted for nothing if one rebelled against His Law. The demons acknowledge that He is their Creator, but this will not save them (James 2:19). As the Lord Himself said regarding this saving union of faith and works, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). If we acknowledge God as our Creator, we must also strive to fulfill His Law and do what He commands. Belief in God is barren without obedience.

Thirdly, the first chapter of Genesis reveals the towering dignity of the least of humanity. In saying that mankind is made in God's image, Genesis democratizes something which was once only the possession and prerogative of kings. The Hebrew concept of image involves representation and authority. The word for "image" in Genesis 1:26 [Hebrew *tselem*] is also the word used to describe the images of the pagan gods. Those images were not regarded as reminders of an absent deity, but as the way the deity was present. It represented the deity and manifested its power in the world. As one scholar put it: "In ancient Near Eastern texts only the king is in the image of God. But in the Hebrew perspective this is democratized to all humanity... 'exercising royal dominion over the earth as God's representative is the basic purpose for which God created man.'" In Egypt, for example, the gods ruled the earth through the Pharaoh. But the Israelites knew that all men everywhere were meant to rule the earth in God's name—and that included all women! Obviously the one charged with this high dignity had to be different from the animals, so that by extension the *imago Dei* could legitimately be described as found in man's freedom, rationality, and capacity for love and self-transcendence. But this does not change the first insight of the sacred text that God's image consisted of being charged with representing God and ruling in His name as His visible co-regents.

This dignity is found in all people everywhere. In democratizing the *imago Dei* the sacred author did not merely take the prerogative away from kings and give it to mankind in general. If the *imago Dei* does not depend upon royal power but is the irrevocable gift of God to all, then it also does not depend upon gender, age, color, sexual orientation, political affiliation, or intellectual gifting. Infants in the womb, devoid of present social utility, are adorned with His image, as are the mentally handicapped and the old and senile. Each human being who draws breathe was created to

represent and manifest God in the world. Our spectacular failure to obey Him does not erase that calling or that dignity. Everyone—absolutely everyone—must be treated with love and respect because all share that divine image.

We see that when closely read, the first chapter of Genesis is not simply an historical record, but a theological testament. It gives us lessons that even now we have not yet learned. All the more reason to read again what it really says, and strive to obey.

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### **Metropolitan Tikhon, OCA delegation participate in anniversary celebrations**

#### **Meeting with Serbian Patriarch, US Ambassador, Canadian Charge d-Affaires, and anniversary concert.**

On the morning of Thursday January 31, Metropolitan Tikhon met with His Holiness, Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, at which time they discussed the current situation of their respective Churches and discussed possible fraternal visits in the future.

Metropolitan Tikhon and the OCA delegation then visited the United States Embassy to Russia, where they were received by Ambassador Jon Huntsman and met Canada's interim Charge d'Affaires, Stephane Jobin. Ambassador Huntsman thanked Metropolitan Tikhon for the important role in the international community played by Saint Catherine Representation Church, which the Ambassador visited for the annual 9-11 Memorial Service and on numerous other occasions.

On Thursday evening, Metropolitan Tikhon and delegation members attended a concert in honor of Patriarch Kirill and the tenth anniversary of the Russian Church's 2009 Local Council, at which His Holiness was elected to the Patriarchal Throne. A choir of 700 voices performed the concert, which featured pieces by numerous Russian composers, at the State Kremlin Palace.

#### **Patriarchal Anniversary Liturgy at Christ the Savior Cathedral.**

On Friday, February 1, Metropolitan Tikhon, Bishop Daniel and the clergy members of the OCA delegation joined

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## Marriage: The Backbone of the Family

*“For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:31-33).*

Since I began these weekly reflections, I have written about families, and particularly on the relationship between children and their parents. However, I have neglected one thing: the relationship between husband and wife. I began with the above quote because it sets a tone for what marriage is to be: an icon of Christ’s love for the Church. A family cannot be an icon of a little church unless the relationship between husband and wife is an icon of Christ’s love for the Church.

I say the above because at times family life can become too “child-centered.” The priority is making one’s own children happy and doing what is done for their sake. This is fine, so long as the health and the stability of the marriage is not sacrificed for the purpose of making one’s children happy.

How often have we heard stories of marriages in trouble, in which a decision is made to not divorce for the sake of the children in the family? This puts the child in charge of the marriage. Yet when parents do get divorced, children are immediately told, “it is not their fault.”

Many children go the therapy because they have been “identified” as having problems. “Fix my kid and all will be well.” Yet in some cases, when a therapist gets to know the family system, the child’s problems are symptoms of dysfunction in the marriage. Until that is addressed, the child’s issues don’t get resolved. When a child is the “identified problem” who needs counseling, he or she serves a purpose of keeping the family together. He needs to be the problem so that the marital issues don’t get addressed. This is why individual therapy in these cases will not be helpful.

So, I would encourage parents to periodically talk about the state of their marriage with their priest. It is good to take an inventory and ask if there are healthy boundaries between children and their parents. Are parents making time for themselves? Do they periodically go out on a date? Do they find the time to pray together? Is marriage and family life child-centered or Christ-centered? The two are not the same.

If there is a need for marital counseling, the parish priest might be able to help a couple see that and seek the necessary help.

There are other areas to explore with regard to family life. In the weeks to come I will write further on such issues as single parent family life and reconstituted families – when two people remarry and bring their own children into the marriage.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you,  
The unworthy +Paul

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### ***Delegation to Russia Con’t***

the Primates and representatives of the Local Churches for the celebration of the anniversary Patriarchal Divine Liturgy at Christ the Savior Cathedral. His Holiness, Patriarch John X of Antioch, Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, and His Beatitude, Metropolitan Rastislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, together with the representatives of the Churches of Alexandria, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland, also concelebrated. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, Patriarch John congratulated Patriarch Kirill on the anniversary of his enthronement, after which His Beatitude, Metropolitan Onufry of Kyiv and All Ukraine read the congratulatory address of the members of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and presented gifts on their behalf, to which His Holiness responded with deep gratitude. [[A video of the Divine Liturgy](#) is available online.]

### **Visits to the Donskoy and Sretensky Monasteries.**

Metropolitan Tikhon and the OCA delegation visited Moscow’s Donskoy Monastery on Saturday, February 2, where they were received by His Grace, Bishop Paramon, Bishop of Bronnitsy and venerated the relics of His Beatitude’s heavenly patron, Saint Tikhon the Confessor of Moscow that are enshrined in the monastery’s Cathedral of the Don Icon of the Mother of God. They also visited the Sretensky Monastery and Seminary in central Moscow, where Metropolitan Tikhon and Bishop Daniel served at the All-Night Vigil with Bishop Matthew.

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## ***Going it alone con't***

they still need to prepare meals, keep the house clean and the laundry done, and pay the bills, including the cost of day care for children. After all is said and done, is there room for church? For those single parents who have their own parents (children's grandparents) that are close by, they are a Godsend as they provide support in many areas and they do it for nothing. Thank God for the love and concern of grandparents who can still fulfill this role.

As I reflect on what we can do in parishes to support single parent families (and those single parents who are seeking and willing to receive this help), the following things come to mind:

- Can parishes support single parents by asking parishioners to prepare meals for such families?
- Can parishes engage a couple of people who would be willing to do house cleaning when needed?
- What can be done in parishes to link single parents up to appropriate childcare relief?
- I think it would be great if a priest or someone he appoints could form a support group in the parish for single parents. The group could focus on how single parents can live out their Orthodox faith in the context of the reality they live in.

I wish to thank parishes that may already be doing some of the above things. It would also be great to hear from single parents with regard to what the Church can do to better support them. May the blessing of the Lord be upon our single parents. Thank you for embracing your labors with joy and love, especially at times when this is difficult.

With love in Christ, The unworthy +Paul

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## ***Delegation to Russia con't***

### **Sunday Divine Liturgy at OCA Representation Church.**

The following morning—Sunday, February 3—Metropolitan Tikhon, Bishop Daniel and Bishop Matthew concelebrated the Divine Liturgy at the OCA Representation Church of the Great Martyr Catherine, where they were welcomed by Father Daniel Andrejuk. Concelebrants included Father Alexander Rentel; Archpriest Leonid Kallinin, Director of the Church of Russia's Architecture and Renovation Department; Archpriest Alexei Kurenkov, Rector of the Belgorod

Seminary and a graduate of Saint Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, South Canaan, PA; Archdeacon Joseph Matusiak; and the parish clergy. [A [series of videos of the Divine Liturgy](#) is available online.] Following the Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan Tikhon thanked Father Daniel and Matushka Vera as they begin their second year of service in Moscow.

After enjoying a luncheon at Saint Catherine's Church, Metropolitan Tikhon and the OCA delegation departed for the airport, accompanied by Metropolitan Ignatius, Bishop Matthew, Father Igor Yakimchuk, and Dmitri Petrovsky, for their return flight to the US.

A photo gallery is available on the OCA [website](#) and [Facebook page](#).

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR THE SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN & PHARISEE**

\*Do we truly live the phrase from the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"?

\*Each evening as we go to sleep, have we forgiven those who have wronged us during that day?

\*Are we more like the Pharisee and proud of our piety, or more like the Publican and constantly asking God for forgiveness of our sins?

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### **MEDITATION FOR THIS SUNDAY**

The heart of the Publican's prayer is an appeal, filled with trust, to the goodness and the tenderness of God. "God be merciful to me a sinner," he says. These first words, "God be merciful" echo the opening words of Psalm 51, which is essentially a psalm of penitence: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness: according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions." The fact that Jesus chooses to place these words in the mouth of the Publican and so to make them a model of our prayers of repentance, throws a great deal of light on the soul of the Savior, and on what He intends. What Jesus asks of a penitent sinner (and so, of each of us), is above all this abandon, this absolute trust in the tender mercy and the favor of God.

The Year of Grace of the Lord, pp.111-12