

Saints or Communists?

Educating Orthodox Christian Youth for Love of the Neighbor

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Introduction

For the Christian religious education of Orthodox youth, specifically high school and college students,¹ there is a growing focus on love of and service to the needy neighbor.² This focus is long in coming: the Orthodox churches in the United States have generally not been known for their social outreach to those outside their own ethnicity and a good place to change this is through educating our youth.³ This focus is also much needed among a population of youth in America who have been called “Generation Me”⁴ and who might not naturally look outward in their spiritual pilgrimage.

¹ Here I focus on the education outside the home—on more “formal” educational structures attempted by local and national ministries of the Orthodox Church in the United States.

² On a national level, examples include the service components of the St. Vladimir’s Youth Summer institute (1998-2004); Orthodox Youth Outreach, now renamed Youth Equipped to Serve and under the auspices of FOCUS North America; “Stage 3” of the Cross Road summer institute at Hellenic College (2004-); and the “Just Love” and “Pilgrimage for Justice” initiatives (2008-2009) of the North American college campus ministry Orthodox Christian Fellowship. For my terminology for this paper, I cannot find a term for “love of and service to the needy neighbor” that I like more than this one for the purposes of Christian education, cumbersome though it may be. Options include: social concern, social compassion, social action, social outreach, social justice, etc. Generally, I am concerned that each turns an attitude and action (loving and serving) into an abstraction. I am also aware that “needy neighbor” may sound pejorative, especially to those in Social Science fields. I utilize it because my chief audience is Orthodox Christian religious educators, and this is the best shorthand way I can think of to push us beyond thinking solely of the neighbor as part of one’s natural community to the one who is sick, in prison, naked, hungry (Matt. 25:31-46).

³ In a study in 2000 administered by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research from 2000 which compared the beliefs, practices, and vitality across Jewish, Christian, and Muslim congregations in America, the Orthodox Churches ranked lowest in terms of community outreach (prison ministry, social advocacy, day care, etc.) and lowest in working for social justice. See David A. Roozen, “Meet Your Neighbors: Interfaith Facts,” in *Faith Communities Today* (Hartford: Hartford Seminary, 2003), 4, 8, figure 9.

⁴ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

Education for love of the neighbor may seem an innocuous enterprise. But those who have wrestled with issues of “social compassion” (to use the term of this conference/volume) know it is not so simple in theory, practice, or history. It is directly related to a basic dilemma Christians must wrestle with today as they seek to help the needy neighbor: we are called to feed the poor, yes. Are we also called to ask why the poor are hungry? Roman Catholic Archbishop Don Helder Camara, a Brazilian theologian and activist, famously stated his predicament in this regard: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.” The first approach is often identified as “charity,” and is seen as direct, immediate action to a person or group in need, as giving someone a fish. The second approach, asking why the poor have no food, is often termed “justice,” and is seen as working for structural change in society, as teaching someone how to fish.⁵

On the ecumenical scene, Christian educators are increasingly attracted to the language and educational methods of two important movements with regard to teaching the needy neighbor to fish: social justice and liberation theology.⁶ Protestant and Catholic youth ministries have drawn on both and developed some provocative, persuasive, and engaging ways of educating. In the public sphere, secular education has also taken up the charge to educate for social justice. Attracted by the vibrancy, creativity, and promise of significant impact in such curriculum, Orthodox educators and ministries are beginning to adopt such ideas and programs.⁷

⁵ For the charity/justice distinction, see Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, The Classroom Edition ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 9 ff. He likens it to what Martin Luther King, Jr., often called “a hand up rather than a handout.”

⁶ An example of Liberation theology influencing Christian education theory is articulated by Frank Marangos, “Liberation Theology and Christian Education Theory,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 29, no. 4 (1984). Marangos’ work is well-intentioned, but does not take into account the larger historical picture of Orthodoxy’s interactions with the ideas of liberation theology which radically shapes an Orthodox Christian’s reception of the theologies of liberation—e.g. as discussed in Olivier-Maurice Clement, “Orthodox Reflections On “Liberation Theology,”” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (1985). See also Stephen Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 73 (1990).

⁷ In fact, much of Orthodox parish education draws on Protestant and Catholic curriculum.

There has been, however, little good critical reflection on how these ways of educating are appropriate for our life and faith as Orthodox Christians. Indeed, as Orthodox educators forge new territory in our educational ministry in the United States, we are largely unaware of the extensive and diverse histories of social justice and liberation theology, and the extent to which each movement carries with it underpinnings related to political philosophy, economic theory, and social welfare policy. Orthodox theologians in the United States have not, by and large, entered the *recent* theological conversations on either social justice or liberation theology. There is no extant body of Orthodox writings that wrestles with these topics in a way that might be readily applicable to the task of educators.⁸ In the mid to late twentieth century, however, Orthodox thinkers abroad grappled with such ideas as they related to Marxism and Communism and tried to “discern the spirits.”⁹ We can retrieve some of their insights for benefit today.

This paper aims to introduce Orthodox Christian educators to the language and issues of social justice and liberation theology, suggest some of the contours of their import for and impact on education, and

⁸ Two potential exceptions: (1) the last printed issue of the Orthodox Journal *The Handmaiden* that focuses on social ministry and outreach and has articles that could be effectively use for parish/youth education. It has a lively short article by Father Michael Plekon, “Towards a Theology of Social Ministry,” where he argues, “To love and care for the neighbor is not an activist extra, a socially aware add-on to essential Christianity. Rather, it is... the essence of Christianity.” Michael Plekon, “Towards a Theology of Social Ministry,” *The Handmaiden* 13, no. 3 (2009): 14. Plekon does argue in his last point that “We need to demand of other institutions in our society that they become compassionate to those who suffer—those of the government at every level, and also schools, hospitals, and especially the churches and other communities of faith” and suggests some organizations that are doing this important work, but he does not probe the complexities of this involvement. Plekon, “Towards a Theology of Social Ministry,” 19. (2) John McGuckin includes a short but important section on “The Poor at the Rich Man’s Gate,” in his book *Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World*. He addresses the tension between being consonant with tradition and newness of the severity of the circumstances of the hungry and dying, as well as the need for the leaders of Orthodoxy to address this need. “There is nothing new in the history of Christianity; but the pressing need for its renewal and reappropriation in the church to hasten to meet the needs of the hungry and dying is something new, and the world leaders of Orthodoxy will be increasingly assessed in terms of their fidelity to this vocation and duty. It is a pressing duty of the leadership of every priest at local level.” John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub. Ltd., 2008), 401.

⁹ Clement, “Orthodox Reflections On “Liberation Theology”,” 69. See also Helene Iswolsky, “Social Justice in Russian-Orthodox Thought,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7, no. 1 (1970). Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology.”

then share some reflections for our Orthodox educational task. After foregrounding my own context and aims, I will briefly define, as best as possible, “social justice” and “liberation theology,” make some notes about their intersection with the field of education, and share some responses by Orthodox Christians (including my own). Finally, I will make some suggestions about how these might influence praxis today. I am struck that this is, on the one hand, trying to do too much for one paper, and on the other, not accomplishing enough. There are ample Orthodox theological resources and historical trajectories that I have not begun to plumb for their wisdom. I expect and hope that what I sketch here will energize others to theologically engage the issues at hand and further the contributions in the areas of theology and praxis.

Such understanding and critical reflection on the part of Christian educators is not a luxury or a solely academic pursuit. Without it, (a) we risk polarizing some Orthodox Christians who would viscerally react to any justice-related language or ideology, usually because of their own knowledge, education and direct experience with these movements. These factions might say, in fact, that we are teaching our youth to become communists, when our goal is to invite them to be saints.¹⁰ (b) We risk distorting our faith through the educational practices themselves. In the long run, an uncritical acceptance of educational models or practices may profoundly damage this immensely important movement towards love of and service to the needy neighbor for Orthodox Christian youth. And (c) we risk missing out on an opportunity to bring the Orthodox faith and tradition into conversation with social justice and liberation theology, and to create distinctly Orthodox

¹⁰ One interesting example of this polarization is the use of the legacy of Mother Maria Skobotsova, an ascetic in France during World War II, in Orthodox efforts towards social action. On one hand, her legacy stands as a powerful witness to those who censured her for being involved with street refugees although she was a consecrated nun. In her words: “At the Last Judgment I will not be asked whether I satisfactorily practiced asceticism, nor how many prostrations and bows I have made before the holy table. I will be asked whether I fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner in jail. That is all I will be asked.” On the other hand, some of the aspects of her theology (her Mariology, specifically) and her life (her own experiences as a mother) have been seen as too problematical to be seen as a model. Perhaps Orthodoxy needs such radical models to push the church in appropriate directions, but perhaps in being extreme such models force some Orthodox to be entrenched in perspectives that allow for ignoring the needy neighbor. I think for the education of youth, a balanced approach is pivotal.

practices that fit both our contemporary context and are faithful to the Tradition. What is an Orthodox Christian way of educating for love of neighbor? Critical, scholarly and faithful reflection is necessary for our educational ministry today.

Foregrounding: Context and Aims

My primary interest is in the Christian religious education of Orthodox youth, specifically teenagers and college students. My academic and administrative focus has been exposing students to patristic-worthy proclamation of the Gospel and introduction to theological inquiry within the context of an Orthodox liturgical life and a mentoring community.¹¹ My intuition is that unless we get our teaching and preaching right, so that students actually know what the Christian gospel is, our outreach and service will be for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that Christian education is incomplete without good experience in and reflection on love of the needy neighbor. In the last decade, I have had direct decision-making involvement in two programs for Orthodox high school youth from across the nation hosted at Orthodox seminaries. These issues are not theological abstractions for me; they are real, practical matters.

The educator's question is how to proceed with education for love of neighbor. What should we teach, and how should we teach it? It is one thing for us as Orthodox Christians to have theological positions on social ministry, action, and *philanthropia*. But teaching these concepts well, to high school students, in church-related settings, where attendance is usually not required, is another matter entirely. When we set out to teach this love-of-neighbor well, we often look for creative ways to make it "stick" with our youth. The educational wisdom of our time challenges the value of classroom learning for such an area: we will not simply talk about care for the needy neighbor in Sunday school classrooms for fifteen minutes, we will creatively restructure our parish education so

¹¹ Orthodox Christians are sometimes accused of being too dependent on the patristic period for their theological insights. I speak of "patristic-worthy proclamation of the Gospel" here not to narrow the Orthodox foundation, but to call the Orthodox to a vision and proclamation of the Gospel that is as powerful, persuasive, and engaging, using and adapting all the best education of the time, as it was in the homilies of the great patristic teachers.

that love of neighbor is, in education speak, “caught not taught.”

Ah, but how? What does it look like? In parishes, for example, is it enough to host canned food drives and fundraisers for local charities? Should we be introducing youth to the very face of the needy neighbor, and if so, how? What is our curriculum surrounding this? On another level, when we encourage youth to take time to travel on short-term mission trips such as those to Project Mexico or a Real Break trip through Orthodox Christian Fellowship, what are the assumptions about the importance of these trips? What is the curriculum that helps students process their experience? To what extent do we challenge the social, political, and economic structures that surround the situations of poverty at home and abroad? It has been my experience that when Orthodox educators do ask youth to seriously examine the structures of poverty, oppression, and injustice, then accusations are not far behind that we are educating our youth to, indeed, become communists. Whether or not these accusations are warranted is debatable. What is for certain is that in the praxis we choose, the theology becomes alive, amplified and real. And in the words of my colleague, Tony Vrame, “the educational agenda we espouse will lead to a changed Orthodox Christianity.”¹² So we must carefully choose that “agenda.”

I am haunted by a critique launched first by Orthodox educators and theologians Alexander Schmemmann, Sophie Koulomzin, and George Nicozisin: when Orthodox began educating in America we uncritically adopted Protestant and Catholic models of educating often to the detriment of an “authentically Orthodox Christian” way of educating, and/or in a way that has different foundational understandings of the faith that are contrary to Orthodox Christianity.¹³ It is essential that

¹² Anton C. Vrame, “Lift up Your Hearts, Open Your Minds: The Challenge of Orthodox Higher Education,” in *Conference on Orthodoxy & The University* (Brookline, MA: Office of Vocation & Ministry, Hellenic College, 2009).

¹³ See Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Lectures and Essays on Christian Development through Liturgical Experience* (New York: Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Church in America, 1974; reprint, 1993); Sophie Koulomzin, *Our Church and Our Children* (Crestwood: SVS Press, 2004; reprint, with a foreword and study guide by Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides); George Nicozisin, *The Road to Orthodox Phronema: Christian Education in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America* (Brookline, MA: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, Department of Religious Education, 1977). Examples of this include: adopting the Sunday School model of educating youth and creating the “Orthodox Catechism” modeled on the scholastic catechisms of

educators develop the critical faculties to assess the extent to which the educational programs we design or adopt are faithful to the Orthodox Christian tradition.

Social Justice

Defining Social Justice

The term “social justice” is used in many diverse ways. Indeed, as Jesuit theologian Thomas Massaro puts it:

Depending on who is consulted, the simple question “What is social justice?” might prompt answers that are abstract and theoretical, on one hand, or vividly concrete, on the other hand. Philosophers and economists might emphasize formulas and syllogisms for ensuring that each member of society receives the due amount of rewards and burdens. An average person on the street might be more inclined to list a bundle of indignities and hardships that nobody would have to undergo in a world that was more just.¹⁴

In the realm of political philosophy, according to the volume on social justice from the Blackwell Readings in Philosophy series, “Issues of social justice, in the broadest sense, arise when decisions affect the distribution of benefits and burdens between different individuals or groups.”¹⁵ These issues have interested past philosophers such as Locke and Hume, who both view justice in terms of respect for private property, and have dominated the study of political philosophy since the 1971 publication of John Rawl’s *Justice as Fairness*; for Rawls, principles of social justice “regulate the choice of a political

the Catholic church. In my research on our educating in faith of Orthodox youth in particular, I’ve discovered that we have the tendency to get excited about Protestant or Catholic models a decade or so after they are *au current*, just as they are being critiqued from within their own contexts. Yet we fail to pay attention to the critiques.

¹⁴ Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 1.

¹⁵ Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams, *Social Justice*, Blackwell Readings in Philosophy (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 1.

constitution and the elements of the economic and social system.”¹⁶ In the political arena, “social justice” is one of the four pillars of the Green Party.¹⁷ It is also the name of an Israeli political party.¹⁸

Social justice is also considered to be an inherent part of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). The Jesuit Luigi Taparelli, in the 1840s, coined the term based on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁹ Catholic Social Teaching “refers to a broad collection of documents that have emerged either from the Vatican or from regional bishops’ conferences.” They are official documents that address social issues “such as transnational justice, health care, poverty relief, living wages, farmer and farm worker relief, antinuclear proliferation, and economic inequities in the world.”²⁰ These documents “claim that Christ himself had given the mission of social justice to the apostles, and thus, by extension, to the church, through his teachings about ushering in the kingdom of God.”²¹ The term “social justice” also appears throughout the Compendium of Social Doctrine, issued by the Pontifical Council of the Catholic Church. The Compendium views social justice as the proper answer to important social questions and as directly related to the understanding of the common good.²²

¹⁶ John Rawls, “On Justice as Fairness,” in *Social Justice*, ed. Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004: 1999), 50.

¹⁷ Along with Ecological Wisdom, Grassroots Democracy, and Nonviolence. See for example: <http://www.gpop.org/index.php?option/content/task/view/id/21>

¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Justice_%28political_party%29

¹⁹ http://www.acton.org/publications/mandm/mandm_article_62.php

²⁰ Brian Matz, “Patristic Texts in Catholic Social Thought,” in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2008), 288.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “*This social doctrine also entails a duty to denounce*, when sin is present: the sin of injustice and violence that in different ways moves through society and is embodied in it [120]. By denunciation, the Church’s social doctrine becomes judge and defender of unrecognized and violated rights, especially those of the poor, the least and the weak [121]. The more these rights are ignored or trampled, the greater becomes the extent of violence and injustice, involving entire categories of people and large geographical areas of the world, thus giving rise to *social questions*, that is, to abuses and imbalances that lead to social upheaval. A large part of the Church’s social teaching is solicited and determined by important social questions, to which *social justice* is the proper answer.” For common good: “*Everyone also has the right to enjoy the conditions of social life that are brought about by the quest for the common good.* The teaching of Pope Pius XI is still relevant: ‘the distribution of created goods, which, as every discerning person knows, is labouring today under the gravest evils due to the huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered propertyless, must be effec-

There is much said and written on the intersection of Roman Catholicism and social justice, but on the general landscape of American Catholicism vis-à-vis social justice, the topic has been somewhat divisive:

Many conservative and neo-conservative Roman Catholics have objected strenuously to the recent social teachings of the United States bishops but seem to have no problem with the official church teaching on sexual ethics. On the other hand, liberal Catholics have applauded the recent social teachings while often dissenting from the sexual teachings.²³

It is a division very much real in American Catholicism, and often plays out in political leanings.²⁴

Social Justice in Education

While social justice in education has perhaps had its most significant impact within Jesuit education, it is a significant trend today across secular education at the primary and secondary, college and graduate levels. The University of Massachusetts-Amherst offers a Social Justice Education graduate program of study that focuses on social diversity and social justice education particularly as they apply to formal

tively called back to and brought into conformity with the norms of the common good, that is, social justice' [354]. (167)" http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

²³ Charles Curran, "Catholic Social and Sexual Teaching: A Methodological Comparison," *Theology Today* 44, no. 4 (1988): 425-6.

²⁴ Erika Bachiochi argues: "Among the intellectual class of Catholics in America, one tends to hear two distinctive and mutually critical voices: that of liberal, progressive, or 'social justice' Catholics on the one hand, and conservative, traditional, or 'right-wing' Catholics on the other. Liberal Catholics praise the Church for her positions on war and peace, her privileged care or 'preferential option' for the poor, and her strong opposition to the death penalty. They disfavor and even scorn the Church's teachings on sexuality, tend to downplay her teachings on abortion and euthanasia—and vote Democrat. Conservative Catholics, on the other hand, adhere to and often defend the Church's sexual teachings, and are ardently and actively pro-life. They tend to hold a special contempt for the social justice teachings of the Church as expressed by U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, view the free market much more favorably than do their liberal counterparts—and vote Republican. Conservative Catholics deride liberal Catholics for their 'cafeteria Catholicism,' while liberal Catholics disdain conservatives for their apparent lack of faithfulness to what the prior take to be the Church's central mission of promoting peace, social justice and charity to the poor." Erika Bachiochi, "Reflections on the Kinship between Catholic Sexual and Social Teaching," in *Women, Sex and the Church: A Case for Catholic Teaching*, ed. Erika Bachiochi (Pauline Books & Media, 2010).

educational systems, kindergarten through higher education.²⁵ Curricula for public high school teachers include such questions as: “How many of our graduates...had the knowledge and understanding of poverty that would even begin to prepare them to serve this population?” “How do you turn the situation in the Delta from a lesson about social *in*justice to a lesson about social justice?” The European Conference on Educational Research created a network specifically on Social Justice and Intercultural Education that brings together researchers “interested in exploring contested issues concerning justice, ethnicity, social inequality, gender, and equity.”²⁶ In the fall of 2009, Harvard University piloted the online presentation of one of the most popular courses in Harvard’s history, “Justice with Michael Sandel.” Sandel, a professor of political philosophy, frames his course around the topic, “What’s the right thing to do?”²⁷ Much of justice education today does not imply or discuss religious perspective whatsoever; indeed, a recent article in the *Journal of College & Character* felt the need to make the argument that “religious differences and interfaith conflict *are* important topics for discussion on college campuses and should be considered within the context of social justice education.”²⁸

Reflection on Orthodox Christian Use of “Social Justice”

For our Orthodox context, I think it is important that if we use the term “social justice,” we do so with a sound awareness of its historical context and current scholarly and educational usage. As the Massaro quote illustrates, the Orthodox are not alone in having a multiplicity of operative definitions of social justice. In Orthodox circles I have heard it used most often to refer to any kind of social issues or social action

²⁵ <http://www.umass.edu/sje/> Many colleges are now offering programs in “Justice Studies” such as James Madison University, Kent State University, University of New Hampshire, Tufts University, etc.

²⁶ <http://www.eera-ecer.eu/networks/network7/>

²⁷ Sandel challenges students and viewers with difficult moral dilemmas and asks their opinion about the right thing to do. He then asks them to examine our answers in the light of new scenarios such as affirmative action, same-sex marriage, patriotism and rights. <http://www.justiceharvard.org/>

²⁸ Nancy J. Evans, “Addressing Religious Difference in Social Justice Education,” *Journal of College & Character* 11, no. 2 (2010): 1.

and outreach.²⁹ Yet, we must resist this as irresponsible. Orthodox theologians and scholars have much accumulated wisdom of the ages to apply to social issues and justice. This, combined with new good scholarship across the disciplines, promises that Orthodox Christians can have much to say and do about the topic of social justice in our day. But there is a difference, in my mind, between social issues, or even “justice,” and “social justice.” “Social justice” is a term with a complex history, and thus we must engage it responsibly on a theological and scholarly level. We should not, however, summarily adopt it for our educational practices for our youth work in the Church.

To speak directly to the use of the term “social justice” for the education of Orthodox youth, three things cause concern at this point. First, its array of possible definitions, which find their home in places that range from political philosophy to Christ’s very teaching. A team of researchers at the University of Portland studied this variety of definitions and note that “specific concepts and values associated with social justice tend to be inconsistently articulated” and that “diverse possible definitions for social justice seem to underlie some controversies surrounding the concept.”³⁰ They explain:

Recently, for example, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) abandoned its requirement that students demonstrate a commitment to social justice because of criticism that it was promoting a particular political agenda. In a related commentary the president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (F.I.R.E.) noted, “While nearly all of us believe in something that we could define as social justice, there is a problem: What does ‘social justice’ actually mean? Vague, subjective, and politicized evaluation standards are dangerous” (Lukianoff, 2007, p. B8).³¹

²⁹ I was especially disheartened by the decision to anachronistically title a St Vladimir’s Seminary Press publication of St. Basil’s writings, “*On Social Justice*.”

³⁰ Andrew M. Guest et al., “Concepts of Social Justice as a Cultural Consensus: Starting Pints for College Students of Different Political Persuasions,” *Journal of College & Character* X, no. 6 (2009): 1.

³¹ Ibid.

The reasons cited by that organization lead me to my second concern: the political nature of social justice. While not all definitions of social justice relate directly to political agendas, enough do to make it problematic for an Orthodox educational context. Orthodox Christians are far from being a united front politically, and “social justice” could be a polarizing force in ministry, as it has been within American Catholicism, forcing a reaction among some, perhaps many, that would jeopardize movement toward true love of neighbor.³²

My third concern stems from an Orthodox skepticism of social action movements that we find scattered throughout Orthodox writings.³³ For example, we find in the writings of St. Ambrose of Optina, a nineteenth century Russian elder:

The desire to toil for the good of mankind appears very admirable, but is misplaced. In [a word], everybody wants to labour for the good of close ones, ignoring or paying very little attention to the necessity of first shunning sin themselves and then worrying about others. The broad schemes of the modern

³² For background in the relationship between Orthodox Christians and Politics see Emmanuel Clapsis, “Politics and Christian Faith,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37, no. 1-2 (1992). “Church leaders as representative persons cannot simply speak as individuals, and this means that they must avoid narrow partisan positions on political issues. If the clergy do have a role in politics, it is not to leap into the arena themselves, but to make their people sensitive to what enhances and what diminishes a truly human life.” Clapsis, “Politics and Christian Faith,” 102.

³³ In a 1970 editorial in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Helene Iswolsky reports on the Russian Orthodox church’s skepticism towards turning a long history of social ethics into a ‘closed system’: “What is the contribution of the Russian-Orthodox Church to the search for the solution of the social problems in our modern world? In order to answer this question it is important first of all to note that though Russian-Orthodoxy has a long tradition of social ethics, it has no special analysis of them for the magisterium; they are so to say taken for granted, as an inseparable part of the evangelical message. This was the point made by Metropolitan Nikodim (Director of Foreign Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate). Speaking at the Geneva Conference of Church and Society, the Metropolitan discussed the relevance of dialogue concerning social problems. He mentioned on this subject the Papal Encyclicals, notably ‘Mater and Magistra’ which stresses that social teaching is part of the Christian life. Though agreeing with this position, Nikodim made an important distinction, by saying that for Orthodoxy it is more appropriate to speak of *Christian thought* rather than of Christian teaching insofar as social justice is concerned. For, as the Metropolitan explained, Orthodoxy is aware that the Divine commandment is ‘exceedingly broad’ (psalm 118,96) and does not seek to transform moral theology and especially its part concerning social problems, into a ‘closed system. Orthodoxy transfers the center of its interest and its spiritual energy to direct practical action in the concrete conditions of living social reality.” Iswolsky, “Social Justice in Russian-Orthodox Thought.” citing *Zhurnal Moskovskoy Patriarkhisy* (Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate), No. 9 (1966), 73-74.

generation about grand activities for the good of all mankind has the appearance that... someone, not having finished an educational course, wishing that he could be a professor and instructor in a university. However on the other hand, to think that if we cannot move humanity forward then we shouldn't labour at all, is the other extreme. Every Christian is obliged to toil according to his capacity and position for the good of others, so that everything is timely and orderly, and that the fruit of our labors are presented to God and His holy will.³⁴

If we translate Ambrose's critique into contemporary terms, one might make a parallel to the college campus devoted to social justice, with its students committed to justice-related concerns for their careers, all the while participating in an array of the usual social campus offerings: casual sex, ample alcohol, and an egocentric internet presence, to cite a mild scenario. This parallel and paradox are not unfamiliar to religiously-oriented Orthodox Christian youth who read and are spiritually formed by writings such as those of St. Ambrose, and who viscerally respond to the language and agenda of social justice.³⁵ The term "social justice" has, in fact, been a divisive term when used in Orthodox college campus ministry. Finally, if Aquinas' theological insights indeed underlie thinking about social justice, this may itself cause Orthodox theologians concern, for such theologians often regard Aquinas as responsible for the over-emphasis on Scholastic theology in the Middle Ages.

For all these reasons, I believe that while Orthodox scholars and theologians, particularly on the university and seminary levels, should engage issues of social justice, Orthodox educators should refrain from using the term "social justice" for our educational endeavors to educate Orthodox youth for love of neighbor. After turning now to liberation

³⁴ http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/ambrose_e.htm#n21

³⁵ A recent study of religiously-active Orthodox Christian college students conducted through the Office of Vocation & Ministry at Hellenic College and Orthodox Christian Fellowship found strong voices among the students that questioned the Orthodox nature of social justice initiatives. The topic of "social justice" was indeed divisive for these college students.

theology, I will conclude with some distinctive elements of love-of-neighbor that can shape an Orthodox Christian educational approach.

Liberation Theology

In liberation theology, the issues of social justice dynamically meet Christian theology. The “theology of liberation” emerged within the wider context of Catholic Social Teaching and many theologians of liberation are Roman Catholic;³⁶ however, the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, while affirming that “The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of freedom and a force for liberation” is itself highly critical of certain aspects of liberation theology, as I mention below. According to Christopher Rowland in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (2007), the theology of liberation is not so much a new theology as a new way of *doing* theology, with the following constitutive elements: (1) It is rooted in ordinary people’s everyday experience of poverty; (2) It relies heavily on Scripture to interpret that experience, particularly those texts which start from a situation of oppression and vulnerability;³⁷ (3) In many parts of the world, it has deep roots within the life of the Roman Catholic Church; (4) It has flourished in the meetings of groups within urban or rural settings, worshipping and reflecting on Scripture and joining in common projects for human welfare in health and education; and (5), it is a theology that engages the whole person in the midst of a life of struggle and

³⁶ “Liberation theology has emerged within the wider context of Catholic social teaching and, in particular, the significant development of Roman Catholic theology based on the Second Vatican Council, and the encyclicals associated with it. The decisions taken by the Latin American bishops at their epoch-making meeting at Medellín, affirmed at Puebla, with the explicit commitment to take a ‘preferential option for the poor’ and reaffirmed at the most recent conference of Latin American bishops at Santo Domingo, have offered a foundation for those Christians committed to the betterment of the poor enabling them to see their task as an integral part of the Church’s vocation to evangelisation.” Christopher Rowland, “Introduction: The Theology of Liberation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge Collections Online: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

³⁷ Rowland furthers that “What some liberation theologians are claiming is that the vantage point of the poor is particularly, and especially, the vantage point of the crucified God and can act as a criterion for theological reflection, biblical exegesis, and the life of the Church. The poor are the means whereby the Church can learn to discern the truth, direction and content of its mission, and they can assure the Church of being the place where the Lord is to be found.” Christopher Rowland, “Introduction: The Theology of Liberation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge Collections Online: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7. Rowland is citing Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Church of the Poor* (London: SCM, 1985), 222.

deprivation, rather than being handed down to them by ecclesiastical or theological experts.³⁸

Rowland describes the work of liberation theologians in the following way:

However sophisticated the books and articles from the liberation theologians may seem to be, it is their experience and that of those with whom they work that is the motor which drives their theology. The struggle for the survival of millions linked with Christian social teaching prompted priests and religious to think again about their vocation. In so doing, they have learnt afresh from the poor as they have lived and worked with them. In a situation where hundreds of thousands of peasants were driven off the land their families have farmed for generations, because of international demand for economic growth to service foreign debt, and where many have drifted to the shanty towns which have sprung up on the periphery of large cities, liberation theology has flourished. So the starting place is not detached reflection on Scripture and tradition but the present life of the shanty towns and land struggles, the lack of basic amenities, the carelessness about the welfare of human persons, the death squads and the shattered lives of refugees.³⁹

In the words of Gustavo Gutierrez, perhaps the most well known voice of liberation theology, “the question in Latin America will not be how to speak of God in a world come of age, but rather how to proclaim God as Father in a world that is inhumane. What can it mean to tell a non-person that he or she is God’s child?”⁴⁰ To summarize its theological emphasis, in liberation theology the salvation or liberation wrought by Christ is examined primarily in terms of a communal or collective liberation: the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social

³⁸ Rowland, “Introduction: The Theology of Liberation,” 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

classes; an understanding of history in which the human being is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for human destiny; and Christ liberating the human race from sin, which is the root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression.⁴¹

Whereas Latin America is often seen as the starting place of liberation theology, related movements have emerged in different parts of the world that suggest it is now most appropriate to speak of liberation *theologies*. In the United States there is a multiplicity of liberation theologies: Black Theology, Latino/Hispanic Theology, Latina Theology, Asian American Theology, Native American Theology, Gay and Lesbian Theology, Feminist Theology, Womanist Theology, Asian American Feminist Theology, and Native Feminist Theology.⁴² The common point of these theologies is that “the perspective of the poor and the marginalized offers another story, an alternative to that told by the wielders of economic power.”⁴³

Within the Roman Catholic Church itself, liberation theology has faced significant criticism and in 1984 issued a statement titled, “Instruction on certain aspects of the ‘theology of liberation’” which discusses “the deviations, and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology.”⁴⁴ Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, in a recent survey of biblical hermeneutics “discern a danger that those engaged in liberation theology might be too one-sided, and find themselves engaged in social and political action which is not the main task of the exegete.”⁴⁵ A primary critique is that liberation theologians often draw on Marxist analysis of social reality as a frame of reference,

⁴¹ Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology : Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Religious Movement in Latin America--and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987).

⁴² Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn, *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

⁴³ Rowland, “Introduction: The Theology of Liberation,” 6.

⁴⁴ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of The “Theology of Liberation”,” (Vatican: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1984). See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

and emphasize a hope for God's reign on earth "to the detriment of the more transcendent dimensions of scriptural eschatology."⁴⁶ Indeed, the 1984 statement provides a salient review and critique of the wedding of the theology of liberation with "Marxist analysis."⁴⁷ Orthodox theologians and educators ought to take the time to study these Vatican texts before moving forward with any appropriation of liberation theology, for they embody important theological critiques from the experience of the Roman Catholic Church.

Liberation Theology in Christian Education

Within Christian education, liberation theology has had a significant impact not simply on the content of *what* is taught (as might be the case, for example, with themes of social justice), but on the very manner and method of education. Among grassroots groups struggling with poverty:

The biblical tradition becomes a catalyst for new thought and action related to the circumstances of everyday commitments.... To engage the poor to read the Bible has involved a program of education about the contents of the biblical material, so that it can be a resource for thousands who are illiterate. In such programs full recognition is taken of the value of the experience of life.⁴⁸

Indeed, this experience of poverty and oppression is seen to be "as important a text as the text of Scripture itself." Liberation theologians recognize that this manner of biblical study may seem to be an example of the dangerous reading into the text of the readers' own prejudices,

⁴⁶ Houlden J. L., *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (London SCM Press, 1995). quoted in Rowland, "Introduction: The Theology of Liberation," 9.

⁴⁷ Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of The "Theology of Liberation"," VII. See http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html

⁴⁸ Rowland, "Introduction: The Theology of Liberation," 8. Rowland cites Karl Barth: "Why should parallels drawn from the ancient world be of more value for our understanding of the epistle than the situation in which we ourselves actually are and to which we can therefore bear witness?" Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

but cite the inevitability that some kind of reading into the text is always at work in biblical interpretation.⁴⁹

Thomas Groome is probably the most well known Christian (Catholic) religious educator for whom liberation theology has profoundly influenced his work. He explains that the most significant influence on him in this regard was Paulo Friere, especially through *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Friere, who critiqued the “banking model” of education (where the teachers deposited education into the students minds), taught illiterate adults in Brazil to read in as little as six weeks by having them start reading from their own contexts, reading the things that were important to them. The agency of the poor through literacy was a lead-in to give people the agency to question their social structures, liberate themselves, and, ideally, liberate their oppressors as well. It was a way of giving critical agency to the disenfranchised, and inviting them to envision a new reality for themselves and their nation. Groome is influenced by both the content of liberation theology —salvation understood as liberation — but also by the educational method that Friere employed, which asks people to turn to their own contexts first, understand them, be “empowered” to do something about them, and then bring this into conversation with existing structures and teaching. This perspective on teaching and learning becomes a template (in more robust form) for all Christian pedagogy for Groome, and this pedagogy has influenced now several generations of Christian religious educators.

Reflection on Orthodox Christianity and Liberation Theology

There are numerous angles from which to reflect on the relationship between Orthodox Christianity and liberation theology: an examination of patristic texts that deal with love of neighbor; the statements of social concern issued from the Clergy-Laity Congresses of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America;⁵⁰ an in-depth study of Orthodox

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ These statements and reflection upon them are collected in the important volume Stanley S. Harakas, *Let Mercy Abound: Social Concern in the Greek Orthodox Church* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1983).

involvement in the World Council of Churches; the 2004 document “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,”⁵¹ to name a few possibilities. In this assessment, I will rely on the thinking of Orthodox theologian Olivier Clement who, twenty-five years ago, published an unassuming piece in the “Notes and Comments” section of the St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly titled, “Orthodox Reflections on Liberation Theology.” These reflections, translated from the French, serve to remind us that in the twentieth century, Orthodox Christians in traditionally Orthodox lands faced many of the questions of liberation theology as they reckoned with the ideals and reality of communism.⁵² Clement’s article is worth digesting in full, but I will highlight a few main points lest his work get lost to us today, especially to those of us who are struggling to educate youth for love of neighbor – to be saints, not communists. His insights are critical for our work; they encourage us to approach liberation theology with a cautious openness. They also speak to the need for Orthodox theologians today to contribute to conversations around liberation theology.

Clement reminds us that “These various ‘theologies of liberation’ pose the problem of the contemporary encounter between Christianity and Marxism — or rather, very concretely, the encounter of Christians and Marxists in a ‘Third World’ suffering from the shock of adjustment to modern civilization.” He reminds us that while Marxism holds little interest for anyone in Western Europe anymore, in Latin America, Communism was “at the forefront in a struggle that seeks to oppose a vicious capitalism of foreign origin that works hand in glove with an oligarchy of wealthy land-owners, a combination that in the cruelest way crushes and destroys millions of people. Here its appeal lies in its

⁵¹ <http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/3/14.aspx>

⁵² In 1990 Stephen Hayes, an Orthodox theologian teaching in South Africa, published a provocative article, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology,” which engages liberation theology the most rigorously since Clement. His article tackles some key ontological and political aspects of the relationship between Orthodoxy and liberation theology, while Clement focuses on what might be called more of the spiritual responses to liberation theology. Hayes’ article should be studied in seminary classrooms and among Orthodox Christians struggling to understand the relationship between the Church and the political sphere (including Marxism and Communism), critiques of “western” liberation theologies from an Orthodox perspective, etc.; Clement’s article is more useful for educational purposes for it stresses some foundational spiritual insights inherent in Orthodoxy that can form the basis of love-of-neighbor curriculum. Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology.”

ability to dismantle certain mechanisms of oppression and to unite into a common front those who long for social justice.”⁵³ Clement believes that Christians should concretely collaborate with “open” Marxists “by working for the liberation of the poor and oppressed, as well as by denouncing the short-sighted egotism of the leaders and fashioners of Western economic policy. This they can do by striving, together with such ‘open’ Marxists, to recover and preserve the mystery of man by insisting on the absolute quality of the person, while making clear the emptiness of ideology and its ability to quench the spiritual thirst of the human soul.”⁵⁴

Against proponents of the most perverse form of liberation theology, who use “machine gun theology” in their pursuit of “justice,” he assesses: “It is precisely for this reason that today, more than ever before, Christian people — and this is especially the vocation of the Orthodox — must proclaim, live and radiate the Resurrection of Christ. But we can do so only on the condition that we constantly remind ourselves that witness to the Resurrection demands that we struggle — within ourselves first of all, but also within society and culture — to defeat every form of death, slavery and degradation of human souls and bodies.”⁵⁵ He concludes that *only* non-violent actions can be truly creative over the long run, and break the cycle of oppression. “Such actions are grounded in prayer and the example of contemplatives; they make of ecclesial communion the leaven of human communion. They seek not so much to control the levers of power as to limit that power...they struggle untiringly to pave the way towards realization of a ‘civilization of communion’ and a ‘civilization of love.’”⁵⁶

⁵³ Clement, “Orthodox Reflections On ‘Liberation Theology,’” 64. On this point, Stephen Hayes argues that Orthodoxy’s trouble with this version of a theology of liberation is that it “absolutizes the struggle of the moment and makes it normative, not only for the participants, but for generations to come.” He cites the example from the Greek struggle for liberation where the Greek bishops blessed the cannons of the freedom fighters and the shells that they were firing at the Turkish imperial forces. The bishops were excommunicated by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Hayes, “Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology,” 14.

⁵⁴ Clement, “Orthodox Reflections On ‘Liberation Theology,’” 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 67-8.

He reminds us that we are not alone in our struggle to “discern the spirits” in liberation theology. He asserts that Orthodox thought “is quite familiar with the various liberation theologies, and [I believe it] has influenced those theologies for the better...” How? “by directing them first of all towards a spiritual liberation of man taken in his totality.” He draws from a range of Orthodox theologians from Russia, Lebanon, Greece, France and Serbia.

Here we find in Clement’s brief thoughts some important emphases that are worth noting. (a) Russian religious philosophers have focused on personhood – personal liberty lived out in communion. (b) Metropolitan George Khodor and participants in the Orthodox Youth Movement of the Patriarchate of Antioch, have developed an attitude of evangelical non-violence that is willing, if necessary, to accept martyrdom.

(c) “Exon” the Greek Christian Socialist Youth, with its master thinker Christos Yannaras, put forth that “ideologies are unable to respond adequately to human needs and situations” and aimed to “create an inter-personal communion...fashioned on the image of the Trinity.”⁵⁷ (d) The French Orthodox reviewer of Yannaras’ book *Orthodoxy and Marxism* explains: “Christians, because they hold to love — and should hold to nothing other than love — pose to the Communists the problem of their ultimate destiny.”⁵⁸ (e) A Serbian Orthodox priest, Fr. Athanasios Jevtic, according to this French reviewer, when invited to participate in discussions about Christianity and Marxism, spoke little and demonstrated that the secret victor on the scene of modern history is “Dovstoievsky’s Christ — our Christ who is deeply humble, deeply silent, deeply loving...”⁵⁹ Clement concludes: “Perhaps there, insofar as Christians have the courage to be what they are called to be, lies the true meaning of ‘liberation theology.’”⁶⁰

In Clement’s synthesis, we have important wisdom that can form

⁵⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 72.

the basis of further theological and educational work around social justice and liberation theology: the insistence on the absolute quality of the person; the inability of ideology to quench the human soul; the struggle to witness to the Resurrection first within ourselves but also within society and culture to defeat every form of death, slavery and degradation of human souls and bodies; action grounded in prayer and the example of contemplatives; the value in the limit of power, rather than in controlling the levers of power; the focus on personal liberty lived out in communion; evangelical non-violence that will accept martyrdom if necessary; the question of our ultimate destiny; the place of humility, silence, and love; and indeed, love as central, love as Christ. Clement's synthesis is an important challenge to us today as Orthodox educators to, on the one hand, move forward to advance our love for the neighbor beyond that of fundraisers and canned food drives and, on the other, to do so in a way that is richly contextualized in the cumulative wisdom of our Orthodox spiritual heritage.

Final Reflections for Educators

Orthodox educators are responsible for educating youth so that they may be saints. As such, our challenge is to navigate the murky waters of educational praxis today and discern ways of educating for true love of neighbor that is authentically Orthodox. On a macro level, educators should be aware, first, that social justice and liberation theology, which ask why the poor are hungry and pose a variety of political and economic solutions, so often have political agendas. Orthodox Christian education must tread carefully to avoid couching its love for neighbor in political agendas or ideologies. While our youth ministry must encourage young Orthodox Christians to have “the courage to be what they are called to be,” and in a humble, loving way, work toward the liberation of the poor and oppressed, at the same time, we must “mak[e] clear the emptiness of ideology and its inability to quench the spiritual thirst of the human soul.”

Second, we learn that just because Orthodox Christians in the United States have not yet developed a rigorous literature on social justice and liberation theology, this does not mean our Orthodox

brothers and sisters elsewhere have not been doing significant thinking on this from within their own cultural contexts. This thinking has a lot of wisdom that we must seek to access and learn from.⁶¹

Third, in a spirit of openness, it is worth noting that if Orthodox educators borrow educational curricula and ideas around social justice and liberation theology, then there are questions that we must ask of these curricula, such as: what are the epistemological and anthropological underpinnings, “hidden curriculum” of these curricula? How do these compare and contrast with what our Orthodox understanding? What is missing from a full picture of our need for service? This questioning and appropriation should be done by educators working in cooperation with a community of believers from a variety of Orthodox backgrounds (such as longevity in the Church, jurisdiction, political perspective, educational background, etc.).

On more of a micro level, Clement has honed in on what I believe are some fundamental theological emphases for curricular development. Here are a few additional thoughts along these lines with the hope that they become conversation points for Orthodox educators who seek to encourage youth in their ministry to love the neighbor.

(1) Clement reminds us of the example of contemplatives, grounded in prayer, who are not interested in controlling the levers of power, but of limiting that power.

(2) A significant portion of contemporary educational theory, which is often influenced by liberation theology, focuses on the “empowerment” of learners. Orthodox educators should be wary of emphasis on empowerment in learning for it flies in the face of a

⁶¹ Iswolsky, “Social Justice in Russian-Orthodox Thought.” “And this can be said of the contribution of the Russian-Orthodox theologians now involved in the ecumenical movement and in the discussion of such important themes as ecclesiology, Christian ethics and social justice. They do not offer a ready made system, they make an attentive and respectful study of Western social teachings, before bringing their own views into focus. It is the cosmic view of a world which, however sinful it may be, is open to salvation and is awaiting transfiguration.” 94.

fundamental posture of humility required of the believer that pervades the tradition. Educators must work towards developing educational trajectories that will emphasize learners' agency and responsibility, based on a robust Orthodox anthropology, but resist such trajectories that advocate for *controlling* levers of power or developing notions of empowerment that would make it hard for these same youth to understand why we pray before communion in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom that we are "first among sinners."

(3) Related to this, we see throughout Orthodox spiritual teaching the primacy of repentance as a spiritual imperative for Orthodox Christian life. Social justice and liberation theology locate sin in the economic, political and social structures. Orthodoxy does not exclude this, but asks us to look at the plank in our own eye.⁶²

(4) Our educational emphases will depend directly on our theological emphasis regarding where we locate the kingdom of God: is it ahead of us, an eschatological kingdom, or are we supposed to be co-creators of a reign of God here on earth? Certainly we are continuing the ministry of Christ here on earth, but is it because we are his servants, living in hope for his eschatological kingdom, or is it because we actually are meant to build his kingdom here on earth? Orthodox theology generally gives precedence to the former, and sees grave dangers in the latter. Yes "we struggle — within ourselves first of all, but also within society and culture — to defeat every form of death, slavery and degradation of human souls and bodies" but we do not do this because we are building the kingdom of God on earth. We forge ahead on our spiritual mandate to love the neighbor with a posture of humility.⁶³

⁶² "Personal moral improvement is inseparable from service to society; 'man saves himself by saving others,' but 'he can save others, only if he can save himself.'" Ibid., 92. Quoting Archpriest Liveryi Voronov, Professor at the Leningrad Theological Academy. One only need study the frequency of the theme of personal repentance in the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church to be struck by its centrality.

⁶³ "This means a return to the early Christian conception of man, converted and perfected in Christ, observing the ascetic rule toward the evil of the world, and at the same time sharing the responsibility for his brother man." Ibid.

(5) Finally, the victor on the scene is Christ, the Son of the living God, the one who “deeply humble, deeply silent, deeply loving,” teaches us to have the courage to be what we are called to be. Any movement towards love of neighbor must be based on Christ’s love.

It is essential that educators develop the critical faculties to assess the extent to which the educational programs we design or adopt are somehow faithful to the Orthodox Christian tradition. As we move ahead in educating Orthodox Christian youth for love of neighbor, these faculties will be badly needed so that we might simultaneously invite our youth to true love of neighbor that is intrinsic to our Christian calling, and do so in a way that invites them to sanctity and holiness of life and is grounded in prayer, humility, peace and non-violence, silence, and love.

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