

Being Christian in a Post-Christian World:
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- I. Cultural wars, cultural seductions, and the ascetic struggle: Recognizing the cultural context
 - A. Life as ascesis: seeking freedom from the passions and deceptions of the world
 1. All of life is a struggle to turn from loving oneself with all one's heart, soul, and mind to loving God with all one's heart, soul, and mind, and one's neighbor as oneself in the light of right-believing, right-worshipping love of God. Unholy love harms.
 2. Any goodness that does not lead beyond itself to holiness is a false goodness.
 3. The ascetic journey from oneself to God is, as the Greek ascesis indicates, not only an exercise, practice, and training, but an all-encompassing way of life.
 4. Days and periods of fasting are times when the Church aids us to increase our efforts to turn fully to God through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.
 5. Yet, the secular world aims us in the opposite direction, from God to ourselves and the false goodness of self-satisfaction and self-indulgence. Consider the world displayed in television, movies, and popular music and its everyday acceptance of sinful lifestyles.
 - B. The secular world is not just seductive, but deceptive: post-traditional and post-Christian.
 - C. Orthodox Christians will survive as Orthodox only insofar as they embed their families and themselves in an authentic Christian life of right belief, prayer, vigil, fasting, and almsgiving. If they do so, they will succeed in being Orthodox Christian but at the price of becoming strangers in a strange culture where there is generally a permissive pursuit of satisfaction, happiness, and at best a do-it-yourself transcendence with a consequence banalization of sexuality, reproduction, dying, and death.
- II. Our age is a post-Christian age: it is after the age of Christendom.
 - A. The post-Christian culture rejects the legal establishment of the norms of Christianity.
 1. Into the 20th century, American courts recognized Christianity (i.e., Protestant Christianity) as forming part of common law. *United States v. Macintosh*, 283 US 605 (1931).
 2. Only in the mid-20th century did the Supreme Court secularize American law. *School District of Abington Township v. Edward L. Schempp et al.*, *William J. Murray et al., v. John N. Curlett et al.*, 374 US 203, 10 L ed 2d 844, 83 S Ct 1560 (1963).
 3. All matters of religion are to be privatized: public reason as canonically secular
 - B. Our post-Christian, post-traditional culture embraces understandings of sexuality, reproduction, and death radically at odds with authentic Christian understandings, leading to numerous temptations to misuse medicine such as
 1. use of donor gametes in order to have children
 2. in vitro fertilization without the implantation of all zygotes produced
 3. physician-assisted suicide
 - C. A brief history of Western thought
 1. The ancient world: polytheistic, multi-cultural, skeptical, decadent, paleo-pagan
 2. Medieval world: monotheistic, mono-cultural, and having a faith in reason
 3. Modern world: deist, faith in reason, human rights and dignity; Christian morality without Christ
 4. Post-modern world - the age of the neo-pagan: agnostic/polytheistic, multi-cultural, a loss of faith in reason, traditional Christianity viewed as intolerant, and all "truth" as relative
 - D. Post-modern culture: after the "death of God" there is no universal, coherent, moral-metaphysical narrative
 1. Moralization of religion: it does not matter what religion one has if one lives a good life (Kant)
 2. Tolerance as acceptance, therefore intolerant of true belief against moralism and fundamentalism

3. The cultural exemplar is the environmentally aware, pro-choice, New Age vegetarian: a nominal mainline Christian with a place for Buddha in "her/his" heart
 4. Cosmic de-orientation: the universe comes from nowhere, goes to nowhere, and for no purpose
 5. The attempt to remove Christianity from the public forum
- E. Paradigms, thought-styles, and life-styles: The constitution of everyday expectations
1. Moral commitments shape the meaning of reproduction, suffering, and death. E.g., sex outside of marriage of a man and a woman considered normal versus recognized as sinful
 2. Orthodox Christians are separated from others by different
 - a. metaphysics: God as fully transcendent or as the object of philosophy
 - b. epistemologies: noetic vs. discursive knowledge
 - c. axiologies: holiness vs. the good - living a good life is not enough
 - d. sociologies of knowledge & values: the Church vs. the academy
 - e. exemplar persons: holy elders vs. learned professors and scientists

III. The emergence of a dominant secular morality

- A. Consider two views of preparing for death -- a conflict of two cultures
1. Secular view -- use advance directives (i.e., directive to physicians or medical power-of-attorney) to preserve autonomy & ensure a death with dignity (a peaceful, unanticipated death is best in a secular culture).
 2. Orthodox view -- use advance directive to ensure a death with repentance, the Mysteries, and prayer (an unanticipated death is usually the worst of deaths - a subitanea et improvisa morte, libera nos, Domine)
- B. Orthodox Christian bioethics is not simply a set of rules about dos and don'ts.
1. it involves not simply what we do, but how and why we do it
 2. all uses of health care have to be put within the ascetic struggle of Christians from self-love to love of God and fellow-man

IV. Moral views in conflict: Christian versus secular understandings

	CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE	SECULAR
Cohabitation without marriage	fornication	expected relationship
Cohabitation without marriage	adultery	consent cures
Pre-natal screening & abortion	murder	responsible parenting
Religion	spiritual therapy	psychologically comforting
Death	with humility and repentance	with dignity
PAS**	self-murder	rational death

*artificial insemination from a donor, **physician-assisted suicide

V. Noetic vs. discursive moral theology: Contrasting views of human life

- A. The West tried to ground morality in rational argument, rather than experience of God.
- B. This cannot succeed without begging the question or arguing in a circle.
- C. The moral cement of a secular pluralist society is consent: permission cures.
- D. True moral content is not secured by argument or consent, but by Grace.
- E. An Orthodox Christian relativizes everything immanent in relation to theosis.
- F. Orthodox Christian life as an all-consuming journey to God

VI. The Widening Gulf Between Orthodox Christianity and the Dominant Secular Culture of the West
"The manner in which we [the Orthodox and the West] exist has become ontologically different. ...the Orthodox Christian does not live in a place of theoretical and conceptual conversations, but rather in a place of an essential and empirical lifestyle and reality as confirmed by grace in the heart [Heb 13:9]. This grace cannot be put in doubt either by logic or science or other type of argument. ... However, the change of man's essence, theosis by grace, is a fact that is tangible for all the Orthodox faithful. Grace is not only obtained through the transformed relics of the saints, which is totally inexplicable without acceptance of the divine. Grace also radiates from living Saints who are truly in the likeness of the Lord [Luke 8:46]." [Patriarch Bartholomew, October 21, 1997]

Suggested Readings for those wanting to learn more about Orthodox Christianity

Available through Conciliar Press (800.967.7377, www.conciliarpress.com)

Thirsting for God, by Matthew Gallatin (2002) - a Protestant's search for authentic Christianity

Our Hearts' True Home, ed. Virginia Nieuwsma (1996) - conversion stories of 14 women Becoming Orthodox, by Peter Gillquist (1992) - how a group of Protestants became Orthodox

Available through Regina Orthodox Press (800.636.2470, www.reginaorthodoxpress.com)

Two Paths, by Michael Whelton (1998) - history of the split of Roman Catholics from Orthodoxy

The Way, by Clark Carlton (1997) - what Protestants should know about the Orthodox Church

The Truth, by Clark Carlton (1999) - what Roman Catholics should know about the Orthodox Church

Available through Eighth Day Books (316.683.9446, www.eighthdaybooks.com)

The Ancestral Sin, by John S. Romanides (Zephyr, 1998)

Adam's sin from the Orthodox perspective

The Mind of the Orthodox Church, by Metropolitan Hierotheos (Levadia, Greece: 1998) what it means to live in the mind of the Fathers

Father Arseny, 1893-1973 (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998) the life of a holy priest in the USSR

Facing East, by Frederica Mathewes-Green (HarperCollins, 1997)

the journey of a Protestant woman to becoming an Orthodox priest's wife

At the Corner of East and Now, by Frederica Mathewes-Green (Tarcher/Putnam, 1999)

the 2nd year as priest's wife

Elder Porphyrios, by Klitos Ioannidis (Athens, 1997) - life of a recent holy Father

The Foundations of Christian Bioethics, by H. T. Engelhardt, Jr. (Taylor & Francis, 2000)

Available through Light and Life (888.925.3918, www.light-n-life.com)

Common Ground, Jordan Bajas (Light & Life, 1996) - comparison of Protestant beliefs & Orthodoxy