

Orthodox Vision

What is an Orthodox vision? Is it the Divine Liturgy, a daily cycle of worship, fish fries, campus ministry, almsgiving, private prayer, festivals, bazaars, Bible studies? The answer is probably, and "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes,... and yes to the things you didn't mention!" John Zizioulas suggests helpful guidelines for articulating Orthodox vision in our culture in his book *Being As Communion*.⁸⁴

Mr. Zizioulas suggests our Orthodox calling is to:

- 1) **Affirm** our culture, as Christ affirmed humanity by becoming man.
- 2) **Assess and critique** our culture; distinguish between truth and error; recognize and affirm *all* truth in it.
- 3) **Build** on those Godly elements of our culture. Use them as "stepping stones" to and for better communications.
- 4) **Explain and beautify** that truth in its fullest context, in Orthodox Truth.
- 5) **Usher** that truth toward its transcendent identity in our Eucharistic procession *into* the Kingdom of God.

Paraphrasing St. Athanasius' discussion of Colossians 1:15: to see the Word is to see the Father⁸⁵ -- our words and behavior reveal our thinking. Likewise, the quality of our

84. John D. Zizioulas. *Being As Communion*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985, p. 283-284.

85. "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation." (NKJV).

implementation plans and actions reveal (1) the quality of our vision and (2) our level of obedience to God. When we see the one, we see the other also. Or, put in terms of our meetings:

To see our behavior in parish council meetings is to see the quality of our Orthodox Christian vision.

It's impossible to hide our vision. According to the Church Fathers, the quality and priority of our vision is revealed in our behavior. We really do reflect our vision in the way we meet together in our parish councils. In order to break out of our meeting ruts, we should examine the fruit of our actions, then change when inappropriate behavior is producing "bad fruit." We need to become "fruit inspectors."⁸⁶

We Orthodox *do* know a lot about Orthodox Christian Vision. In fact, we participate in that vision weekly -- The Divine Liturgy: our procession into the Kingdom of God.⁸⁷ For this part of our worship, we pay meticulous attention to its liturgical exactness (e.g., the Holy Scriptures, rubrics, Canons, service books). Isn't it time we paid just as much attention to the incarnation of that heavenly vision in our work-a-day worship, including (starting with) our meetings?

We need to work just as hard at orchestrating godly meetings as we do at orchestrating beautiful, awe-inspiring liturgies. My prayer is that Orthodox theology of the Kingdom will be just as evident in our meetings as it is in our liturgical worship. And, I pray we'll conduct such good meet-

86. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23a, NKJV).

87. Alexander Schmemmann, "The Eucharist," *For the Life of the World*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988, p. 23-46.

ings that non-Orthodox will feel compelled to "come and see" how to "do meetings right!" Maybe this is an unrealistic expectation. However, who better to practice and perfect the incarnation of a vision than Orthodox Christianity -- The Church of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation?

I think most of us would agree -- we've got our work cut out for us in living up to the Holy Standard to which we're committed!

Only when our Church has a clear vision of where She is going in America will we be able to fill in the gaps in our map. Then, instead of spinning our wheels and sinking ever-deeper into our thinking ruts, we can set out confidently and get where God wants us to go.

My Prayer

My prayer is that fresh visions of Orthodox Christianity will inspire you; solid implementation plans will give you confidence; enthusiasm will encourage you in the celebrations and sustain you in the struggles; and creative thinking will give you fresh outlooks on life. I hope you'll find that suspended judgment makes life a lot more fun; that it gives you and those around you permission to express yourselves without the fear that others will put the kibosh on your sometimes feeble attempts to express heartfelt ideas; and, that it'll encourage you to exercise one of the most creative of virtues... **listening.**

May the grace and mercy of the Holy Trinity
be yours this and every day.

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