

ON BOREDOM

By Metropolitan Ephraim

A couple of years ago, a doctor in the Boston area gave me a copy of an article entitled, "Souls Without Longing," by Robert Bartlett, a college professor.

In brief, this article says that most students today are overcome by boredom. As someone put it, "They are habitually occupied in contemplating a very petty object, namely themselves."

They have no real interest in anything, and nothing inspires their trust or enthusiasm. In fact, they don't *have* enthusiasm. They do not believe in God. They are cynical about everything.

This reminds me of a classmate I had at the seminary. He and I were good friends, and even after I entered the monastery, and later, became a bishop, he would still come to visit me when I was visiting our parish in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. By then, he was a priest in the new calendar Greek Archdiocese. He was always very respectful and would always get my blessing.

During one of his visits, he said to me, "Your Eminence, I think you will be very happy to hear that my parishioners are not at all interested in Ecumenism."

I replied, "Oh, that's wonderful! At least, that's a good start."

"Well, as a matter of fact," he continued, "they're not interested in anything *at all*."

"Oh," answered I, "Well, that's another matter entirely."

So, today, that is how things are with most students also. Today, alas, narcotics and sex often are used to fill the emptiness that these young people have inside.

But narcotics and sex — as mature people will understand — are not the solution. Narcotics and sex may give one a temporary "high." But they cannot provide a permanent solution to one's problems. They are like drinking salt water when you are thirsty. It may relieve your thirst momentarily, but soon enough it will make you very sick, or may kill you.

Or it is like licking your lips when they're chapped to get relief.

Temporarily, it may relieve the pain, but it really only makes the condition worse. What you *really* need is chapstick, just as what you *really* need for thirst is fresh water.

Professor Bartlett ends his article on what, at first sight, seems to be a pretty lame note: "What these young people need," says he, "is an education deserving of the name."

Such a suggestion might elicit a sarcastic laugh from the students.

Actually, from an Orthodox Christian point of view, he is right.

The young people of today, and indeed, all of us, need to be more educated about some unusual and very interesting people — the Saints of God.

People like:

St. Seraphim of Sarov (1833)
St. Theophil the Fool for Christ (1853)
St. Moses of Optina (1862)
St. Ambrose of Optina (1891)
St. Joseph of Optina (1911)
St. John of San Francisco (1966)
St. Seraphim of Kharkov, Ukraine (1943)
Vladyka Andrei of Novo-Diveevo (1978)
St. Elizabeth the Grand Duchess (1917)
St. Nicholas Planas of Athens (1932)
Mother Irene of Oinousses (1960)
The Elder Ieronymos of Aegina (1966)
and the Elder Joseph the Cave-dweller (1959)

If the first reaction is to dismiss the Saints as mythological, we should consider that there are too many of them (consider, for example, the many millions of martyrs in the Soviet Union, Serbia and Asia Minor in the twentieth century alone); there are too many eyewitnesses (who knew them personally); furthermore, they are contemporary (as well as ancient). They are not somewhere in the misty past; they are very close to us in time. Some of us knew them personally.

Let us consider St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Who can read his booklet, "A Wonderful Revelation to the World," and not be stirred by its message: "what is the purpose of our life here?"

Even the simplest person will understand the profound theology found in this little booklet. You don't have to be a space scientist to understand it.

Even the most cynical, the most bored in life, will be forced to confront the possibilities this little booklet opens to the human race.

It has been demonstrated millions of times: Learning about and following these types of people will *certainly* relieve you of boredom.

Holiness is not simply righteousness, for which the righteous merit the enjoyment of blessedness in the Kingdom of God, but rather such a height of righteousness that men are filled with the grace of God to the extent that it flows from them upon those who associate with them. Great is their blessedness; it proceeds from personal experience of the Glory of God. Being filled also with love for men, which proceeds from love of God, they are responsive to men's needs, and upon their supplication they appear also as intercessors and defenders for them before God.

(St. John of San Francisco, +1966)

No room for boredom here.....