

# The Mustard Seed

Volume 1, Issue 1

January—March, 2002

Priest's Corner  
Father John Fleser  
Authority and Unity

Dialogue of St. Justin  
with Trypho, a Jew from  
*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*,  
Vol 1, pgs 313-314.

The following article was written by the late Professor Serge Verhovskoy. He taught dogmatic theology at St. Vladimir's Seminary.

The article refers to the *Metropolia* which was to later change its name to the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) after it was given autocephaly from the Moscow Patriarchate.

What Professor Verhovskoy describes is as applicable today as then. There is a need for all, clergy and laity, to understand authority in the Church.

This was written in 1959 for the *Journal*.

## Authority and Unity.

Serge S. Verhovskoy.

Unity is of the essence of Christianity. We are not Christians if we live by ourselves. If a Christian community considers itself as independent and separated from the Church, is it not a

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It is necessary for us to read the Fathers of the Church and in this way learn how to better defend the Orthodox faith by demonstrating how our faith has not changed over two thousand and two years.

In reading the Fathers and the lives of the Saints we discover that the same false teachings are still being raised against the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church.

Chapter XXXVIII.—It is an annoyance to the Jew that Christ is said to be adored. Justin Confirms it, however, from Ps. XLV.

And Trypho said, "Sir, it were good for us if we obeyed our teachers, who laid down a law that we should have no intercourse with any of you, and that we should not have even any communication with you on these questions. For you utter many blasphemies,

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sect? An independent parish is merely a secular corporation with religious purposes rather than a real parish.

What is the difference between them? A corporation is organized by a group of men in accordance with a statute which they make for themselves with the approval of civil authority. Consequently, the whole life of a corporation is ruled by the will of the majority of its members and the statute established by the same majority. If they recognize the authority of the Church, or its teaching and laws, they do so only in so far as they desire.

*Christians who openly and consciously recognize only part of the authority and teachings of the Church, while rejecting the rest, are clearly heretics or at least schismatic.*

Some "independent parishes" pretend that they cannot accept the Statute of the Church because they are bound by their own statutes. This pretend is utterly hypocritical because every religious corporation can change its statutes so as to bring them into harmony with the Canons of the Church. If they do not want to do this, they only prove their bad will.

Christians who openly and consciously recognize only part of the authority and teachings of the Church, while rejecting the rest, are clearly heretics or at least schismatic.

Those who do not recognize the guidance of the Clergy, or who

arbitrarily limit it to the celebration of the services and personal relations with laymen are openly rebellious against the Church. If the members of these religious corporations are afraid of being deprived by the Clergy of their property or legitimate rights, they are wrong. Nobody denies that the property belongs to the parishes, and the Clergy can only control its use in agreement with the parish meetings and councils.

We stress that Orthodox Canon law energetically protects the laity from all possible abuses by the Clergy. Separatist tendencies among the laity, and even in the priesthood, were already known in the early Church, and many Canons threatened them with excommunication.

The true parish must have a consciousness of being an organic part of the Church, to be the Church as it exists in a given locality. A truly Orthodox community will never oppose its diocese or the rest of the Church. It will freely and gladly accept the authority of the Church and Orthodox tradition in its entirety. Among other things, it will accept the guidance of the clergy. A truly Orthodox parish will not be pervaded by the spirit of indifference and selfishness, but will wholeheartedly participate in the life of the Church and support it.

If there is mistrust among the laity, clergy and central administration, this mistrust must be overcome as soon as possible. If there are some weak points in the central organization, they must be discussed in a practical and concrete form without generalization or exaggeration, with sincere desire to improve the life of our Church. This mean toward improvement must be not only practical, but must also be free of all contradictions

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with our Faith. We must fight wrong ambitions and secular spirit in certain sections of the laity, but we must also rejoice in and encourage all expression by the laity of their desire to work for the Church and to take responsibility for its life. We can fight the defects of the Clergy or Church organization, but we must sincerely accept the necessity of the hierarchy, the unity and the central organization of the Church.

*If the laity considers itself to be on a higher level than the Clergy and if the parishes separate themselves from their dioceses and consider themselves higher than the Church,*

The decisions of the All-American Sobors, of the Council of Bishops, of the Metropolitan or of a Bishop in his diocese are absolutely obligatory for all the organizations and individuals in our Church. The Statute of our Metropolia, approved by the All-American Sobor, has the force of law *(the same would apply to all the decisions made by our Metropolitans Ephraim, Macarios and Moses regarding the Church and the parishes).*

Every parish and each of us, as individual Christians, must strive to help in the realization of the plans adopted by our Church and to support them financially by regular donations. The poverty of our Church is astonishing. On the average, each member of the Metropolia gives less than one dollar to it per year *(the Metropolia would be considered the diocesan office, such as The Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston is the*

*diocesan office of Metropolitan Ephraim).* Is this simply lack of generosity, indifference or mistrust? Whatever the reason may be, it is shameful to spend less for Church than for ice cream, because, certainly, all of us spend much more than a dollar a year to buy ice cream. It is really unforgivable that we are unable to give even those few dollars needed for the necessary activities of the Metropolia. Unfortunately many priests and parish councils are indifferent to the needs of the whole Church outside their own parishes.

Unity and order are badly needed in our Church. Every layman, priest and bishop, every parish and diocese, must have a clear consciousness that they are living members of the whole Orthodox Church in America and they must do their best to make Orthodoxy in this land united, spiritually strong and influential. Every layman, priest, and bishop, every parish and diocese must realize that all of them have their own rights, duties, and responsibilities, but that these rights are determined and limited by the Church.

The highest value belongs to the Church in its unity, then to the dioceses, then to the parishes and finally to each Christian individually. The highest authority belongs to the episcopate, then to the priesthood and finally to the laity. If the laity considers itself to be on a higher level than the Clergy and if the parishes separate themselves from their dioceses and consider themselves higher than the Church, we are then no longer in the Orthodox Church but in a sectarian society.

The laity are not deprived of their rights. They have the widest possibilities of being active in the Church, in its administration, educational and welfare endeavors, in its social work and finances; they can be active members of their parish and diocesan assemblies and of the All-American Sobor *(for our diocese it would be the clergy/laity meeting in October).* They are

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deprived of but one right: to act against the Hierarchy, provided the latter does not violate the teaching and laws of the Church.

The great majority of the members of our metropolia sincerely desire to be Orthodox and to see our Church prospering. Therefore, we really can hope that all misunderstandings will be dissipated and that the spirit of unity and Church discipline will prevail.

The vitality of our Church is great. The possibilities are almost unlimited. There is no reason to be pessimistic. The only conditions for the continuous growth of our Church are a good will and an absolute faithfulness to our Orthodox Catholic Faith.

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in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshipped.”

Then I answered, “I know that, as the word of God says, this great wisdom of God, the Maker of all things, and the Almighty, is hid from you. Wherefore, in sympathy with you, I am striving to the utmost that you may understand these matters which to you are paradoxical; but if not, that I myself may be innocent in the day of judgment. For you shall hear other words which appear still more paradoxical; but be not confounded, nay, rather remain still more zealous hearers and investigators, despising the tradition of your teachers, since they are convicted by the Holy Spirit of inability to perceive the truths taught by God, and of

preferring to teach their own doctrines. Accordingly, in the forty-fourth [forty-fifth] Psalm, these words are in like manner referred to Christ: ‘My heart hath poured forth a good word; I speak of my works to the king; my tongue is the pen of a swiftly writing scribe. Comely art Thou in beauty more than the sons of men; grace hath been poured forth on Thy lips, wherefore God hath blessed Thee for ever. Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Mighty One, in Thy comeliness and Thy beauty. And bend Thy bow, and proceed prosperously, and be king, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and Thy right hand shall guide Thee wondrously. Thine arrows are sharp, O Mighty One, (under Thee shall peoples fall) sharp in the heart of the enemies of the king. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Wherefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness more than Thy fellows. Myrrh and stacte and cassia exhale from Thy garments, from the ivory palaces, whereby they have made Thee glad, they the daughters of kings in Thy honour. At Thy right hand stood the queen, arrayed in a vesture of in woven gold, adorned in varied colors. Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thine own people and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty, for He Himself is thy Lord, and thou shalt worship Him. And Him shall the daughters of Tyre worship with gifts; the rich among the people shall entreat thy countenance. All the glory of the daughter of the King is within, with gold-fringed garments is she arrayed, adorned in varied colours. The virgins that follow after her shall be brought unto the King, those near her shall be brought unto Thee. They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing, they shall be brought into the temple of the King. In the stead of thy fathers, sons are born to thee; thou shalt make them

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princes over all the earth. I shall commemorate thy name in every generation and generation. Therefore shall peoples give praise unto thee for ever, and unto the ages of ages.’

*For indeed Elijah, conversing with God concerning you, speaks thus: ‘Lord, they have slain Thy prophets, and digged down Thine altars: and I am left alone, and they seek my life.’ And He answers him: ‘I have still seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’*

Chapter XXXIX. The Jews hate the Christians who believe this. How great the distinction is between both!

“Now it is not surprising,” I continued, “that you hate us who hold these opinions, and convict you of a continual hardness of heart. For indeed Elijah, conversing with God concerning you, speaks thus: ‘Lord, they have slain Thy prophets, and digged down Thine altars: and I am left alone, and they seek my life.’ And He answers him: ‘I have still seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ Therefore, just as God did not inflict His anger on account of those seven thousand men, even so He has now neither yet inflicted judgment, nor does inflict it, knowing that daily some of you are becoming disciples in the name of Christ, and quitting the path of error; who are also receiving gifts, each as he is worthy, illumined through the name of this Christ. For one receives the spirit of understanding, another of counsel, another of strength, another of healing, another of foreknowledge, another of teaching, and another of the fear of God.”

To this Trypho said to me, “I wish you knew that you are beside yourself, talking these sentiments.”

And I said to him, “Listen, O friend, for I am not mad or beside myself; but it was prophesied that, after the ascent of Christ to heaven, He would deliver us from error and give us gifts. The words are these: ‘He ascended up on high; He led captivity captive; He gave gifts to men.’ Accordingly, we who have received gifts from Christ, who has ascended up on high, prove from the words of prophecy that you, ‘the wise in yourselves, and the men of understanding in your own eyes,’ are foolish, and honour God and His Christ by lip only. But we, who are instructed in the whole truth, honour Them both in acts, and in knowledge, and in heart, even unto death. But you hesitate to confess that He is Christ, as the Scriptures and the events witnessed and done in His name prove, perhaps for this reason, lest you be persecuted by the rulers, who, under the influence of the wicked and deceitful spirit, the serpent, will not cease putting to death and persecuting those who confess the name of Christ until He come again, and destroy them all, and render to each his deserts.”

And Trypho replied, “Now, then, render us the proof that this man who you say was crucified and ascended into heaven is the Christ of God. For you have sufficiently proved by means of the Scriptures previously quoted by you, that it is declared in the Scriptures that Christ must suffer, and come again with glory, and receive the eternal kingdom over all the nations, every kingdom being made subject to Him: now show us that this man is He.”

And I replied, “It has been already proved, sirs, to those who have ears, even from the facts which have been conceded by you; but that you may not think me at a loss, and unable to give proof of what you ask, as I promised, I shall do so at a fitting place. At present, I resume the consideration of the subject which I was discussing.

**Events:**

January 2/December 20, at 7:00 PM Unction was celebrated with clergy from St. Mark's Cathedral. Present were Metropolitan Ephraim, Fathers Christos Constantinou, John Fleser and John Bruk; Deacons Elias Fagan and Neil Galarneau. Over ninety of the faithful were anointed at the end of the service.

January 19/6, at 8:00 AM the Divine Liturgy for Holy Epiphany was celebrated and immediately following the liturgy Father John Fleser, Deacon Elias Fagan and twenty five parishioners went over to the Jamaica Pond and blessed the waters.

**Births**

Gregory Kukunov was born to Father Dmitry and Presbytera Kukunov on Saturday, March 30/17.

Christopher James Fleser was born to Christopher and Donna Fleser on Thursday, April 4/March 22, at 8:25 AM in the South Shore Hospital. He weighed 7 lbs 15 oz and was 20 inches long.

**Orthodox burial site**

St. Mark's Orthodox Cathedral has a section of land in the Gethesmane Cemetery. Plots are available to members of the parish who are under Metropolitan Ephraim for \$800.00. For more details contact Father Christos Constantinou, 617-469-2380, regarding the plots as well as headstones for the graves.

**Candle Costs for St. Anna's Church**

We buy pure beeswax candles from Holy Nativity Convent, Brookline, MA. Last year we spent \$6,800.00 on candles at \$8.00 a pound: that is 16 lbs a week. There is no set price for candles so when you take a handful of them and put in only \$ .25 or \$ 1.00, remember the cost comes out of the general fund.