

KOINONIA: A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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SEEKING THE “NONES” by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

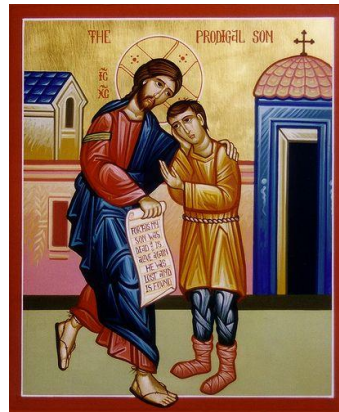
“One should not seek among others the truth that can be easily gotten from the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the apostles have placed all that pertains to truth, so that everyone can drink this beverage of life. She is the door of life.”

– St. Irenaeus of Lyons,
Against Heresies, III.4

A question commonly asked among those who study evangelism is: How can we reach the “Nones”?

“Nones” are defined as those who do not have any religious affiliation at all. They get their title from the survey, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape”, by Pew Research, where one-fourth of respondents polled on their religious affiliation chose the final answer, “none of the above”.

This situation may seem strange to many of us who were raised in a church or denomination, but it is a fast-growing phenomenon and one which merits a lot of attention from all faith traditions as they seek to understand how to reach out



to them. Just consider this statistic: in 1995, only 7% of the population registered as “Nones”. In 2015 it had risen to 25%, likely a conservative estimate. Yet no one has come up with a suitable approach.

There is no magic answer on how to attract such people to the Church. They are often very well-educated and well-read seekers of answers to life’s most important questions. They are quite sensitive to hypocrisy (as they define it), and have a certain, often cynical, vision of what Christianity is. Yet they are also looking for a fulfilling spiritual life, a community in which to belong, and a connection with people who share their values. These are

precisely the entry points in reaching them because the Church has precisely the answers to these questions. So, we must find a way to welcome those with no spiritual family into the family of Christ – His Church.

A good way to begin to understand this category of seekers is to watch a 2017 film directed by Nathan Jacobs for Ancient Faith Films, called *Becoming Truly Human*. It follows a group of “Nones” through their own spiritual journey and provides an insight into what they are about. You can see the trailer or purchase the film online at Ancient Faith Store (click [here](#)). It is well worth watching with your parish and friends and discussing how we can share our Orthodox Faith with people who are looking for exactly what the Church offers. The most important facet of their journey is the seeking of communal relationships, a *koinonia*. So be prepared to answer many questions and, most importantly, to invite spiritual seekers into a loving and healthy relationship with God and His Church.

The Unchurched

“The Church is the spiritual hospital. Communion is the medicine of immortality.”

Though it is hard for those born between 1946 and 1964 – Baby Boomers – to fathom, many among the younger generation, especially those born after 1980, have never been exposed to Christian Church life at all. When able to shed their indoctrinated hedonism, these seekers are often best equipped to drink deeply from the well of the Orthodox Christian Faith.

During my summers in college, I sold books for the Southwestern Book Company. Each year, when recruiting others to go door-to-door, the often-heard excuse was, “I have no sales

experience.” Southwestern’s response was, “Great, that’s even better! No experience is better than *bad* experience.” In other words, learning and training can be hindered by time wasted on unlearning and un-training. Converts without the burden of “Christian baggage” may have fewer struggles with their newfound faith and are often more open to the fullness of Orthodoxy without preconceived resistance, heterodox notions, etc. ...

One thing is certain and bears repeating: *You cannot be Orthodox alone.* Those who try to be Orthodox alone are handicapped. We work out our

Salvation in community. That community God provides for us, is full of sinners and will never be perfect in and of Her individual members.

The Church is a spiritual hospital. Communion is the medicine of immortality. Love is paramount. With this in mind, Converts to American Orthodoxy – Cradles, Retreads and Reverts – struggle toward salvation together, intentionally, in community.

From One Flew Over the Onion Dome: American Orthodox Converts, Retreads and Reverts, by Fr. Joseph Huneycutt (Regina: Salisbury, MA, 2006), pp. 29-32.

Defining Secularism

“[Secularism] is a negation of man as a worshipping being... “

Secularism, I submit, is above all a *negation of worship*, I stress: not of God’s existence, not some kind of transcendence and therefore of some kind of religion. If secularism in theological terms is a heresy, it is primarily a heresy about man. It is a negation of man as a worshipping being, as *homo adorans*: the one for whom worship is the essential act which both “posits” his humanity and fulfills it. It is the rejection as ontologically and epistemologically “decisive,” of the words which “always,

everywhere and for all” were the true “epiphany” of man’s relation to God, to the world and to himself: “It is meet and right to sing of Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks to Thee, and to worship Thee in every place of Thy dominion...”

For once more secularism is by no means identical with atheism, and paradoxical as it may seem, can be shown to have always had a peculiar longing for a “liturgical” expression. If, however, my

definition is right, then this whole search is a hopeless dead end, if not outright nonsense. The very formulation of our theme – “worship in a secular age” – reveals, first of all, an inner contradiction in terms, a contradiction which requires a radical reappraisal of the entire problem and its drastic reformation.

From “Worship in the Secular Age”, in *For the Life of the World*, by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (SVS Press: Crestwood, NY, 1983), pp. 188-199.

From the Fathers: “Sincere Religion” by St. Sebastian Dabovich

We live in a peculiar age. No time has ever dawned upon the earth like the present era. Startling developments in the world of truth keep the minds of men, to some extent, constantly reaching out after it. More light! greater knowledge! is now the almost universal cry. Great discoveries in science have opened many new and hitherto unknown avenues to the greater physical development of the human family; and at the same time it may be said to be true, that the mental development of man has, to some extent, kept pace. In all this onward movement in the world of material and mental research, men turn to the representative of God among men, and inquire if in the religious world there are any developments; and we find that there are many and great changes in the religious world. Mark you — many and great changes in the world of religious opinion, but very little development in religious life!

Many a searching, although blind, mind has mistaken religion for some philosophical system. Too irreverent and profane handling of religion often makes of it a science, a pastime study. Now and again we come by the way



of such who make religion a speculation; yes, and a speculation without a question as to its nature. Do you not know that religion is one of the qualities of your soul? An essential substance, I might say, to be plain, of your self-recognizing, self-satisfied, living spirit? Those who are convinced of this fact are not indifferent to religion. Indifference has no place in the serious life of one who seeks to be right-minded.

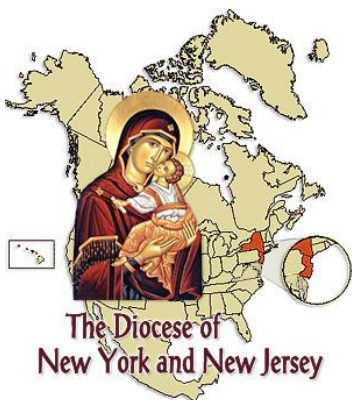
We hear it frequently remarked that it matters not what one believes if he does right. But if one does not believe right, he does not do the right thing—that is, if his belief is sincere and carried out in practice. If one believes that which is wrong, and still acts otherwise from force of circumstance, he is wrong in heart. A man may believe in polygamy, but the law and common

custom may forbid its practice. He would be in outward life aright, but in heart would be a virtual polygamist. And if circumstances were favorable, his life would bear its legitimate fruit. And this is just as true of every other moral evil. It is all-important to believe right. Every false religion which has cursed mankind has started in a wrong belief. It might not have affected practical duties for a time, but the fruit finally developed. Thus belief in that first lie of Satan’s (Gen. 3:4) has borne its legitimate fruit in—first, the deification of the beautiful, and unnatural curiosity; second, self-love, delusion, and idol-worship; third, free-thinking, protesting, infidelity, and anarchy.

“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

From “Sincere Religion”, in *St. Sebastian Dabovich’s Lives of Saints and Several Lectures and Sermons* (Murdock Press: San Francisco, CA, 1898), pp. 174ff.

“Do you not know that religion is one of the qualities of your soul? An essential substance, I might say, to be plain, of your self-recognizing, self-satisfied, living spirit.”



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Being the Church: Our Stewardship Covenant

By Fr. Timothy Holowatch, St. Innocent Mission, Oneonta NY

What does it mean to “be Church”? Each week we come together bringing with us our burdens and cares, our hopes and dreams, our strengths and gifts. Together we give thanks for our blessings and offer prayer for our needs. Joined together at the Table of the Lord, we share the one Body and one Blood. And then we go out as “Church” and share what we have received with the world.

As disciples in community ... we are committed to sharing the gift of “Church”. Working together may we get “to know Christ better and make Him better known.” God forms a covenant with us, and we with God. God equips us with gifts and talents, and then invites us to use them for the good of all. Stewardship (being the Church) is the recognition of these gifts and acknowledges that all that I am and all that I have is from God. It is the conscious decision to make a return in thanks. Together as partners, we each contribute.

Our Stewardship Covenant

The economic impacts of the pandemic

continue to challenge many people. We as a faith family are not untouched. Parishioners and family members are losing jobs, facing salary reductions, and experiencing home foreclosures. Yet, despite these challenges, parish members continue to express gratitude for what God has given us – through their continued financial donations and generous investments in our parish facilities and ministries.

Yes, the economy has declined, but we remain blessed by the generosity and commitment of our family of faith. As the parish community, we are committed to use our gifts and strengths in four ways:

Worship - to deepen our relationship with Christ and His Church, through prayer, Divine Services and the Sacraments;

Fellowship - to deepen our relationship with our parish family by getting to know each other better;

Spiritual Development - to deepen our spiritual life, our faith, and our knowledge of Jesus Christ through opportunities for learning and spiritual growth;

Ministry and Outreach - to deepen the image of Jesus in us by imitating Him who came “not to serve but

to serve” ... to practice “acts of love.”

The life and work of God in a parish community is never completed or perfect ... nor is the work of the Lord in the life of an individual. While there is a wide spectrum of Orthodox Christians, from those who are not actively engaged in the life of the parish to those who are very engaged, it is the special work of the local parish to invite, encourage, and promote a living Christian faith among all our people.

Our real goal is not only to get people **to come to Church**, but to teach people **how to be Church**. To “be Church” is different — it is **to be in love with God, to be in love with life, to be joyful and to be fulfilled, to know hope in the ups and downs of life, to be content, to be less materialistic and more altruistic.**

These are some of the countless very practical and beneficial results of **BEING CHURCH.**

We appreciate all of the help, financial assistance and prayers offered by the many diocesan parishes and individuals who take our vision and ministry as an important part of growing the Church and **BEING THE CHURCH.**