



SAINT INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH

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October 2016 Newsletter

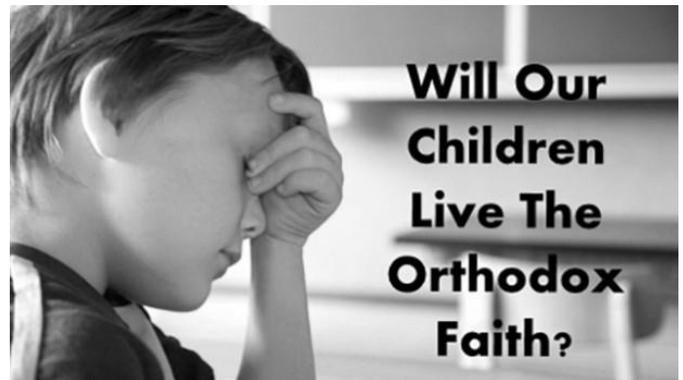
Losing our Religion: On “Retaining” Young People in the Orthodox Church

April 8, 2014 by Seraphim Danckaert

A recent article on the challenge of interfaith marriage in Greek Orthodoxy has been circulating widely on Facebook. One reason for the article’s popularity is its startling claim that 90% of Americans with Greek roots are no longer in communion with the Orthodox Church.

Similarly dismal statistics are likely true for most Orthodox jurisdictions in the United States, but the article in question concerns only the Greek Archdiocese.

The article assumes (but does not show) that the reason for this mass apostasy is two-fold: the inevitable rise of interfaith marriages in America’s multicultural, religiously pluralistic, and secular society; and the Greek Orthodox Church’s failure to respond to the “critical and immediate need for a broad religious outreach; to make room for interfaith families,” and



thereby follow St. Paul’s example in extending “Christianity’s outreach *to all nations*.”

The article is vague when it comes to solutions for the obvious crisis of mass apostasy, so I may have misunderstood its argument, but it *appears* to suggest that if the Church were more sensitive, accepting of religious difference, and in tune with modern sensibilities, she would have a shot at retaining interfaith families in a secular age – and thereby find a means to stem the tide of apostasy.

Such a conclusion is contrary to all evidence I am aware of, both from the sociology of American religion and from the Orthodox Church’s own experience throughout the ages. A few points to consider:

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1. Jesus did not tell the apostles to extend Christianity's *outreach* to all the nations, but to *make disciples* of all nations. The distinction is critical. The Church attracts and "retains" people only when she disciplines them.

2. The article uses various statistics to describe a *problem*, but employs no statistically rigorous studies to find a *solution*. The implied solution is a guess or intuition, and does not necessarily follow from the studies invoked. In fact, as we shall see, the relevant studies that do exist suggest a very different solution.

3. Sociological studies of the ancient world (a highly interpretive but legitimate discipline) are very clear why the early Church grew: **Christians took care of widows, orphans, and the sick and impoverished.** It's that simple, at least on the sociological and statistical plane.

The early Church did not focus on "retaining" her own. On the contrary, she *sacrificed* her own, serving all people in the name of Christ, especially widows, orphans, and the sick and impoverished. Without a similar public witness to Christ expressed through substantial acts of sacrificial mercy, the Church is not being faithful to her own divine identity and calling – and, as long as such is the case, she will struggle to grow in and through the Holy Spirit, ultimately failing miserably to retain even her own.

4. Just as telling as the Church's historical experience are the insights of modern-day sociology of American religion. Rigorous studies on what makes American young people

and emerging adults retain their family's religious traditions do exist; and the studies suggest an entirely different solution than accommodation to the trends of the modern American family.

If we are speaking on the scale of statistical relevance (not just pastoral care in individual cases), the data are clear: patterns of religious conviction and observance are set far before one's 20s or 30s. Simply put, if clergy are trying to play triage nurse at the point of marriage and starting a family, the Church has already lost the war and probably the battle as well (except by the grace of the Holy Spirit, of course!).

Data collected and interpreted by sociologists of religion in a major project called the [National Study of Youth and Religion](#) show that there are three main factors that contribute to a young person retaining their religious tradition into adulthood:

1. The young person's parents practiced the faith **in the home and in daily life**, not just in public or churchly settings.

2. The young person had at least one significant adult mentor or friend, other than parents, who practiced the faith seriously.

3. The young person had at least one significant spiritual experience before the age of 17.

One could therefore say that a person is most likely to retain Christian faith throughout adult life if he or she had three *meaningful and healthy relationships* in their early to mid teenage years: one with faithful Christian parents, one with a faithful Christian mentor outside of the family, and one with God Himself.

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If a young person experiences all three relationships in their childhood and especially in their early teenage years, they are far less likely to drift away from their family's faith tradition as they transition into "emerging adulthood" and beyond. In addition, while all three relationships are important, what the young person **observes in the actions and daily life** of his or her parents is the most decisive element by far.

The practical conclusion is rather straightforward: For most people, and when viewed as a sociological trend, unless there is a specific *adult* in a teenager's life who shows the teenager by example and in the context of a meaningful, long-term relationship how an *adult* incorporates Christian faith *into daily life*, no program, camp, mission trip, youth group, worship style, musical trend, Sunday school, church reform, updated pastoral style, modernization, or even catechetical class will make a statistically significant difference. Further, to retain their faith into adulthood young people need to experience God's grace for themselves, preferably before the latter part of high school.

The most important sociologist of religion to develop these findings is [Christian Smith](#), who holds a chair in sociology of religion and directs a research center at the University of Notre Dame. His work should be required reading for every person serving in the Orthodox Church.

Two of Smith's best books on the topic are *Soul Searching: The Religious And Spiritual Lives Of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005) and *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2009). The findings of the first book have been turned into an accessible film called *Soul Searching: A Movie About Teenagers and God* (2008).

Smith's books are filled with data, carefully footnoted, and eminently scholarly. Other notable scholars have written less

voluminous books, based on the very same findings but geared toward a general audience of clergy, youth pastors, concerned parents, and church volunteers. The best in that genre is Kenda Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

One of the major findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion, a point which Kenda Dean brings out very clearly and in entertaining fashion, is that American teenagers are actually very good at practicing the faith that their parents teach them: not what parents say they believe, but what they actually believe as evidenced by actions.

The result is that most American teenagers and emerging adults, including Christians of *all traditions*, believe in and practice "[Moralistic Therapeutic Deism](#)," not Christianity. Considering this reality, it is hardly surprising that, over time, many emerging adults drift away from their family's Christian roots, choosing to marry outside their church or even Christian faith itself. Yet their doing so is not actually a departure from or a change in their religious convictions: it is merely an alignment of certain external practices (e.g., what they do on Sundays or Easter) with the actual religious beliefs they have held since their teenage years.

As shocking as such a conclusion may seem, here is the most important point:

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Teenagers and emerging adults believe in and practice “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” not because their parents and their local church have failed to teach them otherwise, but precisely because *that is what their parents and their local church are actually teaching them*. As the motto of this website puts it, doctrine matters—and not just the doctrine in a church’s creed, liturgy, bookstore, or pamphlet stand.

The **actual** doctrine of family and local church, as taught to most young people in word and especially deed, ends up driving the next generation from the Church, not because the Church is out of touch with the broader society but because the local church never actually taught and lived by the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the first place.

Just in case it is not already obvious, it is worth noting that the research indicates the problem of apostasy is *universal* across religious traditions in America. It is not a problem of just the Greek Archdiocese or other Orthodox jurisdictions. One thing this reality should tell us is that the problem is not caused merely by confusion over issues such as ethnicity or language. On the contrary, *very Americanized churches*, which use only English in their worship, suffer from the same problem of apostasy. In other words, the issue is much deeper than people want it to be, and it requires repentance and change far greater than switching the language of the liturgy. In fact, there are studies that indicate that most American teenagers (and adults) do not understand the theological or spiritual lessons in hymns or worship services, regardless of language or style. It does not actually do

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anything, in and of itself, to use all English, to update the music, to use contemporary worship strategies, etc.

The fundamental problem is far scarier and far harder to “fix”: the Gospel of Jesus Christ is neither taught nor followed by the vast majority of Christian parents in America. Period. The data are unavoidable. Now, the question arises: Is this fact the parents’ “fault”? On a certain level, yes; but, at the same time, they themselves were neither taught nor disciplined. It therefore falls to the whole Church herself, as the Body of Christ—clergy and laity—to correct this reality through prayer, example, and instruction.

Without seriously grappling with the sociological research that exists on these questions, as well as

the depths of our own Orthodox Christian tradition, which is replete with wisdom on what it takes to make disciples of all nations, we will neither understand the problem of mass apostasy nor find a successful solution to it.

This article is copied in full from:

<http://blogs.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxyandheterodoxy/2014/04/08/losing-our-religion-on-retaining-young-people-in-the-orthodox-church/>

Announcements

- The Parish Council is scheduled to meet on Thursday, October 20th at 6pm.
- We will have a parish cleanup work party on Saturday the 15th at 10am.
- On Sunday October 23rd we will serve our first Baptismal Liturgy.
- Confessions are heard every Saturday from 5-6pm, before Sunday Liturgy if there is a need, and by appointment.

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How to read your Bible Classes

Dr. Gary Cox's four part series on How to read the Bible will finish up on Sunday, October 9th. If you were not able to attend in person the classes have been posted on YouTube, and on our podcast.

2017 Church Pledge

Thank you to those of you who have pledged for our 2017 budget. This year we received 25 pledges from families or individuals. Thank you also, to those of you who give regularly without pledging. It is never too late to pledge if you have not already. The pledge form is in the "donation" section of our website.

November Men's Retreat

We are planning another men's retreat on Saturday November 12th from 10am -5pm at the Dorogy's farm. More information will sent out at the end of the month.

Many Years!

<i>Birthdays</i>	1	Patti Lanier
	6	Carrington Lee
	6	Ella Grace Lee
	11	Linda Tutcher
	14	Victoria Malcoci
	22	Chris Wilcox
	22	Alex Duran
	23	Stacey Dorogy
	25	Deborah Andrews



Sunday, November 13, 2016 Annual Parish Meeting

In Acts 1 after our Lord ascended it is recorded that the Apostles and 120 people gathered in the "upper room." It was in the context of a meeting that God in His mercy and wisdom poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Once a year, every year at St. Innocent Church we gather together in Christ to have our Annual Parish Meeting.

Our Annual Parish Meeting is an opportunity to review the mission of our parish and how we are accomplishing that mission. What is our vision? What are we doing to accomplish the vision that God has given us? The Annual Meeting is also an opportunity to connect with our community as a whole, to hear about the work of the various committees, to give input, and help shape the direction of our parish for the future. The business side of the annual meeting involves voting on various measures that directly affect the life of our community such as electing parish council members and approving next year's parish budget.

As a member of St. Innocent Orthodox Church your attendance is vital to the health and success of our parish in the years to come. Please save the date and make it a point to attend this important community gathering. May God bless us with the same blessing He sent upon His Apostles in the upper room.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
2 9:15 Church school 9:40am Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape 12:30pm Bible Class	3	4 6:30pm Book Club 7pm Bolingbroke Community Club	5 6pm Vigil for St. Innocent	6 9am Divine Liturgy for St. Innocent 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	7	8 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
9 9:15 Church school 9:40am Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape 12:30pm Bible Class	10 Columbus Day	11	12 6pm Daily Vespers	13 8am MCMA 9-1pm CPE 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	14 Kingdom Builders 8-4pm	15 10am Church Cleanup 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
16 9:15 Church school 9:40am Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	17	18	19 6pm Daily Vespers	20 9-1pm CPE 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry 6pm Parish Council	21 Greek Fest	22 Greek Fest 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
23 9:15 Church school 9:20am Hours 10am Baptismal Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	24	25	26 6pm Reader's Vespers	27 9-1pm CPE 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	28	29 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
30 9:15 Church school 9:40am Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	31					

Tentative November 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 6pm Daily Vespers	3 9-1pm CPE 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	4	5 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
6 9:15 Church school 9:20am Hours 10am Baptismal Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	7	8 7pm Bolingbroke Community Club	9 6pm Daily Vespers	10 9-1pm CPE 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	11 Veterans Day	12 10-5pm Men's Retreat 6pm Readers Vespers at Church
13 9:15 Church school 9:40am Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 12pm Annual Parish Meeting	14	15 Nativity Fast Begins	16 6pm Daily Vespers	17 9-1pm CPE 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	18	19 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers Entry of the Theotokos
20 9:15 Church school 9:40am Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape Lenten Class	21 Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple	22	23 6pm Akathist of Thanksgiving	24 Thanksgiving Day	25	26 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
27 9:15 Church school 9:40am Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape Lenten Class	28	29	30 6pm Daily Vespers			