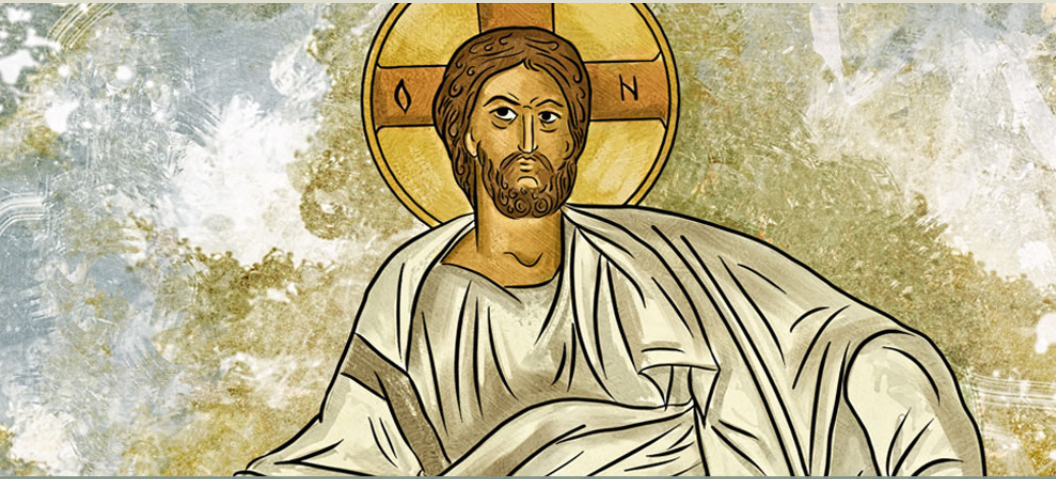


Study Guide



FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church

2021

FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

A Study Guide

Prepared by Chrysostomos H. Gunning

Ecclesiastical Coordinator: Greek Orthodox Church of St. George, Bethesda MD

The purpose of the Orthodox faith and its daily life is to achieve greater intimacy with God. In the words of St. Athanasius of Alexandria, it is “to become by grace what God is by nature.” One of the daunting challenges of living that life in a post-modern world is understanding and addressing the many moral issues and dilemmas that affect us as people of faith moving through often perplexing and worrisome times. The book you are beginning, *For the Life of the World*, is a powerful resource in understanding a number of major moral issues facing the Church today. Moreover, it is enriched by scriptural, patristic, theological, and spiritual references.

The document below is a basic study guide for use in your parish on your spiritual journey, or even for personal reflection, and is designed to encourage careful reading, explanation, dialogue, and an open examination of a number of vital contemporary issues. These issues cry out for the clarity and depth of an Orthodox social ethos in a society that, alarmingly, often seems to be losing its ethical moorings. The text itself is a *living* book that was designed with parish book study groups (for instance, as weekly Lenten discussion), religious education programs, and certainly, individual reading and living in mind. We hope that our parishes will take up this challenge and provide their faithful with the opportunity to plumb the depths of our common moral life, which ultimately reflects the preaching and witness of the Word made flesh – our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be glory unto ages of ages! Amen.

Note: Each chapter in this guide is divided into a series of questions corresponding to the points raised in the text. For ease of use, the locations of the points raised are indicated by their paragraph number, e.g., §4 in the margins of the text (found on-line at <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>) and by their page numbers, e.g., **Pg. 22–24** of the book (published by Holy Cross Orthodox Press).

Suggestion: Some of the members of the commission that drafted *For the Life of the World* appear with other scholars in eight one-hour programs on OCN (<https://myocn.net/for-the-life-of-the-world/>). These programs may be used to supplement parish study or independent reading.

PREFACE (Pg. XIII–XVIII)

1. What was the motivation of the Ecumenical Patriarch in commissioning a group of theological experts to discuss the social theology of the Church?
2. What is the overall context of this text as well as the Church's social theology? (XV)
3. What have been the chief obstacles to the Orthodox Church responding effectively to moral issues? (XVI)
4. What is understood by the phrase "living tradition"? (XVI)
5. What four sources are the foundations for the thinking in the document? (XVIII)

INTRODUCTION (Pg. 1)

1. Why is the starting point "anthropological", i.e. beginning with the nature and destiny of man? (§1–2; Pg. 1 & 2)
2. What part does the love of God play in our identity and how does *theosis* enter into the formation of a social ethos in the Church? (§3; Pg. 3)
3. What is the Orthodox Christian's responsibility to the world in its present condition? (§3–4; Pg. 4–5)
4. What are the two ultimate sources of the Orthodox social ethos? (§5–6; Bottom of Pg.5, all of 6)
5. How do the authors summarize the vocation of the Orthodox Christian in a world so disparate, disconnected, impaired, multiform, and struggling in its values? (§7–8; Pg. 7–8)

CHAPTER 2: THE CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE (Pg. 8)

1. The Church has existed over the centuries in a wide variety of social cultures, religions, and governments. What is the unifying factor that kept the Church united through it all? (§8; Pg. 8–9)
2. Within this pluralistic context, has the Church found it necessary to condemn certain forms of social violation, oppression, and human degradation? (§9; Pg. 9–10)
3. What are the meaning and implication of the following quote: "When the commands of even a legally established political authority contradict our responsibilities as Christians, we must obey God rather than men?" (§9; Pg. 10)
4. In describing the function of the Church within society, why do the authors say: "Even so, the Church remains in some sense always an alien presence within any human order, and recognizes that God's judgment falls upon any political power in some measure." (§9; Pg. 11)

5. Why is it important for the Orthodox Christian community to recognize and support advances in science, technology, social theory, etc.? (§10; Pg. 11–12)
6. What is the danger of *phyletism* which was condemned as heretical by the Council of Constantinople in 1872? What is the most dangerous part of this insidious heresy? (§11; Bottom 12, top 13)
7. The authors make the following point: “It is absolutely forbidden for Christians to make an idol of cultural, national, or ethnic identity. There can be no such thing as “Christian nationalism” or even any form of nationalism tolerable the Christian conscience.” (§11; Pg. 13, mid-page) What do they mean?
8. How does racial bigotry, prejudice, and exclusivism underscore the importance of rejecting divisive nationalisms? (§11; Pg. 14)
9. What is one of the more morally corrosive aspects of modern democratic politics? What are their results, and how ought the Orthodox Christian respond? (§12; Pg. 15–16)
10. Many suggest that a truly democratic society is only possible if religion and religious witness is relegated to the private – disjointed from the public square. What is your reaction to this assertion? (§13; Pg. 16)
11. Why is the separation of state and Church, throne and altar important to the Church’s witness? What are the possible benefits and liabilities to a close Church-state relationship? (§13; Pg. 17)
12. What does the term *symphonia* mean? What is the theory behind it? (§14; Pg. 17–19)

CHAPTER 3: THE COURSE OF HUMAN LIFE (Pg. 19)

1. Regarding the course of human life, what does the use of the word “course” denote? (§15; Pg. 19)
2. What is the proper end (purpose) of every human life? (§15; Pg. 19)
3. In the spectrum of human life, why do children occupy a special place in the thinking and practice of the Church? (§16; Pg. 20–21)
4. How does the Church respond to child abuse and the other injurious behaviors against children? (§16; Pg. 21–22)
5. How does Patriarch Bartholomew describe the deleterious effects of electronic media on children and what spiritual values does the Church maintain that counter these effects? (§17; Pg. 22–23)
6. What does St. John Chrysostom mean when he suggests that parents be “gatekeepers of the senses” for their children? (§17; Pg. 22–23)
7. In the development from childhood to adulthood, what are some of the personal dynamics experienced by individuals as they grow into this new and often confusing phase? (§18; Pg. 23–24)

8. How do the authors deal with the issue of sexuality in human development? What is the Church's posture to individuals with a variety of sexual orientations? (§19; Pg. 24–25)
9. Progressing to adulthood, the authors note that there are three basic “paths” that can be followed – the married life, the monastic life, and the single life. How has the Church dealt with the interplay of these three in its history and of what particular significance is the married state? (§20; Pg. 25–27)
10. How do the authors suggest that the Church deal with so-called “mixed marriages”? What did the Holy and Great Council teach on this matter? (§21; Pg. 28)
11. What is the principal function of the adults in a dysfunctional household? Why is it true to say that divorce is not only a consequence of our brokenness as fallen creatures, it is an expression of it.? (§22; Pg. 29)
12. The Church sees three paths to holiness and closeness to God: the married life, the monastic life, and the life of a single person. How does the Orthodox Church understand the bringing of children into a marriage? What is the role of parenthood in raising children and in facing the potential disappointments and tragic incidents of child rearing? (§23; Pg. 30–31)
13. Though the Church anticipates that all marriages will see the procreation of children, there are situations that prohibit a couple from giving birth. What is the Church's disposition to birth control? to reproductive technologies that assist in conception? to abortion? and to serious medical issues during pregnancy (§24; Pg. 31–32)
14. How does the Orthodox Church regard the practice of abortion and why does it take this position? (§25; Pg. 32–33) Are exceptions possible to the moral prohibition of abortion? (§26; Pg. 33–34)
15. What is the purpose of the monastic path? (§27; Pg. 34–36) For those who don't feel called either to the married or monastic life, the single life can be their way to intimacy with God and closeness to others. What are the gifts that single persons often possess and what can be the primary difficulty in living the single life? (§28; Pg. 36–37)
16. Why does the Church maintain that men and women have full equality and dignity as persons created in the image of God, they have different experiences and orientations, and incarnate human nature in different fashions? The Church rejects any suggestion that one path to holiness surpasses the others in spiritual dignity. How might this stand at odds with some practice in the Church today? (§29; Pg. 37–38)
17. At the opposite end of the life spectrum, the Church's history and practice reveal a particular care for and concern about the elderly. What do the authors suggest is the Church's teaching regarding the elderly and how might it contrast growing contemporary social attitudes and practice? (§30; Pg. 38–39)
18. Lastly, death will come to us all. For many it will come by their own hand or means. How does the Church view suicide and Christian burial in this contemporary time? What are the possible wider consequences in which the taking of one's own life, directly or indirectly, can be viewed? (§31; Pg. 39–41)

CHAPTER 4: POVERTY, WEALTH, AND CIVIL JUSTICE (Pg. 41)

1. When the Lord Jesus emptied Himself and “took the form of a slave,” into what context was He born? To whom did He gravitate and why? (§32; Pg. 41–43)
2. Why is the ministry to the poor and disenfranchised at the very heart of what it means to be “Church”, and what are the consequences of ignoring that ministry? Why was the conversion of the Emperor Constantine a turning point in this outreach effort? (§33; Pg. 43–44)
3. In speaking of the Fathers of the 4th and 5th centuries, what is meant by “life in Christ must entail a militant hostility to the conditions that create poverty.” What does the patristic evidence have to say about the centrality of this effort? (§34; Pg. 44–46)
4. What are the authors saying about the inequality of wealth, the needs of the poor, and the response of the Church regarding economic justice? How would you express the underlying meaning of this section? (§35; Pg. 46–48)
5. Regarding laws designed to “secure the wealth of the wealthy,” what are the consequences of such legislation? Given these laws, what problems do they create for the laborer and for legal immigrants who come to the country to better their lives? (§36; Pg. 48–49) How ought the Church to respond to these people? (§37; Pg. 49–51)
6. The Fathers of the Church make the point that society must supply a “social safety net” for the poor and disenfranchised. What is the Church’s role in reaching out to these people? (§38; Pg. 51–52)
7. How can inordinate debt result in people being pulled into increasing and debilitating poverty? The evil of this kind of indebtedness was central in Christ’s own preaching because it increased the wealth of the few by victimizing the many. (§39; Pg. 52–54)
8. What is the scenario regarding accessible, affordable and quality health care in a society? (§40; Pg. 54–55) What are the moral issues at stake?
9. The authors point out that the poor are almost always the first to suffer as a result of adverse conditions – natural, social, or political. Why is this so? Whether in between developed and underdeveloped countries or within a single country itself, equity and inequality target those who often are functionally unable to fight their victimization. (§41; Pg. 55–57)

CHAPTER 5: WAR, PEACE, AND VIOLENCE (Pg. 58)

1. If the language expressed in God’s creation is one of harmony and peace, what does the presence of so much violence in our world signify? (§42; Pg. 58–59)
2. How do the authors understand the term “violence”? (§43; Pg. 59–60)
3. What is the response of the Orthodox Church to violence in all its forms and are there any exceptions to this response? (§44 and 45; Pg. 60–62)

4. Is there a defined “Just War Theory” in Orthodox teaching and are there any final arbiters of the justness of any war or widespread conflict? (§46; Pg. 62–63)
5. The authors counsel that the Church (Body of Christ) ought to remember that there are spiritual dangers and effects of war and violence. What do they mean? (§47; Pg. 63–64)
6. Why does the Orthodox Church voice its opposition to capital punishment? What is the theological basis for this position? (§48; Pg. 64–67)
7. What does it mean to suggest that the disagreements about the justification of violence represents two differing mindsets? What are they and why is the Christian mindset more faithful to the ministry and preaching of Christ? (§49; Pg. 67–68)

CHAPTER 6: ECUMENICAL RELATIONS AND RELATIONS WITH OTHER FAITHS (Pg. 68)

1. What is the Orthodox Church’s understanding of its own identity? (§50; Pg. 68–69) Why is such an understand of central importance?
2. The authors write: “The Church seeks unity with all Christians out of love and a desire to share the spiritual riches of its tradition with all who seek the face of Christ.” They further point out that “the particular cultural forms of tradition must not be confused with either the true apostolic authority or the sacramental grace with which it has been entrusted.” What does this mean? (§51; Pg. 69–70)
3. The Christian churches do not possess sacramental unity at present – a challenging goal that seems impossible at times. Why is sacramental unity significant? How can the Christian churches as a whole express other forms of unity and oneness of purpose? (§52; Pg. 70–71)
4. The Orthodox Church pays close attention to efforts at unity with the other Christian churches that originated directly from the ancient Apostolic Church – with particular attention to some shared characteristics. What are these and why do they assume such a primary purpose in the Orthodox Church’s ecumenical efforts? (§53-54; Pg. 71–72) Of what use is dialogue in these efforts at unity? (§53; Pg. 72)
5. What is the theological justification for the Orthodox Church’s outreach to and dialogue with other Christian churches and with non-Christian religions? (§55; Pg. 73–74)
6. Regarding particular non-Christian faith dialogues with Orthodoxy, of note is both Islam and Judaism which, with the Christian confession, are “peoples of the book”, part of the Abrahamic traditions. What are some common, shared values of the Orthodox Church and Islam? What are some major differences? (Pg. 74–75) How is the Church’s situation with Judaism different to that of Islam? (§56–57; Pg. 75–77)
7. Why does it make sense for the Orthodox Church to be aware of and attentive to the insights and spiritual landscapes of non-Orthodox faiths – particularly those not part of the Ancient Christian Church tradition? (§58–61; Pg. 77–79)

CHAPTER 7: ORTHODOXY AND HUMAN RIGHTS (Pg. 79)

1. The authors make the point that our modern-day concepts of human rights, its instruments of expression, and its general foundations historically arose from within the Christian tradition – within the context of the Christian faith as it emerges from the pages of the Gospels. What is the function of human rights as we know them? (§61; Pg. 79–81)
2. What is the Orthodox theological foundation for human rights, making them more compelling than mere legal contracts or theories between people and their societal and political structures? Why is the notion of human freedom important to carefully understand in this discussion? (§62; Pg. 81–82)
3. What is the philosophical principle undergirding the priority of human rights? (Pg. 82) The authors tells us that the language of human rights within a society runs parallel to the formation of the Christian conscience and therefore serve a protective function for those who enjoy those rights. What are some of the rights protected by this guarantee? (§63; Pg. 82–84)
4. Why is the freedom of religion and the formation of conscience so critical in the effort to protect our human rights? (§64; Pg. 84–85)
5. How does the issue of slavery illustrate the necessity for defensible human rights and the affirmation of the spiritual and moral worth of every human person? What do the Fathers instruct those of the Christian faith about the moral evils of slavery? (§65; Pg. 85–88)
6. Hospitality and the protection of strangers in need is a constant theme in the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament and stretches directly to the Age of the Apostles. A compendium of citations from the Old Testament illustrates this fundamental priority of faith in the God of Abraham and Jesus. (Pg. 88) How does this ancient moral imperative translate to today’s global issue of immigration, refugees, and other “strangers”? (§66; Pg. 88–89)
7. How does the Orthodox Church understand the efforts to welcome the strangers, the disenfranchised, and others in dire need? (§67; Pg. 89–90)
8. The authors conclude this chapter by describing the contemporary situation regarding the influx of strangers from country to country around the world. What is the feeling created by their description? (§67; Pg. 90–91)

CHAPTER 8: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE NATURAL WORLD (Pg. 91)

1. The chapter begins with a sobering truth: the pace of the development of science and technology today has left human persons unprepared. It is, figuratively speaking, traumatic in many ways. In such an atmosphere, what ought to be the response of the Orthodox Christian individual and of the Church as a whole? (§68; Pg. 91–93)
2. No area has seen this rapid change and development of technology more than the medical sciences. The connection between these medical advancements and the critical moral assessment

and evaluation of those methods is important to the physical and spiritual welfare of human persons created by God. How do the authors deal with this complex issue? (§69; Pg. 93–95)

3. Along with the rapid growth of medical technologies is the explosion of new forms of global communication, data gathering, the internet, and message proliferation. Each has its strengths, and each has its potential liabilities – some quite dangerous. How do the authors assess this explosive and often ignored threat of unbridled virtual technology? (§70; Pg. 95–96)
4. One of the areas where the Orthodox Church can show itself directly engaged in this technological revolution is to foster and teach the positive relation between science and religious faith. The Church needs to remember that “The desire for scientific knowledge flows from the same wellspring as faith’s longing to enter ever more deeply into the mystery of God.” (§71; Pg. 97–98)
5. How can the Church learn from scientific developments and in what pastoral areas might science inform and contribute to the life of the believers? (§72; Pg. 98–99)
6. All of creation is a sacrament of the presence of its Creator. The Church is summoned to care for creation as it expresses the love of God and His continuing creative work. How did the de facto separation of the human person from the natural world (cosmos) contribute to its wholesale decline and degradation? (§73; Pg. 99–101)
7. The authors suggest that what is needed to transfigure creation (our natural world) from its decline to a renewed sense of God’s presence and holiness within it, is an “ascetic ethos.” How would such an ethos make demands of us and our daily behavior? (§74; Pg. 101–102)
8. How did the ancestral sin infect the great gift of our natural world with all its beauty and power? Is there a connection between the brokenness caused by human sin and the state of the cosmos itself? (§75; Pg. 102–103)
9. The Orthodox Church professes belief in the unified integrity between humans, as stewards of creation, and the natural world as expressive of God’s image and presence. What can believers do to guard this holy integrity, this cosmic oneness of all elements of creation? (§76-77; Pg.103–105)
10. How do the lives of the Orthodox saints reflect this intense caring for God’s creation? (§78; Pg.105–106)

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION (Pg. 106)

1. The knowledge of the Orthodox Church’s social ethos is not implemented by simply applying certain ethical prescriptions. Beyond these, the Church’s witness to its values and moral principles is fundamentally sacramental (symbolic of God’s presence in the fabric of humanity) and eschatological (witnessing the connection between creation in this world and the angelic Kingdom to come.) What does this mean for the believer? (§79; Pg. 106–108)
2. The authors tell us that in this effort to renew and define its social moral teaching, the Church exercises a “prophetic” role in the society in which it lives and functions. Such a role includes the robust witness of the communities of faith in the formation of common values – this despite

subtle and overt efforts to sanitize religious witness out of the social compact. What are the implications of such an approach? (§80; Pg. 108–110)

3. How do the authors finally sum up the challenging effort to transfigure the world in light of the Gospel mandates and the enduring words of the Lord Jesus? (§81; Pg. 111–112)