

GROWING IN ZEAL

In A Pluralistic Society

Or

How To Make Do With *Tourloú-Tourloú*

by

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Growing in zeal and love for God in a pluralistic society is a real challenge. How can we grow in zeal for our Orthodox Christian faith and, simultaneously, love our neighbor — especially when our neighbor is a jihadist Muslim, or fanatical Hindu, or a liberal Protestant, or a die-hard Roman Catholic, or a militant atheist? We can't keep moving to a different neighborhood until we finally find a neighbor to our liking. Nor can we ask our neighbor to please move someplace else.

Of their own free will, our ancestors chose to come to the New World, this great mixing-pot of the world's peoples.

So, here we — their children — are, scrambling to survive and thrive as Orthodox Christians in an environment that may be described as "the great blender," or "the assimilator," or "the homogenizer." Whites, blacks, browns, reds, yellows, and every other race in between. As the Ancient Greeks would say, we are *Panspermía*. In Turkish, the appropriate term is *tourloú-tourloú*, a tasty dish of mixed vegetables. That's us.

Now, to return to the original question: How do we grow in zeal and love for our holy Orthodox Christian faith in a pluralistic society?

The same way we grow in zeal and love for God in any society!

If we are truly growing in our faith, we will be growing simultaneously in humility and self-reproach. This is what we see in our Orthodox Christian saints. The closer they drew to God, the more they saw their own flaws. And the more they saw their own flaws, the less they saw the human flaws of others.

Here, to be sure, we must be sure to distinguish the human flaws of others from the erroneous beliefs they may have.

That is to say, we must be careful to hate the sin, but to love the sinner; to hate the erroneous teaching, but to love the one who, for one reason or another, espouses the wrong teaching. This is what Saint John Chrysostom says about this:

I do not persecute the heretic bodily, but I wage war against him with words — and not even against the heretic, but only against his heresy: I do not disdain the man; it is the error I hate, and I seek to pull him out of it...I am accustomed to being persecuted, not to persecute others...Thus did Christ triumph; He did not crucify, but rather it was He that was crucified. He did not smite others, but was Himself smitten. [PG 50, 701]

The Roman Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas, declared: "One cannot make a distinction between the heretic and his heresy." By these words, he provided a theological justification for the Holy Inquisition and "the extermination of dissidents."

At first sight, his statement does seem to make sense. Indeed, how can you have a heresy when there is no heretic to pronounce it? Likewise, how can someone be a heretic unless he espouses and propagates a heresy?

From an Orthodox Christian point of view, however, Aquinas' declaration is blasphemous. The heretic, no matter how rabid, or fanatical, or obstinate he may be, is nevertheless a creature of God. He is fashioned in the image of his Creator, and therefore endowed with free will. That is to say, he can always repent, even at the last moment.

Heresy and sin, on the other hand, are purely and simply inventions of the devil.

The Church Fathers teach us that we must always be careful to distinguish between the works of God and the works of Satan, between the works of light and the works of darkness. The first we must love, the second we must hate. The first we must espouse, the second we must emphatically reject.

To put it another way, we must love our Muslim neighbor, but hate the teachings of falsehood and violence that Islam endorses. We must love our Roman Catholic and Protestant friends, but reject the false teachings of the Papacy and Protestantism.

You can love the sick person while hating the sickness. In fact, you hate the sickness because of the harm it does to someone you love.

Thanks to its "theologians," the West did not make this distinction. But we Orthodox Christians must be careful to avoid this pitfall.

If we love our neighbor with all his human flaws, we may be more likely to draw him away gently from his erroneous beliefs. As the saying goes, "You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

A simple image may help us remember the rules for growing in zeal while living in a pluralistic environment:

If you sit in the dark corner of some room, you may fool yourself into thinking that you are the most handsome man in the world, or that you are a stunning beauty queen, a real man-killer. However, if you begin to draw closer to the light that is in the opposite corner of the room, you will begin to see that there are flaws in your alleged beauty. You will see the pimple on the end of your nose. You will see that you are cross-eyed. You will see that your one eyelid is drooping, or that your teeth are not all aligned, or that your ears look like the wings of a jumbo-jet. (Or, it becomes apparent that you have an unpleasant disposition.) The truth becomes painfully evident.

In like manner, the closer you draw to Christ the Light, the more you will see your own failings, and condemn yourself *and not others*. That, in turn, will help you accept and love others, and will more surely draw the others to the knowledge of our Faith and to the Light, Christ, the Saviour of the world.