THE SPIRIT OF ANTIOCH

BY ARCHPRIEST RICHARD BALLEW

IN THE SUMMER OF 1985, I experienced what I like to call "the Spirit of Antioch" for the first time. Fr. Jon Braun, Fr. Peter Gillquist and I had the honor of meeting His Beatitude, IGNATIUS IV, His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP, and other clergy from the Archdiocese at a private gathering in Los Angeles.

Both hierarchs impressed us with their spirit of a shepherd caring for their flock. In addition, we were greatly encouraged by their willingness — indeed eagerness — to receive new converts and for their vision for Orthodox outreach to North America.

Now that I have been Orthodox for ten years (1987), I believe these qualities are historically the spirit of Antioch from the New Testament days until now. Furthermore, I believe this spirit of Antioch is precisely what North America needs.

In several important respects the spirit of Antioch stands in marked contrast to the spirit of North America. However, this contrast is not meant by me to be **adversarial** in nature. Far from it. Rather, it is **transformational.**

Personally, I care about our country and am distressed at the direction it has taken, especially in the last thirty or forty years. It is what some call "post-Christian." But then, the question arises: Was it ever truly Christian in the first place? Not if **Christian** equals **Orthodox,** which it certainly does in my view.

Therefore, if this be the case, then the good news is, North America is **not** in a post-Christian condition. Rather, it is presently caught, I believe, in a no-man's land between what it used to be and what it is trying to become. What it used to be was a Protestant nation in which the Reformation experiment has failed morally, philosophically and ethically. Now it is trying to become something else. Just what that something else will be remains to be seen. I believe that Orthodoxy, with its spirit of Antioch, has a golden opportunity to make North America a truly Orthodox continent. Or to put it in another way, a truly Christian continent.

What exactly, then, is the spirit of Antioch?

1. The Spirit of Antioch is **trans-ethnic,** whereas the spirit of North America is **multi-ethnic.**

By trans-ethnic I mean the ability to rise above ethnicity and bring various racial groups together in a genuine unity without destroying the diversity. Also, by multi-ethnic I mean the existence of many diverse races and cultures existing in one nation but polarized into both diversity and disunity.

The ancient city of Antioch was a crossroads of many diverse races and cultures. Besides the native Syrians, there were significant Jewish, Roman and Greek communities. Nevertheless, the Church of Antioch was able to unite these people together within the bonds of Christ. Why? Because, early on, Antioch experienced the reality of what St. Paul said in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This spirit is present to this day in the Antiochian Archdiocese. Consider the clergy: besides our brethren with ethnic roots in the Middle East, many have ethnic roots in Western Europe. Why, we have clergy who are Jewish, Black and Hispanic — and may God send us many more.

However, the many and diverse races in North America are not only polarized, but tragically becoming more so as time passes. Racial hatred seems to increase in spite of civil rights laws passed in recent years. Gangs continue to spread, often based on ethnic identity. We have countless unsolved cases of arson directed at black churches. Furthermore, contrary to St. Paul's exhortation, we are also seeing an increasing polarization between male and female in North America.

But Antioch's spirit has the power to transform these polarities between the races and between men and women into a genuine unity. Why? Because Antioch is more than one race or ethnicity! It is **trans-ethnic!**

By establishing hundreds and even thousands of churches with the spirit of Antioch, in which all races can be united together in the oneness of Christ, Jew and Gentile, black and white, men and women, can live in peace with one another! Thus, the trans-ethnic spirit of Antioch can, I believe, transform and heal the multi-ethnic spirit of post-Reformational America into an Orthodox Christian America!

2. Antioch's spirit is **Christian,** whereas the spirit of North America is Christian in name only.

The Bible says, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Therefore, the name **Christian** and the name **Antioch** are historically connected. The Church of Antioch carries in its very spirit the name **Christian.** St. Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch, writes in his letter to the Romans: "Only pray that I may have power, both within and without, so that I may not only be called a Christian but be found to be one. For if I am found to be one, I can also be called one, and then can be faithful when I disappear from this world (3:2).

Then again, in his letter to the Magnesians, St. Ignatius says: "It is fitting, then, not just to be called Christians but to be such ..." (4:1).

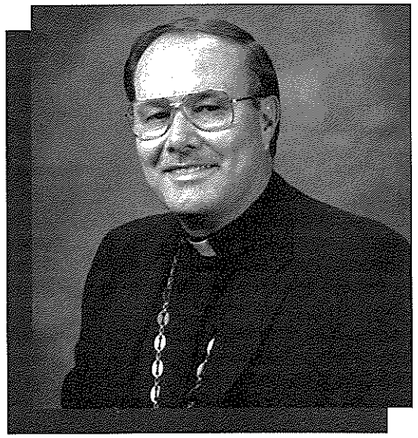
The name **Christian** is to be experienced as reality, and that is what the spirit of Antioch is.

North America, on the other hand, is and has been Christian **in name only.** The U.S. Senate opens its deliberations with prayer, and then proceeds to pass laws which kill over a million unborn babies each year. The vast majority of Americans and Canadians profess to believe in God, yet rarely go to Church. Unbelievers call this hypocrisy. North America is nominal. Why? Because North America has not yet assimilated into itself the Christian spirit of Antioch. This spirit needs to interpenetrate all the present day churches and the nation itself. Can this happen? Most assuredly! Is it time for it to happen? I believe so!

3. The spirit of Antioch is the spirit of **Peter and Paul,** whereas the spirit of America is the spirit of **Peter vs. Paul.**

Peter was the first bishop of Antioch, and Paul was Antioch's first missionary. The Church of Antioch is built on the foundation of these two apostles. Both were in total harmony with one another, with Peter being an apostle especially to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:9). And in Antioch both the Jewish and the Gentile Christians were united in peace within the Church because the same was true of Peter and Paul. Therefore, the spirit of Antioch and that of Peter and Paul is synonymous; it is one and the same spirit, the spirit of unity. It unites whatever it touches.

However, early in history, Peter and Paul, so to speak, found themselves at odds with each other. It



Father Richard Ballew

was no longer Peter and Paul but Peter vs. Paul. How so? Peter became a Roman Catholic, and Paul a Protestant!

I grew up in the midst of this polarity. After all, Peter was the first Roman bishop, too, and Paul "withstood him to his face" (Galatians 2:11) over the issue of legalism. Paul was my hero for doing this! In this I saw Paul facing off with the future bishop of Rome. Why, there was a time when I and many others didn't even believe that Roman Catholics were Christians. Remember the polarity that was seen when John F. Kennedy was trying to become president of the United States in 1960? A great furor broke out! How could America trust a Roman Catholic president? You still, on occasion, hear the Pope declared "the antichrist."

What can solve this polarity and make Peter and Paul one again in America? I believe it's the spirit of Antioch. Why? Because in Antioch Peter and Paul are one in Christ. This oneness can transform the country and make it Orthodox! The majority of North Americans need to rediscover that Peter and Paul truly are one spirit in Christ. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants could be united together in this spirit within Orthodox Christianity.

4. In the spirit of Antioch, **Judaism is based on Christianity,** whereas in North America, **Christianity is based on Judaism.**

Both the apostles Peter and Paul taught that Judaism is based on Christianity. For example, St. Paul says, "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the Gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Galatians 3:7-9). In his letter to the Magnesians, St. Ignatius says, "For Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism, but Judaism on Christianity, in which 'every language' believing in God was 'brought together' (10:3).

Today in our country one often hears the statement that Christianity is based on "the Judeo-

Christian ethic." Few things in my view could be further from the truth. For Christianity is based on our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the Jehovah or Yahweh of the Old Testament who appeared to the Prophets. He is the Jehovah God who in becoming Man took the name Jesus Christ. This is why both Old and New Testaments are Christocentric to the core! And this is why Judaism is based on Christianity. This is the ancient and traditional Christianity. Therefore, our fellow North Americans need to understand traditional Christianity, and the spirit of Antioch is based in this holy tradition.

5. The spirit of Antioch is that of the **one true faith,** whereas the spirit of America is of **many diverse faiths.**

The Bible says that when Paul had found Barnabas at Tarsus, he brought him to Antioch, and "that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

What did Paul and Barnabas teach them? The one true faith that St. Paul said is the following: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified ... I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:16, 20).

This statement leaves no room for many diverse faiths. There is only one Jesus Christ, and one is justified by faith in Him. But the question is, "Who is this one Jesus Christ?" For many Jesus Christs have been and are being preached today, and every religion has an opinion about Jesus Christ. For us Orthodox, He is the one taught to us by Peter and Paul and the other great apostles of Christ. He is the one whose flesh and blood justifies us in the eucharistic cup of salvation. For in this Eucharist, we through faith and love in Him, are crucified and live again and again through Him. It is to this cup of salvation we seek to bring all peoples.

Yet many diverse faiths exist in North America, and one is encouraged to choose the faith of his choice. However, a great many North Americans are ignorant of what might be called **the unknown choice.** Just as when St. Paul said to the Athenians, "For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD' ... and Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23), similarly, Americans and Canadians need to know about the unknown choice: Orthodox Christianity. There is a Church where the Gospel is believed and preached in its fullness, where the faithful pray to God in spirit and in truth, where one can partake of the life-giving flesh of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ from her altar. Let us choose that very altar! And in that choice find everlasting life!

Many false teachers are leading people away from this cup of salvation either knowingly or unknowingly. The same was true in St. Ignatius' day, as he indicated in his letter to the Church at Smyrna in Asia: "They abstain from Eucharist and prayer because they do not acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, which the Father raised up by his goodness. Those who deny God's gifts are dying in their squabbles ..." (7:1).

Today many "are dying in their squabbles" about Jesus Christ because they are choosing altars that cannot give them the life-giving flesh of Christ — the same flesh that Peter, Paul and Ignatius partook of. This is the same life-giving flesh of Christ that St. Ignatius also described to the Ephesians as being "one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote which results not in dying but in living forever in Jesus Christ" (20:2). How beautiful this is: the flesh and blood of Christ described as "the medicine of immortality"! North Americans need to take their medicine, just as the good doctor says! And these good doctors — Peter, Paul, Ignatius and all those in their spirit, the spirit of Antioch — can transform many diverse faiths into the one true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ!

6. The spirit of Antioch is the spirit of **interdependence,** whereas the spirit of America is the spirit of **independence.**

This spirit of interdependence in Antioch is well addressed by St. Ignatius. In his letter to the Ephesians, he says: "Therefore it is fitting for you to run your race together with the bishop's purpose — as you do. For your presbytery — worthy of fame, worthy of God — is attuned to the bishop like strings to a lyre. Therefore by your unity and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. Each of you must be part of this chorus so that, being harmonious in unity, receiving God's pitch in unison, you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, so that He may both hear you and recognize you, through what you do well, as members of His Son. Therefore it is profitable for you to be in blameless unison, so that you may always participate in God" (4:1-2).

Furthermore, in his letter to the Philadelphians, he also emphasized a spirit of interdependence when he says: "Be eager, therefore, to use one Eucharist — for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup for union with His blood, one sanctuary, as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons my fellow slaves — so that, whatever you do, you do it in relation to God" (4:1).

From St. Ignatius, it should be abundantly obvious that the spirit of Antioch is a spirit of interdependence existing between bishops, priests, deacons and laity. Where such an interdependence of unity exists, there is one powerful Eucharist giving immortal life to all who approach in the fear of God and with faith and love. This is the true basis of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" described in the Declaration of Independence, drafted by the fathers of our country, which alludes us. It is the true basis of life that can transform the spirit of independence into the spirit of interdependence within the Body of Christ. And this Body is just what North America needs most!

7. And finally, the spirit of Antioch is the spirit of **martyrdom,** whereas the spirit of North America is the spirit of **self-preservation.**

By the spirit of martyrdom is meant dying for Jesus Christ. That is what faith in Christ is: it is dying for Christ. This may relate to physical death or to a daily dying for Christ as one does His will. The spirit of self-preservation is either preserving one's own individual life and interests, no matter what, or else the life and interests of someone else or one's country. It may even involve the giving of one's life to this end.

St. Ignatius, as exemplifying the spirit of Antioch, the spirit of martyrdom, gave up his physical life for Christ. Listen to the description of his spirit in his letter to the Romans:

"I wish you not to please men but to please God, as you do please Him. For I shall never have such an opportunity for attaining to God, nor do you, if you keep silent, have any better deed for which to be credited. For if you are silent about me, I am a word of God; but if you love my flesh, I shall again be only a voice. Grant me nothing more than to be poured forth to God while an altar is still ready, so that forming a chorus in love you may sing to the Father in Christ Jesus that God has judged the bishop of Syria worthy to be found at the west after sending him across from the east. It is good to set from the world toward God so that I may rise toward him.

"I am writing to all the churches and I command all men: I am voluntarily dying for God if you do not hinder me. I exhort you not to be an 'inopportune favor' to me. (Let me be food for the wild beasts, through which I can attain to God. I am the wheat of God and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts so that I may be found the pure bread of Christ.) Instead, entice the wild beasts so that they may become my tomb and leave no trace of my body, so that when I fall asleep I may not burden anyone. Then I shall be truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will not see my body at all.

"Pray to Christ for me that through these means I may be found a sacrifice to God. I do not give you orders as Peter and Paul did. They were apostles; I am a convict. They were free; I am still a slave. But if I suffer I shall be Christ's freedman and in him I shall rise free" (2:1-2; 4:1-3).

The spirit of martyrdom, as shown in St. Ignatius, can transform the spirit of self-preservation into the spirit of dying for Christ. Instead of living or dying in order to preserve oneself, someone else, or one's country, no matter what, one who has the spirit of martyrdom can die for Christ, whether in life or in death, no matter what! Such is the spirit of martyrdom, the spirit of Antioch. It is the very spirit that can transform North America at this crossroad of history in which it finds itself. It can take our country from no-man's land to the promised land of Orthodoxy, where there is true peace and stability.

The spirit of Antioch has the golden opportunity of taking North America from what it has been for the past two hundred years to what it can possibly become as Orthodox nations! May this be the will of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to whom be glory, now and always, and unto ages of ages. Amen!

Father J. Richard Ballew is pastor of St. Athanasius Antiochian Orthodox Church in Sacramento, California.

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Parishes of Colorado welcome you to the St. John Chrysostom Conference, Sept. 29-October 1, 1997.

His Grace, Bishop Basil &

the clergy brotherhood of the South West Region, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, with the blessing of Metropolitan Philip, invite you to the *St. John Chrysostom Homiletics Conference* September 29-October 1, 1997 (Monday-Wednesday) at the beautiful 750 acre Glen Eyrie Center, West of Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Dr. John Boojamra will deliver a condensed version of his Seminary Homiletics Course. Time for worship, reflection, and fellowship is planned. This Conference is open to all Regions and is Pan-Orthodox.

Two nights' lodging with meals, including Monday Supper, Tuesday Breakfast, Lunch, and Supper, and Wednesday Breakfast and Lunch with all facilities, tuition, and fees, will cost $190 per person when sharing a suite with one another or $240 for a private suite (for registrations received by August 15). All suites include private bath and two queen size beds. Parking is abundant and Airfares are very reasonable into the Colorado Springs Airport on Western Pacific, United, Continental, etc. There is a shuttle for $10 from the Airport to Glen Eyrie.

For information and reservations write or call 303-722-0707:

St. John Chrysostom Conference • 1405 So. Vine St. •