

A Rap Session with a Metropolitan
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Editor's Note: Metropolitan Philip Saliba is President of the Orthodox Christian Education Commission which published *Upbeat* and has often "rapped" with young people. Here are the highlights of one session in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

David: Why did you decide to be a priest?

Metropolitan: It would be easier to tell you why I became Metropolitan since I had nothing to do with it. But my priesthood was tempered by time. I was brought up in a religious home. My mother and father always lived in the life of the Church and there was never any discussion of whether I wanted to go or not. We just went....When I was nine or ten, I was most interested in music and it was exactly that interest in music which attracted me to the Church. You should be able to see two things from my answer to this question: the first is that the way to be Orthodox is not to simply attend Liturgy on Sunday, or to recite the Creed. To be an Orthodox Christian means to LIVE THE LIFE of the Church, to grow into and with the Church. This is why the Church in a way, lives in a particular cycle; it fasts and feasts. It was that life which nurtured my life and led to my priesthood.

The second point is an obvious one: music, like art, in fact, like any of the greatest qualities with which we must use our senses, lies close to the Orthodox experience. We use all that we are capable of, body and soul, the WHOLE MAN, to experience God. That's why I say that music was a powerful force in my entrance into the life of the priesthood.

Norma: What position does the Church take in regard to miracles such as faith healing today?

Metropolitan: The Church believes that miracles are still possible...and why not? Is God different today than He was in the New Testament days? The reason that we have difficulty in understanding miracles is because we, as humans, are subjected to the physical laws of time and space. But God is not subjected to those laws; He transcends such physical laws. What we believe to be "super—natural" can easily and understandably be "natural" to God.

Laila: The future of our Church depends on the caliber of the people in the priesthood, yet not many young men enter the priesthood. What can you say as a word of encouragement?

Metropolitan: ...Part of the problem is that parents don't often encourage their children to be priest. Parents often direct their children to jobs they feel are more materially rewarding. Sometimes they even try to stop them from entering the priesthood.

Robin: What steps are being taken toward Orthodox unity in America?

Metropolitan: As you know, this is a very sensitive and yet important question today. The Russian Metropolia was the first to come to this country and on the basis has the canonical right, according to a certain tradition, to receive Autocephaly, which means “self-heading.” It remains difficult, however, because the various national jurisdictions have existed in this country for so many years. This has never been the case in the history of the Church. That is why the conditions at this moment remain confused and why all the jurisdictions did not become part of it “overnight,” as would have been the case in another time in the history of Orthodoxy. It will take time, but our hope is that in the near future we will have even more than this legal autocephaly in which we rejoice today; we hope that we will have the genuine autocephalous “feeling,” that is, that we will really be one. It is a situation which will take a great amount of humility on the part of the new autocephalic Church as well as those not yet merged with it. Of course, we hope in the near future that other nationalities will join with this American Orthodox movement, and we should do all that is possible to accomplish that end. As long as we have many national jurisdictions, the dream will never be realized.

There has been much opposition, on principle and methods. There remains this controversy over jurisdiction. Some say whoever brought the Faith to an area first, has jurisdiction. Where do I stand? I don’t care who brought Orthodoxy here...the point is simply this: we want the Church governed from here, where we are. That’s what’s important. It’s a historical process to move to such self-government.

Nat: Will Orthodox unity mean the end of national churches?

Metropolitan: Yes...The Church is above nationalism. Nationalism and Christianity are opposed...I don’t see how the Church and nationalism can survive together. The Church encompasses all men, not just one country...

...And let me just conclude with this: I see young people living in a very exciting age for Orthodoxy in this country, and indeed, in the world at large. You must be patient, and yet persistent in your efforts. Above all, you must dedicate your life to Christ and the Orthodox style of life.

Sue: There is a lot of talk about the “New Morality” and about anti-God feelings. What is the Church’s role in trying to combat this and help our young people?

Metropolitan: We try to talk with our young people, to find what they think...I don’t find them anti-Christ or anti-God. We just hear too much about youth delinquency and not enough about youth decency. Virtue is silent but wrong-doing cries out...Restlessness is not new. Egyptian priests were complaining about it 3,000 years ago...But I have faith in young people...What is the “New Morality?” I don’t know. There is only one morality and everything else is pseudo-morality...You see, for the Christian it must be *Christ* who is the criterion. The sociologist tells us that it is society which determines the “rightness” or “wrongness” of any act. He says, “It is right if the society, or the world in which you live, says it is so. But St. Paul, specifically warns us of this when he tells us “not to let the world shape you into its own mold.” The whole of Hitler’s Nazi society, or of the Anti-Christ communists were wrong. How can we say

that one who lived in that society should allow it to shape his morality. The Truth must be the criterion, and for the Christian Christ is that Truth. The martyrs died for that Truth, and, in fact, IN OPPOSITION to the Anti-Christ society which attacked them....

In general, I don't think young people want us to change the essence of religion but to change our expression. And they seem right sometimes....We *are* immoral when we preach peace and tell others to kill....