LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Dr. Ann Bezzerides, OVM Director

Christ’s command to love our enemies can really shake us to our bones, if we spend time thinking about it. And by “us” I really do mean the “us” of the CrossRoad family—we who love Church, love the CrossRoad community, love reconnecting with other alumni, love our chanting and our komboskini. Orthodox life can so easily become the pursuit of “spirituality” as a thing in itself, where we measure ourselves (and others) in how many liturgical services we attend or how closely we follow the fast.

And then we hear this: LOVE. YOUR. ENEMIES. And it should shake us to our bones. Love of enemies requires us to go beyond our own little spiritual world. It requires that we think of our Orthodox life in Christ—the chanting, the Jesus Prayer, the community of fellow believers—as instruction in becoming people of Christ-like love. The traditions are beautiful when they embolden us to know the transformative power of His love, so that we begin to discern how we may love the people whom we would otherwise hate.

Shortly before Jesus tells the crowds to love enemies, he warns them: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). The Pharisees of the Bible did all the “churchy” things they were supposed to. And something was off. Jesus exhorts us to live life in a way that busts down the walls of our spiritual, protected world, and it’s radical. Who are our enemies? How do we love them? These, CrossRoad family, are questions worthy of our best efforts.

In this issue, alumni and staff wrestle with the questions around loving enemies and provide helpful insights from Orthodox Christian perspectives. Reading the articles challenges us to think deeply about perceptions and responses to our own enemies in our homes, communities, regions, and world. Themes and ideas clearly repeat themselves through these pages, but it is refreshing to look at the issues through so many different sets of eyes. We pray that reading this issue will challenge you to more thoughtfully and intentionally follow Christ’s clear exhortation to his followers to love and pray for our enemies. Let’s be known by our love.
In order to ask ourselves what it means to love our enemies, we have to ask first what it means to consider someone an enemy. How do we develop enemies and what is a true enemy? Our instinct may be to answer these questions in light of the other person, enumerating the instances in which they have wronged or betrayed us, highlighting their faults and flaws, or expressing the pain they inflicted upon us. However, natural these responses may be, I would suggest rather that we first look inward to ask what has occurred within ourselves. What has led that person to become more than just a person who has hurt us, to change into someone we choose to identify as an enemy, a person whom we associate solely with the feelings of pain, insecurity, or injustice they have caused us? What has developed in our hearts that prevents us from seeing God in them and loving them as our neighbor, as Christ commanded?

The word “enemy” holds within it a complex and powerful host of emotions, and the notion of loving our enemies is a concept I have had to grapple with and confront in my own life. I have had to ask myself why I have allowed someone to become an enemy and unworthy of my forgiveness, compassion, and love. When did I stop seeing Christ in my neighbor and begin viewing them as anything less than that? Perhaps that moment was when I stopped seeing Christ in myself, when I did not allow His love to guide my heart, soul, and mind, and I lost my sense of empathy and understanding. Love of enemies is undoubtedly one of the most challenging commandments Christ has offered us, but I believe it is not supposed to be easy. To love someone without hesitation, limits, or question who has made us suffer, feel worthless or insignificant is an ongoing challenge.

The question then begs itself, what does this love of enemies look like? Does loving enemies mean we have to be friends with our enemies? To begin answering these questions we must distinguish between two types of love: agape and philia. There is a reason Scripture presents us with different words for love. Philia is the type of love you share with a friend or family member—an earthly love with someone whom you hold dear to your heart. Agape, or God’s love, is the type of love that is unconditional and self-sacrificial. It is the love that Jesus Christ offered us when He sacrificed His life for our sins. So great and divine is this type of love that it is almost inexplicable. Agape is what Christ calls us to offer to our enemies because it is the type of love He made a reality when He Himself loved and prayed for those that ridiculed, persecuted, and crucified Him.

With Christ as our example, it is easy to recognize that the commandment to love our enemies is not “Be best friends with your enemies” or “Like your enemies,” but rather a commandment to love them as God loves them. Love them in such a way that we are able to choose to see every human being on this earth as our neighbor and deserving of the type of love that Christ offers unconditionally. We can achieve this love when we recognize that the only enemy we have is the one we don’t let into our heart.

Perhaps, then, we could say that the equation is as simple as something a wise woman once told me, “love (agape) + enemy = neighbor.”
FORGIVE THEM

Lauren Weita, June ’12

When I contemplate what it means to love my enemies, I always go back to the cross. Jesus, the ultimate example of humility. Any Orthodox Christian who has completed a Paschal cycle will know the scene very well. Christ was tortured, beaten, and had His body broken. Hung on a cross with nails. Betrayed by those closest to Him. Knowing that His dearly beloved mother was watching this unfold.

How does Christ respond? With hatred? With malice? No. Christ transcends His wretched circumstance. He prays “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34) He bears no ill will against those who murdered him. He goes one step further and asks the Father to forgive them this sin. Wow. What a picture of compassion.

During Christ’s sermon on the mount He entreats us, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.” Christ is giving us a formula to follow. Love, do good, bless, and pray for those you call your enemy. Start small. A simple prayer, “Lord, let (insert enemy’s name here) have a good breakfast.” “Lord, let (person) be blessed with the peace that passes understanding today.”

Forgiveness and love are the key to releasing the hatred in one’s heart towards another. As Christ did on the cross, we are called to do also. If Christ can forgive those who crucified Him, I can find strength in His example and forgive those people towards whom I feel hatred and those who have offended me.

THE POWER OF CHRIST’S LOVE

Alexandra Dreschler, June ’13

Few people love both neighbor and enemy as Mary Johnson does. During a fight at a party in 1993, her twenty-year-old son was killed by then sixteen-year-old Oshea Israel. After years of harboring anger toward the man who had stolen her only son, Mary embraced her worst enemy and the healing forgiveness she desperately needed by meeting Oshea during his time in prison. Now he lives next door in her Minneapolis apartment building, as a kind of second son whom Mary has allowed into her life. “Unforgiveness is like cancer,” she says “It will eat you from the inside out.”

Actions of forgiveness open our hearts to the liberating power of Christ’s love. True love can only abide in a heart freed from hate, freed from pride, and willing to let go of the anger and set the self aside. It’s not easy to replace hard feelings with kind actions, but it is impossible if we do not first give the forgiveness that each of us has received from God. No matter how hard we try, we will never be able to love our enemies on our own. Only God’s infinite presence within our hearts will allow us to let go of wrongs as He calls us to. The worldly emotion advertised as “love” is far too weak and far too self-seeking to reach those who have scarred us. Human love is often not willing to sacrifice its own comfort for the good of another. Yet the power of Christ’s love is His willingness to suffer for our sakes. God’s “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18) and allows us to take on the burdens of others—even if they have harmed us.

My family went through a difficult situation at one point when someone hurt us, whom we knew well. I struggled to truly love this person; perhaps I had forgiven him in my mind, but my heart remained calloused and cold—too angry to let go of the many ways he had failed us. It took
many months for me to realize my own hardness of heart was only doing harm. By hanging onto my frustration, I was stuck in the past, watering weeds in my spiritual garden. My unwillingness to forgive prevented me from offering prayers for his difficult life. As I truly came to forgive and pray for him, I began to see the selfishness of my anger. God offers us grace as an ineffable gift, not because of anything we have done (Eph 2:8-9) but simply through His goodness and mercy. He calls us to extend His love to others, whether friend or enemy. When we offer forgiveness to others, we truly experience the power of God’s healing in our hearts. Then we will be able to embrace even those who have irreparably harmed us, as Mary Johnson has.

Mary Johnson’s story can be found at www.theforgivenessproject.com

CONFLICTING MESSAGES?

Mark Sultani, July ’13

The Bible and the Fathers of the Church often speak of our enemies, how we should treat them and how God will treat them if we obey Him or if we don’t obey Him. Yet if you read all of these texts literally, you will find conflicting messages. The Old Testament and the Psalms speak of how God will destroy our enemies or how He will enable us to do so; yet in the New Testament Christ says, “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” How are we, as modern Orthodox Christians, to interpret these seemingly conflicting messages?

The first question that must be asked is, who is our enemy? According to St. Dorotheos of Gaza, the Devil is our ultimate enemy and adversary; he not only hates men and hates all that is good, but he puts obstacles in the way of good. Perhaps we can say that the violent treatment towards our enemies prescribed in the Old Testament is intended for the Devil and his angels, and the command to love our enemies, as prescribed by Christ, is intended for our earthly enemies, our fellow humans who act as adversaries toward us. When the Old Testament describes how Israel conquers and kills her enemies, we understand this destruction and violence between humans to represent the spiritual warfare we are called to undergo with our own passions. This is one reading of how to resolve the complexity (for a more in-depth analysis, it is worth listening to Fr. Thomas Hopko’s podcast, “War and Violence in the Old Testament” on Ancient Faith Radio). As Orthodox Christians, we must understand that the Old Testament acts are under God’s providence and work toward our salvation.

This interpretation then begs the question of how loving our enemies but destroying the spiritual enemies are related. St. Paul answers this in Romans when he says, “No, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.’” Only in leaving our vengeance to the Lord do we truly “destroy” our enemies—it is our responsibility to love them. St. John Chrysostom says, “Meekness consists in praying calmly and sincerely for a neighbor, when it is that neighbor who causes us much turmoil.” We must pray for our neighbors when they persecute us and act as adversaries towards us. By loving them, we destroy any evil efforts, just as Christ commanded us to turn the other cheek, thereby we destroy the power of the Devil. St. Dorotheos of Gaza commands us to be lowly in all things, for humility, he says, cuts off all the power of the evil one. I argue that the violent and warlike imagery used in the Psalms is for us to attack our enemies, not with swords, but with humility. By loving our enemies and humbling ourselves before them, then we will destroy them, as it says in Psalm 17, “I pursued my enemies and overtook them; and did not turn back till they were consumed.”

1 Matthew 5:43–44 (RSV).
3 Romans 12:20 (NKJV).
4 Ibid. 96.
5 Psalm 17(18):37 (RSV).
Enemies are your friends.
Read it again. Enemies are your friends.

Here’s the deal. I’m a selfish person, but I want inner freedom too. In fact, I want it more than anything else. I have mulled these two facts over for most of my life. How can I reconcile them? How do I manage that heavily self-centered tendency within and my intense desire to be unbound and set free from binding selfishness? Orthodox theology, basing man’s template for freedom on the person of Christ, offers several responses.

We may find a definition of our “enemy” from Matthew’s excerpt in chapter 5. Our enemies are those who “curse,” “hate,” “persecute,” or “use” us.

Can you think of your enemies? Be honest, get personal. Christ did (Mark 5:25–34; John 4:1–24, Matt 26:47–50 — Judas’s betrayal). Write down their names. Contemplate their lives for a minute or two. See life from their perspective. Think about what it must be like to be them. Do you know what they have been through? Probably not. I have my enemies. But when I am able to look at their lives outside of my own very limited perspective, I often see a dignified creature pursuing love and protection. It is only when I go beyond myself (my self-centeredness) that I am able to glimpse what that term dispassion could mean. In his song “Lovers on the Sun,” David Guetta says that he’s looking for a feeling “that’s worth dying for.” Christ calls us to die daily to ourselves and that feeling of inner freedom—as St. Maximos defines “dispassion”—is worth it to me. By praying to invoke Christ and the Holy Spirit our freedom is established in God and social harmony becomes possible. Sing it in the car. Think of St. Maximos. Then try not to laugh.

Being enemies with another makes both people suffer. It’s also just plain exhausting. In X-Men: Days of Future Past, when Logan reads Professor X’s mind and witnesses Logan’s past sufferings and pain, X fiercely responds, “I don’t want your suffering!” This is the reasonable response, right? But the scene doesn’t end there. Logan then challenges him to rise up and “look past” the pain. And with this, X sees another dimension of life. He sees Logan’s power. Is it the power of God? To me, this is the gospel in Hollywood disguise. It is another epiphany of selflessness that even the box office numbers can’t lie about. Underneath the surround sound and visual effects, it’s message was about embracing the unlovable. This can be applied to our lives, too. We can transform beyond our surface appearances by embracing our enemies and the accompanying pain. The claims of Christ—immortal life through loving God, shared sufferings, and forgiveness of enemies—offer us profound relief from the sickly cycle of injustice and subsequent, mutual hate. And our share in that immortality begins now. Like, right now.

Depending on how we treat our enemies, we will either become slaves to our pride or free with God. It is our choice. Let’s be honest, Christian love is irrational in that it does not follow logical proofs regarding justice, and it can seem impossible to enact. Mostly, it can seem like it’s from another planet altogether. But that’s because it is. It’s from the supernatural dimension: God’s loving realm. Love unto death is that heavenly wisdom (1 Cor 1:24) that challenges secular notions of justice that seem to make so much sense. Through experience, I’ve found that this is not the full story.

“Christian love is irrational in that it does not follow logical proofs regarding justice...”
LOVING YOUR ENEMIES—THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

Presvytera Marianna Bannon (Ruggerio), ’04

You come home from work after a particularly stressful day. You are sure your boss has it in for you because he has control issues that you have decidedly connected with his stature. Naturally, you are the victim and deserved none of this treatment. After all, you go above and beyond your duties regularly. Furthermore it is completely okay to hate him, because everyone else does anyway. Home for just five minutes, you see the most offensive lack of consideration: an empty mug of hot chocolate on the table without a coaster. You go completely ballistic, yelling at the offender, “How many times have I told you to use a coaster! There is a stack right there next to your empty mug!” The offender is none other than your sister, and you quickly realize the absurdity of your reaction and blame it on stress. We have all had “those days.” The horrible boss at work may not be an “enemy” in our understanding of the word, but The Enemy has used your own pride and spiritual weakness as a way to get to you through that individual.

Christ calls us to love, bless, pray for, and do good to our enemies. Perhaps the simplest of these tasks is to pray for our enemies. Pray that they find peace in their lives, pray that they may come to hear God’s whisper. Sometimes our day-to-day enemies are fighting their own battles. We may never know what those battles are, so we must always pray first. The next task is to do good. We know that we do not have to like someone in order to be kind to them. But Christ did not say, “Be kind.” He told us to “do good.” Since “God alone is good” (Luke 18:19, Mark 10:18) we must treat our enemies as the Lord treats us, full of mercy and compassion. This is why the phrase “I believe in being a good person” is far more challenging than anyone realizes. Anytime you are angered by someone, place yourself at the foot of the Cross, as the Virgin Mary or St. James. Bring the image of Christ crucified, His arms outstretched for the world, to mind. If Christ could do this for all of fallen mankind, we, who threw away Paradise and have managed to pervert every good thing given to us by God, surely we can do good for our enemies who challenge us daily in far smaller ways.

Most importantly we are called to love. This love does not mean deliver a latte with a fake smile. Christ uses the word agape when he says this. We are called to love our enemies to the point of self-sacrifice. Love our enemies with the same kind of love we are called to love our spouse, love our enemies with the same kind of love God had for all of His children through the Cross. Can you do this? Can you sacrifice yourself for the sake of your “horrible” boss or your “aggravating” family member? If not your life, begin by sacrificing your pride. None of us is above reproach, and the task of loving our enemies with sacrificial love begins with keeping our hearts steady and our heads level when we are challenged. This might mean saying the Jesus Prayer during a meeting or after a confrontation. Slowly and surely, God will help us handle these situations and see our own faults, allowing us to love as He loves and truly become “sons of Your Father who is in Heaven.”
The topic of loving our enemies can immediately call to mind large-scale, geopolitical forces—ISIS or North Korea; ideological opponents—conservative or liberal; or groups of people we think of as oppressors—the powerful and privileged. Because these examples tend to be impersonal, they are in one way easy to vilify and hate, as we do not actually know them individually as persons. However, in another way, they are actually easier to love and forgive for the very same reason—those feelings of hatred and love are both in a way quite theoretical. I would submit that the enemies who are the hardest to love and forgive, pray for, and bless are those who are closest to us, those who have betrayed us in some way.

After Our Lord washed the feet of the disciples, knowing that Judas would betray Him, He quoted Psalm 41: “He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.” A closer look at the quote’s context shows the psalmist describing “my bosom friend in whom I trusted” as the one who speaks “empty words” to his face while meeting up with all who hate him to “whisper together” and “imagine the worst for me.” The image of lifting one’s heel can be described in more contemporary terms as kicking the psalmist while he is down. I imagine all of us can relate to these feelings towards a close friend during some point in our lives, perhaps even a family member. In fact, a priest friend of mine once related a story to me about a man on his deathbed asking that his own brother not be allowed to attend his funeral! Perhaps when thinking of the enemies we need to love, we should look at those we loved at one time but no longer do. They may be those toward whom we feel the most justified reasons for anger and resentment, but because they are so close, we do not label them as “enemies.” We can take comfort in the most profound way that Our Lord—who shared not only bread with Judas at the supper but His own body and blood—took even this painful aspect of our humanity onto Himself and heals it when we let Him.
MENTORING PROGRAM
Are you a high school senior or college freshman wishing you could just talk to someone who “gets it”? Are you a college senior or post-college young adult who would offer a listening ear to younger alumni? The Alumni Advisory Board (AAB) is excited to announce the Cross-Road Alumni Mentoring Initiative. This program will connect older CR alumni with CR alumni entering college to offer mentoring conversations based on our Orthodox Christian faith – all with the intention of making the college transition a little easier. The AAB Mentoring Team has been working on a curriculum of short readings, videos, and activities for mentors and mentees to do together. Interested? Send us a note at CrossRoadAlumni@hchc.edu or sign up for more information at your CrossRoad Alumni Retreat.

ALUMNI WEBSITE REDESIGN
Our Social Media/Tech team is redesigning the alumni website! The new site will be a subsection of the main CrossRoad website, http://www.crossroadinstitute.com, and will be an invaluable resource for alumni looking to stay connected and continue to explore their vocations wherever they find themselves in life. It will be the go-to place to learn what the Board is doing to serve you. We are looking forward to a launch this spring.

LENTEN SERVICE PROJECT
During Lent this year, we are encouraging CrossRoad alumni to assemble iocc Hygiene Kits for victims of recent disasters. Full instructions for each kit can be found here: http://www.iocc.org/kidspage/healthkit_frameset.aspx. We will also be asking alumni to bring materials to assemble kits during the Alumni Retreat for college-age alumni. Let the Board know how many kits you assemble so that we can track them and post pictures of your efforts on the Alumni Facebook group. We will send more details soon.

ALUMNI RESOURCE PACKET
Each Christmas the Board mails to the newest alumni a packet of reading and resource suggestions that the Board have found useful. These include books, quotes, poems, websites, and songs that have inspired alumni in their post-CrossRoad lives. We would love to include your suggestions in next year’s mailing—please email them to us! We look forward to sharing your feedback.

MISSION TRIP
One of the Board’s long-term goals is to establish a CrossRoad alumni mission trip. We are using the results from last year’s Mission Trip Survey to guide this process.

WANT TO JOIN THE BOARD?
The application process runs from mid-December to mid-January. The Board term year runs from February to January. Board members serve for one year with an optional one-year extension. After two years, Board members are asked to reapply. Email us with any questions, or if you would like a reminder when the next round of applications become available.

Do you have an idea for a new initiative?
Is there anything in particular you’d like to see the Board do to serve the alumni family?
Email us your ideas!

CONTACT THE BOARD!
The best way to reach us is through email: CrossRoadAlumni@hchc.edu
We also are trying to keep the CrossRoad Alumni Facebook group active, so please join: https://www.facebook.com/groups/CrossRoadAlumni/
LinkedIn is great for professional networking. Join the CrossRoad Alumni Group to see what other alumni are doing and connect with people in similar fields: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/CrossRoad-Alumni-4371720/about
This year, the Alumni Advisory Board has started a fund in memory of Sophia V. Bambalis, a 2006 CrossRoad participant who passed away on January 31, 2014, after a lengthy illness. Sophia was the beloved daughter of Chris and George Bambalis and the sister of Peter Bambalis (cr June 2009). During her high school years, Sophia cultivated her love for academics, the arts, and athletics; she was a member of the National Honor Society, the co-captain of the cross-country team, and a member of the National Art Honor Society. She attended Georgetown University in the McDonough School of Business. Sophia was a devout Orthodox Christian who continually matched her God-given gifts and talents with the needs of the Church and world. She demonstrated compassion in all of her interactions and, following her time at CrossRoad, actively sought to deepen her faith and incorporate it into all facets of her life.

The Board has established this scholarship fund so that young adults like Sophia may have the opportunity to attend CrossRoad and become leaders for the Church and society for years to come. CrossRoad costs about $2,300 per participant, of which each student is asked to pay $500 in tuition (less than 25%). The OVM offers about $10,000 in scholarships to cover the tuition payment, and sometimes travel costs, for those students who otherwise could not afford to attend.

The fund’s goal will be to provide these scholarships each year. In our first year, our goal is to raise $7,500. Of this amount, $5,000 will be used for scholarships for 2015 participants. Additional donations will be used to start building the principal of the fund.

The Board is excited to invite each CrossRoader to give to this fund. We believe it is important to show the new CrossRoad participants how much of an impact CrossRoad made in each of our lives and collectively work to sustaining this incredible institute.

To donate to the scholarship fund, please make checks payable to Hellenic College and in the memo line note "Bambalis Alumni Scholarship Fund" or give online at www.crossroadinstitute.org.

Money is on the list of the top three most taboo subjects to bring up in conversation. Why is this? In our society, money is tightly bound up with the notion of security. We all have an intimate need for security, and we often mistakenly believe that money is the key to that security. Obtaining wealth in itself is not a bad thing, unless it becomes something we desire more than a life in Christ. Our job as Christians is to consider how we interact with money, how we depend on it, and what we do with it.

When I am reminded of my responsibility to tithe, to give a portion of my money to the Church or other philanthropic causes, I sometimes feel insecure at the thought of giving away my hard-earned money, my sense of security. And yet I am reminded that this money is not mine to keep and that it is ultimately not the source of my security.

Let’s go back to the beginning for a moment. God created us. He created the whole world, and in it He gave us everything we need and have. What we have is not our own doing; we often take an active part in obtaining it, but ultimately it was given to us by God.

Every Sunday before the consecration of the body and blood of Christ, the priest says, “We offer to you these gifts from your own gifts…” As a community, we offer our gifts, the wine and bread, before God and we are reminded that these gifts are not of our own creation, but are from that which God gave to us. God receives our gifts and transforms them for healing of our souls and bodies. We give back to God in thanksgiving for all He has given us, and in turn, He blesses us through those gifts.

We are called to a practice of giving, of tithing. This is an exercise in dependence on God, it is an exercise of selflessness and self-offering, it is an exercise for our souls. Giving back to God is a very tangible way in which we give thanks to God for all He has given us. It is an essential element of our liturgy outside of the liturgy.

We must remember that, while we are called to be good stewards of our money and save and spend it wisely, our ultimate security does not lie in the storing up of worldly things but in Christ. When we offer a portion of what we have been blessed with back to Him, we will be amazed at how He will bless us through this act of giving.
Loving our enemies, though it has always been difficult, seems muddled in today’s world. Enemies, at least for most of us in America, aren’t typically the people on our borders who challenge us with force, but are rather those in our neighborhoods, schools, work, and even our churches. They are those who challenge our pride: those who do things better than we do, those who are smarter than we are, those who are stronger than we are, and so on. Our enemies are the ones who speak ill against us when we are not around, the ones who make our path more difficult, and the ones who do not show an ounce of respect to us, yet we are supposed to love them. Either we or our enemies draw a line in the sand and we choose what side we will be on. To love them, we have to open our hearts and decide that we will not give them “a taste of their own medicine,” as we often like to say or do. Hate and hurt must be returned with patience and caring. The line in the sand is only there in our thoughts of our pride. To love our enemies means to overcome our self-pride and our self-centeredness.

Practically, loving your enemies means not starting a Facebook war, not texting wicked things behind someone’s back, and not wishing them evil. This is the start, but we must also begin to pray for them, to learn patience with them, to learn understanding with them and to purify ourselves through their criticism. After you read this, you will not automatically love your enemies, but it is a process which we can all start right now. The beginning is a prayer to God for patience and understanding, followed by a conscientious attempt to show patience and understanding. When we make mistakes we have to ask not only God for forgiveness, but our enemies also, even if they do not grant it, and we have to start the cycle all over again—pray St. Nicolai’s prayer, then pray for patience and understanding, show patience and understanding, seek forgiveness for lack of patience and understanding, and repeat. The end result will turn from only showing patience and understanding, to being patient and understanding, and eventually to love.

A discussion about love of enemies cannot even begin before we at least have a general understanding of what love might be. Since God is love, we must start by recognizing the love of God and then see what that means for us. St. John Chrysostom writes, “For there is not, is not one, be he father, or mother, or friend, or what you will, who so loved us as the God who created us” (Homily 19 on Matthew). In principle, this is obvious, but its implications are greater than we initially realize. St. John is saying that when our parents give of themselves to raise us, when our friends cry with us through our struggles, when our spiritual fathers give of their time and energy to understand us, and when monastics treat us as if we are Christ Himself standing before them, their love still cannot compare to God’s love for us; indeed, all of these actions combined with every act of love in the world still give us only a glimpse of God’s love for us.

This same God commands us to love each other, to love everyone as He loves us (John 13:34). Yet this seems nearly impossible when our society teaches us that there are people whom we should hate or be disgusted by. How often do we complain about others? Sometimes we may think we are avoiding this by not talking about any specific person. How often do we speak poorly of, or complain about, illegal immigrants, politicians, the people who live off welfare, or various terrorist groups around the world? In today’s world, it is far too easy to think of these individuals as not actual people, but rather as something else entirely. We can forget that they too are children of God whom he loves dearly, more than we can imagine.

St. Stephen, the first martyr, lived during a time when Christians were under extreme persecution (not unlike the lives of some Christians today in the Middle East). He was killed by the hands of men under the authority of an officer named Saul, a chief persecutor of Christians, presumably hated by many. We can imagine that Saul’s name was a terror among Christians, and that many had stories of relatives who had died under his authority. It would have been easy to hate him. And yet this same man God called to be a chief of apostles. God never stopped loving Saul, and as a result, I have the blessing of receiving his now sanctified name. The life of St. Paul reminds us that we must love everyone, even those who are persecuting our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christ calls us to love our enemies because we are all His children, made in His image and likeness; and despite our many sins He loves us all and calls us to do likewise. To love our enemies requires us to emulate Christ’s boundless and unending love for all people, evident not only in His preachings, but evident in His actions as well.

During His crucifixion Christ says: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do (Luke 23:34). Christ forgave His persecutors: the religious leaders who approved His death, the Roman soldiers who executed Him, and the civilians who mocked His divinity—Christ forgave them all; and in His forgiveness, Christ expressed His love. To forgive our enemies is to love our enemies; Christ shows us this. In forgiving our enemies, we rid our hearts of the hatred that can consume us and instead we open our hearts to Christ’s love. Christ’s call to love our enemies challenges us to forgive, and in forgiveness Christ’s divine love fills and inspires us.
“Without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). How does this verse relate to Christ’s commandment to love our enemies (Matt 5:44)?

How can Christ tell us to do something, and simultaneously tell us that, without Him, we can do nothing?

There is a way in which Christ’s commandments, because they set the bar so high, ultimately lead us to fail. Even the most successful perfectionist by human standards can’t follow his commandments in their entirety, all the time. This could lead us to the point of despair. Even Christ’s very own disciples have to ask, Who then can be saved? (Mark 10:26). This was in reference to Christ’s enigmatic remark that “it is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mark 10:26). A rich young man came to Christ and asked him how to inherit eternal life. Christ told him to follow the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. He said that he had done these things; he was a “good person” by Jewish standards.

But Christ was not so interested in his goodness, as He was in his heart.

Was his heart fully committed to God, or was it still divided between God and mammon (Matt 6:24), between Life and life? It was clear, in this case, that he was giving only part of himself. He had some major “riches” left over that he wanted to keep for himself. So Christ’s final call to this man made him sad.

He was sad because, in order to truly experience Life, he had to make a commitment. He was willing to be a “good person,” but to dedicate his entire life to Christ, to “sell all that he had”? He was not ready for this. But this is what Christ calls us to do in all of His commandments, and especially in loving our enemies.

We cannot truly love our enemies if we have not first committed our lives to Christ. Love for enemies is divine work (Matt 5:45). When we offer our whole selves to Christ, we await His action (Ps 119:126), which is when He tears out our heart of stone, and replaces it with a heart of flesh (Ez 36:26). Only with this divinely softened heart can we truly love those who hate, persecute, or revile us. What this love looks like on the outside is not the same in every situation; the ways in which we love our enemies may differ in as many different ways as there are people. But we are always called to have a “heart of flesh.” If we have a hard time with this, GOOD! “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27). It is at this point that we find true strength, true success, true Life.

St. Silouan the Athonite says this clearly: “Without the grace of God, we cannot love our enemies” (St. Silouan the Athonite, p. 377). Join me, then, in surrendering ourselves to Christ, and seeking the transformation of our stony hearts into hearts of flesh towards all of humanity.
TO FIGHT BACK OR NOT? THAT IS THE QUESTION! ¹

Gabriel Cremeens, July ’09

“It hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you...resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matt 5:38–39)

“When He [Jesus] had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand... Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?’” (John 18:22–23)

In these two passages, we have before us a dilemma. Inevitably, Matthew 5 calls to mind an image of a meek Christian, silently enduring abuse. Yet in John 18, we see our Lord in the very situation He had described, in which He told us not simply to remain silent, but even to offer ourselves freely to our enemy’s maltreatment. But what does He do? Does He turn the other cheek?

No.

Are we, perhaps, scandalized by this? Was Christ a hypocrite? Was He unable to practice what He Himself preached? Later on, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ commands, “Love your enemies... do good to them that hate you.” (Matt 5:44) How do we love our enemies and do good to them? How do we show them true love, which seeks their own good and spiritual benefit?

By turning the other cheek?

Yes—sometimes. But as our Lord shows us by His own example, not always.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reads, “To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” Sometimes, the most loving thing we can do for our apparent “enemy” is to remain silent and submissive. In the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, there is a story about a demon-possessed man who struck a holy elder. The elder immediately offered his other cheek – and the demon, unable to bear the humility of the elder, fled and left the man well again. This was true love, a love which delivered the demon-possessed man from his spiritual captivity.

However—as the Lord shows us by His example—sometimes turning the other cheek is not the way of love. Sometimes, the most loving thing we can do to our enemy when he abuses us is to stand up to him—to say even just one word that causes him to stop and consider what he is doing. This can also be true love, caring for the salvation of the soul of another. There is “a time to keep silent and a time to speak.” (Eccl 3:7)

How, then, do we discern how to act in a given situation? Most of the time, our Christ turned the other cheek. Throughout His entire Passion, He remained silent. Yet in one instance, He spoke, ever so briefly.

How will we know when to act?

We must acquire the “mind of Christ” (Phil 2:5)—the mind of our Lord, Who truly loves everyone, and Who knows how to act in every situation.

How do we accomplish this? Quite simply: participation in the life of the Church. Prayer. Fasting. Confession. Holy Communion. Reading the Scriptures. The Mysteries. The divine services. By doing these things, we slowly acquire the mind of Christ. And then we will have the discernment to know when to turn the other cheek... and when “the meek should become a warrior.” (Joel 4:11)

¹ It would be remiss of me not to mention that my short essay was largely drawn from and inspired by Elder Nikon of New Skete (Mt. Athos), who addressed the question of “Love for Enemies” in a talk entitled ‘The Others’ (О Άλλοι), delivered on December 15th, 2008. May we have his prayers.
FR. RADU BORDEIANU

In the spring semester of 2014, Fr. Radu was on sabbatical from his work as Associate Professor in Theology at Duquesne University and worked on his second book, provisionally entitled Icon of the Kingdom: Orthodox Perspectives on the Church (of course, he is still working on it). He was then a judge at the National Oratorical Festival, was invited to speak at various Orthodox, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches, presented three papers at academic conferences, and published three articles and book reviews.

DR. DEMETRIOS KATOS

Demetrios Katos, Dean of Hellenic College, recently led the Fall 2014 Metropolis of Atlanta Clergy Retreat at the Metropolis Diakonia Center in South Carolina, speaking to more than 60 clergy over three days. He also attended the Management Development Program at the Harvard Institute of Higher Education this past June. This Spring 2015 semester he’ll be teaching one of his favorite courses, Great Christian Thinkers, a survey course of Christian theology from the second century to the present.

DR. MICHAEL LEGASPI

After several enjoyable years at Phillips Academy (Andover, MA), Dr. Michael Legaspi took a position at Penn State University, where he teaches courses on scripture, Judaism, and Christianity as a member of the Dept. of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies and the Jewish Studies Program. He is happy to be back in his home state of Pennsylvania and to be working, once again, in the academic world. His family is also enjoying life in “Happy Valley.” Though they miss their churches in Massachusetts, they are thrilled that State College has a vibrant and welcoming church: Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (OCA). All in all—thanks be to God—a successful transition!

DR. ARISTOTLE PANAPANIKOLAOU

Aristotle Papanikolaou was appointed as the Archbishop Demetrios Professor of Orthodox Theology and Culture at Fordham University. He is still active in the Orthodox Christian Studies program there, which he co-founded. He is currently researching the relevance of the Orthodox understanding of virtue for the effects of violence, trauma, and moral injury.

FR. EUGEN PENTIUC

In June 2014, Fr. Eugen was appointed as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for Hellenic College Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. His most recent book, The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition, was published by Oxford University Press (OUP) in January 2014, and Fr. Eugen signed another book contract with OUP that deals with the “liturgical exegesis” of Scripture in Eastern Orthodox Tradition. For the academic year 2014-2015 Fr. Eugen is also a Visiting Professor of Scripture at St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and at St. Joseph’s Roman-Catholic Seminary, both in Yonkers, NY.

DR. ALBERT ROSSI

Dr. Albert Rossi has continued recording bi-weekly podcasts on his Ancient Faith Radio series, “Becoming a Healing Presence.” He still serves as a professor and counselor at St. Vladimir’s Seminary in Yonkers, NY. He has recently submitted a book, Becoming a Healing Presence, that was accepted for publication and gave a presentation to the OCF Student Leadership Board, which consists of 15 student leaders that are responsible for the 200+ OCF chapters. This past year he gave a number of parish retreats and days of retreat for Orthodox priests.

FR. TED STYLIANOPoulos

Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos continues to enjoy his retirement, grateful that HCHC provides office space for retired faculty, where he spends his mornings reading, doing research, and some writing. Last year he published a small volume entitled The Making of the New Testament, in which he explores the dynamic interdependence between the early Church, the nature of the gospel, and the eventual formation of the New Testament. To his great joy, Fr. Theodore became a happy Papou for the seventh time in 2014. He sends greetings to all!

FR. PAUL TARAZI

The Very Rev. Dr. Paul Nadim Tarazi recently retired from teaching this year after forty-four years of service at St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary, Holy Cross School of Theology, and the St. John of Damascus Theological Institute in Balamand, Lebanon. Many former students and family members gathered from around the world to attend Fr. Paul’s final class at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, and to honor him at a special retirement dinner. Fr. Paul’s recent publications include biblical commentaries in The Chrysostom Bible series and a two-volume set of audio commentaries covering the entire Bible. In his retirement, Fr. Paul is translating his comprehensive audio commentaries on the Bible into Arabic, a labor of love for the sake of his mother church in Antioch, and completing work on additional Chrysostom Bible commentaries on Ephesians, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Jude.

FR. LUKE VERONIS

Fr. Luke continues to direct the Missions Institute of Orthodox Christianity at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, where he teaches two classes each semester and leads a class/practicum to Albania every summer. He also pastors Sts. Constantine and Helen Church in Webster, MA, and led a group of fifteen to Project Mexico for the fifth time this past summer. He sends out a daily inspirational email, which you can receive by signing up at www.schwebster.org.

STAFF UPDATES

DANIEL BELONICK

CR Asst. Director ’09, ’10

Dan has spent the last few years as a social worker in care management and health navigation positions. In February 2015 he was excited to begin a new role as the Director of Day Services at the Alzheimer’s Resource Center of Connecticut. Dan and his wife Jen live in Wethersfield, CT, and attend Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in New Britain, CT.

GEORGE BRYANT

Staff ’14

After teaching English as a Second Language in South Korea for two months, George has begun the MDiv Program at Holy Cross. He’s created a directed study that focuses on Mark Twain and W.B. Yeats,
as well as the Holy Fools in Russia, to explore a fresh perspective on practical, Orthodox living today. Other than reading, he loves hanging out on the Hill with friends, teachers, and the holy hawk for guidance. God bless you all, CrossRoaders. Visualize the most beautiful you, and be it!

TED CHERPAS Staff ’11

Ted Cherpas is working at the Metropolis of Pittsburgh as the Camping Ministries Coordinator. Metropolitan Savas asked him to grow and develop the camping programs within their Youth Ministry department. He also has the distinct pleasure of serving as the Librarian of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh Library.

FR. MICAH HIRSCHY Staff ’04, ’05

Upon graduating, Fr. Michah Hirschy began working at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Memphis, TN as a pastoral assistant. He was married in 2011 to Anastasia Hartzes of Mobile, AL and was ordained to the diaconate and priesthood by Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta in December 2012. He currently serves as Ephemerios at the Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Birmingham, AL.

ANNA (COLIS) ’05 and
MICHAEL KALLIS ’06

Staff ’11, CR Asst. Director ’12, ’13, ’14

Michael graduated with his MDiv in May and after Anna’s last summer as Assistant Director of CrossRoad, they said a sad farewell to their life in Boston and set off on new adventures. Anna and Mike moved to Greece for four months to study the language and had an incredible time living in Thessaloniki, learning, traveling, taking spiritual pilgrimages, and eating lots of gyros! They have recently moved back to Chicago, where Mike has started his new job as the youth director at Sts. Peter and Paul and Anna has started her new job as the Director of Development for the St. Iakovos Retreat Center. While they both miss being on campus, the OVM and all of their CrossRoaders are in their hearts and prayers always!

KYRA LIMBERAKIS June ’09

Staff ’14, CR Asst. Director ’15

Kyra Limberakis is finishing her last semester in the master’s program at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, where she is focusing her studies on youth and young adult ministry. She has been working part-time as the new Assistant Director of CrossRoad and also runs a women’s group at Hellenic College. Life has been busy, but in the best way possible! She is very grateful for the opportunity to work for the CrossRoad office in a different capacity and looks forward to welcoming new members to the CrossRoad family this summer!

NICK LIONAS ’05 • Staff ’12

Nick, his wife Amanda, and their son Scott moved back home to Michigan in April 2014 where Nick took the pastoral assistant position at St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. He currently serves the community focusing on youth and especially young adult ministry, while assisting Fr. Nicholas Kyritses in the continual spiritual growth of the entire St. John Family.

MARY LONG CR Director ’09, ’10, ’11

After a year of world travels, Mary landed back in Texas in 2012 and has enjoyed re-discovering her hometown of Austin. She is currently working in the health and fitness industry, volunteering in religious education and GOYA activities at her parish, and participating national OCF events such as Real Break, where she is excited to be acting again as lay leader for the Honduras trip. She was recently thrilled to reconnect with several CR alumni at the East Coast College Conference in December.

NICOLE HILLAS MINETOS Staff ’09, ’11

Nicole currently lives in New York City. Her husband is the protopsalti and ministries assistant at the Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, and she’s been busy as a teacher. After completing her MDiv, she went to Columbia University to earn a master’s degree in Teaching Social Studies. Currently, she serves as a social studies and religion teacher at an all-girls Catholic school in Manhattan. She has the pleasure of taking her students to the Metropolitan Museum of Art every week, which is her favorite place in the world. She loves teaching and has enjoyed the awesome ride of figuring out her vocation!

JOSHUA PAPPAS Staff ’13

After getting married this past summer, Josh is finishing up his final year at Holy Cross. After graduation, he and his wife are planning to spend a year in Greece before ultimately settling into parish ministry.

OLENKA (ZHARSKY) RAMOS Staff ’14, ’15

Olenka loves being married (almost six months)! She and her husband enjoy playing games and hosting dinners at their HCHC apartment, a place they feel very blessed to call home. Olenka is currently applying for grad school at the Maryland University of Integrated Health. In this transitional time she is enjoying working as a CrossRoad staff member again for this upcoming summer. Olenka is trying to devour as many books as she can in order to have the nutrition to be healthy when life gets super-busy again with work and school.

JONATHAN RESMINI ’04 • Staff ’09, ’10

Jonathan is currently pursuing his PhD in Practical Theology and Spirituality Studies at Boston University School of Theology. In addition he offers retreats and lectures around the country on themes related to Orthodox spirituality in everyday life.

PETER SCHADLER Staff ’12

Peter Schadler is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the College of Charleston, SC, where he teaches Byzantine History. He has a book coming out later this year on John of Damascus and the History of Christian-Muslim relations. He also serves as the chanter at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Charleston.