



## Writing and Vocation, then and now

Written by Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides

It's an honor to be asked to join this wonderful blogging community and to read some of the other blogs and get a sense for what a blog is all about. I'll admit: I struggle with the genre and am more than a bit apprehensive about taking up this task.

I wrote all the time in college. In fact, my senior thesis was a 130-page series of connected short stories—at that time in my life I wanted to be a writer. But then I ended up at seminary and put all of my creative writing and even journaling on hold in order to turn off my inner writer's voice--which was talking too much and not letting me learn. (I would walk through a door and the writer voice would say, "She walked through the door"—it was exhausting.)

It was a relief to press pause for creative writing, and to embrace the structure and the learning that came with producing formal academic papers. For me, it was not unlike the conscious acceptance of wanting to pray the prayers of the Church, and not my own inner ramblings to God. This is *not* a critique on creative writing (reading it can be like a long drink of cool water to a parched soul), or on extemporaneous prayer, per se. It was just the own trajectory of my vocational journey. It was what needed to be done to take a 21-year-old girl raised in first-world America and allow her to be shaped by Christ and prepare for a life of ministry—a ministry that is not about her and the clever ways she had learned to turn a phrase.

This process was about submitting myself to the ancient Christian tradition—and through this, to learn who I am, in Christ. I stopped writing my own stories of myself, and began to see myself (in literary terms) in the types of the Biblical characters—most often the ones who the Prophets or Christ chastise as woefully egocentric, in desperate need of repentance. This is what our liturgical tradition does—"like the thief, I confess you"—it plunges us into the Biblical narrative; it is Scripture in action, with us being grafted into the story.

As I look back upon this transition now, I can't help but see it through the lens of young adolescent development. And I have realized that it was *because* of the intensive college self-exploratory creative writing that I was prepared for this process at seminary. I had explored so much through writing—self identity, family relationships, deepest longings and fears. This writing brought me to the internal place where I knew that I wanted to live as a servant of Christ, and that His will for my life was better than any I could craft for myself. Discerning His will on a daily basis meant, quite simply, pursuing knowledge of Him. And like in any relationship that I try to foster, if I keep interrupting with my own stories, I'm not really hearing the person's own story as it's told. I was now ready to listen. And writing in the structure that seminary requires became about listening well.

This blog post can be found at:

[http://blog.myoen.com/ministries/called-to-serve/writing\\_vocation.html](http://blog.myoen.com/ministries/called-to-serve/writing_vocation.html)



Through the Office of Vocation & Ministry at Hellenic College, I work with high school and college students, and so have had the opportunity to reflect upon the place of writing in learning within the context of Orthodox Christian ministry. More specifically, I've had the opportunity to reflect on the connection of the OVM's main focus, "vocation," and writing. And I am convinced through both my own life experience and over a decade of designing and running programs for adolescents, that writing is essential to self-understanding and making meaning of student learning—of not always demonstrating *what* we have learned, but as essential to the *process* of learning itself. We need to use writing in our ministry work with young people as a tool of self-exploration, meaning-making, and listening. It doesn't have to be cheesy or forced in the way we use it... find any of the 360+ alumni of the CrossRoad summer institute and ask them, male or female, what they think of their CrossRoad journal.

Using writing should allow us to ask hard questions of students, and give them space to develop nascent responses in their own words. And it should allow *them* to ask and articulate those hard questions. I think that the more self-understanding adolescents and young adults can do, so that they simply know the way God built them, the more ready they will be to be people-for-others.

And so I am teaching myself here as I conceptually struggle with how to blog. What needed to be binary for me in my youth can now be integrated, baptized, in service of Christ. That's the theory, at least. You'll have to tell me what you hear.

**“Let that which tranquilizes my thoughts and my heart be committed to writing as a memorial to me of the constant peace of my heart amidst the cares and vanities of life. What is it? It is the Christian saying, full of living trust and wonderful soothing power: ‘The Lord is everything to me.’ This is the priceless treasure!”** Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ* (HTM, Jordanville, NY, 1994, p. 206)

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