

Interreligious Symposium, September 12, 2006
The Category of the Righteous: What Makes a Spiritual Exemplar?

Texts Selected by Rabbi Alan Shavit-Lonstein of Temple Aaron:

Leviticus 19:1-4

1The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them:

You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

3You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My sabbaths: I the Lord am your God.

4Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I the Lord am your God

Genesis 6:9

9This is the line of Noah.-Noah was a righteous man; he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.

Rashi's Commentary on Genesis 6:9:

Since Scripture mentions him, it tells his praise, as it is said (Prov. 10:7): "The mention of a righteous man is for a blessing." - [Pesikta Rabbathi 12]. Another explanation [for why the names of the children are not mentioned immediately following:"These are the generations of Noah"]: To teach you that the main generations [progeny] of the righteous are good deeds. — [Mid. Tan. Noah 2] **in his generations.** Some of our Sages interpret it [the word בְּלִדְתּוֹ favorably: How much more so if he had lived in a generation of righteous people, he would have been even more righteous. Others interpret it derogatorily: In comparison with his generation he was righteous, but if he had been in Abraham's generation, he would not have been considered of any importance. — [Sanh. 108a, Gen. Rabbah 30:9, Tan. Noach 5] **Noah walked with God.** But concerning Abraham, Scripture says (below 24:40):" [the Lord] before Whom I walked." Noah required [God's] support to uphold him [in righteousness], but Abraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness by himself. — [Tan. Noach 5] **walked.** (הִתְהַלֵּךְ) is here in the past tense. The following is the usage of the "lammed" : in the "heavy" (כִּבְדָּ) form, [this refers to conjugations with a dagesh in one of the root letters, in this case, in the lammed], one form can be used [both] for the future [really the imperative] and the past tense. For example, (Gen. ibid. 13):"Rise, walk (הִתְהַלֵּךְ)" is the future (i.e., imperative)." Noah walked (הִתְהַלֵּךְ) , 1v)" is the past. (I Sam. 12:19):"Pray (הִתְפַּלֵּל) for your servants" is future (i.e., imperative), and (I Kings 8:42):"and he will come and pray (וְהִתְפַּלֵּל) toward this house," is past, only that the "vav" at the beginning converts it to the future. — [as explained by Mizrachi]

Genesis 6:18

18But I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife and your sons' wives.

1 Samuel 1

1There was a man from Ramathaim of the Zuphites, in the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2He had two wives, one named Hannah and the other Peninnah; Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. 3This man used to go up from his town every year to worship and offer sacrifices to the Lord of Hosts at Shiloh.-Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were the priests of the Lord there.

4One such day Elkanah offered a sacrifice. He used to give the portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; 5but to Hannah he would give one portion only though Hannah was his favorite—for the Lord had closed her womb. 6Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the Lord had closed her womb. 7This happened year after year: Every time she went up to the House of the Lord, the other would taunt her, so that she wept and would not eat. 8Her husband Elkanah said to her,

“Hannah, why are you crying and why aren’t you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons?”

9After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose.-The priest Eli was sitting on the seat near the doorpost of the temple of the Lord, weeping all the while. 10In her wretchedness, she prayed to the Lord, weeping all the while. 11And she made a vow: “Oh Lord of Hosts, if you will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if you will grant your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.”

12As she kept praying before the Lord, Eli watched her mouth. 13Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. 14Eli said to her, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!” 15And Hannah replied, “Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the Lord. 16Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all this time out of my great anguish and distress.” 17“Then go in peace,” said Eli, “and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked Him.” She answered, 18“ You are most kind to your handmaid.” So the woman left, and she ate, and was no longer downcast. 19Early next morning they bowed low before the Lord, and they went back home to Ramah.

Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the Lord remembered her. 20Hannah conceived, and at the turn of the year she bore a son. She named him Samuel, meaning “I asked the Lord for him.” 21And when the man Elkanah and all his household were going up to offer to the Lord the annual sacrifice and his votive sacrifice, 22Hannah did not go up. She said to her husband “When the child is weaned, I will bring him. For when he has appeared before the Lord, he must remain there for good.” 23Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Do as you think best. Stay home until you have weaned him. May the Lord fulfill His word. So the woman stayed home and nursed her son until she weaned him.

24When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with three bulls, one ephaph of flour, and a jar of wine. And though the boy was still very young, she brought him to the House of the Lord at Shiloh. 25After slaughtering the bull, they brought the boy to Eli. 26She said “Please, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you and prayed to the Lord. 27It was this boy I prayed for; and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him. 28I, in turn, hereby lend him to the Lord. For as long as he lives he is lent to the Lord” And they bowed low there before the Lord.

Psalm 92

A psalm. A song; for the sabbath day.

2It is good to praise the Lord,

To sing hymns to Your name, O Most High,

3To proclaim Your steadfast love at daybreak,

Your faithfulness each night

4With a ten stringed harp,

with a voice and a lyre together.

5You have gladdened me by your deeds, O Lord;

I shout for joy at Your handiwork.

6How great are Your Works, O Lord,

How very subtle Your designs!

7A brutish man cannot know,

a fool cannot understand this:

8though the wicked spout like grass,

though all evildoers blossom,

it is only that they may be destroyed forever.

9But You are exalted, O Lord, for all time.

10Surely your enemies, O Lord,

surely, Your enemies perish;

all evildoers are scattered

11You raise my horn high like that of a wild ox;

I am soaked in freshening oil.
 12 I shall see the defeat of my watchful foes,
 hear of the downfall of the wicked who beset me.
 13 The righteous bloom like a date-palm;
 they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon;
 14 planted in the house of the Lord,
 they flourish in the courts of our God.
 15 In old age they still produce fruit;
 they are full of sap and freshness,
 16 attesting that the Lord is upright,
 my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

Texts Selected by Father Jonathan Proctor of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church:

The following texts, (except for the first one from Galatians) do not address the subject of Righteousness as an independent idea in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Rather, they are chosen to give you an impression of how “righteousness” is encountered in the life of the church itself... what are the ways the abstraction of righteousness becomes incarnate in worship, in relationship with the righteous, and in prayer.

*But first let’s hear the Apostle Paul on the subject. In Paul, righteousness is measured according to **submission to the law**, as it must in any biblical context. A careful reading of the text shows that Paul does not abrogate the law, as many Christians (including Orthodox ones) assume, but describes a life of righteousness in grace not as freedom FROM the law, but as freedom to fulfill the law in a kind of **hyper-obedience**. This ultimately alludes to the cross. (In icons of martyrs, They are always holding a cross).*

Gal 5:13

For you were called to freedom [from the law] brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love **be servants of one another**.

For **the whole law is fulfilled** in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are plain: **fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like**. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**; against such there is no law.

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The prayers of exorcism before Baptism have a similar opposition between righteousness and evil. In them we pray that God will:

“Expel from him/her every evil and unclean spirit which hides and makes its lair in her heart...the spirit of deceit, the spirit of evil, the spirit of idolatry and of every covetousness, the spirit of falsehood and every uncleanness...”

in opposition to which the prayer immediately asks for the following gifts of righteousness:

“make him/her an honorable member of the Church, a consecrated vessel, a child of the light and an heir of the Kingdom, that having lived in accordance with thy commandments, and preserved inviolate the seal [of the gift of the Holy Spirit] and preserved his/her garment undefiled, he/she may receive the blessedness of the saints in thy kingdom.”

And now for some more texts from the life of the Church:

- 1) Prayer at the Consecration of the Eucharist

*The following prayer will be recognizable to anyone who has worship in the catholic (small 'c') Christian tradition. It is from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, which is the every-Sunday text of the service of the Divine Liturgy, or Service of the Eucharist. **This prayer is said right after the moment of consecration**, in other words at the deep heart of worship. Our relationship with the righteous, it implies, is formed by their place in our worship. What is striking is that WE are offering worship on behalf of THEM. In partaking of Christ's offering, we are in a sense the fulfillment of their righteousness.*

“Again we offer to you this reasonable worship for those who have fallen asleep in the faith: ancestors, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics and every righteous spirit made perfect in faith.”

2) The Hymns Prescribed for All Saints Day

Although ostensibly the day we celebrate all the righteous, the hymns that are prescribed for all saints day in fact give preeminence to Martyrs. It is dying for the faith... an act of being vanquished, not vanquishing... that is paradigmatic for Christian righteousness.

Troparion (the word for a primary hymn)

As with fine porphyry and royal purple,
Your church has been adorned with Your martyrs' blood shed throughout all the world.
She cries to You, O Christ God:
Send down Your bounties on Your people,
Grant peace to Your habitation, and great mercy to our souls!

Kontakion (The word for a secondary hymn)

The universe offers You the God-bearing martyrs,
As the first fruits of creation, O Lord and Creator.
Through the Theotokos, and their prayers establish Your Church in peace

3) The Dismissal prayer for Tuesday, September 12- (the day we meet).

Every day, it is in asking Jesus to have mercy on us “through the prayers of the righteous” , that we conclude major services. On September the 12 we would remember the righteous of that day, and end the service with this closing prayer:

“Through the prayers of the hieromartyr Autonomus, the Venerable Bassian of Tichsnen, of the holy martyr Julian of Galatia, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.”

Very often, a congregation will be unfamiliar with many of the lives of the righteous saints whose prayers we appeal to in this way... but where a full cycle of services takes place, the life stories of the Righteous are built into the service of Matins, or morning worship. On Sep 12, for example, we would have heard at least some of the following life stories, all of whom are remembered on that day. Just to give you a flavor of the literary style and sometimes very unmodern ethos used in recalling these righteous lives, here are some of the samples prescribed for today:

Hieromartyr Autonomus the Bishop in Italy

The Hieromartyr Autonomus was a bishop in Italy. During the time of the persecution against Christians under the emperor Diocletian (284-305), St Autonomus left his own country and resettled in Bithynia, in the locality of Soreus with a man named Cornelius. St Autonomus did his apostolic duty with zeal and converted to Christ so many pagans, that a large Church was formed, for which he consecrated a temple in the name of the Archangel Michael. For this church, the saint at first ordained Cornelius as deacon, and then presbyter. Preaching about Christ, St Autonomus visited also Lykaonia and Isauria.

The emperor Diocletian gave orders to arrest St Autonomus, but the saint withdrew to Claudiopolis on the Black Sea. In returning to Soreus, he had the priest Cornelius ordained bishop. St Autonomus then went to Asia, and when he had returned from there, he began to preach in the vicinity of Limna, near Soreus.

Once, the newly-converted destroyed a pagan temple. The pagans decided to take revenge on the Christians. Seizing their chance, the pagans rushed upon the church of the Archangel Michael when St Autonomus was serving Divine Liturgy there. After torturing St Autonomus they killed him, reddening the altar of the church with his martyr's blood. The deaconess Maria removed the body of the holy martyr from beneath a pile of stones and buried it.

During the reign of St Constantine the Great, a church was built over the tomb of the saint. In the year 430, a certain priest had the old church pulled down. Not realizing that the martyr's body had been buried beneath the church, he rebuilt the church in a new spot. But after another 60 years the relics of the saint were found incorrupt, and a church was then built in the name of the Hieromartyr Autonomus.

Venerable Bassian of Tikhsnen, Vologda

St Bassian of Tiksnensk [Totemsk] (in the world Basil) was a peasant from the village of Strelitsa (by other accounts, from the village of Burtsevo), near the city of Totma, and he was by trade a tailor. Leaving his family, he became a monk under St Theodosius of Totemsk in the Sumorinsk monastery at the River Sukhona, where he spent several years in works and obediences.

In 1594, the monk resettled not far from Totma, at the River Tikсна, near a church named for St Nicholas the Wonderworker. At first he lived at the church portico, but then he made himself a cell near the church. The monk visited at each divine service. For thirty years he wore chains on his body: on his shoulders a heavy chain, on his loins an iron belt, and on his head beneath his head covering an iron cap.

Yearning for solitude, the monk admitted no one to his cell, except his spiritual Father. He lived by the alms which they put by his small window. St Bassian died on September 12, 1624. Only at burial was it discovered how much he had humbled his flesh.

At the place of St Bassian's ascetic struggles a monastery was established in honor of the Icon of the Savior Not-Made-by-Hands. Veneration of St Bassian began in the year 1647, when during a deadly plague, many received healing at his tomb. The Life of the monk was written in the year 1745 by the igumen Joseph.

4) The Committal Prayer from the Funeral Service:

It is with the following words that the funeral service for every Orthodox Christian is concluded:

May Christ our true God, who rose from the dead have mercy on us and save us, through the intercessions of his holy Mother; of the holy, glorious, and praiseworthy Apostles; of our venerable and God-bearing Fathers; of the holy and **righteous forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**; of his holy and **righteous** friend Lazarus, who lay in the grave four days; and of all the Saints, establish the soul of His servant (*Name*) departed from us, in the dwelling place of the Saints; **grant him/her rest in the bosom of Abraham and number him/her among the righteous**, for as much as He is good, and loves mankind.

Amen.

Explanation and Texts Selected by Imam Yasir Bilgin of the Turkish Community:

In the Islamic terminology there are different terms to describe a Spiritual Exemplar. I would like to use them to feel more comfortable and make sense from my point of view.

These terms are often used by Allah and his messenger Muhammad (Peace be upon him) to describe a Spiritual Exemplar and good character in the sight of God. I will put some verses to explain the features of the Righteous Servant and the reward that is waiting for him promised by God in the Quranic verses. These terms used by God and the Prophet Muhammad to describe the Righteous are:

Muslim: Literally means "**Submission of will**". i.e. to the will of Allah the Almighty. A Muslim is someone who follows the way of Islam, not abandoning what is Fard, keeping within the Hudood of Allah,

and following the Sunnah, in what he or she is able. A Muslim is by definition one who is safe and sound, at peace in this world, and promised the Garden in the next world.

"The muslim is he from whose tongue and hand a Muslim is safe," (Bukhari, Muslim)

"The dwellers of the desert say: We believe (became Mumin). Say: You do not believe but say, We submit (became muslim); and faith has not yet entered into your hearts; and if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not diminish aught of your deeds; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." (Quran 48-16)

Mumin: "The Believer". Someone who trusts in Allah and accepts and follows His Messengers, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. The believer has a very strong conscience about the existence of God and being the servant of Him. He can clearly differ what is wrong and what is right and acts accordingly.

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Successful indeed are the believers
Those who humble themselves in their prayers;

Who avoid vain talk;
Who are active in deeds of charity;
Who abstain from sex,
Except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess,-
for (in their case) they are free from blame,
But those whose desires exceed those limits are transgressors;-
Those who faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants;

And who (strictly) guard their prayers;-
These will be the heirs, (Quran 23-01)

Muttaqi: (pious and righteous persons)A person who has respect to the boundaries established by God and who has inner discomfort and fear when he or she transgresses these boundaries because he has a conscience that he will be safe when he stays in these boundaries and acts according to them. Also he has the conscience of that whatever God wants him to do is good for him and whatever God forbids him is dangerous for him.

"Truly! The Muttaqun (pious and righteous persons - see V.2:2) will be amidst Gardens and water-springs (Paradise). "(It will be said to them): 'Enter therein (Paradise), in peace and security.' "And We shall remove from their breasts any sense of injury (that they may have), (So they will be like) brothers facing each other on thrones. "No sense of fatigue shall touch them, nor shall they (ever) be asked to leave it." (Quran 15: 45-48)

Say: (O Muhammad SAW) "Is that (torment) better or the Paradise of Eternity promised to the Muttaqun (pious and righteous persons - see V.2:2)?" It will be theirs as a reward and as a final destination. For them there will be therein all that they desire, and they will abide (there forever). It is a promise binding upon your Lord that must be fulfilled. (Quran 25: 15-16)

Ibadullah: The Servants of God. The literal meaning of the 'abd' is being a slave for someone but it is not the slavery that we witnessed through the history. It is the slavery by will only to God. As it is depicted by Rumi:

"I have become a servant, become a servant, become a servant;

I have bowed and doubled myself up with serving you.
Servants and slaves rejoice when they are emancipated
Whereas I rejoice when I become your servant.”

According to Islam, human being is created to be the servant of God and this servanthood requires some characteristics.

And the servants of (Allah) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!";

Those who spend the night in adoration of their Lord prostrate and standing;

Those who say, "Our Lord! avert from us the Wrath of Hell, for its Wrath is indeed an affliction
"Evil indeed is it as an abode, and as a place to rest in";

Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes);

Those who invoke not, with Allah, any other god, nor slay such life as Allah has made sacred except for just cause, nor commit fornication; - and any that does this (not only) meets punishment.

(But) the Penalty on the Day of Judgment will be doubled to him, and he will dwell therein in ignominy,- Unless he repents, believes, and works righteous deeds, for Allah will change the evil of such persons into good, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful,

And whoever repents and does good has truly turned to Allah with an (acceptable) conversion;-

Those who witness no falsehood, and, if they pass by futility, they pass by it with honourable (avoidance);
Those who, when they are admonished with the Signs of their Lord, droop not down at them as if they were deaf or blind;

And those who pray, "Our Lord! Grant unto us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous."

Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their patient constancy: therein shall they be met with salutations and peace,

Dwelling therein;- how beautiful an abode and place of rest!

Say (to the Rejecters): "My Lord is not uneasy because of you if ye call not on Him: But ye have indeed rejected (Him), and soon will come the inevitable (punishment)!"

(Quran 25-63)