

Connecting with God in a World of Mass Advertising (Gale Bellas-Papageorge)

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(Written exclusively for Pemptousia.com)

Whether watching television, reading a newspaper, walking around town, driving on the interstate, surfing the net, or visiting stores, we are constantly inundated by mass advertising. All day long, our minds are bombarded with images that tell us what to buy, how to look, even how to think. Not only do these images tell us what we should buy, they also fill us with feelings of insecurity, inadequacy and yearning, subliminally suggesting that if we don't own a certain item, look a certain way, even shop or eat at a certain place, we are unsuccessful and unimportant. Let's multiply that by a thousand during the Advent and Christmas season.



These advertisements are carefully designed to not only manipulate, but also to stay in our psyches so that we always feel lacking. Corporations carefully place their products in our favorite television shows and magazines and associate their brands with our favorite athletes and celebrities. It has gotten to the point where these companies have convinced us that brands are synonymous with certain personalities, and that we too can have a certain personality by purchasing a certain brand.



Our society, like most others, suffers from visual pollution. I often visit New York City, and as I get older, I prefer spending time downtown where I can still see the beauty of the architecture, the parks and the different people walking by. I am usually disoriented driving or walking through midtown, especially Times Square, because of all the large screens, lights and advertisements on buildings and buses, which seems to become more dense each year. I never quite know where to look.

There are, in fact, few places we can go where we aren't saturated with advertisements. The only two places that come to mind are nature and the Church.

I often find the need to take long hikes in the woods with family or friends for the very purpose of getting away from all the visual pollution around me to walk and clear my head taking in the beauty of God's creation. In a sense, the Church is like nature, and has become the sacred indoors for us, bringing that nondescript place

in the desert where God first spoke to Moses in front of the burning bush and the moving tabernacle in Exodus in a certain place for us to frequently visit and worship.

Attending Liturgy every week, connects us with God through worship and the Eucharist; but it also connects us with Him on a visual level. In the Orthodox Church, we have the beauty and privilege of so many beautiful icons. These icons have the opposite affect than the hundreds, perhaps thousands of images of mass advertisement we are exposed to on a weekly basis. Rather than making us feel anxious, inadequate and yearning for what we don't have, the icons of the Orthodox Church make us feel peaceful, fulfilled and grateful for what we do have. They reaffirm for us a vision of God's love and His Kingdom. They intercede for us, and in the case of the miracle working icons, they fill us with great hope and healing. What a profound antithesis to the images that flood our heads throughout the week.

I'm truly perplexed at the many different levels of healing the Orthodox Church has to offer no matter what challenges arise in the world around us. It is truly a Hospital for our Souls, as St. John Chrysostom so adequately called it.