

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

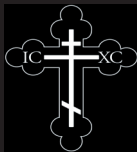
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ON THEOPHANY

A Homily by St. John Chrysostom

Many celebrate the feast days and know their designations, but the cause for which they were established they know not. Thus concerning Theophany, it is shameful every year to celebrate this feast day and not know its reason.

First of all, it is necessary to say that there is not one Theophany, but two: the one actual, which already has occurred, and the second in future, which will happen with glory at the end of the world. About this one and about the other you will hear today from Paul, who in conversing with Titus, speaks thus about the present: "*The grace of God hath revealed itself, having saved all mankind, decreeing that we reject iniquity and worldly desires, and dwell in the present age in prudence and in righteousness and piety.*" And about the future: "*awaiting the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (Tit 2:11-13).

A prophet speaks thus about this latter: "*the sun shalt turn to darkness, and the moon to blood at first, then shalt come the great and illuminating Day of the Lord*" (Joel 2:31). Why is not that day, on which the Lord was born, considered Theophany -- but rather this day on which He was baptized? This is the day on which He was baptized and sanctified the nature of water. Because on this day all of us obtain this water and carry it home and keep it all year, since today the waters are sanctified; and an obvious phenomenon occurs: these waters in their essence do not spoil with the passage of time, but obtained today, for one whole year and often for two or three years, they remain unharmed and fresh!

Why then is this day called Theophany? Because Christ made Himself known to all, not then when He was born, but then when He was baptized. Until this time He was not known to the people. And that the people did not know Him,

and did not know Who He was; listen about this to John the Baptist, who says: "*Amidst you standeth, Him Whom ye know not of*" (Jn.1:26). And is it surprising that others did not know Him, when even the Baptist did not know Him until that day? "*And I, said he, knew Him not: but He that did send me to baptize with water, about This One did tell unto me: over Him that shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, This One it is Who baptizeth in the Holy Spirit*" (Jn. 1:33).

There was a Jewish baptism, which cleansed from bodily impurities, but not to remove sins. Thus, whoever committed adultery, or decided on thievery, or who did some other kind of misdeed, it did not free him from guilt. But whoever touched the bones of the dead, whoever tasted food forbidden by the law, whoever approached from contamination, whoever consorted with lepers, that one washed, and until evening was impure, and then cleansed. "*Let one wash his body in pure water -- it says in the Scriptures, -- and he will be unclean until evening, and then he will be clean*" (Lev 15:5, 22:4). This was not truly of sins or impurities, but since the Jews lacked perfection, then God, accomplishing it by means of this greater piety, prepared them by their beginnings for a precise observance of important things. Thus, Jewish cleansings did not free from sins, but only from bodily impurities. Not so with ours: it is far more sublime and it manifests a great grace, whereby it sets free from sin, it cleanses the spirit and bestows the gifts of the Spirit. And the baptism of John was far more sublime than the Jewish, but less so than ours: it was like a bridge between both baptisms, leading across itself from the first to the last. The baptism of John did not impart the Holy Spirit and it did not grant forgiveness by grace: it gave the commandment to repent, but it was powerless to absolve sins.

Wherefore John did also say: "*I baptize you with water... That One however will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with*

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fire" (Mt 3:11). Obviously, he did not baptize with the Spirit. But what does this mean: "with the Holy Spirit and with fire?" Call to mind that day, on which for the Apostles "there appeared disparate tongues like fire, and sat over each one of them" (Acts 2:3). And that the baptism of John did not impart the Spirit and remission of sins is evident from the following: Paul "found certain disciples, and said to them: received ye the Holy Spirit since ye have believed. They said to him: but furthermore whether it be of the Holy Spirit, we shall hear. He said to them: into what were ye baptized? They answered: into the baptism of John. Paul then said: John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance," -- repentance, but not remission of sins; for whom did he baptize? "Having proclaimed to the people, that they should believe in the One coming after him, namely, Christ Jesus. Having heard this, they were baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus: and Paul laying his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them" (Acts 19:1-6). Do you see, how incomplete was the baptism of John? If the one were not incomplete, would then Paul have baptized them again, and placed his hands on them? Having performed also the second, he shew the superiority of the apostolic Baptism and that the baptism of John was far less than his. Thus, from this we recognize the difference of the baptisms.

Now it is necessary to say, for whom was Christ baptized and by which baptism. Neither the former the Jewish, nor the last -- ours. Whence hath He need for remission of sins, how is this possible for Him, Who hath not any sins? And as His flesh was privy to the Holy Spirit, and He was not subject to sins, then for whom was He baptized? But first of all it is necessary for us to recognize, by which baptism He was baptized, and then it will be clear for us. By which baptism indeed was He baptized? Not the Jewish, nor ours, nor John's. It is evident, that He came to Jordan not for the forgiveness of sins and not for receiving the gifts of the Spirit. But so that some from those present then should not think, that He came for repentance like others, listen to how John

precluded this. What he then spoke to the others then was: "Bear ye fruits worthy of repentance"; but listen what he said to Him: "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and Thou art come to me?" (Mt 3:8, 14). With these words he demonstrated that Christ came to him not through that need with which people came, and that He was far from the need to be baptized for this reason as He was so much more sublime and perfectly purer than Baptism itself.

For whom then was He baptized, if this was done not for repentance, nor for the remission of sins, nor for receiving the gifts of the Spirit? For the other two reasons, of which about the one the disciple speaks, and about the other He Himself spoke to John. Which reason of this baptism did John declare? Namely, that Christ should become known to the people, as Paul also mentions: "John therefore baptized with the baptism of repentance, so that through him they should believe on Him that cometh" (Acts 19:4); this was the consequence of the baptism. If John had gone to the home of each and, standing at the door, had spoken out for Christ and said: "He is the Son of God," such a testimony would have been suspicious, and this deed would have been extremely perplexing. So too, if he in advocating Christ had gone into the synagogues and witnessed to Him, this testimony of his might be suspiciously fabricated. But when all the people thronged out from all the cities to Jordan and remained on the banks of the river, and when He Himself came to be baptized and received the testimony of the Father by a voice from above and by the coming upon of the Spirit in the form of a dove, then the testimony of John about Him was made beyond all questioning. And since he said: "and I knew Him not" (Jn 1:31), his testimony put forth is trustworthy. They were kindred after the flesh between themselves "wherefore Elizabeth, thy kinswoman, hath also conceived a son" -- said the Angel to Mary about the mother of John (Lk. 1: 36); if however the mothers were relatives, then obviously so also were the children. Thus, since they were

kinsmen -- in order that it should not seem that John would testify concerning Christ because of kinship, the grace of the Spirit organized it such, that John spent all his early years in the wilderness, so that it should not seem that John had declared his testimony out of friendship or some similar reason. But John, as he was instructed of God, thus also announced about Him, wherein also he did say: "*and I knew Him not.*" From whence didst thou find out? "*He having sent me that sayeth to baptize with water, That One did tell me*" What did He tell thee? "*Over Him thou shalt see the Spirit descending, like to a dove, and abiding over Him, That One is baptized by the Holy Spirit*" (Jn 1:32-33). Dost thou see, that the Holy Spirit did not descend as in a first time then coming down upon Him, but in order to point out that preached by His inspiration -- as though by a finger, it pointed Him out to all. For this reason He came to baptism.

And there is a second reason, about which He Himself spoke -- what exactly is it? When John said: "*I have need to be baptized of Thee, and Thou art come to me?*" -- He answered thus: "*Stay now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill every righteousness*" (Mt 3:14-15). Dost thou see the meekness of the servant? Dost thou see the humility of the Master? What does He mean: "*to fulfill every righteousness?*" By righteousness is meant the fulfillment of all the commandments, as is said: "*both were righteous, walking faultlessly in the commandments of the Lord*" (Lk 1:6). Since fulfilling this righteousness was necessary for all people -- but no one of them kept it or fulfilled it -- Christ came then and fulfilled this righteousness. And what righteousness is there, someone will say, in being baptized? Obedience for a prophet was righteous. As Christ was circumcised, offered sacrifice, kept the Sabbath and observed the Jewish feasts, so also He added this remaining thing, that He was obedient to having been baptized by a prophet. It was the will of God then, that all should be baptized -- about which listen, as John speaks: "*He having sent me to baptize with water*" (Jn 1:33); so also Christ: "*the publicans and the people do justify God, having been baptized with the baptism of John; the Pharisees and the lawyers reject the counsel of God concerning themselves, not having been baptized by him*" (Lk 7:29-30). Thus, if obedience to God constitutes righteousness, and God sent John to baptize the nation, then Christ has also fulfilled this along with all the other commandments. Consider, that the commandments of the law is the main point of the two denarii: this debt -- which our race has needed to pay; but we did not pay it, and we, falling under such an accusation, are embraced by death. Christ came, and finding us afflicted by it -- He paid the debt, fulfilled the necessary and seized from it those who were not able to pay. Wherefore He does not say: "*it is necessary for us to do this or that,*" but rather "*to fulfill every righteousness.*" "*It is for Me, being the Master,* -- says He, -- *proper to make payment for the needy.*" Such was the reason for His baptism -- wherefore they should see, that He had fulfilled all the law -- both this reason and also that, about which was spoken of before.

Wherefore also the Spirit did descend as a dove: because where there is reconciliation with God -- there also is the dove. So also in the ark of Noah the dove did bring the branch of

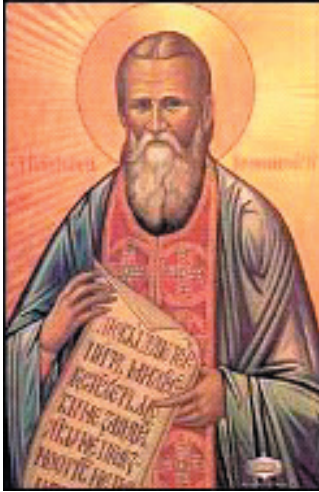
olive -- a sign of God's love of mankind and of the cessation of the flood. And now in the form of a dove, and not in a body -- this particularly deserves to be noted -- the Spirit descended, announcing the universal mercy of God and showing with it, that the spiritual man needs to be gentle, simple and innocent, as Christ also says: "*Except ye be converted and become as children, ye shall not enter into the Heavenly Kingdom*" (Mt 18:3). But that ark, after the cessation of the flood, remained upon the earth; this ark, after the cessation of wrath, is taken to heaven, and now this Immaculate and Imperishable Body is situated at the right hand of the Father.

Having made mention about the Body of the Lord, I shall also say a little about this, and then the conclusion of the talk. Many now will approach the Holy Table on the occasion of the feast. But some approach not with trembling, but shoving, hitting others, blazing with anger, shouting, cursing, roughing it up with their fellows with great confusion. What, tell me, art thou troubled by, my fellow? What disturbeth thee? Do urgent affairs, for certain, summon thee? At this hour art thou particularly aware, that these affairs of thine that thou particularly rememberest, that thou art situated upon the earth, and dost thou think to mix about with people? But is it not with a soul of stone naturally to think, that in such a time thou stand upon the earth, and not exult with the Angels with whom to raise up victorious song to God? For this Christ also did describe us with eagles, saying: "*where the corpse is, there are the eagles gathered*" (Mt 24:28) -- so that we might have risen to heaven and soared to the heights, having ascended on the wings of the spirit; but we, like snakes, crawl upon the earth and eat dirt. Having been invited to supper, thou, although satiated before others, would not dare to leave before others while others are still reclining. But here, when the sacred doings are going on, thou at the very middle would pass by everything and leave? Is it for a worthy excuse? What excuse might it be? Judas, having communed that last evening on that final night, left hastily then as all the others were still reclining.

Here these also are in imitation of him, who leave before the final blessing! If he had not gone, then he would not have made the betrayal; if he did not leave his co-disciples, then he would not have perished; if he had not removed himself from the flock, then the wolf would not have seized and devoured him alone; if he had separated himself from the Pastor, then he would not have made himself the prey of wild beasts. Wherefore he (Judas) was with the Jews, and those (the apostles) went out with the Lord. Dost thou see, by what manner the final prayer after the offering of the sacrifice is accomplished? We should, beloved, stand forth for this, we should ponder this, fearful of the coming judgment for this. We should approach the Holy Sacrifice with great decorum, with proper piety, so as to merit us more of God's benevolence, to cleanse one's soul and to receive eternal blessings, of which may we all be worthy by the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to with Whom the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, power, and worship now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

FASTING AND THE ORIGINAL SIN

From the spiritual diary of Saint John of Kronstadt, "My Life in Christ"



St. John of Kronstadt

Some people say: it does not matter if one eats non-lenten food during lent, fasting does not pertain only to food; it does not matter if one wears beautiful and expensive clothes, goes to the theater, to the dances, buys magnificent furniture, chinaware, keeps excessive savings accounts, etc.

Yet for what reason does our heart turn away from God, the Source of life, for what reason do we lose eternal life? Is it not because of gluttony, because of expensive clothing, like the rich

man of the Gospel, because of our passion for luxuries? Is it possible to serve God and mammon, to be a friend both to the world and to God, to serve Christ and the devil? Totally impossible! For what reason did Adam and Eve lose paradise and embraced sin and death? Was it not from a single food? Look carefully at the reason why we disregard the salvation of our souls, for which the Son of God had paid such a high price, why we pile sin upon sin, why we constantly find ourselves in opposition to God, why we fall into a life of vanity. Is it not because of our attachment to worldly things, particularly to worldly luxuries? For what reason do our hearts coarsen and we become flesh, instead of spirit, distorting our moral nature? Is it not because of passion for food, drink and other earthly goods? After all of this, how is it possible to say that it does not matter if one does not fast during lent? The very fact that we say such a thing is an expression of pride, vanity, disobedience to God and abandonment of Him.

Whoever rejects fasting, forgets why the fall of the first people occurred (from intemperance) and what a weapon against sin and the tempter was indicated to us by the Saviour when he was tempted in the desert, (fasting for forty days and nights); such a person does not know or does not wish to know that man falls away from God primarily due to intemperance, as happened with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and with the contemporaries of Noah. This is all because all kinds of sin appear among people as a result of intemperance.

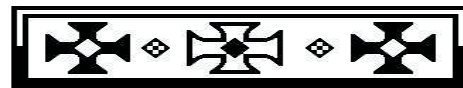
Whoever rejects fasting, that person denies himself and others a weapon against his multi-passioned flesh and against the devil, both of them garnering strength against us particularly through our intemperance; such a person is not a soldier of

Christ, for he throws in his weapon and willingly gives himself up into the imprisonment of his sin-loving flesh; finally, such a person is blind and does not see the relationship between the causes and the consequences of actions.

A Christian should fast in order to purify his mind, encourage and develop his emotions, and incite his will to the doing of good. These three abilities of man we obscure and suppress primarily through gluttony, drunkenness and earthly cares, and subsequently we fall away from the source of life, which is the Lord God, and we fall into corruption and vanity, whereby we pervert and defile the image of God within ourselves. Gluttony and lechery nail us down to earth and clip our soul's wings. And yet regard the high ascent achieved by all those who engaged in fasting and abstinence! They soared like eagles; they, earthly beings, lived with their minds and hearts in the heavens, heard ineffable things there, and learned divine wisdom there. Yet how does man humiliate himself by gluttony and drunkenness?

He corrupts his nature, created in God's image, and becomes comparable to mute beasts, and sometimes descends even lower. O, woe unto us for our passions, for our iniquitous habits! They prevent us from loving God and our neighbors, and from fulfilling God's commandments; they plant within us a criminal self-love of the flesh, whose end is eternal damnation. Thus a drunkard does not hesitate to spend a great deal of money on his bodily pleasure and satiety, yet begrudges pennies for the poor; those who love to dress luxuriously, or who love to buy fashionable furniture and expensive china spend an enormous amount of money on clothes and furnishings, yet walk by the poor with coldness and disdain; those who love to eat well do not hesitate to spend tens and thousands of rubles on fine dining, yet begrudge the poor even a brass farthing.

It is also necessary for a Christian to fast because, through the incarnation of the Son of God, human nature has become spiritual, sacred, and we hurry towards the heavenly realm, which is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. To eat and to drink, i.e., be addicted to sensual pleasures, is characteristic only of pagans, who, not being cognizant of spiritual heavenly pleasures, look upon the satisfaction of the belly – indulgence in food and drink – as the prime pleasure in life. It is for this reason that the Lord denounces this ruinous passion so frequently in the Gospel.



Power and authority are divided into two. One is worldly: God entrusted this to secular rulers; the other is spiritual: God put this in the hands of bishops and stewards of souls. The Pope, besides being a bishop, wants also to be a king – a mixture of things unmixable.

St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite

MODESTY AND WILL

By Metropolitan Philaret Voznesensky (+1985)



Our Lord Jesus Christ, instructing His disciples and apostles, imbued in them the necessity of observing purity of heart and thought. From the thought and from the heart proceed our sinful impulses: *“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart,”* says the Saviour; *“and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies”* (Matt. 15:18-19).

The Saviour pointed to this further with the following words: *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matt. 5:27-28). This law of the psycho-political nature of man is well-known to contemporary perverters, who are consciously striving to corrupt our youth. We remember how in Russia those who prepared the revolution, and then the communists, began the spiritual weakening of that nation by imbuing the youth with shamelessness and depravity. Special circles were organized for this, which spread contempt for the ordinary laws of morality. Such propagation of “free morals” which surrounds us now more than ever, is frequently being spread even among school age children.

In our days, as in pre-revolutionary times in Russia, this propagation has the definite goal of corrupting contemporary society. This is an old method. History is filled with examples of nations which perished from the spread of depravity. The Lord turned Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes. Babylon fell. The Roman Empire perished. The free West could be subjected to this same corruption... What do we see in the life which surrounds us? Indecency and shamelessness in clothing; shameless kissing and embracing on the streets and in public places; shameless advertisements, filthy pornographic literature... All of this dissoluteness and perversion pours into life in an immense wave. Truly, there is no less shamelessness now, if not more, than in pagan times when the Holy Apostles and their successors had to exhort Christians with especial zeal in the observance of modesty.

Man’s nature is such that in the sins of the flesh, the active role belongs on the one hand to the male sex, while on the other, the temptation comes from women. Because of this, Christian cultures everywhere established customs which helped

the preservation of good morals, as well as modest dress for women, so that the exposure of the latter should not evoke sinful thoughts and tempting inclinations in anyone. The more elevated the spiritual culture, the more modest was the dress of the women.

Modesty in dress is our first line of defense. It must guard the purity of women and keep men from the temptation of sinful desires. Meanwhile, the evocation of precisely these feelings characterizes contemporary fashion.

What was peculiar before to a fallen woman, who, in plying her base trade, dressed provocatively with the goal of evoking sensuality in men, is now becoming the mode and norm for young women who are often unconscious of the meaning and consequences of this fashion which enslaves them. We know that the fight against sin which surrounds us on all sides is not an easy matter. The path of salvation is made narrower in proportion to the intensification in the world of evil and apostasy. But the ancient pagan world which surrounded the handful of the first Christians was no less corrupt. These latter, however, did not accede to the temptations of the pagan modes, even as some now do not accede to contemporary temptations.

The Holy Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Philippians wrote that they shone as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (Phil. 2:15). A lofty spiritual disposition and irreproachably clean, strictly chaste life; these were the characteristic traits of the Philippian Christians, for which the Apostle Paul praised them. We live in later times; nineteen centuries separate us from those days in which the Apostle Paul wrote his epistles. But now, just as the Christians of the first centuries, we are encircled by an environment full of shamelessness and perversion. May the high and holy example of the ancient Christians teach us to be as steadfast and firm in the observance of the laws of Christian morals, and not accede to the temptations which surround us.

The moral character and moral value of man’s personality depends most of all on the direction and strength of the will. Of course, everyone understands that for a Christian it is necessary to have first, a strong and decisive will, and second, a will which is firmly directed toward the good of his neighbor; toward the side of good and not evil. How is one to develop a strong will? The answer is simple: above all through the exercise of the will. To do this, as with bodily exercise, it is necessary to begin slowly, little by little. However, having begun to exercise one’s will in anything (e.g., in a constant struggle with one’s sinful habits or whims) this work on oneself must never cease. Moreover, a Christian who wishes to strengthen his will, his character, must from the very beginning avoid all dissipation, disorder and inconsistency of behavior. Otherwise, he will be a person without character, unreliable, a reed shaking in the wind, as we read in Holy Scripture.

Discipline is necessary for every one of us. It has such vital significance that without it, a correct, normal order and success in our endeavors is impossible. This is of primary importance in the life of each individual; for inner self-discipline takes the place here of external school or military discipline. Man must place himself in definite frameworks, having created definite conditions and an order of life, and he must not depart from this.

Let us note this, too: man's habits are of great significance in the matter of strengthening the will. Bad, sinful habits are a great obstacle for a Christian moral life. On the other hand, good habits are a valuable acquisition for the soul and, therefore, man must teach himself much good so that what is good becomes his own--habitual. This is especially important in the early years, when a man's character takes shape. It is not in vain that we say that the second half of man's earthly life is formed from habits acquired in the first half.

Probably no one would argue against the need for a strong will. In life we meet people with varying degrees of strength of will. It often happens that a person who is very gifted, talented, with a strong mind and a profoundly good heart, turns out to be weak willed and cannot carry out his plans in life, no matter how good and valuable they might be. On the other hand, a less talented person who is stronger in character and has great strength of will, this person often succeeds in life.

What is more important than strength of will is its direction: does it act for good or evil? A well intentioned but weak-willed person is seldom of great use to society; while a person with a strong will bent on evil is very dangerous. From this it is clear how very important are those principles, those basic foundations and rules by which man's will is guided.

From what source can man's will draw suitable principles of guidance? For a non-believer, an answer to this is extremely difficult and essentially impossible. Are they to be drawn from science? In the first place, science is interested primarily in questions of knowledge and not morals, and secondly, it does not contain anything solid and constant in principles because it is constantly changing. From philosophy? Philosophy teaches about the relativity of its truths and does not claim to their unconditional authority. From practical life? Even less. This life itself is in need of positive principles which can remove from it unruly, and unprincipled conditions. But while the answer to the present question is so difficult for non-believers, for a believing Christian the answer is simple and clear. The source of good principles is God's will, and this is revealed to us in the Saviour's teaching, in His Holy Gospel. It alone has an unconditional, steadfast authority in this regard; and it alone teaches us self-sacrifice and Christian freedom, Christian equality and brotherhood (a concept stolen by those outside the Faith). The Lord Himself said of true Christians, "*Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father*" (Matt. 7:21).

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LORD JESUS CHRIST HAVE MERCY ON US

UNREAL CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

By Fr. Seraphim Rose, from "Orthodoxy & the Religion of the Future"

It is deeply indicative of the spiritual state of contemporary mankind that the "charismatic" and "meditation" experiences are taking root among "Christians." An Eastern religious influence is undeniably at work in such "Christians," but it is only as a result of something much more fundamental: the loss of the very feeling and savor of Christianity.

The life of self-centeredness and self-satisfaction lived by most of today's "Christians" is so all-pervading that it effectively seals them off from any understanding at all of spiritual life; and when such people do undertake "spiritual life," it is only as another form of self-satisfaction. This can be seen quite clearly in the totally false religious ideal both of the "charismatic" movement and the various forms of "Christian meditation": all of them promise (and give very quickly) an experience of "contentment" and "peace." But this is not the Christian ideal at all, which if anything may be summed up as a fierce battle and struggle. The "contentment" and "peace" described in these contemporary "spiritual" movements are quite manifestly the product of spiritual deception, of spiritual self-satisfaction -- which is the absolute death of the God-oriented spiritual life. All these forms of "Christian meditation" operate solely on the psychic level and have nothing whatever in common with Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is formed in the arduous struggle to acquire the eternal Kingdom, which fully begins only with the dissolution of this temporal world, and the true Christian struggler never finds repose even in the foretastes of eternal blessedness which might be vouchsafed to him in this life; but the Eastern religions, to which the Kingdom of Heaven has not been revealed, strive only to acquire psychic states which begin and end in this life.

In our age of apostasy preceding the manifestation of Antichrist, the devil has been loosed for a time (Apoc. 20:7) to work the false miracles which he could not work during the "thousand years" of grace in the Church of Christ (Apoc. 20:3), and to gather in his hellish harvest of those souls who "received not the love of the truth" (II Thes. 2:10). We can tell that the time of Antichrist is truly near by the very fact that this satanic harvest is now being reaped not merely among the pagan peoples, who have not heard of Christ, but even more among "Christians" who have lost the savor of Christianity. It is of the very nature of Antichrist to present the kingdom of the devil as if it were of Christ. The present-day "charismatic" movement and "Christian meditation," and the "new religious consciousness" of which they are part, are forerunners of the religion of the future, the religion of 'the last humanity, the Religion of Antichrist, and their chief "spiritual" function is to make available to Christians the demonic initiation hitherto restricted to the pagan world.

[continued on page 14]

Ἡ Ἀρρώστεια τῆς Θρησκείας

Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου καὶ Ἁγίου Βλασίου Ἱεροθέου Βλάχου, ΠΗΓΗ: Ἐφημερίς «Ἐλευθεροτυπία», 23-12-2001

Ἡ ἑορτὴ τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ περικλεισθῆ σὲ μερικὲς συναισθηματικὲς καταστάσεις, σὲ ἓνα ἑορταστικὸ διάκοσμο, σὲ μιὰ ἐγκεφαλικὴ ὀρθολογιστικὴ ἐρμηνεία τῶν γεγονότων, σὲ ἓνα ἠθικιστικὸ πλαίσιο, ἀλλὰ ἔχει βαθύτατο ὑπαρξιακὸ νόημα καὶ ὑπαρξιακὴ σημασία. Ἄν μείνῃ κανεὶς σὲ ἓνα ἐξωτερικὸ ἐπίπεδο, τότε ἀφήνει τὸν ἑαυτό του πεινασμένο καὶ διψασμένο, στερημένο ἀπὸ νόημα ζωῆς καὶ ὑπαρξιακῆς ἐλευθερίας.

Ἡ ἐνανθρώπιση τοῦ Χριστοῦ θεωρήθηκε καὶ ἑορτάσθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν λατρευτικὴ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ κοινότητα ὡς *κατάρρηση τῆς θρησκείας καὶ μετατροπὴ τῆς σὲ Ἐκκλησία*. Μάλιστα, κατὰ τὸν πιὸ κατηγορηματικὸ τρόπο ὁ ἀείμνηστος π. Ἰωάννης Ρωμανίδης ἔλεγε ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς ἐνηθρώπησε γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀσθένεια τῆς θρησκείας.

Ἡ λέξη θρησκεία ἀναφέρεται στὰ Ὀμηρικὰ ἔπη, χρησιμοποιεῖται καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἡρόδοτο γιὰ νὰ δηλώσῃ τὴν λατρεία καὶ τὴν τιμὴ πού ὀφείλει νὰ ἀποδίδῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὸν Θεό. Ἐτυμολογικὰ ἡ λέξη θρησκεία προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ θρώσκω καὶ σημαίνει ἀναβαίνω, καὶ ἐπομένως μὲ τὸν ὄρο θρησκεία νοεῖται ἡ ἀνάβαση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ λέξη ἄνθρωπος ἐτυμολογικὰ παράγεται ἀπὸ τὸ ἄνω θρώσκω καὶ σημαίνει ἀνάβαση.

Ὅμως, ὅπως φαίνεται ἐκ πρώτης ὄψεως ἡ ἀνάβαση προϋποθέτει τὴν ἀποδοχὴ τῆς οὐσίας τῆς μεταφυσικῆς, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πού περιέπεσε ἀπὸ τὸν ἀθάνατο καὶ ἀπρόσωπο κόσμο τῶν ιδεῶν καὶ περικλείσθηκε στὸ σῶμα, πρέπει νὰ ἀπαλλαγῇ ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα - σῆμα - τάφο καὶ νὰ ἐπιστρέψῃ στὸν κόσμο τῶν ιδεῶν. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ λατινικὴ λέξη religio, ἡ ὁποία χρησιμοποιεῖται γιὰ νὰ δηλώσῃ τὴν λέξη θρησκεία, σημαίνει, κατὰ τὰ λεξικά, δεσμοενότητα -- ἔνωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὸν Θεό -- δηλώνει τὸ ἴδιο γεγονός, δηλαδὴ τὴν οὐσία καὶ τὸ περιεχόμενο τῆς μεταφυσικῆς. Μάλιστα δὲ προϋποθέτει, ἂν τὸ δοῦμε μέσα στὶς ἀνατολικὲς θρησκείες, καὶ μιὰ ἀπρόσωπη ἔκφραση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀφοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ χαθῆ ὡς σταγόνα μέσα στὸν ὠκεανὸ τοῦ Ἀνωτάτου ὄντος, ὅποτε χάνεται τὸ πρόσωπο.

Ὅπως δίδασκε ὁ ἀείμνηστος π. Ἰωάννης Ρωμανίδης, μὲ τὸν ὄρο θρησκεία νοεῖται ἡ ταῦτιση τοῦ ἀκτίστου μὲ τὸ κτιστό, καὶ μάλιστα ἡ ταῦτιση τῶν παραστάσεων τοῦ ἀκτίστου μὲ τὰ νοήματα καὶ ρήματα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης σκέψης καί, βέβαια, αὐτὴ ἡ ταῦτιση εἶναι τὸ θεμέλιο τῆς θρησκείας καὶ τῆς λατρείας τῶν εἰδωλῶν. Ὅποτε, στὴν περίπτωση αὐτὴ χάνεται τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀρρωσταίνει βαθειὰ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀφοῦ καλλιεργούνται τὰ πάθη καὶ ἡ φαντασία καὶ ἀκόμη περισσότερο μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι τὰ λεγόμενα ἀδιάβλητα -- φυσικὰ πάθη (ἡ πείνα, ἡ δίψα κλπ.) -- γίνονται διαβλητὰ πάθη, αἰτία

κοινωνικῶν ἀνωμαλιῶν μὲ τὴν ἄκρατη φιλοδοξία, τὴν ἄδικη φιλοκτημοσύνη καὶ τὴν ἀχαλίνωτη φιληδονία.

Εἶναι γνωστὸν ὅτι ὁ Φόϋερμαχ κατ' ἀρχὰς καὶ ὕστερα ὁ Μάρξ εἶπαν ὅτι ἡ «*θρησκεία εἶναι τὸ ὄπιο τοῦ λαοῦ*». Μποροῦμε νὰ δεχθοῦμε αὐτὴν τὴν ἀποψη, ὅτι ἡ θρησκεία, ὅπως τὴν συναντοῦμε στὴν Ἀνατολὴ καὶ στὴν θρησκευοποιημένη θεώρηση τοῦ δυτικοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, εἶναι τὸ ὄπιο τοῦ λαοῦ, ἀφοῦ ἀδρανοποιεῖ τὸν λαό, νεκρώνει τὶς κοινωνίες καὶ τὶς ὁδηγεῖ σὲ τέτοιο βαθμὸ ἀπενεργοποίησης, ὥστε νὰ εἶναι ἐκμεταλλεύσιμο ὑλικὸ γιὰ ἐγκαθίδρυση μιᾶς τυραννίας πού στερεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ τὸ ἀναφαίρετο δικαίωμα τῆς ἐλευθερίας του.

Θὰ ἤθελα στὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ νὰ δώσω δυὸ χαρακτηριστικὰ παραδείγματα θρησκευτικῶν ἐκδηλώσεων.

Τὸ ἓνα προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν βουδιστικὴ θρησκεία. Εἶναι γνωστὸν ὅτι κατὰ τὸν βουδισμό ἐκεῖνο πού ἀπασχολεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς ὀδύνης πού προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν πόθο τῆς ζωῆς. Ὅποτε, ὁ ὑψιστὸς σκοπὸς τοῦ «*πεφωτισμένου*» εἶναι νὰ ἀπαλλαγῇ ἀπὸ τὸν πόθο αὐτὸ τῆς ζωῆς. Ἡ νέκρωση τῆς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ζωῆς γίνεται μὲ εἰδικὴ μέθοδο πού λέγεται γιόγκα, μὲ τοὺς διαφόρους τύπους τῆς, ἤτοι Χάτα Γιόγκα (ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Βράχμαν μὲ σωματικὲς ἀσκήσεις), Κάρμα Γιόγκα (ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Βράχμαν μὲ ἔργα καὶ λειτουργικὲς πράξεις), Μάντρα Γιόγκα (ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Βράχμαν μὲ ψαλμοὺς καὶ μαγικὲς συλλαβές), Βάκτι Γιόγκα (ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Βράχμαν μὲ τὴν ὀλοκληρωτικὴ λατρεία μιᾶς θεότητας ἢ τοῦ ἰδίου τοῦ Γκουρού), Γκνάνα Γιόγκα (ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Βράχμαν μὲ μυστικιστικὴ γνώση), Κουνταλίνα Γιόγκα (ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Βράχμαν μὲ δαιμονικὲς ἐνέργειες), Τάντρα Γιόγκα (ἔνωση μὲ τὸ Βράχμαν μὲ ἀχαλίνωτες σεξουαλικὲς πράξεις). Μὲ τὶς μεθόδους αὐτὲς πρέπει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ φθάσῃ στὸ ἀπόλυτο νιρβάνα, πού εἶναι ἡ σβέση τῆς ὑπαρξῆς καὶ ἡ ἀπαλλαγὴ τοῦ πόθου γιὰ τὴν ζωὴ, καὶ ἀπώτερο σκοπὸ νὰ ἀποφύγῃ τὴν σαμσάρα, ἤτοι τὴν ἀνακύκλιση τῆς ζωῆς, τὴν μετενάρκωση. Ἔτσι τὸ ἀτομικὸ Ἄτμαν ἐνώνεται μὲ τὸ καθολικὸ Βράχμαν, ὅπως ἡ σταγόνα εἰσέρχεται μέσα στὸν ὠκεανό.

Εἶναι φανερό ὅτι σὲ μιὰ τέτοια θρησκευτικὴ ζωὴ δὲν ὑπάρχει πρόσωπο, ὁ ἄνθρωπος θεωρεῖται ἀπλῶς ἄτομο, καθὼς ἐπίσης δὲν ὑπάρχει κοινωνία, δὲν ἀναπτύσσεται κοινωνικὴ ζωὴ, ἀφοῦ ἡ κάθε ζωὴ θεωρεῖται ἀπαρχὴ μιᾶς ὀδύνης.

Τὸ ἄλλο παράδειγμα προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὶς θεωρίες τοῦ Ἀνσέλμου Καντερβουρίας, ἐνὸς σχολαστικοῦ θεολόγου, ὁ ὁποῖος θεμελιώνει ἓνα χριστιανικὸ σύστημα, πού ἐπεκράτησε στὴν Δύση, ἔχοντας ὑπ' ὄψη του τὸ φεουδαλιστικὸ σύστημα διοργάνωσης τῆς κοινωνίας. Ὅπως ὁ φεουδάρχης ἔχει τὴν ἀπόλυτη ἀξία καὶ τιμὴ καὶ κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τὴν προσβάλλῃ, διότι κάθε προσβολὴ τῆς τιμῆς του καὶ κάθε διασάλευση τοῦ φεουδαλιστικοῦ συστήματος, πού θεωρεῖται ἔργο τοῦ Θεοῦ, συνεπάγεται τὴν τιμωρία τοῦ παραβάτη, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι ἡ ὑψίστη δικαιοσύνη, ἔχει τιμὴ, καὶ ἔχει θεσπίσει τὴν τάξη μέσα στὴν δημιουργία, ὅποτε ὁ παραβάτης πρέπει ἢ νὰ ἰκανοποιήσῃ τὴν δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἢ νὰ τιμωρηθῇ. Ἔτσι

ὁ Ἄνσελμος ἐρμήνευσε τὴν σταυρική θυσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὄχι ὡς ἔκφραση ἀγάπης γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἐξιλέωση τῆς δικαιοσύνης τοῦ Θεοῦ Πατέρα. Αὐτὸ τὸ σύστημα καὶ μὲ τὴν συνδρομὴ τοῦ ἀπολύτου προορισμοῦ δημιούργησε τεράστια προβλήματα στὸν δυτικὸ χῶρο, προβλήματα προσωπικά καὶ κοινωνικά, ὅπως ἀνέλυσε ὁ Μάξ Βέμπερ στὸ βιβλίο του «*ἡ Προτεσταντικὴ Ἠθικὴ καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Καπιταλισμοῦ*».

Τὰ δυὸ αὐτὰ παραδείγματα, ἓνα ἀπὸ τὸν ἀνατολικὸ καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὸν δυτικὸ χῶρο, μᾶς δείχνουν πὼς ἐφθασε ὁ Φόυερμαπαχ στὴν ρῆση ὅτι «*ἡ θρησκεία εἶναι τὸ ὄπιο τοῦ λαοῦ*». Καὶ βέβαια καὶ ἐμεῖς οἱ Ὀρθόδοξοι πιστεύουμε ὅτι ἂν στὴν θρησκεία δώσουμε αὐτὸν τὸν ὄρισμό, τὸν μεταφυσικό, τότε μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι τὸ ὄπιο τοῦ λαοῦ, γιατί καταστρέφει κάθε προσωπικὴ ζωὴ, ἀφανίζει τὴν προσωπικὴ ἐλευθερία, ἀκόμη δὲ διασπᾶ καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν κοινωνικὴ ζωὴ, τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ πρόσωπο τὸν κάνει ἄτομο.

Ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς ὅμως παρουσιάσθηκε στὴν ἱστορία τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος ὡς τὸ τέλος τῆς θρησκείας καὶ ὡς ἡ βίωση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὁ ὅρος Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἀρχαιοελληνικὸς καὶ δείχνει μιὰ κοινότητα, τὴν σύναξη τοῦ λαοῦ – τοῦ Δήμου – γιὰ νὰ λύση τὰ προβλήματά του. Φυσικά, μὲ τὸν ὄρο Ἐκκλησία δὲν ἐννοοῦμε κάτι ἐξωτερικό, ἀλλὰ δηλώνουμε τὴν προσωπικὴ κοινωνία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς συνανθρώπους του, ὅπως τὸ βλέπουμε στοὺς Προφῆτας τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, στοὺς Ἀποστόλους τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, στὶς Πράξεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων, ὅπου «*πάντες οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά, καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσι καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν...*» (Πράξ. β' 44-45), τὴν συναντοῦμε στὰ κοινόβια τῶν μοναχῶν, στὴν ζωὴ καὶ τὴν διδασκαλία τῶν μεγάλων Πατέρων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ φθάνει μέχρι τὶς ἡμέρες μας, ὅπως τὸ βλέπουμε στὶς ἐκκλησιαστικὲς κοινότητες τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη καὶ στὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη. Καὶ γνωρίζουμε καλά, ἀπὸ διάφορες μελέτες, ὅτι ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης καὶ ὁ Μακρυγιάννης δὲν ἦταν θρησκευτικοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ἀλλὰ ἐκκλησιαστικοί, δὲν διαπνέονταν ἀπὸ τὸν δυτικὸ πουριτανισμό, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἡσυχαστικὴ - νηπτικὴ Ὀρθόδοξη παράδοση.

Τὸ μεγαλύτερο πρόβλημα τοῦ δυτικοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλῶν Ὀρθόδοξων, εἶναι ὅτι, ὅπως λέγει καὶ ὁ Χρῆστος Γιανναρᾶς, θρησκευιοποίησαν τὸν Χριστιανισμό, μετέτρεψαν τὴν Ἐκκλησία σὲ θρησκεία. Καὶ ἔτσι καλλιεργοῦνται οἱ φονταμενταλισμοί, τὰ μίση καὶ οἱ διαιρέσεις, ἡ μαγικὴ ἀντίληψη καὶ σχέση μὲ τὸν Θεό, ἡ ἀνταγωνιστικὴ διάθεση τοῦ ἑνὸς πρὸς τὸν ἄλλο, ἡ ἀτομοκρατικὴ θεώρηση τῆς ζωῆς, ἡ χρησιμοθηρικὴ καὶ ὠφελμιστικὴ ἀντίληψη τῆς κοινωνίας, ἡ φανταστικὴ ἐρμηνεία τῶν πάντων, ἡ συναισθηματικὴ προσέγγιση τοῦ βίου καὶ γενικὰ ἡ ἀποψη ὅτι ὁ ἄλλος ἀποτελεῖ καὶ εἶναι ἀπειλὴ τῆς δικῆς μας ὑπαρξης. Ὅποτε σὲ αὐτὲς τὶς περιπτώσεις τὰ φωτισμένα χριστουγεννιάτικα δένδρα, οἱ συναισθηματικὲς μελωδίες, οἱ ἠθικοπλαστικὲς

ἀναλύσεις καλύπτουν ἐγκληματικὰ τὴν ὑπαρξιακὴ γύμνια καὶ καθιστοῦν τὸν ἄνθρωπο τραγικὸ ὄν.

Ἄν οἱ σύγχρονοι προβληματισμένοι ἄνθρωποι μποροῦν νὰ ἀναζητήσουν ἓνα νόημα στὴν ἐορτὴ τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ τὴν Γέννησή Του κατήργησε τὴν ἀρρώστια τῆς θρησκείας καὶ τὴν μετέβαλε σὲ ζωντανὴ Ἐκκλησία, μὲ ὅτι αὐτὸ συνεπάγεται στὴν αὐθεντικὴ του ἔκφραση. Αὐτὸ ἔχει ἀνάγκη ὁ σύγχρονος ἄνθρωπος πού ὑποφέρει ἀπὸ τὴν τραγικὴ τριάδα, ὅπως θὰ ἔλεγε ὁ Βίκτωρ Φράνλ, ἤτοι τὸν πόνο, τὶς ἐνοχῆς καὶ τὸν θάνατο, πού αἰσθάνεται τὴν ζωὴ του ὡς μιὰ προθανάτια ἐμπειρία, ἐνὸς ὑπαρξιακοῦ καὶ αἰώνιου θανάτου καὶ ἀναζητᾷ ὄχι ἀπλῶς τὴν βίωση τῆς ἡδονῆς, ἀλλὰ ἴσως καὶ μέσα ἀπὸ αὐτὴν, τὴν ἐπιβίωση τῆς ὑπαρξης.



Ὀρθόδοξα Σταχυολογήματα

Ἀπὸ τὸ φυλλάδιον «*Σταχυολογήματα τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀγίουστίνου Καντιώτου*», Ἐκδόσεις «*Ὀρθόδοξος Κυψέλη*»

Αὶ λέξεις, αἱ ὁποῖαι ἦσαν γραμμῆναι εἰς τὸν μαῦρον Ἀπίνακα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος, αἱ λέξεις ἐνοχῆ, σκότος, ἀπελπισία, θάνατος, ἐσβέσθησαν διὰ τοῦ σπόγγου τοῦ σταυροῦ καὶ ἀντὶ αὐτῶν ἐγράφησαν μὲ φωτεινὰ γράμματα αἱ λέξεις ἰλασμός, φῶς, ἐλπίς, χάρις, ζωὴ αἰώνιος.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία παράγει ἁγίους. Μόνον αὐτὴ παράγει ἁγίους. Καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς, νὰ παράγη ἁγίους. Ἡ ἐπιστήμη καλλιεργεῖ τὴν γνῶσιν. Ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀγιότητα, ἡ ὁποία κάνει τὸν ἄνθρωπον νὰ πλησιάσῃ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καλλιεργεῖ μόνον ἡ Ἐκκλησία.

Ἡ Ἑλλάς προσέφερεν εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν τὸ αἶμα μυριάδων ἑτεκνῶν τῆς, μαρτύρων καὶ ὁμολογητῶν τῆς νέας πίστεως. Κανένα ἄλλο ἔθνος δὲν προσέφερε τόσον αἶμα εἰς τὸν Χριστιανισμόν ὅσον ἡ Ἑλλάς. Μὲ τὸ αἶμα τῶν μαρτύρων ἐποτίσθη τὸ δένδρον τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μεγαλύτερα ὑπηρεσία, αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μαγαλυτέρα δόξα τῆς Ἑλλάδος, δόξα ὑπερβαίνουσα τὴν δόξαν μυριάδων Παρθενῶνων.

Τὸ κλειδί τῆς ἐρμηνείας τοῦ Ἰούδα τὸ κατέχεις ἐσύ. Ἐὰν παύσης, φίλε μου, νὰ ἐρευνᾷς τὸν Ἰούδαν καὶ ἀρχίσης νὰ ἐρευνᾷς τὸν ἄγνωστον ἑαυτὸν σου καὶ ἐν τῇ διαρκεί ἐρευνῇ κατέλθης εἰς τὰς ψυχικὰς ἀβύσσους, ἐκεῖ θὰ ἀντικρύσης τὸν Ἰούδαν. Διότι πᾶς ἄνθρωπος φέρει ἐντὸς του ἓναν Ἰούδαν, ὅστις εἶναι ἔτοιμος νὰ ἐπαναλάβῃ τὴν προδοσίαν, ἐὰν δὲν τὴν ἔχη ἤδη πράξει.

Ἰωάννης Ὁ Πρόδρομος (7 Ιανουαρίου)

Πρωτ. π. Γεωργίου Παπαβαρνάβα

Ὁ Τίμιος Πρόδρομος εἶναι τὸ πρόσωπον ἐκεῖνο, τὸ ὁποῖον ἐγκωμίασε ὁ Χριστὸς περισσότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλον ἄνθρωπο. «*Μεῖζων ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν προφήτης Ἰωάννου τοῦ Βαπτιστοῦ οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν*» (Λουκ. ζ' 28). Εἶναι ὁ μεγαλύτερος τῶν Προφητῶν, ὄχι ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἡλικία, ἀφοῦ ἐξῆσε μόνον τριάντα χρόνια, ἀλλὰ ὡς πρὸς τὴν χάρη καὶ τὴν δόξα, γιατί ἀξιώθηκε ὄχι μόνον νὰ ἰδῆ, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ βαπτίσῃ «*τὸν κηρυττόμενον*» Μεσσία. Στὴν συνέχεια ὁ Χριστὸς τόνισε ὅτι ὁ μικρότερος στὴν Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν εἶναι μεγαλύτερος ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Πρόδρομο. Καὶ τὸ εἶπε αὐτὸ, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἐρμηνεία τοῦ ἱεροῦ Χρυσοστόμου, γιὰ νὰ μὴ παρασυρθοῦν οἱ ὄχλοι ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπερβολὴ τῶν ἐπαίνων καὶ θεωρήσουν τὸν Ἰωάννη ἀνώτερον ἀπὸ τὸν Θεάνθρωπο Χριστό. Ἀλλὰ καὶ σύμφωνα μὲ μιὰ ἄλλη ἐρμηνεία, τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ συγγραφέως τοῦ 4ου μ.Χ. αἰῶνος Διδύμου τοῦ Τυφλοῦ, ὁ μικρότερος ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους Ἀποστόλους, ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος, εἶναι μεγαλύτερος τοῦ Προδρόμου, ἀφοῦ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι εἶναι ἀνώτεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς Προφῆτας.

Εἶναι γέννημα στεῖρας γυναικὸς καὶ καρπὸς προσευχῆς. Ἀπὸ ἔμβρυο ἐξὶ μηνῶν στὴν μήτρα τῆς Ἐλισάβετ ἔλαβε τὴν χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ σκίρτησε ὅταν ἡ Παναγία συνάντησε τὴν μητέρα του καὶ μὲ τὸ στόμα τῆς προφήτευσε καὶ ὀνόμασε τὴν Μαρία Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὸ ὄνομα Ἰωάννης, πού ἔλαβε, ἦταν καὶ αὐτὸ δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅπως καὶ ὁ ἴδιος.

Ἡ ἀσκητικὴ του ζωὴ σκανδάλισε πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς συγχρόνους του, πού δὲν μπορούσαν νὰ ἀντιληφθοῦν τὸν ἀγγελικὸ τρόπο τῆς ζωῆς του, καὶ τὸν κατηγοροῦσαν ὅτι εἶναι δαιμονισμένος. Βέβαια, τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτό, δηλαδὴ τὸ νὰ κατηγοροῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι κάποιον συνάνθρωπό τους, ἐπειδὴ θέλει νὰ ζήσει ὄχι ὅπως ἐκεῖνος, ἀλλὰ μὲ διαφορετικὸ τρόπο, συνέβαινε καὶ σὲ ἄλλες ἐποχές, ὅπως συμβαίνει καὶ στὶς ἡμέρες μας, ἀφοῦ καὶ σήμερα ὑπάρχουν πολλοὶ πού κατηγοροῦν αὐτὸ πού δὲν μποροῦν νὰ καταλάβουν μὲ τὴν δική τους λογική. Ἐκτὸς ὁμως ἀπὸ τὸ καταλαβαίνω ὑπάρχει καὶ τὸ αἰσθάνομαι. Δηλαδὴ, πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν λογικὴ ὑπάρχει καὶ ἡ καρδιά, πού ὅταν μεθᾶ ἀπὸ τὸ δυνατὸ κρασὶ τῆς ἀκτιστῆς χάρης τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἀπαρνεῖται ὅλες τὶς ψευτοχαρὲς τῆς ἐφήμερης αὐτῆς ζωῆς. Αὐτὴ τὴν μέθη οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες τὴν ὀνομάζουν νηφάλια. Ὅταν κάποιος γευτῆ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε περιφρονεῖ ὅλες τὶς ἄλλες ἀγάπες πρὸς τὰ ὑλικά πράγματα γιατί τὶς βρίσκει ψεύτικες.

Ὁ Τίμιος Πρόδρομος προετοίμασε τοὺς ἄνθρώπους νὰ δεχθοῦν τὸν Χριστό. Τὸ κήρυγμά του ἦταν κήρυγμα μετανοίας. Ὁ λόγος του ἦταν γεμάτος ἀνδρεία καὶ δύναμη. Δὲν δειλίασε καὶ δὲν δίστασε νὰ τὰ βάλῃ μὲ τὸ κατεστημένο τῆς ἐποχῆς του. Ἦλεγξε τὴν παρανομία τοῦ βασιλῆ Ἡρώδη. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς Φαρισαίους, πού καταδυνάστευαν τὸν λαὸ φορτώνοντας τὸν φορτία βαρεῖα καὶ δυσβάστακτα, τοὺς ἀποκάλεσε φίδια καὶ γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν.

Προπορεύθηκε τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ στὸν Ἄδη καὶ μάλιστα μὲ χαρὰ, ὅπως ψάλλουμε στὸ Ἀπολυτικίό του, γιὰ νὰ κηρύξῃ στοὺς ἀπ' αἰῶνος θανόντας «*Θεὸν φανερωθέντα ἐν σαρκί*».

Στὴν συνέχεια, θὰ τονίσουμε τρία σημεῖα, λαμβάνοντας ἀφορμὴ ἀπὸ τὰ γεγονότα τῆς ζωῆς του, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν βίο καὶ τὴν πολιτεία του.

Πρῶτον, ὅτι κατηγορήθηκε ὡς δαιμονισμένος γιατί ἡ ζωὴ του, πού τὴν εἶχε ἀφιερῶσει στὸν Θεό, ἦταν διαφορετικὴ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνη τῶν πολλῶν. Δὲν ἔμενε στὴν πόλη, ἀλλὰ ἔφυγε στὴν ἔρημο, ὅπου ζοῦσε ἀσκητικά. Δὲν ἔτρωγε φαγητό, ἀλλὰ τρεφόταν μὲ ἀκρίδες, δηλαδὴ μὲ τίς τρυφερὲς ἄκρες τῶν φυτῶν, καὶ μὲ μέλι ἄγριο. Καὶ σήμερα, δυστυχῶς, ὑπάρχει ἀπὸ πολλοὺς ἡ ἴδια ἀντιμετώπιση, ὅταν ἀποφασίσῃ κάποιος, καὶ ἰδίως νέος καὶ μορφωμένος, νὰ ἀφιερῶθῃ στὸν Χριστό καὶ στὴν Ἐκκλησία Του ὡς Ἱερέας ἢ ὡς Μοναχός. Καὶ ἂν δὲν τὸν ἀποκαλοῦν δαιμονισμένο, σίγουρα λένε ὅτι κάτι ἔπαθε στὸ μυαλό. Στὶς περισσότερες περιπτώσεις οἱ ἄνθρωποι πού ἀντιτίθενται καὶ προκαλοῦν πλεῖστα ὅσα ἐμπόδια καὶ δυσκολίες, δὲν εἶναι ἄθεοι ἢ ἄσχετοι μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἀλλὰ ἀντίθετα ἐκκλησιάζονται καὶ μάλιστα τιμοῦν τοὺς Ἁγίους, πού ἀκολούθησαν τὸν ἴδιο δρόμο. Αὐτὸ ἂν δὲν εἶναι παραλογισμὸς τότε τί εἶναι;

Δεύτερον. Ἄν ἤλεγξε τὴν παρανομία τοῦ Ἡρώδη καὶ τὴν ὑποκρισία τῶν Φαρισαίων, τὸ ἔκανε ἀπὸ ἀγάπη καὶ ὄχι ἀπὸ ἐμπάθεια, ἀφοῦ ἦταν ἀπαθῆς καὶ «*πλήρης Πνεύματος Ἁγίου*». Σκοπὸς του δὲν ἦταν ἡ διαπόμπευσή τους, ἀλλὰ ἡ διόρθωση καὶ ἡ θεραπεία τους. Σήμερα ὑπάρχει ἡ νοοτροπία νὰ δικαιολογοῦμε τὰ λάθη μας καὶ τὰ πάθη μας στηρίζοντας τὰ ἀγιογραφικά καὶ ἀγιολογικά, δηλαδὴ φέροντας παραδείγματα ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴ τῶν Ἁγίων. Ἔτσι, πολλοὶ βρίζουν, συκοφαντοῦν καὶ σπιλῶνουν ὑπολήψεις τάχα γιὰ τὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ Ἅγιοι, ὅταν ἀναγκάζονται νὰ ἐλέγξουν, τὸ ἔκαναν μὲ πόνο, ἀγάπη καὶ πολλὴ προσευχὴ γιὰ τὰ συγκεκριμένα πρόσωπα καὶ ἀφοῦ εἶχαν ἐξαντλήσει κάθε ἄλλο μέσο.

Τρίτον. Τὰ γεγονότα τῆς ζωῆς του, ὁ Τίμιος Πρόδρομος, εὐχάριστα καὶ ὀδυνηρά, τὰ θεωροῦσε ὅτι προέρχονται κατ' εὐθείαν ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, ἀφοῦ χωρὶς τὴν θέλησή Του τίποτα δὲν



μπορεί να συμβῆ. Καί πράγματι, ὄχι μόνον ἡ γέννηση καὶ τὰ ἄλλα περιστατικὰ τῆς ζωῆς του ἔγιναν ἐπειδὴ τὸ θέλησε ὁ Θεός, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θάνατός του ἔγινε θεϊκὴ Οἰκονομία, γιὰ νὰ κηρύξη καὶ «*τοῖς ἐν Ἀδῆν*».

Τὸ ἴδιο συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ κάθε ἕναν ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς. Ὁ Θεός μᾶς γνωρίζει πρὶν ἀκόμα γεννηθοῦμε, ἀφοῦ αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ αἰτία τῆς δημιουργίας μας. Μᾶς ἀγαπᾷ περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅ,τι νομίζουμε καὶ φροντίζει γιὰ τὸν καθένα μας ξεχωριστά. Τίποτε ἀπὸ ὅσα συμβαίνουν στὴν ζωὴ μας δὲν εἶναι τυχαῖο. Τὶς ἀποτυχίες, τὶς ἀναποδιές καὶ τὶς πιὸ ὀδυνηρὲς ἀκόμη ἀσθένειες τὶς ἐπιτρέπει ὁ Θεός ἀπὸ ἀγάπη, γιὰτὶ ὅταν ἀντιμετωπισθοῦν σωστὰ μποροῦν νὰ ἀποδειχθοῦν ὡς οἱ μεγαλύτερες εὐλογίες. Πόσοι δὲν μετενόησαν καὶ ἔγιναν πραγματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι μετὰ ἀπὸ μιὰ δύσκολη περιπέτεια ἢ μιὰ βαρεῖα ἀρρώστεια;

Ἡ ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀποτελεῖ τὸ πιὸ σταθερὸ στήριγμα καὶ στὶς μεγαλύτερες ἀναποδιές. Διώχνει τὶς ἀνασφάλειες καὶ τὸ ἄγχος καὶ μᾶς θέτει στὴν σωστὴ προοπτικὴ γιὰ τὴν ψυχραίμη καὶ σωστὴ ἀντιμετώπιση καὶ τῶν πιὸ δύσκολων προβλημάτων.



Παρόντες Ἀλλὰ Ἀπόντες

Ἐπισκόπου Ἀγίουστίνου Καντιώτου, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον του «Φλογέρα Α'»



Συγκρίνατε τὸν ἐκκλησιασμὸν μὲ τὸν ἐκκλησιασμὸν «*ἐν σπηλαιοῖς καὶ ὀπαις τῆς γῆς*» τῶν Χριστιανῶν τῶν πρώτων αἰώνων τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, καὶ εἶπατέ μας ἐὰν ἡμεῖς λατρεύωμε τὸν Θεὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθεία.

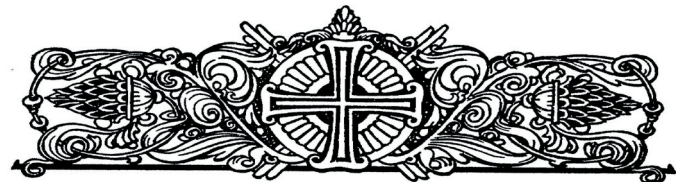
Ἴδετε τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς πῶς ἐκκλησιάζονται. Θὰ στολισθοῦν ὡσὰν νὰ πρόκειται νὰ μεταβοῦν εἰς κοσμικὴν συγκέντρωσιν. Θὰ περιμένουν νὰ κτυπήσῃ ἡ τελευταία καμπάνα. Θὰ εἰσέλθουν εἰς τὸν ναόν, θὰ ἀγοράσουν τὸ κερὶ των, θὰ ζητήσουν τὰ ρέστα των ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐπιτρόπους, ἀδιαφοροῦντες ἐὰν τὴν ὥραν ἐκείνην ἀναγιγνώσκειται τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, ἢ ἐξέρχονται τὰ Ἅγια. Αὐτοὶ θὰ προχωρήσουν, θὰ ζητήσουν θέσιν, θὰ δημιουργήσουν θόρυβον, καὶ ἐν τέλει θὰ σταθοῦν.

Θὰ σταθοῦν; Τρόπος τοῦ λέγειν. Ἴδετε τους! Θὰ στρέφονται, ὡς ἀνεμοδῖκται, πρὸς ὅλας τὰς διευθύνσεις, θὰ συζητήσουν μὲ τὸν διπλανόν τους, θὰ σχολιάσουν τὸν ἱερέα, τὸν ψάλτην. Θὰ ρίψουν βλέμματα περίεργα καὶ ἀναιδῆ... Καμμία συναίσθησις τῆς ἱερότητος τοῦ Ναοῦ δὲν διακρίνει τοὺς σημερινοὺς ἐκκλησιαζόμενους. Δὲν βλέπεις εἰς τὰ

πρόσωπά των τὴν συγκίνησιν πού ἔπρεπε νὰ αἰσθάνονται κατὰ τὰς ἱερὰς καὶ ἀγίας στιγμὰς τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας. Εὐρίσκεται ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία εἰς τὸ κρισιμότερόν της σημεῖον. Γίνεται τὸ θαῦμα τῶν θαυμάτων. Μεταβάλλεται ὁ οἶνος εἰς αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ὁ ἄρτος εἰς σάρκα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Οἱ ἄγγελοι τρέμουν. Καὶ οἱ ἐκκλησιαζόμενοι; Κάθονται μακαρίως εἰς τὰ στασίδια! Καὶ εἶθε μόνον νὰ κάθονται! Τὸ πνεῦμα των τὰς φρικτὰς ἐκεῖνας στιγμὰς δὲν εἶναι εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Ἀπουσιάζει. Ποῦ εἶναι; Ποῦ βόσκει, ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Τὸ κορμὶ των εἶναι μόνον στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ἡ ψυχὴ των εἶναι εἰς τὸν κόσμον καὶ εἰς τὸν διάβολον. Εἰς μάτην φωνάζει ἡ Ἐκκλησία: «*Προσοχή! Πρόσχωμεν! Μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ...*». Εἰς μάτην ψάλλει ὁ ψάλτης: «*Οἱ τὰ Χερουβείμ μυστικῶς εἰκονίζοντες πάσαν τὴν βιοτικὴν ἀποθώμεθα μέριμναν ὡς τὸν Βασιλέα τῶν ὄλων ὑποδεξάμενον*». Αὐτοὶ μηχανικῶς μόνον εὐρίσκονται εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Τὸ πνεῦμα των δὲν παρακολουθεῖ τὰ τελούμενα. Δι' αὐτὸ βγάζουν ἀκατάπαυστα τὰ ὠρολόγια των, βλέπουν τὴν ὥραν καὶ ἀνυπομονοῦν πότε θὰ τελειώσῃ ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία. Πολλοὶ μάλιστα φεύγουν πρὶν νὰ τελειώσῃ! Ἀλλοίμονον! Στρέφουν τὰ νῶτα πρὸς τὸν Σωτῆρα Χριστὸν καὶ ἐξέρχονται τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Αὐτοὶ ἦσαν οἱ παρόντες σωματικῶς, ἀλλὰ ἀπόντες ψυχικῶς κατὰ τὴν ὥραν τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας. Δὲν ἐπῆραν σχεδὸν τίποτε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Κενοὶ εἰσήλθον καὶ κενοὶ ἐξῆλθον, ἴσως καὶ περισσότερον μαῦροι... Καὶ λοιπόν; Νὰ καταργήσωμε τὸν ἐκκλησιασμόν; Ὁχι, μυριάκις ὄχι! Διότι ὁ ἐκκλησιασμός εἶναι ἐντολὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας. Αὐτὸς διέταξε νὰ συγκεντρωθῶμεθα. Αὐτὸς εἶπεν, ὅπου εἶναι δυὸ ἢ τρεῖς συγκεντρωμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα ἐκεῖ θὰ εἶμαι καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν. Ἀλλὰ καυτηριάζοντες τὸν τρόπον μὲ τὸν ὁποῖον σήμερον ἐκκλησιαζόμεθα, ποθοῦμεν νὰ ἴδωμεν, ὅπως, οἱ ὀλίγοι ἐκεῖνοι Χριστιανοὶ πού ἐκκλησιάζονται τακτικῶς, ἐκκλησιάζονται «*ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθεία*».

Τὸ πῶς τώρα οἱ Χριστιανοὶ θὰ ἐπανέλθουν εἰς τὴν ἀρχαίαν τάξιν καὶ θεῖαν ἀρμονίαν τῆς λατρείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, αὐτὸ εἶναι σοβαρὸν πρόβλημα, πού πρέπει νὰ ἀπασχολήσῃ καὶ τὴν διοικοῦσαν Ἐκκλησίαν!



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «*Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν*».

ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE ON PRAYER, PART 3 OF 3

From the Letters of St. Theophan the Recluse (Source: Orthodox Christian Information Center)

Forcing Oneself to Pray (from Letter 48)

You have the book of discourses by St. Macarius of Egypt. Kindly read the 19th discourse, concerning a Christian's duty to force himself to do good. There it is written, "One must force oneself to pray, even if one has no spiritual prayer." And, "In such a case, God, seeing that a man earnestly is striving, pushing himself against the will of his heart (that is, his thoughts), He grants him true prayer." By true prayer, St. Macarius means the undistracted, collected, deep prayer that occurs when the mind stands unswervingly before God. As the mind begins to stand firmly before God, it discovers such sweetness, that it wishes to remain in true prayer forever, desiring nothing more.

I have stated more than once exactly what efforts must be made: Do not allow your thoughts to wander at will. When they do involuntarily escape, immediately turn them back, rebuking yourself, lamenting and grieving over this disorder. As St. John of the Ladder says, "We must lock our mind into the words of prayer by force."

When you have learned the prayers by heart, as I suggested in my earlier letter, perhaps then you will progress more smoothly.

The most helpful idea is to attend church frequently. There, prayers come more readily because all is directed to that end, but this is not very practicable for you. So, labor at home to accustom yourself to pray attentively and try to remain in God's presence the rest of the time, as much as possible.

When memorizing the prayers, do not forget to dig into the meaning and to experience the feeling in each word. Then when you say the prayer, the words themselves will hold your attention and warm you into a prayerful attitude.

Preparation for Prayer (from the same Letter)

Do this also. Prepare yourself to stand properly before God—don't just jump into prayer after gossiping and gadding about or doing house chores. Schedule the time and rouse the urge to pray precisely at that hour. Another opportunity may not come.

Don't forget to re-establish your sense of spiritual need. Bring your need for God to the front of your mind, then begin to draw your mind into your heart by organizing your thoughts into prayer and calling forth your desire to find their fulfillment in God.

When the heart is conscious and feels the need for prayer, then the attentive heart itself will not let your thoughts slide to other matters. It will force you to cry out to the Lord in your prayers. Most of all, be aware of your own helplessness: were it not for God, you would be lost. If someone who is doomed to disaster were to stand before the one person who, with a glance, could save him, would he look here and there

for his salvation? No, he would fall down before him and beg mercy. So it will be when you approach Him in prayer with an awareness of all-encompassing peril and the knowledge that no one can save you but God.

All of us have this little sin hanging about us. Though we make painstaking preparations for every other task (no matter how trivial), we do not prepare for prayer. We take up prayer with flighty thoughts, willy-nilly, and rush to get it over with, as if it were an incidental, though unavoidable, bother—and not the center of our life, as it should be.

Without preparation, how can there be a gathering of thought and feeling in prayer? Without preparation, prayer proceeds shakily instead of firmly.

No, you must determine to deny yourself this little sin and under no circumstance allow yourself to come to prayer with your heart and mind unprepared, your thoughts and feelings scattered in a dozen directions. Such a careless attitude toward prayer is a crime, a serious one—a capital one. Consider prayer the central labor of your life and hold it in the center of your heart. Address it in its rightful role, not as a secondary function!

Toil! God will be your helper. Take care to fulfill your prayer rule. If you begin to fulfill it, soon, very soon, you will see the fruits of your labor. Strive to experience the sweetness of pure prayer. Once experienced, pure prayer will draw you on and enliven your spiritual life, beckoning you to more attentive, more difficult, and ever-deepening prayer.

Nurturing the Desire for God (from Letter 51)

Do you wish to enter Paradise more quickly? This is what you must do: When you pray, do not complete your prayer before arousing in your heart some feeling toward God—reverence, loyalty, thanksgiving, exaltation, humility, contrition, or assurance and hope in God...

Carelessness and Presumption in Prayer (from Letter 71)

Well, where has your prayer vanished? It seems to have started off quite well, and you had already experienced its grace-filled actions in your heart. I will tell you where it has gone. Having prayed once or twice with warmth and in earnest, and having experienced such immediate help through prayer at the shrine of St. Sergius, you thought your prayer was forever established, and that there was no need to maintain it. You thought it would flow by itself. Expecting prayer to continue on its own, you began to rush and carelessly left your thoughts to wander unchecked. From this, your attention scattered, thought went in all directions, and your prayer was no longer true. Once, twice in such a careless manner, and prayer disappeared. Begin anew to establish prayer and plead with the Lord to help you.

Haste in Prayer (from the same Letter)

I presume that you negligently rushed to complete your prayer rule, just to get by. Make it a rule, from now on, never to pray negligently. Nothing is more offensive to God than this. It is better to leave out part of your prayer rule and to complete the remainder reverently and with fear of God, than

to do the whole prayer rule, and do it negligently. It is even better to read but one prayer, or fall on your knees and pray in your own words, than to pray negligently. If you pray carelessly, there will be no fruit.

Give yourself a thorough reprimand for such carelessness. Let this be clear to you: No one who prays earnestly and with attention ends prayer without feeling the effect of prayer. Oh, of what a blessing we deprive ourselves by allowing negligence in prayer!

A Fixed Time for Prayer (from the same Letter)

Why does haste in prayer occur? It is incomprehensible. We spend hours involved in other things, and they seem like minutes; but just begin to pray, and it seems we have stood for a long time. And then we feel we must hurry to finish as soon as possible. No benefit is reaped by praying in this way. What should one do?

To avoid such self-deception, some do this: Set a definite length of time for prayer—a quarter of an hour, a half, or a whole hour (whatever is convenient), and regulate your vigil so that the clock striking on the half hour or the hour signals the end of prayers. Then when you begin prayers, do not concern yourself with the number of prayers read, but only lift your heart and mind to the Lord in prayer, and continue in a worthy manner for the time set aside. Others determine how many prayers can be done on the prayer rope in a given time and proceed in a calm and unhurried way to count them on the prayer rope. They stand with their minds before the Lord, or converse with Him in their own words, or recite some prayer, and this is how they reverently venerate His unending glory.

Such people so accustom themselves to praying, that the minutes at prayer are filled with sweetness. And it is rare that they remain just for the appointed time; they double and even triple it. Choose one of these methods for yourself and hold to it earnestly. You and I cannot go without definite rules. For those who can pray fervently, no rules are necessary.

I have already written to you about memorizing prayers, and reciting them from memory at prayer time without taking the prayer book in hand. How wonderful this is! Having begun to pray, recite a memorized prayer or psalm and ponder every word, not only in your mind, but in your heart. If your own prayer begins to grow from a word in the psalm or prayer, don't cut it off, let it flow. Do not worry about reading this many or that many prayers, but stand at prayer for an appointed length of time, regulated either by the prayer rope or the clock. Haste in prayers is useless. Perhaps you may read only a single prayer or one psalm during the entire time. There was one person who was able to recite only the Lord's Prayer during his regular prayer time; each word transformed itself into a whole prayer. Another person, having been told about this acceptable manner of praying, revealed that he had stood all through Matins reciting Psalm 50, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy"—and ran out of time before he could finish.

Prayer: the Root of All Things (from the same Letter)

Accustom yourself to pray this way and, God grant, soon you will nurture true prayer in yourself. Then there will be no need for rules. Labor, or nothing will come of you. If there is no success in prayer, then there will be no success in anything. It is the root of everything.

The Need for Prayer (Letter 79)

All is from God. To Him we must flee. And you write that you don't pray.

Smart-aleck! Have you joined the ranks of the infidels, or what? How is it possible that you don't pray? Don't just read the appointed prayers; speak in your own words and tell Him what is in your heart; ask for help! "See, Lord, what troubles me?...this and this... I can't straighten myself out. Help, All-Merciful One!" Mention every little thing and plead for everything's appropriate cure. This will be true prayer. You may always pray your own prayers, as long as there is no backsliding into sloth.

From Various Letters

One should not always toil at spiritual things. You should have some simple handiwork to do. But take it up only when the soul is tired, and cannot read or think or even pray to God (Letter 33).

You should pray in your own words—before you have recited formal prayers, after you have read them, and throughout your prayer rule (Letter 33).

Be persistent in addressing God, the Theotokos, your Guardian Angel (Letter 33).

Detours can be to the right and to the left. The first is zeal without knowledge; the second, sloth (Letter 39).

How fitting is the frequent prayer, "By whatever means, save me!" (Letter 39).

Success does not come instantly; one must be patient; one must labor without rest... All will come in due time... That this is so is supported by the experience of all those people who are seeking and working out their salvation (Letter 43).



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)

On The Kingdom of Heaven

To a nun who asks about the parable: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven... The Lord said: The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. 13:33).

You would like to penetrate the mystery of these words, God-loving sister. Indeed, there is a great spiritual mystery concealed in these words. To the carnal mind this parable appears to be ridiculously simple. However, this understanding, which comes from the Holy Spirit, is inaccessible to the carnal mind, for one must penetrate the meaning of these words spiritually. And if one is to penetrate it spiritually, as the Holy Fathers did, then this parable appears as follows.

The leaven signifies the Holy Spirit; the woman signifies the human soul; to take and hide, this means to take from God and to place into oneself; the three measures represent the three capacities of the soul: the mind, heart, and will; the meal represents all these three in their natural state; "till the whole was leavened," signifies that all must be leavened, i.e., penetrated by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, man's soul, when it becomes worthy, receives from its Creator His Spirit. And, having received It, holds It in the mind until the mind becomes deified; he holds It in his heart until the heart becomes deified, and he holds It in his will until the will becomes deified. He holds It in these three "measures" simultaneously, until the whole soul becomes deified. Then, when all is deified, it is enlightened and rises like leavened dough. And thereby the soul becomes spiritually rich and holy. Then the soul is able to enliven the body as well, to give it rebirth and sanctify it. And is this not the Kingdom of Heaven? Is this not a marvelous parable?

On the Use of "Day" and "Night"

To the monk Simeon concerning the use of "day" and "night" in Luke 17:30-34. In His sermon concerning the end of the world and His Second Coming, the Lord Jesus Christ uses interchangeably the words "day" and "night." He compares His second coming to the unexpectedness and speed of lightning: Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. And He tells His listeners: In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop and his belongings in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And later: in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left...

He speaks about the same time but sometimes says "in that day," and at other times, "in that night." You ask, how can this be explained? All the words proceeding from the mouth of Christ are infallible; therefore, these words of His are likewise infallible.

In speaking of His "day," He speaks about His Second Com-

ing, while the words, "that night," signify the end of the world and the end of time. This occurs at the same time - this separation between time and eternity, between the death of time (its end) and the beginning of eternal life. When the sun grows dark, so that it no longer shines, and when the brilliant sign of the Son of Man appears in order to shine forever, then there will be no more time. Time will disappear, and there will usher in the everlasting Day of the Lord, in which the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (II Peter 3:10).

This will be the final meeting of day and night, and their final separation forever.

Therefore, when it speaks about the final meeting of day and night and of their final separation, there is no difference in saying "this day," or "this night."

That which appears to us now to be contradictory or incomprehensible, while the course of time still indicates immutably now day, now night, this expression loses its contrariety on the threshold of that fateful division between temporality and eternity.

On What Is Most Important for Salvation

To Khadzhi Jovanu, who asks, "What is most important for the salvation of the soul?"

I shall likewise ask you a question, my dear companion, and the answer you give me will be your answer also.

And so, what is most important for a newborn child? Perhaps food, or warmth, or bathing, or care? Perhaps you will answer that he needs each of these. In fact, you will have to admit that all four are necessary for a child's proper development.

So, too, the soul of a person who has awakened from the sleep of sin and is repenting is like a newborn child. Let us recall what Christ said to Nikodemos: Ye must be born again (John 3:7). A newborn soul needs to be nourished with the teachings of Christ; it needs to be cleansed by fasting and prayer; it needs the warmth of love for its Creator, and it needs to protect its thoughts and desires from all the arrows of destruction. Did not the Saviour command us through His apostles: If you love Me, keep My commandments? And He did not say to fulfill just one commandment, but to fulfill the commandments, i.e., all of them. Christ's commandments - this is not just one act, one labor, but many.

You are an experienced gardener, and you know how much work is required to grow even one vegetable. You wouldn't leave even one plant without some attention. How, then, can we not labor on our soul, our unique treasure, which the grave itself cannot destroy?

You have acquired a garden in Jerusalem. This was not one of God's commandments, and yet you undertook this labor out of love for God and for the sake of your soul's salvation. How, then, can we disdain even one of our Saviour's commandments as something inconsequential?

+ + + Peace and joy to you all from the Lord! + + +

[continued from page 6]

What has brought humanity--and indeed Christendom--to this desperate state? Certainly it is not any overt worship of the devil which is limited always to a few people; rather, it is something much more subtle, and something fearful for a conscious Orthodox Christian to reflect on: it is the loss of the grace of God, which follows on the loss of the savor of Christianity.

How much, then, must Orthodox Christians walk in the fear of God, trembling lest they lose His grace, which by no means is given to everyone, but only to those who hold the true Faith, lead a life of Christian struggle, and treasure the grace of God which leads them heavenward. And how much more cautiously must Orthodox Christians walk today above all, when they are surrounded by a counterfeit Christianity that gives its own experiences of grace and the Holy Spirit and can abundantly quote the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers to "prove" it! Surely the last times are near, when there will come spiritual deception so persuasive as to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect (Matt. 24:24).

Against this powerful "religious experience" true Orthodox Christians must now arm themselves in earnest, becoming fully conscious of what Orthodox Christianity is and how its goal is different from that of all other religions, Christian or non-Christian.

Orthodox Christians! Hold fast to the grace which you have; never let it become a matter of habit; never measure it by merely human standards or expect it to be logical or comprehensible to those who understand nothing higher than what is human. Let all true Orthodox Christians strengthen themselves for the battle ahead, never forgetting that in Christ the victory is already ours.



The Brotherhood of St. Poimen is pleased to inform our fellow Orthodox Christians that we will be hosting Mr. Demetrios Tselengides (Professor of Dogmatics in the School of Theology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) in Phoenix, AZ, February 11-13, 2005. Professor Tselengides will be presenting some religious-content homilies. We will inform you of the location and exact times for these homilies in our next issue. Additional information will also be included within our website:

<http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org>,

The homilies will be in Greek with simultaneous translation into English. This is a unique and rare opportunity for all of our Orthodox Christian brethren in the United States and we hope that those planning to be around the Phoenix area will attend Professor Tselengides insightful homilies.

Admission is free.

HOW DO THE BODIES OF SAINTS BECOME GOD'S INSTRUMENTS FOR HEALINGS AND OTHER MIRACLES?

By St. Symeon the New Theologian

A soul that has been sanctified has been accounted worthy of becoming a partaker of Divine grace; this soul necessarily sanctifies its whole body, since the soul holds the body together and is present in all its parts. For this reason the grace of the Holy Spirit, just as it appropriates to itself the soul, so too it appropriates to itself the body. However, as long as the soul is united with the body, the All-Holy Spirit does not bring all of the body fully to its own glory, because it is necessary that the soul show its will until the end of this life. But when the end comes, and the soul separates from the body, then, as the struggle has ceased and the soul has won and departs from the body with the wreath of incorruptibility, then I say, the grace of the Holy Spirit appropriates to itself and sanctifies fully the body of such a soul. And for this reason the bare bones and bodies of Saints emit remedies and cure diseases.



Ἡ ἀδελφότης «Ὁσιος Ποιμῆν» χαιρεταὶ νὰ κοινοποιήσῃ στοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας ὅτι θὰ φιλοξενήσουμε τὸν κ. Δημήτριο Τσελεγγίδη (καθηγητὴ Δογματικῆς εἰς τὸ Τμῆμα Θεολογίας τοῦ Ἀριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης) εἰς τὸν Φοῖνικα, Ἀριζόνας, 11-13 Φεβρουαρίου, 2005, ὅπου καὶ θὰ γίνουν ὁμιλίαι θρησκευτικοῦ περιεχομένου. Θὰ σᾶς πληροφορήσουμε εἰς τὸ ἐπόμενο τεύχος σχετικὰ μὲ τὸν τόπο καὶ ὥρες τῶν ὁμιλιῶν. Περισσότερες πληροφορίες θὰ συμπεριληφθοῦν ἐπίσης εἰς τὴν ἱστοσελίδα μας:

<http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org>,

Οἱ ὁμιλίαι θὰ γίνουν στὰ Ἑλληνικὰ, μὲ ταυτόχρονη μετάφραση εἰς τὰ Ἀγγλικά. Ἡ ἐπίσκεψη αὐτὴ ἀποτελεῖ μία σπάνια εὐκαιρία γιὰ ὄλους τοὺς Ἀμερικῆ Ὀρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς καὶ ἐλπίζουμε ὅτι ἐὰν βρεθεῖτε εἰς τὴν περιοχὴ Φοῖνικος, θὰ ἔλθετε νὰ παρακολουθήσετε τὶς ὁμιλίαι τοῦ κ. Τσελεγγίδη.

Ἡ εἴσοδος εἶναι ἐλευθέρη.

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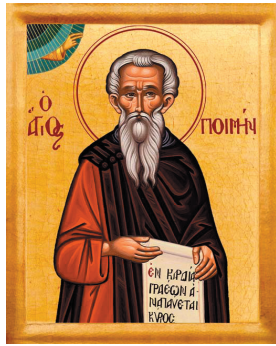
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ON FLEEING SIN'S DESTRUCTIVE PLACES AND WAYS

By St. Theodore the Studite

A physical harbour is not like a harbour of the mind. When someone comes to anchor in the former, they ease off and have no worries about the storms and dangers of the sea. In the latter on the contrary, the passions become more ferocious with the relaxation of the flesh, and the spirits of wickedness join in the assault like storms: the spirit of fornication, the spirit of gluttony, the spirit of avarice, the spirit of despondency, the spirit of dejection, the spirit of pride. The fear is that we may be sunk in harbour. David once looked unguardedly on Uriah's wife, and readers know what he suffered. *Jacob ate and was filled*, says Scripture, *and the beloved kicked* [Deut 32,15]. Someone touched without meaning to and they were enflamed to lust and gave birth to iniquity.

Take care, you who are listening to this. Flee the destructive places and ways of sin. Govern your sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, your food, drink and sleep, that you may keep from being overwhelmed by the tempest of the passions. This is worth remembering: someone who sails across the physical sea is subject to storms and tempests without their wanting it, while someone who crosses the water of the mind is lord of tempest and of calm. For if they manfully shake off unseemly thoughts, they are filled with calm, having the Holy Spirit as the companion of their voyage, as it is related

of Saint Arsenios. But one whose senses are unbridled and who lets in desires like streams, stirs up a most dreadful storm for themselves. Unless the person does not swiftly smooth out their tempestuous thoughts, will end by repeating those miserable words, *I entered the depths of the sea, and a tempest drowned me* [Psalm 68,3]. Therefore let reason be in control, and let the better not be dragged down by the worse, but let the spirit be master and act for the better. Or don't you know what sin produces? Didn't it introduce death into the world? Didn't it destroy the earth? Hasn't it filled the inhabited world with graveyards and tombs from the beginning of time until now? For humanity was incorrupt before the fall and none of the things I have mentioned would have started if the first-formed had steadfastly observed the commandment that had been given. Sin is the cause of the everlasting punishments, the fuel of the unquenchable fire of Gehenna, the food of the undying worm; *sin that has made humanity, that was in honour, be compared to the unreasoning beasts* [Cf. Psalm 48,13.21].

And so, because sin is like all this, destructive and deadly, we must flee from it, brethren, with all our might, and choose virtue, which makes humans angels, raises them from death, resists the demons, overcomes the rulers of this age, and finally betroths them to the kingdom of heaven. May we all reach it too by the grace and love for humankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Spirit belong glory, might and honour, now and for ever, and the ages of ages. Amen.

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

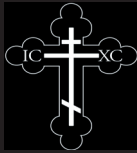
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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TRUE ORTHODOXY

By Archbishop Averky (+1976)

Few people today know that the Orthodox Church is nothing less than that Church which has preserved untainted the genuine teachings of Jesus Christ, the very teachings delivered to every subsequent generation of believers. These teachings came down the centuries from the Holy Apostles, explicated and carefully interpreted by their legitimate successors (their disciples and the Holy Fathers), traditioned and conserved unaltered by our Eastern Church which is alone able to prove her right to be called the *Orthodox Church*.

The divine Founder of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, said clearly, "I will build my Church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her" (St. Matt xvi, 18). To the Church, He sent the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, the Spirit of Truth (St. John xv, 16f) Who *manifests all things* to Her and guides Her (St. John xvi, 13), protecting Her from error. Indeed, it was to declare this Truth to men that the Lord came into the cosmos, according to His own words (St. John xviii, 31). And St. Paul confirms this fact in his letter to his pupil, the bishop Timothy, saying that, "the Church of the living God is the ground and pillar of the Truth" (I Tim iii, 15). Because She is "the ground and pillar of the Truth," then "the gates of Hell cannot prevail against Her."

It follows, then, that the true Christian Church -- palpably unique since Christ established but one Church -- has always existed on earth and will exist to the end of time. She has received the promise of Christ, *I will be with you even unto the end of the age*. Can there be the slightest doubt that the Lord refers here to the Church? Any honest and sane judgment, any act of good conscience, anyone fa-

miliar with the history of the Christian Church, the pure and unaltered moral and theological teachings of the Christian religion, must confess that there was but one true Church founded by our Lord, Jesus Christ, and that She has preserved His Truth holy and unchanged.

History reveals, moreover, a traceable link of grace from the holy Apostles to their successors and to the holy Fathers. In contrast to what others have done, the Orthodox Church has never introduced novelties into Her teachings in order to *keep up with the times*, to be *progressive*, not to be *left at the side of the road*, or to accommodate current exigencies and fashions which are always suffused with evil. The Church never conforms to the world. Indeed not, for the Lord has said to his disciples at the Last Supper, *You are not of this world*. We must hold to these words if we are to remain faithful to true Christianity -- the true Church of Christ has always been, is and will always be a stranger to this world. Separated from it, she is able to transmit the divine teachings of the Lord unchanged, because that separation has kept Her unchanged, that is, like the immutable God Himself.

That which the learned call *conservatism* is a principal and, perhaps, most characteristic index of the true Church. Since the TRUTH is given to us once and for all, our task is to assimilate rather than to discover it. We are commanded to confirm ourselves and others in the Truth and thereby bring everyone to the true Faith, Orthodoxy. Unfortunately, there have appeared in the very bosom of the Church, even among the hierarchy, opinions expressed by well-known individuals that are detrimental to Her. The desire to *march with the times* makes them fear that they will not be recognized as *cultured*, *liberal* and *progressive*. These modern apostates to Orthodoxy are *ashamed* to confess that our Ortho-

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His TRUTH be brought forth.

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dox Church is precisely the Church which was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church to which appertains the great promise that "*the gates of Hell will not prevail against Her,*" and to which He confided the plenum of divine Truth. By their deceit and false humility, by their blasphemy against the Lord, these false shepherds and those with them have been estranged from the true Church. They have given tacit expression to the idea that *the gates of Hell* have prevailed against the Church. In other words, these apostates say that our holy Orthodox Church is equally *at fault* for the *division of the churches* and ought now to *repent* of her sins and enter into union with other *Christian churches* by means of certain concessions to them, the result being a new, indivisible church of Christ.

This is exactly the ideology of the religious movement which has become so fashionable in our times: *The ecumenical movement* among whose number one may count Orthodox, even our clergy. For a long time, we have heard that they belong to this movement in order *to witness to the peoples of other confessions the truth of holy Orthodoxy*, but it is difficult for us to believe that this statement is anything more than *throwing powder in our eyes*. Their frequent theological declarations in the international press can lead us to no other conclusion than that they are traitors to the holy Truth. As a matter of historical fact, the *ecumenical movement* -- of which the WCC is the supreme organ -- is an organization of purely Protestant origin. Nearly all the Orthodox Churches have joined, with only a handful being the notable exceptions. Even those churches behind the *iron curtain* have joined. For some time the Russian Patriarchate resisted, flattering herself with the purity of her Orthodoxy and viewing this movement as hostile to Orthodoxy, but has since become a member. Few are those who stand alone in their opposition to the *ecumenical movement*. How can we explain her isolation from *global Orthodoxy*?

We must understand the situation in terms of the words that "*this must take place*" (St. Luke xxi, 9), that is, the "*great apostasy*" clearly predicted by the Lord (Songs of Solomon ii, 3-12). "*It is permitted by God,*" as [St.] Ignatius Brianchaninoff said almost a century ago. (Another spiritual father, Theophan the Recluse, announced with grief that the horrendous apostasy would begin within Russia.) [St.] Ignatius wrote: "*We are helpless to arrest this apostasy. Impotent hands will have no power against it and nothing more will be required than the attempt to withhold it. The spirit of the age will reveal the apostasy. Study it, if you wish to avoid it, if you wish to escape this age and the temptation of its spirits. One can suppose, too, that the institution of the Church which has been tottering for so long will fall terribly and suddenly. Indeed, no one is able to stop or prevent it. The present means to sustain the institutional Church are borrowed from the elements of the world, things inimical to the Church, and the consequence will be only to accelerate its fall. Nevertheless, the Lord protects the elect and their limited number will be filled.*"

The Enemy of humanity makes every effort and uses all means to confound it. Aid comes to him through the total cooperation of all the secret and invisible heterodox, especially those priests and bishops who betray their high calling and oath, the true faith and the true Church. Repudiation of and preservation from the apostasy which has made such enormous progress demands that we stand apart from the spirit of the age (which bears the seeds of its own destruction). If we expect to withstand the world, it is first necessary to understand it and keep sensitively in mind that in this present age all that which carries the most holy and dear name of Orthodoxy is not in fact Orthodox. Rather, it is often *a fraudulent and usurped Orthodoxy* which we must fear and eschew as if it were fire. Unlike this spurious faith, true Orthodoxy was given and must be received without novelty and nothing must be accepted as

a teaching or practice of the Church which is contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the dogma of the Universal Church.

True Orthodoxy thinks only to serve God and to save souls and is not preoccupied with the secular and ephemeral welfare of men. True Orthodoxy is spiritual and not physical or psychological or earthly. In order to protect ourselves from *the spirit of the age* and preserve our fidelity to the true Orthodoxy, we ought to firstly and with all our strength live blamelessly: A total and rigorous commitment to Christ, without deviation from the commandments of God or the laws of His holy Church. At the same time, we must have no common prayer or spiritual liaison with the modern apostasy or with anything which *soils* our holy Faith, even those dissidents who call themselves *Orthodox*. They will go their way and we will go ours. We must be honorable and tenacious, following the right way, never deviating in order to please men or from fear that we might lose some personal advantage. The sure path to perdition is indifference and the lack of principles which is euphemistically called *the larger view*.

In opposition to this *larger view* we put the *rigor of ideas* which, in modernity, it is fashionable to label *narrow* and *fanatical*. To be sure, if one adopts the *modern mentality*, one must consider the holy martyrs -- whose blood is *the cement of the Church* -- and the Church Fathers -- who struggled all their lives against heretics -- as nothing less than *narrow* and *fanatical*. In truth, there is little difference between *the broad way* against which the Lord warned and the modern *larger view*. He condemned the *broad way* as the way to *gehenna*. Of course, the idea of *gehenna* holds no fear for those *liberals* and avant-garde theologians. They may smugly *theologize* about it, but in rashly and wantonly discussing *the new ways of Orthodox theology* and acquiring a number of disciples, they give evidence that they no longer believe in the existence of Hell.

This new breed of *Orthodox* is really no more than modern *scholastics*. In other words, the way of these *progressivists* is not our way. Their way is deceptive, and it is unfortunate that it is not evident to everyone. The *broader* or *larger view* alienates us from the Lord and His true Church. It is the road away from Orthodoxy. This view is sinister, maliciously invented by the Devil in order to deny us salvation. For us, however, we accept no innovations, but choose the ancient, proven way, the way in which true Christians have chosen to serve God for 2,000 years. We choose the way of fidelity to the true Faith and not the *modern way*. We choose faithfulness to the true Church with all Her canons and dogmas which have been received and confirmed by the local and universal Councils. We choose the holy customs and traditions, the spiritual riches of that faith transmitted complete and entire to us from the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers of the Church, and the Christian heritage of our venerable ancestors. This alone is the faith of the true Orthodox, distinct from the counterfeit *orthodoxy* invented by the Adversary. **We receive only the Apostolic Faith, the Faith of the Fathers, the Orthodox Faith.**

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND CHRISTIANITY, PART 1 OF 2

By Nicholas Martis, Former Minister of the Hellenic Republic
translated in English from Greek by Nina Gatzoulis

From the Editor: In the face of efforts by Hollywood and certain media to re-write history by altering both the heritage as well as the character of Alexander the Great, our Brotherhood considers it prudent that we present our readers with the historically and fact-based truth on this great man. Furthermore, irrespective of what politicians in America or elsewhere do in recognizing FYROM by a name that is Hellenic in both history and origin, the truth will always be out there, in both the writings of historians, some of that time period, as well as all archeological findings within Greece: Macedonia is Greek as were all Macedonians, Alexander the Great inclusive! There is no such thing as a "Macedonian dialect" of that time -- they all spoke Greek! This article presents some valuable information for all Orthodox Christians, especially those of Greek heritage.

INTRODUCTION

Alexander the Great placed his stamp onto the history of nations as an important precursor of Christ, since he (a) brought the Hellenic civilization to the East, (b) established the Greek language as the only common tongue of communication amongst all the nations of the then known world, which was used as a vehicle to promulgate Christianity, that addressed peace and love between nations, and (c) condemned racial discrimination and declared religious freedom.

The above theory can be further reinforced by the following arguments:

- 1) The Prophets of Israel not only portended about Alexander the Great, but Alexander's arrival to Jerusalem signified the encounter of Hellenism with Judaism and the meeting of monotheism with the pagan religion of the ancient world, which in reality prepared the world's transition to Christianity.
- 2) Plutarch considered Alexander the Great as a philosopher, "from the deeds of Alexander, from what Alexander taught and what he said."
- 3) Alexander's achievements had great influence on other religions and other nations.

ALEXANDER AND THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL

Let us now review briefly the prophecies about Alexander the Great:

The 8th c. BC Prophet Isaiah (Isa 19-20), pronounced that "when (the people of Egypt) exclaim to the Lord, then the Lord will send them a man to save them. He will rule them and will save them from dangers." According to Professor and respected theologian Panagiotis Trempeles, Alexander is the liberator of the Egyptians, who were under the Persian dominion and he was considered the incarnation of the expected Messiah. The proclamation of Alexander the Great as Pharaoh by the Egyptian Hierarchy, as soon as they met him, is a further proof of Isaiah's prophecies.

The same Prophet lauds (Isa 19, 23) the years “that [were] a happy period of free exchange between the Assyrians and Egyptians, that helped establish Judaism easier.” According to Professor Trepelas, this time is Alexander’s period in Egypt. Prophet Isaiah also states (6, 18), “I come to unite all the nations.” Professor Trepelas clearly asserts that Alexander “did not only save the Jews, but rescued all the nations.” Plutarch, on the other hand writes that during Alexander’s speech at Opis, in front of 9,000 Greek and Asian officials and others, he pointed out among other manifestations, that “now all people everywhere, will enjoy concord, peace and a common society.”

The 6th c. BC Prophet Daniel (Dan 2, 39) foresaw the reign of Alexander the Great, occupying the throne of Solomon. It is known that the Assyrian King Nebuchadnezzar had a terrifying dream, which was so terrible, to the point that the King was left without any memory of it. Daniel asked God about the Assyrian King’s dream and the following prophecy was revealed through Daniel to the King: “King, you are the golden head and after you a smaller kingdom will emerge. Following this, a third kingdom will appear, which will be symbolized by bronze and this kingdom will dominate all Earth. After that a fourth kingdom will come and this kingdom will be as strong as iron.” All experts agree that the second kingdom was that of the Persians and King Medes, the third was Alexander the Great’s and the reign of the Hellenes, while the fourth one was the Roman dominion. In addition, Prophet Daniel (7, 1--22) prophesied that this Hellene King will conquer the Persian King and also this Greek King will be succeeded by four Kings of the same nation. Certainly the experts agree that the King Daniel refers to is Alexander and the other four Kings of the same nationality are his successors.

The 5th c. BC Prophet Joel prophesied about the Macedonian Greeks (Joel 4, 6): “Children of Judah and Jerusalem you have been attracted to the Hellenes.” He also portended that in subsequent times (during the period of Alexander’s successors) distinguished Jewish individuals would receive Greek names and the Jews would adopt many Greek traditions.

ALEXANDER & THE HEBREW ARCHPRIESTS

Around 70 A.D. the Hebrew historian Josephus Flavius (Hebrew Archeology, Ch. A 329) states that after the conquest of Tyre and the siege of Gaza, Alexander the Great visited Jerusalem, where right at the entrance of the city he was greeted by the Hebrew Archpriest, Simon the Just, accompanied by other Jewish priests and a multitude of people. Alexander descended his horse and went to greet the Jewish Archpriest. Parmenion, Alexander’s General, approached him and advised Alexander that his soldiers are displeased that he rushed first to greet the Jewish Priest. Alexander however, answered,

“I did not greet the Archpriest, but the God he represents.” Following the Archpriest’s indication, Alexander carried out a religious sacrifice at the Temple of Solomon and allowed the Hebrews of Jerusalem and other Jewish states to use their paternal religious rites. Alexander’s act set an original pattern of respect for religious freedom, in an era that such a behavior was totally unprecedented.

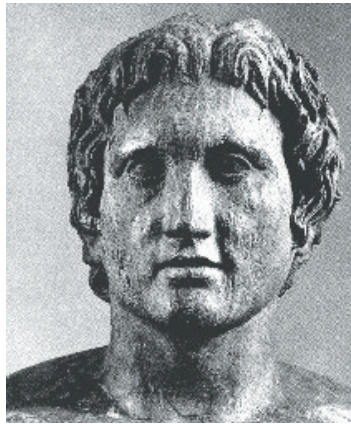
However, when Alexander asked the Archpriest for his statue or his portrait to be placed at Solomon’s Temple, the Archpriest responded that the God of the Jews has ordered them that no statues or any other icons should be placed in the Temple. Nonetheless he assured Alexander, “We will do something that will remain in eternity. All the male children that will be born this year to priests and the descendants of the Levi clan, will receive your name, they will be named Alexander.” According to the Talmud (the Jewish religious text of the Rabbis and the religious Rabbi schools) “this is how the name ‘Alexander’ entered the Hebrew society in commemoration of the Great Greek General and it continues to be used for generation after generation.” Let it be noted that many Hebrew individuals bear even to these days the name Alexander. The admission of Alexander’s name into the genealogy of the Jewish community gave Alexander a divine quality and thus the Hellenic intellect and knowledge in close contact with the world of Revelation, prepared the ground for the expansion of Christianity.

An additional event that verifies the close ties of the Macedonian Greeks with the Jews is the following: When the three Wise Men, while going to Bethlehem, arrived in Jerusalem, they exchanged the currency of their fatherland with local cash. Most of the local money that they used was coins with Greek writings one side. They depicted Hercules’ head (forefather of the Macedonian kings) and on the other side an eagle, symbol of the Seleucid Greeks of Syria. This was the official currency in Judaea until Christ’s years and this kind of currency was also accepted in the Jewish temples.

According to Constantine Paparrigopoulos, the word Synagogue, which is Greek, dates back, probably to the command that Alexander gave, relating to freedom of various Jewish gatherings. Also the annual Hebrew Convention that used to take place in Jerusalem was called “Synitritins”, from the Greek word “Συνέδριον.”

ALEXANDER AND ANCIENT SOURCES

As the ancient geographer Strabo mentions, Alexander was constantly informed by the scientists who followed him about all the ethnographic, geographic, zoological and botanical new encounters they came upon, during the expedition to the East. He internationalized commerce, because he believed that commerce unites people and for this reason he used common



Alexander the Great
(356-323 B.C.)

currency in his Commonwealth. The Attic drachma became the means of commercial exchange amongst nations and people.

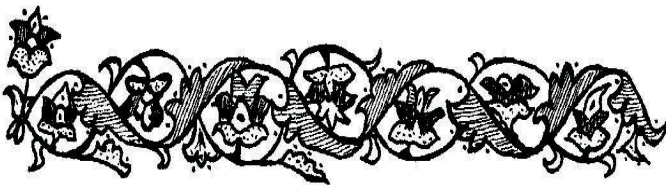
Diodorus in his writings mentions that the “conqueror (Alexander) coerced the enemies to be happy.” If we take under consideration that during Alexander’s era the word and meaning of the word “philanthropy” could not be comprehended, then we can conclude that Alexander the Great can be called the “national precursor of Christ.” Alexander never followed his teacher’s, Aristotle’s, advice, who suggested to him to treat the Greeks well and to behave toward his subservient non-Greeks as the conqueror King. Alexander’s aim was to elevate the conquered and to make them equal to the Greeks. Apostle Paul was the first one to utter such a phrase as, “there is no Jew or Greek”, but Alexander the Great, way before the Apostle’s era, practiced it throughout his life and therefore he did establish himself as the first advocator against racial discrimination.

As Arrian mentions, liberating the Greek cities of Asia Minor from the Persians he “ordered the oligarchies everywhere to be dissipated and democratic laws to be established for each one of them.” Alexander was a compassionate man, especially to those that were not so fortunate; for this reason he exempted his Macedonian soldiers from their debts. At the same time however he showed great respect for public money.

Arrian writes, “About the money that came through contributions he was very frugal, but about money for philanthropy he was very generous.” The Greek scholar and politician Panagiotis Kanellopoulos mentions that Alexander severely punished the administrative personnel, when they exploited public funds and they mistreated citizens of his Commonwealth.

Holtzer in his book, “Paul” writes, “For a time came from Macedonia the young hero (Alexander) and along with his 22 years of youth, he brought with him the gifts of the West to the East, the Greek language and the Greek philosophy. Now the West is asking for the most beautiful gift that exists in the East, the teachings of the Man of Nazareth.”

[To be continued in our next issue]



True history is a guide to navigation in perilous times. History is who we are and why we are the way we are.

David C. McCullough

History is Philosophy teaching by examples.

Thucydides

Our ignorance of history causes us to slander our own times.

Gustave Flaubert

So little trouble do men take in search for the truth; so readily do they accept whatever comes first to hand.

Thucydides

A HERALD OF GOD’S GOODNESS

By St. Isaac of Nineveh the Syrian, Homily 60

If a man readily and joyfully accepts a loss for the sake of God, he is inwardly pure. And if he does not look down upon any man because of his defects, in very truth, he is free. If a man is not pleased with someone who honors him, nor displeased with someone who dishonors him, he is dead to the world and to this life. The watchfulness of discernment is superior to every discipline of men accomplished in any way to any degree.

Do not hate the sinner, for we are all laden with guilt. If, for the sake of God, you are moved to oppose him, weep over him. Why do you hate him? Hate his sins and pray for him, that you may imitate Christ Who was not wroth with sinners, but interceded for them. Do you not see how He wept over Jerusalem? We are mocked by the devil in many instances, so why should we hate the man who is mocked by him [the devil] who mocks us also? Why, oh, man, do you hate the sinner? Could it be because he is not as righteous as you? But where is your righteousness when you have no love? Why do you not shed tears over him? But you persecute him. In ignorance, some are moved with anger, presuming themselves to be discerners of the works of sinners.

Be a herald of God’s goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are; for although your debt to Him is so great, yet He is not seen exacting payment from you, and for the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. Do not call God “just,” for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him “just” and “upright” (cf. Ps. 24:8, 144:17), His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. “He is good,” He says, “to the evil and to the impious” (cf. Luke 6:35). How can you call God “just” when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? “Friend, I do thee no wrong; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is thine eye evil because I am good?” (Matt. 20:12-15). How can a man call God “just” when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth? (Luke 15:11 ff.). None other but His very Son said these things concerning Him, lest we doubt it; and thus He bare witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God’s “justice,” for, whilst we are sinners, Christ died for us! (cf. Rom. 5:8). But if here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not change [viz., in the state after death].

Far be it that we should ever think such an iniquity that God could become unmerciful! For the property of Divinity does not change as do mortals. God does not acquire something which He does not have, nor lose what He has, nor supplement what He does have, as do created beings. But what God has from the beginning, He will have and has until the [unending] end, as the blessed Cyril wrote in his commen-

tary on Genesis. Fear God, he says, out of love for Him, and not for the austere name that He has been given. Love Him as you ought to love Him; not for what He will give you in the future, but for what we have received, and for this world alone which He has created for us. Who is the man that can repay Him? Where is His repayment to be found in our works? Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being? Who intercedes for us before Him, when we shall possess no memory, as though we never existed? Who will awake this our corrupt body for that life? Again, whence descends the notion of knowledge into dust? Oh, the wondrous mercy of God! Oh, the astonishment at the bounty of our God and Creator! Oh, might for which all is possible! Oh, the immeasurable goodness that brings our nature again, sinners though we be, to His regeneration and rest! Who is sufficient to glorify Him? He raises up the transgressor and blasphemer, He renews dust unendowed with reason, making it rational and comprehending, and the scattered and insensible dust and the scattered senses He makes a rational nature worthy of thought. The sinner is unable to comprehend the grace of His resurrection. Where is gehenna, that can afflict us? Where is perdition, that terrifies us in many ways and quenches the joy of His love? And what is gehenna as compared with the grace of His resurrection, when He will raise us from Hades and cause our corruptible nature to be clad in incorruption, and raise up in glory him that has fallen into Hades?

Come, men of discernment, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise and marvelous to wonder worthily at the bounty of our Creator? His recompense of sinners is, that instead of a just recompense, He rewards them with resurrection, and instead of those bodies with which they trampled upon His law, He enrobes them with perfect glory and incorruption. That grace whereby we are resurrected after we have sinned is greater than the grace which brought us into being when we were not. Glory be to Thine immeasurable grace, Oh, Lord! Behold, Lord, the waves of Thy grace close my mouth with silence, and there is not a thought left in me before the face of Thy thanksgiving. What mouths can confess Thy praise, Oh, good King, Thou Who lovest our life? Glory be to Thee for the two worlds which Thou hast created for our growth and delight, leading us by all things which Thou didst fashion to the knowledge of Thy glory, from now and unto the ages. Amen.



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST. THEODORE THE STUDITE

Source: *The Orthodox Christian Information Center*



St Theodore of Studios (759-826) -- Feastday: 11/11 *St. Theodore the Studite was an abbot, monastic reformer, theologian and ardent enemy of heretical iconoclastic policies in the Byzantine Empire. The nephew of St. Pluto, abbot of Saccudium (a monastery in Bithynia), he decided to follow the angelic life of asceticism and was blessed by his uncle to take the holy habit and entered the community at Saccudium about 780. In 794, he followed St. Pluto as abbot when his uncle abdicated in his favor. His name has been permanently associated with the monastic community at Studion, (a suburb of Constantinople) where he moved in 799 in order to escape the growing dangers of the Arab invasions.*

St. Theodore was venerated for his personal holiness, his brilliant abilities as a preacher, and his willingness to champion the rights of the Church, even at the price of deep personal sacrifice. He suffered severe persecution, exiles and many other calamities to the end of his life, all for the defense of Orthodoxy. He was also the author of five hundred letters, hymns, sermons, polemics against Iconoclasm, and two catechisms. His rule for monks, admonitions pertaining to abbots, and letters have influenced monastic life in the Orthodox Church to this very day.

The original source for the excerpts that follow is the single best work available in English on St. Theodore, "Theodore of Studios: Byzantine Churchman," by Patrick Henry III.

ON THE CANONS

[From Epistle I.36]:

Why do I speak of the canons and imply a distinction? For it is one and the same thing to speak of them and of the Gospel of Christ. He himself said when he gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the great Peter, *Whomever you loose and whomever you bind, it will be as you have said.* [Cf. Matt. 16:19] And again he said to all the Apostles: *Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins you retain, they are retained.* [John 20:22-23] And consequently he transmitted the authority to those who came after them, if they should act in the same way.

For this reason the canons of Basil and of saints equal in rank to him have been received along with the Apostolic Canons, in as much as they followed them without making any innovation, only amplifying where necessary.

[Continued on page 11]

Δροσίσετε την Ψυχή σας στην Καλωσύνη και Αγνότητα

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου

Τοῦτος ὁ κόσμος εἶναι ἀνάποδος. Ὅπως καὶ νὰ κάνεις, δὲν τὸν εὐχαριστᾷς. Οὔτε στὸν ἥλιο τὸν βρίσκεις, οὔτε στὸν ἴσκιό. Ὁ κάθε ἕνας λέγει τὸ κοντό του καὶ τὸ μακρὺ του. Γιὰ ὅ,τι ἐνθουσιάζεται ὁ ἕνας, γιὰ τὸ ἴδιο στενοχωριέται ὁ ἄλλος. Ἄλλη φορὰ μπορεῖ οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ μὴν ἦτανε ὅλοι σύμφωνοι, μὰ γιὰ τοὺς πιὸ πολλοὺς τὸ καλὸ ἦτανε καλὸ καὶ τὸ κακὸ, κακὸ. Τώρα ὁ καθένας ἔχει σηκώσει μία παντιέρα καὶ κάνει τὸν καπετὰν ἕναν.

Μὰ οἱ πιὸ πολλοὶ μποδίζονται ἀπὸ τιποτένια πράγματα: ὁ ἕνας θέλει νὰ φαίνεται πιὸ «βαθυστόχαστος» ἀπὸ ὅ,τι εἶναι, ὁ ἄλλος θέλει νὰ φαίνεται μοντέρνος, νὰ μὴν τὸν πάρουνε γιὰ χωριάτη, ὁ ἄλλος φοβᾶται μὴν τὸν πάρουνε γιὰ «ἀφελή», γιὰ ὅχι «σοβαρόν» ἄνθρωπο, ὁ ἄλλος δὲν θέλει νὰ δυσαρεστήσει κάποιον, ἕτερος κολακεύει τίς γυναῖκες καὶ κάνει τὸν «ἰππότη» μιλώντας μὲ ψεύτικη εὐγένεια κ.λ.π. Ὅσοι εἶναι ἴσιοι καὶ ἀπλοῖ, δὲν ἔχουνε καμμιὰ σκοτούρα. Ζοῦνε μακρὰ ἀπὸ λιβανίσματα ἀπὸ πονηριές εἰδῶν – εἰδῶν, ἀπὸ δυσπιστίες ποὺ φαρμακώνουνε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἀπὸ σκηνοθεσίες, ἀπὸ ψευτιές. Χαίρονται γιὰ τὰ καλὰ, γιὰ τὰ ἀπλά, γιὰ τὰ ἀγνά, γιὰ τὰ σεμνά, γιὰ τὰ ταπεινά. Ἐνῶ οἱ ἄλλοι ὀλοένα ταραζόνται, ὀλοένα ἐξιχνιάζουνε. Πολλοὶ κατατρίβονται μὲ πράγματα ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν καμμιὰ σημασία. Ρωτᾶνε, νὰ ποῦμε, νὰ μάθουνε γιὰ μένα τί σοῖ ἄνθρωπος εἶμαι, πὼς εἶναι τὸ σχέδιό μου, ἂν εἶμαι θαλασσινός καὶ τοῦτο καὶ κεῖνο. Ἀδελφέ μου, ἂν σοῦ ἀρέσει ἡ συντροφιά μου, ἔλα ἐκεῖ ποὺ πηγαίνω, ἔλα νὰ νοιώσεις μαζί μου τὰ ὠραία ἔργα τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν θησαυρὸ ποὺ ἔχουνε μέσα τους κρυμμένον οἱ ἀπλοῖ ἄνθρωποι. Παράτησε πίσω σου τὴν ὑποκρισία τῆς ζωῆς κι ἔλα νὰ δροσισθεῖς στὴ βρυσούλα ποὺ τρέχει κρυμμένη στὴ ρίζα τοῦ βουνοῦ, κοντὰ στὸ παλιὸ ἐρημοκκλήσι. Τί κάθεσε κι ἐξετάζεις τὰ ἀνεξέταστα; Τί σὲ μέλλει ἂν εἶμαι στὴν ὄψη ἔτσι ἢ ἄλλοιῶς, ἐγὼ καὶ κάθε ἄλλος; Τί ρωτᾷς ἂν εἶμαι ψηλὸς ἢ κοντὸς, μαῦρος ἢ ἄσπρος; Σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ διαβάζεις βρίσκεται ὁ ἑαυτός μου, τὸ πὼς περπατῶ, τὸ πὼς μιλῶ, δηλαδὴ ὁ σαρκικὸς ἄνθρωπος. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι πνεῦμα ὅπως ὁ Θεός. Αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα νὰ σὲ ἐνδιαφέρει, αὐτὸ εἶναι πνεῦμα ὅπως ὁ Θεός. Αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα νὰ σὲ ἐνδιαφέρει, αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ σύσταση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Ἀπάνω ἀπ' ὅλα νὰ ἀγαπᾶμε τὴν καλωσύνη. Νὰ χαιρόμαστε νᾶμαστε καλοὶ καὶ νὰ νοιώθουμε κοντὰ μας ὄλους σὰν καλοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Κανένα πρᾶγμα δὲν εἶναι σὰν τὴν καλωσύνη. Τὸ πρόσωπό της λαμποκοπᾷ σὰν τὸν ἥλιο ποὺ χρυσώνει τὴν πλάση τὸ πρωὶ τῆς ὁμορφῆς μέρας τοῦ καλοκαιριοῦ. Τί εὐλογημένοι ποὺ εἶναι οἱ καλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ πρόσχαροι, οἱ γλυκομίλητοι, οἱ ἀπλοῖ, οἱ ἀπονήρευτοι, οἱ πονετικοί, οἱ ταπεινοί! Τί ἀληθινὸς πλοῦτος μέσα σὲ μιὰ τέτοια καρδιά! Καὶ τί φτώχεια, τί μιζέρια, τί ἀσχήμια μέσα στὶς κακὲς ψυχές, στὶς ἐγωιστικές, κι ἄς φουσκώνουνε ἀπ'

ἐξω κι ἄς παραστένουνε τὸν πλοῦσιο! Πόσο ξεκουράζεται ἡ ψυχὴ μας ἀπὸ τὴ δροσιὰ τῆς καλωσύνης καὶ πόσο κουράζεται ἡ ψυχὴ μας ἀπὸ τὸν λίβα τῆς κακίας.

Μὰ οἱ καλοὶ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι δυστυχημένοι, ὑποφέρουνε, τυραννιοῦνται. Ναι. Ὁ σατανᾶς τοὺς βασανίζει, τοὺς ρίχνει σὲ συμφορές. Μὰ ἔτσι γίνονται ἀκόμα πιὸ καθαροί, σὰν τὸ χρυσάφι ποὺ πέφτει στὸ χωνευτήρι. Ζοῦνε φτωχικά, μακρὰ ἀπὸ δόξες, κρυμμένοι, μὰ ζοῦνε ἀληθινά. Νὰ μὴν ζεῖς βουτηγμένος μέσα στὴν ψευτιά. Αὐτὸ εἶναι ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Χριστός «Τί θὰ ὠφελήσει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἂν κερδίσει ὅλον τὸν κόσμον καὶ ζημιωθεῖ τὴν ψυχὴ του;» Αὐτός, ὁ φτωχός, ὁ παραπεταμένος, κέρδισε τὴν ψυχὴ του. Ἀφοῦ κέρδισε τὴν ψυχὴ του, τί ἔχασε; Ὅ,τι ἔχασε εἶναι τιποτένιο μπροστὰ σ' αὐτὸ ποὺ κέρδισε.

Κι' ὁ ἄλλος ὁ χοντροπετσιασμένος ἀπὸ τὴ σαρκικὴ καλοπέραση, ἀπὸ τὰ σπόρ, ἀπὸ τὰ λουτρά, ἀπὸ τίς γυναῖκες, ἀπὸ τίς διάφορες ματαιότητες, τί κέρδισε ἄραγε, ἀφοῦ ἔχασε τὴν ψυχὴ του; Πόσοι καὶ πόσοι ὕστερα ἀπὸ μία ζωὴ γεμάτη λογῆς – λογῆς σαρκικὲς ἀπολαύσεις, κοσμικὲς τυμπανοκρουσίες, πλοῦτη, ρεκλάμες κ.λ.π., ἔρχονται σ' ἕναν λογαριασμὸ καὶ ξεζαλίζονται ἀπ' αὐτὰ τὰ σπιρτόζα πιστὰ καὶ νοιώθουνε τὴ γύμνια τους καὶ ζητᾶνε τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους ποῦ βρίσκεται; Μὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει πιά. Ἐρημιά, ξέρακας τῆς ἀπελπισίας ζώνει τοὺς ἐγωιστές! Τρομάζουνε μὲ τὴ μοναξιά τους μόλις τὴ νοιώσουνε. Ἀπὸ πάνω τους ὁ οὐρανὸς εἶναι ἔρημος, ἀδειανός, ἡ γῆ ἔρημη, οἱ ἀνθρώπινες καρδιές ἔρημες, γιατί ποτέ τους δὲν γνοιασθήκανε γι' αὐτές, καὶ ἔτσι κόπηκε κάθε τρυφερὴ ἀνταπόκριση μαζί τους.

Στὸ τέλος καταλαβαίνουμε οἱ τέτοιοι πὼς μὲ τὰ λεφτὰ δὲν ἀγοράζονται ὅλα τὰ πάντα. Καὶ πὼς, ἴσια – ἴσια, ὅσα δὲν ἀγοράζονται μὲ τὰ λεφτὰ αὐτὰ εἶναι ποὺ ἔχουνε τὴν πιὸ μεγάλη ἀξία. Καὶ πὼς ἀπ' αὐτὰ ἔχουνε μεγάλη ἀνάγκη, ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ δὲν ἀγοράζονται. Σὲ ποῖο μέρος πουλᾶνε τὴν ἡσυχία τῆς ψυχῆς, τὴν ἀγνότητα, τὴν ἀπλότητα, τὴν κρυφὴ χαρὰ ποὺ νοιώθει ὁ ἄνθρωπος κοντὰ στὸν Θεὸ σὲ στιγμὴ ποὺ ζεῖ κρυμμένος ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον, τὴν πραότητα, τὴν ἀγάπη; Δὲν τὰ πουλᾶνε σὲ κανένα ἀπὸ τὰ μαγαζιά κι' ἀπὸ τὰ παζάρια γιὰ τὸ διάφορο, τὴν ἀπονία γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, τὴν ψευτιά κάθε λογῆς, κι' ὅσα πᾶνε μαζί μ' αὐτὰ, δηλαδὴ τὸν ἐγωισμό, τὴν περηφάνεια, τὴν καταλαλιά μ' ἕναν λόγο τὸ χοντροπέτσιασμα τῆς ψυχῆς.

Τί μεγαλομανία σ' ἔχει πιάσει, ἀδελφέ μου, καὶ δὲν βρίσκεις ἡσυχία καὶ χτίζεις πατώματα ἀπάνω στὰ πατώματα, κι' ἔχεις δυὸ τρία αὐτοκίνητα καὶ κότερα καὶ κάθε λογῆς μάταια πράγματα! Γύρισε καὶ κῦτταξε καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸ σου, νὰ δροσισθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ σου μὲ τὴν εὐλογημένη καλωσύνη, ποὺ τὴν ξεράνανε τὰ τσιμέντα, οἱ ψεύτικες κουβέντες, οἱ συμφεροντολογικὲς παρέες, οἱ συνοφρυωμένες ἀξιοπρέπειες. Ἄν δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ κάνεις θυσίες, τοῦλάχιστον νὰ σχαθεῖς τὴν ἀδικία. Μὴν ἀδικεῖς. Ἡ ἀδικία εἶναι σχαμερὴ στρίγγλα, χωρίστρα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀνθρωποκτονία σὰν τὸν πατέρα τὸν σατανᾶ.

Τί θὰ δίνανε πολλοὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς, ποὺ κερδίσανε τὸν κόσμον καὶ χάσανε τὴν ψυχὴ τους, γιὰ νὰ νοιώσουνε ὅ,τι νοιώθουνε

οί άλλοι πού δέν χάσανε τήν ψυχή τους! Ἄν τύχει νά ξεκόψει κανένας τέτοιος ἀπό ψεύτικη παρέα καί βρεθεῖ στή συντροφιά τῶν ἀπλῶν, τῶν ἀχάλαστων, νοιώθει πῶς ζεῖ ἀληθινά καί σάν ἀπογευθεῖ τὰ ἀγνά αἰσθήματα ὕστερα ἀπό τή ψευτιά, καταλαβαίνει τέτοια χαρά, πού κάνει σάν τόν ἄνθρωπο πού ξαναγεννήθηκε, σάν τυφλός πού εἶδε τὸ φῶς του. Κάτι τέτοιοι δέν ξεκολλάνε πιά οἱ κακόμοιροι ἀπό τή συντροφιά τῶν ἀπλῶν, τῶν ἀχάλαστων, νοιώθει πῶς ζεῖ ἀληθινά καί σάν ἀπογευθεῖ τὰ ἀγνά αἰσθήματα ὕστερα ἀπό τή ψευτιά, καταλαβαίνει τέτοια χαρά, πού κάνει σάν τόν ἄνθρωπο πού ξαναγεννήθηκε, σάν τυφλός πού εἶδε τὸ φῶς του. Κάτι τέτοιοι δέν ξεκολλάνε πιά οἱ κακόμοιροι ἀπό τή συντροφιά τῶν ἀπλῶν, τῶν καρδιακῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἀλλά γιὰ νά ξεμακρύνει ἀπὸ τὰ ψεύτικα πρέπει νάχει λίγη ψυχή. Ἄλλοιῶς δέν μπορεῖ νά ζήσει χωρὶς ψευτιά. Ὁ ἄμμος τῆς Σαχάρας, ὄση βροχὴ κι' ἂν πέσει ἀπάνω του, δέν φυτρώνει τίποτα.

Ἄν πεῖς πάλι σέ ἕναν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους, τοὺς φτωχοὺς, νά περάσει μισὴ ὥρα μὲ τήν παρέα τῶν κοσμικῶν, καλύτερα ἔχει νά τὸ βάλεις στὸ μπουντρούμι, παρὰ νά βλέπει καί ν' ἀκούγει ἐκεῖνα τὰ ψεύτικα κομπλιμέντα, τίς ἀνάλατες συζητήσεις, τὰ κρύα χωρατά. Στὴ συναναστροφή πού κάνουνε αὐτοὶ οἱ ψευτισμένοι, θαρρεῖς πῶς τοὺς χωρίζει ἕνας τοῖχος τὸν ἕναν ἀπὸ τὸν ἄλλον. Ἐνῶ οἱ ἄλλοι, πού ζοῦνε μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον, νοιώθουνε πῶς οἱ καρδιές τους γίνονται ἕνα, πῶς ἀκουμπᾶ ὁ ἕνας ἀπάνω στὸν ἄλλον καί ξεκουράζεται. Ἀγαπᾶ καί ἀγαπιέται, χαίρεται καί δίνει χαρά. Ἀπὸ πάνω ἀπὸ τή συντροφιά τῶν σαρκικῶν ἀνθρώπων στέκεται ὁ διάβολος καί τοὺς κάνει νά μιλᾶνε ὀλοένα γιὰ λεφτὰ καί γιὰ τὰ ὁμοια, γιὰ νά μὴ γροικήσουνε οὔτε τὸ φαγὶ πού τρῶνε. Ἀπὸ πάνω ἀπὸ τή συντροφιά τῶν ταπεινῶν στέκεται ὁ Θεός, κι' ὅλα εἶναι εὐλογημένα.

Πετάξετε ἀπὸ πάνω σας τήν ψευτιά. Ἀνοίξετε τὰ πανιά, νά τὰ φουσκώσει ὁ καθαρὸς ἀγέρας τοῦ πελάγου. Νά δροσισθεῖ ἡ ψυχή σας, νά νοιώσετε πῶς ζητᾶ ἀληθινά κι' ὄχι ψεύτικα!



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νά μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὁσιος Ποιμίν».

Ἡ Μεγάλῃ Δύναμη τῆς Ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς Ἀπλότητος

Πρεσβ. Διονύσιος Τάτσης, Ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος»

Ἐπισκέφτηκε κάποτε τὸ Γέροντα Παῖσιο ἕνας γνωστός του, ἦταν καθηγητῆς τῆς Ἀθωνιάδος Σχολῆς, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε ἕνα ἔντονο προβληματισμὸ σχετικά μὲ τὴν ἀντοχὴ τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας: Πῶς μπόρεσαν νά ὑποφέρουν τόσο πόνο καί τόση κακουχία; Ρώτησε τὸ Γέροντα, γιὰ τὸ θέμα αὐτὸ κι ἐκεῖνος τοῦ ἀπάντησε μὲ δυὸ ὠραιότατα παραδείγματα, στὰ ὁποῖα φαίνεται ἡ μεγάλῃ δύναμη τῆς ἀγάπης: «Ἡ ἀγάπη ποῦχαν στὸ Χριστὸ τοὺς ἔδινε τὴ δύναμη. Οἱ μάρτυρες ἀγαποῦσαν πολὺ τὸ Χριστὸ, μὲ ἀγάπη, πού καίει κι αὐτὴ τοὺς ἔκανε νά μὴ νοιώθουν πόνο. Νὰ σοῦ πῶ δυὸ περιστατικὰ γιὰ νά καταλάβεις.»

«Μιὰ φορὰ εἶχε πιάσει φωτιά ἕνα σπίτι καί ἦταν μέσα τὰ παιδάκια. Ὁρμαίει ἡ μάνα μὲς στὶς φλόγες καί δέν ἄκουγε τίποτα. Γύρισε μὲ τὰ παιδιὰ στὴν ἀγκαλιά. Ἦταν καμένη στὸ πρόσωπο, στὰ μαλλιά στὸ χέρι, παντοῦ. Ὅμως, δέν ἔνιωθε τίποτα, οὔτε λογάριζε τὸν πόνο μπροστὰ στὰ παιδιὰ της.»

«Νὰ σοῦ πῶ κι ἕνα περιστατικὸ ἀπ' τὴ ζωὴ μου. Ἐμεῖς, μιὰ φορὰ ἦμασταν στὸ χωριὸ ὅλοι μαζί. Μᾶς εἰδοποίησαν ὅτι ἔρχονται οἱ Γερμανοὶ καί γι' αὐτὸ θὰ ἔπρεπε ν' ἀνεβούμε στὸ βουνό. Ἐμένα τ' ἀδέλφια μου ἦταν κάτω στὸν κάμπο. Ποιὸς νά τὰ εἰδοποιήσει; “Ἐκείνους τοὺς ἔχασες, πού τοὺς ἔχασες, τοῦλάχιστο νὰ σοῦ μείνει αὐτός,” λέγανε οἱ γείτονες στὴ μάνα μου κι ἐννοοῦσαν ἐμένα “Ἄν εἶναι νά τοὺς σκοτώσουν, ἄς σκοτώσουν καί μένα,” λέω καί δίνω μία καί ἀρχίζω τὴν τρεχάλα. Ἐπεσα σ' ἕνα χωράφι φρεσκοοργωμένο καί βούλιαξα μέχρι τὸ γόνατο. Ἦμουν ξυπόλυτος κι ἔτρεχα, χωρὶς νά λογαριάζω τ' ἀγκάθια καί τίς πέτρες. Ἐφτασα στ' ἀδέλφια μου καί τοὺς μίλησα. Δὲ προλάβαμε καί νάτοι οἱ Γερμανοὶ. Δὲν μᾶς πείραξαν ὅμως.»

Ἡ ἀγάπη ἔχει ἀκατανίκητη δύναμη. Κανένα ἐμπόδιο δέν μπορεῖ νά τὴν ἐμποδίσει. Μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη στὸ Χριστὸ ὁ ἀδύνατος καί δειλὸς γίνεται ἀτρόμητος καί γενναῖος, ἀψηφώντας τοὺς κινδύνους καί τὸ θάνατο ἀκόμα! Τώρα λιγότεψαν τὰ βιώματα. Ἡ ἐποχὴ μας εἶναι δύσκολη. Οἱ χριστιανοὶ ἀντιμετωπίζουν πολλὰ προβλήματα καί ὑπέρβλητα ἐμπόδια. Τὸ ρεῦμα τῶν συγχρόνων ἀνθρώπων εἶναι ὀρμητικὸ καί ἀντίθετο πρὸς τίς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Οἱ χριστιανοὶ ἀντιστέκονται, ἀλλὰ τὸ ρεῦμα εἶναι τόσο ἰσχυρὸ, πού δέν μποροῦν ν' ἀλλάξουν τὰ πράγματα. Τὸ πιὸ πιθανὸ εἶναι νά παρασυρθοῦν κι ἐκεῖνοι. Γιὰ αὐτὸ χρειάζονται τὰ φωτεινὰ παραδείγματα Δυστυχῶς, ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας δέν ἔχει ἀνθρώπους μὲ ἀγιότητα. Ὁ Γέροντας Παῖσιος ἔλεγε: «Τώρα πλήθυναν τὰ βιβλία καί λιγότεψαν τὰ βιώματα.»

Οἱ συνειδητοὶ χριστιανοὶ αἰσθάνονται πολὺ ἄβουλα μέσα στὴ σημερινὴ κοινωνία. Βλέπουν ὅτι ὅλοι οἱ συνάδελφοί

τους έχουν ξεχάσει τὸ Θεό. Ζοῦν δίχως τὸ Θεό. Στὴν Ἐκκλησία ἐμφανίζονται μόνο γιὰ κοινωνικούς λόγους· στὶς κηδεῖες, τὰ μνημόσυνα, τοὺς γάμους, καὶ τὶς βαπτίσεις. Τὰ ἐνδιαφέροντά τους εἶναι περιορισμένα. Σκέφτονται κι ἐπιθυμοῦν τὰ ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὶς ἡδονές.

Ὁ Γέροντας Παῖσιος ἔλεγε ὅτι «Σήμερα, ἂν κάποιος θέλει νὰ ζήσει τίμια καὶ πνευματικά δὲν χωράει στὸν κόσμο, δυσκολεύεται, καὶ ἂν δὲν προσέξει, θὰ τὸν πάρει ὁ κατήφορος, τὸ κοσμικὸ κανάλι. Παλιότερα, ἦταν πολὺ τὸ καλὸ, πολλὴ ἡ ἀρετὴ, πολὺ τὸ καλὸ παράδειγμα, καὶ τὸ κακὸ πνιγόταν στὸ πολὺ καλὸ καὶ ἡ λίγη ἀταξία, ποὺ ὑπῆρχε στὸν κόσμο ἢ στὰ Μοναστήρια δὲν φαινόταν οὔτε ἐβλεπε. Τώρα τί γίνεται; Τὸ κακὸ παράδειγμα εἶναι πολὺ, καὶ τὸ λίγο καλὸ ποὺ ὑπάρχει, περιφρονεῖται. Γίνεται δηλαδή τὸ ἀντίθετο· πνίγεται τὸ λίγο καλὸ στὸ πολὺ κακὸ καὶ ἔτσι κυβερνάει τὸ κακὸ».

Δίχως μέριμνες καὶ ἀγγος πρέπει νάναί ἡ ζωὴ μας. Εἶναι σπουδαῖο πρᾶγμα νὰ ζεῖς χωρὶς πολλὰς φροντίδες καὶ ἀγγος. Νὰ μὴ ἐπιθυμεῖς τὰ περιττὰ καὶ μάταια. Νὰ ἀναπαύεσαι σὲ ὅσα ἔχεις καὶ ν' ἀγωνίζεσαι μὲ μέτρο καὶ λογικὴ γιὰ τὴ βελτίωση τῆς κατάστασός σου.

Ὅστοςο, οἱ σύγχρονοι ἄνθρωποι δὲν μένουν ἱκανοποιημένοι μὲ τίποτα. Θέλουν πάντα κάτι νεώτερο, κάτι πληρέστερο, πιὸ σύγχρονο, πιὸ ἄνετο, πιὸ ἐντυπωσιακὸ καὶ προκλητικὸ. Ἔτσι χάνουν τὴ γαλήνη τους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἀνθρωπισμὸ τους. Καὶ βέβαια καμιά σκέψη γιὰ τοὺς φτωχοὺς, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν οὔτε τὰ πρὸς τὸ ζῆν ἀναγκαῖα. Ὁ Γέροντας Παῖσιος πάντα ἔλεγε ὅτι οἱ πολλὰς εὐκολίες γίνονται δυσκολίες, γι' αὐτὸ συμβούλευε τοὺς χριστιανοὺς νὰ ἔχουν ἀπλὴ ζωὴ. Διηγίταν μάλιστα κι ἓνα χαριτωμένο περιστατικὸ, ποὺ εἶχε συμβεῖ, ὅταν ἦταν στὸ Σινὰ.

«Μιὰ φορὰ», ἔλεγε ὁ Γέροντας, «ἦρθε στὸ Σινὰ ἓνας Γερμανὸς καὶ κουβέντιαζε μ' ἓνα πανέξυπνο Βεδουϊνάκι: "Ἔσυ εἶσαι ἔξυπνο παιδί. Μπορεῖς νὰ μάθεις γράμματα." τοῦ εἶπε μὲ ἄγνὸ ἐνδιαφέρον ὁ Γερμανός.

"Καὶ μετὰ;" ρώτησε ὁ μικρὸς

"Μετὰ θὰ γίνεις μηχανικὸς."

"Καὶ μετὰ;"

"Μετὰ θ' ἀνοίξεις ἓνα συνεργεῖο αὐτοκινήτων."

"Καὶ μετὰ;"

"Μετὰ θὰ τὸ μεγαλώσεις."

"Καὶ μετὰ;"

"Μετὰ θὰ πάρεις καὶ ἄλλους νὰ δουλεύουν καὶ θὰ ἔχεις πολὺ προσωπικὸ."

Ὁ μικρὸς δὲν ἐνθουσιάστηκε ἀπ' τὶς ἀπαντήσεις τοῦ Γερμανοῦ, ἰδίως τὴν τελευταία καὶ εἶπε:

"Δηλαδή, νὰ ἔχω ἓνα πονοκέφαλο, νὰ βάλω ἄλλον ἓνα πονοκέφαλο καὶ μετὰ νὰ βάλω κι ἓναν ἄλλον; Δὲν εἶναι καλύτερα τώρα, ποὺ ἔχω ἡσυχὸ τὸ κεφάλι μου;"

Κι ἔτσι ἐκλείσει ἡ συζήτηση τοῦ μικροῦ μὲ τὸ Γερμανό.»

Ὁ Γέροντας χαιρόταν τοὺς Βεδουϊνοὺς κι ἔπαιρνε διδάγματα ἀπ' τὴν ἀπλὴ καὶ ἀμέριμνη ζωὴ τους. Ἴσως πρέπει νὰ πάρουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς αὐτὸ τὸ δίδαγμα...

Τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ὑμνογραφίας καὶ Μουσικῆς

Τοῦ Πρωτ. π. Θωμὰ Βαμβίνη, ἀπὸ τὴν ἔκδοση «Παρέμβαση» τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Ναυπάκτου, Τεύχος 102

Ὁ ὁσιος Ἰσαὰκ σὲ μιὰ ἐπιστολὴ ποὺ ἔστειλε σὲ ἓνα φίλο τοῦ γράφει: «Ἡ σιωπὴ μυστήριον ἐστὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ μέλλοντος, οἱ δὲ λόγοι ὄργανον εἰσὶ τούτου τοῦ κόσμου». Μιλώντας γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Μουσικὴ, εἶναι ἀπαραίτητο νὰ ἀναφερθῆ κανεὶς στὴ γόνιμη σιωπὴ ποὺ συνδέεται μὲ τὴν βίωση, μέσα στὸ παρόν, τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος. Οἱ λόγοι -- ποιητικοὶ ἢ πεζοί, ἀναγινωσκόμενοι ἢ ψαλλόμενοι -- εἶναι ὄργανα τούτου τοῦ κόσμου.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ὑμνογραφία εἶναι γέννημα τῆς ἐν γνώσει σιωπῆς, γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι πρὸ πάντων προσευχὴ καὶ δοξολογία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Εἶναι διατύπωση μὲ κτιστὰς ἀνθρώπινες λέξεις καὶ κτιστοὺς ἤχους τῶν μυστικῶν ψαλμῶν καὶ ὕμνων καὶ τῶν ὠδῶν τῶν πνευματικῶν, ποὺ ἄδονται καὶ ψάλλονται μὲ τὴν ἔμπνευση τῆς ἀκτίστου Χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ «ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ» τῶν ἀγίων «τῷ Κυρίῳ». Γι' αὐτὸ ἄλλωστε ἡ ποιήσῆ τους δὲν κινεῖται στὸ ὀριζόντιο ἀνθρώπινο συναισθηματικὸ ἐπίπεδο. Κινεῖται κατακορύφως σὲ ὕψη θεογνωσίας καὶ βάθη ἀνθρωπογνωσίας.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ὑμνογραφία καὶ ψαλτικὴ διακονία εἶναι βέβαια τέχνη, ὅμως τέχνη λειτουργικὴ. Δὲν εἶναι ἀπλῶς ἓνα καλλιτεχνικὸ ἔργο· εἶναι πρωτίστως ἔργο ἐκκλησιαστικὸ. Ὁ μακαριστὸς Μητροπολίτης Κοζάνης Διονύσιος σὲ ἓνα κείμενό του γράφει: «Πρέπει ἐν ἀρχῇ νὰ διευκρινισθῆ, ὅτι ἡ μουσικὴ ἐν τῇ θεῖᾳ λατρείᾳ δὲν εἶναι ζήτημα ἀπλῶς καλλιτεχνικόν, ἀλλὰ πρωτίστως ἐκκλησιαστικόν, αἰσθητικῆς δὲ καὶ καλλιτεχνικῆς τάξεως». Καὶ συνεχίζει λέγοντας: «Ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ μουσικὴ δὲν εἶναι ὑπόθεσις τῶν καλλιτεχνῶν μόνον, οἵτινες δὲν εἶναι Ἱερεῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν Ἱερέων, οἵτινες δύνανται νὰ εἶναι καλλιτέχναι».

Ἐδῶ πρέπει νὰ ὑπογραμμίσουμε ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Μουσικὴ εἶναι τέχνη, ἐπιστήμη ἀλλὰ καὶ μέσο τῆς ἱερατικῆς διακονίας. Ὅποτε ἡ καλλιέργειά της ἀπαιτεῖ, καλλιτεχνικὸ αἰσθητήριον, σπουδὴ, δηλαδή μελέτη καὶ ἄσκηση, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἱερατικὴ συνείδηση. Κι αὐτὸ ὄχι μόνο ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἱερεῖς ποὺ ἐκφωνοῦν ἐμμελῶς τὶς αἰτήσεις ἢ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἱεροψάλτες. Διότι αὐτὸς ποὺ ψάλλει στὴν Ἐκκλησία ψάλλει ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ λαοῦ· γι' αὐτὸ μαζί μὲ τὴν ὀρθὴ ἐκτέλεση τῆς μελωδίας ὀφείλει νὰ κατανοῇ τὰ ψαλλόμενα, νὰ μετέχη στὸ πνεῦμα τους καὶ νὰ προσευχεται, ὥστε νὰ μπορῇ νὰ μεταδίδῃ κατάνυξη στὸν λαὸ καὶ νὰ ἐμπνέῃ προσευχὴ.

Ἡ κακοποίησις τῶν ἱερῶν ἀσμάτων, ποὺ γίνεται εἴτε μὲ τὴν λανθασμένη ἐκτέλεσῆ τους, λόγω ἀγνοίας τῶν στοιχειωδῶν κανόνων τῆς μουσικῆς, εἴτε μὲ τὴν ἐπιτηδευμένη, προκλητικὴ μελώδησῆ τους, εἶναι ἀσέβεια ἀπέναντι στὸ σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἀπέναντι στὸν λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Δηλώνει ἀγνοία τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Ὑμνολογίας.

Ἡ τέχνη μέσα στο χώρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κρατᾷ τὴν ἀπλότητα καὶ τὴν αὐθεντικότητά της, δηλαδή διασώζει τὴν ἐλληνικότητά της. Εἶναι φιλοκαλία μετ' εὐτελείας. Στὴν Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ μουσικὴ, στὴν αὐθεντικὴ τῆς μορφή, δὲν ὑπάρχει τίποτε τὸ πομπῶδες, τὸ περίπλοκο καὶ τὸ προκλητικὸ. Συντονίζεται ἔτσι μετὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη εἰκονογραφία καὶ τὴν ναοδομία. Ἄλλωστε οἱ ὕμνοι κυρίως ψάλλονται μέσα στοὺς ναοὺς μπροστὰ καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὶς εἰκόνες. Ὁ ὕμνωδὸς γνωρίζει ὅτι ὁ ὕμνος του προσάγεται «τῷ τῶν κρυπτῶν ἐφόρῳ Θεῷ». Γι' αὐτὸ μπροστὰ Του ἀποκαλύπτεται. Δὲν προσποιεῖται τὸν ἄμεπτο. Δὲν ζητοκραυγάζει τὸν ἑαυτό του. Τὸ πᾶν εἶναι ὁ Χριστός.

Ἐνας σύγχρονος Ἕλληνας ποιητής, ὁ Μανώλης Ἀναγνωστάκης, σ' ἓνα ποίημά του ὁμολογεῖ: «ἡ ποίηση δὲν εἶναι ὁ τρόπος νὰ μιλήσουμε, ἀλλὰ ὁ καλύτερος τοῖχος νὰ κρύψουμε τὸ πρόσωπό μας». Ὅταν μία ἐσωτερικὴ τραγωδία ψάχνει μορφὲς τῆς τέχνης γιὰ νὰ ἐκφραστῆ, χάνεται πολλὲς φορὲς πίσω ἀπὸ τοὺς αἰσθητικοὺς κανόνες. Τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ τὴν μορφή μπλέκει τὸν καλλιτέχνη στοὺς ἐσωτερικοὺς μηχανισμοὺς τῆς ὑποκρισίας. Ἡ τέχνη του γίνεται τεῖχος ποὺ κρύβει τὸ πρόσωπό του. Αὐτὸ ὅμως εἶναι ἄγνωστο στὸν θεοφόρο ὕμνογράφο. Στὸν ὕμνο του ὁ ὕμνογράφος ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ πρόσωπό του καὶ τοὺς διχασμοὺς του. Δὲν μένει ὅμως μόνο στὴν ἐπισήμανση τῆς τραγωδίας του. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν ὕμνο του, ποὺ εἶναι καὶ προσευχή, βρίσκει τὴν διέξοδο. Ζητᾷ τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Δὲν στοχάζεται, οὔτε ρεμβάζει. Μετανοεῖ, προσεύχεται καὶ θεολογεῖ.

Χαρακτηριστικὸ παράδειγμα τῆς Ὄρθοδόξου Ὑμνολογίας εἶναι τὸ τροπάριο, ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπόστιχα τοῦ ὁρθοῦ τῆς Τρίτης: «Πολλάκις τὴν ὕμνωδιαν ἐκτελῶν, εὐρέθην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐκπληρῶν, τῇ μὲν γλώττῃ ἄσματα φθεγγόμενος, τῇ δὲ ψυχῇ ἄτοπα λογιζόμενος· ἀλλ' ἐκάτερα διόρθωσον, Χριστέ ὁ Θεός, διὰ τῆς μετανοίας καὶ σῶσον με». Αὐτὴ ἡ ὁμολογία καὶ προσευχὴ φθάνει σὲ ὑψηλὴ ποιητικὴ ἐκφράση στὸ γνωστὸ τροπάριο τῆς Κασσιανῆς. Ἡ ὕμνογράφος περιγράφοντας τὴν μετάνοια κάθε ψυχῆς ποὺ δόθηκε στὶς ἄνομες σχέσεις τῶν παθῶν, γράφει: «ἁμαρτιῶν μου τὰ πλήθη καὶ κριμμάτων Σου ἀβύσσους τὶς ἐξιχνιάσει ψυχοσώστα Σωτήρ μου;». Ἐπειδὴ ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι σωτὴρ ψυχοσώστης, ἔχει ἡ ἁμαρτωλὸς τὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴν τόλμη νὰ προσβλέπη μετ' ἐλπίδα στὴν παντοκρατορικὴ πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ δίνει ζωὴ καὶ κινεῖ τὴν κτίση. Βλέπει ἡ ὕμνογράφος τὸ νερὸ τῆς θάλασσας καὶ τὸ συνδέει ποιητικῶτα μετὰ τὰ ἄλμυρά δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας. «Δέξε μου τὰς πηγὰς τῶν δακρύων, ὁ νεφέλαις διεξάγων τῆς θαλάσσης τὸ ὕδωρ. Κάμφθητί μοι πρὸς τοὺς στεναγμοὺς τῆς καρδίας, ὁ κλίνας τοὺς οὐρανοὺς τῇ ἀφάτω σου κενώσει».

Μέσα στοὺς ὕμνους ὑπάρχει πόνος καὶ ἐλπίδα. Ὑπάρχει ἡ ταπεινώση τοῦ Γεννηθέντος στὴ Φάντη, ὁ πόνος τοῦ ἐσταυρωμένου στὸ Γολγοθᾶ, ὁ ὁποῖος μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του κράτησε τοὺς τύπους τῶν ἡλίων στὰ χέρια Του. Αὐτὴ ἡ σταυροαναστάσιμη ἀτμόσφαιρα εἶναι ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ὕμνογραφίας καὶ μουσικῆς.

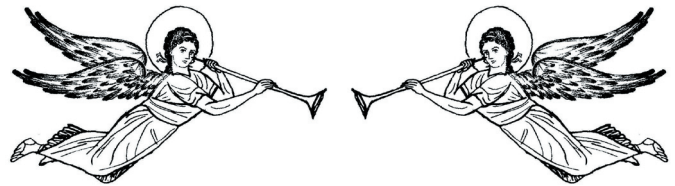
Ὁρθόδοξα Σταχυολογήματα

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὸ φυλλάδιον «Σταχυολογήματα τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀύγουστίνου Καντιώτου», Ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη»

Τὰ πάθη ἀποτελοῦν τὰ ὑπάρχοντα, τὰ κύρια ὑπάρχοντα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τὰ ὁποῖα καλεῖται οὗτος νὰ ἀφήσῃ, νὰ ἀποχωρισθῆ καὶ νὰ ἀκολουθήσῃ τὸν Χριστόν. Ἄφθαρτος δὲ στολή εἶναι αἱ ἀρεταὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ γίνουν καὶ ἀρεταὶ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ.

Δια νὰ θελήσῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ ἀπαλλαγῆ πάσης πονηρᾶς Δυσνηθείας, πρέπει νὰ ἔλθῃ εἰς γνῶσιν καὶ συναίσθησιν τῆς ἀπεριγράπτου ἀθλιότητος ποὺ δημιουργοῦν τὰ ἀνθρώπινα πάθη, καὶ λαμβάνων γνῶσιν τῆς ἀθλιότητος ταύτης, νὰ κράξῃ πρὸς τὸν Κύριον, τὸν μόνον δυνάμενον νὰ τὸν ἀπαλλάξῃ τῆς φρικτῆς του καταστάσεως.

Ἡ εἰς Χριστόν πίστις εἶναι ἡ μυστηριώδης ἔλξις, εἰς τὴν ὁποῖαν ἐλκύεται ἡ ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστόν, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς στιγμῆς τῆς ἔλξεως ἐκείνης, εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὴν θείαν τροχίαν καὶ γίνεται δορυφόρος αὐτοῦ, κέντρον τῆς ζωῆς τῆς ἔχουσα τὸν Κύριον.



ΑΝΑΚΟΙΝΩΣΙΣ

Ἡ ἀδελφότης «Ὅσιος Ποιμίν» χαίρεται νὰ κοινοποιήσῃ στοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας ὅτι θὰ φιλοξενήσουμε τὸν κ. Δημήτριο Τσελεγγίδη (καθηγητὴ Δογματικῆς εἰς τὸ Τμῆμα Θεολογίας τοῦ Ἀριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης) εἰς τὸν Φοῖνικα, Ἀριζόνας, 11-12 Φεβρουαρίου, 2005, ὅπου καὶ θὰ γίνουν ὁμιλίαι θρησκευτικοῦ περιεχομένου. Οἱ ὁμιλίαι θὰ γίνουν εἰς τὴν **μεγάλην αἴθουσαν τοῦ Καθεδρικοῦ Ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος, 1973 E. Maryland Ave.**, καὶ εἰς τὶς ἀκόλουθες μέρες καὶ ὥρες:

- Παρασκευὴ, 11 Φεβρουαρίου, 7:00 μμ
- Σάββατο, 12 Φεβρουαρίου, 2:00 μμ

Τα θέματα τὰ ὁποῖα θὰ ἀναπτυχθοῦν εἶναι:

1. Ἡ Ὄρθόδοξη θεολογία καὶ ἡ ἀνώτατη θεολογικὴ ἐκπαίδευση σήμερον.
2. Ὁ χαρακτήρας τῆς ἐλευθερίας κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο Παλαμᾶ.
3. Ἡ θεολογικὴ ταυτότητα τοῦ Προτεσταντισμοῦ.
4. Ὁ μοναχισμὸς καὶ ἡ Ὄρθοδοξία τῆς πίστεως.

Οἱ ὁμιλίαι θὰ γίνουν στὰ Ἑλληνικά, μετὰ ταυτοχρονῆς μετάφραση εἰς τὰ Ἀγγλικά. Ἡ ἐπίσκεψις αὐτὴ ἀποτελεῖ μία σπάνια εὐκαιρία γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἐν Ἀμερικῇ Ὄρθοδόξους Χριστιανοὺς καὶ ἐλπίζουμε ὅτι ἐὰν βρεθεῖτε εἰς τὴν περιοχὴ τοῦ Φοίνικος, νὰ ἔλθετε νὰ παρακολουθήσετε τὶς ὁμιλίαι τοῦ κ. Τσελεγγίδη.

Ἡ εἴσοδος εἶναι ἐλευθέρη.

[Continued from page 6]

On the other hand, these new pseudo-apostles demonstrate clearly that they do not act according to the limits set down by the saints. Rather, **according to their own authority and discretion they act against what has been declared by the saints, when some bishop or other absolves in a situation where the saints did not absolve, or binds in a situation where the saints did not bind. And you see these things happening every day.** (PG 1037AB; Henry p. 158-159)

ON VALID COUNCILS

From the letter to Magister Theoctistus (Ep. I.24):

[The Church of God] has not permitted anything to be done or said against the established decrees and laws, although many shepherds have in many ways railed against them when they have called great and very numerous councils, and given themselves to **put on a show of concern for the canons, while in truth acting against them.**

What then is remarkable in the gathering of about fifteen bishops to declare innocent and to absolve for the priesthood one who is deposed on two counts?

Sir, **a council does not consist simply in the gathering of bishops and priests, no matter how many there are.** For Scripture says that *one doing the will of the Lord is better than thousands who transgress* [Eccls. 16:3]. **A council occurs when, in the Lord's name, the canons are thoroughly searched out and maintained. And a council is not to bind and loose in some random way, but as seems proper to the truth and to the canon and to the rule of strictness.**

Let those who gathered demonstrate that they have acted in this way and we will join them; but if they do not demonstrate it, let them cast out the unworthy one, lest it become a reproach to them and to future generations.

The Word of God is not such as to allow itself to be bound. [II Tim. 2:9] **And no authority whatever has been given to bishops for any transgression of a canon.** They are simply to follow what has been decreed, and to adhere to those who have gone before. (PG 985ABC; Henry p. 120)

ON SCHISM

From the Epistle to the Patriarch of Constantinople Nicephorus (Ep. I.25), during the Moechian Controversy (808 A.D.):

We are not schismatics, O Holy Head, from the Church of God [for refusing to commune with him, as well as Abbot Joseph and his supporters]: God forbid that should ever happen. I am a sinner in countless ways, but I am Orthodox and a child of the Church catholic. I repudiate every heresy and accept every approved catholic and local synod, and the canonical constitutions promulgated by them as well. For he is not completely, but only halfway Orthodox, who seems to have right faith while not being guided by the divine canons. (PG 989A; Henry p. 280)

From the Epistle to Monk Basil (Ep. I.28):

We are not schismatics from the Church of God; God forbid

that we should ever come to that! But although our sins are many, nevertheless we are of one body with the Church; we are its children and the children of its divine dogmas; and we strive to keep its canons and constitutions... This is not a schism of the Church. It is defense of the truth, and vindication of the sacred laws. What Your Honor suggests would be a breaking of the truth and would paralyze the canons. (PG 997CD, 1001D; Henry p. 123, 109)

To the Iconoclastic Synod on Behalf of All the Abbots (Ep. II.I, 815 AD):

If anyone at all from among our contemporaries or from earlier times, if even Peter and Paul (for the sake of argument I suggest as possible something which is impossible), should come from heaven itself teaching and preaching something other than this faith, we could not receive him into communion, as not adhering to the pure teaching of the faith. And no matter what your authority thinks, Our Humility is ready to resist to death rather than deny such a pure confession as ours is. (PG 1120A; Henry p. 301)

Expanding upon Galatians 1:8 St. Theodore says in Ep. I.24:

Shall we say: Since it is lawful for an archbishop together with his associates to do as he pleases, let him be for the duration of his archbishopric a new Evangelist, another Apostle, a different Lawgiver? Certainly not. For we have an injunction from the Apostle himself: **If anyone preaches a doctrine, or urges you to do something, against what you have received [from the Fathers], against what is prescribed by the canons of the catholic and local synods held at various times, he is not to be received, or to be reckoned among the number of the faithful.** And I forbear even to mention the terrible judgment with which the Apostle concludes. (PG 988A, Henry pp. 118-119)

Patrick Henry summarizes on p. 263:

What mattered [to St. Theodore] was the maintenance of the patristic and canonical tradition; where that was maintained, there was the Church.



The Magi adore this Body lying in the manger ... It is not now lying in a crib that I see Thee, but upon the altar. There is no difference between this (the Eucharist) and that. This is the same Body that was covered in blood, pierced by the spear, pouring forth the saving streams of blood and water, for the whole world. Christ soared up from the depths of the abyss in dazzling light and, leaving His rays there, ascended to His throne in the heavens. It is that same Body that He now gives us hold and to eat!

St John Chrysostom

THE EIGHT DEADLY SINS AND THEIR SUBDIVISIONS

By St. Ignaty Bryanchaninov (+1867), from the on-line catalogue of the "Transfiguration of Our Lord" Russian Orthodox Church, Baltimore, MD -- USA.

1. Gluttony

Overeating, drunkenness, not keeping the fasts, eating in secret, over-indulgence, extreme love of one's body and bodily comforts, which leads to egoism and indifference to God, the Church and virtue.

2. Lust

Sexual desires in the heart and soul. The entertainment of impure thoughts, delight in them, acceptance of them. Sexual fantasies and enthrallment. Inappropriate physical contact. Foul language and the reading of sexually inflaming literature. Sins of natural sex (fornication and adultery) and unnatural (sodomy and bestiality).

3. Avarice

Love of money and material possessions. The desire to enrich oneself and thoughts of how to achieve it. Greed and cupidity. Lack of faith in God's Providence. Addiction to and unhealthy love for earthly possessions, which keep the soul in bondage. Love of gifts. Misappropriation. Usury. Hard-heartedness towards the needy. Theft. Piracy.

4. Wrath

Hot temper, angry and revengeful thoughts, irritability, seething of the heart and mind with rage; quarreling, indecent shouting, use of obscenities and cruel words, beating, pushing, murder. Malice, hate, enmity, revenge, slander, the passing of judgment on others, giving offense to others.

5. Despair

Chagrin, despondency, loss of faith in God, doubt of God, ungratefulness towards God for everything that happens in one's life, faint-heartedness, impatience, taking offense, grumbling, renunciation of one's cross, the attempt to give it up.

6. Idleness

Indolence towards all good deeds, especially prayer. Abandonment of church and home prayers. Abandonment of constant prayer and spiritual reading. Indifference to and hastiness in praying. Negligence. Impiety. Slothfulness. Excessive abandonment to sleep and other bodily comforts. Idle talk. Improper jokes. Sacrilege. Abandonment of spiritual labors. Forgetfulness of one's sins. Forgetfulness of Christ's commandments. Carelessness. Bitterness. Loss of the fear of God.

7. Vanity

Vainglory. Bragging. Desire and seeking after earthly and vain honors. Love of beautiful clothing and things. Excessive attention to the attractiveness of one's body. Shame in confessing one's sins. Deceitfulness. Self-justification. Contradiction. Hypocrisy. Lying. Flattery. Sycophancy. Envy. Humiliation of others. Moral relativism. Shamelessness. Demonic lifestyle.

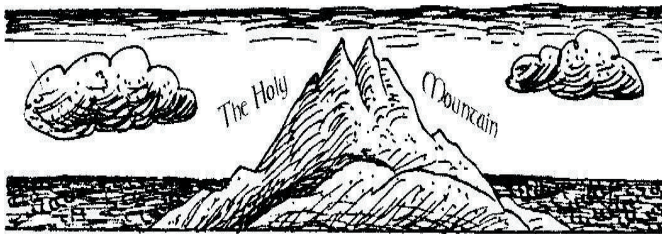
8. Pride

Contempt for others. Self-preferment. Defiance. Clouding of the mind and heart. Exclusive reliance on earthly things. Blasphemy. Disbelief. False intellect. Disobedience of the law of God and the Church. Imposing of one's own will. Reading heretical, profane and vain books. Revolt against authority. Mockery. Abandonment of humility and silence. Loss of simplicity. Loss of love for God and one's neighbors. Death of the soul.

Such are the sins which constitute the great curse - the mortality of Adam, which sprang from his fall. The prophet Isaiah speaks of this great curse, saying: "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in him; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Isaiah 1:6). According to the holy fathers, this means that the curse - sin - is not local, i.e., striking only one bodily member, but affects the entire being; envelops the body, envelops the soul, takes possession of all the faculties of a person. God called this great curse - death, when He forbade Adam and Eve to taste of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, saying: "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Immediately upon eating the forbidden fruit the forefathers experienced eternal death; they felt an earthly sensation in their eyes; they saw that they were naked. The knowledge of the nakedness of their bodies reflected the nakedness of their souls, which had lost the beauty of chastity granted them by the Holy Spirit Himself. In their eyes there was this new physical sensation, while in their souls there was the feeling of shame, which comprised all their new sinful feelings: pride, uncleanness, sorrow, despondency, despair. Death becomes the great curse; irremediable is the mortality which came with the loss of the Divine image! The Apostle Paul calls this great curse the law of sin, the body of death (Romans 7:23-24), because the mortified mind and heart have turned completely towards the earth, slavishly serve the lowly desires of the flesh, have become dark and heavy, have themselves become flesh. This flesh is no longer able to communicate with God (Gen. 6:3). This flesh is unable to inherit eternal, heavenly bliss (1 Cor. 6:50). The great curse has spread upon all mankind, has become the ill-fated legacy of each and every person.

Looking upon this great curse of mine, I am filled with bitter sorrow! I ponder what to do. Shall I follow the example of ancient Adam, who, upon seeing his nakedness, hastens to hide himself from God? Shall I attempt to justify myself, as he did, throwing the blame upon sin? It is futile to hide from the All-seeing One! It is futile to justify oneself before the One Who always wins in judgment (Psalm 30:7)! Instead of fig leaves let me dress myself in tears of repentance; instead of justification let me bring to Him my sincere penitence. But, dressed in penitence and tears, can I present myself before my God?

O, sinful descendant of Adam, take heart! A great light has shone forth in your prison: God has descended into the land of your exile, in order to bring you up into the heavenly homeland which you had lost. You wished to have knowledge of good and evil. He allows you to retain this knowledge. You wished to become like God, and because of this your soul has become like the demons and your body like the animals; but God, joining you to Him, makes you godlike through grace. He forgives your sins. And that is not all! He extracts the root of evil from your soul, the very pestilence of sin, and grants you anodyne (*pain and distress "reliever"*) against sin for the entire course of your earthly life, no matter how many times you sin through your frailty. This anodyne is the confession of sins. Do you wish to take off the mortality of Adam? Do you wish to attain freedom from your enslavement to sin? Immerse yourself in humility! Overcome the shame of vanity, extract your sins, engage in battle with your sins by means of sincere confession. This anodyne must precede all others; without it the anodynes of prayer, tears, fasting and all other means will be insufficient, unsatisfactory, unstable. Go, proud one, to your spiritual father, find at his hands the charity of the Heavenly Father. Only sincere and frequent confession can free us of sinful habits, make our repentance fruitful, our correction lasting and sincere.



Active love without submission cannot exist. How can you love and serve if you don't first submit to the other's will? Every movement of active love is service, and so those who obey serve in two ways. On the one hand, they show their faith in the one giving the order; and on the other hand, they show their love through the service rendered.

When you are in the presence of someone whom you know judges you and tempts you, it is almost impossible for him not to bother you, as much as you may try to remain unaffected. After pardoning and praying for him, however, you will recover from the grief of sadness.

Neglect plots against us. It's like a drought that hinders any kind of planting. It hurts everyone. It hinders those who want to begin the spiritual battle, and stops those who have begun it. It hinders those who are unaware, and keeps those who have been deluded from returning.

Before temptation has the opportunity to draw the tempting thought into your mind, destroy it with the prayer. Don't let it be!

Blessed Elder St. Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

PRAYER INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHILDREN

By Abbot Theodosius of Optina, translated by Mary Mansur

On a tour of his diocese, Bishop James of Saratov visited Atkarsk (Russia) and served the Divine Liturgy in the cathedral. He was a highly educated man and he always delivered his sermons to the people without the help of notes, extemporaneously, for which reason he left no trace in the literature of church sermons. The people loved His Eminence and listened to his sermons with great reverence. The simplicity and heartfelt warmth of his sermons were extraordinary, and so close were these qualities to the hearts of the people, and so deeply did they penetrate, that even I, a boy of eleven at the time, have clearly retained in my memory one of these talks of his which, in passing, I wish now to record in my memoirs.

The people considered His Eminence to be a saint. And so it was that this holy man, after celebrating the Divine Liturgy in the Atkarsk cathedral, came out onto the ambon in his hierarch's mantle, surveyed with his kind and penetrating gaze those standing before him, and, noticing in their midst some children, amongst whom was I myself, said: "Children, come closer up to me!"

Several of us came forward, and I stood in the very front. I stood before the very face of the Bishop and he, as if addressing me personally, began to speak.

"I wish, children, to talk to you about prayer. Do you know how to train yourself to pray? First, you must pray just a little, but as often as possible. Prayer is like a spark: in time it can turn into a great flame, but in order to kindle this flame you must have untiring zeal, and you must also have time and skill. Let us take for example two pieces of coal: one is red-hot, and the other cold. Try to kindle the cold one with the other. What must you do? You must put the cold one next to the red-hot one. But simply to place them together is not enough to make the cold piece of coal red-hot, unless you constantly and gently blow on the burning piece. If you blow too hard, sparks will fly out but the cold piece will not begin to burn, and your efforts will be in vain. But if you blow on the burning coal constantly and not too hard, then soon your entire piece of coal which was placed next to it will become itself red-hot. Then not only will these two pieces burn, but if you separate them one from the other a certain distance, everything that you place between them will also catch, and then it can spread into a whole sea of flame."

"But just think how much time is needed to light a stove of wet wood or to ignite and fan a damp piece of coal - how much time, effort, patience and, most of all, perseverance! And so, I would say to you my children: prayer is a fire; and even more I say: it is a burning coal, while our hearts are dead coals. For this reason we must pray every day. This is

the same as placing the dead coal of our hearts next to the burning coal of prayer and blowing on it a little at a time. Believe me, children, if you listen to me and pray just a little every day, but consistently, then your hearts will become ignited by the love of the divine flame. But take care not to pray simply in moments of inspiration - do not just scatter sparks from the burning coal of prayer. Remember that after such outbursts laziness follows, and it is not by sparks that you will ignite your hearts."

"Begin this way: at first make three prostrations with these words: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,' and again a prostration; 'All Saints, pray for me a sinner,' and again a prostration; and let that be enough for you. And the next day again repeat this without fail. Continue in this way day by day, and then you will notice, my children, that in the beginning you will be overcome by laziness like some heavy burden. But if you persist in making these three prostrations, later you will see that instead of three you will want to make more, and then prayer itself will demand an increase in the number of prostrations. This will mean that already the coal of the heart has begun to burn by the power of faith and has become ignited with love towards God and that the constancy of your efforts has begun to bear fruit, from which comes the thirst for more prayer."

"Test my words in action, children, and you will see for yourselves that it is just as I have told you. Run to God as to your own mother. He is good and all-knowing; He loves us as a Mother loves her own children. If you ask Him, He will surely hear you and will fulfill your request, if only it is not contrary to His holy will. He Himself said 'Ask and it shall be given you' - and so run to Him with boldness with all your needs: on your way to school get down on your knees but in such a way that only God sees you, and ask Him to enlighten your mind and memory, and you will see that you will be able to learn your lessons more quickly and more easily than others or than you yourself when you were not turning to God for this. Do this always before you begin anything."

"Pray, children, pray more often. Forgive those who offend you, and the God of peace will be with you always. Every evening and every day, repent before the Lord for whatever sins you have committed, and implore His goodness and try not to sin in this way any more; and if somehow you fall again into sin, again straightway repent and say: 'Lord, I have sinned; have mercy on me and help me to change my ways.' And He will forgive you and help you to change. Pray more often to God, children, and He will save you."

This teaching so impressed itself on my memory that although already so many years have passed, I am recording it as if reading it from a book.

When the Bishop finished speaking I took his blessing, and ever since then, from the evening of that ever-memorable day, I begin daily to make three prostrations: to the Lord Jesus, the Mother of God, and to all the Saints.



On Nov. 9, 2004, the icon of St. Righteous Anna at the Russian Orthodox Church of "Our Lady, Joy of All Who Sorrow" (Philadelphia, PA), was found to have wept myrrh. Myrrh seems to have also streamed from her hands. Considering our fallen state, especially in our days, as well as current events in Indonesia we humbly entreat our Lord and Savior for His Mercy upon all of us and ask His Most Holy Mother for her intercession in our prayers.

[A clear picture of the icon and the streaming myrrh can be clearly seen at: <http://churchofourlady.org/StAnnaIcon.htm/>]



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Brotherhood of St. Poimen is pleased to inform our fellow Orthodox Christians that we will be hosting Mr. Demetrios Tselengides, Professor of Dogmatics in the School of Theology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in Phoenix, AZ, February 11-12, 2005. Professor Tselengides will be presenting a series of homilies at the **main hall of the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral, located at 1973 E. Maryland Ave.,** on the following days and times:

- Friday, February 11, @7:00 pm

- Saturday, February 12, @ 2:00 pm

There will be a total of four topics presented / discussed:

1. Orthodox theology and upper level theological education
2. The character of freedom according to St. Gregory Palamas
3. The theological identity of Protestantism.
4. Monasticism and the Orthodoxy of faith.

The homilies will be in Greek with simultaneous translation into English. This is a unique and rare opportunity for all of our Orthodox Christian brethren in the United States and we hope that those planning to be around the Phoenix area will attend Professor Tselengides' insightful homilies.

Admission is free.

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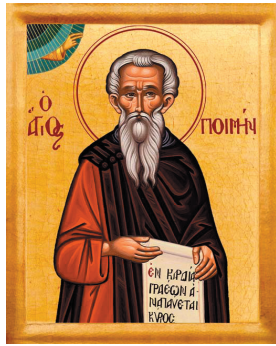
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A PRAYER TO JESUS CHRIST

By St. Symeon of the "Wondrous Mountain" (+659)

"O Master, Lord Jesus Christ, immortal Word of God, Artist and Governor of these greatest creatures, the Only-begotten son, Who shown forth from the Father beyond time and Who ineffably came out from the Virgin Mary and wast incarnate without change or confusion, as Thou Thyself knowest, that Thou mayest deliver from the bondage of the enemy those whom Thou hast created; Thou Who did not separate Thyself from the Father and yet Thou did live with us, Thy useless servants; the Light of truth, the Dispeller of the darkness of ignorance, the Brightness of sober souls; Thou who art all insatiable beauty, sweetness, desire and longing, the abundant blissfulness of the understanding of the mind for those who are genuine followers of Thee; Thou Who art the good, compassionate and merciful One by nature: cast away from me, the wretched one, those thoughts which disturb me. For Thou, Who knowest the secrets of my heart, know that they are involuntary. Forgive me, O Master of all, and let not these imaginations become a regiment of sin. Take pity upon me, send Thy grace from the holy throne of Thy glory and overshadow me, Thy weak and useless servant. Give me wisdom and I will learn Thy commandments and live. Heal the wounds of my soul and illumine the eyes of my mind that I may always understand,

O Lord, Thine economy, which was done for me; for my mind has been foolish. But why am I saying this to Thee, Who foreknowest and examine the hearts and reins? Thou knowest that my heart thirsts after Thee like a parched land. Therefore, send down Thy grace, O Lord, that it may come down and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. For I long and thirst for Thee, the Light of truth, the Giver of salvation. Therefore, drop, O Lord, a drop of Thy mercy -- that it may burn as a fire in my heart and consume its thorns and thistles, the evil thoughts. And let my mind be like a captive who longs and asks for Thee only, the Saviour of the world. Deliver me, O Lord, from all invisible enemies that go after my soul. Grant that I may pass the remainder of my life without trespasses, in peace, in pure conduct, in a life pleasing to Thee, in waveless patience. Grant me, also, because of the multitude of Thy compassions, the remission of my daily sins. Yea, O Master, Who art the only good One, hear my supplication and grant the petitions of my heart. Grant that I may become a temple of Thy grace, which will dwell in me and control my mind as with bridles -- that I may not be wandering in sins against Thee and be cast out of Thy light. For Thine it is to have mercy and to save us, O Christ our God, and to Thee we send up glory, thanksgiving and worship, together with Thy Father Who is without beginning, and Thine All-Holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

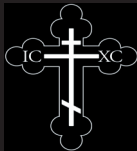
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SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

By Archbishop Averky, from "The Life and Works of Archbishop Averky", Vol. 1, 1977

On the first Sunday of the Great Fast our Church celebrates the triumph of Orthodoxy, the victory of true Christian teachings over all perversions and distortions thereof -- heresies and false teachings. On the second Sunday of the Great Fast it is as though this triumph of Orthodoxy is repeated and deepened in connection with the celebration of the memory of one of the greatest pillars of Orthodoxy, the hierarch Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, who by his grace-bearing eloquence and the example of his highly ascetic private life put to shame the teachers of falsehood who dared reject the every essence of Orthodoxy, the ascetic struggle of prayer and fasting, which enlightens the human mind with the light of grace and makes it a communicant of the divine glory.

Alas! How few people there are in our times, even among the educated, and at times even among contemporary "theologians" and those in the ranks of the clergy, who understand correctly what Orthodoxy is and wherein its essence lies. They approach this question in an utterly external, formal manner and resolve it too primitively, even naively, overlooking its depths completely and not at all seeing the fullness of its spiritual content.

The superficial opinion of the majority notwithstanding, Orthodoxy is not merely another of the many "Christian confessions" now in existence, or as it is expressed here in America "denominations." Orthodoxy is the teaching of Christ in all its purity and fullness -- the teaching of faith and piety which is life according to the Faith.

Orthodoxy is not only the sum total of dogmas accepted as true in a purely formal manner. It is not only theory, but

practice; it is not only right Faith, but a life which agrees in everything with this Faith. The true Orthodox Christian is not only he who thinks in an Orthodox manner, but who feels according to Orthodoxy and lives Orthodoxy, who strives to embody the true Orthodox teaching of Christ in his life.

"The words that I speak unto you are spirit and life" — thus the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples of His divine teaching (John 6:63). Consequently, the teaching of Christ is not only abstract theory merely, cut off from life, but spirit and life. Therefore, only he who thinks Orthodoxy, feels Orthodoxy and lives Orthodoxy can be considered Orthodox in actuality.

At the same time, one must realize and remember that Orthodoxy is not only and always that which is officially called "Orthodox," for in our false and evil times the appearance everywhere of pseudo-Orthodoxy which raises its head and is established in the world is an extremely grievous but, regrettably, an unquestionable fact. This false Orthodoxy strives fiercely to substitute itself for true Orthodoxy, as in his time Antichrist will strive to supplant and replace Christ with himself.

Orthodoxy is not merely some type of purely earthly organization which is headed by patriarchs, bishops and priests who hold the ministry in the Church which officially is called "Orthodox." Orthodoxy is the mystical "Body of Christ," the Head of which is Christ Himself. (See Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18, 24 et seq.), and its composition includes not only priests but all who truly believe in Christ, who have entered in a lawful way through Holy Baptism into the Church He founded, those living upon the earth and those who have died in the Faith and piety.

The Orthodox Church is not any kind of "monopoly" or "business" of the clergy

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as think the ignorant and those alien to the spirit of the Church. It is not the patrimony of this or that hierarch or priest. It is the close knit spiritual union of all who truly believe in Christ, who strive in a holy manner to keep the commandments of Christ, with the sole aim of inheriting that eternal blessedness which Christ the Savior has prepared for us, and if they sin out of weakness, they sincerely repent and strive "to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8).

The Church, it is true, may not be removed completely from the world, for people enter her who are still living on the earth, and therefore the "earthly" element in her composition and external organization is unavoidable, yet the less of this "earthly" element there is, the better it will be for her eternal goals. In any case this "earthly" element should not obscure or suppress the purely spiritual element -- the matter of salvation of the soul unto eternal life -- for the sake of which the Church was both founded and exists.

The first and fundamental criterion, which we may use as a guide to distinguish the True Church of Christ from the false churches (of which there are now so many!), is the fact that it has preserved the Truth intact, undistorted by human sophistries, for according to the Word of God, "the Church is the pillar and ground of truth" (I. Timothy 3:15), and therefore in her there can be no falsehood -- "...not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27). Any [religion] which in its name officially proclaims or confirms any falsehood is already **not** the Church. Not only the higher servants of the Church, but the ranks of believing laymen must shun every falsehood, remembering the admonition of the Apostle: "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25), or "Lie not to one another" (Colossians 3:9). Christians must always remember that according to the words of Christ the

Savior, lying is from the devil, who "is a liar, and the father of lies" (John 8:44). And so, where there is falsehood there is not the True Orthodox Church of Christ! There is instead a false church which the holy visionary vividly and clearly depicted in his Apocalypse as "a great whore that sitteth upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication" (Revelation 17:1-2).

Even in the Old Testament from the prophets of God we see that unfaithfulness to the True God frequently was represented by the image of adultery (see, for example, Ezekiel 16:8-58, or 23:2-49). And it is terrifying for us not only to speak, but even to think that in our insane days we would have to observe not a few attempts to turn the very Church of Christ into a "brothel," -- and this not only in the above figurative sense, but also in the literal sense of this word, when it is so easy to justify oneself, fornication and every impurity are not even considered sins! We saw an example of this in the so-called "Living Churchmen" and "renovationists" in Russia after the Revolution, and now in the person of all the contemporary "modernists" who always strive to lighten the easy yoke of Christ -- "for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30) for themselves and betray the entire ascetic structure of our Holy Church, legalizing every transgression and moral impurity. To speak here about Orthodoxy, of course, is in no way proper despite the fact that the dogmas of the Faith remain untouched and unharmed!

True Orthodoxy, on the other hand, is alien to every dead formalism. In it there is no blind adherence to the "letter of the law", for it is "spirit and life." Where, from an external and purely formal point of view, everything seems quite correct and strictly legal, this does not mean that it is so in reality. In Orthodoxy there can be no place for Jesuitical casuistry; the favorite dictum of worldly jurists cannot be applied: "One may

not trample upon the law -- one must go around it." Orthodoxy is the one and only Truth, the pure Truth, without any admixture or the least shadow of falsehood, lie, evil, or fraud.

The most essential thing in Orthodoxy is the spiritual struggle of prayer and fasting which the Church particularly extols during the second week of the Great Fast as the double-edged "*wondrous sword*" by which we strike the enemies of our salvation -- the dark demonic power. It is through this spiritual struggle of prayer that our soul is illumined with grace-bearing divine light, as teaches St. Gregory Palamas, who is triumphantly honored by the Holy Church on the second Sunday of the Great Fast. Glorifying his sacred memory, the Church calls this wondrous hierarch "*the preacher of grace,*" "*the beacon of the Light,*" "*the preacher of the Divine Light,*" "*an immovable pillar of the Church.*"

Christ the Savior Himself stressed the great significance of the spiritual struggle of prayer and fasting when His disciples found themselves unable to cast out demons from an unfortunate boy who was possessed. He told them clearly, "*This kind (of demon) goeth not out save by prayer and fasting*" (Matthew 17:21). Interpreting this passage in the gospel narrative, our great patristic theologian-ascetic, the hierarch St. Theophan the Recluse asks, "*May we think that where there is no prayer and fasting, there is a demon already?*" And he replies, "*We may. Demons, when entering into a person do not always betray their entry, but hide themselves, secretly teaching their hosts every evil and to turn aside every good. That person may be convinced that he is doing everything himself, while he is only carrying out the will of his enemy. Only take up prayer and fasting and the enemy will immediately leave and will wait elsewhere for an opportunity to return; and he really will return if prayer and fasting are soon abandoned*" (Thoughts for Each Day of the Year, pp. 245-246).

From this a direct conclusion may be reached: where fasting and prayer are disregarded, neglected or completely set aside, there is no trace of Orthodoxy -- there is the domain of demons who treat man as their own pathetic toy.

Behold, therefore, where all contemporary "*modernism*" leads, which demands "*reform*" in our Orthodox Church! All these liberal free thinkers and their lackies, who strive to belittle the significance of prayer and fasting, however much they shout and proclaim their alleged faithfulness to the dogmatic teaching of our Orthodox Church, cannot be considered really Orthodox, and have shown themselves to be apostates from Orthodoxy.

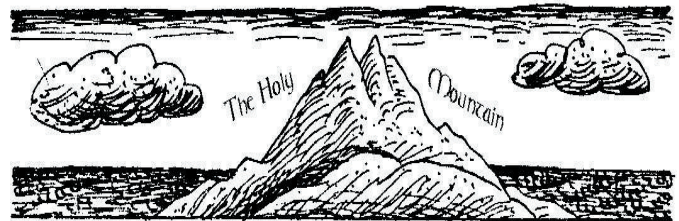
We will always remember that by itself totally formal Orthodoxy has no goal if it does not have "*spirit and life*" -- and the "*spirit and life*" of Orthodoxy are first and foremost in the spiritual struggle of prayer and fasting; moreover, the genuine fasting of which the Church teaches is understood in this instance to be abstinence in every aspect, and not merely declining to taste non-lenten foods.

Without spiritual struggle there is altogether no true Chris-

tianity, that is to say, Orthodoxy. See what Christ, the First Ascetic Himself clearly says: "*Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*" (Mark 8:34). The true Christian, the Orthodox Christian, is only he who strives to emulate Christ in the bearing of the cross and is prepared to crucify himself in the Name of Christ. The holy Apostles clearly taught this. Thus the Apostle Peter writes: "*If when you do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is accepted with God. For even here unto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps*" (I Peter 2:20-21). In precisely the same way the holy Apostle Paul says repeatedly in his epistles that all true Christians must be ascetics, and the ascetic labor of the Christian consists of crucifying himself for the sake of Christ: "*They that are Christians have crucified the flesh together with the passions and lusts*" (Galatians 5:24). A favorite expression of St. Paul is that we must be crucified with Christ that we might rise with Him. He puts forth this thought in a variety of his sayings in many of his epistles.

You see, therefore, that one who loves only to spend time enjoying himself and does not think of self-denial and self-sacrifice, but continually wallows in every possible fleshly pleasure and delight is completely un-Orthodox, un-Christian. Concerning this the great ascetic of Christian antiquity, the Venerable Isaac the Syrian, taught well: "*The way of God is a daily cross. No one ascends to heaven living coolly (i.e., comfortably, carefree, pleased with himself, without struggle). And of the cool path, we know where it ends*" (Works, p. 158). This is that "*wide and broad way*" which, in the words of the Lord Himself, "*leadeth to destruction*" (Matthew 7:13).

This then is what Orthodoxy, or True Christianity, is!



Why did Adam and Eve lose paradise, why did they fall into sin and death? Was it not because of one evil? Let us attentively consider why we do not care about the salvation of our soul, which cost the Son of God so dearly. Why do we compound sin upon sin, fall endlessly into opposing to God, into a life of vanity? Is it not because of a passion for earthly things and especially for earthly pleasures? What makes our hearts become crude? Why do we become flesh and not spirit, perverting our moral nature? Is it not because of a passion for food, drink, and other earthly comforts? How after this can one say that it does not matter whether you eat non-Lenten food during Lent? The fact that we talk this way is in fact pride, idle thought, disobedience, refusal to submit to God, and separation from Him.

St. John of Kronstadt

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND CHRISTIANITY, PART 2 OF 2

By Nicholas Martis, Former Minister of the Hellenic Republic
translated in English from Greek by Nina Gatzoulis

[Continued from the previous issue]

ALEXANDER AND CHRISTIANITY

Before Apostle Paul declared the equality of man and woman (Gal 3:28: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*”), Alexander always displayed chivalry toward women. Arrian was impressed with Alexander’s attitude and Plutarch, in his writings, mentions about Alexander that to him “*conquering one’s own passions seemed more royal than to conquer his enemies.*” Although polygamy was common, Alexander never touched a woman until he was married. As soon as he saw Roxanne among the women that he captured in Petra of Sogdiani, he fell in love with her. He, however, did not disgrace her, but married her. The immense respect he showed to Darius’ III mother, when he captured her resulted in the great maternal love she felt for Alexander. When Mazaios, one of Darius’ men, tried to liberate her she refused to go and when she heard that Alexander was dead she went on a hunger strike for five days and finally she committed suicide. Saint Basil the Great, addressing the youth, presents Alexander as the role model of self-discipline.

One outcome and result of Alexander’s vision and achievements, is the fact that during the year 285 BC, the Old Testament was translated into Greek. This Greek translation is the formal text used in East and West. The New Testament was also written in Greek. This kind of scholarship, which was spread in the East, had its origins in Alexander the Great’s Macedonia. It is also through Macedonia that Christianity was carried to Europe and to the rest of the then known world. St. Paul, influenced by the endeavors of Alexander the Great and his successors, accepted the Greek intellect and teachings and he began spreading Christianity first in the city of Philippi, in Macedonia – “*And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony.*” (Acts 16:9-12).

This historical significance of the Greek intellect, which

during the Hellenistic years was epitomized by the Macedonians, is crystallized within Chapter 12, paragraphs 20-23 of the Gospel by St. John. Two of our Lord’s disciples, Philip and Andrew, inform Him that the Greeks came to see Him; Jesus answered them: “*The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.*” Christ’s statement in reference to the events that would follow about His Own glorification and the glorification of Christianity, clearly prescribed the historical significance and the role that Hellenism played in conveying Christianity to the world.

ALEXANDER AND OTHER RELIGIONS

Alexander’s deeds had a great influence and overall impact on other religions and nations of that time period. Up to his era Hindu Gods, especially Buddha, were not permitted to be depicted in any form or shape. However, since the Indians came in close contact with the Greek world, their gods were portrayed full-bodied. The first statues of Buddha resembled ancient Greek gods (especially Apollo) and they were wearing the Greek “*chiton*,” furthermore, their facial features carried the Greek art (art of Kantara in today’s Pakistan and Afghanistan). Also the effect of the Hellenistic world, from the Selefkids era, can also be verified in the coins of Baktria and today’s Pakistan area, where during the Hellenistic time period thirty kings of Greek descent reigned, without any interruption.

In the West the Romans deified Alexander. The Romans were the first to name Alexander “*Great*.” The Roman Senate and the Emperors of Rome were proud to be heirs of Alexander’s Empire.

Mohamed in the Koran mentions Alexander (with the name Zaul Karnein) among the prophets who wished to lead the world in the practice of charitable deeds.

ALEXANDER AND HIS SUCCESSORS

After Alexander’s death, his able Generals [“*διάδοχοι*” – successors] divided his vast empire, and followed his plan, at least in the political field, and thus succeeded in making several of his visions come true. The Ptolemies concentrated their energies in Alexandria, while the Selefkids’ center was Antioch. Ptolemy A’, who attended Aristotle’s school the same years as Alexander, founded the legendary Library of Alexandria, which up till Ptolemy’s VI era continued to be enriched with books (about 700,000 books). It should be mentioned that the first library of Rome was the one that was seized from the last King of Macedonia, Perseus, by the Roman government official Emilius Paulus.

Alexandrian scholars, having the support of the Ptolemies, worked on the classical documents; they classified them, translated them and sent copies to Rome’s, Athens’ and Con-



Alexander the Great
(356-323 B.C.)

stantinople's libraries. With these documents and readings as intellectual and spiritual base, the Fathers of the Church, outlined and established the framework for the teachings of the first centuries of Christianity. The work of the Alexandrian scholars was used in Europe during the Renaissance era and thus the culture of the ancient Greeks became property of today's societies of the world. Furthermore, even Islam was influenced by the Greek way of thinking, when Islam reached such areas as Syria and Alexandria.

Alexandria was Alexander's and his successors' creation and played an important role in passing on the bright lights of Christianity. During the flourishing of the Neo-Platonic theories from 160 to 405 AD, the first theological school thrived there. The Greek language was used as a vehicle to fulfill its mission toward the world, the spread of Christianity to the world. As it was mentioned prior, the Fathers of the Church, who were the first heralds of Christianity, became known mainly in Alexandria, due to the Greek culture and the Greek language.

The husbandry between Christendom and Greek intellect was accomplished in Alexandria due to the efforts in particular of Hierarchs Klemis and Origenis. The Fathers of the Church, especially the Three Hierarchs possessed theological knowledge and had a great Greek education. "Alexander's and his successors' great achievement, the Hellenistic era and its culture, which later was inherited by the Romans, Byzantium and by the peoples of the Near East, had significant influence in the development of nations later", said Abraham Rankovitz.

Christianizing the Slavs by the Greek Thessalonian brothers and monks, Methodius and Cyril, was such a milestone in European and international history and this was a consequence of Byzantium's glory and in reality the outcome, the end result of the Hellenistic period. Pope John Paul VIII, delivering a speech on April 22, 1990, in Czechoslovakia said: "...that we the Slavs are Christians today, we owe it to the Macedonian Greek brothers who were born in Thessaloniki, Methodius and Cyril.

They are the ones who carried the Byzantine tradition in Europe."

The cultural infrastructure of the Hellenistic period and especially the great monetary contributions and the interest of the Byzantine Emperors became the cause of establishing and creating the monastic city of Hagion Oros (Holy Mountain), the only monastic city that exists in the world. This city can be characterized as the Ark of Orthodoxy in its more than a millennium existence.

THE VISION AND DEEDS OF ALEXANDER

ALEXANDER'S OATH AT OPIS

(324 BC)

"I wish all of you, now that the wars are coming to an end, to live happily, in peace. All mortals from now on will live like one people, united, and peacefully working towards a common prosperity.

You should regard the whole world as your own country with common laws, a country where the best and the brightest rule, regardless of race.

I do not separate people, as do the narrow-minded, into Greeks and barbarians. I am not interested in the origin or race of citizens. I only distinguish them on the basis of their virtue. For me each good foreigner is a Greek and each bad Greek is worse than a barbarian.

If ever differences arise, never resort to arms, but resolve them peacefully. If need be, I will serve as your arbitrator. Do not consider God as a dictatorial Ruler, but as Father of all, so that your conduct would resemble the cohabitation of siblings within one family.

On my part, I consider all of you equal, white or dark, and I would like you not to be only plain subjects of my Commonwealth, but all shareholders, all of you partners.

To the extent it is in my power, I shall try to accomplish all that I promise. Keep the oath we are taking with the libation tonight like a Contract of Love."

The vision and the achievements of Alexander the Great in the political, financial and cultural development of nations, resulted in a brilliant model, as mankind advances onto the third millennium. Launched from Macedonia with the aspiration to unite nations with peaceful ties, ties of cooperation and social intermingling, his intent was neither to conquer riches, nor to satisfy passions. Alexander expressed this exact aspiration when he met with the philosopher Diogenis in Corinth. His ideas about respecting the traditions of conquered peoples, their participation in governing themselves, the eventual elimination of discrimination between conquered and conquerors and finally the program of decentralization of the governing agencies, taught many nations in the international arena how to govern themselves. Also, the social achievements of Alexander and his successors are more significant than the

battles that took place during his campaign. Nothing can surpass the social welfare, the public education, and the justice for the weak during that era.

Alexander with his deeds transformed the shape of global history. He conceived the idea of humanism in government and he boldly made it happen. With the propagation of the Greek language as the official language of his Asiatic and African Commonwealth, Greek became the formal tongue of communication between the multi-ethnic peoples of the East. Alexander and his successors became not only the bearers

of the Greek tongue, but they also offered to the world the Greek culture and knowledge, elements that further prepared nations to accept the teachings of their Savior. Alexander's own marriage to Roxanne, Oxiartis' daughter from Vactria, as well as the massive marriage of his one hundred officers to Persian women, his trust to include non-Greeks in his government's administrative positions, further validate his strong beliefs against inequality.

Alexander the Great's dazzling personality, which explains the fadeless seal by which he sealed the path of humanity for ages to come, becomes apparent in the speech which he delivered at the end of his conquests at Opis. There, he called a symposium of nations consisting of soldiers and officers alike, and in this dinner celebration, he joined the East with the West.

Alexander would refer to the name of his own god, Zeus, but gives his oath with all other representatives of the Asian nations to "*the god father of all people.*" It is said by historians that he often visualized that behind all of the local gods there is the One All Powerful God that rules the universe.

At Opis and in front of 9,000 Greek and Asian officials and others he proclaimed what has come to be known as Alexander the Great's Oath at Opis, of 324 BC. We thus come easily to the conclusion that Alexander the Great, through his deeds and achievements, became "*the vehicle of God.*" The historian Arrian, as he completed his book "*Alexandrou Anavasis*" ("*Αλεξάνδρου Ανάβασις*" -- Expedition of Alexander), proclaims: "*Not even to me does it seem possible that he turned out to be unlike any other human being, without divine intervention.*"



Our intellect often finds it hard to endure praying because of the straightness and concentration that it involves; but it joyfully turns to theology because of the broad and unhampered scope of divine speculation. Therefore, so as to keep the intellect from expressing itself too much in words or exalting itself unduly in its joy, we should spend most of our time in prayer, in singing psalms and reading the Holy Scriptures, yet without neglecting the speculations of wise men whose faith has been revealed in their writings. In this way we shall prevent the intellect from confusing its own utterances with the utterances of grace, and stop it from being led astray by self-esteem and dispersed through over-elation and loquacity.

Saint Diadochos of Photiki

UNREAL CHRISTIAN CONTEMPORATIVE PRACTICES

By Fr. Seraphim Rose, from "*Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*"

It is deeply indicative of the spiritual state of contemporary mankind that the "charismatic" and "meditation" experiences are taking root among "Christians." An Eastern religious influence is undeniably at work in such "Christians," but it is only as a result of something much more fundamental: the loss of the very feeling and savor of Christianity.

The life of self-centeredness and self-satisfaction lived by most of today's "Christians" is so all-pervading that it effectively seals them off from any understanding at all of spiritual life; and when such people do undertake "spiritual life," it is only as another form of self-satisfaction. This can be seen quite clearly in the totally false religious ideal both of the "charismatic" movement and the various forms of "Christian meditation": all of them promise (and give very quickly) an experience of "contentment" and "peace." But this is not the Christian ideal at all, which if anything may be summed up as a fierce battle and struggle. The "contentment" and "peace" described in these contemporary "spiritual" movements are quite manifestly the product of spiritual deception, of spiritual self-satisfaction -- which is the absolute death of the God-oriented spiritual life. All these forms of "Christian meditation" operate solely on the psychic level and have nothing whatever in common with Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is formed in the arduous struggle to acquire the eternal Kingdom, which fully begins only with the dissolution of this temporal world, and the true Christian struggler never finds repose even in the foretastes of eternal blessedness which might be vouchsafed to him in this life; but the Eastern religions, to which the Kingdom of Heaven has not been revealed, strive only to acquire psychic states which begin and end in this life.

In our age of apostasy preceding the manifestation of Antichrist, the devil has been loosed for a time (Apoc. 20:7) to work the false miracles which he could not work during the "thousand years" of grace in the Church of Christ (Apoc. 20:3), and to gather in his hellish harvest of those souls who "received not the love of the truth" (II Thes. 2:10). We can tell that the time of Antichrist is truly near by the very fact that this satanic harvest is now being reaped not merely among the pagan peoples, who have not heard of Christ, but even more among "Christians" who have lost the savor of Christianity. It is of the very nature of Antichrist to present the kingdom of the devil as if it were of Christ. The present-day "charismatic" movement and "Christian meditation," and the "new religious consciousness" of which they are part, are forerunners of the religion of the future, the religion of 'the last humanity, the

[continued on pg. 12]

Ἡ Κρίση στήν Ἐκκλησία, οἱ Ἀποκαλύψεις καί οἱ Ἐπικίνδυνες Ὑπερβολές

Μάρω Σιδέρη, θεολόγος, ἀπό τίς ἰστοσελίδες τοῦ ἐκδοτικοῦ οἴκου «Ἐπτάλοφος»

Τὰ γεγονότα εἶναι συγκλονιστικά, οἱ εἰδήσεις καταγιστικές, ὁ θόρυβος μεγάλος. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μοιάζει νὰ τραντάζεται -- τουλάχιστο σύμφωνα μέ τίς ἐκτιμήσεις τῶν δημοσιογράφων -- ὁ λαός μοιάζει ἀπογοητευμένος ἢ τρομαγμένος. Μπροστά σέ τούτη τή καινούργια θύελλα, ἀκούγονται πολλά. Κάποιες ἀποκαλύψεις ἀπεικονίζουν τήν ἀλήθεια καί εἶναι σεβαστές. Κάποιες ἄλλες ὅμως ὑπηρετοῦν τήν ὑπερβολή γι' αὐτό εἶναι ὄχι μόνο ἐνοχλητικές, μὰ ἐπικίνδυνες καί ὑποуλες καί σ' αὐτές θά ἀφιερῶσαι ἡ πένα στίς παρακάτω ἀράδες.

Ἡ πρώτη μεγάλη ὑπερβολή τήν ὁποία ἀκούω συνεχῶς τόν τελευταῖο καιρό εἶναι αὐτός καθαυτός ὁ τίτλος τῶν εἰδήσεων: «Ἡ κρίση στήν Ἐκκλησία». Για νὰ εἶμαι ἀκριβής, αὐτό δέν ἀποτελεῖ ἀπλά ὑπερβολή, ἀλλά μέγιστη ἀνακρίβεια, ἢ μᾶλλον μέγιστο ψέμα! Ἡ κρίση δέν ἀφορᾷ τήν Ἐκκλησία. Ἀφορᾷ τόν κληρο, ὁ ὁποῖος μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποτελεῖ ἕνα κομμάτι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἀλλά δέν εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία γιά τή Χριστιανική ἀντίληψη, εἶναι ὁ ἀπόλυτα Θεανθρώπινος ὄργανισμός, ἡ κοινωνία Θεοῦ καί ἀνθρώπων. Αὐτή ἡ κοινωνία δέν γνωρίζει σκάνδαλα, ὥστε εἶναι συκοφαντικός ὁ ἰσχυρισμός ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία περνᾷ κρίση. Ὅπως δέν ἐπηρεάζεται ἡ συνοχή μιᾶς οἰκογένειας ἐάν ὁ ὑπηρετής της ἀποδειχθεῖ κλέφτης, ἔτσι δέν κινδυνεύει ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἐπειδή κάποιος ὑπηρετής της ἀποφάσισαν νὰ ἀπολαύσουν τίς ὠφέλειες τῆς παρανομίας.

Ἐξίσου ὑπερβολικός εἶναι ὁ ἰσχυρισμός ὅτι οἱ ἀποκαλύψεις ἴσως κλονίσουν τὸ θρησκευτικό φρόνημα τῶν πιστῶν. Για νὰ εἶμαι εἰλικρινής, ἐπειδή ἡ πένα εἶναι μία μορφή ἐξομολόγησης, ὅταν ἄκουσα γιά πρώτη φορά τὰ περὶ «μιαρῶν» μητροπολιτῶν, σκέφτηκα κι ἐγὼ μία ἀπό τίς συνηθισμένες δικαιολογίες τοῦ στίλ «τί νὰ πάω στήν ἐκκλησία, ἀφοῦ οἱ ἱερεῖς συμπεριφέρονται ἔτσι;», γιά νὰ μὴν ξυπνήσω τήν Κυριακή πρωί-πρωί. Ἡ ἀλήθεια ὅμως εἶναι ὅτι οὔτε καί πρὶν τήν κρίση ξυπνοῦσα, ὥστε ἡ ἀπομάκρυνσή μου ἀπὸ τὸ Ναὸ δέν ὀφείλεται στοὺς ἱερεῖς, ἀλλά στοὺς γεγονότα ὅτι ἐγὼ δέν μπορῶ, (ἢ δέν θέλω) νὰ θυσιάσω τὸν Κυριακάτικο ὕπνο μου γιά τήν Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ κρίση στὸν κληρο ἀπλά μοῦ παρεῖχε ἕνα πρώτης τάξης ἄλλοθι, ἀλλά δέν ἦταν ἡ αἰτία τῆς ἀπουσίας μου ἀπὸ τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία. Ἀντίθετα, ἡ μητέρα μου, πού ἀνέκαθεν ἀφιέρωνε τὰ Κυριακάτικα πρωῒνά της -- καί ὄχι μόνο -- στή λατρεία, μπαίνει στὸ ναὸ μέ τήν ἴδια λαχτάρα, ἀκόμα

καί μετὰ τίς ἀποκαλύψεις, χωρὶς νὰ νοιάζεται γιά τὰ ἔργα κάποιων Μητροπολιτῶν. Οἱ Ναοὶ δὲ θά ἀδειάσουν ἐξαιτίας κάποιων «κακῶν» Ἀρχιερέων, γιατί ὁ πιστὸς πού περνᾷ τὸ κατώφλι τοῦ ναοῦ πιστεύει σ' ἕνα Θεὸ πού σταυρώθηκε ἀπὸ Ἀρχιερεῖς. Ἐκεῖνος πού θέλει νὰ ἐπικοινωνήσαι μέ τὸ Δημιουργό του, δὲ θά ἐμποδιστεῖ ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπους πού χλεύασαν τὸ σχῆμα τους, ὅπως δὲ θά ἐμποδίζοταν στὸ νὰ ἐπισκεφτεῖ τὸν πατέρα του, ἀπὸ τὸ ἦθος ἐνὸς ἐκ τῶν ἐργατῶν τοῦ πατέρα. Ὅσο γιά μᾶς, τοὺς ὀπαδοὺς τοῦ δόγματος «ἡ Εὐα μέ ἠπάτησε», ἐμεῖς εἶχαμε δικαιολογίες καί πρὶν τήν κρίση, καί σίγουρα θά βροῦμε καινούργιες ὅταν αὐτὴ θά ἔχει κοπάσει, ὥστε, παρὰ τὰ σκάνδαλα, παραμένουμε ἀνάξιοι σχολιασμοῦ.

Τὸ πλέον ἐπικίνδυνο ὅμως κομμάτι τούτης τῆς δύνης, εἶναι αὐτό πού ἀφορᾷ στὸν χλευασμὸ τῶν κατηγορουμένων καί στὰ δικαιώματά τους. Εἶναι τραγικὴ ἀλήθεια ὅτι τὸ ράσο μεγαλοποιεῖ τὸ ἀμάρτημα στὴ συνείδηση τῆς κοινωνίας. Ἐνα παράπτωμα φαντάζει σοβαρότερο ἐάν ὁ ἀνθρώπος πού

τὸ διαπράττει εἶναι χειροτονημένος, γεγονὸς ὡς ἕνα σημεῖο κατανοητό, ἀλλά καί πολὺ ἀνελεύθερο. Πράγματι, περιμένουμε ἀπὸ τοὺς ὑπηρετές τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ πλησιάζουν τήν τελειότητα, μόνο καί μόνο ἐπειδὴ ὀρκίστηκαν ὅτι θά ἀφιερῶσουν τὴ ζωὴ τους σ' Ἐκεῖνον. Λησμονοῦμε, ὅμως, ὅτι ὁ ὄρκος δέν μπορεῖ νὰ ἄρει τήν ἀνθρώπινη φύση πού συνεχίζει νὰ γονατίζει καί στήν προκειμένη περίπτωση· ἡ λήθη αὐτὴ ἀπειλεῖ τήν ἴδια τήν ἐλευθερία καί τὸν πολιτισμὸ. Ἡ ἐμφάνιση καί δημοσιοποίηση τῶν κασετῶν καί τῶν φωτογραφιῶν, καί τὰ σχόλια

Οἱ Ναοὶ δὲ θά ἀδειάσουν ἐξαιτίας κάποιων «κακῶν» Ἀρχιερέων, γιατί ὁ πιστὸς πού περνᾷ τὸ κατώφλι τοῦ ναοῦ πιστεύει σ' ἕνα Θεὸ πού σταυρώθηκε ἀπὸ Ἀρχιερεῖς. Ἐκεῖνος πού θέλει νὰ ἐπικοινωνήσαι μέ τὸ Δημιουργό του, δὲ θά ἐμποδιστεῖ ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπους πού χλεύασαν τὸ σχῆμα τους...

πού τίς συνοδεύουν, ὑπηρετοῦν τὴ δικαιοσύνη, ὅσο τήν ὑπηρετοῦσε ἡ διαπόμπευση στὴ διάρκεια τοῦ Μεσαίωνα. Τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἕνας ἀνθρώπος -- Μητροπολίτης ἢ λαϊκός -- ἐμπλέκεται σὲ σεξουαλικά σκάνδαλα, δὲ σημαίνει ὅτι χάνει τὸ δικαίωμα τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἀξιοπρέπειας, οὔτε σημαίνει ὅτι, ἐπειδὴ τὸν βρήκαμε γυμνὸ, μποροῦμε νὰ τὸν σύρουμε γυμνὸ στοὺς δρόμους (στὰ κανάλια ἢ στὰ περίπτερα) καί νὰ γελάμε εἰς βάρος του. Αὐτὲς εἶναι τακτικὲς πού θά ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶχαμε κλείσει στὸ ντουλάπι τῆς ἱστορίας, καί πού τίς καταδικάζουμε ὅταν ἀκοῦμε νὰ ἐφαρμόζονται ἀπὸ ἄλλους λαούς. Σὲ τελικὴ ἀνάλυση, ἡ ἀδυναμία ἐνὸς κληρικοῦ νὰ ἐλέγξει τίς ὁρμές του, ἀφορᾷ Ἐκεῖνον στὸν ὁποῖον ὀρκίστηκε ἐγκράτεια, καί ὄχι ἐμᾶς πού δέν πιστεύουμε σ' αὐτήν. Ἐάν σ' ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἱστορία ὑπάρχει κάτι ἀξιόποινο, τότε ὁ κατηγορούμενος πρέπει νὰ λογοδοτήσει καί νὰ ὑποστῆ τίς συνέπειες τῶν πράξεών του, εἴτε φέρει τὸ ἱερὸ ἔνδυμα, εἴτε ὄχι. Για τὴν Ἑλληνορθόδοξη κοινωνία ὅμως ὁ χλευασμὸς δέν ἀποτελεῖ ποινὴ ἀλλά κατάντια. Δὲν ἐξυπηρετεῖ τὴν ἀλήθεια, ἀλλά τὴν προσβάλλει. Βλέπετε ἡ ἀλήθεια ὑπῆρξε τὸ ὄπλο τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ ἐναντία στὴ μισαλλοδοξία καί τὸ

φανατισμό, γι' αυτό και δὲν ἀγαπᾶ τὴν εἰρωνεία καὶ τὴ διαπόμπευση.

Ἡ κρίση στὸν κλῆρο τελικὰ δὲν εἶναι ἀπλή ὑπόθεση: Δοκιμάζει τὶς ἀντοχὲς καὶ τὶς ἠθικὲς ἀξίες τῆς κοινωνίας μας, δοκιμάζει ὅλους μας. Ἡ στάση μας ἀπέναντι στὰ γεγονότα εἶναι καθοριστικῆς σημασίας, γιατί τὰ πρόσωπα πού ἐμπλέκονται ὑπηρετοῦν θεσμούς καὶ ἰδανικά. Τὰ ὑπηρετοῦν, μὰ δὲν τὰ ἐξουσιάζουν. Αὐτοὶ πού ἐξουσιάζουν τοὺς θεσμούς εἴμαστε ἐμεῖς, ἐγὼ κι ἐσύ. Κάποιοι ὑπηρετές κατηγοροῦνται καὶ κάποιοι ἄλλοι ὑπηρετές κατηγοροῦν, ἀλλὰ ἐμεῖς θὰ θέσουμε τὰ ὅρια τῆς κατηγορίας καὶ δὲ πρέπει νὰ εἴμαστε οὔτε ἐπιεικεῖς μὲ τοὺς κατηγορούμενους, οὔτε ἀφημένοι στὶς ὀρέξεις τῶν κατηγορῶν. Ἡ ὑπερβολὴ ἐδῶ βλάπτει ἀνεπανόρθωτα τὴν ἐλευθερία γιατί ἀλλοιώνει τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς. Χρέος μας εἶναι νὰ ἀπαιτήσουμε τὴν ἀπομάκρυνσή τῆς: ἡ κάθαρση θὰ ἔρθει μόνο ἐὰν δοῦμε τὸ πρόβλημα κατὰματα, χωρὶς πανικό καὶ χωρὶς κακεντρέχεια. Ὁ φόβος καὶ ὁ ἐξευτελισμός δὲν ταιριάζει οὔτε στὸ παρελθόν οὔτε στὸ μέλλον μας!



Ἡ Συμβολὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὴν Παλιγγενεσία τοῦ 1821

Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Νικολάου Ἰωαννίδη, Αναπλ. Καθηγητῆ Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν

Σὲ ὅλη τὴν διάρκεια τῆς Ὀθωμανικῆς δουλείας, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία ὑπῆρξε ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Γένους καὶ ἡ δύναμη ἐκείνη ἡ ὁποία μὲ τὸ ποιμαντικὸ καὶ ἐθνικὸ ἔργο τῆς προετοίμασε τὸν ὑπόδουλο Ἑλληνισμό νὰ ἀγωνισθῇ καὶ νὰ κερδίσει τὴν ἐλευθερία του.

Ἀμέσως μετὰ τὴν ὑποταγὴ τοῦ Βυζαντίου στοὺς Ὀθωμανούς, ἡ Ἐκκλησία διαισθάνθηκε τὸν κίνδυνο τοῦ ἐξαφανισμοῦ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Γένους καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἀναζήτησε μὲ αἴσθημα εὐθύνης ἀποτελεσματικὸς τρόπους ἀντιστάσεως. Ἀντλήθηκε ὅτι μόνο ἡ διατήρηση τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Χριστιανικῆς Πίστεως θὰ ἐνίσχυαι τὴν ὑπομονή, τὴ συνοχὴ καὶ τὴν καρτερία τοῦ Γένους στὰ δεινὰ τῆς μακρᾶς δουλείας· ἡ ἐμμονή, δηλαδή, στὴν Πίστη τῶν πατέρων θὰ διατηροῦσαι τὴν ἱστορικὴ συνέχεια καὶ τὴν αὐτοσυνειδησία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἔθνους.

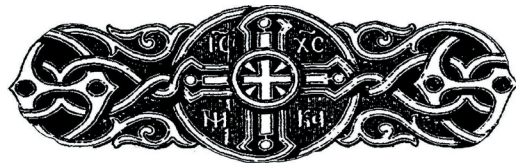
Ἔτσι, μὲ ὅλες τὶς περιορισμένες λόγῳ τῆς σκλαβιάς

δυνάμεις τῆς, ἡ Ἐκκλησία καλλιέργησε τὸ Χριστιανικὸ ἦθος καὶ τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο λειτουργικὸ τρόπο ζωῆς. Διατήρησε τὴν γλώσσα καὶ τὴν ἱστορία, μαζί μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Ἡ Ἑλληνορθόδοξος Πίστη καὶ παράδοση συνιστοῦν πλέον τὴν ταυτότητα τοῦ ὑπόδουλου Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ τὴν εἰδοποιὸ διαφορὰ ἔναντι τῶν μουσουλμάνων Ὀθωμανῶν. Ἐὰν ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν ἀναλάμβανε τότε νὰ διαπαιδαγωγῆσῃ ἐκκλησιαστικῶς καὶ ἐθνικῶς τὰ ὑπόδουλα τέκνα τῆς, ὅλα αὐτὰ θὰ ἦταν ἀδύνατον νὰ ἐπιτευχθοῦν μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀμάθειας πού ἐπέφερε ἡ Ὀθωμανικὴ δουλεία.

Μὲ τὰ «κρυφὰ σχολεῖα» κατ' ἀρχάς, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ ἄλλα μεγαλύτερα σχολεῖα, ὅταν τὸ ἐπέτρεψαν οἱ περιστάσεις, προσέφερε τὶς δυνατότητες μαθήσεως τῆς παλαιᾶς Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας, ἐκαλλιέργησε καὶ διατήρησε τὴν ἐθνικὴ συνείδηση καὶ σφυρηλάτησε τὸ ἐθνικὸ καὶ θρησκευτικὸ φρόνημα τῶν ὑποδούλων Ἑλλήνων. Ἔτσι, ἡ σχέση Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας καὶ Ἐκκλησίας κατέστη ἀδιάρρηκτη, ἡ δὲ «πάτριος πίστις» ἀποτέλεσε «τὸ μόνον προτιμώτατον καὶ ἀναγκαιότατον» ἀγαθὸ ἐθνικῆς σωτηρίας.

Γιὰ τὰ ἰδανικά αὐτὰ θυσιάσθηκε πλῆθος νεομαρτύρων καὶ ἐθνοματύρων, δεκάδες χιλιάδες κληρικοὶ μαρτύρησαν «ὐπὲρ πίστεως καὶ πατρίδος» καὶ ὁ μαρτυρικὸς τους θάνατος συνετέλεσε τὰ μέγιστα στὴν προετοιμασία τοῦ Γένους γιὰ τὴν παλιγγενεσία τοῦ 1821 ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴ τροφοδότηση τῆς ἀγωνιστικότητος καὶ τῆς ἐλπίδας.

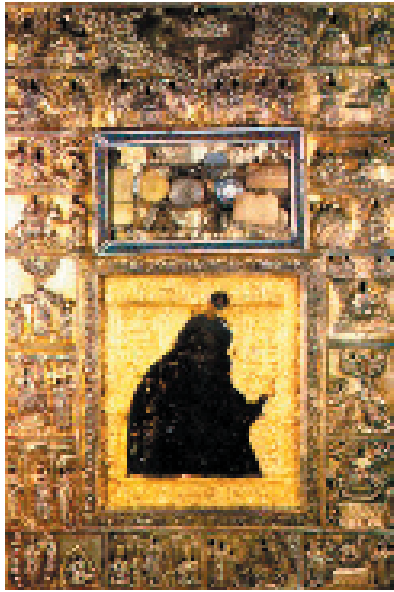
Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, λοιπόν, ἐγίνε ὁ διαπορθμευτὴς τῆς Θεῆς Πρόνοιας, ἡ ὁποία τέλεσε τὸ θαῦμα τῆς διασώσεως τοῦ Γένους μας ἀπὸ τὴν Ὀθωμανικὴ σκλαβιά τῶν τετρακοσίων χρόνων καὶ ὀδήγησε τὸν ὑπόδουλο Ἑλληνικὸ λαὸ στὴν ἐλευθερία. Γι' αὐτὸ ἡ Ἐπανάσταση τοῦ 1821 δὲν στηρίχθηκε σὲ δημαγωγικὲς ἢ ταξικὲς ἢ ἄλλες ἰδιοτελεῖς ἀρχές, ἀλλὰ σὲ βάσεις θρησκευτικὲς καὶ ἐθνικὲς, στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό, ὅπως διακήρυξαν οἱ ἄγνοι ἀγωνιστὲς τοῦ '21 καὶ ἡ Α' Ἐθνοσυνέλευση τῆς Ἐπιδαύρου: «πόλεμος ἐθνικός, πόλεμος, ἱερός, πόλεμος, τοῦ ὁποίου μόνη αἰτία εἶναι ἡ ἀνάκτησις τοῦ δικαίου τῆς προσωπικῆς ἡμῶν ἐλευθερίας... καὶ τῆς τιμῆς».



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντάς κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμίν».

Ἡ Παναγία τῶν «Χαιρετισμῶν» Ἡ τοῦ «Ἀκάθιστου Ὕμνου»

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἐκδόσεις «Ἀπόστολος Βαρνάβας»



Ἀπό τις πολυτιμότερες εἰκόνες τῆς Παναγίας εἶναι καὶ ἡ τῶν «Χαιρετισμῶν» ἢ τοῦ «Ἀκάθιστου» πού βρίσκεται στήν Ἱερὰ Μονή Διονυσίου τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Ἀπό τις πιό παλαιές χρονολογικά, στό δὲ Ἅγιον Ὄρος εἶναι ἢ πιό ἀρχαιότερα.

Εἶναι κατασκευασμένη ἀπό κηρομαστίχα καὶ μέ μύρο περιρροεμένη. Στό πίσω μέρος της, σὲ ἀργυρὰ πλάκα, εἶναι τετυπωμένος ὁ Αὐτοκράτορας Ἀλέξιος ὁ Γ΄ ὁ Κομνηνός καὶ ὁ

Ὅσιος Διονύσιος, ὁ κτήτορας τῆς Μονῆς, καὶ εἶναι γραμμένο τὸ ἐξῆς: «Αὐτὴ ἡ εἰκὼν ἢ Θαυματουργός ἐστὶ ἐκείνη τὴν ὁποῖαν βάσταξε Σέργιος ὁ Πατριάρχης περιερχόμενος τὰ τεῖχη τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ ἔδωξε τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ τὴν ὁποῖαν ὁ Αὐτοκράτωρ Ἀλέξιος ἰδιοχειρῶς ἐδώρησε τῷ Ἁγίῳ Διονυσίῳ».

Εἶναι λοιπὸν ἐκείνη τὴν ὁποῖαν ὁ Σέργιος, κατὰ τὴν ἱστορικὴ ἐκείνη βραδιά τοῦ 626, κρατώντας τὴν περιήρχετο μαζί με κληρο καὶ λαὸ τὰ τεῖχη τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ ἐμψύχωνε τὸ λαὸ καὶ τὸν ὀλιγάριθμο στρατὸ πού υπεράσπιζε τὴν Πόλη. Εἶναι ἱστορικὰ παραδεκτὸ ὅτι ὑπερφυσικὴ δύναμη κατατρόπωσε τοὺς πολυάριθμους Σκύθες καὶ Ἄβαρους. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐξηγηθεῖ διαφορετικὰ ἀφοῦ ὁ στρατὸς με τὸν Ἡράκλειο εἶχε ἐκστρατεύσει πρὸς τὴν Περσία. Οἱ πολέμιοι, με ἀρχηγὸ τὸν Χαγάνο ἐφθασαν ἐπιθετικοί, καὶ με στρατὸ καὶ στόλο πολιορκήσαν τὰ στενὰ καὶ τὴν ξηρὰ καὶ ἀπειλοῦσαν. Ποιὸς θὰ σώσει τὴν Πόλη; Ὁ Χαγάνος παρασπόνδησε σὲ μία συνθηκολόγηση με τὴν Πόλη γιὰ νὰ λύσει τὴν πολιορκία καὶ με αὐθάδεια καὶ σαρκασμὸ εἰρωνεύτηκε τοὺς πιστεύοντας στό Θεὸ Βυζαντινούς: «Μὴ σὰς γελαίει ὁ Θεός σας γιατί ἐγὼ αὔριο θὰ εἶμαι κύριος τῆς πόλεώς σας».

Ἡ ἀπάντηση ἐπῆρσε τὸ ἠθικὸ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἔφερε μεγάλη ταραχὴ, φόβο καὶ ἀπελπισία στὶς καρδιές τῶν πολιορκημένων. Τὸ κλίμα τῆς ἀπαισιοδοξίας ἄρχισε νὰ κυριαρχεῖ. Τὴ χαλύβδωση τοῦ ἠθικοῦ ἤλθε νὰ ἐπιφέρει ἢ θαρραλέα παρουσία τοῦ γενναίου καὶ ἀξιοτάτου Πατριάρχου Σεργίου: «Εἶναι κρίμα νὰ ἀπελπίζεστε. Σκέπτεστε σὰν ἄνθρωποι πού δὲν πιστεύουν στό Θεὸ καὶ στό ἀποτέλεσμα τοῦ ἱεροῦ πολέμου. Στὰ χέρια τῆς Παναγίας ἐμπιστεύθηκα τὴν Πόλη καὶ τὸν ἄμαχο πληθυσμὸ της. Στὴν Παναγία ὅλοι μας με θέρμη ψυχῆς ἄς προσευχηθοῦμε». Πραγματικὸς συναγεμὸς καὶ ἐνθουσιασμὸς συνέβηκε τότε. Ὁ Πατριάρχης, ὁ Κληρὸς καὶ ὁ Λαός, με μία φωνὴ καὶ με μία ψυχὴ, ξεχύθηκε στοὺς δρόμους καὶ στὰ τεῖχη

με τὰ ἱερὰ κειμήλια στὰ χέρια, πού ἦσαν ἢ Ζώνη τῆς Παναγίας, ἢ Ἱερὰ Ἐσθῆτος της, λείψανα ἁγίων, λάβαρα καὶ εἰκόνες. Ὁ Πατριάρχης, ζωντανός καὶ ἄκαμπτος, κρατοῦσε ὑπερυψωμένη τούτη τὴν Εἰκόνα καὶ ἔδινε δύναμη καὶ θάρρος. Ἀπ' ὅλων τὶς καρδιές αὐθόρμητα ἐβγαῖναν φωνές καὶ εὐχές πού φανέρωναν τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη τοῦ Λαοῦ πρὸς τὴν Παναγία: «Φθάσε Παναγία μου, μὴ μᾶς ἐγκαταλείπεις τώρα πού χανόμαστε, σῶσε τὸ λαὸ Σου καὶ τὴν Πόλη Σου».

Τότε συνέβηκε ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ μεγαλύτερα θαύματα καὶ ὑπερφυσικὰ γεγονότα τῆς πίστεως. Τρομαγμένοι οἱ ἐπιτιθέμενοι ἐχθροὶ ἄκουγαν θόρυβο, σὰν χιλιάδες στρατὸς νὰ ἐπιτέθηκε ἐναντίον τους, πού ἔφερνε ὄλεθρο καὶ καταστροφή στὶς τάξεις τους. Ξαφνικὰ καὶ ἀπροσδόκητα, ἀπὸ διώκτες ἔγιναν διωκόμενοι. Χιλιάδες πτώματα στρώθηκαν στὴ γῆ, καὶ ὅσοι εἶχαν ἀπομείνει πανικόβλητοι τράπηκαν σὲ φυγὴ γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦν μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλη, φωνάζοντας ἀπεγνωσμένα μεταξύ τους: «Ποῦ βρέθηκε, πού ἦταν κρυμμένος τόσος στρατός;». Ὅμως στρατὸς δὲν ὑπῆρχε· ἢ θεία τιμωρία τοὺς κυνηγοῦσε, ἀφοῦ προκλητικὰ καὶ ὑπερήφανα τὰ ἔβαζαν με τὴν Πόλη τῶν Πόλεων πού ἐντὸς της εἶχε πολλοὺς πιστοὺς οἱ ὁποῖοι με ἐμπιστοσύνη κατέφυγαν στὴ Θεία προστασία. Ἡ ἱστορικὴ παράδοση ὁμιλεῖ γιὰ ἓνα ἀνεξήγητο μέγα θόρυβο καὶ ἀνεμοστρόβιλο πού ἔφερε πανικὸ καὶ καταστροφή. Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὰ πτώματα νεκρῶν πού βρίσκονταν σκόρπια ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ τεῖχη, συντρίμια εἶχαν γίνει τὰ ἐχθρικά πλοῖα καὶ πολλὰ πτώματα ναυτῶν φάνηκαν στὴν ἀκροθαλασσιὰ τῶν Βλαχερνῶν.

Τὸ γεγονός τοῦτο ἀποτελεῖ μία ἱστορικὴ πραγματικότητα. Τὰ δάκρυα πόνου, ὀδύνης καὶ ἀγωνίας, ἢ ὀσμὴ θανάτου καὶ αἰχμαλωσίας πού εἶχε παγώσει στὴν κυριολεξία τοὺς χιλιάδες ἐντὸς τῆς Πόλεως Βυζαντινούς, μετεβλήθησαν σὲ ζητωκραυγές καὶ ἀλαλαγμοὺς χαρῆς καὶ δοξολογίας στό Θεὸ καὶ τὴν Παναγία Δέσποινα. Τότε ὁ Πατριάρχης Σέργιος μέσα σὲ ἀνέκφραστα χαρμόσινα συναισθήματα βάδισε με τὸν κληρο καὶ τὸ λαὸ πρὸς τὴν Παναγία τῶν Βλαχερνῶν. Μέσα σὲ θρησκευτικὸ παραλήρημα χαρῆς καὶ ἱεροῦ ἐνθουσιασμοῦ, σὲ μιὰ ἀτμόσφαιρα πού οἱ καρδιές σκιρτοῦσαν καὶ τὰ μάτια ἔρεαν δάκρυα ἀπὸ ἄκρα συγκίνηση καὶ θεία εὐγνωμοσύνη, δοξολόγησαν καὶ εὐχαρίστησαν τὴν Παναγία σὲ μέγεθος καὶ βαθμὸ πού δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἔχει τὸ ὅμοιό του. Με ἄλλα λόγια, μιλάμε γιὰ μία γενικὴ εὐχάριστη εἰκόνα χιλιάδων ἀνθρώπων πού εἶχαν στὴν κυριολεξία «μεθύσει» Χριστιανικά. Μοναδικὸ τὸ γεγονός σὲ πανανθρώπινη κλίμακα. Ἐκεῖ, ἐντὸς τοῦ Ναοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκτὸς, ὅπου βρέθηκαν οἱ πιστοὶ ἀρχῆς γενομένης ἀπὸ τὸν Πατριάρχη ὁ ὅποιος ἄρχισε νὰ ψάλλει γιὰ πρώτη φορά τὸ: «Τῆ Ὑπερμάχῳ Στρατηγῷ τὰ νικητήρια κ.λ.π.». Στὴ συνέχεια, ὅλοι μαζί τὴ νύκτα ἐκείνη «ὀρθοστάδην τὸν ὕμνο τῆ τοῦ Θεοῦ Μητρὶ γηθοσύνως ἔμελλαν». Γιὰ αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο, τὸ θαυμάσιο αὐτὸ πνευματικὸ ἄσμα τῶν «Χαιρετισμῶν», ὀνομάσθηκε «Ἀκάθιστος Ὕμνος».

Ὁ ἄγνωστος ποιητὴς τῶν «Χαιρετισμῶν» ἔπλεξε τὸ καλύτερο ἐγκώμιο καὶ γενικὰ ὅτι ἀνώτερο ἔχει γραφεῖ γιὰ τὴν Ὑπερμάχο Στρατηγῷ. Ἔχει χαρακτῆρα διηγηματικὸ, θεολογικὸ καὶ δοξαστικὸ. Κυρία ὑπόθεση ἔχει τὸν Εὐαγγελισμό τῆς Θεοτόκου καί, γενικότερα, τὴν ἐνανθρώπιση τοῦ Χριστοῦ καί, ἀκόμη, γίνεται λόγος γιὰ τὸ ἠθικὸ καὶ πνευματικὸ μέγεθος καὶ ὕψος τῆς Παναγίας καὶ τῶν προσφορῶν της στὸν κόσμο. Τὸ Κοντάκιο

«Τῆ Ὑπερμάχῳ», δὲν ἔχει σχέση με τὸν ποιητὴ τοῦ Ὑμνου, εἶναι δημιούργημα τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης. Σ' αὐτὸ ἀκούγεται λυτρωτικὸς καὶ νικητήριος πρὸς τὴ Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ παιάνας πού ὡς πνευματικὸς Στρατηγὸς ἔχει ἀκατανίκητη τὴ δύναμη καὶ οἱ πιστοὶ παρακαλοῦν νὰ ἐλευθερώνη «ἐκ παντοίων κινδύνων».

Πλέον στοὺς αἰῶνες καὶ σήμερα οἱ Χαιρετισμοί, ὁ Ἀκάθιστος Ὑμνος, ὁ τόσο λαοφιλῆς, συγκινεῖ βαθιὰ τὴν πιστεύουσα ψυχὴ καὶ ἰδιαίτερος τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο Ἑλληνισμό, ὁ ὁποῖος στὸν ὕμνο αὐτὸ καὶ στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Θεοτόκου βλέπει συνδεδεμένες ἐκκλησιαστικὴ καὶ ἐθνικὴ παράδοση καὶ ζωὴ. Πίστη καὶ Πατρίδα φαίνεται ὅτι συσφιγγονται ἐναρμονίως γύρω ἀπὸ αὐτὸν τὸν ὕμνο. Διαχρονικὸς καὶ λαοφιλέστατος, ἠλεκτρίζει πολλὰς ψυχὰς ὅποιες τὴν περίοδο τῆς Μ. Τεσσαρακοστῆς τρέχουν νὰ τὸν ἀκούσουν μέσα ἀπὸ τοὺς θόλους τῶν Ναῶν. Γιὰ αἰῶνες καὶ μάλιστα στὴν 400χρονη σκλαβιά, ἦταν ὁ Ἐθνικὸς Ὑμνος τοῦ Γένους. Ἀπ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ἐξάγεται ἀβίαστα καὶ ἡ μεγίστη σημασία τῆς Εἰκόνας αὐτῆς. Δικαίως οἱ πιστοὶ Ἕλληνες μπρὸς στὴν εἰκόνα αὐτὴ αἰσθάνονται ἐντονα τὴν παντοδυναμία τῆς Παναγίας καὶ τὴν εσωτερικὴ τους ἐθνικὴ ἐξαρση.

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ ἐξαισία γεγονότα τῆς Εἰκόνας, ἀφ' ὅτου τὸν 13^{ον} αἰῶνα δόθηκε στὴ Μονὴ Ἁγίου Διονυσίου, εἶναι τὸ ἐξῆς: Τὸ 1592, ὁ Ἀλγερινὸς πειρατὴς Ἰφ Ἀρταβάν Ἄλφα, ξεκινώντας ἀπὸ τὴ νῆσο Σκύρο, ἦλθε μὲ πολλοὺς δικούς του στὴν Ἱ. Μ. Διονυσίου προκειμένου νὰ ἀρπάξει τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῆς. Γνώριζε ὅτι ὑπῆρχε ἐκεῖ καὶ μία πολύτιμη εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας. Ἀφοῦ ἀπεβίβασε κάπου 200 ἄνδρες ὀπλισμένους, ἀπειλοῦσε. Ὁ Ἡγούμενος ἀφοῦ συσκέφθηκε ἀποφάσισε νὰ προσφέρει μία γενναία δωρεὰ στὸν πειρατὴ γιὰ νὰ σώσει τοὺς Μοναχοὺς καὶ τὴ Μονή. Ἐνας Μοναχός, ἀπὸ τὸ παράθυρο, φώναξε πρὸς τὸν Ἀρταβάν: «Ἄς τὰ κανονίσουμε φιλικὰ γιὰ μὴ χυθεῖ αἷμα. Ἀποφασίσαμε νὰ σᾶς δώσουμε 50.000 φλουριά, λάδι καὶ κρασί». Ὁ πειρατὴς τοῦ ἀπάντησε: «Καλόγηρε, σύμφωνοι ἀλλὰ θὰ πάρουμε καὶ ἓνα ἀντικείμενο ἀπὸ τὰ κειμήλια σας κατὰ ἐκλογή μου». Ὁ Ἡγούμενος πού ἦταν πλησίον τοῦ Μονάχου συμφώνησε, ἀλλὰ στὸ Μοναστήρι νὰ περάσει ὁ Ἀρταβάν μὲ μόνο δέκα δικούς του. Ἀφοῦ εἰσῆλθαν καὶ ὁ Ἡγούμενος μέτρησε τὰ χρήματα καὶ τοὺς παρέδωσε λάδι καὶ κρασί, ὁ ἀρχιεπειρατὴς εἶπε σὲ ἓναν δικό του πού γνώριζε ἀπὸ ἄλλη φορὰ τὴν εἰκόνα (τοῦ Ἀκάθιστου) καὶ σὲ ποῖο σημεῖο ὑπῆρχε καὶ τοὺς κάλεσε ἐκεῖ. Ἀφοῦ ἔφθασαν, ὁ πειρατὴς πῆγε νὰ πάρει τὴν εἰκόνα, ἐνῶ ὁ Ἡγούμενος καὶ οἱ Μονάχοι ἔμειναν ἀναυδοί. Αὐτὸ τὸ παληόξυλο διάλεξε, εἶπε στὸν Ἀρταβάν ὑποκριτικά. Αὐτὸ ἀξίζει μιλιούνια, ἀπάντησε ἐκεῖνος. «Ἄφησε τὴν στὴ θέση τῆς, εἶπε ὁ Ἡγούμενος, οἱ εἰκόνες ἔχουν ἀξία μόνο γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανούς, πάρτε κάτι ἄλλο». Ὁχι, αὐτὸ θὰ πάρω, εἶπε πεισματικά ὁ Ἰφ. Προτιμῶ νὰ ταφῶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ἐρείπια τῆς Μονῆς, παρὰ νὰ τὴν πάρετε, εἶπε καὶ προσπάθησε νὰ τὸν ἐμποδίσει. Ὁ Ἰφ ὁμως τὸν ἔσπρωξε φωνάζοντας καὶ ἀπειλώντας: «Θὰ πεθάνετε ὅλοι σας». Πάνω στὴν ἀγανάκτηση του πρόλαβε ὁ Ἡγούμενος νὰ τοὺς πει: «Ἐτσι πού φέρεστε, πηγαίνετε ἀλλὰ μαζί με τὴν κατάρρα μου».

Ἀμέσως ἐξαφανίστηκαν πρὸς τὴ θάλασσα καὶ ἔφυγαν μὲ προορισμὸ τὴν Σκύρο. Τὸ βράδυ, ἐνῶ ταξίδευαν, εἶδε στὸν ὕπνο του τὴν Παναγία πού τοὺς εἶπε ἀπειλητικά: «Γιατί πονηρὸ με πῆρες; Πήγαίνέ με πίσω, ἐκεῖ πού ἔμενα ἡσυχη καὶ

εἰρηνική». Ἐύπησε ἐντρομος ὁ Ἀρταβάν, μὰ δὲν κάμφθηκε. Σὲ λίγο ξέσπασε ξαφνικὰ μεγάλη τρικυμία, ὥστε ἐκλυδωνίζοντο καὶ κινδύνευαν τὰ πλοῖα νὰ καταποντιστοῦν. Πάνω στὸν ἀναπάντεχο κίνδυνο, μιμήθηκε τὸ ὄνειρο καὶ πῆγε πρὸς τὴν Εἰκόνα καὶ βλέπει τὸ κιβώτιο πού τὴν εἶχε τοποθετήσει κομματιασμένο καὶ ἡ εἰκόνα νὰ εἶναι γεμάτη μῦρο τὸ ὁποῖο εὐωδίαζε ἰσχυρά. Κατάλαβε ἀμέσως ὅτι ἡ τρικυμία εἶναι τοπικὴ τιμωρία τῆς Μητέρας τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Μόλις τὴν πῆρε στὰ χέρια του σταμάτησε ἡ τρικυμία. Μετὰ ἀπὸ συνενόηση με τοὺς δικούς του, φώναξαν ὅλοι, «νὰ γυρίσουμε πίσω γιατί θὰ μᾶς πνίξει Θεὸς τῶν Χριστιανῶν».

Ἐπειτα ἀπὸ ἀρκετὲς ὥρες, ἐπέστρεψαν στὸν ὄρμο τῆς Ἱ. Μ. Διονυσίου. Ὁ Σαριφ ἔστειλε στὴ Μονὴ πειρατὴ, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶπε στὸν Ἡγούμενο: «Ἀνθρωπε τοῦ Θεοῦ, ξέρω ὅτι κάναμε κακὸ, ὁ ἀρχηγός μου σὲ περιμένει νὰ κατέβεις, νὰ πάρεις τὴν εἰκόνα, καὶ νὰ μᾶς ἀπαλλάξεις ἀπὸ τὴν κατάρρα πού μᾶς ἔδωσες». Ἀφοῦ κατέβηκαν στὸ λιμάνι οἱ Μοναχοί, ὁ Ἀρταβάν ἔδειξε τὸ κομματιασμένο κιβώτιο καὶ τὰ ρούχα πού εἶχε τυλίξει τὴν εἰκόνα καὶ πού ἦταν μουσκεμένα ἀπὸ τὸ θεῖο μῦρο. Συγκινημένοι οἱ Μοναχοὶ παρέλαβαν τὴν Εἰκόνα. Τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν ὑπόθεση, εἶναι ὅτι μερικοὶ πειρατὲς μετανόησαν, ἄφησαν τὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ καὶ ἔμειναν στὴ Μονὴ καὶ ἀφοῦ κατηχήθηκαν ἔγιναν Χριστιανοί! Ἐπίσης διαπιστώνει ἐδῶ κανεὶς μὲ πόσους κόπους καὶ θυσίες ἔχουν διατηρηθεῖ οἱ τόσο πολλοὶ πνευματικοὶ θησαυροὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους.

Ἐνα ἄλλο μέσα στὰ πολλὰ θαύματα τῆς Παναγίας τοῦ «Ἀκάθιστου Ὑμνου» εἶναι καὶ τοῦτο: Τὸ 1753 δίδασκε στὴν Ἀθωνιάδα Σχολὴ ὁ σοφὸς διδάσκαλος καὶ ἐπίσκοπος Εὐγένιος Βούλγαρης. Ἀρρώστησε βαρεῖα ἀπὸ φοβερὸ ἔλκος. Τὸν μετέφεραν στὴ Ἱ. Μ. Διονυσίου προκειμένου νὰ τὸν περιποιηθεῖ ἓνας σπουδαῖος νοσοκόμος τῆς Μονῆς μὲ γνώσεις ἱατρικῆς, πλὴν οὐδὲν κατόρθωσε παρὰ τις προσπάθειες. Τότε, οἱ παρευρεθέντες εἶπαν στὸν στενάζοντα Εὐγένιο γιὰ τὴ θαυματουργὴ εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἀκάθιστου. Παρακάλεσε νὰ τὸν μεταφέρουν κληνὴρη πρὸ αὐτῆς. Ἐκεῖ, γενομένης παρακλήσεως μέσα στοὺς ὀξεῖς πόνους του, ἰκέτευσε τὴν Κεχαριτωμένη. Τότε αἰσθάνθηκε ξαφνικὰ τὸ φοβερὸ ἐκεῖνο βουβόνα ὅτι ὑποχώρησε καὶ τοὺς ὀξεῖς πόνους καταπραυνομένους, τὰ δὲ δάκρυά του νὰ σταματοῦν. Τὸ ἔλκος ἐκεῖνο αὐτόματα διεράγηκε καὶ σὲ λίγα λεπτὰ εἶχε ἐντελῶς θεραπευτεῖ. Τότε, ὁ σοφὸς κατασυγκινημένος πῆρε τὴν πέννα καὶ ἀμέσως ἔποιε σὲ τοὺς ἐξῆς ἱαμβικοὺς στίχους: «Ζωῆς δότην φέρουσα Σῆς ὑπ' ἀγκάλης, ζωῆς φέροντα θάνατον μ' ὑπαὶ μάλης». Δηλαδή, ἐσὺ πού φέρεις τὸν δοτήρα τῆς ζωῆς μέσα στὴν ἀγκυλιά σου δίνεις ζωὴ σὲ μένα πού φέρω τὸν θάνατον κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ μασχάλη.

Γιὰ τὴν ὠφέλεια πρὸς τὶς ψυχὰς ὅσων διαβάσουν τοὺς Χαιρετισμοὺς -- ἐκτὸς φυσικὰ ἀπὸ τὶς καθιερωμένες Παρασκευὲς στὸ Ναοὺς -- ἡ ἴδια ἡ Παναγία φανεῖσα σὲ Ἁγίους εἶπε: «Θὰ ἀγαπῶ, θὰ προστατεύω, θὰ φυλάττω κάθε πιστὸν ὁ ὁποῖος θὰ με χαιρετίζει ἀπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας εἰ δυνατόν με τοὺς ὠραίους ὕμνους τῶν Χαιρετισμῶν Μου, καὶ θὰ ζεῖ σύμφωνα με τὸν νόμον τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κατὰ δὲ τὴν τελευταία ἡμέραν τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ, θὰ τὸν ὑπερασπισθῶ καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Υἱοῦ Μου».

THE SANCTIFIED REVOLUTION OF 1821

By Photios Kontoglou [excerpted from the book "Hellenic Orthodox Tradition, Root and Perspective," ed. by Constantine J. Cholevas, Athens, 2003, pp. 176-181. It originally appeared in the book "Pained Romanity," by Photios Kontoglou; translated into English by Fr. Nicholas Palis and edited by Irene Maginas and George Karras]

The Hellenic Revolution of 1821, celebrated by Hellenes all over the world on March 25th, is the most spiritual revolution that has ever happened in the history of mankind. It is truly sanctified.

Revolutions happen most of the time for some material causes, such as slavery, deprivation, hardship, tortures, and scorn. Freedom is the divinity that the revolutionary worships, and for this he sheds his blood. But often, when the revolutionary obtains freedom, he doesn't use it for spiritual purposes, but only to enjoy the material life. Along with the material life, spirituality may also come, but most of the time people mistakenly associate spiritual life with some of the materialistically inclined joys, which may seem to be spiritual in nature. For example, a revolutionary of the French Revolution considered as spiritual some things which in truth were not. He wanted to obtain freedom for people's lives only in this world so that they can do the things which he considered as correct and just; in other words, the aim was to achieve "things" for their material lives, thus believing that there was nothing else for man to pursue. For this reason it is strongly advocated that the causes for most revolutions were material in nature, and the freedom they strived for was destined to satisfy purely material needs.

The Hellenic Revolution, however, on the one hand had as a cause the material deprivations and physical hardships, like every other revolution, but above these, it also had some underlying causes that are purely spiritual. A truly spiritual cause is one that is related or linked to the spiritual part of the revolutionary, that is, to his soul and to his religion. The slavery that pushed the Hellenes to arise against the Turks was not only the deprivation and the physical hardship, but above all, that the tyrants wanted to ruin their [Orthodox Christian] faith and prevent them from fulfilling their religious duties; they were changing their faith and slaughtering, butchering or hanging them because they would not reject their faith and convert to Islam. For this reason, faith and homeland had become one and the same thing, and the freedom they longed for was not only the freedom all revolutionaries long for, but the freedom to keep their sanctified faith, with which they hoped to save their souls. In the minds of the 1821 revolutionaries, along with the body, which had so many needs and was maintained with so much hardship, there also existed the soul, which Christ said is worth more than the body, as much as the body is worth more than clothing.

It is noteworthy that these simple souls, who lived in the mountains and the wilderness, were taught the faith of Christ

by their fathers and knew, despite the fact that they were unlettered, some of His words, such as these: "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" or "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" and "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" and many more. For this reason, during the years of slavery, thousands of young men and women were literally butchered and hung and impaled for their faith, disregarding their youth, and not paying any attention to their bodies in this temporal life. This vast group of holy neo-martyrs constitute a whole army, and were all killed not for the material goods of this life, but for their precious souls. They knew their souls would not die together with their bodies, but would live eternally. They heard and believed unshakably the words of Christ, Who said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

The freedom they sought and for which they were sacrificing themselves was not some undefined divinity, but it was Christ Himself, about whom the Apostle Paul said, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." And elsewhere he says, "Stand fast, therefore, in the freedom by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage... For you, brethren, have been called to freedom; only do not use freedom as an opportunity for the flesh."

It is thus for this reason that the Hellenic Revolution is truly sanctified, as are its fighters, as were those who fought together with Constantine Paleologos [emperor at the time of the fall of Constantinople] three hundred sixty-eight years earlier, during the taking of the City, against the same enemy of their faith. Listen with what words that this great emperor spoke to his soldiers, they sound as if they arose from some troparion: "Brethren, this impious emir and enemy of our Holy Faith has come and besieged us. Everyday, his vast mouth is gaping, so as to find a suitable time to swallow us and this city - this city, which that thrice-blessed and great king Constantine erected and dedicated to our all-holy and exceedingly pure lady Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary. He granted her to be lady and helper and protector of our homeland and refuge of the Christians, the hope and joy of all Hellenes, the boast of all who are under the dawning of the sun." And in the end he said, "I hope to God that we be delivered of His present righteous threat. Secondly, the adamant crown and eternal memory awaits us in Heaven, and [our memories] be forever worthy in the world."

At the revolution of 1821, as also at the siege of the City, a multitude of cassock wearing monks, priests and bishops fought together with the lay people. They went forward with the cross in hand, and behind them the people rushed, crying and chanting:

*For the homeland's freedom, for the holy faith of Christ,
for these two I am fighting. With these I desire to live,
And if I don't obtain them, what does it benefit me to live?*

In the City (Constantinople), their holy Patriarch Gregory becomes the immediate recipient of the Turkish wrath and is

hung, his body paraded all over the City and then dumped into Bosphorous; Patriarch Gregory thus opened the new martyrology [list of martyrs] of the 1821 Revolution. He will be joined by the deacon Athanasios Thiakos who fought like a new Leonidas, and was roasted for his faith. The hierarchs Germanos of Ancient Patra, Isaiah of Salonon, and Joseph of Rogon, the deacon Papaflesas, the priest Thymios Vlachavas, and many others fought for their sanctified homeland. In Tripolitsa the bishops of Morea were imprisoned during the Revolution, and most died after unbearable tortures. The same in the City; many bishops were imprisoned and hung. Here I put a few words from the diary of the vice-admiral George Sachtouri:

“Friday, December 25. Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. Docked at Dardiza with a calm north wind, except it is snowing. This morning, because of the joyousness of the feast, elevating our flag, a cannon shot was blasted, as all the Hellenic docked ships did the same thing...”

“Sunday, August 15. Feast of the Theotokos. We are docked. At dawn we elevated the flags and blasted a cannon shot because of the joyousness of the day.”

The admiral Kountouriotis did his prayers, like one of his forefathers, for the Panaghia to help him in the sea battle of “Ellis,” and wherever else his duty called him. All the Hellenes did the same, as they do in battle. Later on in the Hellenic history and during the destruction of Asia Minor, the clergy was the first to pay with their lives the new head tax to the enemy of our faith. The metropolitan of Smyrna, Chrysostom, was hung; the bishop of Kydonion, Gregory, was buried alive; the bishop Ambrose of Moschonisi was killed without mercy, and all the priests and monks died by the sword.

All these event stand as a firm testimony that for the modern Hellene, it is indeed a fact. Yes! Faith and homeland are indeed one and the same thing. Whoever fights the one, fights the other also, and let him not be fooled. The Hellenes’ spiritual mother is our Orthodox Church, which was watered with much sanctified blood. No people shed blood for the faith, even to this day, as much as Hellenes have, especially relative to the proportion of the available population of that time. The Orthodox faith is the one and only hidden treasure that is worth fighting for and the costly pearl of which Christ speaks.



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

UNREAL CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

[continued from pg. 6]

Religion of Antichrist, and their chief “spiritual” function is to make available to Christians the demonic initiation hitherto restricted to the pagan world.

What has brought humanity--and indeed Christendom--to this desperate state? Certainly it is not any overt worship of the devil which is limited always to a few people; rather, it is something much more subtle, and something fearful for a conscious Orthodox Christian to reflect on: it is the loss of the grace of God, which follows on the loss of the savor of Christianity.

How much, then, must Orthodox Christians walk in the fear of God, trembling lest they lose His grace, which by no means is given to everyone, but only to those who hold the true Faith, lead a life of Christian struggle, and treasure the grace of God which leads them heavenward. And how much more cautiously must Orthodox Christians walk today above all, when they are surrounded by a counterfeit Christianity that gives its own experiences of grace and the Holy Spirit and can abundantly quote the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers to “prove” it! Surely the last times are near, when there will come spiritual deception so persuasive as to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect (Matt. 24.:24).

Against this powerful “religious experience” true Orthodox Christians must now arm themselves in earnest, becoming fully conscious of what Orthodox Christianity is and how its goal is different from that of all other religions, Christian or non-Christian.

Orthodox Christians! Hold fast to the grace which you have; never let it become a matter of habit; never measure it by merely human standards or expect it to be logical or comprehensible to those who understand nothing higher than what is human. Let all true Orthodox Christians strengthen themselves for the battle ahead, never forgetting that in Christ the victory is already ours.



Remember what I told you before: the forest is not afraid of someone who carries off a cart-load of wood because it knows that the axle of the cart will break as it goes down the road. No, the forest fears the one who carries off a piece of wood every time he leaves the woods, because bit by bit he will clear the forest. It is the same with the enemy of our souls: he does not fear the person who undertakes great ascetic feats at once, for he knows that person will soon become tired and abandon everything. Instead he fears the one who increases in the spiritual life little by little. St. Theodosius says that by working little by little, man gains great wealth in both spiritual and material things. **Do things little by little and always regret that you have not done more.**

Elder Cleopa Ilie (+1998)

WE BELIEVE IN ONE, HOLY, UNIVERSAL, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "The Faith of Chosen People," translated by: Fr. Theodor Mika and Fr. Stevan Scott

Wayfarers, behold the ark! When the flood came, Noah was saved in a secure ark. The flood of madness and sin continues incessantly. Therefore, the Lover of Mankind constructed the ark of salvation. Ask for His ark, and you will soon be entering it.

Do not let yourselves be led astray by the multitude of variegated vessels, decorated and adorned on the outside. Ask about the power of the engine and about the skill of the captain. The most powerful engine and the most skillful helmsman are to be found in the ark of Christ. This is the all-seeing, all-powerful, Holy Spirit himself.

Neither let yourselves be led astray by those who invite you into their tiny and new rowboats, or those who offer you private rowboats just for yourselves. The journey is distant and the storms are dangerous.

Neither let yourselves be led astray by those who say that on the other side of the ocean there is no new land, no new world, and that there is no reason to prepare for a distant voyage. They invite you to go fishing on the shore. To such a little extent do they see or know. Truly, they are setting out for destruction, and are inviting you to destruction as well.

Do not allow yourselves to be deceived, but rather ask about His ark. Even though it may be less dazzling to the eyes than others, nevertheless it is strong and secure. Even though it does not have many variegated banners, except the sign of the cross, know that your life is safe aboard it. And on a sea voyage the first and primary concern should be that the life of the passenger is safe.

If you believe in Christ the Savior, O Christ-bearers, you also believe in His work. His work is the Church, the Ark of Salvation. Aboard it are sailing the hosts of the saved and of those being saved. The Lord founded this work of His on faith, as strong as rock. Just as He said and prophesied: "On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). And truly, up to the present day they have never prevailed, nor will they from this day forward.

The Church is called the body of Christ. "You are the body of Christ" (Rom. 15:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). Therefore, there is only one Church. For there cannot be two bodies under one head, and Christ is called the head of the Church (Col. 1:18). Therefore: one Christ, one head, one body -- one Church.

If there are apostasies and heresies, why should that confuse you? This was all foreseen and foretold, just as an experienced helmsman foresees and tells travelers about the storms and troubles ahead. "For there must be heresies among you," says

the apostle, "so that those who are genuine among you may be recognized" (1 Cor. 11:19). If one group of passengers aboard the ark should carve a dugout for themselves and then lower themselves into the sea to drift apart, you are naturally sad--and so you should be. Their example, a desperate example of a stubborn plunge into peril, strengthens your faith in the one and only ark of salvation.

The Church is called holy. It is clear to you why she is called holy. First, because it was the Saint of saints, the Holy of holies, who founded her. Second, because the Lord transformed, redeemed, purified and strengthened her with His own holy and most pure blood. Third, because from the beginning the Holy Spirit of God has been guiding her, inspiring her, and bringing her to life. Fourth, because all her members are called to be holy, separated from everything unholy in this world, in which they are growing and through which they are journeying. Fifth, because the holy heavens are set aside for her habitation. Sixth, because in her are all the God-given means by which men become holy and prepare themselves for heavenly citizenship. Therefore, the Church is called holy.

Moreover, the Church is called universal. Why this? First, because she unites to the living God the children of all lands, all tribes, and all languages. She is not confined to a single race, nor to a single tribe, nor to a single nation. Like the man who stands at the crossroads and summons all wayfarers to the king's banquet (cf. Matt. 22:9), so also does the Church. So also does the holy, universal Church summon and unite all the sons and daughters of men to salvation. And she rejects no one except one who rejects her and, consequently, himself as well. This is the difference between the all-inclusive Church of the New Testament and the preparatory Church of the Old Testament, which was limited to a single people.

Furthermore, the Church is called universal because she includes both the living and those who have fallen asleep. Those who have fallen asleep in the Lord are as much her members as those who are still living on earth. Wayfarers whom the ark of salvation has transported to the new land, to the eternal kingdom as well as those who are being transported today or those who will be transported tomorrow are all members of the one, holy, universal Church.

And thus the Church is called universal because it is not limited by race, by language, by space, by time, or by death.

In addition to all this, the Church is also universal in both her teaching and in her structure.

The holy Church is called apostolic. The Church is called this first because Christ's apostles were her first members. They were the first personal witnesses of the miraculous life and work of the Son of God on earth, and His first followers. Second, because the apostles organized the structure of the Church and spread the Church across the world. Third, because the holy apostles were the first after the Lord to spill

their own blood onto her foundations. Fourth, because her apostolicity has not ceased even to this day. The apostolicity of the Church is reflected today in two ways: in her apostolic mission to the world and in the apostolic succession of her hierarchy. Both in her ministry in the world and in her ministers, the true Church, the Orthodox Church, bears the ceaseless seal of apostolicity.

It is not the task of the Church as an institution to rule but to minister; to minister to the nations of God to the point of martyrdom after the manner of Christ the Lord; to illuminate the souls of men, to guide the moral life of men spiritually, to shine. It is her task not to enslave but to set free. For all men are called to the freedom of Christ, to the freedom of the sons of God. As it is written: "You are no longer a slave but a son" (Gal. 4:7). And again: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1). As the ark of salvation the Church of God transports not slaves but free children, royal children, into the immortal heavenly kingdom. There is no cargo more precious and no pier more joyful!

This is the faith of the valiant and of those who love others. The cowardly and selfish find it difficult to accept this faith. The valiant are those who have the courage to rise up against the pagan chaos in their soul and establish order in it according to the gospel. Those who love others are those who like to journey with others and who view their companions in the light of that eternal light in the distance. And they rejoice in their companions, as in their own brothers, in themselves, and in that eternal light which illuminates and embraces them all, and draws them all to itself. The valiant and those who love others like order in themselves and around themselves. They appreciate the help of others and do not refuse help to others. They like to step back in order to make way for others. Like God they burn with the desire that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Recognizing the majesty of the living God, they consider themselves as nothing great. They regard themselves as tiny organs of the mysterious and great body of the Church, whose head is Christ. They do not push or quarrel over first place. They are not afraid of this life, nor do they fear death. They praise the good works of their companions, but their own they do not make public. And so in harmony, in order, and in joy, they migrate like a flock of birds to warmer regions -- to the kingdom of divine light and fatherly warmth.

This is your faith, Christ-bearers, the faith of your valiant forefathers who loved others. Let it also be the faith of your children from generation to generation, all the way to the end of the journey, to the tranquil haven. This is the salvation-bearing Orthodox faith, which has never been put to shame. In truth, this is the faith of the truly chosen people, of those who bear the image of God in themselves. On the Day of Retribution, on the great Day of God's justice, when Christ will have judged with justice, they shall be called blessed.

IS THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH IN HERESY?

From the web pages of the "Orthodox Christian Information Center"

The Coptic Orthodox (aka "Oriental Orthodox") church contends both traditional beliefs as well as an identity that does not differ from that of all other canonical Eastern Orthodox churches. What is it, though, that they believe that is different from Orthodoxy as we Eastern Orthodox practice it? Why are so many Orthodox jurisdictions in America (OCA, GOA, etc.) anxious to have ecumenical dialogue with these people? Lastly, how should we view the "Oriental Orthodox"?

The superficial theological milieu of our era has proven most advantageous for ecumenical ideology, which seeks to gloss over the fundamental and abiding differences which distinguish the heterodox confessions from the Orthodox Faith. All too often, such differences are now conveniently dismissed as merely long-standing miscommunications of alternative, yet equally valid, terminological emphases. This perfunctory approach has been eagerly employed by Orthodox modernists in their theological dialogues with the so-called "Oriental Orthodox" churches. The designation "Oriental Orthodox" itself clearly illustrates the ecumenistic tendency to obfuscate essential theological differences with euphemisms. This deceptive appellation, popularized by the defective world view of Western Christian thought, -- a world view which lumps together such mutually exclusive ecclesiastical entities as the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Assyrian Church of the East (i.e., Nestorians), "Oriental Orthodox" churches, and Eastern Rite Papists (i.e., Uniates, such as Melkites and Maronites) under the umbrella term "Eastern Christians" -- masks the intransigent heresies held for centuries by three main groups: 1) Armenians, 2) Copts and Ethiopians (Abyssinians), and 3) Syrian and Malabarese Jacobites.

The adjective Oriental is synonymous with the adjective Eastern. There is thus no real distinction between the term Eastern Orthodox (which identifies the only True Church) and the term "Oriental Orthodox" (which denotes several false churches). More importantly, although the "Oriental Orthodox" have appropriated the title Orthodox for themselves (e.g., the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, etc.), it was precisely their failure to embrace the Christology of the Holy Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod in 451 that led to their departure from the domain of Orthodoxy to the hinterlands of heresy. They are therefore correctly and accurately designated either as Non-Chalcedonians, reflecting their rejection of this Divinely-inspired Ecumenical Synod, or Monophysites, characterizing their specific heterodox confession of Christianity.

These three groups of Non-Chalcedonians are united in

their common profession of Monophysitism, as well as its logical consequents, Monotheletism and Monoenergism -- the doctrines that in Christ there are, respectively, only one nature, one will, and one energy. The Fourth Ecumenical Synod anathematized Monophysitism, the Fifth Ecumenical Synod confirmed this decision, the Sixth Ecumenical Synod condemned Monotheletism and Monoenergism, and the Seventh Ecumenical Synod reaffirmed all of the foregoing. Therefore, in addition to being Non-Chalcedonians, the "Oriental Orthodox" are also Non-Second Constantinopolitans, Non-Third Constantinopolitans, and Non-Second Nicaeans. Their unyielding opposition to four of the seven Ecumenical Synods makes it not just a little difficult for us to consider the Monophysite churches Orthodox. After all, even the Latins, not to mention some Protestants, ostensibly claim to "abide" by all seven of the Ecumenical Synods, and they are never referred to as "Orthodox" churches.

To bear the name Orthodox, one must confess -- without equivocation -- the Ecumenical Christology of the Catholic and Apostolic Tradition: Jesus Christ united without confusion within His Own Hypostasis His Divine Nature and His Human Nature, His Divine will and His Human will, and His Divine energy and His Human energy. There is no room here for semantic sidestepping. A recent study of Non-Chalcedonianism by the Monastery of Saint Gregory (Gregoriou) on Mt. Athos, *The Non-Chalcedonian Heretics: A Contribution to the Dialogue Concerning the "Orthodoxy" of the Non-Chalcedonians*, came to exactly this same conclusion.

A great ecclesiological chasm exists between us and the Non-Chalcedonians, which only the explicit confession of the holiness and ecumenicity of the Fourth and the following three Holy Ecumenical Synods on the part of the Non-Chalcedonians can bridge. Any manifest or hidden deviation whatsoever from Orthodox dogma, for the sake of some union contrary to the truth, will occasion only harm to immortal souls and suffering for the Church.

Because of their subconscious ecclesiastical insecurities, some Orthodox Churches in America have a pathological craving for worldly recognition, making them only too willing to accept the "harm to immortal souls and suffering for the Church" already occasioned by dialogues between the "official" Orthodox and the Monophysites. For example, as reported in other Orthodox publications, several modernist theologians have participated in an "Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Symposium" co-sponsored by St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary and St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, a symposium obviously mimicking the union dialogues held in Europe in 1989 and 1990. On the Orthodox side, the symposium included representatives from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, the Orthodox Church in America, and the Romanian Orthodox Church

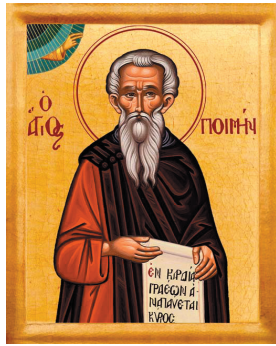
in America; on the Monophysite side, it included representatives from the Armenian Apostolic Church of America, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

As reported by Solia (Vol. 60, No. 6 [June 1995]), the symposium, in heinous violation of the ecclesiological self-definition of the Orthodox Church as the One and Only Church of Christ, blasphemously referred to "the two Orthodox Churches" as "one Orthodox family," to quote the heretical phrase of some Coptic priests. Relying on the results achieved by past conferences and commissions which have examined the "Orthodoxy" of the Monophysites, the participants glibly concluded "that there exists full agreement on the substance of the faith of the two churches, notwithstanding the differences in terms" -- and this, apparently, notwithstanding the Divine Grace which enlightened such God-bearing Fathers as Saints Flavian of Constantinople, Leo the Great, and Proterios of Alexandria (all of whom struggled against and suffered because of the Monophysite heresy) to develop and to refine a precise Christological nomenclature delineating the Orthodox Faith.

Having thus summarily disposed of the insuperable dogmatic barrier between the Truth of Orthodoxy and the falsehood of Non-Chalcedonianism, the symposium quickly turned its attention to the "practical steps...which could be implemented at the global and local levels to ultimately achieve [sic] unity," and "this includes among other things, a statement of reconciliation, academic cooperation, and common catechesis of young people" (ibid.). Deciphering this "ecumenically correct" jargon and restating it in plain Orthodox language, this symposium embraced the renunciation of Patristic Tradition, the scholarly prostitution of sacred theology, and the sacrifice of the next generation of Orthodox to appease the Moloch of Monophysitism. And for this, we have to thank "the great contribution of modern scholarship and the current worldwide ecumenical movement" (ibid.)! The words of the Savior ring with prophetic force: "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (St. Matthew 7:16).

In contrast to our ecumenist counterparts, who, to the detriment of their fellow man, reinforce the Monophysites in their error, we, out of love both for the Truth and for those who have deviated from it, challenge the Monophysites to accept the standard of True Orthodox Christianity. Let the Non-Chalcedonian heretics become truly Oriental Orthodox: Let their spiritual orientation turn eastward, facing the Chalcedonian sunrise that dawns universally from the noetic Anatolia of Eastern Orthodoxy, where the Theanthropic One, "Whose Name is Orient" (Zechariah 6:12 [LXX]), the God-Man Christ Jesus, rises in Truth. Only then, when they have renounced their heterodox beliefs, can we genuinely address these theologically disoriented Easterners as Orthodox brethren.

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AGE OF DECEPTION

By Fr. Seraphim Rose of Platina, from "The Inspiration and Sure Guide to True Christianity Today"

Never has there been such an age of false teachers as this pitiful 20th century, so rich in material gadgets and so poor in mind and soul. Every conceivable opinion, even the most absurd, even those hitherto rejected by the universal consent of all civilized peoples -- now has its platform and its own "teacher." A few of these teachers come with demonstration or promise of "spiritual power" and false miracles, as do some occultists and "charismatics"; but most of the contemporary teachers offer no more than a weak concoction of undigested ideas which they received "out of the air," as it were, or from some modern self-appointed "wise man" (or woman) who knows more than all the ancients merely by living in our "enlightened" modern times. As a result, philosophy has a thousand schools and "Christianity" a thousand sects. Where is the truth to be found in all this, if indeed it is to be found at all in our most misguided times? In only one place is there to be found the fount of true teaching, coming from God Himself, not diminished over the centuries but ever fresh, being one and the same in all those who truly teach it, leading those who follow it to eternal salvation. This place is the Orthodox Church of Christ, the fount is the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, and the true teachers of the Divine doctrine that issues from this fountain are the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church.

THE VISION OF ST. NIPHON

From "The Vision of St Niphon"

What was he seeing when the Liturgy began? He saw fire coming down from heaven and covering the altar and the celebrant, without the latter realizing it. Later, when the Trisagion hymn was being chanted, four angels descended and chanted along with them. When the Epistle was read, blessed Paul appeared and guided the reader. And during the Gospel, each one of the words came out of the mouth of the priest like a flame. Then the mystical alleluia started. All the voices intertwined in a rope of fire which reached up to heaven. A little before the Great Entrance, when the Holy Gifts were about to come out, suddenly he saw the heavens open and an ineffable fragrance pour out. Angels were descending chanting hymns and doxologies to the Lamb and Christ and Son of God. Immediately, an Infant with the purest and sweetest face appeared. The Cherubim brought Him in their palms and placed Him on the holy paten where the Holy Gifts were. Around Him gathered a large number of white-dressed men reflecting His bright beauty. The priest approached to take the Holy Gifts for the Great Entrance. He then raised them and placed them above his head. Two Cherubim and two Seraphim preceded, and an infinite number of other angels followed chanting ineffable melodies. As soon as the celebrant placed the Holy Gifts on the holy table, they covered them with their wings. The two Cherubim were standing on the right of the priest and the two Seraphim on his left...

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

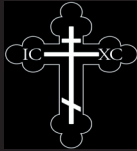
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WE AWAIT THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD...

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "The Faith of Chosen People," translated by: Fr. Theodor Mika and Fr. Stevan Scott

A flock of birds - what an amazing sight! A single bird never leaves an impression of such intoxicating beauty as does a flock of birds. Nor is a flock of birds which has landed on the ground as beautiful as a flock in flight, flying hither and thither.

Imagine a million birds of one species. Imagine them all red. And they are flying in and landing on the ground and remain on the ground. Another million fly in, and land, and remain. And again another, and another, and so on across centuries and centuries, for ages and ages. Countless flocks, countless billions of birds. Remaining on the ground they change color under various influences. Some turn dark red, some black, some speckled, others white.

And imagine if all those countless flocks, those countless billions of birds, by some almighty command took off from the ground and began to fly. What a majestic sight! The white birds are in the majority, and their dense flocks soar to the fore. Behind them are the speckled birds, and then the red, and then the black. The white flocks fly swiftly and cheerfully, while the rest in turn more and more sluggishly and cheerlessly. The sun would be completely blocked, and the earth would be covered with the darkness of night.

Oh my brothers and sisters, this is not just a dream and an illustration. Reality will surpass every dream and illustration of man.

One starry night God led the righteous and faithful Abraham outside and said to him: "Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you can number them." Abra-

ham stood in fear and looked in amazement. Then God said to him: "So shall your descendants be" (Gen. 15:5). And at that time Abraham was old and childless. Would God fulfill His promise?

Already up to the present day countless billions of human souls have flown in and landed on the earth, all clothed in flesh and blood as in a crimson garment. This is a sign of their Creator's good pleasure. Countless billions up to the present day -- and yet at that moment, when God gave His promise, Abraham did not have a single child! Countless billions just up to the present day -- are there more stars in heaven?

But Sarah laughed to herself when she heard of God's promise that she would soon bear a son. And Sarah, the wife of Abraham said: "Now that I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have the pleasure of bearing a child?" Then the Lord said to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh?... Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:12-14). And truly, God does not go back on what He promises. God fulfilled His promise. Abraham's righteous descendants extended in a spiritual line in the Christian people, and have perhaps already multiplied and reached the number of the stars in heaven.

This was God's promise concerning the descent of souls onto the earth. A great and wondrous promise, which is equalled by another promise of God - concerning the raising of souls from the earth, concerning the resurrection of the dead. God in Christ the Lord, the Resurrected One who resurrects, made a truthful promise that the dead will be resurrected and will appear at the Judgment. "When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. And before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them..." (Matt. 25:31f).

The Lord speaks about all the nations,

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about all the flocks of men which have landed on the earth from the beginning to the end of time. Christ's apostle considered the resurrection a precious mystery, and thus he revealed it to the faithful slowly and carefully when he said: "We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope... For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise" (I Thess. 4:13-16). And again he says: "Lo! I tell you a mystery... in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable" (I Cor. 15:51-52). Then what is perishable shall be clothed in what is imperishable, and what is mortal shall be clothed in immortality. And then the saying that is written shall come to pass: "O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?" (I Cor. 15:55).

Then countless billions of souls shall be clothed in light, imperishable clothing, in heavenly bodies similar to Christ's. And those flocks, Oh those countless flocks, will take off from the ground. Some flocks will be as white as many snowfalls, others will be dark red, others speckled, and others black. The white flocks will be white from the purity and virtue in them, the red flocks will be red from the preponderance of blood over spirit in them, the speckled will be speckled from the intermingling of good and evil in them, and the black will be black from their sin.

Do not let it disturb you, should someone laugh at God's promise concerning the resurrection of the dead. Sarah also laughed at God's promise long before, and later she was ashamed. Believe, Oh believe and do not doubt, that anyone who laughs at this second promise of God will likewise be ashamed. Ask him and say to him: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

"I await the resurrection of the dead." We await the spiritual resurrection of sinners day by day and minute by minute. We wait for souls speckled and blackened by sin as with scabs to whiten and come back to life through repentance. And we rejoice together with the angels in heaven when even one sinner repents and returns to Christ (cf. Luke 15:10). We rejoice with the father who, when he found his lost prodigal son, said:

"This my son was dead, and has come back to life" (Luke 15:24). We often await this sort of resurrection of the dead, and we frequently receive it.

But we also await a general resurrection. We await a single, final resurrection of all the dead, who from the beginning of creation lived on earth and succumbed to the power of death. We base our waiting on reason and conscience, and especially on God's promise.

Unconfused and clear reason tells us that this whirlpool of life does not end with death. From time immemorial nations have sensed that death is not a period, but a comma. All the tribes on earth, even in their idolatrous darkness, felt a presentiment of some sort of life after death. The poets and philosophers of ancient Greece spoke about the life of human souls in Hades, in semidarkness and semilife. The Egyptians used to embalm dead bodies with resins and aromatic spices, so that they might be preserved for some other life. The continuance of life by death and of judgment by justice, which not everyone on earth had attained - this has always seemed like something natural and necessary to a clear human conscience.

However, we Christians do not base our faith in the resurrection and life beyond the grave on the theories of poets and philosophers, nor on the inklings and presentiments of nations and tribes, but on experience and God's promise. Our faith is founded on rock and not on sand. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Revealer of all the truths of life, also revealed to us the

truth of the resurrection of the dead. He revealed it to us both by word and by deed - so that your hearts might rejoice, O Christ-bearers.

On one occasion the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, put the Lord Jesus to the test. They asked Him whose wife a certain woman would be in that "world to come." The mockers were themselves rebuked by their own irrationality! The meek Lord answered them: "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven." Moreover, the Lord added: "God is not God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:30, 32). And if all the living on earth were to die and remain in the tombs, how could God be called the "God of the living?"

In Capernaum, in that city of unbelievers which has vanished from the face of the earth because of its lack of belief - in this city the spiritually shallow Jews kept asking the Lord one question after another. Finally the Lord told them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever eats My body and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day" (John 6:53-54). And before Solomon's temple, which has vanished from the face of the earth because of being desecrated by lack of belief, the Lord said: "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God... and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:25-29). To those who shake their heads and say how difficult this is to believe - tell them: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

Moreover, Jesus made many other statements about the resurrection of the dead. But in order not to leave people in any doubt, He attested to these words of His with deeds. He resurrected the dead daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the Jewish synagogue. The Lord took her cold, dead hand in His own and exclaimed: "Little girl, arise!" And the dead girl came to life and arose (Matt. 9:25, Mark 5:41).

Furthermore, the Lord resurrected the son of the widow of Nain. Arriving at that city with His disciples, He encountered a funeral procession and saw a widow in despair, mourning for her only son. First He approached the mother and comforted her with the words: "Do not weep!" Then He set out to comfort her with a deed as well. He crossed over to the pallbearers and cried out to the dead youth: "Young man, I say to you, arise!" And the lad came to life and arose. "And He gave him to his mother" (Luke 7:12-15).

Furthermore, the Lord also resurrected Lazarus at Bethany. Four days he lay dead in his tomb. His sisters were weeping. All his relatives were weeping. Even the Lord began to weep. And Jesus cried out: "Lazarus, come out!" And "the dead man

came out" (John 11). And the Lord released him alive, to go to his sisters.

Whom else did the Lord resurrect? Himself. He resurrected from the tomb on the third day after His death, just as He had prophesied. And His disciples "rejoiced when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20). What human soul, thirsty for life would not rejoice in the Lord, the Resurrected One who also resurrects!

Thus did the almighty Lord Jesus confirm His words and His promise concerning the resurrection with actual deeds.

The holy apostles made the event of the Messiah's resurrection from the dead the foundation of their preaching of the gospel.

And all their personal hope and all their unwavering courage in the face of death drew strength and nourishment from that glorious event. One of them, who initially persecuted Christ's Church but later saw the living, risen Lord, wrote:

"Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can any of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men the most unfortunate" (I Cor. 15:12, 19). But Christ did rise from the dead, and he also confirmed our resurrection; and He made us who believe in Him the most fortunate of all men.

The Lord died and resurrected to prove and demonstrate our own resurrection from the dead. With His resurrection an inextinguishable flame of faith was kindled forever

in the hearts of men, that they too would be resurrected. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all return to life" (I Cor. 15:22). And should some present-day Sarah laugh and say: "This is difficult to believe;" answer her and tell her: "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

Long ago in ancient times a prophet saw and prophesied how "those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

Yet another prophet, before this one, looked and saw in a vision a great valley, filled to overflowing with the dry bones of the dead. And he looked and he saw, how at the voice of God there was a great quake, and the dry bones began to gather and assemble. And staring he saw how the dry bones began to be covered with flesh and interwoven with sinews. And God commanded, and the spirit of life entered into them. And the prophet saw how the bodies of men came to live and stood upon their feet. "It was an exceedingly great host" (Ezek. 37).

These are the visions and prophesies of the righteous prophets of God. But the reality of these visions and the fulfillment of these prophesies came from Christ and through Christ. As for those who still doubt and say that all this is impossible, answer and tell them:



St. Nikolaj Velimirovic
(1880-1956)

“For men this is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). Answer them in the words of the same One who resurrects. You will dispel their doubts, and you will save your brothers and sisters.

This is the faith of the right-believing and the vigilant. Those who have been led astray by the thinking of this world and those who have been lulled to sleep by the aroma of this world find it difficult to accept and keep this faith. Those whom the world decorates with scabs and blackens with the mire of this world do not incline their ear to the promise of God. But the right-believing believe in God’s word, and vigilantly await its fulfillment. They are sick of the lies of liars, and they are fed up with the shortcuts of falsehood. Therefore, the long paths of the Most High have become dear to them, and the great ways of the True One have become precious to them. On that long path He refreshes them with more and more confirmations of the good destination. Their greatest refreshment is the word of the Savior and Guide, who traversed their entire path as a man, and reached the destination, and saw the destination, and proclaimed great joy to them.

At the end of the shortcuts of liars there always sits the dragon; always that ancient serpent, who pushed the first ancestor of our race out of Paradise. But at the end of the long path of truth waits the King and Father, the Comforter who resurrects. This gladdens the right believing and the vigilant. And they share their gladness with their brothers, their fellow wayfarers, the children of the Great King.

This is your faith, O Christ-bearers, the faith of your right-believing and vigilant forefathers. Let it also be the faith of your children, from generation to generation, to the end of the journey, to the blessed end. This is the salvation-bearing Orthodox Faith, which has never been put to shame. Truly, this is the faith of the truly chosen people, of those who bear the image of God in themselves. At the Judgment of Christ, on the Great Day, they shall not be saddened, but shall receive life and be called blessed.



THE APOSTLES ON HERETICS

Therefore, let us be strengthened against the heretics. Let us prepare for the noise of battle against the false accusers. Let us work hard and struggle continuously against them, until we cast them out. Let us speak openly to the sons of perdition: “Where is the Man Whom the soldiers guarded and over Whom your seals kept watch? Where has He been stolen away? Where has He been raised up? Who stole Him? Who raised Him up? Was He stolen from the tomb? How, from the firmament of heaven, did He send a message to us and say to us: ‘Do not fear. They shall not overcome you. For I say to you, I am not separated from you; I am with you, and no one is against you.’”

LOVE THY ENEMIES: THE TEACHING OF ST. SILOUAN

By Jean-Claude Larchet, reprinted from “In Communion” (issue 8, Pascha 1997)

Although it is natural and usual to love those who love us and to do good to those who do good to us (Mt 5:46-47; Lk 6:32-33), to love our enemies is distasteful to our nature. One can say that it isn’t in our power but is an attitude that can only be the fruit of grace, given by the Holy Spirit. This is why St. Silouan the Athonite writes, “The soul that has not known the Holy Spirit does not understand how one can love one’s enemies, and does not accept it.”

The Staretz repeatedly says that love of enemies is impossible without grace: “Lord, You have given the commandment to love enemies, but this is difficult for us sinners if Your grace is not with us”; “Without God’s grace we cannot love enemies”; “He who does not love his enemies, does not have God’s grace”; “He who has not learned to love from the Holy Spirit, will certainly not pray for his enemies.” On the contrary, St. Silouan always teaches that this attitude is a gift of the Holy Spirit: “The Lord has commanded us to love our enemies, and the Holy Spirit reveals this love to us”; “One can only love one’s enemies through the grace of the Holy Spirit”; “When you will love your enemies, know that a great divine grace will be living in you.”

This grace does not suddenly erupt in the soul, but rather shows itself in a divine pedagogy, where taking into account the weakness and the difficulties of man, the Holy Spirit progressively teaches him to love and teaches him all the attitudes and ways which will allow him to do so. “The Holy Spirit teaches us to love even our enemies”; “The Holy Spirit teaches the soul a profound love for man and compassion for the lost. The Lord had pity for those who were lost. . . . The Holy Spirit teaches this same compassion for those who go to hell”; “I could not speak about it if the Holy Spirit had not taught me this love”; “The Lord taught me love of enemies. . . . The Holy Spirit taught [me] to love.”

The grace of the Holy Spirit shows to him who possesses it the way to love his enemies. But it also reveals to him the foundation of this love: the love of God for all people and His will to save them: “No man can know by himself what divine love is if the Holy Spirit does not instruct him; but in our Church divine love is known through the Holy Spirit, and that is why we speak about it.” Grace also “gives man the capacity and the strength to love his enemies, and the Spirit of God gives us the strength to love them.”

Staretz Silouan insists that because love of enemies is a fruit of grace, it is essentially through prayer that it can be obtained. Several times he urges us to “ask the Lord with our whole being to give us the strength to love all men.” He also advises to pray to the Mother of God and the Saints: “If we are incapable [of loving our enemies] and if we are without

love, let us turn with ardent prayers to the Lord, to His Most Pure Mother, and to all the Saints, and the Lord will help us with everything, He whose love for us knows no bounds.” The Staretz confesses that he himself constantly prays God for this: “I continuously beg the Lord to give me the love of enemies. . . Day and night I ask the Lord for this love. The Lord gives me tears and I weep for the whole world.” Wishing in his universal love for all men to receive such a gift, he links them to himself in his prayer: “Lord, teach us through Your Holy Spirit to love our enemies and to pray for them with tears . . . Lord, as you prayed for your enemies, so teach us also, through the Holy Spirit, to love our enemies.”

Yet obtaining the grace to love one’s enemies presupposes other conditions.

The love of enemies is completely bound to the love of God: we have seen that the principal foundation for the love of enemies is the love that God shows to all His creatures equally and His will that all people should be saved, and Christ gave us a perfect example of such love throughout his earthly life. The love of God leads man to accomplish His will and to imitate Him as much as possible, and so also to love his enemies. The Staretz also notes that he who does not love his enemies shows that he has not learned from the Holy Spirit to love God.

To love one’s enemies is also tightly bound to humility. The Staretz often associates these two virtues. Almost all the difficulties we encounter in loving our enemies are linked with pride: it is from pride that flows the affliction that follows upon insults, hatred, bad temper, spite, the desire for revenge, contempt for one’s neighbor, refusing to forgive him and to be reconciled with him.

Pride excludes the love of enemies and love of enemies excludes pride: “If we love our enemies, pride will have no place in our soul.” The fact that humility goes hand in hand with love of enemies proves the presence of grace and the authenticity of love: “If you have compassion for all creatures and love your enemies, and if, at the same time, you judge yourself the worst of all people, this shows that the great grace of the Lord is in you.”

Indeed humility is the indispensable condition to receive and keep the grace that teaches us to love our enemies and gives us the strength to do so. The Staretz advises: “Humiliate yourself, then grace will teach you.” On the other hand, “pride makes us lose grace. . . . The soul is then tormented by bad thoughts and does not understand that one must humiliate oneself and love one’s enemies, for without that one cannot please God.”

The Staretz sometimes also stresses the role played by penitence in connection with humility. “Regard yourself the worst of men,” he advises. This is an attitude of great humility that of its nature implies penitence. He who counts himself the worst of men necessarily thinks others better than himself; he will judge and blame himself, and not judge and criticize his enemies, for he tends to estimate them better than himself.

The Staretz also gives us the example of another penitential attitude -- asking God’s forgiveness each time one has not loved

one’s enemy: “If I judge someone or look at him angrily, my tears dry up and I fall into despondency; and again I start asking the Lord to forgive me, and the merciful Lord forgives me, a sinner. “Through such an attitude, by which the soul humbly recognizes before God its faults and shortcomings and obtains from Him forgiveness, an opening can be made that becomes bigger and bigger for grace and unceasing progress in love. As to a total absence of compassion for enemies, it shows the presence and the action of an evil spirit; sincere repentance is the only way to be freed from it.”

The insistence on prayer, humility and penitence shows that, although St. Silouan recognizes a determining role to the action of grace in acquiring love of enemies, he does not neglect the role played by the efforts that man makes. The Staretz is very conscious of the importance of the initial action; this is why he says, “I beg you, try,” and states, “In the beginning, force your heart to love your enemies.” The efforts one makes must manifest themselves in a general way in a straight intention and constant good will, stretched toward the realization of God’s command. God will not fail to respond.

For the person who feels discouraged by such a demanding task, St. Silouan reassures him: “Seeing your good intention, the Lord will help you in everything.” The Staretz who felt in himself so acutely human powerlessness and weakness seems to think constantly of these words of the Apostle: “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13) and witnesses in his own experience the mighty help that everyone can receive from God.

For Christ there are no enemies!

The Staretz would say that for Christ there are no enemies -- there are those who accept “the words of eternal life,” there are those who reject and even crucify; but for the Creator of every living thing, there can be no enemy. So it should be for the Christian, too, who “in pity for all must strive for the salvation of all.”

Wherein, then, lies the force of the commandment, “Love your enemies”? Why did the Lord say that those who keep His commandments would know from very experience whence the doctrine?

. . . . God is love, in superabundance embracing all creatures. By allowing man to actually know this love the Holy Spirit reveals to him the path of fullness of being. To say “enemy” implies rejection. By such rejection a man falls from the plenitude of God. . . .”The whole paradise of Saints lives by the Holy Spirit, and from the Holy Spirit nothing in creation is hid,” writes the Staretz. “God is love and in the Saints the Holy Spirit is love. Dwelling in the Holy Spirit, the saints behold love and embrace it, too, in their love.”

. . . .[It] is possible to judge whether a given state of contemplation was a reality or an illusion only after the soul had returned to consciousness of the world; for then, as the Staretz pointed out, if there were no love for enemies and so for all creatures, it would be a true indication that the supposed contemplation had not been a real communion with God.

THE CUP OF CHRIST

By St. Ignatii Brianchaniov, from "Saint Ignatii Brianchaniov, vol. 1, p. 544.

Two beloved disciples asked the Lord for thrones of glory. He gave them His cup. (Matt. 20:23) The Cup of Christ is suffering. To those who drink from it on earth, the Cup of Christ grants participation in Christ's Kingdom of grace; it prepares for them the thrones of eternal glory in heaven.

We stand in silence before the Cup of Christ, nor can any man complain about it or reject it; for He who commanded us to taste it, first drank of it Himself. O tree of the knowledge of good and evil! You killed our ancestors in Paradise, you deceived them by the delusions of sensual pleasure and the delusions of reason. Christ, the Redeemer of the fallen, brought His Cup of salvation into this world, to the fallen and to those who are exiled from Paradise. The bitterness of this Cup cleanses the heart from forbidden, destructive and sinful pleasure; through the humility flowing from it in abundance, pride of understanding on the carnal level is mortified. To him who drinks from the Cup with faith and patience, the eternal life which was and still is lost to him by his tasting of forbidden fruit will be restored.

"I will accept the Cup of Christ, the cup of salvation." (Psalm 116:13) The cup is accepted when a Christian bears earthly tribulation in the spirit of humility learned from the Gospel. Saint Peter turned swiftly with a naked sword to defend the God-man, who was surrounded by evil doers; but the meek Jesus said to Peter: "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup My Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11) So you too, when disaster surrounds you, should comfort and strengthen your soul, saying: "The Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

The Cup is bitter: at first sight all human reasoning is confounded. Surmount reason by faith and drink courageously from the bitter Cup: it is the Father who gives it to you, He who is all good and all wise. It is neither the Pharisees, nor Caiaphas, nor Judas who prepared the Cup; it is neither Pilate nor his soldiers who gave it! "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

The Pharisees think evil, Judas betrays, Pilate orders the unlawful killing, the soldiers of the government execute his order. Through their evil deeds all these prepared their own true perdition. Do not prepare for yourself just such a perdition by remembering evil, by longing for and dreaming of revenge, and by indignation against your enemies. The heavenly Father is almighty and all-seeing: He sees your afflictions, and if He had found it necessary and profitable to withdraw the Cup from you, He certainly would have done so.

The Lord as the Scriptures and Church history testify has often allowed afflictions to befall His beloved, and often warded off afflictions from them, in accordance with the unfathomable ways of Providence. When you are faced with the Cup, turn your gaze from the people who give it to you; lift your eyes to

Heaven and say: "The Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

I will take the cup of salvation. I cannot reject the Cup, the promise of heavenly and eternal good. The apostle of Christ teaches me patience when he says: "...we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) How can one reject the Cup which is the means of attaining this Kingdom and growing within it? I will accept the Cup the gift of God. The Cup of Christ is the gift of God. The great Paul writes to the Philippians, "For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Phil. 1:29)

You receive the Cup which seemingly comes from the hand of man. What is it to you whether the bearer of the Cup acts righteously or unrighteously? As a follower of Jesus, your concern is to act righteously; to receive the Cup with thanksgiving to God and with a living faith; and courageously to drink it to the dregs. In receiving the Cup from man, remember it is the Cup of Him who is not only innocent but all-holy. Thinking on this, remind yourself and other suffering sinners of the words that the blessed and enlightened thief spoke when he was crucified on the right hand of the crucified God-man: "We receive the due reward of our deeds... Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy Kingdom." (Luke 23: 41 & 42) And then, turning to the people, you will say to them: "Blessed are you who are instruments of the righteousness and of the mercy of God, blessed are you henceforth and forever more!" (If they are not in a fit state to understand and receive your words, do not cast your precious pearls of humility under the feet of those who cannot value them, but say these words in thought and heart.) By this alone will you fulfill the commandment of the Gospel which says: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you..." (Matt. 5:44)

Pray to the Lord, on behalf of those who have insulted and outraged you, that what they have done for you should be repaid by a temporal blessing and eternal reward of salvation, and that when they stand before Christ to be judged, it should be counted to them as if it had been an act of virtue. Although your heart does not wish to act in this way, compel it to do so: because only those who do violence to their own heart in fulfilling the commandments of the Gospel can inherit Heaven. If you have not the will to act this way, then you have not the will to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look deep within yourself; consider searchingly: have you not found another teacher, the teacher of hatred the devil and fallen under his power?

It is a terrible transgression to offend or to oppress one's neighbor: it is a most terrible transgression to commit murder. But whoever hates his oppressor, his slanderer, his betrayer, his murderer, and whoever thinks ill of them and takes revenge on them, commits a sin very near to their sin. In vain does he pretend to himself and others that he is righteous. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer of man, proclaimed Saint John, the beloved disciple of Christ. (I John 3:15)

[continued on pg. 11]

Τὸ Μέλος τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδος κατὰ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρο Παπαδιαμάντη

Τοῦ Παναγιώτη Α. Ανδριόπουλου



Τὴν Μεγάλη Παρασκευὴ ὁ ὑμνωδός, ἐκστατικὸς πρὸ τοῦ μεγαλείου τῆς θυσίας τοῦ Θεανθρώπου, ἀναφωνεῖ: «Ποῖα ἄσματα μέλῳ τῆ σῆ ἐξόδῳ, οἰκτίρμων;» Ἡ ποίηση καὶ ἡ μουσικὴ τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδος εἶναι σίγουρα ἡ κορύφωση τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ὑμνογραφίας, πού προσφέρει στὸν ἄνθρωπο τὴν δυνατότητα βιώσεως τῆς σιωπῆς, τὴν δυνατότητα βιώσεως τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς ἀνακεφαλαίωσης τῆς σωτηρίας ἀνθρώπου καὶ κόσμου, μέσα ἀπὸ τὴ λατρεία. Τὸ «σήμερον» τῆς θείας λατρείας, «σήμερον ὁ Χριστὸς παραγίνεται ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ Φαρισαίου», «σήμερον κρεμάται ἐπὶ ξύλου», «τὴν σήμερον μυστικῶς ὁ Μέγας Μωϋσῆς προδιετυποῦτο», αὐτὴ ἡ ἀμεσότητα, ἡ παροντοποίηση τῶν σωτηριωδῶν γεγονότων πού συνδέονται μὲ τὰ Πάθη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πραγματοποιεῖται μὲ τὰ δρώμενα πού προβλέπονται ἀπὸ τὸ Τυπικὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας -- λιτάνευση τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ Νυμφίου, τοῦ Σταυροῦ, τοῦ Ἐπιταφίου -- ἀλλὰ κυρίως μὲ τὸ βασικότερο μέσον τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μας λατρείας, τὸν λόγο τοῦ ὕμνου, καὶ τὸ μουσικὸ ἔνδυμά του. Ὁ θεολογικὸς καὶ πατερικὸς λόγος, γίνεται ποιητικὸς, γίνεται φωνὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, περιβεβλημένος, μάλιστα τὸ ἔλκυστικὸ ἔνδυμα τῆς μελωδίας.

Ἡ μελωδία ὑπάρχει γιὰ τὸν Λόγο, καὶ ὄχι ὡς αὐθυπόστατο καλλιτεχνικὸ μέσο. Σκοπὸς τῆς δὲν εἶναι ἡ τέρψη ἢ ἡ συναισθηματικὴ διέγερση -- τὴ Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδᾳ ἰδιαίτερα ἐλλοχεύει ὁ κίνδυνος τοῦ μεγάλου συναισθηματισμοῦ -- ἀλλὰ ἡ ὑποβοήθηση τοῦ λόγου νὰ διεισδύσει στὰ βάθη τῆς υπάρξεως, δημιουργώντας διάθεση προσευχητικῆ, κατάνυξη καὶ αὐτομεμψία. Δὲν εἶναι μουσικὴ ἀκροάματος, ἀλλὰ λειτουργικὴ. Διακονεῖ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ ἔνσαρκου Λόγου, ἐπενδύοντας τὸν θεολογικὸ λόγο, γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ τὸ σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας νὰ «πλέκει» στὸν Θεὸ Λόγο «ἐκ λόγων μελωδιαν». Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν βρῆκαν στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Λατρεία ποτὲ θέση τὰ μουσικὰ ὄργανα. Στὴν Ἐκκλησία, «ὄργανο» γλυκύφθογγο τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος γίνεται ὁ πιστός, μὲ τὴν καθαρὴ καρδιά του. «Αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ψαλτήριον γενόμενος», ὅπως λέει ὁ Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος. Ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ ἄλλες νεωτερίζουσες μορφὲς ἀποδόσεως τῶν ὕμνων ἔχουν θέση στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Λατρεία.

Ὁ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης, ἐραστὴς τῆς γνήσιας Βυζαντινῆς μουσικῆς, προβαίνει σὲ διάφορα ἔργα του (ἄρθρα, διηγήματα, «ἀποσπάσματα σκέψεων») στὴν διατύπωση καίριων παρατηρήσεων γιὰ τὸ μέλος τῆς Μ. Ἑβδομάδος.

Στὰ 1893 ἔγραψε σὲ ἀθηναϊκὴ ἐφημερίδα γιὰ τὸ περιόνυμο τροπάριον τῆς Κασσιανῆς: «Κύριε, ἡ ἐν πολλαῖς ἀμαρτίαις περιπεσοῦσα γυνή...».

«...Ὅσω λαμπρὸν καὶ ὑψηλὸν ἀπὸ ἄποψιν ποιήσεως, τοσοῦτω περιπαθὲς κ' ἐν σεμνότητι εὐστροφον ὑπὸ ἔποψιν μέλους. Μέλος δ' ἡμεῖς ἐννοοῦμεν τὸ Βυζαντινόν, διότι ἡ ποίησις καὶ ὁ ρυθμὸς αὐτὸς τοῦ τροπαρίου, ὡς καὶ ὄλων τῶν τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδος, ἔχει τονισθεῖ ὑπὸ ἀρχαιοτάτου μουσικοσυνθέτου, συνδυάσαντος τὸν ρυθμὸν τῶν στίχων μὲ τοῦ μέλους τὴν ἀφελῆ χάριν. Δὲν χωρεῖ λοιπὸν εἰς ταῦτα οὐδεὶς νεωτερισμὸς, οὐδεμία καινοτομία τετραφωνικὴ ἢ πολυφωνία, ὡς τὴν σήμερον ἀποπειρῶνται τοῦτο καινοτόμοι τινές. Δὲν εἶνε δυνατόν νὰ τονίσῃ τις σήμερον αὐτὸ καλλίτερον ἢ ὁ ποιητὴς τοῦ τροπαρίου ὁ καὶ μελοποιὸς τυγχάνων. Ὡστε κατὰ τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦλάχιστον ταύτας ἄφετε τὴν μονοφωνίαν τῆς Βυζαντινῆς καὶ μὴ μιγνύετε ἐν αὐτῇ ξενισμούς, οἵτινες δὲν εἶνε ἄλλο παρά αὐτόχρομα βεβήλωσις τοῦ ἀγνοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ μέλους...»

Ἡ Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδᾳ εἶναι ἴσως ἡ σημαντικότερη περίοδος τοῦ Λειτουργικοῦ ἔτους. Τὰ σωτηριώδη γεγονότα εἶναι φρικτά. Οἱ ὕμνοι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὀδηγοῦν τοὺς πιστοὺς σὲ κατάνυξη καὶ συντριβή. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ μέλος πρέπει νὰ εἶναι σεμνοπρεπές, λιτό, ἀλλὰ ταυτόχρονα καὶ δυναμικὸ, ὥστε νὰ δεσπόζει μέσα στὴ λατρεία. Ἀξίζει νὰ σημειωθεῖ ὅτι πολλὰ μέλη τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδος φέρουν, στὰ μουσικὰ χειρόγραφα, τὴν ἐνδειξὴ «μέλος ἀρχαῖον». Κι αὐτὸ τὸ μέλος μας πάει πολὺ πίσω καὶ μᾶς συνδέει μὲ ἤχους κι ἐποχὲς βυζαντινῆς καὶ, γιατί ὄχι, ἴσως καὶ πρωτοχριστιανικῆς, καθὼς πολλὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἐκκλησίας διασώζονται μέχρι σήμερα στὴν Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδᾳ, ὅπως π.χ. τὰ ἀντίφωνα τῆς Μεγάλης Παρασκευῆς.

Στηριζόμενος ὁ Σκιαθίτης στὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ καὶ μουσικὴ μας παράδοση ὑποστηρίζει ὅτι σὲ κάθε ἀρχαία καὶ σεμνὴ μουσικὴ «τὸ μέλος ἀνάσσει, ὁ δὲ ρυθμὸς ὑπουργεῖ». Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης περιγράφει μὲ ἐνθεο ζήλο τὴν μοναδικότητα τῆς Ἀκολουθίας τῆς Μεγάλης Παρασκευῆς:

«...Ἀλλὰ μετὰ προσοχῆς κατόπιν παρακολουθήσατε τοὺς ἀπαραμίλλους τῶν μελωδῶν ὕμνους ψαλλομένους ἐξόχως κατασκευαστικὰ, οἵτινες καὶ ὡς ποίησις καὶ ὡς μέλος θά παραμείνωσιν ἐσαεὶ ἀθάνατα μνημεῖα τῆς Βυζαντινῆς μουσικῆς. Ἡ τῆς Μεγάλης Παρασκευῆς ἀκολουθία εἶνε ἡ μόνη ἣτις περιλαμβάνει τόσην ποικιλίαν τροπαρίων ἀρμονικῶς καὶ μετὰ σπανίας χάριτος ἐναλλασσομένων τῶν ὀκτῶ ἤχων, οἵτινες ὅλοι ἀπόψε ψάλλουσιν ἐκθάμβως καὶ ἐπλημένως ὑπὲρ τῆς Βυζαντινῆς μουσικῆς τὸν πειστικώτερον τῶν ρητορικῶν λόγων. Τὰ λεγόμενα Ἀντίφωνα σεμνοπρεπῆ καὶ κατανύττοντα, ἀναφερόμενα δὲ εἰς τὰ Πάθη τοῦ Σωτῆρος καθιστῶσι μελωδικωτάτην καὶ λίαν ἐπαγωγὸν τὴν ἀκολουθίαν ταύτην, δεξιότατα ποικιλλόντα εἰς ρυθμούς καὶ ἤχους καὶ μεταπίπτοντα ἐν μαγευτικῇ ἀντιθέσει ἀπὸ τοῦ χρωματικοῦ εἰς τὸ διατονικόν.

Μετὰ τὸ τέλος τοῦ ἐξοχωτέρου τῶν τροπαρίων «Σήμερον κρεμάται ἐπὶ ξύλου» ψάλλονται εἰς φαιδρὸν ἤχον δ' οἱ

Μακαρισμοί, διότι ἐν τούτοις μεγάλην χαράν αισθανόμενος ὁ μελωδός χαίρει ὅτι διὰ τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων ἐσώθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ μετ' εὐφροσύνης ἀνακράζει: «Ἐσταυρώθης δι' ἐμέ, ἵνα ἐμοὶ πηγάζης τὴν ἄφεςιν, ἐλογχέυθης τὴν πλευράν, ἵνα κρουνούς ἀφέσεως ἀναβλύσης μοι»».

Οἱ ἀκολουθίες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, διακρίνονται γιὰ τὴν ἔξαρση τὴν κατανυκτικὴν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν σεμνὴ μεγαλοπρέπειά τους. Οἱ ὕμνοι τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδος εἶναι γλυκεῖς, χωρὶς νὰ διέπονται ἀπὸ ὅποιονδήποτε συναισθηματισμὸν, εἶναι ἀβίαστοι ρυθμοὺ καὶ μέλους, χωρὶς αὐτὸ νὰ σημαίνει ὅτι δὲν ἀπαιτοῦν τὴν δέουσα προσοχὴ ἀπὸ τοὺς ψάλτες, εἶναι περιπαθεῖς, χωρὶς βέβαια νὰ ἐξάπτουν τὰ γῆινα πάθη, ἀλλὰ νὰ διεγείρουν πρὸς πόθον τοῦ Πάθους τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι ποιητικότεροι, ἀλλὰ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα εἶναι θεόπνευστοι.

Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης χαρακτηρίζει τοὺς ὕμνους τοῦ Ἐπιταφίου ὡς «παθητικὰ ἄσματα». Ἀκριβῶς διότι βιώνει τὸν λόγο τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰγνατίου τοῦ Θεοφόρου: «ὁ ἐμός ἔρωσ ἐσταύρωται». Καὶ μαζί με τὸν ἄνθρωπο πάσχει καὶ ἡ φύσις «ἐν Σταυρῷ καθορῶσα τὸν Κύριον». Γιὰ τὸν Παπαδιαμάντη τὴν ὥρα τοῦ Ἐπιταφίου «καὶ ἡ θάλασσα φλοισβίζουσα καὶ μορμύρουσα παρά τὸν αἰγιαλὸν ἐπαναλάμβανε “οἶμοι γλυκύτατε Ἰησοῦ!”»

Ἐξαιρετικὰ σημαντικὲς εἶναι καὶ οἱ παρατηρήσεις τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη γιὰ τὸν τρόπο τῆς ἐμμελοῦς ἀπαγγελίας τῶν ἀναγνωσμάτων ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱερεῖς καὶ τοὺς ψάλτες. Στὸ θέμα αὐτὸ σήμερα παρατηρεῖται μεγάλη ἀκαταστασία καὶ σύγχυση λόγῳ ἄγνοιας ἢ ἐπιδειξιομανίας. Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης εἶναι πεπεισμένος ὅτι διὰ τοῦ λογαοιδικοῦ τρόπου τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μουσικῆς «κατέστησαν γνωριμώτερα εἰς τὰς ἀκοάς καὶ τὰ λόγια τῶν θείων Εὐαγγελίων, ὡς καὶ τοῦ Ἀποστόλου. Ὁ λογαοιδικὸς οὗτος τρόπος τῆς ἀπαγγελίας, εἶναι ἀρχαιότατος ἐν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ εἶναι γνησίως Ἑλληνικός, ὅπως φαίνεται καὶ εἰς τὰ παλαιὰ δράματα. Ὁ τρόπος οὗτος τῆς ἀπαγγελίας, διὰ τῆς παρατάσεως ὄλων μὲν τῶν συλλαβῶν, ἀλλὰ μάλιστα τῆς καταλήξεως ἐκάστης περιόδου ἢ ἐκάστου κώλου, σημαίνει καὶ μιμεῖται τὸ κήρυγμα, ἤτοι τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ κήρυκος, καὶ ἀνταποκρίνεται εἰς τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “κηρύξατε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον πάση τῇ κτίσει”. Ἐθίζεται δὲ ν' ἀπαγγέληται ὁ μὲν Ἀπόστολος μετὰ τινὸς ποικιλίας τόνων καὶ φθόγγων, τὸ δὲ Εὐαγγέλιον ἀπλούστερον καὶ ὅλως ἀπερίττως».

Ἦδη ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη ἐμφανίσθησαν κάποιοι «καινοτόμοι» ἱερεῖς, οἱ ὅποιοι «κατήργησαν αὐθαιρέτως τὸν λογαοιδικὸν τρόπον καὶ ἀπαγγέλλουσιν τὰς περικοπὰς τῶν θείων ρημάτων δι' ἀπλῆς ἀναγνώσεως.

Εἰς τοὺς τοιοῦτους ἱερεῖς πρέπει ν' ἀπαγορευθῇ ἀρμοδίως ἢ καινοτομία αὕτη».

Γιὰ τὸν Παπαδιαμάντη πρωτοτυπία στὶς τέχνες τῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς παραδόσεως, στὶς λειτουργικὲς τέχνες, σημαίνει νὰ μὲνει κανεὶς πιστὸς στοὺς πρώτους τύπους τῆς τέχνης αὐτῆς. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία γιὰ τὸν Παπαδιαμάντη ἔχει ἕνα παραδεδεγμένο τύπο, τὸν ὁποῖον κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ παραβεῖ «ἀποινεῖ», ἀφοῦ «ρητῶς ἀπαγορεύεται πᾶσα καινοτομία εἴτε εἰς τὴν ἀρχιτεκτονικὴν καὶ γραφικὴν καὶ τὴν λοιπὴν τῶν ναῶν διακόσμησιν, εἴτε εἰς τὴν μουσικὴν καὶ τὴν ἄλλην λατρείαν».

Ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρου, κατὰ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς Μ. Ἑβδομάδος, εἶναι πατερικὸς καὶ προτρεπτικός. Καὶ σήμερα ἐπικαιρὸς καὶ οὐσιαστικός: «... Ἄς ἀρθῶμεν ἀπὸ

τῆς σήμερον ὑπὸ τῶν θείων τοῦ Νυμφίου μολπῶν ὑπὲρ τὸ ὑλιστικὸν πεδίου, ἐφ' οὗ τὸν λοιπὸν βιοῦμεν χρόνον, καὶ κατανυσσόμενοι καὶ ἐνοῦντες τὴν φωνὴν τῆς ψυχῆς μας εἰς τοὺς λυρικοὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὕμνους τοῦ κατακληλῶντας ἡμᾶς διὰ τῆς γλυκυτάτης βυζαντινῆς μούσας των, ἃς ἐνωτισθῶμεν τὴν μελαγχολικὴν κ' ἐμπνέουσιν ἀκολουθίαν τοῦ Νυμφίου, ἐπιλαθόμενοι τοῦ γῆϊνου κόσμου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ συναδελφούμενοι. Εἰσέλθωμεν εἰς τοὺς ναοὺς καὶ ἴδωμεν ἄλλον κόσμον, κόσμον

Οὐράνιον. Ἐνωθῶμεν τοῦλάχιστον πνευματικῶς ἐκεῖ εἰς τὰς Ἐκκλησίας, γινόμενοι ὅλοι ἀδελφοί, ὅλοι ἴσοι ἀπέναντι τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου. Ἐκεῖ πρὸ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου ἃς σιγήσουν τὰ πάθη, καὶ ἃς ὁμιλήσῃ ἡ καρδιά, καὶ ἃς ἀκουσθῇ ἡ φωνὴ τῆς συνειδήσεως...».



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἐκδοσὴ τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἃς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντες κατὰ περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».



**Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης
(1851 - 1911)**

Ἀσάλευτο Θεμέλιο

Τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου



Φώτης Κόντογλου (Αἰβαλί, Κυδωνιές Μ. Ἀσίας 1899 - Ἀθήνα 1965): Μεγάλη μορφή τῆς νεοελληνικῆς ζωγραφικῆς καὶ τῶν γραμμάτων. Μεγάλωσε στὴ Μονὴ τῆς Ἁγίας Παρασκευῆς Κυδωνιῶν καὶ ἔτσι ἀνατράφηκε μὲ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ μέσα στὸ ζωντανὸ περιβάλλον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Μετὰ τὴν ἀποφοίτησή του ἀπὸ τὸ Γυμνάσιο τοῦ Αἰβαλίου ἦρθε στὴν Ἀθήνα ὅπου ἔγινε δεκτὸς στὴν Ἀνωτάτη Σχολὴ Καλῶν Τεχνῶν Ἀθηνῶν (Α.Σ.Κ.Τ.).

Τὸ 1914 ταξίδεψε στὴ Γαλλία καὶ

τὴν Ἰσπανία καὶ τὸ 1919 ξαναγύρισε στὸ Αἰβαλί καὶ δίδαξε ὡς καθηγητὴς τῆς Ἱστορίας τῆς Τέχνης στὸ Παρθεναιωγεῖο. Τὸ 1922, μετὰ τὴν Μικρασιατικὴ καταστροφή, πῆγε στὴν Μυτιλήνη καὶ ὕστερα στὴν Ἀθήνα. Ὑπῆρξε ὁ εἰσηγητὴς ἐνὸς προσωπικοῦ καλλιτεχνικοῦ ιδιώματος στὴ θρησκευτικὴ ζωγραφικὴ, στὸ ὁποῖο συνδυάζονται ἡ βυζαντινὴ παράδοση μὲ τὰ θέματα ἀπὸ τὴν σύγχρονη ζωή. Ἐπαίξε καθοριστικὸ ρόλο στὴ στροφὴ τῆς ἀγιογραφίας τῶν ναῶν πρὸς τὴν βυζαντινὴ παράδοση. Ἡ πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν ἔστειλε στὴν Πατρίδα μας γιὰ νὰ ἀναγεννήσει μὲσω τῆς ἀγιογραφίας καὶ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ του λόγου τὴν ἐλπίδα γιὰ τὴν αἰώνια ζωή, πού φέρνει τὸ γνήσιο ἐκκλησιαστικὸ βίωμα.

Ἐγραψε μυθιστορήματα, πεζά, ποιήματα, ταξιδιωτικὲς ἐντυπώσεις, αἰσθητικὲς μελέτες καὶ μία μελέτη γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ ἀγιογραφία μὲ τὸν τίτλο «Ἐκφρασις». Ὡς ἀγιογράφος ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς συγγραφέας, «ἔργω καὶ λόγῳ», κήρυξε γιὰ τὴν θεολογικὴ ἀξία τῆς εἰκόνας ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς τέχνης. Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, συνέβαλε σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ μὲ τὸ ἔργο του στὴν διατήρησιν τῆς Ἑλληνορθόδοξης Παράδοσής μας. Γιὰ τὸν Κόντογλου ἡ εἰκονογραφία, ὅπως καὶ ἡ μουσικὴ ἢ ἡ ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ εἶναι λειτουργικὴ, πνευματικὴ καὶ μαρτυρεῖ τὴν ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπὸ αὐτὸν τὸν φθαρτὸ κόσμον. Ὁ Κόντογλου πιστεύει καὶ διακηρύσσει ὅτι ἡ λατρευτικὴ ζωὴ στὸ χῶρον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀποτελεῖ τὸν θετικὸ καὶ ἀπλὸ τρόπο κοινωνίας μὲ τὸν Θεό. Μέσα στὴν λατρεία βρίσκουν καταφυγὴ οἱ πονεμένες ψυχὲς τῶν πιστῶν καὶ προσφέρουν «θυσία αἰνέσεως» στὸν Κύριό τους.

Τὸ παρὸν κείμενον εἶναι παρμένο ἀπὸ τὰ 16 μικρὰ ἀφηνιστικὰ κείμενά του στὸ ὁμώνυμον βιβλίον «Ἀσάλευτο Θεμέλιο».

Σήμερα νομίζεται καλὸς σὲ ὅλα, ὅποιος εἶναι ἀδιάφορος, ὅποιος δὲν νοιάζεται γιὰ τίποτα, ὅποιος δὲν νιώθει καμιά εὐθύνη. Ἀλλιῶς τὸν λένε σωβινιστὴ, τοπικιστὴ, μισαλλόδοξο, φανατικὸ. Ὅποιος ἀγαπᾷ τὴν χώρα μας, τὰ ἦθη καὶ ἔθιμά μας, τὴν παράδοσή μας, τὴν γλῶσσα μας, θεωρεῖται ὀπισθοδρομικὸς. Οἱ ἀδιάφοροι παιρνοῦν γιὰ φιλελεύθεροι ἄνθρωποι, γιὰ ἄνθρωποι πού ζοῦνε μὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, πού ἔχουν γιὰ πιστεύω τὴν καλοπέραση, τὸ εὐκολο

κέρδος, τὶς εὐκολίες, τὶς ἀναπαύσεις, κι ἄς μὴν ἀπομείνει τίποτα πού νὰ θυμίζει σὲ ποιὸ μέρος βρισκόμαστε, ἀπὸ πού κρατᾶμε, ποιοὶ ζήσανε πρὶν ἀπὸ μᾶς στὴν χώρα μας. Ἡ ξενομανία μας ἔγινε τώρα σωστὴ ξενοδολεῖα, σήμερα περνᾷ γιὰ ἀρετὴ, κι ὅποιος ἔχει τούτη τὴν ἀρρώστεια πὺ βαραῖ παρμένη, λογαριάζεται γιὰ σπουδαῖος ἄνθρωπος.

Ἡ Ἑλλάδα ἔγινε ἓνα παζάρι πού πουλιοῦνται ὅλα, σὲ ὅποιον θέλει νὰ τὸ ἀγοράσει. Καταντήσαμε νὰ μὴν ἔχουμε ἀπάνω μας τίποτα Ἑλληνικὸ, ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα μας ἴσαμε τὸ πνεῦμα μας. Τὸ μασκάρωμα ἄρχισε πρῶτα ἀπὸ τὸ πνεῦμα, καὶ ὕστερα ἔφθασε καὶ στὸ σῶμα. Περισσότερο ἀντιστάθηκε σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν παραμόρφωση ὁ λαὸς καὶ βαστάξε καμπόσο, μὰ στὸ τέλος τὸν πῆρε τὸ ρεῦμα καὶ πάει κι αὐτός. Μάλιστα εἶναι χειρότερος ἀπὸ τοὺς γραμματισμένους. Τώρα μαίμουδιζει τὰ φερσίματα καὶ τὶς κουβέντες πού βλέπει στὸν κινηματογράφο, ἔγινε ἀφιλότιμος καὶ ἀδιάντροπος. Ἐνῶ πρῶτα ξεχώριζε ἀπὸ ἄλλες φυλές, γιατί ἦταν σεμνός, φιλότιμος, ντροπαλός, καλοδεκτικός, τώρα ἔγινε ἀγνώριστος. Τὰ ὁμορφα χαρακτηριστικὰ του σβήνουνε μέρα μὲ τὴν μέρα. Καὶ οἱ λιγοστοὶ πού διατηροῦνε ἀκόμη λίγα σημάδια ἀπὸ τὴν ὁμορφιά τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ψυχῆς, παρασέρνονται σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν παραμόρφωση ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλούς, πού εἶναι οἱ ἐξυπνοὶ, οἱ συγχρονισμένοι, οἱ μοντέρνοι, ἀλλὰ πού εἶναι στ' ἀληθινὰ οἱ ἀναίσθητοι καὶ οἱ ἀποκτηνωμένοι. Οἱ καλοὶ ντρέπονται γιατί εἶναι καλοὶ, συμμαζεμένοι καὶ μὲ ἀνατροφή. Οἱ ἄλλοι τοὺς λένε καθυστερημένους. Συμπαθητικὸς ἄνθρωπος δύσκολα βρίσκεται πιά σήμερα στὸν τόπο μας. Ἡ μόδα εἶναι νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς ἀντιπαθητικὸς, κρύος, ἄνοστος καὶ μάγκας. Μάλιστα ὅπως ὅλα φραγκέψανε, φράγκεψε καὶ ὁ μάγκας.

Οἱ πὺ ἀγράμματοι ἀνακατώνουνε στὴν κουβέντα τους κάποια ἐγγλέζικα καὶ ἐκεῖ πού δὲν χρειάζονται. Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς γραμματισμένους, ὅλη ἡ γραμματοσύνη τους εἶναι νὰ μιλᾶνε ἐγγλέζικα καὶ σὲ λίγο καιρὸ δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχει Ἑλληνας νὰ μιλᾷ Ἑλληνικά. Ἄς καταργηθεῖ λοιπὸν ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα ὀλότελα, νὰ μὴν κουράζονται τὰ παιδιὰ μας στὴν ἄσκοπη ἐκμάθευσή της. Κοιτᾶχτε τὰ παιδιὰ μας. Παρατηρεῖστε τὶς φυσιογνωμίες τους, τὸ βλέμμα τους, τὶς κουβέντες τους, τὰ ἀστεῖα τους, τὰ παιχνίδια τους. Ὅλα μυρίζουνε... Ἑλλάδα, νὰ μὴν ἀβασκαθοῦμε! Τὸ μόνο πού ἀπόμεινε Ἑλληνικὸ εἶναι τὸ «ρέ». Τὸ μασκάρωμα γίνεται γοργὰ καὶ στὸ κορμὶ καὶ στὴν ψυχὴ. Οἱ λιγοστοὶ πού ἀντιστέκονται ἀκόμη σὲ αὐτὸν τὸν κατακλυσμὸ, πῶς νὰ μπορέσουνε νὰ βαστάξουνε; Γύρω τους βογγᾷ ἡ μεθυσμένη ἀνθρωποθάλασσα. Ἐρχεται καινούργιος κόσμος! Τὸ κολοσσαῖο μὲ τὰ οὐρλιάσματά του σκεπάζει τὶς ψαλμοδιὲς πού λένε οἱ μάρτυρες, περιμένοντας τὰ θηρία νὰ τοὺς φᾶνε.

Ἄλλὰ ἂν θὰ λείψουν οἱ Ἑλληνες ἀπὸ τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς γῆς, μήπως θὰ ἀπομείνουν τὰ βουνά, οἱ ἀκροθαλασσιές, οἱ θάλασσες, τὰ νησιά καὶ τὰ βράχια μὲ τὸν Ἑλληνικὸ χαρακτήρα τους; Καθόλου! Τὰ περισσότερα τὰ ἔχουνε ἀγοράσει ἄνθρωποι πού ἦρθαν ἀπὸ τὸν βόρειο Ὠκεανό, ἀπόγονοι τῶν Βικίγκων. Ἐκεῖνα τὰ κακόμοιρα νησιά

τί συμφορά ἔχουνε πάθει! Ἡ φτώχεια τους στάθηκε ἡ καταστροφή τους. Σήμερα τὰ ριμάζανε ἄλλοι κουρσάροι, πὸ ἐπικίνδυνον πὸ σφάζουνε μὲ τὸ μπαμπάκι. Σκλαβώσανε τὰ νησιά μὲ εὐγενικὸ τρόπο, μὲ τὸ χαμόγελο στὰ χεῖλη. Τὰ ἄσπρα σπιτάκια τῶν νησιωτῶν, πὸ ζούσανε σὲ αὐτὰ ἀπλοϊκοὶ καὶ συμμαζεμένοι ἄνθρωποι, θαρρεῖς πὸς γίνανε δημόσια. Κυκλοφοροῦν χιλιάδες φωτογραφίες τῆς Μυκόνου, τῆς Πάρου, τῆς Αἴγινας, τῆς Ὑδρας, καὶ ἀντὶ νὰ βλέπει κανεὶς στοὺς στενοὺς δρόμους τους κάποιους ἀραιοὺς νησιῶτες ψαράδες, ψημένους στὴν θάλασσα καὶ νησιώτισσες μὲ τὰ σεμνά τους ροῦχα, βλέπει νὰ γυρίζουν κάποια πλάσματα μισόγυμνα ἢ ὀλόγυμνα, ξενόφερτα, ἀγκαλιασμένοι θεατρνίστικα καὶ νὰ κάνουνε κάποιες ἄνοστες ἐπιδείξεις «ταμπλῶ βιβᾶν», σὰ νὰ παίζουν στὸν κινηματογράφο. Καὶ ρωτᾶς, κουνώντας τὸ κεφάλι σου: τί σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχουν αὐτὰ τὰ δίποδα, μὲ ἐκεῖνα τὰ σπίτια καὶ μὲ τὰ στενοσόκκακα τῶν νησιῶν; Ταιριάζουνε μὲ αὐτά, ὅσο ταιριάζουνε οἱ τουρίστες μὲ τὰ σόρτς μὲ τὸν Παρθενῶνα πὸ μπροστὰ του φωτογραφίζονται. Ὅμως ἐκεῖ στέκονται ὅσο νὰ φωτογραφηθοῦνε, καὶ δὲν ἔχουνε γιὰ σπίτι τους τὸν ἀρχαῖο ναό, ἐνῶ τοῦτοι στὰ νησιά, κατοικοῦνε μέσα σὲ ἐκεῖνα τὰ ἀταίριαστα σπίτια. Ὅλα ὑπηρετοῦνε τὰ γοῦστα αὐτῶν τῶν ἀφεντάδων. Μάλιστα τόσο πολὺ ἀγαποῦν αὐτοὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, πὸ εἶναι ἐνθουσιασμένοι πὸς δὲν θὰ ἀφήσουνε τίποτα Ἑλληνικὸ ὅπου πατήσουνε.

Καημένη Ἑλλάδα! Τί τέλος σὲ περίμενε! Μὰ δὲν ἔχεις μήτε κάποιον νὰ σὲ κλάψει, γιὰ τὴν κηδεῖα σου τὴ γιορτάζουνε σὰν γάμο, μὲ χαρὲς καὶ μὲ τραγούδια, πὸ αὐτὰ εὐτυχῶς δὲν εἶναι Ἑλληνικά. Ἀκοῦστε τὴν ἐξῆς ἱστορία: ἡ χταπόδα βοσκᾶ στὸν πάτο τῆς θάλασσας, μαζί μὲ τὸ χταποδάκι. Ἄξαφνα τὸ καμακίζουμε. Τὸ χταποδάκι φωνάζει: μὲ πιάσανε μάνα! Ἡ μάνα του τοῦ λέγει: μὴν φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου! Ξαναφωνάζει τὸ μικρό: μὲ βγάζουν ἀπὸ τὴν θάλασσα! Πάλι λέγει ἡ μάνα: μὴν φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου. Καὶ πάλι: μὲ σγουρίζουμε μάνα! Μὴν φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου! Μὲ κόβουμε μὲ τὸ μαχαίρι! Μὴν φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου! Μὲ βράζουμε μάνα! Μὴν φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου! Μὲ μασᾶνε μάνα! Μὴν φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου! Πίνουνε κρασί μάνα! Τότε ἐκεῖνη ἀναστέναξε καὶ φώναξε: Ἄχ, σὲ ἔχασα παιδί μου! Γιὰ τὸ κρασί εἶναι ὁ ἀντίμαχος τοῦ χταποδιοῦ, ἐπειδὴ τὸ λιώνει στὸ στομάχι. Δηλαδή ἡ μάνα δὲν φοβήθηκε μήτε τὸ μαχαίρι, μήτε τὴν φωτιά, μήτε τὰ δόντια, ἀλλὰ τὸ κρασί, πὸ εἶναι πὸ ἡρεμο καὶ ἀθῶο μπροστὰ στὰ μαχαίρια καὶ τὰ δόντια. Ἡ Ἑλλάδα σὰν τὸ χταποδάκι πέρασε ἀπὸ φωτιές, δόντια, μαχαίρια, ἀλλὰ πνεῦμα ΔΕΝ παρέδινε. Ὁ Φράγκος δὲν ἔρχεται μὲ μαχαίρια, πιστόλια καὶ φωτιές. Ἦρθε μὲ χάδια καὶ γλυκόλογα. Ἦρθε μὲ δῶρα, μὲ λεφτά, νὰ ἀνακουφίσει τὴν φτώχεια μας, νὰ διασκεδάσει μαζί μας, νὰ χορέψει μαζί μας, νὰ μᾶς εὐκολύνει τὴν ζωὴ μὲ τὰ μηχανήματά του. Ὅπως τὸ χταποδάκι ἔλιωσε στὸ κρασί, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάδα κοντεύει νὰ χαθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ γλυκὸ κρασί πὸ τὴν μέθυσε καὶ δὲν ξέρεῖ τί κάνει καὶ ξεγυμνώθηκε καὶ στρήνιασε καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στρήνους αὐτῆς ἐπλούτισεν.

Ὁρθόδοξα Σταχυολογήματα

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὸ φυλλάδιον «Σταχυολογήματα τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀγυουστίνου Καντιώτου», Ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη»

Ἐκεῖνος ὅστις ἐξέλεξε τὸν γάμον, ἄς μὴ κατηγορῆ τοὺς μοναχοὺς, μᾶλλον δὲ ἄς θαυμάζη· καὶ ἐκεῖνος πάλιν, ὅστις ἐξέλεξε τὴν παρθενικὴν ζωὴν, ἄς μὴ περιφρονῆ τοὺς ἔγγαμους, μᾶλλον δὲ ἄς συμπαθῆ αὐτοὺς διὰ τοὺς κόπους καὶ ταλαιπωρίας τοῦ οἰκογενειακοῦ βίου καὶ ἄς προσεῦχεται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν.

Ἡ παρθενία, ὅπως βλέπομεν εἰς τὰ κείμενα τῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων, εἶναι ἕνας ποταμὸς διαυγῆς, ὁ ὁποῖος πηγάζει ἀπὸ τὸν λόφον τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ. Ὁ ποταμὸς αὐτὸς τῆς παρθενίας διχάζεται εἰς δύο ρεύματα. Τὸ ἕνα εἶναι ἡ μοναχικὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἡ ἱεραποστολικὴ ζωὴ. Τὰ δύο αὐτὰ ρεύματα πρέπει νὰ ἐργάζονται καὶ νὰ συνεργάζονται ἄρμονικῶς.

Αἱ ἱεραὶ μοναὶ ἀποτελοῦν λιμένες ἐν μέσῳ μαινομένης θαλάσσης τοῦ κόσμου.

Ὅσον κακὸν ἡμπορεῖ νὰ προξενήσῃ εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον ἕνας κακὸς ἐπίσκοπος, δὲν ἡμποροῦν νὰ κάνουν ἑκατὸν κοσμικοὶ.

Μόνον αἱ ψυχαὶ πὸ διατηροῦν ἐντὸς των τὴν δροσερότητα τῶν παιδικῶν χρόνων, μόνον ταπειναὶ καὶ ἀπλαῖ ψυχαὶ δύνανται νὰ πιστεύσουν εἰς τὸν Χριστόν.

Ὑπεράνω τοῦ Θαβῶρ εἶναι ὁ Γολγοθᾶς. Ἐκεῖ ἡ δόξα. Ἐκεῖ, μεταξὺ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, θὰ ὑψωθῆ ὁ Κύριος. Ἐκεῖ θὰ ἀκουσθοῦν τὰ τελευταῖα ῥήματα τοῦ Θεανθρώπου, τὰ ὁποῖα θὰ συγκλονίσουν τοὺς αἰῶνας.

Ἔτσι, ἡ ἐκδίκησις εἰς τὰς ἡμέρας μας, εἶναι τρομερὸν δαιμόνιον. Ἡ συγχορητικότης θεωρεῖται ἀδυναμία. Ἐνῶ κατὰ τοὺς λόγους τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἀρετὴ μεγάλη, εἶναι ἡρωϊσμός τοῦ πνεύματος...

Ποιμένες τοῦ νέου Ἰσραὴλ, δὲν τρέμετε διὰ τὰς εὐθύναι σας; Τὸ ποίμνιόν σας νὰ διαλύεται καὶ σεῖς;... Ἀκούεται ἡ σάλπιγξ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἡμερῶν! Ποιμένες, ἐκτινάξατε ἐκ τῶν βλεφάρων σας τὸν νυσταγμὸν, ἀφήσατε τὰς φλογέρας, ἀρπάσατε τὰς σφενδόνας, καταδιώξατε τοὺς λύκους, σώσατε τὸ ποίμνιον, τὸ ὑπολειφθὲν ἐλάχιστον ποίμνιον...

Τὸ «ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ» εἶναι μέσον θεογνωσίας. Μελετῶν, δηλαδή, καὶ σπουδάζων ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν ἑαυτὸν του ὁδηγεῖται εἰς γνῶσιν τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ.

Ἡ ὁδὸς πρὸς εὐτυχίαν εἶναι μία, νὰ πιστεύης, νὰ γνωρίζης, νὰ συνδεθῆς μὲ τὸν Θεόν.

Εἰς τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, αὐτοὶ πὸ ἀναλαμβάνουν τὸ δύσκολον ἔργον, οἱ νέοι ἀπόστολοι, ἀποτελοῦν ἰδιαιτέρον κεφάλαιον. Εἶναι αἱ ζῶσαι εἰκόνες τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι οἱ θεμέλιοι λίθοι τῆς Θείας οἰκοδομῆς.

Καὶ ἐὰν ὅλος ὁ κόσμος ἐγκαταλείψῃ ἐσᾶς τοὺς ἱεραποστόλους καὶ σᾶς ἀρνηθῆ, ἀρκεῖ διὰ σᾶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς. Αὐτὸς οὐδέποτε θὰ σᾶς ἐγκαταλείψῃ!

Ἡ ὁδὸς πρὸς εὐτυχίαν εἶναι μία, νὰ πιστεύης, νὰ γνωρίσης, νὰ συνδεθῆς μὲ τὸν Θεόν.

THE CUP OF CHRIST

[continued from pg. 6]

A living faith in Christ teaches one to receive the Cup of Christ, and the Cup of Christ inspires hope in the heart of him who receives it; and hope in Christ gives strength and consolation to the heart. What torment of hell to complain or to murmur against the pre-destined Cup from above! Murmuring, impatience, faint-heartedness and especially despair are sins before God; they are the ugly children of sinful disbelief. It is sinful to complain of neighbors when they are the instruments of our suffering; still more sinful is it when we cry out against the Cup that comes down to us straight from Heaven, from the right hand of God. He who drinks the Cup with thanksgiving to God and blessings on his neighbor, achieves holy serenity, the grace of the peace of Christ. It is as if already he enjoys God's spiritual Paradise. Temporal suffering has no importance in itself: we lend it significance because of our attachment to the earth and to all corruptible things, and through our coldness towards Christ and eternity.

You are prepared to bear the bitter and repellent taste of medicines, the painful amputation and cauterization of your limbs, the long drawn out suffering of hunger, and prolonged seclusion in your room; you are prepared to bear all this to restore lost health to your body, which after it is healed will certainly become ill again, and will certainly die and become corrupt. Bear then the bitterness of the Cup of Christ which brings healing and eternal beatitude to your immortal soul.

If the Cup appears to you to be unbearable, deadly, then it reveals that, although you bear Christ's Name, you do not belong to Christ. For the true followers of Christ, the Cup of Christ is the Cup of joy. Thus the holy apostles, after having been beaten before the gathering of the elders of the Jews, went out from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 5: 40- 41) The righteous Job heard bitter news. Tiding after tiding came to pierce his steadfast heart; the last of these was the hardest all; his sons and daughters had been struck down suddenly by a cruel and violent death. In his great sorrow, the righteous Job rent his clothes and sprinkled his head with ashes. And then in submissive faith he fell down upon the ground, and worshipped the Lord saying; "I myself came naked from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, the Lord taketh away: as it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)

Entrust your heart in simplicity to Him by whom all the hairs of your head are numbered: He knows the measure of the healing Cup that you should be given. Look often on Jesus standing before those who put Him to death; He was delivered to death, to be slain as a defenseless sheep. Do not take your eyes from Him, and your suffering will be transformed into heavenly spiritual sweetness: the wounds of your heart are healed with the wounds of Jesus. "Suffer ye thus far," said the Lord to those who wished to defend Him in the garden of

Gethsemane, and He healed the ear that had been struck off. (Luke 22:51) "Thinkest thou," replied the Lord to him who had tried to take the Cup from Him, "that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26: 53)

In the time of misfortune do not seek the help of man; do not lose precious time. Await help from God: by His command and in His own time will people come to your help. The Lord remained silent before Pilate and Herod, He made no attempt to justify Himself. You must imitate His holy and wise intention of certain conviction.

Whether the cup comes to you as a gradual gathering of clouds, or as suddenly as a furious whirlwind, say to God, "Thy will be done." You are a disciple, follower and servant of Jesus. Now Jesus said: "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be." (John 12:26) But Jesus spent His life on earth in sufferings; He was persecuted from His birth to the grave; from the time of His swaddling clothes malice was preparing for Him a violent death. Nor was malice satisfied by achieving such an aim, but tried to uproot the very remembrance of Him from the earth.

In following Him, all the chosen of our Lord pass by the road of temporary suffering to blessed eternity. While bodily pleasures dominate us, it is impossible that a spiritual state should also prevail in us. That is why our Lord ceaselessly offers His Cup to those He loves, so as to keep them in deadness to the world and to enable them to live the life of the Spirit. St. Isaac the Syrian said: "The man who is sent unceasing sorrow is known to be especially under God's care. Pray to God, that He may avert all calamity and every trial from you; but when sorrows come of themselves, do not be afraid of them, do not think that they have come by chance, or by force of circumstance. No, they are allowed by the inscrutable Providence of God. Filled with faith, and the fortitude and magnanimity born of it, swim fearlessly amidst the darkness and howling storm into the peaceful harbor of eternity: the unseen hand of Jesus Himself will guide.

With reverent and deep reflection, learn the prayer which our Lord offered to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane during the heavy hours of suffering that came to Him before His Passion and Death on the Cross. With this prayer, meet and conquer every sorrow. "O my Father", prayed our Savior, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (Matt. 26:39) Pray to God to avert misfortunes, and at the same time renounce your own will, as being a sinful, blind will; entrust those nearest to your heart to the all-holy and all-wise will of God. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41) When you are surrounded by afflictions, pray more often, that you may draw the special grace of God towards you. Only with the help of special grace are we able to surmount temporal misfortunes.

When you receive from Heaven the gift of patience, be attentive and vigilant over yourself, so as to hold and keep within

yourself the grace of God, lest sin should creep unnoticed into your soul or body and drive away this grace. But if with carelessness and inattention you let sin enter within you, and particularly the one sin to which your weak flesh is specially addicted, and which stains the body and soul, then grace will depart leaving you stripped and lonely. Then sorrow, given to you for your salvation and perfection, will trample heavily on you, will crush you with sadness, depression, despair, and like someone who holds the gift of God without due reverence to the gift. Hasten to bring back your heart to purity in true and resolute repentance, and through purity to the gift of patience: since this gift of the Holy Spirit reposes only in the pure. The holy martyrs sang a song of joy in the midst of the fiery furnace, when walking on nails, on sharp swords, sitting in cauldrons of boiling water or oil. So also will your heart rejoice when by prayer you have drawn to yourself the comfort of grace, and kept it within by constant watch over yourself. Then your heart will sing amidst misfortunes and terrible misery, with a joyful song of praise and thanksgiving to God.

The mind, purified by the Cup of Christ, is endowed with spiritual vision; it begins to see the all-embracing Providence of God, invisible to the carnal mind: to see the law of corruption in all things mortal; to see near at hand the immensity of eternity; to see God in His great works, in His creation and re-creation of the universe. The earthly life then comes to seem like a quickly-ending pilgrimage, whose events are dreams, whose blessings are but brief visual delusions, short-lived because of the perilous misconceptions of the mind and heart.

What fruit does temporary suffering bear for eternity? When Heaven was shown to the Apostle John, with an innumerable gathering of bearers of light dressed in white and celebrating their salvation and blessedness before the throne of God, one of the dwellers in Heaven asked him: "What are these arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?" "And I said unto him," says Saint John the Divine, "my Lord, Thou knowest." Then the dweller in Heaven answered Saint John, "These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Revelation 7:13-17)

Withdrawal from God is eternal torment in hell, eternal contact with the devil and devilish people; with flames, bitter cold, the gloom of Gehenna; that is what may be truly described as suffering. That is torment, great, terrible and insupportable. Over-indulgence in the sweetness of earthly pleasures leads to great eternal suffering. The Cup of Christ saves from this torment whoever drinks from it with thanksgiving and praise to the all-blessed God who, through the bitter Cup of temporal suffering, gives man His boundless and eternal mercy.

THE HOLY FATHERS ON THE BAPTISM OF HERETICS AND SCHISMATICS

The writings below are clear, yet our current leaders do not appear to teach or follow them. Why is Ecumenism treated as being more important than the Canons? Why do many of our priests seem to be afraid of saying the word "Canon" in a positive context? Why are these rules set forth by the Holy Fathers ignored or treated so cavalierly? It truly seems that for many of our priests today Economia is embraced while the Holy Canons are shunned. May God forgive us and give us all a new respect and love for this critical part of our Holy Faith!

Canon I of the Synod of Carthage (258)

[Affirmed and Upheld by the Sixth Ecumenical Council]

While assembled in Council, beloved brethren, we read letters sent by you, concerning those among the heretics and schismatics presuming to be baptized who are coming over to the Church which is one, in which we are baptized and regenerated. We are confident that by your doing these things concerning them, you yourselves hold fast to the stability of the Church.

But since you are of the same communion with us, and so wished to inquire about this matter on account of our mutual love, we pronounce no recent opinion or one that has only now been established, but on the contrary we share with you and join you to that which of old was tested with all precision and care by our predecessors, and which by us has been observed. Decreeing now also by vote what we firmly and securely hold for all time, we declare that no one can possibly be baptized outside the Church, there being but one baptism, and this existing only in the catholic Church. For it has been written: "They have forsaken me the fountain of living water, and they dug for themselves broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer. 2:13). And, again, Holy Scripture forewarning says: "Keep away from another's water, and drink not from another's well" (cf. Pr. 5:15).

Also, the water must first be purified and sanctified by the priest, in order that it may be capable of washing away the sins of the person being baptized when he is thereinto immersed. And through the Prophet Ezekiel, the Lord says: "And I will sprinkle you with clean water, and cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, and I will give you a new spirit" (Ezek. 36:25). But how can he who is himself unclean, and with

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whom there is no Holy Spirit, purify and sanctify water, with the Lord saying in the book of Numbers: "And everything the unclean man touches shall be unclean" (Num. 19:22)? How can he who was not able to rid himself of his own sins, being as he is outside the Church, baptize and grant remission of sins to another? And even the question asked at the baptism is witness to the truth. For when we say to the examinee, "Do you believe you shall receive eternal life and remission of sins?" we are saying nothing else than that in the Church remission of sins can be given, and that it is impossible to receive this from the heretics, where the Church is not. And that is why the advocates of the heretics are obliged either to ask the question, or to do justice to the truth, unless they attribute the Church to them also.

Moreover, it is necessary that he who has been baptized be chrismated, so that receiving the chrism he become a partaker of Christ. But the heretic cannot sanctify oil, seeing that he has neither altar nor Church. It is not possible for there to exist any chrism whatsoever among the heretics. For it is obvious to us that oil can by no means be sanctified among them for such worthy use. And we ought to know and not ignore that it has been written: "Let not the oil of a sinner anoint my head," which the Holy Spirit even long ago declared in the Psalms (140:6); lest anyone be tracked down and led astray from the right way and be chrismated by the heretics, the enemies of Christ.

Furthermore, how shall he who is not a priest, but sacrilegious and a sinner, pray for the one who was baptized, when the Bible says, "...God does not hear sinners; but if one is a worshipper of God and does His will, him He hears" (Jn. 9:31)? We understand remission of sins as being given through the Church. But how can one give what he does not himself have? Or how can one do spiritual works when he himself has not received the Holy Spirit? For this reason he who comes over to the Church ought to be renewed, so that within [the Church] he be made holy by the holy, as it is written: "You shall be holy, even as I am Holy, says the Lord" (cf. Lev. 19:2; 20:7). And thus he who was deluded in error—being a man who, coming to God and seeking a priest, yet under the sway of error joined a sacrilegious [imposter]—might in the Church's true baptism put off this very error. For to accept with approval those whom the heretics [and schismatics] have baptized is to endorse the baptism they administer. For one cannot be only partially capable. If he had the power to baptize, then he could also impart the Holy Spirit. But if he was incapable of giving the Holy Spirit, in that being outside [the Church] he does not have it to begin with, then he does not have the power to baptize anyone who might come to him.

Baptism being one, and the Holy Spirit being one, there is also but one Church, founded upon (Peter the Apostle of old confessing) oneness by Christ our Lord. And for this reason, whatever is performed by them [i.e., the heretics] is reprobate, being as it is counterfeit and void. For nothing can be acceptable or desirable to God which is performed by them, whom

the Lord in the Gospels calls His foes and enemies: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Mt.12:30). And the blessed Apostle John, in keeping with the Lord's commands, wrote in his epistle: "You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and now many antichrists have appeared" (1 Jn. 2:18). Hence we know it is the last hour. They came out from among us, but they were not from among us. Therefore, we too ought to understand and consider that the enemies of the Lord, and the so-called antichrists, would not be able to gratify the Lord. And therefore, we who have the Lord with us, and who hold fast to the unity of the Lord, abundantly supplied as we are in proportion to His excellence, and exercising His priesthood in the Church: we ought to disapprove, and refuse, and reject, and consider profane everything done by those opposed to Him, i.e., His foes the antichrists. And we ought to impart in full the mystery of divine power, unity, faith and truth unto those who from error and perversity come to us for knowledge of the Church's true faith.

Apostolic Canons regarding Baptism -

(c. 2nd century)

Canon XLVI (46)

We order that a bishop or presbyter that recognized the baptism or sacrifice of heretics be defrocked. For "what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6:15).

Canon XLVII (47)

If a bishop or presbyter baptize anew anyone that has had a true baptism, or fail to baptize someone that had been polluted by the impious, let him be defrocked, on the grounds that he is mocking the cross and death of the Lord, and fails to distinguish priests from false priests.

Canon L (50)

If a bishop or presbyter conduct an initiation [i.e., baptism] and perform not three immersions, but one immersion -- that administered into the Lord's death -- let him be anathema.



If someone believes evil about the faith [i.e., heretically], flee from him and have nothing to do with him -- not only if he is a man, but even if he happens to be an angel from heaven. However, do not critique a person's lifestyle; because, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged," applies to all matters of the lifestyle, and not to matters of faith.

St. John Chrysostom

Keepr from prying into other people's affairs, for such prying gives occasion for slander, judgment, and other grievous sins. Why do you need to be concerned about others? Know and examine your own self.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

A HOMILY BY ST ISAAC

St. Isaac the Syrian is the great luminary of the life of stillness; he was born in the early seventh century and became a monk at a young age. He was consecrated Bishop of Nineveh (and is therefore sometimes called St Isaac of Nineveh), but after five months received permission to return to solitude; he spent many years far south of Nineveh in the mountainous region of Beit Huzaye, and lastly at the Monastery of Rabban Shabur. He wrote his renowned and God-inspired Ascetical Homilies toward the end of his long life of monastic struggle. The fame of his Homilies grew quickly; about 100 years after their composition they were translated from Syriac into Greek by two monks of the Monastery of Mar-Sabbas near Bethlehem in Palestine, from which they spread throughout the monasteries of the Byzantine Empire and became a guide to hesychasts of all generations thereafter. The subject homily is one of his better known ones and is referred to as Homily 60.

If a man readily and joyfully accepts a loss for the sake of God, he is inwardly pure. And if he does not look down upon any man because of his defects, in very truth, he is free. If a man is not pleased with someone who honors him, nor displeased with someone who dishonors him, he is dead to the world and to this life. The watchfulness of discernment is superior to every discipline of men accomplished in any way to any degree.

Do not hate the sinner, for we are all laden with guilt. If, for the sake of God, you are moved to oppose him, weep over him. Why do you hate him? Hate his sins and pray for him, that you may imitate Christ Who was not wroth with sinners, but interceded for them. Do you not see how He wept over Jerusalem? We are mocked by the devil in many instances, so why should we hate the man who is mocked by him [the devil] who mocks us also? Why, oh, man, do you hate the sinner? Could it be because he is not as righteous as you? But where is your righteousness when you have no love? Why do you not shed tears over him? But you persecute him. In ignorance, some are moved with anger, presuming themselves to be discerners of the works of sinners.

Be a herald of God's goodness, for God rules over you, unworthy though you are; for although your debt to Him is so great, yet He is not seen exacting payment from you, and for the small works you do, He bestows great rewards upon you. Do not call God "just," for His justice is not manifest in the things concerning you. And if David calls Him "just" and "upright" (cf. Ps. 24:8, 144:17), His Son revealed to us that He is good and kind. "He is good," He says, "to the evil and to the impious" (cf. Luke 6:35). How can you call God "just" when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? "Friend, I do thee no wrong; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is thine eye evil because I am good?" (Matt. 20:12-15). How can a man call God "just" when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth? (Luke 15:11 ff.). None other but

His very Son said these things concerning Him, lest we doubt it; and thus He bare witness concerning Him. Where, then, is God's "justice," for, whilst we are sinners, Christ died for us! (cf. Rom. 5:8). But if here He is merciful, we may believe that He will not change [viz., in the state after death].

Far be it that we should ever think such an iniquity that God could become unmerciful! For the property of Divinity does not change as do mortals. God does not acquire something which He does not have, nor lose what He has, nor supplement what He does have, as do created beings. But what God has from the beginning, He will have and has until the [unending] end, as the blessed Cyril wrote in his commentary on Genesis. Fear God, he says, out of love for Him, and not for the austere name that He has been given. Love Him as you ought to love Him; not for what He will give you in the future, but for what we have received, and for this world alone which He has created for us. Who is the man that can repay Him? Where is His repayment to be found in our works? Who persuaded Him in the beginning to bring us into being? Who intercedes for us before Him, when we shall possess no memory, as though we never existed? Who will awake this our corrupt body for that life? Again, whence descends the notion of knowledge into dust? Oh, the wondrous mercy of God! Oh, the astonishment at the bounty of our God and Creator! Oh, might for which all is possible! Oh, the immeasurable goodness that brings our nature again, sinners though we be, to His regeneration and rest! Who is sufficient to glorify Him? He raises up the transgressor and blasphemer, He renews dust unendowed with reason, making it rational and comprehending, and the scattered and insensible dust and the scattered senses He makes a rational nature worthy of thought. The sinner is unable to comprehend the grace of His resurrection. Where is gehenna, that can afflict us? Where is perdition, which terrifies us in many ways and quenches the joy of His love? And what is gehenna as compared with the grace of His resurrection, when He will raise us from Hades and cause our corruptible nature to be clad in incorruption, and raise up in glory him that has fallen into Hades?

Come, men of discernment, and be filled with wonder! Whose mind is sufficiently wise and marvelous to wonder worthily at the bounty of our Creator? His recompense of sinners is, that instead of a just recompense, He rewards them with resurrection, and instead of those bodies with which they trampled upon His law, He enrobes them with perfect glory and incorruption. That grace whereby we are resurrected after we have sinned is greater than the grace which brought us into being when we were not. Glory be to Thine immeasurable grace, Oh, Lord! Behold, Lord, the waves of Thy grace close my mouth with silence, and there is not a thought left in me before the face of Thy thanksgiving. What mouths can confess Thy praise, Oh, good King, Thou Who lovest our life? Glory be to Thee for the two worlds which Thou hast created for our growth and delight, leading us by all things which Thou didst fashion to the knowledge of Thy glory, from now and unto the ages. Amen.

THE SICKNESS OF APOSTASY

By Saint Nikolai Velimirovic

“The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint” (Isaiah 1:5)
Brethren, God, the God of Sabaoth, is the source of health. Go out to the heights of God, you whose heads are troubled by superfluous works and still more by superfluous concerns and be imbued with health which comes from God, only from God. A sick head -- those are the leaders and the elders of the people -- and a faint heart -- those are the people. The prophet presents an entire people as one body and shows how even with the body of a people, the same thing happens as with the body of a man, i.e., when one organ of the body is sick, then only that organ is sick, but from the sickness of this one organ, the entire body feels faint. So it was with the people of Israel: the head was sick and from a sick head, the heart is faint. The leaders and the elders of Israel abandoned the law of God and followed their senses as their guides. Their sensual mind, tarnished, overly tarnished from the various worldly influences, they took as their direction for a correct life instead of the law of God. They fell into the hopeless darkness of idolatrous errors. And from the insanity of the head, the heart was faint. It is more difficult for the heart to separate from God than it is for the head, it is more difficult for a people to separate from God than their elders, but when the head remains sick for a long time, than the heart is faint and yields. From corrupt leaders, even a people finally stray from the path.

This is the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amos, the true prophet. Indeed, a true vision, both for then and for now, for the people of Israel and for the people of today. Brethren, look at the people whom you know best and you alone judge, is the head sick and is the heart faint?

O Lord, true and just, enlighten the head of every people with Your light and strengthen with Your might the heart of every people, so that our enemies will not rejoice and say that You have abandoned us. Amen.

ST. JOHN OF DAMASCUS ON FREE WILL

St. John of Damascus, “An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,” c. 743 AD, Book II, Chapter XXV, “Concerning what is in our own power, that is, concerning Free-will,” and Chapter XXVII, “Concerning the reason of our endowment with Free-will.”

The first enquiry involved in the consideration of free-will, that is, of what is in our own power, is whether anything is in our power: for there are many who deny this...

We are left then with this fact, that the man who acts and makes is himself the author of his own works, and is a creature endowed with free-will...

Further, if man is the author of no action, the faculty of deliberation is quite superfluous for to what purpose could deliberation be put if man is the master of none of his actions? ...

Every one, then, who deliberates does so in the belief that the choice of what is to be done lies in his hands, that he may choose what seems best as the result of his deliberation, and having chosen may act upon it. And if this is so, free-will must necessarily be very closely related to reason. For either man is an irrational being, or, if he is rational, he is master of his acts and endowed with free-will.

Hence also creatures without reason do not enjoy free-will: for nature leads them rather than they nature, and so they do not oppose the natural appetite, but as soon as their appetite longs after anything they rush headlong after it. But man, being rational, leads nature rather than nature him, and so when he desires aught he has the power to curb his appetite or to indulge it as he pleases.

Hence also creatures devoid of reason are the subjects neither of praise nor blame, while man is the subject of both praise and blame.

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LORD, BLESS MY ENEMIES

By St. Nikolai of Ochrid

Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Enemies have driven me into Your embrace more than friends have. Friends have bound me to earth, enemies have loosed me from earth and have demolished all my aspirations in the world. Enemies have made me a stranger in worldly realms and an extraneous inhabitant of the world. Just as a hunted animal finds safer shelter than an un hunted animal does, so have I, persecuted by enemies, found the safest sanctuary, having ensconced myself beneath Your tabernacle, where neither friends nor enemies can slay my soul.

Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

They, rather than I, have confessed my sins before the world. They have punished me, whenever I have hesitated to punish myself. They have tormented me, whenever I have tried to flee torments. They have scolded me, whenever I have flattered myself. They have spat upon me, whenever I have filled myself with arrogance.

Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Whenever I have made myself wise, they have called me foolish. Whenever I have made myself mighty, they have mocked me as though I were a dwarf. Whenever I have wanted to lead people, they have shoved me into the background. Whenever

I have rushed to enrich myself, they have prevented me with an iron hand. Whenever I thought that I would sleep peacefully, they have wakened me from sleep. Whenever I have tried to build a home for a long and tranquil life, they have demolished it and driven me out. Truly, enemies have cut me loose from the world and have stretched out my hands to the hem of Your garment.

Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Bless them and multiply them; multiply them and make them even more bitterly against me: so that my fleeing to You may have no return; so that all hope in men may be scattered like cobwebs; so that absolute serenity may begin to reign in my soul; so that my heart may become the grave of my two evil twins: arrogance and anger; so that I might amass all my treasure in heaven; ah, so that I may for once be freed from self-deception, which has entangled me in the dreadful web of illusory life. Enemies have taught me to know what hardly anyone knows, that a person has no enemies in the world except himself. One hates his enemies only when he fails to realize that they are not enemies, but cruel friends. It is truly difficult for me to say who has done me more good and who has done me more evil in the world: friends or enemies. Therefore bless, O Lord, both my friends and my enemies. A slave curses enemies, for he does not understand. But a son blesses them, for he understands. For a son knows that his enemies cannot touch his life. Therefore he freely steps among them and prays to God for them.

Bless my enemies, O Lord. Even I bless them and do not curse them.

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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WE AWAIT THE LIFE OF THE AGE TO COME

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "The Faith of Chosen People," translated by: Fr. Theodor Mika and Fr. Stevan Scott

Coming home. Oh how joyful it is to come home! Moreover, to a home where a father is waiting, along with many brothers, and sisters, and children, and friends! Even more so when the home is not a famished and empty hut, but a royal palace, where a father king awaits his children from afar with deep concern!

Wayfarers, you know that the Father King is none other than the Most High Himself. You are those children whom He awaits with such deep concern. From a foreign land you are returning to Him. Truth and this world are His fields, but they are distant and overgrown with thorns. He sent you into this distant land, so that you might long for Him and see that you can do nothing without Him. It was not mandatory for Him to separate Himself from you, no. This was first mandatory for your first mother, Eve. And at that moment God sent both her and her descendants into this distant domain of His, into this thorny field, where bread is earned by the sweat of the brow.

Many flocks of your forefathers have landed on this thorny field, and on it they have fought over fodder with locusts and beasts. And they became accustomed to a society beneath themselves. And when they had forgotten their home and origin, they began to think that there existed no better field or brighter world than this muddy potter's shop, nor any society more noble than that of animals.

The gentle heavens grew sad when they saw man as a disciple of beasts. The radiant angels grew confused when they

beheld the image of God in man debased. The Most High felt sorry for the human race, and resolved upon the most dramatic act in the history of the created world, in the history of heaven and earth. He decided to do something which only infinite love can resolve upon—namely, to send His Only-begotten Son into torments for the sake of man's salvation, to clothe Him in human rags, in the rags of a beggar so that beggars might not be afraid of Him, of His light, of His majesty. He decided to cast the most precious pearl of His heart before swine, before those who were wallowing in the mire like pigs.

And the Son of the King joyfully set out for this sacrifice, and He came down into this bed of worms, where the descendants of Eve were fighting over fodder with animals. He found one unique daughter of Eve—one, unique, pure and holy Virgin, who was worthy to knit a body for Him from her own body. And in this poor clothing of the flesh He appeared among the drunk and the rabid, as though He had appeared in a house of lunatics.

As soon as the disciples of beasts saw Him, they assaulted Him with knives. He withdrew.

When He called them sons of the heavenly Father, they gaped at Him, and demanded a miracle. When He performed many miracles, they said that He did this with the aid of the devil. For they had ceased to believe in God, but in the devil they never ceased to believe.

When He began to cast out demons from people, they said that He cast out demons with the help of Beelzebub, the prince of demons! When He poured out the wisdom of heaven before them, they asked Him where He received His schooling. And when they heard that He was a carpenter, without schooling or teachers on earth, they scorned Him.

When He bestowed sight on the blind on the Sabbath, they reprimanded Him

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for breaking the Sabbath. When He fasted, they called Him a glutton. When He prayed to God, they called Him an atheist. When He shared the company of sinners, they called Him a sinner. When He asked them what sin He had committed, they barked like rabid dogs.

When He spoke to them about the heavenly kingdom, they accused Him of wanting to betray them to the Romans. But when He told them that they should render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, they handed Him over to the Romans, accusing Him of being a traitor who had committed high treason against Rome!

Finally, they spat on Him; that is, they gave Him just what they had and were - repulsive spittle! They crucified Him on the cross. And while His holy blood flowed onto the ground, they reviled Him and danced round about Him. But He was victorious and rose from the grave and proved to the world who He is. And the world set out to follow Him. And the world began to learn from Him and ceased to be disciples of beasts.

Remember, wayfarers, His blood was shed over the earth. With His own blood He marked the path for your homeward journey lest you lose your way. Seafarers keep their eyes on the stars lest they lose their way. Make sure that you likewise keep your eyes on His blood, on those drops which glisten like stars, and you will see the path that leads you homeward.

Neither death nor the grave can block your way. Even if your bodies die before He appears to the world for the final time, you will not be lost or forgotten. You will just wait before the gates of eternal light until the archangel's trumpet sounds.

First the archangel's trumpet will sound. The resurrection of the dead from the graves will follow that blast of the heavenly trumpet. The Fearful Judgment of God will follow the resurrection. And following the Fearful Judgment of God-life for the righteous in the eternal kingdom of Christ. Thus was it

foretold by the True One. All His prophesies have been fulfilled. This one will be fulfilled also.

The life of the age to come is life in glory and joy, in the kingdom of the Creator, in the embrace of the Father, in Paradise. It is life unswayed by fear, untroubled by worry, unmarred by sickness, immune to decay and death.

All the troubles of life on earth will seem like a drop of salt water in a fresh water river when compared to life in Paradise. "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what the heart of man has not conceived-God has prepared for those who love Him" (I Cor. 2:9). Earthly life is to that life what the shadow of a tree is to a tree. The shadow resembles the tree, but is not the tree. Likewise, the earthly life of man resembles life, but is not true life.

It is like sleep compared to consciousness. When we enter into that life, it will be like awakening from sleep and entering into consciousness, into the kingdom of consciousness. This kingdom of consciousness is the immortal kingdom of God. In it God alone reigns. And in it there is no mixture of falsehood and truth, for all is truth: no mixture of justice and injustice, for all is justice; no mixture of beauty and ugliness, for all is beauty; no mixture of light and darkness, for all is light; no mixture of joy and sorrow, for all is joy; no mixture of life and death, for all is life.

This immortal kingdom is called the kingdom of Christ, "eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1:11; II Tim. 4:18). For He is the greatest Victor, and He has been given power and glory and authority and lordship and judgment, and a throne above every throne, and majesty above every majesty. He possessed all this in eternity as the Only-begotten Son of God, but He earned all this on earth as a man: by His own humiliation, suffering, and death.

In this kingdom Christ will be surrounded by the follow-

ers of Christ, the sufferers who bear the seals of suffering for their Lord and King on themselves. These are the apostles, the prophets and righteous ones of the Old Testament, the martyrs and monastics, the ascetics and cross-bearers, the shepherds and teachers of the Church—all those who were Christ-like. All those, who waged His war and won His victory, will gather around Him together with His angels. Thus shall it be, for thus did He promise when He said: “I shall take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3).

Furthermore, this immortal kingdom is called the “Holy City” and the “New Jerusalem.” In its beauty this city will exceed all dreams, all words, all comparisons, all human preconceptions. As for those who are deemed worthy to enter this holy and eternal city, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, or crying, nor pain any more; for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). Thus was it proclaimed by the True One, thus was it perceived by the Clairvoyant One. And thus shall it come to pass.

In this holy city neither sun nor moon nor stars will shine. “And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign to the ages of ages” (Rev. 22:5). Thus was it proclaimed by the True One, thus was it perceived by the Clairvoyant One. And thus shall it come to pass.

Imagine a world, Christ-bearers, where instead of the sun the Most High God himself shines, warms, gives life, and constantly rejuvenates! This is your world, toward which you are journeying. This is your homeland, to which you are returning: an imperishable homeland, where you will also be imperishable. This is the fatherland of the sons of the heavenly Father, of all those who have been adopted as sons of God through the Lord Jesus. And you shall be numbered among them, if you are victorious. Furthermore, this kingdom is called “the kingdom of the saints of the Most High.” Just as the clairvoyant prophet foresaw through the veils of time when he stated: “And the kingdom and the dominion and the majesty of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom” (Dan. 7:27). In this kingdom no foreigners rule, only the Father. Nor are the subjects of that kingdom slaves, but rather sons.

A slave does not dare to look a foreign king in the face. But the holy sons of the holy King will look the Most High King in the face freely and joyfully. Everything will be just as it was foretold and told: “And they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). Oh delights of delights, Oh treasures of treasures, Oh beauties of beauties—to see the face of the One, Living, and True God!

This is the Paradise for which you have longed. Paradise—this is the name, one of the sweetest names, of that kingdom. Paradise—your homeland, to which you, tired wayfarers, are returning from distant earth, from the field of thorns.

What is the price for all this blessedness, you ask? How does

one answer you, inquisitive brothers? If the sun, the moon, and the stars belonged to one of you, and if you gave all this in exchange for that blessedness you will have given nothing. How does one buy eternity with dust? With what perishable treasure does one buy what is imperishable?

Yet there is a hidden, imperishable treasure which every heir of that blessedness carries within himself. He carries it wrapped in perishable fabric. It is a tiny, flickering flame of love for the Lord God. This little flame of love does not die out with the death of physical fabric, but lives and glows. Heroic souls heroically protect it, lest shifting winds extinguish it in the course of the journey. With this flame of love righteous souls are deemed worthy to come out before the face of the living God, clothed in a resurrected heavenly body. This is the price. For this tiny gift to God, lovers of God will receive as gifts in return the kingdom, sonship, and eternal life. In a word—Paradise.

This is the faith of the enlightened and persevering. This is not the faith of the darkened and the cowardly, who have hidden themselves from the divine light, or who hear about it with cowardice. Those enlightened by God’s Spirit joyfully receive the rays of divine light emanating from that world of reality. They receive them like letters from their homeland, like holy letters from their father. And they answer those letters with heartfelt greetings in reply. From these holy, fatherly letters which are collectively called the Holy Scriptures, they come to know about the beginning, the middle, and the end of the created world. And they come to know about the origin and destiny of human life. And they come to know about their royal lineage, their present nothingness, and their future glory. This knowledge they confirm with the Tradition of the holy and enlightened fathers, the Tradition which is preserved in the Orthodox Church.

Possessing this knowledge they perseveringly prepare themselves for their entry into the eternal homeland and for their joyful meeting with their heavenly Father. And they help their brothers, their fellow wayfarers, to prepare themselves also. For the heavenly Father is not awaiting the return of one child from a distant land, but many, many millions of children. Who can say how many they number? Their number is like the number of stars in heaven, like the sand on the seashore, like the dust on the earth. This is the population of the heavenly nation, the kingdom of God, which no nation has ever equalled or ever can equal.

Yes, and this is only one part of the population of the immortal nation of God. The other part consists of the innumerable hosts of bodiless angels.

This is your faith, O Christ-bearers, and the faith of your enlightened and persevering forefathers. Let it also be the faith of your children, from generation to generation, all the way to the blessed end. This is the salvation-bearing Orthodox Faith, which has never been put to shame. Truly, this is the faith of the chosen people, of those who bear the image of God within themselves. On the Day of Judgment, when Christ will judge with justice, they shall be taken into the heavenly kingdom and shall be called blessed.

MOTHER: THE MOST DYNAMIC AND ORIGINAL ARCHETYPE OF CHRISTIAN UPBRINGING

Source: "PROSVASIS" Magazine, July-August 1998, written by Fr. Sarantis Sarantou, translated from Greek by the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

It is a most discussed matter. It is frequently ascertained. It is a common educative topic: Mother, this archetype, this original and most ancient of all pedagogic persons plays the first and most important role in the most exerting task of raising a new person. St. Gregory the Theologian mostly, but also all of the Church's Holy Fathers who exerted a great part of their pastoral efforts and work within the world and among people, they all consistently concluded that there exists a great difficulty in the tending and upbringing of man absent of a true Christian archetype.

The personality of man is comprised of obvious external creative components as well as of hidden internal psychodynamic elements. Both factors which compose and make the personality of man, the external abilities and the internal psychodynamic elements, are formed and configured with their basis being the first archetypes of behavior, especially the first one which happens to be the mother. Thus, a mother is the first, most basic and original example of behavior for a child.

How great was truly the respect which the Holy Elder Porphyrios had towards the person of his mother! What great admiration he had for the miracle of child creation and subsequent birth of a new human being! He watched full of Christ's love through his discreet spiritual eyes the development of the fetus, a new human being, within a mother's womb. He advised the young women and the future mothers as if he was a most experienced doctor. The Holy Elder expressed the full extent of his Christ-like fatherly love towards all pregnant women. He believed that love and affection in Christ's name are necessary and essential prerequisites so that a pregnant mother can bring to completion the miraculous "god-like co-creation" but laborious act.

The Elder's Christ-like love comprised the cardinal god-man archetype regimen which helped women become essential participants in the act of creation by our Trinitarian God. When a woman senses and comprehends the first and basic duty and mission, when she becomes obedient to the inward appeals of her heart, when she understands and accepts that her most valuable charisma is the realization of this "God-man operation" of motherhood, she then has her whole existence achieve her true worth. The whole divine grandeur of the Holy Trinity's creation is then affected within her body. It is then that she becomes the happiest of all of God's creations. She becomes joyful with the greatest of joys of the greater creation, her true coopera-

tion and participation in the act of creation of a new person, with inconceivable and everlasting prospects.

The Holy Elder Porphyrios had reached what is most desired by every consciously struggling Christian, that being the extreme level of a dispassionate nature, purely dedicated to Christ. There was not even a slight shadow of prudence to take away from the miracle of cell reproduction, which his divinely inspired eyes could observe take place within the bodies of the new mothers that were his spiritual children. He would bless them and wholeheartedly wish and pray for them that these new mothers serve in this God-pleasing act of obedience in a dignified manner and a heart full of joy. The archetype of this holy spiritual father, a true icon of Christ, functioned in a dynamic Christian manner within the souls of the new mothers. The physical strength and overall condition of all those pregnant mothers blessed by the Elder evolved in a charismatic manner, all the way to the last moments of their pregnancy and the birth of the new child. Concurrently, all of their psychodynamic abilities were also developing in a manner necessary to withstand the various and plentiful hardships of pregnancy and the laborious child-birth.

The Elder would advise the expecting mothers to cast away every dark thought, and every gloomy and pessimistic feeling. He would teach them that they must hunt away fear, agony, and every possible aversion which poisons their relationship with the unborn child. He would ask them instead to repeat the prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner), listen to Byzantine music, interact with everything beautiful in their surrounding environment, get involved in pleasant spiritual discussions, and, most important, maintain excellent relations with their spouse. The Elder would also recommend that they speak to their unborn child and to show a loving interest by caressing them, even if it was through the walls of their belly. The God-inspired Elder maintained that the fetus, this new human being, literally "breathes" the temperate psychological and spiritual climate of his mother. He is psychologically and spiritually nourished through the Christ-like psyche and spirit of the mother, not unlike the manner by which he is fed through her blood, through her physical body.

It is for all these reason that all of us ought to be extremely attentive towards any prospective mother. From the person nearest, her husband, all the way to her more distant environment, we must all become extremely considerate and discreet. We must display warmth towards the incubating mother and her child in gestation so that it is born able, balanced and graceful. We are all responsible for our personal behavior towards the pregnant mothers and her child.

If we, as a society, do not repent and change our timid and inhumane behavior towards the expecting mother and her unborn child – after all we are living through a misanthro-

pous time period which displays little, if any, value towards children – we can not possibly expect any form of improvement in the quality of our youth. A balanced and spiritually progressive youth will never exist in essence for as long as we do not have the consistent presence of this dynamic and original archetype of Christian upbringing by the mother; she is the one who will compose and weave, with our Lord's cooperation, the psychological make-up and the flesh of the child. She is the one person who, giving her own body and the blood from her heart to the unborn child first and later to the small infant and even later to her growing young boy or girl, will help bring up the person that will dictate the quality of his or her generation.

Glory be to our Trinitarian God, because our whole Orthodox Church, as the treasury of the Holy Trinity's grace, guards within Her own body and flesh – within the Holy Sacraments – this type of wonderful mother. They, alone, are the ones who are capable of bringing into this world incomprehensibly plagued with low birth rate, Christ-blessed healthy and Christ-worthy children.



A PRAYER AGAINST EVIL THOUGHTS

Master, Lord my God, in Whose hands are my lots, help me according to Thy mercy and do not allow me to be destroyed with my iniquities; nor permit me by my will to follow the desires of my flesh against my spirit. I was fashioned by Thee. Do not forsake the works of Thy hands. Turn not Thy face, have pity, do not despise me, neither forsake me, O Lord, for I am weak; and it is to Thee, my protecting God, that I have come for refuge. Heal my soul, I have sinned against Thee. Save me for the sake of Thy mercy, for upon Thee have I cast myself from my very youth. May those who war against me be put to shame, and may those who seek to separate me from Thee through immodest acts, unseemly thoughts, and unprofitable recollections be turned back. Chase far from me every filthiness that is the superabundance of evil. For Thou alone art holy; Thou alone art mighty; Thou alone art immortal --- having unfathomable power against all things. And it is through Thee that every power is given against the Devil and his forces. Unto Thee is due all glory, honor, and worship, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

PRAXIS AND THEORIA

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "Orthodox Spirituality"

In the teachings of the Holy Fathers, the three stages of the spiritual life are characterized by use of the terms "praxis" and "theoria". It is of value for one to dwell upon this subject also, in order, on the one hand to understand more clearly what is meant by repentance and purification of heart; and, on the other hand, to ascertain the misinterpretation of the terms "praxis" and "theoria" by contemporary individuals.

When reading texts from the Holy Fathers, many people behold these terms without being aware of their deeper meaning. They interpret them within the perspective of western thought: "Theoria" is termed as speculative, is based on theory and not on practice, in other words, dealing simply with logic theoretically. Whereas "praxis" is the teaching and application of these intellectual concepts. Still others see "theoria" as the reflection on things divine, and "praxis" as its missionary thrust, i.e., the teaching of these rational concepts.

However, in the Patristic tradition other meanings are attached to the terms "praxis" and "theoria." St. Gregory the Theologian says that theoria and praxis are beneficial because theoria elevates man's nous above earthly things; it guides him to the Holy of Holies and restores him to his original nature; whereas praxis receives and serves Christ and tests love with actions. Clearly, theoria is the vision of God -- the nous' restoration and return to God; praxis is whatever deeds it takes to lead to this love.

In another text, St. Gregory the Theologian, in making reference to the last and the most dreadful of the seven plagues of the Egyptians -- i.e., the death of their first-born children -- states that in order for a person to escape the angel of death, he must anoint the guardians of his nous -- praxis and theoria -- with the blood of Christ. Thus praxis and theoria are linked with the nous. They are the nous' guardians and are cured by the blood of Christ. And this, for certain, is our identification with and participation in Christ's crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension.

Within the whole of patristic tradition it is clear that praxis is the purification of the heart's passions and theoria is both the illumination of the nous and the vision of the uncreated glory of God. According to St. Gregory the Theologian, praxis is the cause of theoria. According to Elias the Elder, praxis is fasting and all night vigil; psalm-singing and prayer; and silence which is more precious than words; also praxis is whatever is done patiently without complaint. St. Isaac the Syrian says that theoria is the "vision of the nous". It must be noted, of course, that there is no praxis independent of theoria, neither does theoria exist independently of praxis. This means that man is led to the theoria of God through purification; and when theoria ceases, then praxis begins again.

St. Gregory Palamas is more analytical on the subject of praxis and theoria. He teaches that theoria of God is nothing else but the vision of God. Therefore theoria is not speculation on what is said or what is seen, but it is the vision of God. If this is in fact theoria, then it follows that praxis is nothing less than the cleansing of the heart, and repentance, the complete hesychastic way of life, instruction on hesychia. Thus, according to St. Gregory Palamas, praxis is equated with hesychasm, a method of prayer (holy silence) which necessitates stillness of the nous; the halting of the world, and the forgetting of earthly things. It is an initiation into the things from above and the putting aside of all concepts of goodness. Through praxis -- sacred hesychia -- "we are liberated from what is worldly and direct ourselves toward God." This is the path and manner of ascent towards God which the Most Holy Mother of God followed; she attained to theosis thus and became the mother of the Word of God.

Praxis, therefore, is the purification of the heart; this constitutes genuine repentance, as proclaimed by St. John the Baptist, Christ Himself and, of course, by all of His Apostles, because repentance is the indispensable prerequisite for one to experience the Kingdom of God. Thus, purification of the heart, i.e., of our inner world, is the first stage of the spiritual life, through which we must pass in order to attain to salvation.

In regards to the meaning attached to "purification of heart" by the Holy Fathers, they intended to convey primarily three things. Firstly, purification of the heart is the cure of the soul's faculty, so as to function in accordance with nature and above nature -- not contrary to nature. Man's soul is both unified and manifold. She has primarily three faculties: the intelligent, the appetitive and the incentive. All three faculties, when functioning normally, are directed towards God. The intellect seeks God; the desire longs for God, and the will must do everything to achieve this communion and union with God.

Secondly, purification is man's deliverance from pleasure and pain, in other words a person's liberation from the oppression exerted by pleasure and pain. When man is cleansed, he is freed from their domination. It is the spiritual pleasures which primarily are cultivated within him; and he does not become distressed or afflicted when diverse people or problems and adversities in life cause him pain.

Thirdly, purification is the cleansing of the heart from the various thoughts-logismoi (the plural of logismos -- thought forms; negative logismoi obstruct our vision of God) existing therein. They are called logismoi because they must dwell in the reason and not within the heart. What does this mean? When a "logismos" comes and a person is not sufficiently attentive, it then becomes a desire which wants to be fulfilled, i.e. realized. This means that the logismos proceeds from the

intelligent faculty of the soul to the passible faculty, that is the faculties of desire and will. Being realized and developing into a passion the logismos enters, in fact, into the heart and remains all powerful there.

The Fathers say that the heart can be cleansed of logismoi through repentance and by means of the ascetic method of the Church. And this ascetic method is inspired by divine grace. A simple thought may enter the reason but not find its way within the heart. When all logismoi are dismissed and the heart is cleansed, only one word-prayer prevails. For this reason the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" is called the one-word-prayer. Thus, the simple remembrance within the heart helps retain the unceasing prayer while reason accommodates the so called simple logismoi -- the plain concept of a thing disengaged from passion.

These three states are what the Fathers call purification of the heart. When a person's heart is cleansed he becomes more sociable, balanced. He behaves properly within society, because his selfishness has given way to love for God and love for man. Selfish love is transformed into unselfish love. Formerly, he would love selfishly, with a love which seeks its own. Now, however, he loves with a pure love. He loves others without expecting anything in return. He loves independently of whether others love him. There is no self-seeking in his actions. Thus, when selfish love is changed into unselfish love, one speaks of the person as having become a real human being. And it is this transformation which is considered the cure of man.

In patristic tradition, praxis is also called ethics. St. Gregory Palamas, when he speaks of ethics in his texts, is actually developing the theme of purification of heart. Therein the entire way of man's cure is described. In Orthodox tradition ethics is not an abstract condition, neither is it a pharisaical outward behavior; rather it is asceticism. Therefore, when the Fathers speak of ethics, they mean asceticism. And since asceticism is a person's passage from impurity of the nous to its cleansing and on to its illumination, orthodox ethics, therefore, is man's purification.

If praxis is the purification of heart in patristic tradition, theoria is on the one hand the illumination of the nous and on the other the vision of the uncreated Light. Thus in the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, it appears that theoria of God is man's union with God. It is effected through divinization (theosis) and bestows upon him the knowledge of God. Theoria - union - theosis and knowledge of God are synonyms in patristic tradition.

This is the path leading to a person's cure. Just as every science has a specific way of guiding a person to knowledge, so also does the Church have a method to lead man to God. And this method consists of purification of the heart, illumination of the nous and divinization (theosis) -- also called praxis and theoria.

Αίρεση και Σχίσμα

Τοῦ Πανοσ. Ἀρχιμανδρίτου π. Ἰωαννικίου Κοτσώνη

Ἐπειδὴ ὑπάρχει μεγάλη σύγχυση καὶ προβληματισμὸς πάνω στὸ θέμα αὐτό, τόσο στὰ ἀπλοϊκὰ στρώματα τοῦ πληρώματος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὅσο καὶ σὲ πολλοὺς ἱερωμένους καὶ θεολόγους, εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ διαλευκανθεῖ ἡ διαφορὰ μεταξὺ αἵρέσεως καὶ σχίσματος.

Κατὰ τοὺς Ἱεροὺς Κανόνες, αἵρεση εἶναι ἡ ἀλλοίωση, ἡ παραχάραξη καὶ ἡ διαστρέβλωση τῆς ἀλήθειας, τοῦ Δόγματος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, τὸ ὁποῖο ἀποτελεῖ θεμέλιο καὶ ἀκρογωνιαίو λίθο καὶ πέτρα τῆς Πίστεως, «ἡ δὲ Πέτρα ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός». Ἡ θεολογικὴ αἵρεση, λοιπόν, εἶναι μία εὐθὺς προσβολὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ πολεμικὴ. Ξεκινᾷ ἀπὸ τὴν στρέβλωση τῶν δυσνόητων ἀγιογραφικῶν χωρίων μὲ ἓνα ὑπερήφανο ἐγκεφαλισμό ἢ ὑπερφίαλη λογοκρατία τοῦ αἱρεσιάρχου (ἀρχηγοῦ τῆς αἵρέσεως) καὶ ἔχει ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα τὴν ταραχὴ τῆς εἰρήνης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὴν ἀπώλεια τῶν αἱρετικῶν καὶ τῶν πιστῶν ἐκείνων οἱ ὁποῖοι θὰ κατρακυλήσουν πρὸς τὸ βάραθρο τῆς αἵρέσεως. Διότι μὲ τὴν αἵρεση γκρεμίζεται τὸ σωτηριολογικὸ ἔργο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, χάνονται οἱ προϋποθέσεις τῆς σωτηρίας, ἀφοῦ Θεολογία καὶ Ἐκκλησιολογία καὶ Σωτηριολογία συμπορεύονται, συμπλέκονται καὶ ἀλληλοπεριχωροῦνται. Τότε ἔχουμε μία αἱρετικὴ Ἐκκλησιολογία, μία αἱρετικὴ καὶ μία Σωτηριολογία καὶ αἱρετικὴ Θεολογία.

Ἀπὸ ἀγιογραφικὴ ἄποψη, ἡ αἵρεση θεωρεῖται βλασφημία κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ εἶναι ἀσυγχώρητη, διότι στὴ οὐσία της περιέχει τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀμετανοήσιας καὶ τοῦ ἑωσφορισμοῦ.

Ὁ βίος καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ ἀρχηγοῦ τῆς αἵρέσεως (αἱρεσιάρχου) εἶναι βίος καὶ διδασκαλία ἡ ὁποία τοποθετεῖται ἐντελῶς ἀντίθετα πρὸς τὸν Ἀρχηγὸ τῆς Πίστεώς μας καὶ πρὸς τὸ Ἱερὸ Εὐαγγέλιο. Οἱ αἱρετικοὶ πολλὰς φορὲς – συμβουλίᾳ τοῦ Πονηροῦ – ὑποκρίνονται τοὺς Ὀρθόδοξους καὶ καπηλεύονται τὴν Ὀρθόδοξον Πίστην.

Τὸ ἀνατρεπτικὸ ἔργο τῶν αἱρετικῶν ἔχει στόχο καὶ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δηλαδὴ τοὺς Ἱεροὺς Κανόνες τῶν Οἰκουμενικῶν Συνόδων, πού ὑπομνηματίζουν καὶ ἐρμηνεύουν Ὀρθόδοξως τὴν Ἁγία Γραφὴ. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ οἱ αἱρετικοὶ εἶναι φορεῖς μίας ἐπιδημικῆς νόσου, οἱ Ὀρθόδοξοι εἴμαστε πολλὴν περισσότερο προσεκτικοὶ ἀπ' ὅσο πρέπει γιὰ μία ἐπιδημία ἡ ὁποία προσβάλλει τὴν υγεία τοῦ σώματος.

Ἀγαπᾶμε μὲν τοὺς αἱρετικούς ὡς ἀθάνατες ψυχές, ὑπὲρ ὧν ἐτόθη Χριστός, εὐχόμεστε νὰ μετανοήσουν, μισοῦμε ὅμως καὶ ἀποστρεφόμεστε τὴν αἵρεση. Δὲν ἀμνηστεύουμε τὴν

αἵρεσή τους, ἐν ὀνόματι τῆς ἀγάπης. Δὲν κάνουμε σύγχυση προσώπων καὶ αἱρετικοῦ σκότους, αἱρετικοῦ ψεύδους καὶ αἱρετικῆς δοξασίας ἐν ὀνόματι τῆς ἀγάπης, πού δὲν εἶναι ἡ πραγματικὴ Χριστοκεντρικὴ καὶ Ἁγιογραφικὴ ἀγάπη. Ἡ γνήσια καὶ ὄχι νόθος ἀγάπη πάντοτε ὑποδεικνύει τὸ ψεῦδος, τὸ σκοτάδι, τὴν αἵρεση, τὸν γκρεμὸ, τὴν ἄβυσσο!

Τὸ Ἐκκλησιαστικὸ σχίσμα εἶναι κάτι πολὺ διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὴν αἵρεση, καθὼς ἐρμηνεύει αὐτὸς ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης στὸ Πηδάλιό του (σελ. 388). Τὸ σχίσμα ἔχει ὡς αἰτία κάποια προβλήματα, πού εὐκολὰ ἀντιμετωπίζονται καὶ λύνονται, μόνον ὅταν ὑπάρχει καλὴ πρόθεση καὶ πολλὴ ταπείνωση καὶ πνεῦμα διακρίσεως καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς δυὸ πλευρές. Οἱ σχισματικοὶ ἀνεξαρτητοποιοῦνται βέβαια, ἀποσχίζονται ἀπὸ τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸ κορμὸ, δημιουργοῦν δική τους Σύνοδο, ἀλλὰ δὲν παύουν νὰ εἶναι Ὀρθόδοξοι. Δὲν διαστρέφουν τὰ ἱερὰ Δόγματα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δὲν εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς Ἀλήθειας καὶ τῶν Ἁγίων Γραφῶν καὶ τῆς Ἱερᾶς Παραδόσεως, ὅπως οἱ αἱρετικοί.

Μία ἡμέρα εἶχε βγεῖ ὁ διάβολος περίπατο μαζί μὲ ἓνα φίλο του.

Ἐκεῖ λοιπόν πού ἐπήγαιναν, βλέπουν ξαφνικὰ ἓναν ἄνδρα νὰ σκύβει κάτω καὶ κάτι νὰ παίρνει.

- Τί νὰ εὐρῆκε ἄραγε; ἐρώτησε ὁ φίλος του.

- Λίγη ἀλήθεια! ἀπάντησε ὁ διάβολος.

- Καὶ ἀνησυχεῖς; τὸν ἐρώτησε ὁ φίλος του.

- Ὁχι, τοῦ ἀπάντησε. Ὁχι. Δὲν ἀνησυχῶ καθόλου! Αὐτὸ γιὰ μένα εἶναι καλὸ. Θὰ τὸν βάλω νὰ τῆς δώσει πιὸ πολλὴ σημασία ἀπὸ ὅτι τῆς ἀξίζει, καὶ νὰ τὴν πιστεύσει τόσο, πού νὰ τὴν κάμει μία καινούργια θρησκεία...

Ἡ ἀπειθαρχία τῶν σχισματικῶν στὴν Ἐκκλησία συνίσταται στὴν ἔλλειψη διακρίσεως ἀπὸ τὴ μία καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη πλευρά, στὴν ἀπουσία ἀγάπης. Ἄν παραμεριστοῦν οἱ ἀνθρώπινες ἀδυναμίες καὶ πρυτανεῦει ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀγάπη καὶ ἡ ἀρετὴ τῆς διακρίσεως εὐκολὰ ἀντιμετωπίζονται, συζητοῦνται καὶ λύνονται τὰ διοικητικῆς ἢ ἄλλης φύσεως αἰτία πού προκάλεσαν τὸ σχίσμα.

Ὁ Πρωτοπρεσβύτερος Βαλεντίνος Σβεντσιόσκι (1882-1931) ἦταν μία ἐξέχουσα μορφή τῆς Ρωσικῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὅμως ἔκανε καὶ ἓνα τραγικὸ λάθος. Ἀποσχίστηκε ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Διαφώνησε μὲ τὴν διακήρυξη τοῦ τότε τοποτηρητῆ τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ θρόνου τῆς Ρωσικῆς Ἐκκλησίας Μητροπολίτη Σέργιου (1927) ἐπειδὴ ἀναγνώριζε τὸ κομμουνιστικὸ καθεστῶς. Ἀργότερα ὅμως κατάλαβε τὸ λάθος του. Μετανόησε. Καὶ ζήτησε συγγνώμη ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτη Σέργιο. Ἔστειλε γι' αὐτὸ μία ἐπιστολὴ στὸν Μητροπολίτη Σέργιο τὴν ὁποία καὶ κοινοποίησε στὰ πνευματικά του παιδιὰ. Οἱ δυὸ αὐτὲς ἐπιστολὲς ἔχουν πολλὰ νὰ μᾶς διδάξουν ὅλους μας καὶ νὰ μᾶς προβληματίσουν γιὰ τὸ σωστὸ φρόνημα γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θέμα: Ἡ ἐνότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ σχίσματα.

Στὸ γράμμα του στὸν Μητροπολίτη Σέργιο μεταξὺ τῶν ἄλλων γράφει:

«Σεβασμιότατε πατέρα, πεθαίνω! Ἐδῶ καὶ καιρὸ μὲ βασανίζει ἡ συνείδησή μου. Ἀμάρτησα βαριά ἀπέναντι στὴν Ἁγία Ἐκκλησία. Καὶ μπροστὰ στὸν θάνατο τώρα, τὸ βλέπω ὀλοκάθαρα. Σᾶς παρακαλῶ νὰ μὲ συγχωρήσετε γιὰ τὸ ἀμάρτημά μου· καὶ νὰ μὲ δεχθῆτε νὰ ἐπανενωθῶ μὲ τὴν Ἁγία Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Μετανοῶ γιὰ τὸ ὅτι τόλμησα,

ἀντίθετα στους Ἱεροὺς Κανόνες, νὰ μὴ σᾶς ἀναγνωρίσω ὡς πρῶτο, κανονικὸ ἐπίσκοπο καὶ γιατί ἔβαλα τὴν δική μου σκέψη καὶ τὴν δική μου γνώμη, πάνω ἀπὸ τὴν κανονικὴ τάξη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας... Δὲν ζητάω τίποτα. Τώρα περιμένω τὸ τέλος μου. Ἀπλῶς παρακαλῶ, γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, δεχθεῖτε τὴν μετάνοιά μου καὶ δεχθεῖτε με νὰ πεθάνω ἐνωμένος μετὰ τὴν Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία».

Στὰ γράμματα ποὺ ἔστειλε σὲ πνευματικά του παιδιὰ ἔγραφε:

«Ὁ πνευματικὸς σας πατέρας ἔκαμε ἓνα τρομερὸ λάθος. Ἀμάρτησε βαριά. Τρία χρόνια πρὶν, ἀποκόπηκα ἀπὸ τὸν μητροπολίτη Σέργιο καὶ μαζί μου φύγατε καὶ σεῖς ἀπὸ τοὺς κόλπους τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας. Ἀλίμονο σ' ἐκείνον ποὺ γίνεται αἰτία νὰ σκανδαλισθεῖ ἄνθρωπος! Καὶ ἐγὼ ἔβαλα σὲ σκάνδαλο πολλούς... Τώρα πεθαίνω. Καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θανάτου, τὸ βλέπω, ὅτι διέπραξα βαρὺ ἁμάρτημα. Συγχωρήστε με, γιὰ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ἐπιστρέψτε μαζί μου στοὺς κόλπους τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας. Μετανοήστε γιὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία στὴν ὁποία σᾶς παρέσυρα. Ὅσοι ἀπὸ σᾶς δὲν χάσατε τὴν πίστη σας σ' ἐμένα σὰν πνευματικὸ ὁδηγὸ σας, μιμηθεῖτε με καὶ στὴν μετάνοια!»!

Ὁ π. Βαλεντίν Σβεντσιτски κοιμήθηκε στὶς 20 Ὀκτωβρίου 1931. Μὲ τὴν μετάνοιά του μᾶς δείχνει, ὅτι ἡ ΑΓΙΑ Ἐκκλησία ποὺ ἱδρύσε ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ τὴν ἄφησε στὸν κόσμον νὰ συνεχίσει τὸ ἔργο Του, εἶναι Αὐτὴ ποὺ ξέρουμε. Καὶ δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται νὰ τὴν ὑποτιμᾶμε.

Ἀντιθέτως ὁμως, πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ π. Σβεντσιτски, ἔχουμε τὴν περίπτωση τῆς Λατινοπαπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ρώμης. Ἡ περίπτωση αὐτὴ ἀποτελεῖ ἓνα διαφορετικὸ παράδειγμα ἐγωϊστικοῦ σχίσματος τὸ ὁποῖο ἐν καιρῷ ἔχει ὑπερ-προχωρήσει εἰς αἵρεση καὶ (ἀνεξαρτήτως) τῶν πολλαπλῶν οἰκουμενιστικῶν προσπαθειῶν, ἢ ἐπαναφορὰ τῶν Παπικῶν εἰς τοὺς κόλπους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Κυρίου Ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, στὴν ἀγκαλιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξίας, θεωρεῖται πλέον ὡς μία ἀπίθανη προσδοκία!



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».

Ὁ Ἀνάξιος Κλήρος Βλάπτει τὴν Ἐκκλησία

Φώτης Κόντογλου, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον του « Ἀσάλευτο Θεμέλιο »

Ἐυστυχῶς ὅπου σταθεῖ κανεὶς ἀκούει ἐπικρίσεις καὶ παράπονα γιὰ τοὺς κληρικούς μας γιὰ τὴν ἀδράνεια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Αὐτὸ στενοχωρεῖ καὶ θλίβει κάθε Ὁρθόδοξο Χριστιανὸ καὶ πολὺ περισσότερο ἐκείνους ποὺ ἔχουν πῶς στενοὺς πνευματικὸς δεσμούς μετὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι ὅτι ἐξ' αἰτίας κάποιων ἀναξίων κληρικῶν γενικεύεται ἡ δυσφήμιση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἐξογκώνονται τὰ παραστρατήματα τῶν ἱερωμένων· κι αὐτὸ εἶναι φυσικὸ, ἐπειδὴ ὁ λαὸς ἔχει τὴν ἀπαίτηση οἱ κληρικοὶ νὰ εἶναι χωρὶς κηλίδα, ἀλλοιῶς δὲν τοὺς ἀναγνωρίζει γιὰ πνευματικὸς ὁδηγὸς του. Οἱ πολλοὶ δὲν εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ ξεχωρίσουν τὸ πρόσωπο ἀπὸ τὸ πνευματικὸ λειτουργημὰ ποὺ κάνει καὶ ἐπιηρεάζονται τόσο πολὺ ἀπὸ κάποιο σκάνδαλο ποὺ φημολογεῖται γιὰ ἓναν ἱερωμένο, ὥστε γίνονται ἄπιστοι, δὲν πατοῦν πιά σὲ Ἐκκλησία καὶ εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολο ἓναν τέτοιο ἀγανακτισμένο ἀποστάτη νὰ τὸν συμφιλιώσει κανεὶς μετὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Μήτε ἓνας Χρυσόστομος μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει ἓνα τέτοιο κατόρθωμα. Ἀφήνω πῶς ὅποιος ἐπιχειρήσει νὰ μετατρέψει ἓναν τέτοιο ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπέχθεια ποὺ πῆρε γιὰ τὴν θρησκεία, θὰ βρεῖ τὸν μετὰ του καὶ μπορεῖ ν' ἀκούσει ὅτι «κι αὐτὸς εἶναι ὑποκριτής, γιατί σκεπάζει τὶς ἀθλιότητες τῶν παπάδων». Οἱ τέτοιοι ἄνθρωποι, ἂν δὲν γίνουν ὀλότελα ἄθεοι, πηγαίνουν καὶ γίνονται χλιαστὲς ἢ εὐαγγελιστὲς ἢ παπικοὶ ἢ προτεστάντες.

Τὰ σκάνδαλα τῶν ρασοφόρων μας εἶναι ἡ σπουδαιότερη αἰτία ποὺ πληθαίνουν οἱ αἵρετικοί, καὶ μάλιστα, αὐτοὶ οἱ νέοι προσύλητοι γίνονται φανατικώτατοι μέσα στὴν αἵρεση ποὺ προσχωροῦν, ἀηδιασμένοι ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνάξιους ἱερωμένους μας. Γιὰ τοῦτο πρέπει νὰ τρέμουν οἱ κληρικοὶ μὴν τυχὸν ἀκουσθεῖ τὸ παραμικρὸ σὲ βάρος τους, γιατί οἱ ψυχὲς ποὺ χάνονται θὰ ζητηθοῦν μία μέρα ἀπ' αὐτούς. Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε στοὺς μαθητὲς του ὅτι αὐτοὶ εἶναι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὸ ἅλας τῆς Γῆς, καὶ ὅτι πρέπει νὰ λάμπει τὸ φῶς τους ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων γιὰ νὰ ἰδοῦνε τὰ καλὰ ἔργα τους καὶ δοξάσουν τὸν Πατέρα Τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. Λοιπὸν, κι ὅταν γίνεται τὸ ἀνάποδο, δηλαδή ὅταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι βλέπουν τὰ κακὰ ἔργα τους, ἀντὶ νὰ δοξάσουν τὸ Θεό, θὰ τὸν βλασφημήσουν. Καὶ αἰτία θὰ εἶναι ὄχι οἱ ἄθεοι, ὄχι οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ μαθητὲς καὶ ἀντιπρόσωποι τοῦ στὸν κόσμον, «οἱ κεχρισμένοι».

Πάντα, σὲ κάθε ἐποχῇ, ὑπῆρχαν οἱ ἀνάξιοι κληρικοὶ, κοντὰ στοὺς ἁγίους ρασοφόρους. Ἀλλὰ σήμερα τὸ πράγμα ἐχειροτέρευσε κατὰ πολὺ. Μία ἀπὸ τὶς πολλὰς αἰτίες αὐτῆς τῆς θλιβερῆς καταστάσεως εἶναι ὅτι γίνονται συχνὰ κληρικοὶ κάποιοι ἄνθρωποι ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν κλίση στὴν θρησκεία καὶ ποὺ γι' αὐτούς τὸ ρασοφορεῖν εἶναι ἓνα ἐπάγγελμα. Ὁ ἱερεὺς ὄχι μοναχὰ πρέπει νὰ ἔχει κλίση στὴν θρησκεία, ἀλλὰ νὰ φλέγεται ἀπὸ πίστη καὶ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὰ θεία, νὰ εἶναι «τῷ πνεύματι ζέων», ὅπως λέγει ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Λουκᾶς. Καὶ νὰ τελεῖ τὴν θείαν μυσταγωγίαν μετὰ τέτοια κατάνυξη, ποὺ

πολλές φορές να δακρύζει μπροστά στην Άγια Τράπεζα, ιερουργώντας με φόβο και τρόμο. Ένώ πολλοί από τους σημερινούς ρασοφόρους, αντί ή ευσέβειά τους και ή κατάνυξή τους να συνεπάρει τους εκκλησιαζομένους, τους παγώνει ή άτονία, ή άδιαφορία και ή ψυχρότητα με την όποια εκτελούν την ιεροτελεστία. Σ' αυτό συνεργεί και ή άθλια θυμελική μουσική που άκούεται σε πολλούς ναούς αντί για ψαλμωδίες...

Έπειδή λοιπόν λείψανε από την Έκκλησία μας ιερωμένοι που έχουν φωτιά μέσα τους, ή Έκκλησία αυτή δεν μπορεί παρά να βραδυπορεί, άσυγκίνητη κι άδιάφορη για όσα θα έπρεπε να την ενδιαφέρουν ζωηρά, άδιάφορη για ότι το ποιμνίό της σκανδαλίζεται και δοκιμάζεται σκληρά ή πίστη του από τα καμώματα μερικων ιερωμένων (άδιάφορων για την παραμόρφωση της ιερής παραδόσεως), άδιάφορη για τα τέκνα της που την άρنيούνται (για να πυκνώσουν τις τάξεις των διαφόρων αίρετικων), με κίνδυνο αυτή ή αίμοραγία της να καταντήσει θανάσιμη γι' αυτήν.

Ό τρόπος με τον όποιο θα μπορούσε να διορθωθεί τούτη ή πολύ θλιβερή κατάσταση, φανερώνεται από τα παραπάνω συμπτώματα ότι είναι πολύ άπλός, είναι όμως και πολύ δύσκολη ή θεραπεία της. Γιατί για την Έκκλησία του Χριστού δεν υπάρχει κανένα φάρμακο, ούτε καμιά μαγική ράβδος, αφού ή ίδια έχει έργο της την καθοδήγηδη και την σωτηρία των ανθρώπων.

Η θεραπεία βρίσκεται στα χέρια της, και είναι ή κάθαρσή της από στοιχεία κακά για την ύψιστη άποστολή της. Όταν γίνει, άκόμα και σχετικά, μια τέτοια κάθαρση, θα μπορέσουν να καταταχθούν στην ύπηρεσία της άγνοι και άξιοι κληρικοί, με βαθιά πίστη και με άνιδιοτέλεια, «τῷ πνεύματι ζέοντες», για τους όποιους θα είναι «ώς αγαπητά τα σκηνώματα του Κυρίου των δυνάμεων». Και όταν γίνει αυτή ή επάνδρωση της Έκκλησίας μας με στοιχεία σοβαρά, έκλεκτά και άξιοσέβαστα, τότε το ιερό δέντρο της Έκκλησίας θα παρουσιασθεί, μέσα σε λίγα χρόνια, κατάφορτο από καρπούς «ώς κατάκαρπος έλαία» προς χαράν των πιστων Όρθοδόξων, και προς δόξαν του Θεού.

Τότε θα λείψει αυτό το θανατερό μούδιασμα, που την κατέχει σήμερα κι ή άπίστευτη άδιαφορία της για όσα την άφορούν, άκόμα και για ζητήματα ζωής και θανάτου γι' αυτήν. Οί καλοί εκπρόσωποι της θα στέκονται άνύστακτοι φρουροί της, ήμέρας και νυκτός, και τότε θα λάμψει το άνέσπερο φώς της Όρθοδόξου πίστεως μέχρι περάτων της Οίκουμένης, μέσα στο σκοτάδι που πλακώνει σήμερα τον κόσμο. «Ίδου νυν καιρός Εϋπρόσδεκτος» για να γίνει αυτό.

Άλλά «ή βασιλεία του Θεού βιάζεται και οί βιασται άρπάξουσιν αυτήν». Η Έκκλησία του Χριστού πρέπει να έχει ύπηρετες που να είναι άφοσιωμένοι σ' αυτήν και έτοιμοι για θυσίες, κατά το ματωμένο υπόδειγμα του Σταυρωμένου Αρχηγού της.

Η Έκκλησία του Χριστού πρέπει να ύπηρετείται και να φυλάγεται από ψυχές ήρωϊκές που να είναι έτοιμες όχι

μόνον για θυσίες ύλικές και σωματικές, αλλά και για πνευματικές, που είναι ίσως πιο δύσκολες. Τέτοιες θυσίες είναι το να ταπεινώνεται ό ένας μπροστά στον άλλον, το να μη λογαριάζει το συμφέρον του, το να βάζει το καλό και την προκοπή της Έκκλησίας άπάνω από τη δική του, το να θυσιάζεται ως καλός ποιμην για τα πρόβατα του Χριστού κ.τ.λ.

Όλα αυτά δεν μπορεί να τα έχει ένα ιερωμένος, αν δεν έχει πίστη φλογερή και άτράνταχτη και θερμουργό κι αν δεν πιστεύει ότι «οὐκ έχει μένουσαν πόλιν, αλλά την μέλουσαν επιζητεί».

Μια Όρθόδοξη Έλληνική Έκκλησία, που θα έχει τέτοιους άγρυπνους και άδέκαστους φρουρούς, θα είναι ή κιβωτός της Άλήθειας, που θα πλέει άπάνω στα θολά κι άφρισμαμένα νερά του παγκόσμιου Όκεανού της άμαρτίας και άπωλείας.

Πόσο πάσχουμε, πόση θλίψη νοιώθουμε, κάθε φορά που θα παρουσιασθεί κανένα σκάνδαλο σε βάρος κάποιου κληρικού! Άν ήτανε τρόπος να πέφτουν σε μās οί κατηγορίες, αντί σ' εκείνους, σ' έμās που οί πράξεις μας δεν άντανακλούν την Έκκλησία.

Ό εύλαβής Λαός μας δεν αισθάνεται την άνάγκη να άκούει βαθυστόχαστες θεολογίες με πανεπιστήμια και με διπλώματα, ούτε παγκόσμια συμβούλια και «διαλόγους». Ό πόθος του είναι να άκούσει ότι υπάρχει κάποιος ρασοφόρος, ιερεύς ή καλόγερος, που έχει καθαρή ζωή, ως είναι και άγράμματος. Τόση είναι ή δίψα του για άγιότητα, που φτάνει να είναι ένας ιερωμένος μονάχα ενάρετος, και τον λένε άγιον.

Πιστεύουμε ότι ή Όρθόδοξη Έκκλησία είναι ό φύλακας της Άλήθειας του Χριστού, ό μόνος φύλακας. Άν φανούμε άνάξιοι να έχουμε αυτόν τον θησαυρό, θα χάσουμε, θα τον πάρει ό Κύριος από τα χέρια μας, όπως άπέτρεψε το πρόσωπό του, τον παλαιό καιρό, από τους Έβραίους.

Και ότι ή Έκκλησία μας κατέχει την άλήθεια αυτή, το φανερώνουν, χωρίς να θέλουν, άκόμα και οί παπικοί, που κατά τα τελευταία χρόνια έκδηλώνουν το θαυμασμό τους για τα πατερικά μας κείμενα, για την ύμνολογία μας και για την ύμνογραφία μας, και γενικά για την λατρεία μας. Αυτό είναι σαν να όμολογούν ότι ή Έκκλησία μας είναι «ή Μία Καθολική και Άποστολική Έκκλησία» κι ότι αυτά που αναφέραμε παραπάνω είναι ή έκφρασις της πνευματικής ουσίας της, ότι είναι το καθρέφτισμά της στον αισθητό κόσμο. Και δεν μπορεί το καθρέφτισμά της παρά να έχει άνταπόκριση με εκείνο που καθρεφτίζεται και μάλιστα να είναι μία άδύνατη σκιά του.

Άς παρακαλούμε, λοιπόν, νύχτα-μέρα, και με δάκρυα τον Κύριο να μη μās στερήσει από το άθάνατο αυτό στεφάνι που έβαλε άπάνω στο κεφάλι μας, και που τα άφθορα άνθη του ποτισθήκανε από το άγιον αίμα μυριάδων μαρτύρων, από καταβολής Χριστιανισμού. Κι ως κλάζουμε με κλαυθμό: «Μη άποστρέψεις το πρόσωπό Σου από του λαού σου, ότι θλίβεται. Ταχύ επάκουσον αυτού, πρόσχες τη Έκκλησία Σου και λύτρωσον Αυτήν».

Κωνσταντινούπολη, 29 Μαΐου 1453...



Εημέρωνε 29 Μαΐου 1453. Στά τείχη της Ἀρχόντισσας τῶν πόλεων ἀνεμίζουν οἱ Αὐτοκρατορικοὶ Δικέφαλοι. Στὴν πύλη τοῦ Ἁγίου Ρωμανοῦ ἐφιππος ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Παλαιολόγος. Ἦξερε πὼς ἡ Δύση καὶ ἡ τύχη τοῦ εἶχαν γυρίσει τὴν πλάτη. Ὅμως ἐκεῖ «αὐτοπροαιρέτως» στάθηκε ἀνδρείως καὶ κοίταξε κατὰ πρόσωπο τὸν Τοῦρκο καὶ τὸν θάνατο. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν πέθανε! Δὲν πέθανε στὴ συνείδηση τῶν Ἑλλήνων... Οἱ Ἕλληνες λένε πὼς «τοῦ ἀντρειωμένου ὁ θάνατος, θάνατος δὲ λογιάται».

Τὸ ὄνομά του καὶ ἡ ἱστορία του ἐγίναν τραγοῦδι στὸ στόμα, ἐλπίδα στὴν καρδιά τῶν ὑπόδουλων Ἑλλήνων... «ὁ Μαρμαρωμένος Βασιλιάς»... Ἄγγελος Κυρίου μαρμάρωσε τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο τὴ στιγμή πού οἱ Ἀγαρηνοὶ ἐφορμοῦσαν ἀσεβῶς στὴν θεοφύλακτη Πόλη. Ὁ Αὐτοκράτορας μαρμαρώθηκε καὶ δὲν πέθανε... περιμένει τὸ ἄγγιγμα τοῦ Ἀγγέλου πού θὰ τοῦ δώσει τὸ ξίφος γιὰ νὰ κυνηγήσει ὄχι μόνο τοὺς κατακτητὲς ὡς ἐκεῖ ἀπ' ὅπου ξεκίνησαν -- τὴν κόκκινη Μηλιά -- ἀλλὰ ἀκόμα καὶ τὸν ἀδερφό του καὶ τὸν ἀνιψιό του πού ἀργότερα τούρκεψαν καὶ πολέμησαν τοὺς Ἕλληνες. Γιὰ νὰ ἐπιβάλλει ποινὴ σὲ ὅσους ἀτίμασαν τὸ αἷμα καὶ τὰ δάκρυα τοῦ Γένους... γιὰ νὰ γίνει τιμωρός τους...

Κάπου 400 χρόνια ἀργότερα, ὁ μέγας ἐθνικὸς ἥρωας τοῦ 1821 θὰ μᾶς ὑπενθυμίσει ὅτι «...τὸ Γένος ποτὲ δὲν ὑποτάχθηκε στὸν Σουλτάνο. Εἶχε πάντα τὸ βασιλιά του, τὸ στρατό του, τὰ κάστρα του. Βασιλιάς του, ὁ Μαρμαρωμένος Βασιλιάς, στρατὸς του οἱ Ἄρματολοι καὶ οἱ Κλέφτες, κάστρα του ἡ Μάνη καὶ τὸ Σούλι...»



Ἦκοσμικὲς σκέψεις, ὧ μέριμνες τοῦ βίου, πὼς δὲν μᾶς ἀφήνετε οὔτε τὴν ὥρα τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας, ἀλλὰ ἐξακολουθεῖτε καὶ τότε νὰ μᾶς ἐνοχλεῖτε! Σὰν τὶς σφήκες μᾶς περικυκλώνετε, μᾶς κεντᾶτε, μᾶς ἐνοχλεῖτε. Ἀλλὰ ὅπως μιά σφηγκοφωλιά πού ἐνοχλεῖ τοὺς διαβάτες βάζουν φωτιά καὶ τὴν καῖνε καὶ ἀπαλλάσσονται οἱ διαβάτες ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνοχλητικὴ παρουσία της, ἔτσι καὶ τὶς πονηρὲς αὐτὲς σκέψεις, πού μᾶς ἐνοχλοῦναι καὶ δὲν μᾶς ἀφήνουν ἀνεπηρέαστους νὰ παρακολουθήσουμε τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία, πρέπει νὰ βροῦμε τρόπο νὰ τὶς ἐξοντώσουμε, νὰ τὶς ἀπομακρύνουμε ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησή μας καὶ νὰ κάψουμε τὴ φωλιά τους.

Ἐπίσκοπος Ἀγίουστίνοσ Καντιώτης

Θρήνος τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφιάς

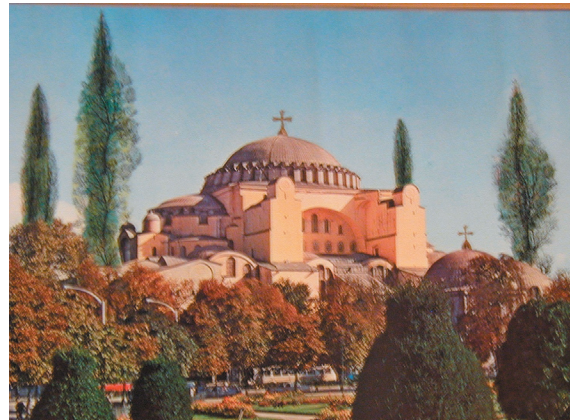
Σημαίνει ὁ Θιός, σημαίνει ἡ γῆς,
σημαίνουν τὰ ἐπουράνια,
σημαίνει κι ἡ Ἁγία-Σοφία, τὸ μέγα μοναστήρι,
μὲ τετρακόσια σήμαντρα κι ἐξηνταδυὸ καμπάνες,
κάθε καμπάνα καὶ παπᾶς, κάθε παπᾶς καὶ διάκος.
Ψάλλει ζερβὰ ὁ βασιλιάς, δεξιὰ ὁ πατριάρχης,
κι ἀπ' τὴν πολλὴν τὴν ψαλμουδιὰ
ἐσειόντανε οἱ κολόνες.

Νὰ μποῦνε στὸ χερουβικὸ καὶ νὰ ἔβγει ὁ βασιλέας,
φωνὴ τοὺς ἤρθε ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κι ἀπ' ἀρχαγγέλου στόμα:
«Πάψετε τὸ χερουβικὸ κι ἄς χαμηλώσουν τὰ ἴγια,
παπᾶδες πάρτε τὰ γιερά καὶ σεῖς κεριὰ σβηστήητε,
γιατί εἶναι θέλημα Θεοῦ ἡ Πόλη νὰ τουρκέψει.

Μόν' στεῖλτε λόγο στὴ Φραγκιά,
νὰ ἴρουνε τρία καράβια:

Τὸ ἴνα νὰ πάρει τὸ Σταυρὸ καὶ τ' ἄλλο τὸ Βαγγέλιο,
τὸ τρίτο τὸ καλύτερο, τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζά μας,
μὴ μᾶς τὴν πάρουν τὰ σκυλιὰ καὶ μᾶς τὴ μαγαρίσουν».

Ἡ Δέσποινα ταράχτηκε καὶ δάκρυσαν οἱ εἰκόνες.
«*Σώπασε κυρὰ Δέσποινα, καὶ μὴ πολυδακρῦζεις,
πάλι μὲ χρόνους, μὲ καιρούς, πάλι δικὰ μας θᾶνα!*»



Ὁ Γέροντας Ἰάκωβος Τσαλίκης (+1991) ἐξομολόγησε κάποτε μιὰ γερόντισσα καὶ τῆς ἔβαλε κανόνα νὰ μὴν κοινωνήσει γιὰ τρία χρόνια.

- Γιατί δὲν κοινωνᾶς; Τὴ ρώτησε μίαν ἡμέραν ὁ ἱερέας τῆς ἐνορίας της.

- Μοῦ ἔβαλε κανόνα ὁ π. Ἰάκωβος, ἀπάντησε ἐκείνη, καὶ τοῦ εἶπε τὴν αἰτία.

- Ὅχι γιατί, μὴ στενοχωριέσαι. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ἀγράμματος καλόγερος. Ἐγὼ εἶμαι μορφωμένος καὶ σοῦ λύνω τὸν κανόνα. Νὰ ἔρθεις τὴν Κυριακὴ νὰ σὲ κοινωνήσω.

Καθὼς ὁμως πλησίασε ἡ γιαιὰ νὰ μεταλάβει, ἔνωσε στὸ στόμα της τὴν ἁγία λαβίδα ἄδεια καὶ κρύα. Δὲν κατάλαβε τὴ γεύση τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας. Τὸ θαυμαστὸ γεγονός ἐπαναλήφθηκε ἄλλες δυὸ Κυριακές, ὅποτε ἡ γυναίκα ἀνησύχησε καὶ ξαναπῆγε στὸ γέροντα Ἰάκωβο.

- Παιδί μου, τῆς εἶπε ἐκεῖνος, ὁ κανόνας δὲν λύνεται. Πρέπει νὰ κάνεις τὸν κανόνα πού σοῦ ἔβαλα...

THE MYSTERY OF KNOWLEDGE

An excerpt from the chapter, "The Theory of Knowledge of Saint Isaac the Syrian," in "Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ" by Archimandrite Justin Popovich. This volume (comprised of several essays and selected texts) reflects Fr. Justin's theological brilliance in its varied dimensions. His Christocentric philosophy argues irrefutably against not only secular humanism but also against humanistic Christianity, which sadly is making inroads within the Orthodox world.

According to the teaching of St. Isaac the Syrian, there are two sorts of knowledge: that which precedes faith and that which is born of faith. The former is natural knowledge and involves the discernment of good and evil. The latter is spiritual knowledge and is "the perception of the mysteries," "the perception of what is hidden," "the contemplation of the invisible."

There are also two sorts of faith: the first comes through hearing and is confirmed and proven by the second, "the faith of contemplation," "the faith that is based on what has been seen." In order to acquire spiritual knowledge, a man must first be freed from natural knowledge. This is the work of faith. It is by the asceticism of faith that there comes to man that "unknown power" that makes him capable of spiritual knowledge. If a man allows himself to be caught in the web of natural knowledge, it is more difficult for him to free himself from it than to cast off iron bonds, and his life is lived "against the edge of a sword."

When a man begins to follow the path of faith, he must lay aside once and for all his old methods of knowing, for faith has its own methods. Then natural knowledge ceases and spiritual knowledge takes its place. Natural knowledge is contrary to faith, for faith, and all that comes from faith, is "the destruction of the laws of knowledge" -- though not of spiritual, but of natural knowledge.

The chief characteristic of natural knowledge is its approach by examination and experimentation. This is in itself "a sign of uncertainty about the truth." Faith, on the contrary, follows a pure and simple way of thought that is far removed from all guile and methodical examination. These two paths lead in opposite directions. The house of faith is "childlike thoughts and simplicity of heart," for it is said, "Glorify God in simplicity of heart" (cf. Col. 3:22), and: "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Natural knowledge stands opposed both to simplicity of heart and simplicity of thought. This knowledge only works within the limits of nature, "but faith has its own path beyond nature."

The more a man devotes himself to the ways of natural knowledge, the more he is seized on by fear and the less can he free himself from it. But if he follows faith, he is immediately freed and "as a son of God, has the power to make free use of all things." "The man who loves this faith acts like God in the use of all created things," for to faith is given the power "to be like God in making a new creation." Thus it is written: "Thou desiredst, and all things are presented before thee" (cf. Job 23:13). Faith can

often "bring forth all things out of nothing," while knowledge can do nothing "without the help of matter." Knowledge has no power over nature, but faith has such power. Armed with faith, men have entered into the fire and quenched the flames, being untouched by them. Others have walked on the waters as on dry land. All these things are "beyond nature"; they go against the modes of natural knowledge and reveal the vanity of such modes. Faith "moves about above nature." The ways of natural knowledge ruled the world for more than 5,000 years, and man was unable to "lift his gaze from the earth and understand the might of his Creator" until "our faith arose and delivered us from the shadows of the works of this world" and from a fragmented mind. He who has faith "will lack nothing," and, when he has nothing, "he possesses all things by faith," as it is written: "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22); and also: "The Lord is near; be anxious for nothing" (Phil. 4:6).

Natural laws do not exist for faith. St. Isaac emphasizes this very strongly: "All things are possible to him that believeth (Mark 9:23), for with God nothing is impossible..." To step beyond the limits of nature and to enter into the realm of the supernatural is considered to be against nature, as something irrational and impossible.... Nevertheless, this natural knowledge, according to St. Isaac, is not at fault; it is not to be rejected; it is just that faith is higher. Natural knowledge is only to be condemned in so far as, by the different means it uses, it turns against faith. But when this knowledge "is joined with faith, becoming one with her, clothing itself in her burning thoughts," when it "acquires wings of passionlessness," then, using other means than natural ones, it rises up from the earth "into the realm of its Creator," into the supernatural. This knowledge is then fulfilled by faith and receives the power to "rise to the heights," to perceive him who is beyond all perception and to "see the brightness that is incomprehensible to the mind and knowledge of created beings." Knowledge is the level from which a man rises up to the heights of faith. When he reaches these heights, he has no more need of it - for it is written: "We know in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (I Cor. 13:9-10). Faith reveals to us now the truth of perfection, as if it were before our eyes. It is by faith that we learn that which is beyond our grasp -- by faith and not by enquiry and the power of knowledge. /... /

There are three spiritual modes in which knowledge rises and falls, and by which it moves and changes. These are the body, the soul, and the spirit.... At its lowest level, knowledge "follows the desires of the flesh," concerning itself with riches, vainglory, dress, repose of body, and the search for rational wisdom. This knowledge invents the arts and sciences and all that adorns the body in this visible world. But in all this, such knowledge is contrary to faith. It is known as "mere knowledge, for it is deprived of all thought of the divine and, by its fleshly character, brings to the mind an irrational weakness, because in it the mind is overcome by the body and its entire concern is for the things of this world." It is puffed up and filled with pride, for it refers

every good work to itself and not to God. That which the Apostle said, *knowledge puffeth up* (1 Cor. 8:1), was obviously said of the knowledge that is not linked with faith and hope in God, and not of true knowledge. True spiritual knowledge, linked with humility, brings to perfection the soul of those who have acquired it, as is seen in Moses, David, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, and all those who, within the limits of human nature, were counted worthy of this perfect knowledge. With them, knowledge is always immersed in pondering things strange to this world, in divine revelations and lofty contemplation of spiritual things and ineffable mysteries. In their eyes, their own souls are but dust and ashes. Knowledge that comes of the flesh is criticized by Christians, who see it as opposed not only to faith but to every act of virtue.

It is not difficult to see that in this first and lowest degree of knowledge of which St. Isaac speaks is included virtually the whole of European philosophy, from naive realism to idealism -- and all science from the atomism of Democritus to Einstein's relativity.

From the first and lowest degree of knowledge, man moves on to the second, when he begins both in body and soul to practice the virtues: fasting, prayer, almsgiving, the reading of Holy Scripture, the struggle with the passions, and so forth. Every good work, every goodly disposition of the soul in this second degree of knowledge, is begun and performed by the Holy Spirit through the working of this particular knowledge. The heart is shown the paths that lead to faith, even though this knowledge remains "*bodily and composite*."

The third degree of knowledge is that of perfection. "*When knowledge rises up above the earth and the care for earthly things and begins to examine its own interior and hidden thoughts, scorning that from which the evil of the passions springs and rising up to follow the way of faith in concern for the life -- 'to come ...'*"

It is very difficult, and often impossible, to express in words the mystery and nature of knowledge. In the realm of human thought, there is no ready definition that can explain it completely. St. Isaac therefore gives many different definitions of knowledge. He is continually exercised in this matter, and the problem stands like a burning question mark before the eyes of this holy ascetic. The saint presents answers from his rich and blessed experience, achieved through long and hard asceticism. But the most profound, and to my mind the most exhaustive answer that man can give to this question is that given by St. Isaac in the form of a dialogue: "*Question: What is knowledge? Answer: The perception of eternal life. Question: And what is eternal life? Answer: To perceive all things in God.*" For love comes through understanding, and the knowledge of God is ruler over all desires. To the heart that receives this knowledge every delight that exists on earth is superfluous, for there is nothing that can compare with the delight of the knowledge of God.

Knowledge is therefore victory over death, the linking of this life with immortal life and the uniting of man with God. The

very act of knowledge touches on the immortal, for it is by knowledge that man passes beyond the limits of the subjective and enters the realm of the trans-subjective. And when the trans-subjective object is God, then the mystery of knowledge becomes the mystery of mysteries and the enigma of enigmas. Such knowledge is a mystical fabric woven on the loom of the soul by the man who is united with God.

For human knowledge the most vital problem is that of truth. Knowledge bears within itself an irresistible pull towards the infinite mystery, and this hunger for truth that is instinctive to human knowledge is never satisfied until eternal and absolute Truth itself becomes the substance of human knowledge; until knowledge, in its own self-perception, acquires the perception of God, and in its own self-knowledge comes to the knowledge of God. But this is given to man only by Christ, the God-Man, he who is the only incarnation and personification of eternal truth in the world of human realities. When a man has received the God-Man into himself, as the soul of his soul and the life of his life, then that man is constantly filled with the knowledge of eternal truth. /.../

It is the man who restores and transforms his organs of knowledge by the practice of the virtues that comes to the perception and knowledge of the truth. For him faith and knowledge, and all that goes with them, are one indivisible and organic whole. They fulfill and are fulfilled by one another, and each confirms and supports the other. "*The light of the mind gives birth to faith,*" says St. Isaac, "*and faith gives birth to the consolation of hope, while hope fortifies the heart.*" Faith is the enlightenment of the understanding. Faith, which bathes the understanding in light, frees man from pride and doubt, and is known as "*the knowledge and manifestation of the truth.*"

Holy knowledge comes from a holy life, but pride darkens that holy knowledge. The light of truth increases and decreases according to a man's way of life. Terrible temptations fall upon those who seek to live a spiritual life. The ascetic of faith must therefore pass through great sufferings and misfortunes in order to come to knowledge of the truth.

A troubled mind and chaotic thoughts are the fruit of a disordered life, and these darken the soul. When the passions are driven from the soul with the help of the virtues, when "*the curtain of the passions is drawn back from the eyes of the mind,*" then the intellect can perceive the glory of the other world. The soul grows by means of the virtues, the mind is confirmed in the truth and becomes unshakable, "*girded for encountering and slaying every passion.*" Freedom from the passions is brought about by crucifying of both the intellect and the flesh. This makes a man capable of contemplating God. The intellect is crucified when unclean thoughts are driven out of it, and the body when the passions are uprooted. "*A body given over to pleasure cannot be the abode of the knowledge of God.*"

True knowledge, "*the revelation of the mysteries,*" is exclusively attained by means of the virtues, and this is "*the knowledge that saves.*"

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE PASCHA EGG



Of the Pascha customs, one of the most symbolic and beautiful is the practice of preparing, giving and eating eggs. Most of us, however, seem to take for granted the idea of eggs at Pascha. We have fun in boiling and coloring them and even more enjoyment in giving them to our relatives and friends and cracking the eggs by hitting them one upon the other. How-

ever, the real enjoyment of the Pascha eggs comes only when we fully realize the symbolism in connection with Holy Pascha. The egg itself is a symbol of the Resurrection – white being dormant, it contains a New Life sealed within its walls.

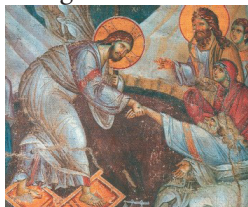
In Christianity, the Pascha egg represents the sealed tomb in which the Precious Body of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, was placed after His Crucifixion... the shell being the sealed tomb having dormant life within its walls.

Since the early days of Christianity and to this day, red has been the predominant color that has been used in coloring the eggs, signifying the sacred blood of Christ, which was shed on Calvary, and the Joy of Pascha – the great and glorious Day of His Resurrection. However, other colors have gradually come into common use. It is said that the many colors of the different eggs together represent the beautiful hues of the springtime, which join Christendom in the rejoicing of the Resurrection of Christ.

At the conclusion of the Resurrection Liturgy in the Orthodox Church, the eggs are blessed and distributed by the Priest to the congregation. Thus, everyone receives a personal blessing of the Feast. The members of the congregation then go about hitting the eggs together. Upon cracking of one of the eggs, the beautiful words “Christ is Risen” (Christos Anesti) are said by the one whose egg is cracked, whereupon the other replies, “Truly He is Risen” (Alithos Anesti).

The cracking of the egg means the seal of the tomb is broken and Christ is Risen! The eating of the eggs at Pascha is symbolic of breaking Lent, since dairy products are avoided in a strict fast, especially during Holy Week. No egg of the Fast should remain unbroken, to symbolize emphatically that Christ has conquered Death and is Risen thereby granting New Life to all believing Christians.

CHRIST
IS RISEN



ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ
ΑΝΕΣΤΗ

SPIRITUAL COUNSELS, PART I

By St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain translated by P. A. Chamberas
(“A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel,” New York: Paulist Press, 1989)

This is a series of teachings on “Guarding the Senses” from the teachings of a more contemporary “Desert Father,” St. Nicodemos (1749 - 1809) of the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos). St. Nicodemos compiled “The Philokalia” which contains the treasured teachings of many of the ancient Desert Fathers. As a contemporary father of the 18th and early 19th centuries, St. Nicodemos’ writings (over 200 in all!) have inspired generations of monastics and spiritual strugglers. His writings are steeped in the teachings and traditions of the ancient Desert Fathers and he is in large part responsible for the revival of interest in the Fathers over the past two hundred years. “A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel” was written by St. Nicodemos at the request of his cousin, Ierotheos, who had recently been made Bishop of Euripos. However, the work is applicable to all Christians -- not just to clergy. His approach is psychological, ethical, and practical -- just what we need in modern times.

WHY ONE MUST STRUGGLE TO CONTROL ONE’S SENSES

According to St. Gregory the Theologian we must struggle to block our senses and to control them, for they are the easy ways toward evil and entrances of sin. Let us not give in to the easy ways of evil and to the easy entrances of sin. I say to you then, put all your strength forward to protect your senses. I also say to you to be attentive, to struggle, and I insist on this, by using various synonymous words. I wish to prove to you that the devil is always standing before us, observing and studying the condition of our senses. Just as soon as we open even one sense to him, he enters into our soul directly and brings death to us, as St. Isaac has noted: “The enemy is standing and observing day and night directly against our eyes to detect which entrance of our senses will be opened to him to enter. Once he enters through one of our senses because of our lack of vigilance, then this devious shameless dog attacks us further with his own arrows.”

We must also struggle to protect our senses because it is not only through curious eyes that we fall into the sin of desire and commit fornication and adultery of the heart, as the Lord noted. There is also the fornication and the adultery of the sense of hearing, the sense of smell, the sense of taste, the sense of touch, and of all the senses together. Therefore, St. Gregory the Theologian has written in his heroic counsel to the virgin: “Virgin, be truly a virgin in the ears, in the eyes and in the tongue! Every sense that wanders with ease sins.” St. Gregory of Nyssa also said: “The Lord has spoken, I believe, about all the senses, so that the one who touches and the one who uses every inner power in us to serve pleasure has actually committed the sin in his heart.”

THOSE WHO LIVE IN THE WORLD MUST PROTECT THEIR SENSES MORE THAN THOSE ASCETICS IN THE DESERT

You who are in the world, dear friend, must guard yourself even more than those who are in the desert. St. Basil wrote to someone living in the world the following advice: "Do not relax your efforts because you are in the world. In fact you are in need of greater efforts and more vigilance to achieve salvation. After all you have chosen to live in the midst of all the pitfalls and in the very stronghold of the sinful powers. You have before you constantly the instigations of sins, and day and night all of your senses are being attacked by their evil desires." If we are overcome by the desire for food or drink, we do not experience such a strong attack. Being in a desolate place where one does not see or hear anything out of place or experience the other causes of sin, we are thus surrounded by a protective wall that helps to win our battles without wars, as St. Isaac said: "When one does not receive a sense perception, then he can have a victory without a struggle."

In other words, the monks who have removed themselves from the world are fighting behind trenches, but you are fighting an arm-to-arm combat against the enemies. The attacks are coming from all directions. And the causes of sin are all around you. While they stand afar off from the precipice, you are at its very edge. That great luminary of spiritual discretion, St. Poimen, once said: "Those who live far away from the world are like those who are far from a precipice and, whenever they are misled by the devil, before they reach the edge, they call upon God who comes to save them."

Those who live in the world, however, are like those who are near the precipice and when the devil draws them toward it, they have no time to call upon God and be saved but fall directly into the abyss." Therefore, because you are so close to this abyss, you are in immediate danger just as soon as you neglect or open one of your senses. God forbid! This is the reason why you want to use all your energy to protect your senses from coming into contact with sin. As it is impossible



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for a house not to be darkened by smoke entering from the outside, it is similarly impossible for a man not to let them in without restraint, allowing all manner of passionate images to enter the soul. The wise St. Syngletike said, "Even when we do not want it, the thieves will enter through the senses. For how is it possible for a house not to be darkened by the smoke entering from outside through the doors and windows that have been left opened?"

IT IS A GREAT VICTORY TO OVERCOME OURSELVES

Do not think for a moment that this victory is small and insignificant. In fact it is a greater victory to overcome one of your passions and a pleasure of your senses than to overcome one hundred of your enemies. It is a more glorious trophy of victory to shed willingly a few drops of perspiration and one drop of blood, for the love of God, in order to overcome one of your evil wills and to spite the devil, than to shed rivers of blood to subdue entire armies. Again it is a greater triumph to subdue your senses and your entire body to your hegemonious mind than to subdue large kingdoms. Once, when King Alexander was praised for having conquered the whole ecumene, he responded with the prudent remark: "All of my victories will prove to be vain, if I do not succeed to conquer myself."

Many who have subdued their enemies, cities, and countries have later been subdued miserably by their own improper passions and have shamefully become slaves of their own passions. A certain Father was very correct when he said that "the first victory is the victory of self." St. Isidore Pelousiotes also said: "The true victor is not he who subdues the foreign barbarians, but he who wages spiritual warfare against the evil passions. Many who have conquered barbarians have in turn been shamefully subdued by their own passions."

GUARDING THE SENSE OF SIGHT [DESCRIPTION OF THE SENSE OF VISION AS IT RELATES TO THE SPIRIT]

Sight is the most regal of the senses, according to the naturalists; sight is dependent upon the psychic spirit and related to the mind, according to the theologians; sight is the most knowledgeable of the other senses and therefore the most dependable, according to the metaphysicians. According to the popular proverb, "The eyes are more trustworthy than the ears." According to the word of the Lord, "The eye is the lamp of the body" (Matthew 6:23).

According to the astronomers, the eyes are the two stars of the face. According to the moral philosophers the eyes are the two first thieves of sin. A certain wise man has called the eyes two braids of the soul which it spreads out like the tentacles of an octopus to receive from afar whatever is desirable to it. Or, if I may say with St. Basil the Great, the eyes are the

two “bodiless arms” with which the soul may reach out and touch from afar the visible things it loves. For whatever we cannot touch with our hands, these we can touch and enjoy with our eyes.

The sense of sight, after all, is a touch more refined than the touch of the hands, but less refined than the touch of the imagination and of the mind. St. Basil wrote: “Vision can deceive the soul toward a certain pleasure through the touch of some object by means of the rays of the eyes that act as bodiless arms. With these the soul can touch from afar whatever it desires. And the things that the hands of the body do not have under their authority to touch, these can nevertheless be embraced by the rays of the eyes passionately. This is why St. Gregory the Theologian also said: “The lamps of the eyes touch the untouchable.”

It is from these eyes then that we must cut off the vision of those beautiful bodies which tempt the soul to shameful and inappropriate desires. You have heard the great Father St. Basil, who said: “Do not play host with your eyes to the displays of wonder workers, or to the visions of bodies that place one at the center of passionate pleasure.” You have also heard the wise Solomon: “Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you” (Proverbs 4:25). Listen also to Job who said: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?” (Job 31:1). . . .

FIGHTING TEMPTATION CAUSED BY THE SENSE OF SIGHT

What must one do when Captivated by the eyes? If ever this thief comes and captivates you, fight against him and do not allow any idol of Aphrodite, that is, of any shameful desire, to be impressed upon your soul. How? By taking refuge in God through prayer, which is the most secure way. “Deliverance comes only from the Lord” (Psalms 3:8). Another way is to turn your imagination to another spiritual thought so that one

imagination wipes out another and one idol destroys another. According to the popular proverb, “One peg drives out the other.” This is what St. Gregory the Theologian meant when he wrote: “A vision caught me, but was checked; I set up no image of sin. Was an image set up? Yet, the experience of sin was avoided.”

Do you hear what he is saying? The image of sin stood before him but was not impressed upon his imagination. Thus he was directly freed from the experience, that is, from the assent or the act of sin. If then the devil does not cease to tempt you with that image that has been impressed upon your imagination, St. Chrysostom and St. Syngletiki advise you to use this method in order to be delivered from his wiles: with your mind gouge out the eyes of that image, tear its flesh and cut away its lips from the cheeks. Remove, moreover, the beautiful skin that appears externally and meditate on how what is hidden underneath is so disgusting that no man can bear to look upon it without hate and abhorrence. It is after all no more than a skinned skull and an odious bone filled with blood and fearful to behold. Here is what St. Chrysostom said: “Do not therefore pay attention to the external flower here, but proceed further through your mind. Unfold that fine skin with your imagination and consider what lies beneath it.”

The most wise St. Syngletiki said this: “If ever by thought an inappropriate fantasy comes to us, it must be expelled by reason. Thus, shut your eyes to this image. Remove from it the flesh of the cheeks, cut away the lips and imagine then a mass of bones which is deformed. Think then what the desired image really is. This way our thought will be relieved of any vain deceits, for the desired image is nothing more than blood mixed with phlegm... From this point on the mind notes nothing about the once desired image, but foul-smelling and decaying ulcers, and soon imagines it lying dead next to the inner eyes. Thus it is possible for one to escape from sensual thought.”

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THE RESURRECTION SERMON

By St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople (~400 AD)

Is there anyone who is a devout lover of God? Let them enjoy this beautiful bright festival! Is there anyone who is a grateful servant? Let them rejoice and enter into the joy of their Lord!

Are there any weary with fasting? Let them now receive their wages! If any have toiled from the first hour, let them receive their due reward; If any have come after the third hour, let him with gratitude join in the Feast! And he that arrived after the sixth hour, let him not doubt; for he too shall sustain no loss. And if any delayed until the ninth hour, let him not hesitate; but let him come too. And he who arrived only at the eleventh hour, let him not be afraid by reason of his delay.

For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first. He gives rest to him that comes at the eleventh hour, as well as to him that toiled from the first. To this one He gives, and upon another He bestows. He accepts the works as He greets the endeavor. The deed He honors and the intention He commends.

Let us all enter into the joy of the Lord! First and last alike receive your reward; rich and poor, rejoice together! Sober and slothful, celebrate the day!

You that have kept the fast, and you that have not, rejoice today for the Table is richly laden! Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted

one. Let no one go away hungry. Partake, all, of the cup of faith. Enjoy all the riches of His goodness!

Let no one grieve at his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it.



He destroyed Hades when He descended into it. He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh. Isaiah foretold this when he said, "You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below."

Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar because it is mocked. It was in an uproar, for it is destroyed. It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated. It is in an uproar, for it is now made captive. Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see. O death, where is thy sting? O Hades,

where is thy victory?

Christ is Risen, and you, o death, are annihilated! Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down! Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is Risen, and life is liberated! Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead; for Christ having risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

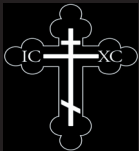
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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OUR WESTERNIZED ORTHODOXY...

By Fr. Filotheos Faros, from "Word Magazine," May 1976

CULTURE, CELEBRATION & EXPRESSION

It is difficult to figure out how the prevailing assumption developed that Western cultural tradition is more refined and civilized than is the Eastern. Nevertheless, whatever the origin of this assumption might have been, it seems that this has been taken for granted for a long time. In this part of the world this is especially true, and people of both Eastern and Western cultural backgrounds seem to accept this assumption. As a result, the Westerners have developed a certain air of superiority and have at times demanded that those of an Eastern cultural background renounce their cultural tradition and conform to their prevailing superior Western cultural practices.

When in the beginning of this century, and to some extent even now, the Anglo-Saxon city clerk told the intimidated immigrant that his name would not be Basil or Constantine but William or Charles, he did not have the slightest doubt that he was a missionary who was civilizing the "barbarians." On the other hand, the immigrant Easterner often felt embarrassed for his "barbarian" background and he was very eager to Anglo-Saxonize himself. He would change his name from Papadopoulos to Papson, forget his mother tongue, speak to his children in broken English, and, finally, he would also change his religion, and become Episcopalian, because Episcopalianism was the religion of the "high" class. Even if he did not change his religion, he would try very hard to Protestantize Orthodoxy so that it was less "barbaric." The use of incense was limited, as was lighting candles, kissing icons, or doing prostrations. All these were the uncouth practices of an old

grandmother; these were dismissed with disgust by father and mother.

In everyday life many reformations were also very quickly introduced. Those reformations had mainly to do with the ways of expressing anger, sadness, happiness, and despair, as well as the role and value of the human body. Expression of anger, which was so direct with Easterners, was strongly discouraged. Screaming or yelling, a very common and healthy way for Easterners to express anger, was characterized as cannibalism, and composure and calmness became the definite indication of refinement. The expression of joy was also limited to controlled smiles and celebrations, and feasting was so much devitalized that it became difficult to know the difference between a wake and a wedding reception.

This mentality influenced immensely Orthodox worship in the West, since Orthodox worship is celebrating and feasting more than anything else. The spontaneity of the faithful was suppressed and Orthodox worship deteriorated to an orderly bore. The expression of grief was reduced to an ugly farce. Many non-reformed Orthodox who visited their grieving Anglo-Saxon friends found themselves in the predicament of being consoled by the bereaved themselves who would try to control their visiting friends' sobbing by repeating in disgust, "Do not cry my dear, everything is fine."

I do not think there are many things more pathetic and more barbaric than the mother who stands dressed in a flowery dress with a glamorous hairdo and makeup next to the casket of a young son or daughter who has died a tragic death and asks with a smile of every newcomer, "Doesn't he look beautiful?", and the visitor replies with the same smile, "He definitely does; they have done a beautiful job," to which the grieving mother responds very politely, "Oh, thank you very much."

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His TRUTH be brought forth.

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Another strong element of Western culture is a definite dualism. For example, there is a strong contempt for the human body which is not expressed in the crudely open ways that some of the ascetics express it, but in a very subtle, undetectable way which penetrates everyday living. Most common is the strong distaste for any bodily gestures or facial expressions, as well as touching, which implies that the body exists only for sexual promiscuity.

Many zealous Orthodox, especially converts, are overcome with indignation when Orthodoxy is mixed up with cultural or, as they call it in order to make it sound more Chauvinistic, ethnic traditions. These people are obviously still unable to get rid of their former error, which is probably the worst of Western heresies, namely, the separation of religion from life and its reduction either to a sterile religious intellectualism or to some kind of quaint and exotic mysticism. In reality, unless religion becomes a style of life that is a culture which is continually experienced in everyday life without any impressive pronouncements and fanfare, it is only a gimmick, a game, or a "trip." To help in understanding this point, I would like to bring to your attention that the Anglo-Saxon cultural characteristics I tried so hard to ridicule have a theological origin. They were inspired by Puritanism and pietism, those ugly monsters which were begotten out of wedlock from the triangle of Christianity, Romanism and European barbarism.

SPIRITUALITY: STATIC OR BECOMING?

I do not know if I can fully explain how these disastrous distortions of Christian morality developed, but it seems that Western Christianity very early developed the belief that people either are Christians, which means they meet certain standards, or they are not. Western Christian spirituality and morality is static in that sense. The procedure of becoming a member of the body of Christ is similar to the procedure of

becoming a member of a club. That is, to become a member of a certain club you have to meet certain requirements. Actually in the Orthodox Church in America the procedure of becoming a member of the Church is not similar to that of becoming a member of a club but identical.

It is not probably an accident that the passage of the 5th chapter of St. Matthew is translated in English as: "You must be perfect." However, in Greek, the verb is in the future tense of indicative mood and it is a promise which implies very clearly that perfection will be granted through grace in the future, though in English it is in present tense and the imperative mood which implies that man is expected to reach perfection by himself immediately.

As I said, I cannot trace out the origin of this notion; I only know that Augustine was already introducing it when, if I am not mistaken, he said in his confessions that after his baptism he had no sexual thoughts. I hate to question Augustine's honesty, but it is absolutely impossible for me to accept his statement. I suspect that he made that statement because he already had the notion that since he was a Christian, he was not supposed to have any sexual thoughts. The understanding of Eastern Christianity at the same time was entirely different. Historically, outstanding Christians with a great reputation for wisdom, perfection, and holiness, like St. Anthony, do not have any difficulty talking about their sexual thoughts and temptations, even to a very old age. The desert fathers, those giants of Christian spirituality, report their sexual anxieties and transgressions with an amazing simplicity and openness. I would like to mention only one of those beautiful stories that convey so well the desert fathers' definite conviction that a Christian is constantly in the process of becoming; consequently, what makes somebody a Christian is that he is moving, that is, he is growing spiritually, and not just that he is meeting any standards at any specific time.

"A brother was goaded by lust, and rising at night he made his way to an old man, and told him his thoughts, and the old man comforted him. And revived by that comforting he returned to his cell. And again the spirit of lust tempted him, and again he went to the old man. And this happened many times. But the old man did not discountenance him, but spoke to him to his profit, saying, 'Yield not to the devil, nor relax thy mind; but rather as often as the devil troubles thee, come to me, and he shall go buffeted away. For nothing so dispirits the demon of lust as when his assaults are revealed. And nothing so heartens him as when his imaginations are kept secret.' So the brother came to him eleven times, confessing his imaginings. And thereafter he said to the old man, 'Show love to me, my father, and give me some word.' The old man said, 'Believe me, my son, if God permitted the thoughts with which my own mind is stung to be transferred to thee, thou wouldst dash thyself headlong.' And by the old man saying this, his great humbleness did quiet the goading of lust in the brother."

I said before that what makes somebody a Christian is the fact that he is moving and growing; he is not stagnant, nor has he reached a certain level of perfection as a final point. The expectation for the person who is on the first step of the ladder of perfection is to move to the second; the expectation for the person who is on the tenth step is to move to the eleventh; therefore, when the latter individual is not moving towards the eleventh step, he can be condemned, while the first one can be saved, although he is eight steps lower than the latter. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is a good example of that. The Pharisee is a decent man. He is not a thief, not an adulterer; he is a temple-goer and an ardent temple supporter. But he is satisfied with his accomplishments, and he believes that there is nothing else he has to do; and, as a result, he had become stagnant. On the other hand, the tax collector lives an ugly life, but he realizes it; he is not satisfied with it, and he is resolved to move. It is the latter, not the former, who went up to his home justified, said Christ. The whole Eastern Christian tradition has developed on the basis of this stand. Western Christianity seems to have missed this entirely, and it got really caught up in its inflexible and impersonal generalizations. It developed the either/or Christian morality which presented very serious problems right away, and these show up very clearly in our times. The Christian West tried to cope with the consequences of its either/or generalized and standardized morality by developing two highly destructive patterns: 1) the "appear to be" pattern and 2) the "lowering of standards" pattern.

THE TWO DESTRUCTIVE PATTERNS IN THE WEST

The first, in essence, just removes the focus from trying to be a Christian to trying to appear to be a Christian. Very early, Western Christians realized that they would never make it if the only way they could be Christians would be to meet all the standards; therefore they concentrated their efforts on trying to appear to be the way they were supposed to be. A good name for that tactic is hypocrisy, and it is familiar to all

legalistic and rigid moralities. Phariseeism was exactly that, and Puritanism and pietism excelled in this, far beyond Phariseeism. Southern Baptist piety is an excellent contemporary example of this tactic.

The other pattern has been the lowering of the standards. That is, if the only way you can be a Christian is to meet all the standards, we can increase the number of Christians by decreasing the moral standards. Our age has witnessed much of this tactic. It started with Protestantism and developed to a spectacular firecracker in Roman Catholicism which responded with an overflow of permissiveness to the recent overwhelming exodus and indifference of its followers. I wonder which of the two tactics has been more destructive. The first created false people who spent their energy not to grow but to hide! The second took the excitement out of life. All the average American expects from himself is not to steal and not to kill, and when he accomplishes that, he sits back doing nothing and ends up vegetating and being bored to death. There is not any far-reaching perspective in his life; therefore, he develops an infantile self-concern, which leads either to depression or to breakdown. When he cannot have instant gratification of his great needs, the world falls apart. He would never have a chance to get depressed due to sexual frustration, if he had the far-reaching direction in his life that a certain ascetic had, who every time he ate food, cried because he was nurturing his corruptible body when his incorruptible soul was starving.

That static notion of Christian morality and spirituality penetrated the life of Western Christians and became a life style, which they live without being aware of it. Since the Western notion of Christian morality was the meeting of certain standards, a Christian was not supposed to have any negative feelings like anger or hatred. That notion was incorporated in the culture and eventually the expression of anger became a sign of "barbarism." Refined people were not supposed to express or feel any anger. As a result of this notion, anger was suppressed, and it was transformed to all kinds of bad symptoms. Repressed anger is a basic part of all mental disturbances. The suppressed anger becomes devious and comes out well camouflaged and over-destructive. This is exactly what Christ describes, saying, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first." (Matthew 12, 43-45)

The unclean spirit that comes out of the Easterner with uncouth screaming and yelling, and which is repressed by the refined Westerner, comes back bringing with him seven spirits more evil than himself like all kinds of neurosis, schizophrenia, depression, religious fanaticism, and many others; undoubtedly, the state of the psychotic refined Westerner is far worse than the state of the uncouth and crude, screaming

and yelling Easterner. Repressed anger has been the cause of many disasters in human history. Many wars, revolutions, and massacres have been the disastrous outburst of repressed anger, and likewise many destructive effects of religious fanaticism like the Inquisition and the dreadful murders of the Calvinistic communities in the Middle Ages. Also, many dictators or stern and punitive religious leaders are moved by a repository of repressed anger which usually refers more appropriately to parental figures and which has been repressed by religious and cultural inhibitions. This is how religion becomes life, and it is lived by these people without awareness. This is how Western Christianity has influenced Western culture and this is how a distorted Christianity has caused immeasurable harm and innumerable deplorable cases of mental disturbance with which modern psychiatry is struggling. The therapeutic process for a schizophrenic in essence is a process of Easternization of the Western man; it is a process of re-orthodoxizing the Western Christian, because Orthodox Christianity has not accepted the “appear to be” pattern and, although it encourages the struggle for perfection, condemns perfectionism which is intolerance of human imperfection and which, in the language of the ascetics, is an indication of demonic pride.

THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

Finally, it is amazing how Western Christianity distorted, in this issue, the scriptural image of Christ; He is presented as condemning human aggression and as a sickening, soft, and effeminate man with rosy cheeks and blond wavy hair. It is deplorable that so many Orthodox are offended by the strong, powerful, dynamic, scriptural Christ of the Byzantine art although they are infatuated by this nauseating Western Christ. It is amazing how Western Christianity managed to visualize the fiery eyes of Christ which “looked around” at the Pharisees “with anger,” (Mark 3,5) as sweetish and wishy-washy, how it resolved to present as soft and effeminate, the powerful Christ who made “a whip of cords” and drove with it all the merchants “out of the temple” with their sheep and oxen, and “poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.” (John 2, 13-16) It is amazing how Western Christianity managed to describe as quiet and soft-spoken him who uttered the dreadful “woes” and called the Scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites,” “blind fools,” “blind guides,” “white-washed tombs,” “serpents” and “brood of vipers” (Matthew 23) and told his tempting disciples “be gone Satan.” (Matthew 16, 23) It is inconceivable how Christ disintegrated to a eunuch prince of peace although he stated very emphatically, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and man’s foes will be those of his own household,” (Matthew 10, 34-36) Christ did promise peace but not a hypocritical external peace but a real inner peace. He said, “My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” (John 14,27)

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

By St. John Chrysostom

Do not think that only monks need to learn the Bible; children about to go out into the world stand in greater need of Scriptural knowledge. A man who never travels by sea does not need to know how to equip a ship, or where to find a pilot or a crew, but a sailor has to know all these things. The same applies to the monk and the man of this world. The monk lives an untroubled life in a calm harbor, removed from every storm, while the worldly man is always sailing the ocean, battling innumerable tempests. Although he himself (the worldly man) may not have any need (of instruction), it may be necessary to him in case he must stop the mouths of others.

The obligation belongs to fathers as well as mothers. There are fathers who spare nothing in order to secure for their children teachers of pleasure and to pander to their cravings as wealthy heirs. But so that the children would be Christians, so that they would exercise themselves in piety, is of little need to them. O criminal blindness! It is this very crude inattention that is responsible for all the disorder that causes our society to groan. Let us suppose that you have acquired large property for them. However, if they do not know how to conduct themselves sensibly, this property will not last long with them. It will be squandered; it will perish with its owners, and will be their most grievous inheritance.

If good fathers would strive to give their children a good upbringing, then we would need neither laws, judges, courts, nor punishments. Executioners exist because we have no morality. Therefore I beg you to take care for the good upbringing of your children. First of all think of the salvation of their souls. God has placed you as the heads and teachers over your families. It is your duty to watch, and to watch continually after the behavior of your wife and children. Listen to St. Paul. If your wives, says he, want to learn anything, let them learn it from their husbands. Educate your children in the teaching and instructions of the Lord (cf. I Cor. 14:35, Eph. 6:4). Imitate Job, who continually looked after his children and offered sacrifices for mercy towards any secret misdeeds they might have committed (Job 1:5). Imitate Abraham, who concerned himself less with the acquisition of riches than with the keeping of God’s law by every member of his house, and about whom the Lord witnessed: For I know that he will order his sons, and his house after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord, to do justice and judgment (Gen. 18:19). David, when he was near death, wanted to leave Solomon the surest inheritance; he called him to himself in order to repeat the following wise instructions: that the Lord may confirm his word which he spoke, saying, if thy children shall take heed to their way to walk before me in truth with all their heart, I promise thee, saying, there shall not fail thee a man on the throne of Israel (III Kings 2:4). These are the examples that we should follow during our lives and with our final breath!

With whom shall a monk speak? With the walls of his cell,

or his blanket? With the desert or the bushes? With the hills or the trees? Thus, he does not need the same teaching, in spite of the fact that he is striving to perfect himself in it, not in order to teach others, but to teach himself. What about those people who live in this (worldly) life? They are in total need of this teaching; for the worldly man is presented with more causes of temptation than the monk. And if you please, know, that with such an education, a man will be the most pleasant of men. All will begin to respect him when they see that he is not irascible and seeking after power. Know this, educate your children in the discipline and knowledge of the Lord. And if someone be poor? Let him remain poor. It will never be the worse for him if he does not serve among the courtiers; on the contrary, he could become the object of wonder. For if the Hellenists, who are a dime a dozen, the cynics, who are accepted by those who cost a dime a dozen, the philosophers (i.e., Greek philosophers) or rather, the philosophers only in name, dressed up in mantles with flowing hair, are able to put many to shame, can the true lover of wisdom not do much more? If a false appearance alone, the mere shadow of philosophy can so exalt a man, what can be said of the love for true and enlightened wisdom? Will not everyone begin to respect such a man? Will they not entrust to him without reservation their houses, wives and children?

God Himself takes great care over the upbringing of children. That is why He placed such a natural attraction in parents toward their children, in order to put parents in unescapable necessity of caring for their children. Subsequently, He created laws concerning their care, and, establishing the feasts, commanded us to explain their meaning. He summed up the meaning of the Passover in this instruction: And thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying, Therefore the Lord dealt thus with me, as I was going out of Egypt (Ex. 13:8). He does the same in the Law. For, telling of the first-born, He adds again: And if thy son should ask thee hereafter, saying, What is this? then thou shalt say to him, With a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast; therefore do I sacrifice every offspring that opens the womb. The males to the Lord, and every first-born of my sons I will redeem (Ex. 13:14-15). Through all of this He commands him to lead the children to the knowledge of God. Even to the children themselves He commands much with respect to the parents, rewarding the obedient and punishing the disobedient, thereby making them even more dear to their parents. Actually, when someone makes us lords over someone else, by this honor he places upon us the greatest obligation to care for him, so that this alone without anything else is able to convince us that the entire fate of this person is in our hands, and we will not lightly dare to injure the one who has been thus entrusted to us. When he also becomes even more wrathful and displeased with us for breaking this trust than the offended ones themselves, and becomes a stern punisher, he thereby inspires us even more to fulfil our obligation. This is what God has done. To these two He has added a third, natural obligation, and if you like, it is the first. Namely, it is that parents, having received the commandment to educate their children, would not dis-

dain His commandment by which God has bound them by natural obligation. If this tie should be held in contempt by the children, He has protected it from being broken entirely by His own punishments and by the parents. Thus He has subjected children to their parents and inspired love in the parents for their children. But there is also a fourth method by which God has strongly and closely bound us with them. He not only punishes those children who work evil against their parents but He also rewards the good ones. He does the same with parents, cruelly punishing those who neglect their children, while granting honor and praise to those who care. Thus did He punish the elder (Eli), who was worthy of praise in every other respect, but rewarded the patriarch Abraham for his care no less than for other virtues. For, speaking of those many and great gifts that He promised to Abraham, God names precisely this virtue as His reason for such a promise: For I know that he will order his sons, and his house after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord, to do justice and judgment (Gen. 18:19).

Untamed youth has need of many instructors and teachers, guides, observers and educators. Only with this effort can it be reigned in. Therefore, if we place limits from an early age, we will not need to use such great force; to the contrary, habit will become law. We will not allow them to do what is pleasant but harmful; we will not try to please them because they are children, for this brings more harm than anything to youth. But most of all we will preserve chastity. We should concern ourselves with this more than anything else, and pay the most attention to this. We will take wives for them early, so that they would unite themselves to their brides with pure and incorrupt bodies. This kind of love is especially ardent. Whoever was chaste before marriage is more likely to remain so after marriage. But those who learned before marriage to fornicate will do the same after marriage. For it is written in the Scriptures: All bread is sweet to a whoremonger (Sir. 23:17). That is why a crown is placed on the head, as a sign of victory, that they are entering the bridal chamber unvanquished, unconquered by lust. If someone prone to love of pleasure has given himself to harlots, then what reason does he have for wearing a crown on his head, since he has been vanquished? We will instill this in them, teach it to them and threaten them in various ways.



Like a man wearing an all-silk garment, if someone throws a dirty rag at him he leaves so as not to ruin his expensive clothes, it is with the saints, who are dressed in virtues, and avoid human glory in order not to be defiled. However, those who seek glory are like a naked man trying to find a small rag or anything else to cover his indecency. The person who is naked of virtues, seeks the glory of people.

Saint Dorotheos of Gaza, on Humility

CHURCH IN THE END TIMES

By Alexander Kalomiros, from his book "Against False Union"

The world and the devil are leading the Church to such frightening trials that the day might come when all the bishops of the land will enter into communion with the heretics. What will the faithful do then? What will the few do who have the heroism not to follow the masses, not to follow their kin, their neighbors, and their fellow citizens?

All the faithful will have to understand that the Church is not there where it appears to be. Liturgies will continue to be performed, and the churches will be filled with people, but the Church will have no relation with those churches or those clergy and those faithful. The Church is where the truth is. The faithful are those who continue the unbroken tradition of Orthodoxy, that work of the Holy Spirit. Those real priests are those who think, live, and teach as the Fathers and the Saints of the Church did, or at least do not reject them in their teaching. Where that continuity of thought and life does not exist, it is a deception to speak of the Church, even if all the outward marks speak of it.

There will always be found a canonical priest, ordained by a canonical bishop, who will follow the Tradition. Around such priests will gather the small groups of the faithful who will remain until the last days. Each one of these small groups will be a local catholic Church of God. The faithful will find in them the entire fullness of the grace of God. They will have no need of administrative or other ties, for the communion that will exist among them will be the most perfect there can be. It will be communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, communion in the Holy Spirit. The golden links of the unalterable Orthodox Tradition will connect those Churches among themselves as well as with the Churches of the past, with the Church triumphant of heaven. In these small groups the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church will be preserved intact.

Of course, it is wonderful that order and coordination should exist in the outward functionings of the various churches, and that the less important churches should receive their direction and guidance from the more important churches, the way it is now between dioceses, metropolises, archdioceses, and patriarchates, but in the last days, such outward relations and contacts will be impossible most of the time. When the age of the Antichrist approaches, even the Ark of the Church will be difficult to discern. There will be such confusion in the world that one Church will not be able to be certain of the Orthodoxy of another because of the multitude of false prophets who will fill the world and who will be saying, "here is Christ", and "there is Christ". Whatever will be accepted officially as the Church, having little by little already betrayed the treasures of the Faith, will have been assimilated by the indescribable, unifying marmalade which will retain most of the outward signs of the Church with satanic cleverness. Here and there small groups of faithful with some priest will still preserve the true Tradition alive. However, there might even

be misunderstandings among the really Orthodox churches because of the confusion of tongues which exists in the contemporary Babel. But none of that will ever sever the essential unity of the Church.

But who will be able to recognize the Church of Christ in those small, scorned groups of faithful that lack all worldly splendor? Yet at the end of time, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church will be just those forgotten and outwardly disunited little parishes which may even be ignorant of the others' existence, but will be united among themselves by the mystical bonds of the Body and Blood of the Lord, in the Holy Spirit, with the common Faith and Tradition which will remain undefiled.



A PRAYER FOR CHILDREN

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich, from "The Struggle for Faith," Vol IV of "A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality"

All-plenteous Lord Jesus Christ, Who was once even Thyself a child and Who used to love and bless children, have mercy upon the children of our time, and save them, so that unbaptized children may be baptized, and so that baptized children may be strengthened in their faith in Thee, Who art Truth eternal, and in their love for Thee, Who art Love ineffable.

Save, O Lord, those children whom unbelieving parents corrupt with atheism and turn away from Thee, their Savior and salvation.

Save, O All-meek Lord, also those children whom evil teachers, without God or soul, alienate from Thee, their Savior and salvation.

Save, O Lord, also those children whose pure soul is defiled by all the immorality in the streets, in the theater, and on television, save them from the impurity of the streets and the theater and from every impurity.

Save, O All-merciful Lord, also those children who are orphans and have fallen into the hands of cruel guardians, or bad stepfathers or stepmothers, or those who are supposed to rear them but do not, save them from hearing blasphemous words and from seeing malicious deeds.

Save, O Son of God, the sons of the sons of men, whom the world tugs here and there into many physical trainings and occupations, without giving them any training in Thy Holy Law, training in proper thoughts, in truth and mercy, and in all deeds of goodness and righteousness.

Help the children of this age, O Almighty One, so that they may grow up and mature to Divine sonship and heavenly citizenship, for their eternal salvation and for Thy glory and praise. Amen.

Οὐνία: Ἀκέφαλη, Ἐρμαφρόδιτη και Παρασιπική

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμ. π. Δαμασκηνοῦ Βασιλοπούλου

Ὅπως ἐξηγεῖ ὁ Πρωτοπρ. π. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός, καθηγητῆς Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν, λέγοντας «Οὐνία», ἐννοοῦμε ἓνα θρησκευτικοπολιτικό σχῆμα ποῦ ἐπινοήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Παπισμὸ γιὰ τὸν ἐκδυτικισμό τῆς μὴ Λατινικῆς Ἀνατολῆς, τὴν πνευματικοπολιτικὴ δηλαδὴ ὑποταγὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας στὴν ἐξουσία τοῦ Πάπα. Ἡ ἐπεκτατικὴ αὐτὴ κίνηση τοῦ Παπικοῦ θρόνου, ὀνομαζόμενη Οὐνία ἢ Οὐνιτισμὸς στὴ γλῶσσα μας, ὀφείλει τὸ ὄνομά της στὴ Λατινικὴ λέξη UNIO (ἔνωση), ἀλλὰ τὸ 1596 ἔλαβε στὴν Πολωνία ἐπίσημα τὸ ὄνομα UNIA. Τὸ ὄνομα χρησιμοποιήθηκε τότε γιὰ νὰ χαρακτηρισθῆ ὄχι μόνον ἡ ἐνωτικὴ κίνηση μὲ τὸν Πάπα, ἀλλὰ και τὸ συγκεκριμένο σῶμα (κοινότητα) τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων οἱ ὁποῖοι συνοδικὰ ἀπεφάσισαν ὄχι τὴν ὀλοτελή προσχώρησή τους στὸν Παπισμὸ, ἀλλὰ μόνον τὴν ἀναγνώριση τοῦ Πάπα ὡς πνευματικῆς κορυφῆς τους, διατηρώντας τὰ λατρευτικὰ καὶ λοιπὰ ἔθιμά τους, καὶ δίνοντας ἔτσι ἐξωτερικὰ τὴν ἐντύπωση τῆς συνέχειας καὶ παραμονῆς στὸ ἐθνικὸ πλαίσιο τους.

Ἡ διακράτηση τοῦ «Βυζαντινοῦ ρυθμοῦ» ἀπὸ τοὺς Οὐνίτες ἐξηγεῖ τὰ ὀνόματα Βυζαντινόρρυθμοι, Ἑλληνόρρυθμοι, κ.ἄ., μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα συνήθως χαρακτηρίζονται. Περισσότερο ὁμως ἀνταποκρίνεται στὰ πράγματα ἡ ὀνομασία «Καθολικοὶ τῆς Ἀνατολῆς», διότι οἱ Οὐνίτες εἶναι οὐσιαστικὰ Παπικοί, δεχόμενοι τὰ δόγματα ἐκεῖνα, ποῦ διαφοροποιοῦν ριζικὰ τὸν Παπισμὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, καὶ μόνον ἐξωτερικὰ καὶ ἐπιφανειακά, μὲ τὴν περιβολὴ τῶν κληρικῶν τους καὶ τὰ ἀνατολικά ἔθιμά τους («ρυθμός»), δίνουν τὴν ἀπατηλὴ ἐντύπωση ὅτι παραμένουν Ὁρθόδοξοι.

Ἡ ἰδέα τῆς Οὐνίας συναρτᾶται μὲ τὴν ἐπεκτατικὴ βούληση τῆς φραγκευμένης Παλαιᾶς Ρώμης, συνισταμένη στὴν ἐξάπλωση καὶ ἐπιβολὴ τοῦ Παπικοῦ πρωτείου ἐξουσίας. Γι' αὐτὸ ἡ Οὐνία, ὡς ἰδέα, γεννήθηκε καὶ ἀναπτύχθηκε παράλληλα μὲ τὴν Ἱερὰ Ἐξέταση (inquisition). Ἱερὰ Ἐξέταση καὶ Οὐνία ἀποδείχθηκαν ἀμφιβαλλεῖς καρποὶ τοῦ Παποφραγκικοῦ πνεύματος. Καὶ ἡ μὲν Ἱερὰ Ἐξέταση ἀνέλαβε τὴν ἐπιβολὴ τῆς Παποφραγκικῆς ἐξουσίας στὰ ὄρια τῆς Φραγκοκρατουμένης Δύσεως, ἡ δὲ Οὐνία ἐπωμίσθη τὴν ἐπέκταση τῆς θρησκευτικοπολιτικῆς Παπικῆς ἐξουσίας στὴν Ἀνατολή. Μὲ τὴν Ἱερὰ Ἐξέταση ἐπιδιώκοταν ἡ ἐξουδετέρωση τῶν ἀνυποτάκτων στὴν Παποφραγκικὴ ἐξουσία: μὲ τὴν Οὐνία, ὁ ἐκλατινισμὸς, εἴτε ὡς κανονικὸς ἐκλατινισμὸς, εἴτε μὲ τὴ μέθοδο τῆς Οὐνίας, ἐκφραζόταν μὲ τὸ ρῆμα «φραγκεύω» (ἐφράγκευσε) ἢ περιφραστικὰ «ἔγινε Φράγκος». Ἡ Οὐνία θὰ συμβαδίξῃ ἱστορικὰ μὲ τὴν Ἱερὰ Ἐξέταση. Ἡ μία λοιπὸν, φωτίζει τὸν ρόλο τῆς ἄλλης.

Ἡ θρησκευτικοπολιτικὸ χαρακτήρα ὀργάνωση τοῦ Πάπα «ΟΥΝΙΑ» μοιάζει πολὺ μὲ ἓνα... κοχύλι. Τὸ κοχύλι αὐτὸ ὀνομάζεται ἐπίσης «ΟΥΝΙΑ» καὶ εἶναι γνωστὸ σὰν «κοχύλι τῶν ζωγράφων», λόγῳ τοῦ ὅτι τὸ κέλυφος του ἐχρησιμοποιεῖτο παλαιότερα ἀπὸ τοὺς ζωγράφους σὰν πιατάκι γιὰ τὴν ἀνάμειξη τῶν χρωμάτων. Οἱ δυὸ Οὐνίες ἔχουν τὰ ἐξῆς κοινὰ γνωρίσματα:

1. Τὸ κοχύλι ΟΥΝΙΑ «ζεῖ στὴν Εὐρώπη στοὺς λασιπώδεις βυθοὺς τῶν γλυκῶν νερῶν». Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ὀργάνωση ΟΥΝΙΑ,

ζεῖ καὶ κινεῖται κυρίως στὴν Εὐρώπη. Δραστηριοποιεῖται ἰδιαίτερα στὴς χῶρες τῆς Κεντροανατολικῆς Εὐρώπης, στὴς δυτικὲς περιοχὲς τῆς πρώην Σοβιετικῆς Ἐνώσεως, στὰ Βαλκάνια· κινεῖται δηλαδὴ στὰ «θολὰ νερά» τῶν κοινωνικοπολιτικῶν καὶ οικονομικῶν ἐκεῖ ἐξελίξεων, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν χώρα μας. Οἱ εἰδικοί ἐρευνητές μας λένε γι' αὐτὴν ὅτι εἶναι «ἓνα θρησκευτικοπολιτικό σχῆμα, ποῦ ἐπινοήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Παπισμὸ, γιὰ τὸν ἐκδυτικισμό τῆς μὴ Λατινικῆς Ἀνατολῆς, τὴν πνευματικοπολιτικὴ δηλαδὴ ὑποταγὴ τῆς στὴν ἐξουσία τοῦ Πάπα» καὶ δὲν ἔχουν καθόλου ἄδικο. Ἀρκεῖ νὰ θυμηθοῦμε τὴν κατὰ τὸ παρελθὸν ἀγωνιώδη προσπάθεια τοῦ Πάπα νὰ ἐπιβληθῇ στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ νὰ ὑποτάξῃ τοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους λαοὺς στὴν θρησκευτικοπολιτικὴ ἐξουσία του. Ἡ ὀργάνωση αὐτὴ τοῦ Πάπα, εἶναι ἐπιφορτισμένη μὲ τὸ ἔργο τοῦ προσυλητισμοῦ καὶ τῆς μεταστροφῆς τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων στὸν Παπισμὸ, κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν ὄντως ἔλκυστικό τίτλο «Ἐνωση τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν».

2. Τὸ κοχύλι ΟΥΝΙΑ εἶναι ἔρμαφρόδιτο. Ὅμως ἔρμαφρόδιτη εἶναι καὶ ἡ ἄλλη ΟΥΝΙΑ -- ἡ ὀργάνωση τοῦ Πάπα καὶ μάλιστα ἀπὸ τὴν γέννησή της. Ἡ Ἱστορία της ἀρχίζει στὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Σταυροφοριῶν. Μὲ πρόσχημα τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων, ἡ Δύση ἐπιχειροῦσε νὰ καταλύσῃ τὴν Ἀνατολικὴ Ρωμαϊκὴ Αὐτοκρατορία, μὲ σκοπὸ τὴν ὑπαγωγὴ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας στὴν δικαιοδοσία τοῦ Πάπα. Μὲ αὐτὴν τὴν προοπτικὴ κατέλαβαν οἱ Σταυροφόροι τῆς Δ' Σταυροφορίας τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη.

Ἐδῶ θὰ πρέπει νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι δὲν ἔγιναν τὰ πράγματα ὅπως εἶχαν σχεδιασθεῖ. Διότι ναὶ μὲν κατελήφθη ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη ἀπὸ τοὺς Σταυροφόρους τῆς Δ' Σταυροφορίας τὸ 1204, οἱ ὀραματισμοὶ ὁμως, οἱ ἐπιθυμίες καὶ οἱ στόχοι τοῦ Πάπα δὲν ἔγιναν πραγματικότητα.

Ὅμως, αὐτὸ ποῦ δὲν κατάφερε διὰ τῶν Σταυροφόρων νὰ ἐπιτύχῃ ὁ Πάπας, θὰ τὸ ἐπιχειροῦσε στὸ μέλλον ἡ κυοφορούμενη ἤδη Οὐνία. Ὅσο δὲ γιὰ τὴν γέννησή της αὐτὴ τοποθετεῖται λίγα χρόνια ἀργότερα, στὴν Σύνοδο τοῦ Λατερανοῦ, τὸ 1215. Ἡ ΟΥΝΙΑ, λοιπὸν, θὰ λέγαμε, ὅτι γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν «ἀλάθητη» κεφαλὴ τοῦ Πάπα, ὅπως περίπου γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι τοῦ Δία ἡ Ἀθηνᾶ. Μόνον ποῦ στὴν προκειμένη περίπτωσι χωρίς καμμιὰ ἀμφιβολία ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ γέννηση μὲ τραγικὲς συνέπειες στὴν συνέχεια τῆς Ἱστορίας, ἀφοῦ τὸ γεννημένο εὐρέθη σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ ἔρμαφρόδιτο!

Πράγματι, ἔρμαφρόδιτη γεννήθηκε ἡ ΟΥΝΙΑ. Καθὼς δὲ μεγάλωνε «ἡ κόρη» (ἡ Οὐνία) τοῦ Πάπα, γινόταν πιὸ φανερός (καὶ πιὸ ἐπικίνδυνος) ὁ ἔρμαφροδιτισμὸς της. Ἐτσι λοιπὸν ἡ ΟΥΝΙΑ στὴν συνέχεια ὅσο κι ἂν προσπαθοῦσε, δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ κρύψῃ τὴν ἔρμαφρόδιτη συμπεριφορὰ της: ἔδειχνε ὅτι ἀγαποῦσε τὴν Ἀνατολή, ἐνῶ ἦταν θανάσιμα ἐρωτευμένη μὲ τὴν Δύση. Ὑποκρινόταν καὶ διαλαλοῦσε ὅτι εἶναι Ὁρθόδοξη, ἐνῶ συγχρόνως ὀμολογοῦσε πίστη στὸν Πάπα καὶ στὸν Παπισμὸ. Καὶ τὸ πιὸ τραγικὸ καὶ ἀθεράπευτο: ἡ ΟΥΝΙΑ τελικὰ δὲν ἦταν οὔτε γνήσια Ὁρθόδοξη, οὔτε μὲ ἀκρίβεια Παπικὴ. Ἦταν κάποιον εἶδος ἐνδιάμεσο. Ὡς εἶδος προβληματικὸ καὶ ἔρμαφρόδιτο ἡ ΟΥΝΙΑ εἶναι ἀπόβλητο

και ξένο σώμα στην Όρθοδοξία. Ωστόσο, δεν είναι απόλυτα αποδεκτό και στους κόλπους του Παπισμού.

3. Ένα ακόμη χαρακτηριστικό της ΟΥΝΙΑΣ, της οργάνωσης του Πάπα, είναι ότι ζει παρασιτικά στο χώρο της Όρθοδοξίας, όπως παρασιτικά ζει και το κοχύλι ΟΥΝΙΑ στο πρώτο στάδιο της ζωής του. Έχουν πολύ δίκαιο όσοι παρατηρούν: «Ακριβέστερα ή Ουνία αποτελεί διείσδυση του Παπισμού στην Όρθοδοξία, ένα Ρωμαιοκαθολικό παράσιτο στο σώμα της Ρωμιοσύνης. Διότι ή Ουνία τρέφεται και διεκδικεί τον πνευματικό πλούτο της Όρθοδοξίας αποσκοπώντας στον έκλατινισμό του». Η παρασιτική ζωή της Ουνίας στο σώμα της Όρθοδοξίας, δημιουργούσε πάντα σοβαρά προβλήματα στους Όρθοδόξους πληθυσμούς των χωρών της Εύρώπης. Σήμερα είναι μέγιστο εμπόδιο για την προσέγγιση Ανατολής και Δύσεως και σοβαρή αιτία της διακοπής του διαλόγου ανάμεσα σε Όρθοδόξους και Παπικούς.

4. Τέλος, θα πρέπει να πούμε πως ή οργάνωση του Πάπα ΟΥΝΙΑ, είναι άκεφαλη, όπως και το «κοχύλι των ζωγράφων». Όσο κι αν ισχυρίζονται οι Ουνίτες ότι έχουν κεφαλή τον Πάπα, ουσιαστικά μοιάζουν με ένα σώμα άκεφαλο. Και τούτο διότι ούτε οι Παπικοί τους αναγνωρίζουν ως «ισότιμους» αδελφούς, ούτε ο ίδιος ο Πάπας τους θεωρεί γνήσια μέλη της Έκκλησίας του. Άλλα και οι ίδιοι οι Ουνίτες όμολογούν δια του στόματος του Μελχίτη Πατριάρχη Μάξιμου του Δ' ότι «θεωρούνται Καθολικοί δευτέρας κατηγορίας».

Όμως το θέμα της Ουνίας δεν εξαντλείται σε ένα άρθρο. Ούτε λύνεται εύκολα το μεγάλο αυτό πρόβλημα. Ευχόμαστε με την βοήθεια του Θεού να θεραπευθή ή Ουνία και να ξεπεράση την έρμαφρόδιτη, παρασιτική και άκεφαλη, προβληματική κατάστασή της. Χρειάζεται οι ηγέτες της και οι πιστοί της να θελήσουν να επιστρέψουν από την αίρεση στην αλήθεια και να ενταχθούν στην Μία, Άγία, Καθολική και Αποστολική Έκκλησία, στην Όρθοδοξία.

Μέχρι τότε όμως είναι προτιμότερο να δηλώνουν «Καθολικοί της Ανατολής», ΟΥΝΙΤΕΣ και όχι Όρθόδοξοι. Έμεις θα τους ονομάζουμε Ουνίτες, όσο κι αν αυτοί άρέσκονται σε άλλα όνόματα, όπως Έλληνοκαθολικοί, Κοπτοκαθολικοί, Βυζαντινόρρυθμοι, Έλληνόρρυθμοι, Μελχίτες κ.λ.π. Θα ελέγχουμε την προπαγανδιστική τακτική τους, θα άρνούμαστε την έπαμφοτερίζουσα πολιτική τους και θα διακηρύττουμε πως δεν φθάνει το να διατηρούν τις παραδόσεις ως προς τον έξωτερικό τύπο, χωρίς την ουσία και την αλήθεια της Όρθοδοξίας.

Ήδη καταγγέλλονται μυστικές διαβουλεύσεις, στα εκκλησιαστικά και πολιτικά παρασκήνια, για εξομάλυνση των σχέσεων με το Βατικανό, που προσπαθεί να διασκεδάσει τις άρνητικές έντυπώσεις. Η Ουνία όμως παραμένει. Η καταστροφή στην Όρθοδοξία της Ανατολικής Εύρώπης έχει γίνει. Κάθε, λοιπόν, υποχώρηση των Όρθοδόξων θα ισοδυναμεί με έγκλημα. Οι ανάλογες ενέργειές μας δεν καταγράφονται μόνο στις δέλτους της Ιστορίας, αλλά και από τον Κύριο όλης της ανθρωπότητας, που είναι συγχρόνως ο Σωτήρ της και Κριτής της...

Ο Όσιος Λεόντιος ο Μονεμβασιώτης

«Αυτό που ονομάζουμε αγιότητα είναι ή φανέρωση, ή ανθοφορία, ή καρποφορία του Αγίου Πνεύματος. Η άπουσία της αγιότητας παραμορφώνει την ζωή και τον κόσμο σε μία άθλια, σκληρή και παράλογη πραγματικότητα. Η απώλεια της αγιότητας είναι ή μόνη πραγματική θλίψη του ανθρώπου».



Όσιος Λεόντιος (+1452)

Οί πανταχού εύρισκόμενοι Έλληνες έχουμε την μεγίστη εύλογία να βρίσκουμε στο άγιολόγιο της Έκκλησίας μας πλήθος άγιων συμπατριωτών μας: έτσι δυνάμεθα καθημερινώς να ανακαλύπτουμε ένα «δικό» μας άγιο. Ένας τέτοιος «άγνωστος» άγιος είναι και ο Όσιος Λεόντιος. Όμόρφυνε και άγίασε με την παρουσία του την πατρίδα μας, έλκύοντας με την άσκητική ζωή του την χάρη του Θεού, ή οποία και παραμένει πλούτος άδαπάνητος στα άγια, μυροβόλα λείψανά του.

Λίγο πιο πάνω από την Ίερά Μονή Παμμεγίστων Ταξιαρχών Αιγιαλείας βρίσκεται το άσκητήριο του Οσίου Λεοντίου, ο όποιος καταγόταν από τη Μονεμβασία της Λακωνίας και ήταν απόγονος άριστοκρατικής οικογενείας, συγγενικής των αυτοκρατόρων του Βυζαντίου Παλαιολόγων. Γεννήθηκε γύρω στο 1377 και το όνομά του (πριν γίνει μοναχός) ήταν Λέων. Οί γονείς του ήσαν άνθρωποι έπιφανείς και θεοφιλείς. Η μητέρα του Θεοδώρα φαίνεται ότι ήταν θυγατέρα του αυτοκράτορα Άνδρονίκου, και ο πατέρας του Άνδρέας είχε το άξίωμα του γενικού Διοικητή όλης της Πελοποννήσου. Έτσι, ο Λέων ανατράφηκε με ιδιαίτερη φροντίδα και γρήγορα κατόρθωσε να ξεχωρίσει, καθώς συνδύαζε όξυτητα νου και καθαρότητα βίου. Παράλληλα, με την άπόκτηση γνώσεων φρόντιζε και την πνευματική του καλλιέργεια, έντρυφώντας στις Γραφές και στα κείμενα των άγιων πατέρων. Μετά τα έγκύκλια γράμματα άποστέλλεται από τους γονείς του στην Κωνσταντινούπολη για εύρύτερες σπουδές. Με νεανικό ένθουσιασμό και αξιοθαύμαστο ζήλο επιδίδεται στις επιστήμες και πιο πολύ στη φιλοσοφία. Μέσα σε λίγο χρόνο παρουσιάζει τέτοια πρόοδο, ώστε τον θαυμάζουν ακόμα και οι δάσκαλοί του.

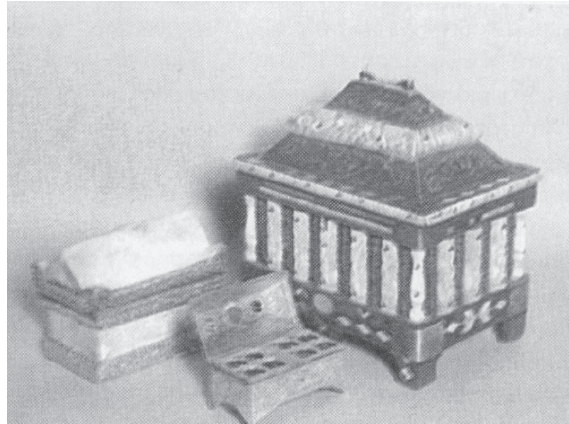
Ο θάνατος του πατέρα του όμως αναγκάζει τον Λέοντα να επιστρέψει από την Κωνσταντινούπολη στη γενέτειρά του Μονεμβασία και να σταθεί βοηθός και παρηγορητής της μητέρας του. Η Θεοδώρα, που διαβλέπει στο παιδί της μοναχικές τάσεις, φορτικά παρακινεί το γιό της να νυμφευτεί και να αναλάβει εκείνος τη φροντίδα του σπιτιού και της μεγάλης κληρονομιάς. Και όταν το έπιτυγχάνει,

έγκαταλείπει τὰ ἐγκόσμια, ἐνδύεται τὸ μοναχικὸ χιτῶνα καί, κατὰ τὴν παράδοση, μεταβαίνει στὴν ἀριστερὴ ὄχθη τοῦ πόταμου Σελινούντα, ὅπου ἰδρύει τὴ μονὴ τῆς «Ἐλπίδας τῶν Ἀπελπισμένων», σήμερα Μονὴ Πεπελενίτσας.

Στὸν Λέοντα ὅμως ὁ πόθος τῆς ὀλοκληρωτικῆς ἀφιέρωσης στὸ Θεὸ ἐπανέρχεται ζωηρότερος, καταφλέγοντας τὴν καρδιά του. Τίποτα τὸ γήινο δὲν μπορεῖ πλέον νὰ τὸν ἀνακόψει. Κι' ἀφοῦ βρῆκε σύμφωνη καὶ τὴ σύζυγό του, ἡ ὁποία δέχτηκε νὰ ἀναλάβει ἐκεῖνη τὶς οἰκογενειακὲς ὑποθέσεις καὶ τὴ φροντίδα τῶν τριῶν παιδιῶν τους, γύρω στὰ 1410, εἰσήλθε στὴ χορεία τῶν ἀσκητῶν πού διηύθυνε ὁ μοναχὸς Μεννίδης καὶ ἔλαβε τὸ μοναχικὸ ὄνομα Λεόντιος. Ἡ ζωὴ του εἶναι προσευχὴ καὶ ἡ καθημερινὴ του φροντίδα εἶναι ἡ ἀναζήτησι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως ἤθελε νὰ γνωρίσει καὶ ἄλλους σεβάσιμους γέροντες ἀναχωρεῖ γιὰ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος. Ἐκεῖ, ἀφοῦ ἔζησε ἀρκετὸ διάστημα καὶ ἀνδρώθηκε στὴν ἀρετὴ, ἐπιστρέφει στὴν Πελοπόννησο καὶ ἀναζητεῖ τὸν τόπο γιὰ τὴν ἰσόβια πλέον ἄσκησή του.

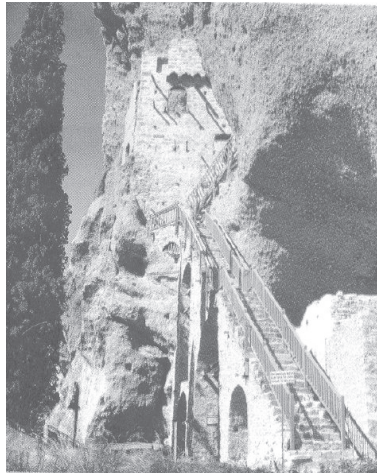
Προσεύχεται μέρα καὶ νύχτα γιὰ νὰ τοῦ φανερώσει ὁ Θεὸς τὸ μέρος πού θὰ μονάσει. Ὁ συγγραφέας τοῦ συναξαριοῦ του σημειώνει: «Ἀπεκαλύφθη αὐτῷ ἀφίκεσθαι ἐπὶ τὰ βόρεια, εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ λεγόμενον Κλωκὸν τοῦ Γέροντος, ἄνωθεν Αἰγίου». Ὑστερα ἀπὸ τὸ ὄραμα αὐτό, περὶ τὸ 1415-1420, ὁ Λεόντιος ἦλθε στὸν Κλωκὸ, καὶ συγκεκριμένα στὴ θέση πού βρίσκεται σήμερα τὸ «Παλιό-μονάστηρο». Στὴ βάση τοῦ βράχου αὐτοῦ ὑπάρχει ἓνα φυσικὸ κοίλωμα, ὅπου ἐγκαταστάθηκε ὁ νεοφερμένος μοναχός, στὴν λεγόμενη ἀετοφωλιά του. Ἡ παρουσία του μετέβαλε τὴν ὄψη τῆς περιοχῆς. Ἡ φήμη του προσέλκυσε πολλοὺς μαθητές. Ὁ ἀπόκριμος αὐτὸς χώρος, μὲ τὸ μικρὸ ναὸ ἀφιερωμένον στὸν Ἀρχάγγελο Μιχαὴλ, ἔγινε γνωστὸς ὄχι μόνο στὴ γύρω περιοχὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ σ' ὅλο τὸν ἑλληνικὸν χώρον. Ἡ φήμη του ἔφτασε καὶ στοὺς Θωμὰ καὶ Δημήτριον Παλαιολόγους, οἱ ὁποῖοι γιὰ νὰ τὸν τιμήσουν, πρόσφεραν τὰ μέσα γιὰ νὰ ἰδρυθεῖ -- στὸ μέρος πού ἀσκήτευε στὸν Κλωκὸ -- μεγαλόπρεπο μοναστήρι, τὴν σημερινὴ Ἱ. Μ. Ταξιαρχῶν. Οἱ Παλαιολόγοι εἶναι αὐτοὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι καὶ παραχώρησαν στὸ μοναστήρι πολλὰ κτήματα καὶ κατασκεύασαν ὑδραγωγεῖο. Δώρισαν ἀκόμη λείψανα Ἁγίων, καὶ κυρίως μέρη τῶν φριχτῶν καὶ ἀχράντων Παθῶν τοῦ Κυρίου, δηλαδὴ μέρος

ἀπὸ τὸν Τίμιον Σταυρό, τὸν Ἀκάνθινο Στέφανο, τὸ Σπόγγο, καὶ τὴ γλαμύδα, καθὼς καὶ μέρος τῆς πλεξίδας τοῦ πρώτου ἀσκητοῦ, Ἰωάννη τοῦ Προδρόμου.



Στὴν Ἱ. Μ. Παμμεγίστων Ταξιαρχῶν Αἰγιαλείας εὐρίσκονται μέρος τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, τὸν Ἀκάνθινο Στέφανο, τὸν Σπόγγο, μέρος τῆς Χλαμύδας τοῦ Κυρίου, μέρος τῆς Πλεξίδας τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννη τοῦ Προδρόμου

γνωστὴ σὰν Μονὴ τῶν Ταξιαρχῶν. Καταστρέφεται καὶ πάλι τὸ ἔτος 1772 ἀπὸ τοὺς Τουρκαλβανοὺς κατὰ τὰ Ὀρλωφικά. Σὲ διάστημα τριῶν ἐτῶν, δηλαδὴ τὸ 1775 κτίζεται ἡ σημερινὴ μορφή τῆς Μονῆς. Τὸ καθολικὸ τῆς εἶναι Σταυρόσχημο,



Ἡ ἀετοφωλιά τοῦ Ὁσίου Λεοντίου

τετρακίονο, καμαρωτό, μὲ ὀκταγωνικὸ τροῦλο καὶ μαρμαροσκάλιστα παράθυρα. Στὸν αἰῶνα μετὰ τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση, ἡ Μονὴ γνώρισε πολὺ καλὲς ἡμέρες. Ἐφτασε νὰ ἔχει 150 περίπου μοναχοὺς καὶ μοναχοπαιδιά. Εἶχε γίνει μία πολυάνθρωπη μοναχικὴ κοινότητα, μὲ ἀρκετὴ κοινωνικὴ προσφορά. Σήμερα ἔχει μικρὸ ἀριθμὸ μοναχῶν, πού πιστοὶ στὴ μοναχικὴ παράδοση συνεχίζουν τὴν ἱστορία καὶ τὴν προσφορά τῆς Μονῆς.

Μετὰ τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση, οἱ ἐγγράμματοι μοναχοὶ ἐργάστηκαν στὰ γύρω χωριά σὰν ἐφήμεροι, δάσκαλοι, συμβολαιογράφοι καὶ δικολάβοι (δικηγόροι). Τὸ 1837, ὁ Ἡγούμενος Μελέτιος Ροβῆτος ἱδρυσε ἑλληνικὸ σχολεῖο στὴ μονὴ ὅπου δίδαξαν πολλοὶ μοναχοὶ καὶ λαϊκοὶ μὲ ἐξαιρετικὴ μόρφωση. Ἀπὸ τὸ ἑλληνικὸ αὐτὸ σχολεῖο ἀπεφοίτησαν πάρα πολλοὶ μοναχοὶ μὲ ἀξιοσημείωτη μόρφωση πού στελέχωσαν στὴ συνέχεια τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐκκλησία. Τὸ 1880, ἰδρύεται μὲ ἄδεια τοῦ Ὑπουργείου Παιδείας, Γυμνάσιο πού λειτούργησε μέχρι τὸ 1926. Μετὰ τὴν κατοχὴ πού καὶ πάλι ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ὑπαιθρος εὐρίσκετο σὲ πολὺ δύσκολη κατάσταση, ἡ μονὴ Ταξιαρχῶν διαδραματίζει τὸν πνευματικὸν ρόλον, μὲ τὴν ἱδρυση Γυμνασίου - Οἰκοτροφείου πού λειτούργησε δωρεὰν μέχρι τὸ 1970 περίπου, καὶ προσέφερε πάρα πολλὰ στὰ φτωχό-παιδιά τῆς ὑπαιθρου.

Ὁρθόδοξα Σταχυολογήματα

ΠΗΓΗ: Από τὸ φυλλάδιον «Σταχυολογήματα τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀγυουστίνου Καντιώτου», Ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη»

Ὅπως ὅλοι γνωρίζουμε, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος ἱεραποστολή καταπίπτει συνεχῶς. Ὅλοι, συγγενεῖς καὶ φίλοι, ὡς ἐκ συνθήματος ἐπιτίθενται σφοδρῶς κατὰ τοῦ νέου τοῦ ἐκδηλώσαντος ἱεραποστολικῆς ἐπιθυμίας, καὶ διὰ ποικίλων μέσων ἀγωνίζονται νὰ σβήσουν ἐν τῇ γενέσει τῆς τὴν ἱεραποστολικὴν φλόγα, πού ἦσαν ὁ οὐρανὸς εἰς τὴν καρδίαν τοῦ νέου. Θεέ μου, τί ἀντιχριστιανικὸς, τί σατανικὸς πόλεμος εἶναι αὐτός, πού γίνεται ἐκ μέρους ἀνθρώπων, πού καυχῶνται ὅτι εἶναι Χριστιανοί, καὶ μάλιστα οἱ καλύτεροι τῶν Χριστιανῶν!

Ἡ συνειδήσις, ὦ ἡ συνειδήσις! Ἀκούγεται μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι πού καλύπτει τὴ γῆ, ἀκούγεται σὰν τὸ λάλημα τοῦ πετεινοῦ τὴ νύχτα τῆς Μεγάλης Πέμπτης. Ἔτυχε ποτὲ νὰ κοιμηθῆτε σὲ ἓνα ἐξοχικὸ μέρος, ὅπου τὴ νύχτα ἐπικρατεῖ ἡσυχία; Πόσο καθαρά ἀκούγεται τὸ λάλημα τοῦ πετεινοῦ! Ἀλλὰ ὅταν ἐκεῖ φυσήξῃ ἄγριος ἄνεμος καὶ τὰ κλαδιά τῶν δέντρων σειῶνται καὶ γίνεται θόρυβος μεγάλος, τότε τὸ λάλημα τοῦ πετεινοῦ πνίγεται καὶ δὲν ἀκούγεται.

Ἔτσι συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ τὴ συνειδήσι. Πάντοτε λαλεῖ. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν τὰ πάθη ξεσηκώνονται σὰν θύελλες καὶ καταιγίδες καὶ δημιουργοῦν τεράστιο θόρυβο μέσα στὸ ψυχικὸ μας κόσμο, τότε ἡ φωνὴ τῆς συνειδήσεως πνίγεται καὶ δὲν ἀκούγεται.

Ἀλλὰ μία μέρα ὅπωςδήποτε θ' ἀκουστεῖ. Μακάρι ν' ἀκουστεῖ. Σ' αὐτὸ τὸν κόσμο. Γιατί ἀλλιῶς θ' ἀκουστεῖ στὸν ἄλλο κόσμο. Καὶ τότε τὸ «κατηγορῶ» τῆς συνειδήσεως θάνατι ἀδιάκοπο καὶ ἀνυπόφορο. Θάνατι αἰώνια κόλασις. Ὅπως λέει ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, καλύτερα νὰ σὲ κεντήσῃ σκορπιός, παρὰ νὰ σὲ κεντήσῃ ἡ συνειδήσις.

Χρειάζεται φωτιά. Χρειάζεται, δηλαδή, φλογερὴ ἀγάπη στὸ Χριστό. Ὅταν αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνάψει στὴν καρδιά, τότε δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἔχουν θέσι ἐκεῖ οἱ κοσμικὲς σκέψεις καὶ μέριμνες τὴν ὥρα τῆς Θεῆς Λειτουργίας. Τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ ἀγαπημένου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ θὰ μᾶς ἐλκύει τόσο πολὺ, ὥστε δὲν θὰ ἔχουμε μάτια καὶ αὐτιά νὰ δοῦμε καὶ νὰ ἀκούσουμε τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ μόνο τὸ Χριστό. Ἔτσι θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἐκτελέσουμε τὴν προτροπὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας: «Πᾶσαν τὴν βιωτικὴν ἀποθώμεθα μέριμναν, ὡς τὸν Βασιλέα τῶν ὅλων ὑποδεξόμενοι».

Ὁ Χριστιανέ, νὰ κοινωνήσεις μὲ φόβο Θεοῦ. Νὰ κοινωνήσεις μὲ πίστι. Νὰ κοινωνήσεις μὲ ἀγάπη. Δηλαδή, στὴν ψυχὴ σου τὴν ὥρα τῆς Θεῆς Κοινωνίας πρέπει νὰ βασιλεύει τὸ εὐγενέστερο ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ αἰσθήματα, ἡ ἀγάπη. Ἡ ἀγάπη, πού μπορεῖ νὰ πῆ καὶ νὰ ἐπαναλάβῃ τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ: «Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τί ποιοῦσι» (Λουκ. 23, 24).

Ἀλλὰ, δυστυχῶς, οἱ πιὸ πολλοὶ δὲν κοινωνοῦν μ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπη. Αὐτοὶ μοιάζουν μὲ κάποιον πού νήστεψε, καὶ τὴ Λαμπρὴ πῆγε νὰ κοινωνήσῃ, ἀλλ' ὅταν μέσα στὸ ναὸ εἶδε τὸν ἐχθρό του, ταράχθηκε τόσο πολὺ, ὥστε ξέχασε καὶ

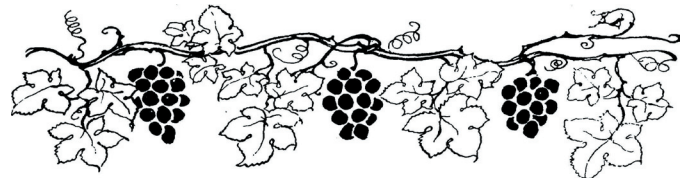
τὸν τόπο καὶ τὴ στιγμὴ τὴν ἱερὴ, κι' ἐβγαλε μαχαίρι νὰ τὸν σκοτώσει. Καὶ θὰ τὸν σκότωνε, ἂν δὲν τὸν συγκρατοῦσαν! Σκληρὲς καρδιές, πού δὲν μαλακώνουν οὔτε μπροστὰ στὴ Θεϊκὴ φωτιὰ τῆς ἀπέραντης ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Φτάνει καὶ ἓνα χωρίο τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς νὰ ξυπνήσῃ τὸν ἁμαρτωλό. Ξυπνοῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι μὲ μύρια μέσα πού χρησιμοποιεῖ ὁ Θεός. Ἀλλ' ὅταν δὲν ξυπνάμε οὔτε μὲ τὰ πουλιά, οὔτε μὲ τὶς ἀστραπές, οὔτε μὲ τὸ θεῖο κήρυγμα, οὔτε μὲ τὴν ἀνάγνωσι τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, θὰ ξυπνήσουμε, ἀδελφοί μου, κατ' ἄλλο τρόπο. Στὸ νοσοκομεῖο, ὅταν κάνει κάποιος ἐγχείρησι καὶ μετὰ δὲν ξυπνάει, τοῦ δίνουν μπάτσους, γιατί ἂν κοιμηθῇ περισσότερο, θὰ πεθάνει. Ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Οὐράνιος Πατέρας μας, ἀφοῦ χρησιμοποιήσῃ τὰ ἥπια μέσα, μετὰ πλέον χρησιμοποιεῖ ράβδο. Τί εἶναι, π.χ. οἱ ἀσθένειες καὶ οἱ θλίψεις γενικῶς; Ὁ Θεέ μου, πόσο μας εὐεργετεῖς ἐμᾶς τοὺς ὑπερήφανους ἀνθρώπους μὲ τὸ μαστίγιο τῶν θλίψεων! «Ἐν θλίψει ἐμνήσθην σου» (Ἠσ. 26, 16)...

Δι' αὐτὸ τὸ «γνώθι σαυτόν» εἶναι μέσον θεογνωσίας. ΔΜελετῶν, δηλαδή, καὶ σπουδάζων ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν ἑαυτὸν του ὁδηγεῖται εἰς γνῶσιν τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ. Ἡ ὁδὸς πρὸς εὐτυχίαν εἶναι μία, νὰ πιστεύεις, νὰ γνωρίζεις, νὰ συνδεθεῖς μὲ τὸν Θεόν.

Ὁ δὲ τὸ ἐμάθαμεν. Ἡ σωμαικὴ ὠραιότης ἐάν δὲν συνοδεύεται ἀπὸ ψυχικὴν ὠραιότητα, ὄχι μόνον χάνει τὴν ἀξίαν τῆς, ἀλλὰ γίνεται ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ πλέον ἐπικίνδυνα πράγματα, ἓνας πραγματικὸς δυναμίτης τοῦ διαβόλου. Καὶ δι' αὐτὸ πόσον εὐτυχὴς θὰ ἦτο ἡ ἀνθρωπότης, ἐάν ἔστρεφε τὴν προσοχὴν τῆς εἰς τὸ πῶς θὰ ἐξωραΐσει τὸν ψυχικὸν κόσμον, πῶς δηλαδή, τὰ διάφορα ἐλαττώματα πού ἔχει κάθε ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἀσχημίζουν τὴν ψυχὴν του καὶ τὴν κάνουν νὰ παρουσιάζεται με μορφήν τερατώδη, θηριώδη, θὰ ἐξαλειφθοῦν.

Ναὶ! Ἡ προσευχὴ σώζει. Σώζει ἐκ κινδύνων σωματικῶν, ἐφ' ὅσον ἡ σωτηρία αὐτὴ φαίνεται συμφέρουσα ὑπὸ Θεῆς Προνοίας. Σώζει ὅμως κυρίως καὶ πάντοτε ἐκ μυρίων κινδύνων τὸν ἀνεκτίμητον θησαυρὸν τῆς ὑπάρξεώς μας, τὴν ψυχὴν, τὴν ὁποίαν καὶ ἀσφαλίζει εἰς τοὺς κόλπους τῆς Θεότητος!



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοσι τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὁσιος Ποιμίν».

SPIRITUAL COUNSELS, PART II

*By St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain translated by P. A. Chamberas
("A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel," New York: Paulist Press, 1989)*

EXAMPLES FROM THE BIBLE OF THOSE WHO GUARDED THEIR EYES

Again I must tell you to guard yourself well against these things, dear friend, for as St. Paul said, "It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you" (Philemon 3:1). Guard your deceiving eyes that would steal the pleasures of others. Have great concern for these portals, the eyes. Most robbers enter through these portals to overthrow the castle of the soul. Had the forefathers guarded their eyes, they would not have been exiled far from God and Paradise. "The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good..." (Genesis 3:6). Do you hear what the text says? She saw, she desired, she received, she ate, she died.

Had the sons of God, that is of Seth, guarded their eyes, they would not have been destroyed by the flood. "The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and they married any of them they chose" (Genesis 6:2). Again, had the Sodomites guarded their eyes to avoid looking upon the two angels, they would not have been destroyed by fire (Genesis 19:1). When Shechem, son of Hamon the Hivite, saw Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and desired her, he and all his people were destroyed by her brothers (Genesis 34:2). David saw Bathsheba bathing and he fell into the dual pit of adultery and murder (II Samuel 11:1). After this when he repented and learned to call upon God to turn his eyes away from vain beauty, he wrote: "Turn my eyes away from seeing vain things" (Psalms 118:37).

GUARDING THE SENSE OF HEARING

[THE EVILS BORN FROM "HEDONISTIC" MELODIES]

The second sense is that of hearing and one must be careful to guard it from corrupt melodies, which are composed for pleasure and which pour out the sweet honey of sound unto the ears. It seems to me that there are three evils that come from such melodies. First, these hedonistic and worldly songs tend to weaken the manly and proud bearing of the soul so that it becomes effeminate and lethargic as it listens to these sweet sounds. Secondly, these sensual songs tend to fill up the mind with the many passionate images which they describe. Thirdly, let us suppose that even if the persons doing the singing are not seen -- and especially when these may be women -- nevertheless the songs themselves are capable of impressing the imagination, moving the desire of the heart and drawing out an asset from the soul. This is why St. Basil taught us: "Do not submit your souls to corrupt melodies that come to us through the ears. Many passions that enslave us have been caused to grow in our natures by this sort of music." St. Gregory the Theologian in one of his paschal homilies said: "Let us not have the flute played to our hearing." And in his Iambic Poetry he wrote, "Block your ears with wax, and foolish words hear not, nor pleasant songs or thrilling melodies..."

THE PROBLEM OF SLANDER

You must definitely shut your ears to slanderous remarks against other persons, as is commanded by God: "You shall not utter a false report" (Exodus 23:1). You must be especially careful to oppose the slanders leveled against the clergy. St. Paul when writing to Timothy said: "Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses" (I Timothy 5:19). Open therefore only one of your ears to hear the words of slander according to the example of Alexander the Macedonian. Do not by any means allow yourself to open both ears to the slanderers and to draw your conclusions and decisions on the basis of what they alone have to say, and thereby judging the case "in absentia" without the presence of the person slandered to defend himself.

Oftentimes many unjust and irrational decisions have followed from slanderous accusations. St. Basil noted that each slanderer is unjust to three different persons: to himself for lying, to the hearers who may be misled and deceived, and to the person slandered for destroying his good reputation and honor. "For this very reason then I beseech your love in Christ not to accept the slanders presented onesidedly as at all true. For, as it is written, the law does not judge anyone unless the judge listens and finds out what indeed the defendant has done.

It is therefore necessary not to keep silent before such slanders, not that we will avenge ourselves through controversy, but rather because by not conceding (to the slanderer) we do not promote falsehood and do not allow those deceived to fall into harm. He who slanders does harm to three persons at the same time. First of all he is unjust to the person he has slandered; he also harms those persons who have to listen to his slander; finally the slanderer harms himself... "

It goes without saying, of course, that while one must avoid the many abuses of hearing, one must also be more inclined to utilize this important sense of hearing for the many positive ways available to us in our Christian way of life; to listen to the word of God, to attend and participate in the worship services of the Church, to sing hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God, to listen with compassion and understanding to the concerns of your fellow human beings, and to do so many other positive things with our wonderful sense of hearing.

GUARDING THE SENSE OF TASTE

[SUMPTUOUS EATING DEPRIVES ONE OF PIETY AND HARMS, ESPECIALLY YOUNG PEOPLE]

Sumptuous eating is harmful to all without exception, but especially to the young. The natural reason for this is obvious. The natural warmth of the young person is enhanced when it receives the fatty matter of various foods. The heavy foods consumed draw out the heavy excretions of digestion in the stomach. These in turn are converted into substances and blood and eventually into fatty tissue. The abundance of food creates a fat body that is susceptible to the forceful temptations of one's sexuality.

Thus treated and exposed, the poor body becomes a flaming fire, a Babylonian furnace. If the young body is a wild and

untamed animal even when it lacks essential nourishment, imagine what it is like when it is well fed! All young people know this because they experience these passions on a daily basis. This is why St. Gregory the Theologian said: "Its own evil is sufficient for the body. Why add to the existing fire any additional fuel, or any more nourishment to the beast? It will only become more difficult to control and more violent (forceful) than the mind."

Solomon too said: "It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury" (Proverbs 19:10). In interpreting this passage, St. Basil considered the body of a young person to be "a fool." "What is more senseless than the body of a young person prone to easy temptations?" He asked.

Now if you cannot avoid these fatty foods completely, then set a discipline for yourself to eat only once a day, as many spiritual persons, hierarchs, and even worldly leaders do. In this manner the body is kept lighter and healthier and the mind is clearer and more capable of advancing upon divine thoughts. Even then, it is important not to overeat.

THE THREE DEGREES OF EATING

According to St. Gregory the Sinaite there are three degrees in eating: temperance, sufficiency, and satiety. Temperance is when someone wants to eat some more food but abstains, rising from the table still somewhat hungry. Sufficiency is when someone eats what is needed and sufficient for normal nourishment. Satiety is when someone eats more than enough and is more than satisfied. Now if you cannot keep the first two degrees and you proceed to the third, then, at least, do not become a glutton, remembering the words of the Lord: "Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger" (Luke 6:25).

Remember also that rich man who ate in this present life sumptuously every day, but who was deprived of the desired bosom of Abraham in the next life, simply because of this sumptuous eating. Remember how he longed to refresh his tongue with a drop of water. St. Basil not only did not forgive the young people who ate to satiety but also those who ate until satisfied; he preferred that all eat temperately. He said, "Nothing subdues and controls the body as does the practice of temperance. It is this temperance that serves as a control to those youthful passions and desires."

St. Gregory the Theologian has also noted in his poetry: "No satiety has brought forth prudent behavior; for it is in the nature of fire to consume matter. And a filled stomach expels refined thoughts; it is the tendency of opposites to oppose each other." Job, too, assuming that one could fall into sin through eating, offered sacrifice to God for his sons who were feasting among themselves. "And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said: "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts" (Job 1:5-8).

In interpreting this passage Olympiodoros wrote: "We learn from this that we ought to avoid such feasts which can bring on

sinfulness. We must also purify ourselves after they have been concluded, even if these are conducted for the sake of concord and brotherly love as in the case of the sons of Job."

Surely then, if the sons of Job were not at a feast but in prayer or some other spiritual activity, the devil would not have dared to destroy the house and them, as Origen interpreted the passage: "The devil was looking for an opportunity to destroy them. Had he found them reading, he would not have touched the house, having no reason to put them to death. Had he found them in prayer, he would not have had any power to do anything against them. But when he found an opportune time, he was powerful. What was the opportune time? It was the time of feasting and drinking." Do you see then, dear reader, how many evils are brought forth by luxurious foods and feasting in general?

WHAT ONE MUST DO TO AVOID OVEREATING AND OTHER SINS OF THE TONGUE

When eating and drinking, always remember the Psalm: "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit?" (Psalms 30:9). St. Basil has advised that we recall this verse in order to help us avoid overeating and overdrinking, as he has interpreted it in the following manner:

"What is the need for robustness of flesh and an abundance of blood if their future is to be delivered over to the common corruption of the body? For this reason I constrain and deprive my body, otherwise my blood becomes so robust and overzealous that it makes my flesh to sin. Do not therefore flatter your body with sleep and baths and soft beds, but always recall the saying: 'What profit is there for my blood if I go down to the Pit?' Why do you care for the lesser thing that will later become corrupt? Why do you bother to make yourself fat? Do you not know that the fatter you make your body so much heavier will be the soul's prison?"

In this sense of the mouth are also included all those sins which are enacted by the tongue: condemnation, slander, mocking, insults, unreasonable excommunications, curses, reprimands, obscene talk, and all the other idle and vain words. From all these we must guard ourselves as much as possible, for as you know, we must give an account for every vain and idle word, according to the Sacred Scriptures (Matthew 12:36)...

GUARDING THE SENSE OF SMELL

[THE NEGATIVE RESULTS OF FRAGRANCES]

The hedonistic desire to please the sense of smell can reach such bizarre foolishness. Not far from this particular foolishness is also the habit of those who attempt to please all their senses through the use of fragrances in general. They like to add fragrant substances to everything -- their foods, their drinks, their clothes, their mattresses, and so forth. They do not at all realize, the poor souls, that this living body of ours is a veritable container of smells, but after death it becomes food for worms and foul smelling. This is why St. Gregory the Theologian said: "Do not allow your sense of smell to be effeminated; do not honor the luxury of perfumes."

ON "UNION" WITH THE PAPISTS

By Elder Philotheos Zervakos

But the whole subject has been made marvelously and superbly clear, leaving no doubt whatever, by St. Nektarios of Pentapolis in his God-enlightened book, "A Historical Study Concerning the Causes of the Schism... Concerning the Impossibility or Possibility of Union." It would be most beneficial and to the enlightenment of the faithful if we quote the text verbatim. The Saint says on page 9: "The terms of union are such that they render the sought-for union impossible, because they have no point of contact. Each seeks from the other nothing more nor less than the denial of itself and the basic principles upon which the whole structure of the church is founded. For on the one hand, the Papal church is based on the primacy of the Pope according to their understanding of this point; and on the other, the Eastern Church is founded upon the Ecumenical Councils. Because of this, the terms of union brought forward by either side are impossible of acceptance since they overturn the churches from their very foundations.

Hence the ineffectiveness of any concessions either side can make. The primacy of honor which is given by the Eastern Church to the Pope is a useless concession because it lacks the power to hold the fabric of the Western Church together. The concessions given by the Pope to the Eastern Church -- that is, her remaining in her own dogmas, customs and disciplines -- are not in the least considered as 'concessions' by her but as legitimate in themselves, since they are founded on the Canons of the Church, for which reason alone she abides in them. But she demands also that the Pope himself with all the Western Church return to her bosom, renouncing their former life, and come in repentance to her. Therefore the apparent concessions have no meaning whatever, since they are not actually concessions. For union to come about, it is necessary that the concessions remove the main causes of separation. The concessions will truly be such when the Pope gives up his own ways, and not when he simply tolerates those things that have been well-established in the Church. Since the main causes of the separation remain as such, the churches persist in their own ways, and union is impossible. For union to be established, it must be made secure upon the same principle. Otherwise every labor is vain."



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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD ORTHODOX

By St John Maximovich

Shortly after the doctrine of Christ began to be propagated among the Gentiles, the followers of Christ in Antioch began to be called Christians (Acts XI:26). The word "Christian" indicated that those who bore this name belonged to Christ -- belonged in the sense of devotion to Christ and his Doctrine. From Antioch the name of Christian was spread everywhere.

The followers of Christ gladly called themselves by the name of their beloved Teacher and Lord; and the enemies of Christ called His followers Christians by carrying over to them the ill will and hatred which they breathed against Christ.

However, quite soon there appeared people who, while calling themselves Christians, were not of Christ in spirit. Of them Christ had spoken earlier: Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven (St. Matt. VII:5). Christ prophesied also that many would pass themselves off for Christ Himself: Many shall come in my name, sayings I am Christ (Matt. XXIV:5). The Apostles in their epistles indicated that false bearers of the name of Christ had appeared already in their time: as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists (I John II:19).

They indicated that those who stepped away from the doctrine of Christ should not be considered their own: They went out from us but were not of us (I John II:19)" Warning against quarrels and disagreements in minor matters (I Cor. I:10-14), at the same time the Apostles strictly commanded their disciples to shun those who do not bring the true doctrine (II John I:10). The Lord, through the Revelation given to the Apostle John the Theologian, sternly accused those who, calling themselves faithful, did not act in accordance with their name; for in such a case it would be false for them. Of what use was it of old to call oneself a Jew, an Old Testament follower of the true faith, if one was not such in actuality? Such the Holy Scripture calls the synagogue of Satan (Apocalypse II:9).

In the same way, a Christian in the strict sense is he only who confesses the true doctrine of Christ and lives in accordance with it. The designation of a Christian consists in glorifying the Heavenly Father by one's life: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (St. Matt. V:16). But true glorification of God is possible only if one rightly believes and expresses his right belief in words and deeds. Therefore, true Christianity and it alone may be named "right-glorifying" (Ortho-doxy). Thus, by the word "Orthodoxy" we confess our firm conviction that it is precisely our Faith that is the true doctrine of Christ. When we call anyone or anything Orthodox, we by this very fact indicate his or its non-counterfeit and uncorrupted Christianity, rejecting at the same time that which falsely appropriates the name of Christ.

ON LEARNING TO LOVE OUR LORD

By St. Theophan the Recluse



St. Theophan the Recluse
(+1894)

St. John the Theologian instructs us concerning love. He loved the Lord more than anyone else and was loved by Him. Let us imprint in our minds this image of love, and let us begin to turn our feelings according to it and our attitude in relation to the Lord. How did St. John the Theologian attain such lofty love for the Lord and become a model of love for all of us? I think that he did this in the same way that people

begin to love one another. They see the beauty and goodness of a person and become attracted to them with all their heart. In like manner, St. John saw the beauty of the Lord and was attracted to Him. He sensed the Lord's special love for him and likewise was inflamed with love for Him. He saw the great, wondrous, and fruitful works of the Lord and, moved by fervent piety, he became completely devoted to Him. He tasted the sweetness of love for Him and, immersed with his whole heart in this love, took rest in it. Here follows the path of assent in love for the Lord. Let us enter upon it, and in the end we will acquire it.

First: St. John saw the beauty of the Lord and was attracted to it. In the same manner love among people is born. They see someone's beauty, spiritual or physical, and begin to love one another. Let us lift up our mind to the contemplation of the Lord's beauty, and surely we will not remain cold and indifferent towards Him. The Lord's beauty is the sum total of all His perfection. "Look and observe, what does the Lord lack?" says St. Tikhon of Zadonsk. Anything that you might desire can be found with the Lord in indescribable and unlimited fullness. Do you seek blessedness? He has eternal and true blessedness. Are you seeking beauty? Comely art Thou in beauty more than the sons of men; (Ps. 44:3). Do you seek nobility? Who is more noble than the Son of God? Are you looking for honor? Who has more honor or is more elevated than the King of the heavens? Do you seek wisdom? He is the Person (Hypostasis) of God's Wisdom. Do you want gladness? He is the joy and gladness of blessed spirits and the chosen of God. Do you need comfort? Who can comfort you more than the Lord Jesus? Do you seek rest? Here is the eternal rest of those souls that love Him. Do you want life? He is the

fountain of life. Are you afraid of being lost? He is the way. Do you fear deception? He is Truth. Are you in fear of death? He is life as He Himself assures us: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In short, all the perfection, beauty, and goodness that the human soul could love is found in Him. Force your mind to grasp this and, you will not be able to do otherwise than love the Lord. St. Catherine the Great Martyr promised to love the one in whom she would see the same wealth that she possessed, the same beauty, the same wisdom she boasted of, expecting that in the whole world she would not find such a person. But when she came to know the Lord, she saw that compared to His beauty, wisdom, and wealth her own was nothing and contemptible. She then gave herself completely to Him, clinging to Him and offering herself to Him as a sacrifice.

Secondly, St. John the Theologian, sensing the Lord's love for him, was inflamed with love for Him. Sincere and selfless love, when experienced from another, always inspires a corresponding feeling. Let us experience the Lord's love and kindle our love for Him. "What did the Son of God not do for us?" asks St. Tikhon. "What did He not attain for us? What did He not bear and suffer for the sake of our poor and needy souls? What labors and sufferings did He not take upon Himself in order to bring us, who had fallen away, to His Heavenly Father? He came down from Heaven in order to raise us, who had been cast out of Paradise, up to Heaven. For our sake He was born in the flesh in order to bring us unto Himself through spiritual regeneration. He humbled Himself for our sake, in order to lift us up. He became impoverished, in order to enrich us wretched ones. He suffered dishonor and wounds in order to heal and glorify us. He died for us in order to give life to us who were dead. Behold, what condescension and humility His perfect love and sympathetic mercy brought to Him." Has not each one of us experienced this movement of God's love? How often have we fled from this love by sinning? Every time, because of one phrase, "I am guilty and will not do it again," have we been reunited through His mercy. How many times have we angered Him by giving into the temptation of the delights of this world. Then when we turned to Him again we were admitted to the Lord's Table, to partake of His Body and drink His Blood. Is this not the embrace of His merciful love? Christ is among us in our everyday life. Who among us has not experienced His caring nearness to us, in deliverance from misfortune, illness, sorrow, difficult circumstances, in all needs, spiritual and physical? Is it possible not to respond to such great love and turn to One who so untiringly loves us? Is it possible because of distraction and inattention to forget about the Lord's love for us? Having known and remembered this love, it is then impossible not to experience a feeling of love for the Lord, no matter how calloused one's heart might be. He who continually walks in the presence of God's love will always be kindled with love for Him. Such is the nature of love!

Thirdly: St. John tasted the sweetness of love for the Lord and with perfect peace rested on his breast. Love is in itself a

gift which can be compared with no other. It brings a blessing which is higher than anything in heaven or on earth. The Lord says: He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him, and If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him (Jn.14:21,23). How comforting are these words! What great and exalted promises the Son of God offers to those who love Him -- that the true lover of Christ will share in friendship with the Father and His Son! The human mind cannot fathom God's goodness. God Who is great, endless, and unattainable, desires to have friendship with man whom He created and who is His slave. He desires to have friendship as long as man does not reject it ...fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (I Jn.13) writes St John. Where the Son and the Father are, there also the Holy Spirit is not excluded. Behold what the love of Christ attains! He who loves is worthy to be the dwelling and home of the Most Holy Trinity. The Tri-Hypostatic God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- is well disposed to dwell in man by Grace. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (I Jn. 4.16). Blessed indeed is such a heart! Even here on the earth it feels joy which is abundantly poured forth into the hearts of the chosen unto eternal life. The heart tastes the very essence of "how good the Lord is" and possesses that which is meant by the words, The Kingdom of God is within you.

For where God is, there is also all that which belongs to Him. If God is within you because of your love, than you will have His justification for your sins, deliverance from your captivity, peace instead of your evil conscience, joy instead of your misery, comfort instead of your sorrow, justification at God's judgment, assistance against your enemies, wisdom and intelligence instead of confusion and ignorance, strength in your weakness (from St. Tikhon, same citation). If the Lord dwells in you for the sake of your love, then who can be against you, what harm can befall you? If He is your peace, then who can disturb you? If He is your joy and comfort, then who or what can cause you sorrow? If He is your strength, then who can overcome you? If He is your King, then who can subjugate you? If God is with us then who can be against us, boldly exclaims St. Paul together with all those who love the Lord (Rom. 8:31). Such is love, and behold what it brings with it! Those who enter into the love of the Lord feel that they are more and more filled and perfected. For love is the bond of perfectness (Col. 3,14).

If you desire to love the Lord then strive to contemplate with your mind His beauty, or the fullness of His perfection, sense the warmth of His love and taste the sweetness of love itself with your heart. One cannot learn love, it takes place in the hidden places of the heart. It is sown in secret and ripens unobserved, like seed cast on the ground which sprouts without the knowledge of the sower, bringing forth a stem, an ear of grain and seed in the ear. Love is sown mysteriously,

always, however, from the effect on the heart, the object of love. Turn your mind in your heart to the radiant, visage of the Lord, full of love and worthy of love, and from His eyes a spark will descend into your heart and kindle it with love for Him. He who stands by a fire is warmed by it, and he who turns to the Lord with his mind and heart is warmed by the fervor of His love, and himself begins to return a warm disposition towards Him. ...The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts... (Rom. 5:5), the Apostle Paul teaches. Love is a gift, but a gift prepared for everyone who seeks it: only desire it and seek, and immediately you will receive it. Just as the Lord embraces everyone, so it is impossible not to love Him. However, since not everyone turns to Him and seeks Him, so not everyone loves Him. For indeed He loved us first, and therefore we should love Him [even after the fact].

As it is, we have loved something instead of Him, something not pleasing to Him and not blessed by Him, and are not capable of loving Him since we have but one heart and not two. Therefore we cannot work for God and mammon [the world]. Remember, brethren, that the "friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). Enmity with God! This is terrible! But worse are the words, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha" (I Cor. 16:22). Such was the expression of St. Paul's zealous love.

Let us dwell on these things brethren, and force ourselves to love the Lord with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our strength. Even better, let us arouse the love for Him sleeping in us and bring it out into action to be seen by us and everyone. Amen.



The disciple whom Christ loved, John the Theologian says of those who left the one and only True Church, like the Papacy did a thousand years ago:

"Little children, it is the last time; and as you have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists; and from this we know it is the last time. They went out from us brethren but they were not of us. For had they been of us they would have continued with us, but they went out that it may be manifest that they were not of us." (1 John 2:18-19)

The same John in the Book of Revelation tells us who will suffer in everlasting Gehenna.

"The fearful and unbelieving, the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters AND ALL LIARS, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

Finally, St. John of Kronstadt proclaims with firmness: *"The Papacy has usurped the authority of Christ, and placed the Pope-king in His place. There is no church among them, and a thread of blood runs through their history."*

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ST. KALLIOPE THE HOLY MARTYR

From a pamphlet by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

One of the genuine heroines of third-century Christianity was a quite lovely girl with the pretty name of Kalliope who lived in the reign of the vicious Emperor Decius, an extremely callous and pompous monarch. He took great delight in barbarous acts, chief among which was the persecution of Christians for whom he had a hatred born of fear of their Lord. It is generally conceded that Nero was mad and that Decius was madder still; even though they were separated by two centuries, they were two of a kind, the kind usually looked upon as the scourge of God. Had she been born in the twentieth century, Kalliope may have been a candidate in a beauty contest, but in the third century her beauty indirectly made her a candidate for sainthood, a contest she won at the expense of her earthly life.

When Kalliope reached the age of twenty-one, she had already passed the age at which most women of that day married, but it was not for lack of suitors, which she had in great numbers. Her days were filled with activity, social and religious, and twenty-one years had come and gone seemingly unnoticed. When at last she seemed ready for marriage, a host of suitors clamoured for her hand. Among the would-be husbands was a pagan who would not take no for an answer. He sent word that were she to reject him in favour of another, especially a Christian, he would see to it that the pagan authorities called her before them for their well-known brand of justice. Kalliope did not hesitate to not only deny this suitor, but made it plain that she would not marry him even if he were a Christian, a conversion which

would have been highly unlikely as well as useless.

The threat to her life was carried out and through the use of false rumour and accusation, she was brought to trial before the magistrate. She stood accused of a variety of crimes against the state, ranging from a mockery of the pagan faith to treason against the state, all of which was attested to by a parade of well-paid false witnesses, none of whom had ever seen the girl. The rejected suitor stepped forth to offer a withdrawal of the charges against her if she would disavow Christ and become his pagan bride. The alternative was torture, and if that didn't bend her will, then it was death in a manner to be devised.

If Kalliope had any fear or was the least bit hesitant, she did not show it, but instead she declared that the only mockery in this affair was the trial itself, and she furthermore asserted her faith in Jesus Christ. That was enough to seal her fate and she was led off to prison, a far cry from the comfort of her home with her loving parents. The deadly game had begun and the gentle Christian girl had to know the helplessness which leads to terror and which in turn weakens the will, but she gave no indication that she would change her mind. She was then put to the cruellest of tortures. Taken to a public square, she was bound to a post and mercilessly flogged until her clothing and flesh were in tatters. Her beautiful face was scarred with branding irons and salt was poured into her open wounds, and while the breath of life was still within her, she was told to disavow Christ. When this gallant girl refused she was put to death. In 1957 AD a special synod allowed a liturgical service to be written honouring St. Kalliope the Martyr, whose feast day is observed on June 8.

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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WHILE THERE IS TIME

By Bishop Avgoustinos of Florina, from the weekly bulletin "Kiriaki," Feb. 6, 2005, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen

"In an acceptable time I have heard thee..." [Isaiah 49:8, 2 Cor 6:2]

Ask, dear friends, that you pay close attention to these words. We will spend some time in interpreting them; they are a prophecy by Isaiah and those of you who will comprehend them will become the "lottery's grand prize winners." Otherwise I am left with no alternative and I wash my hands...

What is the meaning of these words? I will start my interpretation from a little further away.

When a person intends to travel internationally, he prepares his passport and arranges for a visa from the intended destination country's embassy accordingly. Generally speaking, all travelers inquire about the departure time of the bus, train, ship or airplane and make every reasonable effort to ensure that they are on time, with their ticket in hand. Similarly, a young man who plans to study at a university ensures that he prepares and submits the necessary application forms, as required by the educational institution of his choice. It is likewise for the businessman who has borrowed funds for his business and is obliged to submit monthly payments; he makes every effort to be on time and to not cause any issues with his lender. What I am trying to say is that as we always make the necessary time to ensure that we obtain our passport, purchase our ticket, pay our loan, and attend to all of our other duties related to employment, marriage and family, similarly there is adequate time for a different obligation, more important than any which life presents us.

What is this obligation? Well, God did

not create us for travel and business, for degrees and titles, for dowries and weddings. These things have nothing to do with our main purpose. What is our true purpose? The above verse says it clearly. As there is always time for all worldly matters, there is likewise plenty of time for this most important matter. However, which one of us truly understands this? One may say that it is necessary for an angel to descend from Heaven and inject within our heart some of the faith and love that our saints possess; only then might it be possible for us to truly feel and comprehend the Apostle's words.

"In an acceptable time I have heard Thee." In other words the time which we spend in this world is truly priceless; it is time for the purpose of salvation. Our life may last 20, 40, 60 or 80 years; what can we do during this time? Why do we ask? Why do we not open the holy scriptures, the synaxarion, or even visit a cemetery, where the bodies of many lie buried? Why do we not look in the stars in the sky and then, searching within our heart, ask ourselves: "Why did we come to this world?" What is it that we ought to accomplish within the span of our earthly life? Well, I am about to tell you, just make sure you are paying attention:

You my young lady, that spends so much time in front of the mirror or stay up during all hours of the night entertaining yourself, draw near and listen to me. And you, my young man, who spends your day running around in your car or motorcycle, draw near and listen to me as well. And you, my dear housewife, who spends hours window shopping in the malls, come near me as well. All of you, why are you wasting so much of your time? I do not ask for much; I only ask that you set aside some of your time each day for prayer, to kneel and speak with God.

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His TRUTH be brought forth.

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I am also talking to you, the husband, who spends hours upon hours studying those papers with the fine print. I see you on the train or bus or at home either in front of the TV or staring at magazines and newspapers. What is it that you find in them? Please forgive my language, but have you ever seen a man use a stick to dig up or disturb cow droppings? Not really, because such an act would bring forth offensive odors and stench. Draw near my fellow Christian and if you are a baptized Orthodox man, than open up your Bible each day and spend some time reading it with your wife and children so that all of your eyes may open.

What else? Take a pen and paper and start counting the hours. One entire week comprised of 168 hours. From all these hours, what does God ask of you? Simply just one or two hours to attend the weekly Sunday Liturgy; to be in church from the moment you hear "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" all the way to "Through the prayers of the Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us and save us, Amen." If the priest asks us to attend an all-night vigil who goes? If, however, the devil calls us to join him in the dark entertainment centers of the evening, then many run to be with him through midnight and beyond. While in church, though, they all ask "How much longer until it's over?"

In the end my fellow Christians, every new year God grants you a new cycle of 365 days. Every year is like a long komboloi (worry beads) with 365 beads. Every day is represented by a golden bead. Yes, my fellow Orthodox Christian, it is truly made of gold since we all know too well that "time is money." From all these 365 days dedicate at least one day and approach the spiritual clinic through the sacrament of Holy Confession. When you lose your physical health, I see you running to doctors and hospitals. For your soul, however, do you do

anything? Thus my child, from all these 365 days, pick a day or two and seek a confessor, go and kneel in front of him and confess your offenses.

So you see my child, it is unfortunate but true. There is such great unwillingness to dedicate five minutes for prayer, a few minutes to study the Holy Bible, an hour or two to attend the weekly Liturgy, a day or two for confession. What can we then expect from God?

My brethren, as you can see, I have taken a hold of the valuable coin on which is inscribed "In an acceptable time I have heard Thee..." and I peeled it apart so all of us can comprehend these words. Now that this deed is completed, which one of you will take the time to establish his or her timetable and itinerary. Which one of you will rise in the morning and instead of standing in front of the bathroom mirror will take the time to seek the spiritual mirror contained within our Holy Bible and read it? Which one of you will kneel at home to pray? Which one of you will make it a point to start coming to church every Sunday? Which one of you will make it a point to seek and find a spiritual father for confession?

It is within the time afforded to us by God in this life of ours that these deeds must be completed. You must also take note that time is of the essence, even though it appears that we have plenty of time. Our church reminds us of this every day: "That we complete the remaining time of our lives in peace and repentance, let us ask of the Lord." What is the duration of our life going to be? How much longer will we live? Is it perhaps possible that this current year is the last one of our earthly life? What am I saying? Could this current month be our last one? Perhaps even this next week or next day may end up being our last one... Do you doubt me? Well, just open the newspaper and read the obituary section...

There was a mayor of Athens once who organized a large

party to celebrate his birthday, inviting politicians, ministers and many others. They all gathered in happiness. The table was set with the finest foods; flowers were everywhere; the music was playing. In his pocket he even had the papers ready with the speech he would deliver. He was standing by the door having his picture taken as he greeted each of his guests. But before he made it to the table, his call arrived. He could have never expected it to come at that time, but it did come, as lightening from a clear sky! What type of lightening? A heart attack... He fell down, never to get up again; they lifted him and carried him away with their hands... He was truly gone. As far as his guests, none of them sat around to enjoy the meal. They were all beside themselves. Those of you who were raised in small villages may have seen the following: several chickens grazing in the meadow when suddenly a hawk appears out of nowhere and plunges among them, snatches one of them and quickly disappears. The remaining chickens become greatly agitated. This is exactly, my brethren, how death appears – like a hawk that snatches lives away. He snatches you in the store, in the street, in the town square, during a wedding, during a baptism, during elections, wherever he finds you! He snatches the elderly as well as babies from their cribs.

My brethren, how much longer shall we remain senseless? How much longer shall we refuse to consider eternity?

“In an acceptable time, I have heard thee...” In a very old book, I read that there was a king a long time ago who had the following custom. Throughout his entire kingdom and whenever he came near a city with his army, he carried two flags; a white one and a black one. When he approached the city, he raised the white flag which meant that as long as that flag was raised, a soldier did not have permission to disturb anything, not even the hair on a person’s head! All of the city’s inhabitants had also the ability to request favors from the king, whatever they desired. This, however, was for a short duration only and it had a very definitive time limit. As soon as time was up, the black flag was raised and then mothers would weep for their children; in homes and in fields, to people and to animals alike, fire, murder, blood everywhere...

Do you comprehend what I am telling you? Christ, our good King, raises His white flag over this world through His Holy Cross. Let all the sinful come, all people, all nations, while there is time (“In an acceptable time...”)! The time will soon come that the white flag of love and mercy will be lowered and then all gates will be shut. The day will come that you will arrive only to find the Church door closed. You will keep knocking but not even the chanter will be there to answer. The stars and the sun will be extinguished and the rivers will dry up. The moment of judgment and justice will be upon us all!

My brethren, as long as we remain in this vain world, let us repent, let us weep, and let us all beg for God’s mercy. May God deem us worthy to spend the rest of our life “in peace and repentance,” through the intercessions of our Holy Theotokos and all the saints. Amen.

MODESTY AND WILL

By Metropolitan Philaret Voznesensky (+1985)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, instructing His disciples and apostles, imbued in them the necessity of observing purity of heart and thought. From the thought and from the heart proceed our sinful impulses: “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart,” says the Saviour; “and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:18-19).

The Saviour pointed to this further with the following words: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28). This law of the psycho-political nature of man is well-known to contemporary perverters, who are consciously striving to corrupt our youth. We remember how in Russia those who prepared the revolution, and then the communists, began the spiritual weakening of that nation by imbuing the youth with shamelessness and depravity. Special circles were organized for this, which spread contempt for the ordinary laws of morality. Such propagation of “free morals” which surrounds us now more than ever, is frequently being spread even among school age children.

In our days, as in pre-revolutionary times in Russia, this propagation has the definite goal of corrupting contemporary society. This is an old method. History is filled with examples of nations which perished from the spread of depravity. The Lord turned Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes. Babylon fell. The Roman Empire perished. The free West could be subjected to this same corruption... What do we see in the life which surrounds us? Indecency and shamelessness in clothing; shameless kissing and embracing on the streets and in public places; shameless advertisements, filthy pornographic literature... All of this dissoluteness and perversion pours into life in an immense wave. Truly, there is no less shamelessness now, if not more, than in pagan times when the Holy Apostles and their successors had to exhort Christians with especial zeal in the observance of modesty.

Man’s nature is such that in the sins of the flesh, the active role belongs on the one hand to the male sex, while on the other, the temptation comes from women. Because of this, Christian cultures everywhere established customs which helped the preservation of good morals, as well as modest dress for women, so that the exposure of the latter should not evoke sinful thoughts and tempting inclinations in anyone. **The more elevated the spiritual culture, the more modest was the dress of the women.**

Modesty in dress is our first line of defense. It must guard the purity of women and keep men from the temptation of sinful desires. Meanwhile, the evocation of precisely these feelings characterizes contemporary fashion.

What was peculiar before to a fallen woman, who, in plying her base trade, dressed provocatively with the goal of evoking sensuality in men, is now becoming the mode and norm for young women who are often unconscious of the meaning and consequences of this fashion which enslaves them. We know that the fight against sin which surrounds us on all sides is not an easy matter. **The path of salvation is made narrower in proportion to the intensification in the world of evil and apostasy.** But the ancient pagan world which surrounded the handful of the first Christians was no less corrupt. These latter, however, did not accede to the temptations of the pagan modes, even as some now do not accede to contemporary temptations.

The Holy Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Philippians wrote that they shone as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (Phil. 2:15). A lofty spiritual disposition and irreproachably clean, strictly chaste life; these were the characteristic traits of the Philippian Christians, for which the Apostle Paul praised them. We live in later times; nineteen centuries separate us from those days in which the Apostle Paul wrote his epistles. But now, just as the Christians of the first centuries, we are encircled by an environment full of shamelessness and perversion. May the high and holy example of the ancient Christians teach us to be as steadfast and firm in the observance of the laws of Christian morals, and not accede to the temptations which surround us.

The moral character and moral value of man's personality depends most of all on the direction and strength of the will. Of course, everyone understands that for a Christian it is necessary to have first, a strong and decisive will, and second, a will which is firmly directed toward the good of his neighbor; toward the side of good and not evil. How is one to develop a strong will? The answer is simple: above all through the exercise of the will. To do this, as with bodily exercise, it is necessary to begin slowly, little by little. However, having begun to exercise one's will in anything (e.g., in a constant struggle with one's sinful habits or whims) this work on oneself must never cease. Moreover, a Christian who wishes to strengthen his will, his character, must from the very beginning avoid all dissipation, disorder and inconsistency of behavior. Otherwise, he will be a person without character, unreliable, a reed shaking in the wind, as we read in Holy Scripture.

Discipline is necessary for every one of us. It has such vital significance that without it, a correct, normal order and success in our endeavors is impossible. This is of primary importance in the life of each individual; for inner self-discipline takes the place here of external school or military discipline. Man must place himself in definite frameworks, having created definite conditions and an order of life, and he must not depart from this.

Let us note this, too: man's habits are of great significance in the matter of strengthening the will. Bad, sinful habits are a great obstacle for a Christian moral life. On the other hand, good habits are a valuable acquisition for the soul and, therefore, man must teach himself much good so that what is good becomes his own -- habitual. This is especially important

in the early years, when a man's character takes shape. It is not in vain that we say that the second half of man's earthly life is formed from habits acquired in the first half.

Probably no one would argue against the need for a strong will. In life we meet people with varying degrees of strength of will. It often happens that a person who is very gifted, talented, with a strong mind and a profoundly good heart, turns out to be weak willed and cannot carry out his plans in life, no matter how good and valuable they might be. On the other hand, a less talented person who is stronger in character and has great strength of will, this person often succeeds in life.

What is more important than strength of will is its direction: does it act for good or evil? A well intentioned but weak-willed person is seldom of great use to society; while a person with a strong will bent on evil is very dangerous. From this it is clear how very important are those principles, those basic foundations and rules by which man's will is guided.

What is the source from which man's will can draw suitable principles of guidance? For a non-believer, an answer to this is extremely difficult and essentially impossible. Are they to be drawn from science? In the first place, science is interested primarily in questions of knowledge and not morals, and secondly, it does not contain anything solid and constant in principles because it is constantly changing. From philosophy? Philosophy teaches about the relativity of its truths and does not claim their unconditional authority. From practical life? Even less. This life itself is in need of positive principles which can remove from it unruly, and unprincipled conditions. But while the answer to the present question is so difficult for non-believers, for a believing Christian the answer is simple and clear. The source of good principles is God's will, and this is revealed to us in the Saviour's teaching, in His Holy Gospel. It alone has an unconditional, steadfast authority in this regard; and it alone teaches us self-sacrifice and Christian freedom, Christian equality and brotherhood (a concept stolen by those outside the Faith). The Lord Himself said of true Christians, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father" (Matt. 7:21).



Is the prayer on your lips? Then grace is there as well. But from the lips it must pass into the nous and descend into the heart -- and this takes much time and labor. The tongue must toil in order to pay for all its idle talk and its falls, and it must acquire the habit of praying. For without labor and practice, a habit cannot be formed. Humility must also appear for grace to come. After that the road is clear; the prayer cleaves to our breathing and the nous wakes up and follows it. With time passions abate, thoughts subside, and the heart grows calm.

Elder Ephraim of Philotheou
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

THE LIFE OF ST. SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

The Feast of His Holy Relics - July 5

One of the most beloved Orthodox saints of Russia is St. Sergius of Radonezh whose life for countless generations of pious Orthodox, both young and old, served as a source of spiritual nourishment. And so it can for us, if only we read it not so much with our minds, as with our hearts.

A Greek bishop, a contemporary of St. Sergius, doubted the many reports he had heard concerning the saint's sanctity and said: "Can there be such a lamp in this land and in these latter times?" Desiring to see for himself, he set out for St. Sergius' monastery, but "no sooner had he seen the Saint when he was struck blind. The Saint took him by the hand to his cell, and there the bishop confessed his unbelief and begged with tears for healing. The Saint touched his eyes and healed him, exhorting him not to come tempting the simple monks again. The bishop, now enlightened, spoke loudly everywhere about having seen a true man of God, a heavenly man and earthly Angel."

How many of us approach the reading of lives of saints, our minds clouded by doubt, skeptical about the miracles and thus blind to the treasure of holiness which they contain? Let us heed the example of the Greek bishop and beg God to open our mind's eye, for only in this way shall our reading of these lives be spiritually fruitful.

St. Sergius was born in 1314 in Rostov of pious and devout parents. Even before his birth, God worked a miracle upon the future saint: while still in his mother's womb he cried aloud three times during the Divine Liturgy. His biographer says that from this moment his mother "carried the child in her womb as if it were a precious treasure. She guarded herself from every stain of sin, observing a fast."

Baptized with the name Bartholomew, the growing boy was a poor student, unable to learn how to read. He often prayed to God in secret: "O Lord, give me understanding of learning!" One day he met in the fields a holy elder of angel-like appearance who asked, "What are you seeking, my child?" The boy replied that he wished most of all to read and write. Assuring him that for his faith the Lord would give him learning, the elder at the boy's entreaty accompanied him to his parents' house. They all went into the house chapel and the elder told the boy to read aloud from the Psalter. "Father, I do not know how," Bartholomew said. But after the elder commanded him to "Speak the word of God without doubt," the boy began to read easily. Then the elder foretold to the parents that their son would be a dwelling of the Holy Trinity, that he would be great before God and man, and that he would direct others thanks to his virtuous life.

Some time later it fell on Bartholomew to care for his parents in their old age, a task he willingly undertook, although he wanted to become a monk. After his parents died he abandoned the world and, together with one of his brothers, went deep

into the forest to build a cell and a small church, dedicated to the Holy Trinity. His brother was unable to remain long with him, so Bartholomew continued in the forest alone. At the age of 23 he received the monastic tonsure with the name Sergius.

Late one night when the Saint was praying, he heard a voice calling "Sergius." Opening the window of his cell he beheld a marvelous vision... an extraordinary radiance shone in the heavens and a multitude of beautiful birds filled the air.

He was troubled by wild animals -- especially bears. One bear in particular would come to the Saint. Seeing that the animal came only to get some food, the Saint would place a small slice of bread on a log... Often there was no bread, and both he and the bear would go hungry. Sometimes the Saint would give his only slice to the bear, being unwilling to disappoint him. When questioned about his behavior, Sergius replied, "The beast knows nothing about fasting." Let no one be astonished at this, knowing certainly that when the Holy Spirit dwells in a man, the creatures become submissive to him, just as to first-created Adam in the beginning.

After two years, God-fearing monks came to dwell with St. Sergius. Although he had gone to the forest to work out his salvation in solitude, St. Sergius accepted their arrival as God's providence and said to them, "Know that if you have come to dwell in the wilderness, the beginning of righteousness is the fear of the Lord."

Each monk built his own cell, and all gathered with the Saint for the divine services in the chapel. A priest came from a village for Divine Liturgy until, finally, the Saint was persuaded to accept ordination at which time the bishop also named him abbot and exhorted him to "Remember this saying: 'Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2). If you follow this precept, you will save yourself and those who live with you." St. Sergius remembered this all his life and was not only a father but also a servant to all those who came to him.

St. Sergius worked at grinding grain, baking bread, cooking food, and making candles, as well as making shoes and clothing for the other monks. He never spent an idle hour. Remaining thus in ceaseless prayer and labors, he completely wore out and refined his flesh, having the constant desire to be a citizen of the Jerusalem that is above. Over and over he reminded his monks: "God's grace cannot be given without trials; after tribulation comes joy."

Multitudes flocked to him, wishing to be part of this growing family of monks. When dissensions arose, the Saint did not enter into them, preferring, as when the monks would not accept correction, to be silent rather than participate in any strife.

Once after prayer before an icon of the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, a dazzling radiance shone upon him and he beheld the Most Pure One, together with the Apostles Peter and John. The bright light of the vision was unbearable, and he fell to the ground. But the Mother of God, touching him,

promised that she would be with his monastery during his life and afterwards, protecting it.

Continually chastening himself with fasting, working unceasingly, performing numberless miracles, the Saint reached advanced age. The older his body grew, the stronger grew his fervor, in no way weakened by age. With the approach of death (which he foreknew) he gathered his flock and delivered a final exhortation. He made them promise to be steadfast in Orthodoxy and to preserve oneness in mind with each other; to keep pure in body and soul and to have un-hypocritical love; to avoid all evil and carnal lusts; to be moderate in food and drink; above all, to be clothed with humility; not to forget love of strangers; to avoid back-talk, and on no account to set value on honor and praise in this life, but rather to await reward from God in the joys of heaven and eternal blessings.

There was a peasant, who living far away, had heard much about St. Sergius, and wished to see him. He came to the monastery and asked to see where the saint could be found. The godly Sergius, who at that time was digging in the garden, was told of the man's arrival. The peasant went into the garden and saw the saint digging in the earth, dressed in humble apparel, tattered and patched throughout. He thought those who had told him that this was Sergius were mocking him, for he expected to see the saint dressed in splendid apparel. When he returned to the monastery, he asked once more, "Where is Sergius? Show him to me, for I have come a great distance to see him." The monks replied, "He who you have seen is Sergius." Then the saint came from the garden, and the peasant turned his face away from him, not even wishing to look upon the blessed one. He thought to himself, "I have come such a long way to see the mighty prophet of whom I have heard, thinking to find him in great glory, but I see nothing but a poor and contemptible old man!" The saint perceived his thoughts and thanked him greatly, for he who is humble rejoices when he is despised and belittled. Then he said to him, "Soon you will see him whom you desire to behold." As the saint was speaking a herald came and announced the arrival of a prince at the monastery. When the prince saw the saint, he hastened to him and prostrated, asking for his blessing. Sergius blessed him and led him into the monastery with honor. The peasant then realized his error, and upbraided himself for not giving the proper honor to Sergius. He later fell at Sergius' feet. Sergius replied, "Do not grieve, for you have judged me correctly, regarding me as a person of no significance. The others are all deceived, for they regard me as someone great." Such was the humility of St. Sergius, that he loved the peasant who despised him not less than the prince who had showed him such honor.

He surrendered his pure, holy soul to the Lord, in the year 1392, on September 25, being 78 years of age. After his death the Saint's body gave off an ineffable, sweet fragrance. His face shone white as snow. Angels preceded him after his repose and opened for him the doors of Paradise and -- what he had always desired -- the illumination of the Most Holy Trinity.

The Mother of God has kept her promise to St. Sergius. His monastery was one of the last to remain open under the Soviet Yoke, and countless pilgrims still come to venerate his holy and incorrupt relics. It is open to this day.

So remarkable is the life of this wondrous Saint, so full of miracles, which we tend to overlook those points which, with prayer, can be applied to our own circumstances. Even his childhood gives a picture of an exemplary Christian life. How many contemporary mothers are so solicitous over the spiritual needs of their children even while they are still in the womb? How many of us turn first to God in time of need and teach our children to do likewise? And how many young people of today sacrifice their own desires in order to care for their parents in their old age? And who among us can afford to disregard the Saint's example of constant labor even at "menial" tasks? Furthermore, while our society places such a high value on secular education (and even theological degrees) can we not see from this life that it is not so much the reading of books which we must cultivate, but rather the fear of God and the practice of His commandments? If only we would be more inclined to follow the example of St. Sergius. In his book on this Saint, Pierre Kovalevsky writes:

"Throughout his life he remained a man for whom the Christian experience was more important than learning or reason. He never wrote anything, and he drew his knowledge not from reading but from his continual communion with God. His vocation was not to speculative theology but rather to the application of the Gospel's precepts."



THE POWER OF CONFESSION

Our Holy Father, St. John Chrysostom, in order to console his flock, presents the following example with a coal. Let's say that you have a lit coal; you can not hold it for it will burn you. If, however, you drop it into the open sea, who do you think will "win?" The coal or the sea? Surely the sea; you will hear a quick extinguishing noise and the coal will rapidly disappear.

Sin is just like a piece of coal that consumes our spiritual existence, our soul. It causes great pains and anguish. Do not allow it to continue its harmful effect. Take it to the hour of Holy Confession and with full contrition, toss it in the great sea of God's philanthropy. At once, the coal of your sin will be extinguished and disappear. If you now wish to tell me that you are not bothered by just one coal, but have many serious sins, I will then inform you that God's mercy is not just a sea; it is a huge ocean!

Σημεία τῶν Καιρῶν

Γέρων Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀγιορείτης

*«Μετά ἀπό τὴν μπόρα τὴν δαιμονική, θά ἔλθῃ ἡ
Λιακάδα ἢ Θεϊκή»*

Πίσω ἀπὸ τὸ κοσμικὸ πνεῦμα τῆς σημερινῆς «ἐλευθερίας» τῆς ἔλλειψης σεβασμοῦ στὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, στοὺς μεγαλυτέρους, στοὺς γονεῖς καὶ διδασκάλους ποὺ ἔχουν φόβο Θεοῦ, κρύβεται ἡ πνευματικὴ σκλαβιά, τὸ ἄγχος, καὶ ἡ ἀναρχία, ποὺ ὀδηγοῦν τὸν κόσμον στὸ ἀδιέξοδο, στὴν ψυχικὴ καὶ σωματικὴ καταστροφή.

Πίσω λοιπὸν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ τέλειο σύστημα «κάρτας ἐξυπηρετήσεως» ἀσφαλείας κομποῦτερ, κρύβεται ἡ παγκόσμια δικτατορία, ἡ σκλαβιά τοῦ ἀντιχριστοῦ. Ἀποκ. Ἰωάννου κεφ. Ιγ' 16: «ἵνα δῶσιν αὐτοῖς χάραγμα ἐπὶ τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν τῆς δεξιᾶς ἢ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν, καὶ ἵνα μὴ τις δύνηται ἀγοράσαι ἢ πωλῆσαι εἰ μὴ ὁ ἔχων τὸ χάραγμα, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου ἢ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ· ... ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστὶ· καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτοῦ χξς' .» (= 666)

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀνδρέας ὁ Καισαρείας γράφει τὰ ἐξῆς: «Περὶ τοῦ μαροῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἀντιχριστοῦ. Καὶ τὴν μὲν ἀκρίβειαν τῆς ψήφου, ὡς καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένα, ὁ χρόνος ἀποκαλύψει καὶ ἡ πείρα τοῖς νήφουσιν... ἀλλ' οὐκ εὐδόκησεν ἡ Θεία Χάρις ἐν Θεῖα Βίβλῳ τὸ τοῦ λυμεῶνος ὄνομα γραφῆναι· ὡς ἐν γυμνασίας δε λόγῳ πολλὰ ἐστὶν εὐρεῖν...». Ἅγιος Ἀνδρέα Καισαρείας, ἐξήγησις εἰς τὴν Ἰωάννου Ἀποκ. σελ. 341-42, κεφ. ΛΗ.

Τὸ παράξενο ὁμῶς, καὶ πολλοὶ πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι ἐκτὸς ποῦ δεῖνουν δικῆς τῶν ἐρμηνεῖες, φοβοῦνται καὶ αὐτοὶ τὸν κοσμικὸ φόβο τοῦ φακελλώματος, ἐνῶ ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀνησυχοῦν πνευματικὰ καὶ νὰ βοηθήσουν τοὺς Χριστιανούς μετὰ τὴν καλὴ ἀνησυχία, καὶ νὰ τοὺς τονῶνουν στὴν πίστι, νὰ νιώθουν Θεϊκὴ παρηγορία.

Ἀπορῶ! Δὲν τοὺς προβληματίζουν ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ γεγονότα; Γιατὶ δὲν βάζουν ἔστω ἓνα ἐρωτηματικὸ γιὰ τὶς ἐρμηνεῖες τοῦ μυαλοῦ τους; Κι' ἂν ἐπιβοηθοῦν τὸν ἀντίχριστο γιὰ τὸ σφράγισμα, πῶς παρασύρουν καὶ ἄλλες ψυχῆς στὴν ἀπώλεια; Αὐτὸ ἐννοεῖται στὸ «... τὸ ἀποπλανᾶν, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτούς». Μάρκ. Ιγ'.

Θὰ πλανηθοῦν αὐτοὶ ποῦ τὰ ἐρμηνεύουν μετὰ τὸ μυαλό. Κι' ἐνῶ τὰ σημεῖα φαίνονται ξεκάθαρα, «τὸ θηρίον» στίς Βρυξέλλες μετὰ τὸ 666 ἔχει σχεδὸν ρουφίξει ὅλα τὰ κράτη στὸ κομποῦτερ. Ἡ κάρτα, ἡ ταυτότητα, «ἡ εἰσαγωγὴ τοῦ σφραγίσματος» τί φανερώνουν; Δυστυχῶς στὸ ράδιο μόνον παρακολουθοῦμε τί καιρὸ θά ἔχουμε. Τί θὰ μᾶς πῇ ὁ Χριστός; «Ἐποκρίται, τὸ μὲν πρόσωπον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ γινώσκετε διακρίνειν, τὰ δὲ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν οὐ δύνασθε γνῶναι;» Ματθ. κεφ. Ιστ'

Μετά λοιπὸν ἀπὸ τὴν κάρτα καὶ τὴν ταυτότητα («τὸ φακέλλωμα»), γιὰ νὰ προχωρήσουν πονηρὰ στὸ σφράγισμα, θά λένε συνέχεια στὴν τηλεόραση, ὅτι πῆρε κάποιος τὴν

κάρτα τοῦ δεῖνα, καὶ τοῦ σήκωσε τὰ χρήματα ἀπὸ τὴν τράπεζα. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη μεριά, θά διαφημίζουν «τὸ τέλειο σύστημα» τὸ σφράγισμα στὸ χέρι ἢ στὸ μέτωπο μετὰ ἀκτίνες λέιζερ, ποῦ δὲν θά διακρίνεται ἐξωτερικὰ, μετὰ τὸ 666, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἀντιχριστοῦ.

Δυστυχῶς, καὶ πάλι «ὀρισμένοι γνωστικοὶ» θά φασκίωνουν τὰ πνευματικὰ τοὺς τέκνα σὰν τὰ μωρὰ, δῆθεν γιὰ νὰ μὴ στενοχωριοῦνται: «Δὲν πειράζει αὐτὸ, δὲν εἶναι τίποτα, ἀρκεῖ ἐσωτερικὰ νὰ πιστεῦτε!» Κι' ἐνῶ βλέπουμε τὸν Ἀπόστολο Πέτρο ποῦ ἐξωτερικὰ ἀρνήθηκε τὸν Χριστό, καὶ ἦτο ἄρνησις, αὐτοὶ ἀρνοῦνται τὸ Ἅγιο σφράγισμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποῦ τοὺς δόθηκε στὸ Ἅγιο Βάπτισμα («Σφραγὶς δωρεᾶς Πνεύματος Ἁγίου») μετὰ τὸ νὰ δέχονται τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ ἀντιχριστοῦ· καὶ μετὰ θά λένε καὶ ὅτι ἔχουν μέσα τοὺς τὸν Χριστό!

Τέτοια δυστυχῶς λογικὴ εἶχαν καὶ ὀρισμένοι «γνωστικοὶ» στὰ χρόνια τῶν Ἁγίων Μαρτύρων, ποῦ προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ μεταστρέψουν τοὺς ὑποψήφιους μάρτυρας, ὅπως ἀναφέρει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος στὸν λόγο του στὸν Μάρτυρα Γόρδιο: «... Πολλοὶ παραλογίζοντοσαν προσπαθώντας νὰ πείσουν τὸν Μάρτυρα νὰ ἀρνηθῆ μόνον μετὰ τὰ λόγια, καὶ νὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν πίστι μετὰ τὴν ψυχὴ, τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ διάθεση, γιὰ τὸ Θεὸς δὲν δίνει προσοχὴ στὴν γλῶσσα ἀλλὰ στὴν διάθεση. Ὁ Μάρτυς ὁμῶς Γόρδιος ἦταν ἀκαμπτος καὶ ἀπεκρίθηκε: “Οὐκ ἀνέχεται τί γλῶσσα κτισθεῖσα παρὰ Χριστοῦ φθέγγασθαι τί κατὰ τοῦ Κτίσαντος... μὴ πλανᾶσθε Θεὸς οὐκ μυκτηρίζεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ἡμᾶς τοῦ ἡμετέρου κρίνει, ἐκ τῶν λόγων δικαιοῦ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν λόγων καταδικάζει”».

Ἐπίσης ἐπὶ Δεκίου, μετὰ διάταγμα ζητοῦσε νὰ ὁμολογήσουν τὴν θρησκεία τῶν εἰδωλολατρῶν, καὶ ὅσοι Χριστιανοὶ δήλωναν καὶ θυσιάσαν στὰ εἰδῶλα, ἐπαιρναν πιστοποιητικὸ, καὶ γλύτωναν τὸ Μαρτύριο. Ὅχι μόνον αὐτοὶ ἦταν ἀρνητῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκεῖνοι ὅπου ἔδειναν χρήματα στοὺς εἰδωλολάτρους στὴν ἐπιτροπὴ, καὶ ἔπερναν τὸ πιστοποιητικὸ, χωρὶς νὰ ἀρνηθοῦν, οἱ ὀνομαζόμενοι «λιβελλοφόροι», καὶ αὐτοὺς ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας τοὺς θεώρησε ἀποστάτας-πεπτωκότας.

Ἔχουμε τόσα πολλὰ παραδείγματα, ὅπως καὶ τοῦ γενομένου θαύματος τοῦ Ἁγίου Θεοδώρου, ποῦ ἐορτάζουμε κάθε χρόνο τὸ Σάββατο τῆς Α' ἐβδομάδος τῶν Νηστειῶν: «Ἰουλιανὸς ὁ παραβάτης, γινώσκων ὅτι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ καθαίρονται μᾶλλον διὰ νηστείας τὴν πρώτη ἐβδομάδα τῆς Ἁγίας Τεσσαρακοστῆς, ἦν καὶ ἡμεῖς διὰ τοῦτο καθαρὰν ἐβδομάδα καλοῦμεν, ἠβουλήθη ἵνα τότε μάλιστα μολύνῃ αὐτούς· διὸ καὶ προσέταξε κρυφίως ἵνα τεθῶσιν εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν κατ' ἐκείνας τὰς ἡμέρας βρώματα μεμιασμένα ἐκ τῶν αἱμάτων τῶν εἰδωλικῶν θυσιῶν. Ἀλλὰ νεύσει Θεῖα ἐπιφανεῖς καθ' ὕπνον ὁ Μάρτυς Θεόδωρος εἰς τὸν τότε ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Εὐδόξιον καὶ φανερώσας τὸ πρᾶγμα παρηγγεῖλεν αὐτῷ ἵνα συγκαλέσῃ τοὺς πιστοὺς εὐθύς τὸ πρωῖ τῆς Δευτέρας καὶ ἐμποδίσῃ αὐτοῖς τῶν βρωμάτων ἐκείνων τὴν χρῆσιν, τὴν ἔλλειψιν

τῆς ἀναγκαίας τροφῆς ἀναπληρώση ἐκ τοῦ προχείρου διὰ κολλύβων... Τοιουτοτρόπως ὁ μὲν σκοπὸς τοῦ παραβάτου ἐματαιώθη· ὁ δὲ εὐσεβῆς λαός, διαφυλαχθεὶς ἀμόλυντος...» Ὁρολόγιον τὸ Μέγα, σελ. 446 .

Τὸ νὰ ἀπέχουμαι ἀπὸ τὰ εἰδωλόθυτα, εἶναι κανὼν τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων. Πράξ. Ἀποσ. Κεφ. Ιε´: «Συνήχθησαν δὲ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι... ἀπέχθεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνικτοῦ καὶ πορνείας...».

Παρ' ὅλα λοιπὸν αὐτὰ ποὺ ἀνέφερα, ἀκούει κανεὶς ἕνα σωρὸ δυστυχῶς ἀνοησίας τοῦ μυαλοῦ, ἀπὸ ὀρισμένους σημερινούς «γνωστικούς», ὁ ἕνας νὰ λέει: «Ἐγὼ θὰ δεχθῶ τὴν ταυτότητα μὲ τὸ 666, θὰ βάλω καὶ ἕνα Σταυρὸ», κι' ὁ ἄλλος νὰ λέει: «Ἐγὼ θὰ δεχθῶ τὸ σφράγισμα στὸ κεφάλι μὲ τὸ 666 καὶ θὰ κάνω κι' ἕνα Σταυρὸ στὸ κεφάλι...» καὶ ἕνα σωρὸ ὁμοίως ἀνοησίες, ποὺ νομίζουν ὅτι θὰ ἀγιασθοῦν μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο, ἐνῶ αὐτὰ εἶναι πλᾶνες. Μόνον αὐτὰ ποὺ δέχονται ἀγιασμό, αὐτὰ μόνον ἀγιάζονται. Ὅπως τὸ νερό, δέχεται Ἀγιασμό, καὶ γίνεται Ἀγιασμός. Τὰ οὐρα δὲν δέχονται Ἀγιασμό.

Ἡ πέτρα μὲ θαῦμα γίνεται ψομί. Ἡ ἀκαθαρσία, δὲν δέχεται Ἀγιασμό. Ἐπομένως, ὁ διάβολος, ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ὅταν εἶναι στὴν ταυτότητά μας, ἢ στὸ χέρι, ἢ στὸ κεφάλι μας, μὲ τὸ σύμβολό του, δὲν ἀγιάζονται, μὲ τὸ νὰ βάλουμε καὶ ἕνα Σταυρὸ.

Ἔχουμε τὴν δύναμη τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, τοῦ Ἁγίου Συμβόλου, τὴν Θεία Χάρη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μόνον ὅταν ἀρκοῦμεθα στὸ Ἅγιο Σφράγισμα τοῦ Βαπτίσματος, καὶ ἀπαρνοῦμεθα τὸν σατανά, καὶ συντασσώμεθα στὸν Χριστό, καὶ δεχόμεθα τὸ Ἅγιον Σφράγισμα: «Σφραγὶς δωρεᾶς Πνεύματος Ἁγίου»!

Ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ μᾶς δίνη καλὴ φώτιση. Ἀμήν.

Ἅγιον Ὅρος Κουτλουμουσιανὸ Κελλὶ «Παναγούδα»
Σάββατο Α' Νηστεϊῶν 1987.

Με πολὺ πόνου καὶ ἀγάπη Χριστοῦ,
Μοναχὸς Παῖσιος



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντάς κατὰ περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὁσιος Ποιμῆν».

Προσευχὴ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου Χρυσοστόμου

Κατὰ τὸ Μέτρο τῶν Εἴκοσι-Τεσσάρων Ὁρῶν τοῦ Νυχθημεροῦ

Α. Κύριε μὴ στερήσεις με τῶν ἐπουρανίων σου καὶ αἰωνίων σου ἀγαθῶν.

Β. Κύριε λύτρωσαί με τῶν αἰωνίων κολάσεων.

Γ. Κύριε εἴτε λόγῳ, εἴτε ἔργῳ, εἴτε κατὰ νοῦν καὶ διάνοια ἡμάρτον, συγχώρεσέ με.

Δ. Κύριε λύτρωσαί με ἀπὸ πάσης ἀνάγκης καὶ ἀγνοίας καὶ λήθης καὶ ραθυμίας καὶ τῆς λιθώδους ἀναισθησίας.

Ε. Κύριε λύτρωσαί με ἀπὸ παντὸς πειρασμοῦ καὶ ἐγκαταλείψεως.

Στ. Κύριε, φώτισον τὴν καρδιά μου ἣν ἐσκότισαι ἢ πονηρὴ ἐπιθυμία.

Ζ. Κύριε, ἐγὼ μὲν ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἁμαρτάνω. Σὺ δὲ ὡς Θεός, ἐλέησόν με.

Η. Κύριε ἴδε τὴν ἀσθένεια τῆς ψυχῆς μου καὶ πέμψου τὴν χάριν σου εἰς βοήθειά μου, ἵνα καὶ ἐν ἐμοὶ δοξαστεῖ τὸ ὄνομά σου τὸ ἅγιον.

Θ. Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ ἔγραψον τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ δούλου σου ἐν βιβλίῳ ζωῆς χαριζόμενος μοὶ καὶ τέλος ἀγαθόν.

Ι. Κύριε ὁ Θεός μου, οὐκ ἐποίησα οὐδὲν ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ ἀρξαιίμην ποτε τῆ εὐσπλαχνία σου.

ΙΑ. Κύριε, βρέξον εἰς τὴν καρδιά μου τὴν δρόσον τῆς χάριτός σου.

ΙΒ. Κύριε ὁ Θεός τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς μνήσθητί μου τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ τοῦ αἰσχροῦ τοῦ πονηροῦ καὶ βέβηλου κατὰ τὸ μέγα ἔλεός σου, ὅταν ἔλθεις ἐν τῇ Βασιλείᾳ σου.

ΙΓ. Κύριε ἐν μετάνοια με παράλαβέ με καὶ μὴ ἐγκαταλείψεις με.

ΙΔ. Κύριε, μὴ εἴσενεγκης εἰς πειρασμό.

ΙΕ. Κύριε, δὸς μοὶ ἔννοια ἀγαθή.

ΙΣΤ. Κύριε, δῶσε μοὶ δάκρυ καὶ μνήμη θανάτου καὶ κατάνυξη.

ΙΖ. Κύριε, δῶσε μοὶ τῶν λογισμῶν μου ἐξαγόρευσει.

ΙΗ. Κύριε, δὸς μοὶ ταπεινώση, ἐκκοπή θελήματος καὶ ὑπάκουη.

ΙΘ. Κύριε δῶσε μοὶ ὑπομονὴ μακροθυμία καὶ πραότητα.

Κ. Κύριε, ἐμφύτευσον ἐν ἐμοὶ τὴν ρίζαν τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τοῦ φόβου σου.

ΚΑ. Κύριε, ἀξίωσόν με ἀγαπᾶν σὲ ἐξ' ὅλης μου τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τῆς διάνοιας καὶ τῆς καρδίας καὶ τήρειν ἐν πάσει τὸ θέλημά σου.

ΚΒ. Κύριε, σκέπασόν με ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπων πονηρῶν καὶ δαιμόνων καὶ παθῶν καὶ ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ καὶ μὴ προσήκοντος πράγματος.

ΚΓ. Κύριε, ὡς κελεύεις, Κύριε ὡς γινώσκεις, Κύριε ὡς βούλει, γεννηθῆτω τὸ θέλημά σου ἐν ἐμοί.

ΚΔ. Κύριε, τὸ σὸν θέλημα γενέσθω καὶ οὐ τὸ ἐμόν. Πρεσβείας καὶ ἰκεσίας τῆς Παναγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων σου, ὅτι εὐλογητὸς εἶ εἰς πάντες τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.

Οί Γενιές πού Θρέφουν Αγίους

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμ. Γρηγορίου, Καθηγουμένου τῆς Ι. Μ. Δοχειαρείου Ἀγίου Ὁρους [Ἀναμνήσεις του στὰ παιδικὰ του χρόνια στὴν νῆσο Πάρο, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Σπίθα», Ἰανουάριος 2005]

ΛΙΤΑΝΕΙΕΣ

Οί λιτανεῖες τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων ἦταν πάρα πολλές φορές τὸ χρόνο. Τίς εἶχαν σὲ μεγάλη εὐλάβεια, τὸ ζοῦσαν ὡς ἁγιασμό τοῦ χωρίου. Ἄν προσπαθοῦσε κάποιος γέρο-παπᾶς, ἐξ' αἰτίας καιρικῶν συνθηκῶν, κάποια νὰ περικόψει, οἱ διαμαρτυρίες τοῦ κόσμου ἦταν σκληρές.

Ἡ λιτανεία τοῦ Πάσχα καὶ ὁ τρόπος πού γίνεται ἔχει μοναστηριακὴ ἐπίδραση. Πρῶτα λιτανεύουνε τὴν Ἀνάσταση κι ἔπειτα εἰσέρχονται στὸν Ἑσπερινό τῆς Ἀγάπης. Φαίνεται πὼς ἱερομόναχοι, πού ἔζησαν στὸν Ἄθωνα, μετέφεραν τὴν παράδοση αὐτή. Δίνουν τόση σημασία στὴ λιτανεία, ὥστε καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς πρῶτα θὰ τοὺς λιτανεύουνε σ' ὅλο τὸ χωριὸ μὲ ὅλα τὰ ἐξαρτήματα τῆς λιτανείας (σταυρό, φανάρι, ἐξαπτέρυγα) κι ἔπειτα θὰ τοὺς ψάλλουνε στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Ἡ λιτανεία ἦταν ζωντανὴ συμμετοχὴ ὄλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ τῶν ἀρρώστων καὶ τῶν γερόντων. Ἀφοῦ κι αὐτοὶ στέκονταν στὸ κατώφλι τοῦ σπιτιοῦ τους, νὰ προσκυνήσουνε τὴν εἰκόνα. Οἱ νοικοκυρὲς προέτρεχαν διακριτικὰ τῆς λιτανείας, γιὰ νὰ ἀφήσουν τὸ λιβανιστήρι στὴν πεζούλα τῆς αὐλῆς, νὰ λιβανίσει τὸν Ἅγιο πού θὰ πέραση. Ἦταν ὅλα ζωντανά, Ἀφοῦ καὶ τὰ λιβανιστήρια, χωρὶς νὰ τὰ κρατᾶ χέρι, λιβάνιζαν εἰκόνες.

ΙΕΡΕΣ ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΕΙΣ

Εἶχαμε πολλὰ πανηγυράκια, σχεδὸν ὅλο τὸ χρόνο· δὲν περνοῦσε μῆνας ἀνέορτος. Στολιζάμε τὰ ἐκκλησιάκια, τίς εἰκόνες καὶ τοὺς πολυελέους μὲ μύρτα καὶ βασιλικά. Στὶς ἐξώθυρες κάναμε στεφάνια, στρώναμε μυρτιές στὸ δάπεδο καί, ὅταν ἡ Ἐκκλησία μοσχομύριζε, χτυποῦσανε οἱ βενετσιάνικες καμπάνες γιὰ τὸν Ἑσπερινό. Τὰ πανηγύρια αὐτὰ ἦταν ἡ χαρὰ μας. Πρόσφορα κι ἄρτοκλασίες ἦταν τὰ δῶρα τῶν πιστῶν πού γιόρταζαν ἢ εἶχαν τάματα. Τὸ ἀποκορύφωμα τῆς χαρᾶς μας ἦταν νὰ δοῦμε στὸ πανηγύρι μας τοὺς Γέροντες τῆς Μονῆς νὰ ψάλλουνε, νὰ λειτουργοῦνε καὶ νὰ κηρύττουνε. Τὸ Μοναστήρι πάντα κοντὰ μας, κι ἐμεῖς τὸ βάζαμε στὴν καρδιά μας.

Εἶχαμε καὶ τὰ προσκυνήματά μας. Τὴν προετοιμασία τὴν ἔκανε ἡ μάννα. Ζύμωνε πρόσφορα καὶ ἄρτους. Ἐπλαθε κερὰ κι ἔβαζε λάδι στὸ δοχεῖο. Κι αὐτὸ δὲν ἦταν κάποιο ἰδιαίτερο τάμα, ἦταν ἡ βασικὴ ὑποχρέωση τοῦ προσκυνητοῦ. Χωρὶς νὰ λείπουν καὶ τὰ φιλέματα τῶν διακονητῶν τοῦ προσκυνήματος. Τώρα στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος κάποιοι προσκυνητὲς μόνο καφέ καὶ λουκούμια γιὰ τὸ ἀρχονταρῖκι φέρνουν. Γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησιὰ τίποτα. Σπάνια νὰ δεῖς προσκυνητὴ μὲ κερὶ καὶ λάδι. Ὁ σημερινὸς προσκυνητὴς, μᾶλλον περιηγητὴς, μὲ μιὰ φωτογραφικὴ μηχανὴ στὸ λαιμὸ του γυρίζει τὰ Μοναστήρια. Πίσω ἀπὸ κάθε προσκυνητὴ, πού βαστάζει τὰ δῶρα γιὰ τὸ Θεό, ὑπάρχει μιὰ μάννα εὐσεβῆς. Ἡ μάννα μου, ὅταν βγαίναμε στὴν ἐξοχή, μόνιμα εἶχε στὴν τσέπη τῆς

ποδιάς τῆς τὸ μπουκάλι τὸ λάδι, ν' ἀνάψει τὰ καντήλια στὰ ξωκλήσια πού θὰ διαβαίναμε.

Κι ἔλεγε: «Δῶσε λίγα στὸ Θεό, γιὰ νὰ τὰ ἔχεις ὅλα.» Κι ἀκόμα: «Τὸ προσκύνημα θέλει προετοιμασία.» Ἄν δὲν εἶχε κάνει, ἔλεγε: «Δὲν εἶμαι ἐτοιμῆ. Ὅπως λάχει, δὲ διαβαίνομε τὸ κατώφλι τῆς Ἐκκλησιᾶς.» Παλιὰ στὰ προσκυνήματα ὑπῆρχε ἡ αἴτηση «ὕπερ τῶν εὐσεβῶν καὶ Ὁρθοδόξων προσκυνητῶν». Σήμερα τί λέμε;...

Στὰ πανηγυράκια ὑπῆρχε μιὰ συνήθεια, πού δὲν τὴ βρῆκα πουθενά, ὅπου καὶ νὰ γύρισα. Στὸ τέλος τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας εἶχαμε τὰ λεγόμενα μεράσματα. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ ἑορταζόμενου Ἀγίου, οἱ πιστοὶ κρατοῦσανε καλάθια περιποιημένα πού εἶχανε μέσα ὅτι διέθετε ὁ πτωχὸς νησιώτης. Μέσα σὲ εὐπρεπισμένη ἄσπρη πετσέτα ὑπῆρχαν σύκα, παξιμάδια καὶ γλυκά. Κρατώντας τα φώναζαν ἔξω φωνή, ἐκ βαθέων: «Πάρε, νὰ χωρέσης τὸ μακαρίτη τὸν τάδε» (συνήθως ἄκουγες τὰ παρατσούκλια). Κι ὅλος ὁ κόσμος ἔπαιρνε κι ἔλεγε τὸ «Θεὸς χωρέσ' τον», κι ἦτανε ἓνα θέαμα κι ἓνα ἄκουσμα ἐξᾶισιο – μιὰ πραγματικὴ ἔνωση οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς. Ἦτανε πραγματικὰ ὅλοι οἱ πεθαμένοι ἀνάμεσά μας, μὲ ζωντανὴ παρουσία πού μένει ἀλησμόνητη. Ἐνας ξένος εἶπε κάποτε: «Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ χωριὸ κανεὶς ποτὲ δὲν πεθαίνει.» Μάλιστα, ὅταν ἤθελαν νὰ χαρακτηρίσουν ἀρνητικὰ κάποιον, ἔλεγαν: «Αὐτὸς ἓνα μέρασμα δὲν ἔβαλε ποτὲ γιὰ τοὺς γονεῖς του. Τὶ περιμένεις;»

Τὴν Κυριακὴ τὴ βιώνανε ὡς τὸ ἐβδομαδιαῖο Πάσχα, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τοὺς τὸ δίδαξαν οἱ Ἅγιοι Κολλυβάδες. Καθάριζαν τὰ σπίτια τους, ἄσπριζαν τίς αὐλές τους, σὰ νὰ ἦταν Πάσχα. Καθαρὴ κολλυβάδικη ἐπίδραση. Ἡ γιὰ τὴν Κυριακὴ φώναζε τὸ πρωί: «Σηκωθεῖτε, πρέπει νὰ πᾶμε νωρὶς στὴν Ἐκκλησία, νὰ ἀκούσουμε τὸν Ἐξάψαλμο. Χριστιανὸς πού δὲν ἀκούει ἐπὶ τρεῖς συνεχεῖς Κυριακὲς τὸν Ἐξάψαλμο, ἀφορίζεται.» Στὴν ἀνάγνωση τοῦ Ἐξάψαλμου ὅλοι στέκονταν εὐλαβικά μὲ ἓνα ἐλαφρὸ σκύψιμο τῆς κεφαλῆς καὶ τὰ χέρια ἀνοιχτά σὲ στάση δεήσεως. Οὔτε ἡ παραμικρὴ κίνηση δὲν ἐπιτρεπόταν. Ἦταν ὥρα φοβερή. Εἶχαν βεβαία τὴν πίστη πὼς προσμένουν τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία. Τώρα ἀκόμα καὶ θεολόγοι κάθονται καὶ πολλοὶ παπάδες «παίρνουν καιρό», γιὰ νὰ λειτουργήσουνε. Σιγά-σιγά πάει νὰ χαθεῖ τὸ ἱεροτελεστικὸ τοῦ Ἐξάψαλμου μαζί μὲ τὴ θεολογία του.

Διέκριναν τίς γιορτὲς καὶ τίς χαρακτηρίζαν σὰ νὰ ἦταν θεολόγοι. Τὰ Θεοφάνια καὶ τὸ Πάσχα ἦταν τὸ ἴδιο. Ἦταν οἱ κορυφὲς τῶν θείων ἑορτῶν, πού κανεὶς δὲν ἔπρεπε νὰ λείπει ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ γιορτὴ τῆς Θείας Μεταμορφώσεως ἦταν μέρα, πού οἱ ἄθωοι καὶ καλοὶ χριστιανοὶ ἐβλεπαν τὸ φῶς τῆς Θείας Μεταμορφώσεως. Κανεὶς δὲν ἔσπερνε ἂν δὲ λειτουργοῦσε σπόρο πού τὸν εὐλογοῦσε ὁ παπᾶς. Κανεὶς δὲν ἔτρωγε σταφύλια, πρὶν τὰ εὐλόγησι ὁ παπᾶς στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Κανεὶς βοσκὸς δὲν ἔφτιαχνε τυρὶ τῆς Θείας Ἀναλήψεως· ὅλο τὸ γάλα τὸ μοίραζε στὸν κόσμο, γιὰ νὰ εὐλογηθεῖ ἢ ποιμνὴ του. Κανεὶς δὲν ἔτρωγε ψωμί τὰ Φῶτα, ἂν δὲν περνοῦσε ὁ παπᾶς νὰ τὸ φάτση κι ἔτσι νὰ γίνετὶ τὸ λεγόμενο «φωτόψωμο».

Ὅραϊα χρόνια, γεμάτα ἀπὸ εὐλογημένες ἀναμνήσεις, πού δυστυχῶς φύγανε καὶ δὲν ξαναγυρίζουν...

Ένας Σύγχρονος, Άγιος Λειτουργός

ΠΗΓΗ: Θαύματα και Αποκαλύψεις από τη Θεία Λειτουργία, Έκδοση Ι. Μ. Παρακλήτου Αττικής

Ο Άγιος Νικόλαος ο Πλανάς (†1932), ένας άγιος τῶν ἡμερῶν μας, λειτουργοῦσε καθημερινά, χωρίς διακοπή, σὲ διάστημα μισοῦ αἰώνα. Στὸ διάστημα αὐτὸ τύχαινε κάποτε νὰ μὴν ἔχει πρόσφορο. Πάντοτε ὅμως ἐξοικονομοῦσε εἴτε ἀπὸ τοὺς πιστοὺς εἴτε ἀπὸ τοὺς γύρω φούρνους.

Κάποια μέρα εἶχε προχωρήσει ὁ ὄρθρος ἀρκετά, ἀλλὰ πρόσφορο δὲν φαινόταν πουθενά. Ἔστειλε νὰ ψάξουν στοὺς φούρνους καὶ στὶς νοικοκυρὲς ποὺ πάντα εἶχαν. Κοίταξε καὶ στὰ ντουλάπια τοῦ ἱεροῦ, μήπως εἶχε ἀφήσει ἄλλος ἱερέας. Μὰ κανένα ἀποτέλεσμα. Στενοχωρήθηκε μέχρι δακρῶν.

Κάποια στιγμή τὸν βλέπουν νὰ βγαίνει στὴν ὠραία πύλη κρατώντας ἕνα πρόσφορο φρέσκο - φρέσκο. Τὸ εἶχε βρεῖ πάνω στὴν ἁγία τράπεζα!

- Κοιτάξτε παιδιά μου, τί σημεῖο μου ἔκανε ὁ Θεός, εἶπε συγκινημένος καὶ χαρούμενος. Ὅλα τὰ θαύματα, σημεῖα τὰ ἔλεγε. Τὰ θεωροῦσε φυσικά, γιατί εἶχε μεγάλη πίστη. Στὰ συναζάρια συναντᾶμε ἀσκητὲς ποὺ τοὺς ὑπηρετοῦσε ἄγγελος Κυρίου. Πολὺ φυσικὸ λοιπὸν νὰ ὑπηρετοῦσε ἄγγελος Κυρίου καὶ τὸν παπα-Νικόλα, τὸν «ἐντὸς τοῦ κόσμου διαβιούντα ἀληθινὸν ἀσκητὴν».

Ἄρκετοὶ ἐνορίτες του, κυρίως μικρὰ παιδιά, τὸν ἔβλεπαν ὅτι λειτουργοῦσε κυριολεκτικὰ μεταρσιωμένο.

«Ἡ φήμη τοῦ παπα-Νικόλα», διηγεῖται σεβαστὴ γυναίκα, «εἶχε ἀπλωθεῖ σ' ὅλη τὴν Ἀθήνα. Κάποτε, παραμονὴ Χριστουγέννων, ξεκίνησα μὲ τὰ ἐγγονάκια μου γιὰ νὰ κοινωνήσω ἀπὸ τὰ ἁγιασμένα χέρια του. Τότε στὴ Βουλιαγμένη ἦταν ἀκόμα ἐρημιά. Εἴκοσι χαμόσπιτα σκόρπια ἐδῶ κι ἐκεῖ καὶ τριγύρω χωράφια. Στὴ θέση τῆς σημερινῆς ἐκκλησίας ὑπῆρχε ἕνα παλιὸ βυζαντινὸ ἐκκλησάκι, μικρὸ σὰν κουβούκλιο, χαμηλὸ καὶ μισοσκότεινο. Εἶχαν ἔρθει καὶ ἄλλες οἰκογένειες μὲ τὰ παιδάκια τους. Κάποια στιγμή ποὺ ὁ παπα-Νικόλας ἐφανίστηκε στὴν ὠραία πύλη κρατώντας τὸ ἅγιο ποτήριο, τὸ ἐγγονάκι μου φώναξε:

-Γιαγιά, ὁ παπὰς περπατᾶει στὸν ἀέρα!

-Πάψε, τοῦ λέω, ἐνῶ συγχρόνως σταυροκοπήθηκα. Πῶς περπατᾶει στὸν ἀέρα;

-Τὸν βλέπω κι ἐγώ, φώναξε ἄλλο παιδάκι. Δὲν πατάει κάτω.

Στὸ «μετὰ φόβου...» πλησιάσαμε ὅλες οἱ γυναῖκες καὶ τὰ παιδάκια νὰ κοινωνήσουμε. Ὁ παπα-Νικόλας δὲν εἶχε ἀκούσει τίποτε, ἀλλὰ κι ἂν εἶχε ἀκούσει. Δὲν ἔδωσε καθόλου προσοχή. Ἀπὸ τότε ἐρχόμουν πάντοτε ἐδῶ καὶ κοινωνοῦσα. Καὶ κάθε φορὰ ἦταν ἀδύνατον νὰ μὴν ἀκούσω παιδάκια νὰ φωνάζουν:

-Ὁ παπὰς περπατᾶει στὸν ἀέρα!»

Τὸ 1920, ἀνήμερα τὰ Χριστούγεννα, ὁ ὁσιος λειτούργησε στὸν ἅγιο Ἰωάννη Βουλιαγμένης. Ὅταν βγήκε νὰ κοινωνήσει πιστοὺς, πλησίασε καὶ μία γυναίκα μὲ τὸ μωρὸ τῆς. Ἀφοῦ κοινωνήσε τὸ μικρὸ, τὸ ἔδωσε σὲ μία κοπέλα, τὴν Ἰουλία, νὰ τὸ κρατήσει.

Ἡ Ἰουλία, καθὼς τὸ κρατοῦσε, γύρισε καὶ κοίταξε τὸν ἱερέα. Τότε παρὰ λίγο νὰ τῆς πέσει τὸ παιδί ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια.

- Πρόσεξε! Τί ἔπαθες; τῆς φώναξε ἡ γυναίκα.

- Βλέπω τὸν παπὰ νὰ στέκεται πάνω σ' ἕνα σύννεφο, ἀπάντησε ἐκστατικῶς.

Ἄλλοτε πάλι, ἐνῶ λειτουργοῦσε ὁ ὁσιος στὸν προφήτη Ἐλισσαῖο, ἐγινε καὶ τοῦτο: Ἐνα ὀκτάχρονο παιδάκι βγαίνει κάτωχρο ἀπὸ τὸ ἱερὸ καὶ λέει στὴ μητέρα του:

- Μαμά, ὁ παπα-Νικόλας εἶναι τόσο ψηλὰ ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ!

Καὶ τῆς ἔδειξε μισὸ πήχη μὲ τὸ χεράκι του.



Τί Εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ τί Εἶναι ὁ Παπισμὸς

Τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου, ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ ὁμώνυμο βιβλίο, Δ' ἔκδοση, ἐκδοτικὸς οἶκος ΑΣΤΗΡ

Ἐκαμαν ἄνω κάτω σήμερον τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν μας, ἐχώρισαν τὸ ποίμνιόν της, τὸ ἐσκόρπισαν καὶ τρέχει σαστισμένον ἐδῶ καὶ ἐκεῖ. Μεταχειρίσθησαν πᾶν μέσον διὰ νὰ προσεταιρισθοῦν πάντα Ἕλληνα, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι τελείως ἀδιάφορος εἰς τὰ τῆς θρησκείας καὶ τὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἡ ἄθεος καὶ ἐχθρὸς της, καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος προσποιεῖται ὅτι ἐνδιαφέρεται δι' αὐτὴν καὶ διὰ τὴν τύχην της ἀπὸ ἰδιοτέλειαν ἢ ἀπὸ ἄλλην αἰτίαν, ὅλοτελῶς ξένην πρὸς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ἂν καὶ διὰ νὰ μεταβληθοῦν οἱ τοιοῦτοι χλιαροὶ εἰς φιλοπαπικοὺς ζηλωτάς, δὲν ἐχρειάσθη καὶ μεγάλη προσπάθεια, διότι αὐτοὶ οἱ «Ὁρθόδοξοι τῆς περιστάσεως» δὲν ἔχουν νὰ χάσουν τίποτε, ἐὰν καταστραφεῖ ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος ἀλήθεια, καὶ ἐπὶ πλέον ἡ φιλία τοῦ Παπισμοῦ ἠμπορεῖ νὰ προσφέρει πάντοτε πολλὰ ὀφέλη εἰς ἐκεῖνον ποὺ τὴν ἔχει. Δι' αὐτοὺς «οἱ λίθοι γενήσονται ἄρτοι». Ὡς ἐκ τούτου, πολλοὶ ὁποῦ ἦσαν προηγουμένως ἀδιάφοροι, καὶ πολλάκις σαρκασταὶ τῆς θρησκείας καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἐγιναν αἰφνης διαπρῦσοι κήρυκες τῆς Χριστιανικῆς «ἀγάπης», τὴν ὁποίαν μεταχειρίζονται ὡς προπέτασμα καπνοῦ διὰ τὸν πονηρὸν συνεταιρισμὸν τῶν μετὰ τῶν Λατίνων. Ὁ σπαραγμὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ τοῦ ποιμνίου της, ἡ ἀναταραχὴ καὶ ἡ διχόνοια, αὐτὰ εἶναι οἱ θεάρεστοι καρποὶ τῆς πολιτείας τῶν κακῶν ποιμένων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ πρωτάκουστα δεινὰ τὰ ὁποῖα συνεσφωρέθησαν, ἐντὸς μερικῶν μόνον μηνῶν, ἐπάνω εἰς τὸ σῶμα τῆς πολυπαθοῦς Ὁρθοδοξίας, διὰ τὰ ὁποῖα θρηνοῦν οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν. Καὶ οἱ πρωταίτιοι τῶν δεινῶν τούτων, οἱ κακοὶ ποιμένες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, παρουσιάζουν ὡς ἀγάπην τὸν δαίμονα τῆς φιλοδοξίας ποὺ ἐμφωλεύει εἰς τὰς καρδίας των...

SPIRITUAL COUNSELS, PART III

*By St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain translated by P. A. Chamberas
("A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel," New York: Paulist Press, 1989)*

ALL CLERGY WITHOUT EXCEPTION OUGHT NOT TO SMOKE

Here, dear reader, I want to remind you of a bad habit not only among lay people, but also among the clergy and even the bishops. I am referring to the use of that plant called nicotine, which was discovered in some region of America known as Anthea and introduced to Catherine the Queen of France by the Ambassador of Portugal as a sort of miracle of the new world. This is why it was given the exalted name of a "royal plant."

Of course, this is nothing other than what is commonly known as tobacco. I hope, therefore, that you will never imitate those who wrongfully use this tobacco and that you will never privately or before other persons smoke tobacco or place some of it into your nostrils as snuff. First of all, the use of tobacco is contrary to the virtuous way of life. Secondly, it is inappropriate to the high character of the priesthood. Thirdly, it is contrary to good health habits. The habit of smoking is contrary to the virtuous way of life.

The true boundary of virtuous living, according to the teaching of "Galation" [a small book published in Florence that was widely accepted in Italy as a moral guide], is trespassed when we do something that may naturally harm the senses or the imagination of noble persons and call forth an abhorrence. Who then cannot see that the use of tobacco crosses over this boundary of virtuous habits and introduces barbarous habits, rustic habits, which are abhorrent to those who see and who hear and imagine what is done by those who use tobacco?

Proper behavior requires that a person turn away when cleaning his nose into his handkerchief. The smoke which is inhaled through the nostrils causes the nose to excrete that abhorrent mucus that is then collected in the handkerchief in the presence of others. Proper manners further direct that when a person has to sneeze before others, he must try to block it, if at all possible, or at least to cover it with his handkerchief so that the nose does not bellow like a horn trumpet and cause alarm and abhorrence. Those who would place and stuff into their nose this tobacco powder only vex the organ of smell and bring upon themselves the need to sneeze. A good sneeze usually creates such a violent and terrible shaking of the head that it invokes from people standing by a call for divine intercession with such expressions as these: "Health to you," "Be saved," "God bless you."

The most terrible thing, however, is for a person to put into his mouth a pipe made from an animal horn or from some type of wood and from that pipe to inhale the smoke of burning tobacco through his larynx and then to exhale that abhorrent smoke through the mouth and the nostrils like some smoking chimney or like the horses of Diomedes, or the bulls of Jason that exhaled fiery smoke through their mouth and nostrils. Can one find a more abhorrent and abominable habit than this?

Smoking is also an inappropriate habit and unbecoming to the spiritual character of the priesthood. The hierarch is a type of God, an icon of Christ Jesus. Therefore all of his habits must be Christ-like, solemn, habits that bring not scandals, but benefits to the people. What solemnity is there in the use of that horrible tobacco plant? Or of what benefit is it? On the contrary, what a scandal it is to the pious Christians, when they see their hierarch or priest holding between his teeth that strange-looking object -- the pipe -- in which the tobacco is burning! Indeed, how scandalous it is to see a clergyman exhaling from his nose and mouth that foul-smelling smoke, and to have his house filled with that dark cloud of unpleasant smoke!

The hierarch and all the clergy are obliged by their very nature to exude a spiritual fragrance from all of their senses so that they may transmit this fragrance upon all those who approach them -- Christians as well as unbelievers, as St. Paul wrote: "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (II Corinthians 2:15). When the clergy draw into their body both through their mouth and their nose that most foul smelling smoke, that many cannot bear and faint, how can they then be, according to the very nature of their calling, an aroma and a fragrance of Christian life for those who are around them? This is the reason why in that most pious Kingdom of Russia there is an un-transgressed law that forbids all the orders of clergy and monks from using publicly tobacco through the nose or the mouth. Anyone so doing is considered by all to be a transgressor worthy of aversion.

Finally, the excessive use of tobacco is also harmful to the health of the body. Many who were chronic users of tobacco were found after death to have their lungs blackened and burned, as well as their brain. Inasmuch as the brain receives continuously the inhaled smoke, it consequently uses up not only the excess fluid but also the natural and essential one. Thus, it is difficult to find even one among those who use tobacco regularly who does not admit that its use is more of an evil than a necessity, and who does not condemn himself for using it. Even the moral philosophers, without exception, condemn the regular use of tobacco in public as something abhorrent and boorish.

GUARDING THE SENSE OF TOUCH

[THE SENSE OF TOUCH AND ITS ACTIVITIES]

We have reached in our discussion the fifth sense, which is the sense of touch. Even though the activity of this sense is generally considered to be concentrated in the hands, it actually encompasses the entire surface of the body so that every feeling and every part and every organ of the body both external and internal becomes an instrument of this sense of touch. Guard yourself then with great attention from such tender touches that arouse strong feelings, feelings that are mostly in the body and most vulnerable to sin. St. Gregory of Nyssa, in interpreting a passage in the Song of Songs, com-

mented that the sense of touch is the subservient sense, the one most likely created by nature for the blind. It is most difficult for one to be free from the power of this sense, once it has been activated. This is why one must be careful to guard it with all his power.

Even though the power of the other senses seems to be active, it nevertheless seems to be far from the enactment of sin. But the sense of touch is the closest to this enactment and certainly the very beginning and the initial action of the deed.

ONE SHOULD NOT EVEN TOUCH HIS OWN BODY IF IT IS NOT NECESSARY

Be careful not to bring your hands and your feet close to other bodies, especially of the young. Be especially careful not to stretch your hands to touch anything, unless it is necessary, nor upon members of your body, or even to scratch yourself, as St. Isaac the Syrian and other Holy Fathers have taught. Even from such minor activities, the sense of touch becomes accustomed, or to put it more correctly, the devil seeks to arouse us toward sin and at the same time to raise up into our mind improper images of desire that pollute the beauty of prudent thoughts. This is why St. John Climacus wrote: "It so happens that we are polluted bodily through the sense of touch." Even when you go out for the natural needs of your body respect your guardian angel, as St. Isaac has reminded us. Elsewhere this same father has written: "Virgin is not one who has merely preserved one's body from sexual intercourse, but one who is modest unto oneself even when alone."

The pagan Pythagoras taught that even if there were no other spectator of human evils in heaven or earth, man should have a sense of modesty and shame for himself. When someone does evil, he dishonors and degrades himself. The ancient Athenians had a temple dedicated to the goddess of modesty that would act in the place of God upon the true conscience. Now, if these pagans taught this and had such shame for themselves, when alone, how much more should we Christians be ashamed of ourselves when we are alone in a closed room, or in an isolated lonely place or even in the darkness of night? For it is only right that the modesty and reverence we feel when in a holy temple be also felt for ourselves, since we are a temple of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit. "For we are the temple of the living God" (II Corinthians 6:16).

Again St. Paul wrote: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (I Corinthians 6:19). St. John Chrysostom has taught us also that our bodies are even more honorable and more revered than a temple. We are a living and rational temple, while a building-temple is lifeless and irrational. Moreover, Christ died for us and not for temples. Therefore it follows that more shame and modesty should be kept for ourselves and for our bodies than for the temple. For this reason, then, anyone who would dare to degrade the holy temple of his body by committing some sinful deed will in truth be more sinful than those who would desecrate the most famous temple.

Again, our pagan forefathers sought to teach men to avoid shameful deeds by asking them to imagine the presence of some important and revered person. If the imaginary presence of mortal men can avert one from doing evil when found alone, how much more can the true and abiding presence of the true and omnipresent and immortal God, who not only sees the external deeds of men but also knows the inner thoughts and feelings of the heart?

Most foolish then are those who are by themselves alone in an isolated or dark place and who have no self-respect and shame, nor remember the presence of God. They may say: "I am now in this darkness, who can see me?" God condemns such persons as being foolish. "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? . . . Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jeremiah 23:24). "A man who breaks his marriage vows says to himself, "Who sees me? Darkness surrounds me, and the walls hide me, and no one sees me. Why should I fear? The most High will not take notice of my sins." His fear is confined to the eyes of men, and he does not realize that the eyes of the Lord and ten thousand times brighter than the sun" (Sirach 23:18 - 19).

THE USE OF LUXURIOUS CLOTHING AND WHAT ITS USE IMPLIES

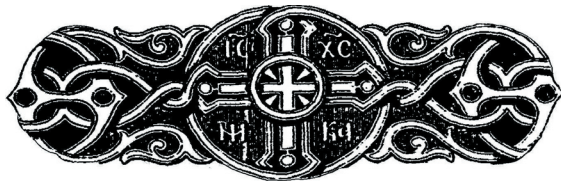
The use of soft and fine clothing is another matter that we can relate to the sense of touch. Now, if I may be permitted to be more blunt, I want to emphasize especially to hierarchs and priests that they not fall into the error of fantastic apparel which unfortunately many experience because of their bad habits from childhood and the bad examples of others.

St. John Chrysostom, first of all, reminded us that the very custom of covering the body with clothing is a perpetual reminder of our exile from Paradise and our punishment, which we received after our disobedience. We who were previously in Paradise, covered by the divine grace and having no need of clothing, find ourselves now in need of covering and clothing for our bodies. The forefathers were naked before the disobedience but not ashamed; after the disobedience they sewed fig leaves together and coverings for their bodies (Genesis 3:7).

Therefore, what is the reason for this reminder of our sin and punishment to be done with bright and expensive clothing? "The use of clothing has become a perpetual reminder for us of our exile from the good things of Paradise and a lesson of our punishment which the human race received as a consequence of the original sin of disobedience. There are those who are so affected in their vain imaginations that they say to us that they no longer know the clothing that is made by the wool of the sheep and that they now wear only clothes made of silk... Tell me now, for whom do you so clothe your body? Why are you glad over your particular set of clothing? Why don't you heed St. Paul who wrote: "If we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (I Timothy 6:8).

SOFT BEDS SHOULD BE AVOIDED FOR THEY ARE THE CAUSE OF MANY EVILS

In this sense of touch we must also include the soft and comfortable beds and everything that has to do with our comfort. Inasmuch as these may contribute to our spiritual harm, they must be avoided by all, but especially the young. Such comforts weaken the body; they submerge it into constant sleep; they warm it beyond measure, and therefore kindle the heat of passion. This is why the prophet Amos wrote: "Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches" (Amos 6:4). Once a young monk asked an elder (monk) how to guard himself against the carnal passions. The elder replied that he should avoid overeating, avoid slander and all those activities which excite carnal passions. The monk however was unable to find the cure for his passion even after observing carefully all the admonitions of the elder. He would return to the elder again and again for advice until he became a burden for the elder. Finally, the patient elder got up and followed the brother to his cell. Upon seeing the soft bed where he slept, the elder exclaimed: "Here, here, is the cause of your struggle with carnal desire, dear brother!..."



RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

By St. Basil the Great

Question: Is it acceptable for a person who is not free from every defilement of the flesh and of the spirit to safely eat the Body of the Lord and drink His Blood?

Response: God in the Law appointed the supreme penalty for those who dare to touch holy things when in a state of impurity, for the following words written figuratively for the men of old are meant for our correction. "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons, that they beware of those things that are consecrated of the children of Israel and defile not the name of the things sanctified to me which they offer. I am the Lord. Say to them and to their posterity: Every man of your race that approacheth to those holy things that the children of Israel have consecrated to the Lord, and in whom there is uncleanness, shall perish from my face. I am the Lord.'"

If a threat so grave was pronounced against those who merely approached things consecrated by men, what would be said against one who ventured to draw near to such a great and holy Sacrament? For, in the measure that He was superior who was greater than the temple, according to the Lord's words, so much more awesome and dread is the act of daring to touch the Body of Christ when the soul is defiled as compared with handling rams and bulls. The Apostle says: "Therefore, whosoever shall eat the bread and drink the chalice of the Lord

unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." Then, presenting the penalty in a manner at once more striking and more awe-inspiring through repetition, he says: "But let a man prove himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the chalice. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord." And if one who is in a state of uncleanness only (and from the law we learn in figure the proper nature of uncleanness) incurs so dire a condemnation, how much more severe a penalty will one bring upon himself who, being in a state of sin, is guilty of presumption toward the Body of the Lord! Let us be free, therefore, from all defilement (the difference between defilement [μολυσμός -- molismos] and uncleanness [ἀκαθαρσία -- akatharsia] being clear to persons of intelligence) and so approach the Holy Mysteries that we may avoid the condemnation of those who killed the Lord; for "whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord." And let us come to the possession of eternal life as He promised, Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, who is without deceit, if only, in eating and drinking, we will be mindful of Him who died for us and if we will accomplish the Apostle's words: "For the charity of Christ presses us; judging this, that if one died for all, then all were dead, And Christ died for all, that they who live may not now live to themselves but unto Him who died for them and rose again." And this is our pledge in Baptism.

Guideline for Preparation for Holy Communion

The Holy Orthodox Church sets certain guidelines for members to prepare themselves for the joyous partaking of the divine Body and precious Blood of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. These are: (1) Attendance at Church services the night before the Liturgy. (2) Observance of the fasting regulations of the Church during the week before Communion, and since the last confession made. (3) Fasting from all food and beverage (including water) from midnight on the day which Communion is being received. (4) Reading of the appointed Psalms, the Canon and the pre-Communion prayers; after Holy Communion, the Post-Communion prayers are to be read as well.

Before approaching the divine Mysteries of the holy Body and Blood of Christ, one must be at peace with all others. A recent confession should have been made before Communion. Members of the faith should make confessions as often as possible, and must confess immediately before Communion if they have neglected the Church's guidelines for fasting, Church attendance, or the like. Likewise, confession should always immediately proceed Communion if a person has committed any transgression against God or neighbor that would defile his presence at the partaking of the Holy Communion. Note: Certain sins require the clergy to forbid the partaking of the Eucharist until the confessing person ceases involvement in such sins. Among such sins are fornication and adultery. Furthermore, penance given by the spiritual father must be completed before the confessing person may partake of the Holy Mysteries.

NEGLIGENCE, THE UNSLEEPING DANGER FOR THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

From the "Plow" magazine, July 2003

Negligence is a terrible conspirator against our lives and has wronged us many times, and we must never cease to regard it as our most implacable enemy. The Elder's fervour in protecting us from it and his profound experience of the crafty and intricate ways in which it confuses and entangles its victims makes it imperative for us to say something about this enemy of ours.

In the language of the Fathers this is called listlessness (*ἀκηδία* -- *acedia*) as well as negligence and sloth, which all mean the same thing – spiritual death. We shall not go into what the Fathers have said about this pestilence, except that it is included among the eight evil thoughts as a comprehensive vice. We shall simply give helpful extracts from the Elder's experience, which are of particular use in our own generation.

When we asked about the chief cause of man's failure in his spiritual purpose, he would reply that it was negligence. On one occasion I asked him how it was that the Fathers give self-esteem as the reason, and he replied, "Yes, that conspires against us too; but not all of us, only those it deceives. And again it affects only a few, because self-esteem corrupts treasures that have been amassed, while negligence does not even let you collect them. Negligence is like a drought in which nothing grows. Self-esteem damages those who have fruit, who have made some progress; whereas negligence harms everyone, because it impedes those who want to make a start, it stops those who have advanced, it does not allow the ignorant to learn, it prevents those who have gone astray from returning, it does not permit the fallen to get up – in general, negligence spells destruction for all those it holds captive."

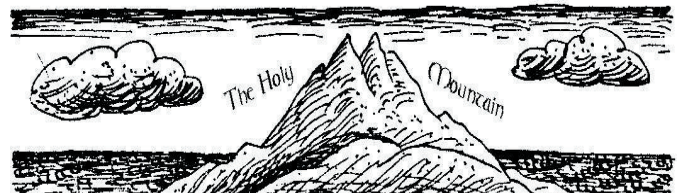
"Using the pretext of physical needs and weariness from the struggle, this deceiver makes itself credible; and like a conductive material, listlessness transmits us and hands us over to self-love, the more general enemy. Only a courageous soul grounded in faith and hope in God can overthrow this conspiracy. Otherwise, it is difficult for someone inexperienced to escape from these nets. This is a great ordeal for those who live alone and for everyone who avoids a regulated life, whereas it is unable to harm those who are under obedience and have tasks to perform."

We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

"Listlessness begins with despondency and faintheartedness and the prolonged withdrawal of grace. It starts off with the application of economy towards some supposed infirmity or weakness, and ends in total disbelief and shamelessness and ingratitude. For those who live alone as hesychasts, it starts from neglect of the rule and order of their lives, and grows if not attended to in good time. But in those who live with others, it begins with idle talk and backbiting."

As a cure for negligence, the Elder recommended eschatological meditation in ascending and descending form: reward and punishment, the Kingdom of heaven and hell; and also calling to mind the honorable memory of those who have taken part in the struggle. The means of grace against negligence are prayer, tears and faith. Again, the Elder would recount many examples from the lives of earlier spiritual warriors who happened to be led astray by negligence and lost the record of spiritual progress which they had gained through great fervour and ascetic labour. The Elder would say, "In my opinion, the other passions into which spiritual warriors are led astray are complications of indifference, because this erodes our attention and so opens the way to related and connected passions, and these take men captive."

To wake us up in the morning he would always shout to us, "Don't be negligent, boys, lest you fall into the hands of thieves." He even regarded a pointless occupation as negligence, because he believed that this too could lead to the same bondage. As David says, "Let not thy foot be moved, and He who keeps thee will not slumber (Ps. 121:3, LXX);" and again, "If Thy law had not been my meditation, I should have perished in my humiliation (Ps. 119:92, LXX)."



ORTHODOXY AND THE ROMAN PAPACY

To believe that the Holy Orthodox Church and the Roman Papacy are sister churches, having Christ as their head and the Holy Spirit as their guide is to lose your Orthodoxy and with that your immortal souls. To say that the Church has two lungs, one Orthodoxy and the other the Papacy is one of the worst of heresies and blasphemies against our own Head Jesus Christ and our Guide the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ does not have two heads nor two bodies. It is deceptive propaganda to fool the multitude.

St. Mark of Ephesus is shouting down from heaven about those Orthodox Bishops seeking to unite us with the Papacy: "Flee from them my brothers; flee from them as from a serpent." St. Cosmas Aitolos shouts down from God's Kingdom above: "Curse the Pope. He is the cause of all evils." St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite sends down this brilliant lightning bolt: "The Latins are unbaptized and unsaved."

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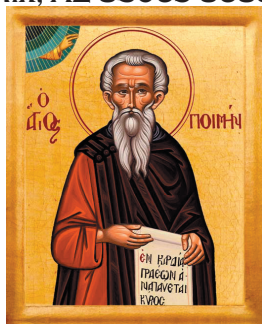
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VIRTUE OF THE PERFECT MAN (THE SPIRITUALLY AMBIDEXTROUS)

By St. John Cassian (+430)

There are persons, who are referred to in Holy Scripture as ambidextrous. Ehud, "who used either hand as if it were his right hand," is described as such in the Book of the Judges (3:15). We shall also be able to possess this quality in a spiritual way if by a good and correct use we put the things which are considered fortunate and right-handed and the things which are called unfortunate and left-handed on the right side, so that whatever befalls may become for us, in the words of the Apostle, "the arms of righteousness." For we see that our inner man consists in two parts or, as I might say, two hands. No holy person can be without what we call the left hand, but perfect virtue is discerned in the fact that by proper use he turns both into a right hand.

Let us make what we are saying more understandable: The holy person has a right hand -- namely, his spiritual achievements. He has this, when fervent in spirit, he masters all his desires and lusts; when safe from every diabolical attack, he rejects and cuts off the vices of the flesh without difficulty; when, raised from the earth, he contemplates all present and earthly realities as mere smoke and disdains them as soon to disappear; when, with ecstatic mind, he not only ardently desires future realities but even sees them with clarity; when he is effectively fed by spiritual theoria; when he sees unlocked to himself the heavenly sacraments in all their brightness; when he sends prayers purely and swiftly to God; and when, inflamed with spiritual ardor, he passes over to invisible and eternal realities with such utter

eagerness of soul that he cannot bring himself to believe that he is in the flesh.

He also has a left hand namely for when he is involved in the turmoil of trials; when the desires of the flesh are seething emotions and impulses; when the fire of aggravations enkindles or vainglory; when he is depressed by a death-dealing sadness; when every virtuous practice takes on a certain unbearable and darkly loathsome quality.

Whoever, then, is on what we have referred to as the right side, that person is not elated at the approach of vainglory and, courageously struggling with the things on the left side, is not disheartened by any despair. Rather he seizes the arms of patience from adversity for the sake of exercising his virtue, uses both hands as right hands, and having triumphed in both respects, snatches the palm of victory from the left as much as from the right.

Take Joseph the Patriarch as an example of being spiritually ambidextrous. In prosperity he was more thankful than his father Jacob, more devout than his brothers, and more acceptable to God. In adversity he was chaste, faithful to the Lord, more gentle to those who were imprisoned, heedless of insults, kind to his enemies, and not only respectful of his jealous and very nearly murderous brothers but even exceedingly kind in their regard. Joseph (and others like Job the Long-Suffering) used either hand as if it were their right hand.

We shall be ambidextrous ourselves, therefore, when neither an abundance nor a lack of present things change us; when the former does not push us into harmfully lax pleasures and the latter does not draw us into despair and complaining, but when in either case we are thankful to God and draw similar fruit from both successes and failures.

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So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ON THE DORMITION OF OUR PURE LADY THEOTOKOS & EVER-VIRGIN MARY

By St. Gregory Palamas (edited for length)

Both love and duty today fashion my homily for your charity. If there be any among those things that bind by obligation and love and can be narrated with praise for the Church, it is the great deed of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God.

If “death of the righteous man is honorable” (cf. Ps. 115:6) and the “memory of the just man is celebrated with songs of praise” (Prov. 10:7), how much more ought we to honor with great praises the memory of the holiest of the saints, she by whom all holiness is afforded to the saints! Even so we celebrate today her holy Dormition or translation to another life, whereby, while being “a little lower than angels” (Ps. 8:6), she has ascended incomparably higher than the angels and the archangels and all the super-celestial hosts that are found beyond them.

For her sake the God-possessed prophets pronounce prophecies, miracles are wrought to foreshow that future Marvel of the whole world, the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. The flow of generations and circumstances journeys to the destination of that new mystery wrought in her; the statutes of the Spirit provide beforehand types of the future truth. The end, or rather the beginning and root, of those divine wonders and deeds is the annunciation to the supremely virtuous Joachim and Anna of what was to be accomplished: namely, that they who were barren from youth would beget in deep old age her that would bring forth without seed Him that was timelessly begotten of God the Father before the ages.

A vow was given by those who marvelously begot her to return her to the Giver; so accordingly the Mother of God

strangely changed her dwelling from the house of her father to the house of God while still an infant. She passed not a few years in the Holy of Holies itself, wherein under the care of an angel, she enjoyed ineffable nourishment such as even Adam did not succeed in tasting. But after that unutterable nourishment, a most mystical economy of courtship came to pass, a strange greeting surpassing speech which the Archangel addressed to her, and disclosures and salutations from God which overturn the condemnation of Eve and Adam and remedy the curse laid on them, transforming it into a blessing. The King of all “hath desired a mystic beauty” of the Ever-Virgin, as David foretold (Ps. 44:11) and, “He bowed the heavens and came down” (Ps. 17:9) and overshadowed her, or rather, the enhypostatic Power of the Most High dwelt in her.

Thus the Word of God took up His dwelling in the Theotokos in an inexpressible manner and proceeded from her, bearing flesh. He appeared upon the earth and lived among men, deifying our nature and granting us, after the words of the divine Apostle, “things which angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:12). This is the encomium which transcends nature and the surpassingly glorious glory of the Ever-Virgin, glory for which all mind and word suffice not, though they be angelic. But who can relate those things which came to pass after His ineffable birth? For, as she cooperated and suffered with that exalting condescension (kenosis) of the Word of God, she was also rightly glorified and exalted together with Him, ever adding thereto the supernatural increase of mighty deeds.

And after the ascent into the heavens of Him that was incarnate of her, she rivaled those great works, surpassing mind and speech, which through Him were her own, with a most valiant and diverse asceticism, and with her prayers and care

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for the entire world, her precepts and encouragements which she gave to God's heralds sent throughout the whole world. She was herself both a support and a comfort while she was both heard and seen, and while she labored with the rest in every way for the preaching of the Gospel. In such wise she led a most strenuous manner of life proclaimed in mind and speech.

The death of the Theotokos was thus also life-bearing, translating her into a celestial and immortal life and its commemoration is a joyful event and festivity for the entire world. It not merely renews the memory of the wondrous deeds of the Mother of God, but also adds thereto the strange gathering at her all-sacred burial of all the sacred apostles conveyed from every nation, the God-revealing hymns of these God-possessed ones, and the solicitous presence of the angels, and their choir, and liturgy round about her, going on before, following after, assisting, opposing, defending, being defended.

They labored and chanted together to their uttermost with those who venerated that life-originating and God-receiving body, the saving balsam for our race and the boast of all creation; but they strove against and opposed with a secret hand the Jews who rose up against and attacked that body with hand and will set upon theomachy. All the while the Son of the Ever-Virgin, was present, into Whose hands she rendered her divinely-minded spirit, through which and with which its companion, her body, was translated into the domain of celestial and endless life. In truth, many have been allotted divine favor and glory and power, as David says, "But to me exceedingly honorable are Thy friends, O Lord, their principalities are made exceeding strong. I will count them and they shall be multiplied more than the sand" (Ps. 138:17). And according to Solomon, "many daughters have attained wealth, many have wrought valiantly; but she doth exceed, she hath surpassed all, both men and women" (Prov. 31:29).

For while she alone stood between God and the whole human race, God became the Son of Man and made men sons of God; she made earth heavenly, she deified the human race, and she alone of all women was shown forth to be a mother by nature and the Mother of God, transcending every law of nature, and by her ineffable childbirth, the Queen of all creation, both terrestrial and celestial. Thus she exalted those under her through herself, and, showing while on earth an obedience to things heavenly rather than things earthly, she partook of more excellent desserts and of superior power, and from the ordination which she received from heaven by the Divine Spirit, she became the most sublime of the sublime and the supremely blest Queen of a blessed race.

But now the Mother of God has her dwelling in Heaven. She "stands at the right of the King of all clothed in a vesture wrought with gold and arrayed with divers colors" (Ps. 44:9), as the psalmic prophecy says concerning her. By "vesture wrought with gold" understand her divinely radiant body arrayed with divers colors of every virtue. She alone in her body, glorified by God, now enjoys the celestial realm together with her Son. For earth and grave and death did not hold forever her life-originating and God-receiving body -- the dwelling more favored than Heaven and the Heaven of heavens.

If, therefore, her soul, which was an abode of God's grace, ascended into Heaven, how could it be that the body which not only received in itself the pre-eternal and only-begotten Son of God, the ever-flowing Wellspring of grace, but also manifested His Body by way of birth, should not have also been taken up into Heaven? Or, if while yet three years of age and not yet possessing that super-celestial indwelling, she seemed not to bear our flesh as she abode in the Holy of Holies, and after she became supremely perfect even as regards her body by such great marvels, how indeed could that body

suffer corruption and turn to earth? How could such a thing be conceivable for anyone who thinks reasonably?

Hence, the body which gave birth is glorified together with what was born of it with God-befitting glory, and the “ark of holiness” (Ps. 131:8) is resurrected, after the prophetic ode, together with Christ Who formerly arose from the dead on the third day. The strips of linen and the burial clothes afford the apostles a demonstration of the Theotokos’ resurrection from the dead, since they remained alone in the tomb and at the apostles’ scrutiny they were found there, even as it had been with the Master. There was no necessity for her body to delay yet a little while in the earth, as was the case with her Son and God, and so it was taken up straightway from the tomb to a super-celestial realm, from whence she flashes forth most brilliant and divine illuminations and graces, irradiating earth’s region; thus she is worshipped and marvelled at and hymned by all the faithful.

It was meet that she who contained Him that fills all things and who surpasses all should outstrip all and become by her virtue superior to them in the eminence of her dignity. Those things which sufficed the most excellent among men that have lived throughout the ages in order to reach such excellency, and that which all those graced of God have separately, both angels and men, she combines, and these she alone brings to fulfillment and surpasses. And this she now has beyond all: That she has become immortal after death and alone dwells together with her Son and God in her body. For this reason she pours forth from thence abundant grace upon those who honor her -- for she is a receptacle of great graces -- and she grants us even our ability to look towards her.

Because of her goodness she lavishes sublime gifts upon us and never ceases to provide a profitable and abundant tribute in our behalf. If a man looks towards this concurrence and dispensing of every good, he will say that the Virgin is for virtue and those who live virtuously, what the sun is for perceptible light and those who live in it. But if he raises the eye of his mind to the Sun which rose for men from this Virgin in a wondrous manner, the Sun which by nature possesses all those qualities which were added to her nature by grace, he shall straightaway call the Virgin a heaven. The excellent inheritance of every good which she has been allotted so much exceeds in holiness the portion of those who are divinely graced both under and above heaven as the heaven is greater than the sun and the sun is more radiant than heaven.

Who can describe in words thy divinely resplendent beauty, O Virgin Mother of God? Thoughts and words are inadequate to define thine attributes, since they surpass mind and speech. Yet it is meet to chant hymns of praise to thee, for thou art a vessel containing every grace, the fulness of all things good and beautiful, the tablet and living icon of every good and all uprightness, since thou alone hast been deemed worthy to receive the fulness of every gift of the Spirit. Thou alone didst bear in thy womb Him in Whom are found the treasures of all these gifts and didst become a wondrous tabernacle for Him;

hence thou didst depart by way of death to immortality and art translated from earth to Heaven, as is proper, so that thou mightest dwell with Him eternally in a super-celestial abode. From thence thou ever carest diligently for thine inheritance and by thine unsleeping intercessions with Him, thou showest mercy to all.

To the degree that she is closer to God than all those who have drawn nigh unto Him, by so much has the Theotokos been deemed worthy of greater audience. I do not speak of men alone, but also of the angelic hierarchies themselves. Isaiah writes with regard to the supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts: “And the seraphim stood round about Him” (Isaiah 6:2); but David says concerning her, “at Thy right hand stood the queen” (Ps. 44:8). Do you see the difference in position? From this comprehend also the difference in the dignity of their station. The seraphim are round about God, but the only Queen of all is near beside Him.

She is both wondered at and praised by God Himself, proclaiming her, as it were, by the mighty deeds enacted with respect to Him, and saying, as it is recorded in the Song of Songs, “How fair is my companion” (Song of Songs 6:4), she is more radiant than light, more arrayed with flowers than the divine gardens, more adorned than the whole world, visible and invisible. She is not merely a companion but she also stands at God’s right hand, for where Christ sat in the heavens, that is, at the “right hand of majesty” (Heb. 1:3), there too she also takes her stand, having ascended now from earth into the heavens. Not merely does she love and is loved in return more than every other, according to the very laws of nature, but she is truly His Throne, and wherever the King sits, there His Throne is set also. And Isaiah beheld this throne amidst the choir of cherubim and called it “high” and “exalted” (Isaiah 6:1), wishing to make explicit how the station of the Mother of God far exceeds that of the celestial hosts.

For this reason the Prophet introduces the angels themselves as glorifying the God come from her, saying, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His Place” (Ezek. 3:12). Jacob the patriarch, beholding this throne by way of types (enigmata), said, “How dreadful is this Place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven” (Gen. 28:17). But David, joining himself to the multitude of the saved, who are like the strings of a musical instrument or like differing voices from different generations made harmonious in one faith through the Ever-Virgin, sounds a most melodic strain in praise of her, saying: “I shall commemorate thy name in every generation and generation. Therefore shall peoples give praise unto thee for ever, and unto the ages of ages.”

Do you see how the entire creation praises the Virgin Mother, and not only in times past, but “forever, and unto the ages of ages”? Thus it is evident that throughout the whole course of the ages, she shall never cease from benefacting all creation, and I mean not only created nature seen round about us, but also the very supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts, whose nature is immaterial and transcendent. Isaiah shows us clearly that it

is only through her that they together with us both partake of and touch God, that Nature which defies touch, for he did not see the seraphim take the coal from the altar without mediation, but with tongs, by means of which the coal touched the prophetic lips and purified them (Isaiah 6:6-7).

Moses beheld the tongs of that great vision of Isaiah when he saw the bush aflame with fire, yet unconsumed. And who does not know that the Virgin Mother is that very bush and those very tongs, she who herself (though an archangel assisted) conceived the Divine Fire without being consumed, Him that taketh away the sins of the world, Who through her touched mankind and by that ineffable touch and union cleansed us entirely. Therefore, she only is the frontier between created and uncreated nature, and there is no man that shall come to God except he be truly illumined through her, that Lamp truly radiant with divinity, even as the Prophet says, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be shaken" (Ps. 45:5).

If recompense is bestowed according to the measure of love for God, and if the man who loves the Son is loved of Him and of His Father and becomes the dwelling place of Both, and They mystically abide and walk in him, as it is recorded in the Master's Gospel, who, then, will love Him more than His Mother? For, He was her only-begotten Son, and moreover she alone among women gave birth knowing no spouse, so that the love of Him that had partaken of her flesh might be shared with her twofold. And who will the only-begotten Son love more than His Mother, He that came forth from Her ineffably without a father in this last age even as He came forth from the Father without a mother before the ages? How indeed could He that descended to fulfill the Law not multiply that honor due to His Mother over and above the ordinances of the Law?

Hence, as it was through the Theotokos alone that the Lord came to us, appeared upon earth and lived among men, being invisible to all before this time, so likewise in the endless age to come, without her mediation, every emanation of illuminating divine light, every revelation of the mysteries of the Godhead, every form of spiritual gift, will exceed the capacity of every created being. She alone has received the all-pervading fullness of Him that filleth all things, and through her all may now contain it, for she dispenses it according to the power of each, in proportion and to the degree of the purity of each.

Hence she is the treasury and overseer of the riches of the Godhead. For it is an everlasting ordinance in the heavens that the inferior partake of what lies beyond being, by the mediation of the superior, and the Virgin Mother is incomparably superior to all. It is through her that as many as partake of God do partake, and as many as know God understand her to be the enclosure of the Uncontainable One, and as many as hymn God praise her together with Him. She is the cause of what came before her, the champion of what came after her and the agent of things eternal. She is the substance of the prophets, the principle of the apostles, the firm foundation of the martyrs and the premise of the teachers of the Church.

She is the glory of those upon earth, the joy of celestial beings, the adornment of all creation. She is the beginning and the source and root of unutterable good things; she is the summit and consummation of everything holy.

O divine, and now heavenly, Virgin, how can I express all things which pertain to thee? How can I glorify the treasury of all glory? Merely thy memory sanctifies whoever keeps it, and a mere movement towards thee makes the mind more translucent, and thou dost exalt it straightway to the Divine. The eye of the intellect is through thee made limpid, and through thee the spirit of a man is illumined by the sojourning of the Spirit of God, since thou hast become the steward of the treasury of divine gifts and their vault, and this, not in order to keep them for thyself, but so that thou mightest make created nature replete with grace.

Indeed, the steward of those inexhaustible treasures watches over them so that the riches may be dispensed; and what could confine that wealth which wanes not? Richly, therefore, bestow thy mercy and thy graces upon all thy people, this thine inheritance, O Lady! Dispel the perils which menace us. See how greatly we are expended by our own and by aliens, by those without and by those within. Uplift all by thy might: mollify our fellow citizens one with another and scatter those who assault us from without -- like savage beasts. Measure out thy succor and healing in proportion to our passions, apportioning abundant grace to our souls and bodies, sufficient for every necessity.

And although we may prove incapable of containing thy bounties, augment our capacity and in this manner bestow them upon us, so that being both saved and fortified by thy grace, we may glorify the pre-eternal Word Who was incarnate of thee for our sakes, together with His unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the endless ages. Amen.



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PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

By St. John of Kronstadt



St. John of Kronstadt
(+1908)

I, a sinful soul, confess to our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, all of my evil acts which I have done, said or thought from baptism even unto this present day.

I have not kept the vows of my baptism, but have made myself unwanted before the face of God.

I have sinned before the Lord by lack of faith and by doubts concerning the Orthodox Faith and the Holy Church; by ungratefulness for all of God's great and unceasing

gifts; His long-suffering and His providence for me, a sinner; by lack of love for the Lord, as well as fear, through not fulfilling the Holy Commandments of God and the canons and rules of the Church.

I have not preserved a love for God and for my neighbor; I have not made enough efforts, because of laziness and lack of care, to learn the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Holy Fathers.

I have sinned: by not praying in the morning and in the evening and in the course of the day; by not attending the services or by coming to Church only half-heartedly, lazily and carelessly; by conversing during the services, by not paying attention, letting my mind wander and by departure from the Church before the dismissal and blessing.

I have sinned by judging members of the clergy.

I have sinned by not respecting the Feasts, breaking the Fasts, and by immoderation in food and drink.

I have sinned by self-importance, disobedience, willfulness, self-righteousness, and the seeking of approval and praise.

I have sinned by unbelief, lack of faith, doubts, despair, despondency, abusive thoughts, blasphemy and swearing.

I have sinned by pride, a high opinion of myself, narcissism, vanity, conceit, envy, love of praise, love of honors, and by putting on airs.

I have sinned: by judging, malicious gossip, anger, remembering of offenses done to me, hatred and returning evil for evil; by slander, reproaches, lies, slyness, deception and hypocrisy; by prejudices, arguments, stubbornness, and an unwillingness to give way to my neighbor; by gloating, spitefulness, taunting, insults and mocking; by gossip, by speaking too much and by empty speech.

I have sinned by unnecessary and excessive laughter, by reviling and dwelling upon my previous sins, by arrogant behavior,

insolence and lack of respect.

I have sinned by not keeping my physical and spiritual passions in check, by my enjoyment of impure thoughts, licentiousness and unchastity in thoughts, words and deeds.

I have sinned by lack of endurance towards my illnesses and sorrows, a devotion to the comforts of life and by being too attached to my parents, children, relatives and friends.

I have sinned by hardening my heart, having a weak will and by not forcing myself to do good.

I have sinned by miserliness, a love of money, the acquisition of unnecessary things and immoderate attachment to things.

I have sinned by self-justification, a disregard for the admonitions of my conscience and failing to confess my sins through negligence or false pride.

I have sinned many times by my Confession: belittling, justifying and keeping silent about sins.

I have sinned against the Most-holy and Life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord by coming to Holy Communion without humility or the fear of God.

I have sinned in deed, word and thought, knowingly and unknowingly, willingly and unwillingly, thoughtfully and thoughtlessly, and it is impossible to enumerate all of my sins because of their multitude. But I truly repent of these and all others not mentioned by me because of my forgetfulness and I ask that they be forgiven through the abundance of the Mercy of God.



... Heretics will seize power over the Church and will place their servants everywhere; the pious will be regarded with contempt. He (the Lord) said, by their fruits ye shall know them, and so, by their fruits, as well as by the actions of the heretics, strive to distinguish them from the true pastors.

... Therefore, my son, when you see the violation of patristic tradition and the divine order in the Church, the order established by God, know that the heretics have already appeared, although for the time being they may conceal their impiety, or they will distort the Divine Faith imperceptibly, in order to succeed better in seducing and enticing the inexperienced into the net.

(New-Martyr Anatoly the Younger of Optina, +1922)

OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL SPEAKS

From "Thoughts of a Christian Dedicated to the Guardian Angel"

I sense the greatest joy, says the Angel to my soul, when I see that you unswervingly follow the path leading to heaven. Life is a brief arena; the earth is a dark cradle where a person – from the day of his birth until his death – suffers and lives on bread moistened with tears. How is that? You forget about heaven and cling to earthly vanities? You are captivated by the present moment? You give no thought to eternity?

Let us suppose that Providence was pleased to grant you a hundred years of life. What does this number mean? In comparison with eternity it is a drop in a boundless ocean. And truly, your days pass rapidly and their end is soon to come. The last day is already not far off. But – what is saddest of all – you know neither the day nor the hour when the end of your earthly life will arrive. Death will come to you when you think not and will cut the thread of your life just as an arrow shoots down a bird playing in the air. Nothing is as sure as death; nothing is so concealed from man as the hour of its appearance.

How many more years do you hope to live? Thirty? Forty? You, of course, cannot say this with any certainty. But of the years remaining, one of them will be the year of your death. Death watches over you along the course of your life, at that place where you do not expect it, like a murderer lying in wait in a desolate forest to fall upon a passerby; you will go by – and it will strike you in the heart. Why do you slumber and do not take any precautionary measures? Why do you not imitate the soldier who, although he does not see the enemy, does not slumber but stands guard at the gate to the city? He does not slumber so as not to be overtaken by a sudden attack on account of negligence. Don't you see with what frightful consequences this unknown threatens you for all your eternity?

We have often seen that a man's life ends with a light movement of the air, a breath of cold wind, the setting of a sun's ray, a single drop of water. Our days, like a shadow, disappear, and glory fades like a flower of the field. And in this fleeting life you want to secure your hope and your happiness! You hope to erect a strong building on a foundation as unstable as a river! What could so captivate and deceive you? The past grieves you with its memories; the present is heavy with misfortunes. Do you not see that those hopes which the future used to seduce you have disappeared like a shadow, and just as you drew near to them they dissipated like nocturnal visions upon your awakening? Lies, deceit, vanity, grief, physical ills – this is the life you love to such an extent that you forget about eternity!

Unhappy is he who sacrifices the future to the present. Pitiable is that person who, instead of building himself a house in his homeland, builds it in a strange land and does not prepare anything for the homeland in which he is to dwell! How I suffer to see you earnestly busying yourself in seeking sensual and corruptible things, disdaining the good things of heaven; not only do you subject yourself to the danger of losing these good things, but you willingly strive towards eternal torment!

So it is that a foolish man sells the kingdom of heaven, and he sells it for a momentary pleasure which the devil gives him, scoffing at his foolishness.

Sanctify my mind, O good one, and enlighten me, I pray thee, O holy Angel, and teach me to think always positively and profitably.

Calm my heart from present disturbance, and strengthen me to be vigilant in good, O my Guardian, and guide me miraculously in quietness of life.

Have compassion on me, O holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, and leave me not, impure as I am, but illumine me with Divine Light, and make me worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom.

(From the Canon to the Guardian Angel)

When the Almighty sent me to guard over you, He named me Guardian of the Royal infant, who is destined at some future time to rule together with his Father. I saw on this infant gold apparel adorned with precious stones, and on his head a brilliant crown. After all, are you not an heir of the heavenly Father and a co-heir with Jesus Christ? But alas! What misfortune! Soon I saw that my young royal son threw his clothing and his crown into the dirt, broke his scepter, offended his Father the King, and gave himself over to His enemy.

Son of the King Most High! Turn again your eyes to heaven, gaze upon your Heavenly Father, bend your knee before the throne of the Mother of God, and look upon the glory of the Angels and that glory which is prepared for you. Cease, cease at last your foolish concerns over earthly vanities, and strive to be worthy of your high calling. You are called to reign – begin to reign over yourself, begin to govern your mind and your heart, show your firm authority over the devil, over the world, over your passions. Are your powers growing weak in the battle? Remember that in heaven you will rest for all eternity. You ask: when will I take pleasure in this rest? Perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow; one thing alone is certain – it will be soon. Yet a little while and I shall accompany you to heaven.

Thus does a Guardian Angel converse with the soul of a man, and blessed is he who listens and calls out to him in prayer:

Guardian Angel! Rouse my heart with that divine fervor which inflamed the saints who endured all manner of torment and suffering and even death itself with joy. For this, O my holy Angel, remind me constantly of eternity. Remembrance of eternity is true wisdom, higher than any human wisdom. It awakens holy desires, enlightens the mind and strengthens spiritual vigor. But the devil hinders it from penetrating my soul, and when it has penetrated, the enemy tries to darken it. O Angel of God! Grant that the thought of eternity should always occupy my mind; then the pleasures and treasures of this world will not seduce me. I prefer sorrows and downfalls which enlighten and strengthen the soul with grace-filled power. I shall choose a humble life, far removed from the vanities of the world, where, in silence, eternity will be the subject of my thoughts. Here I shall use every moment of my brief existence to acquire those riches in which, together with you, I shall delight for all eternity...

Μία Κηδεία και Μία Άπατη

Τοῦ Πανοσ. Ἀρχιμανδρίτου π. Δοσίθεου Καννέλου,
Καθηγουμένου τῆς Ἱ. Μονῆς Παναγίας Τατάρνης, Εὐρυτανίας

Ὅλα ἦσαν πομπώδη. Ὅλα προμελετημένα. Ὅλα καλοσχεδιασμένα. Ἦτο μιά καλή, μιά χρυσή εὐκαιρία. Τὸ κράτος τοῦ μισοῦ τετραγωνικοῦ χιλιομέτρου ἀνεδείχθη, ὅπως τὸ ὄνειρεύονταν, σὲ ὑπερκράτος, σὲ ὑπερδύναμη. Διακόσιοι ἀρχηγοὶ κρατῶν. Ἀρχηγοὶ θρησκειῶν καὶ δογμάτων. Πατριάρχαι καὶ Ἀρχιεπίσκοποι. Ἀναρίθμητες σκουφίες καρδινάλιων. Τέσσερα ἑκατομμύρια πιστῶν. Ἄλλοι κλαίνε, ἄλλοι χειροκροτοῦν. Ἀπέθανε ὁ vicarius Christi, ὁ ἀντιπρόσωπος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Ὁ διάδοχος τοῦ Πέτρου, ὁ ἀλάθητος. Καὶ ἐνῶ ὅλα προχωροῦσαν, καλῶς ἦλθε καὶ τὸ καλῶς προγραμματισμένο - ἀναπάντεχο. Ἀναπάντεχο μόνο γιὰ τοὺς ἀφελεῖς. Γιατί ὅσοι γνωρίζουν τοὺς παπικούς τὸ περίμεναν. Μόνο πού δὲν γνώριζαν σὲ ποῖο βαθμὸ καὶ πῶς.

Στὸ τέλος τῆς κηδείας νὰ καὶ οἱ οὐνίτες. Ντυμένοι μὲ λαμπρὰ ἄμφια, ὅμοια μὲ τὰ τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων. Ἀκούσθηκαν καὶ ὕμνοι. Μετὰ πνευμάτων δικαίων τετελειωμένων, Χριστὸς ἀνέστη. Ἑλληνιστὶ καὶ στοὺς γνωστούς μας ἤχους. Καὶ οἱ ἡμέτεροι ἐχάρησαν. Ἀκούσθηκαν ὕμνοι στὴν ἑλληνικὴ γλώσσα. Ἐθνικὴ ἱκανοποίησις ἀπὸ τοὺς γραϊκύλους. Ἄγνοοῦν οἱ τάλαινες τί εἶπε ὁ λόρδος Βύρων ἀπευθυνόμενος πρὸς τὴν Ἑλλάδα: «Φοβοῦ τὴν τουρκικὴ βία καὶ τὸν λατινικὸ δόλο».

Καὶ μίᾳ περιτράνῃ ἀπόδειξις τοῦ δόλου ἢ οὐνία, ὁ δούρειος ἵππος πρὸς ἄλωσιν τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας. Μιά ἀπάτη ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνες πού μόνον οἱ παπικοὶ γνωρίζουν πολὺ καλὰ νὰ ἐξυφαίνου.

Σημειωθῆτω δὲ ὅτι ὁ ἀποθανὼν πάπας, ὢν Πολωνός, ἦτο καὶ μισορθόδοξος ζακουστός. Ὅλοι οἱ Πολωνοὶ μισοῦν τοὺς Ὀρθοδόξους γιατί τοὺς συνδέουν μὲ τοὺς Ρώσους, πού εἶναι οἱ προαιώνιοι ἐχθροὶ τους. Ἦτο δὲ καὶ ὑποστηρικτῆς τῆς οὐνίας φανερός. Μέχρι πού ἤθελε νὰ διορίσει οὐνίτη πατριάρχη στὴν Οὐκρανία!

Ἡ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἀγία Ἀνατολή ἔχει ὑποστῆι τὰ πάνδεινα ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν δαινομικὴ ἐφεύρεση τῆς παποσύνης. Εἶπαν: «Μείνετε στὶς παραδόσεις σας, λειτουργήστε ὅπως λειτουργοῦσατε. Φορᾶτε ἄμφια καὶ ράσα, ὅπως τὰ φοροῦσατε. Ἄς ἔχετε καὶ γένια. Ἄς νυμφεύονται καὶ οἱ παπᾶδες σας. Ὅλα δεκτά. Μόνον δογματικῶς θὰ ἐνωθεῖτε μὲ μᾶς. Θὰ πιστεύετε ὅτι καὶ ἐμεῖς. Θὰ ἔχετε γιὰ κεφαλὴ σας τὸν Πάπα. Μόνον αὐτὰ τὰ ὀλίγα».

Ἡ πρόσκληση παρέσυρε πολλοὺς. Ἀφοῦ δὲν θὰ ἀλλάξουμε τίποτε ἀπὸ τὰ ἔθιμά μας γιατί νὰ μὴ ἐνωθοῦμε μὲ τὸν πανίσχυρο πάπα; Καὶ ἔτσι ὁμάδες ὀλόκληρες ὀρθοδόξων ἀπὸ Οὐκρανία, Πολωνία, Ρουμανία, Τσεχία, Σλοβακία, Συρία, Παλαιστίνη, Σικελία, κάτω Ἰταλία, ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη προσκύνησαν τὴν παντούφλα

τοῦ πάπα. Τὰ ἴδια ἔπαθαν καὶ οἱ Κόπτες τῆς Αἰγύπτου, οἱ Χαμπέσοι τῆς Αἰθιοπίας, οἱ Ἰακωβίται τῆς Συρίας, οἱ Μαρωνῖτες τοῦ Λιβάνου, οἱ Ἀσσύριοι τῆς Μεσοποταμίας, οἱ Χριστιανοὶ τοῦ Μαλαμπάρ στὶς Ἰνδίες. Καὶ ὅλοι αὐτοί, οἱ τέως Ὀρθόδοξοι ἔγιναν ὀρθοδοξομάχοι χειρότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς χριστιανομάχους γενίτσαρους.

Ὁ μητροπολίτης Πηλουσίου Εἰρηναῖος βρῆκε τραγικὸ θάνατο μαζί μὲ τὸν Πατριάρχη Ἀλεξανδρείας Πέτρο. Εἶμεθα συμφοιτηταί. Τὸν συνήντησα κάποτε στὴν Ἀθήνα καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: «Ὅταν ἤμουν μητροπολίτης Καρθαγένης, συνήντησα τὸν καρδινάλιο τῆς περιοχῆς. Καὶ μοῦ εἶπε, Πολωνός καὶ αὐτός, τὸ ἐξῆς πρωτάκουστο· ἐμεῖς προτιμοῦμε οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες ἰθαγενεῖς νὰ γίνονται μουσουλμᾶνοι παρὰ Ὀρθόδοξοι!».

Καὶ κατὰ τὴν κακὴ ἐκείνη παράσταση τῶν οὐνιτῶν κληρικῶν θὰ πρέπει ὁ Πατριάρχης μας, ὁ Ἀθηνῶν καὶ ὁ Τιράνων νὰ θυμῆθηκαν αὐτὸ πού συνεχῶς ἐπαναλάμβανε ὁ πατρο-Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλός: «Τὸν πάπα νὰ καταρᾶσθε!».

Τελειῶνω μὲ μίαν μικρὴ ἱστορία. Πρὶν ἀπὸ χρόνια ζοῦσε στὸ Καρπενήσι κάποιος Θανάσης Γεμενής. Ἦταν ταραξίας καὶ μεγάλη κουτάλα. Οἱ Καρπενησιῶτες εἶχαν καὶ παροιμία: «πῦρ, γυνὴ καὶ Θανάση Γεμενή».

Πέθανε καὶ πῆγαν νὰ τὸν θάψουν. Ἔπρεπε ὅμως νὰ περάσουν ἓνα ρέμα. Ἐκεῖ σκόνταψε ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς βαστάζοντας, τούμπαρα τὸ φέρετρο καὶ ὁ πεθαμένος κύλισε στὰ λασπόνερα. Στρέφεται ὁ προπορευόμενος παπᾶς, βλέπει τί συνέβη καὶ λέγει θυμοσόφος: «εἶχες δὲν εἶχες Θανάση καὶ πεθαμένος τὴν ἔκανες τὴν διαολιά σου».

Εἶχε δὲν εἶχε ὁ πάπας καὶ πεθαμένος ἔκανε τὴν ζαβολιά του.



Ἑλληνες ἐνωθεῖτε ἐναντίον τοῦ κοινοῦ ἐχθροῦ, ἐναντίον τοῦ μίσους, τῆς διχόνοιας καὶ τῆς διαίρεσης, πού εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος μας ὁ ἐαυτός»

Θ. Κολοκοτρώνης



Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».

Μακρυγιάννης, ὁ Ἀτόφιος Ἑλληνορθόδοξος Ἡγέτης

Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀγιορείτη μοναχὸν Θεόκλητο Διονυσιάτη, περιοδικὸ «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», τεύχος 1469 (2/08/2002)

Οστρατηγὸς Μακρυγιάννης, ἕνας ἀτόφιος μεταβυζαντινὸς Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανός, εἶχε σαρκώσει στὸν ἑαυτό του τὸν πῖο συνθετικὸ Ἑλληνα πολιτικὸ, ποὺ συμπύκνωσε ὅλες τὶς ἀρετές, ὡς παράγοντος γιὰ τὴ συγκρότηση μίας ἀληθινῆς Ἑλληνορθόδοξης Πολιτείας. Θ' ἀφήσω αὐτὸν τὸν σπουδαῖο πολιτικὸ καὶ στρατιωτικὸν Ἑλληνα νὰ ὁμιλήσῃ μὲ τὴ ζωὴ του πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς πολιτευομένους τῆς ἐποχῆς μας.

Ὁ πιστότατος καὶ γενναϊότατος στρατηγὸς Μακρυγιάννης ἀποτελεῖ μιά ἐξαιρετικὴ μορφή τοῦ νεοελληνισμοῦ, ἕνα αὐθεντικὸ παράδειγμα ἰσορροπημένης σκέψεως γνησίου Ρωμηοῦ ἡγέτου. Τὸ πολιτικὸ του ἦθος, τὴ γενναϊότητά του τὴν ἀπαράμιλλη, τὸν χρηστευόμενο χαρακτήρα του, τὶς χριστιανικὲς ἀρετές του, τὴν πολιτικὴ ὀξυδέρκειά του, ὅλ' αὐτὰ τὰ ὀφείλε στην Ὁρθόδοξη φωτεινὴ πίστη του, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἄγγιζε τὰ ὄρια ἀγίου μὲ σπαθί.

Ἐγνώριζε τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὴν ἱστορία καὶ τῆς κλασσικῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Καὶ τὶς δυὸ αὐτὲς μακρὲς περιόδους τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ, τὶς θεωροῦσε σὰν κληρονομία τοῦ νεοελληνισμοῦ. Ἀλλὰ ὁ στρατηγὸς εἶχε διακρίνει ὅτι ὁ Βυζαντινὸς πολιτισμὸς ἦταν Χριστοκεντρικός, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἐναλλάσσει μὲ τὴν ἴδια σημασία τὸ ὄνομα Ρωμαῖοι μὲ τὸ Ἑλληνες. Καὶ ἐπίστευε ὅτι ὁ δρόμος τοῦ ἔθνους δὲν πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἄλλος παρὰ αὐτός ποὺ τὸν σταμάτησε ἢ δουλεία, δηλαδὴ δρόμος Ἑλληνικός, Χριστιανικός, Ὁρθόδοξος, Βυζαντινός, Ρωμαϊκός.

Συνεχῶς διαμαρτυροῦταν κατὰ τῶν παρεκκλίσεων, ποὺ τὶς θεωροῦσε ὡς προδοσία ἀπέναντι τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῆς ἱστορίας, τῶν σοφῶν καὶ ἡρώων, τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ ὅλων τῶν Ἁγίων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Φρονοῦσε, λοιπόν, ὅτι ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς ἔχει ἀναχωνεθεῖ μέσα στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ τὸν Σαρκωμένο Λόγο καὶ τὸν λογοποιημένο λαὸ σὲ μίαν ἀγαπητικὴν ἀλληλοπεριχώρηση. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Μακρυγιάννης ἐφώναζε, ὅτι ὑπέρτατο κριτήριον σωτηρίας πλεύσεως τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ, εἶναι ἡ συντήρηση τῆς ἐνότητος τοῦ Θεανθρώπου μὲ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ φυλή. Χωρὶς αὐτὴ τὴν ἔνωση, διαλαλοῦσε στοὺς πολιτικούς τῆς ἐποχῆς του, ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς νοθεύεται, ἀδυνατίζει, φτωχαίνει, ἐκφυλίζεται καὶ παραμορφώνεται, χάνει τὴν ὁμορφιά του καὶ τὸ μεγαλεῖο του καὶ καταντᾷ τὸ περικάθαρμα τοῦ κόσμου. Καὶ ἐνῶ

φαίνεται ὅτι ζῆ, ὁμως οὐσιαστικὰ εἶναι νεκρός, ἀφοῦ μοναδικὴ πηγὴ ζωῆς εἶναι ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Κύριος.

Βέβαια, ὁ σοφώτατος Μακρυγιάννης, μὲ ὅλη τὴν ἐμπειρικὴ του ἀπλότητα, ἐγνώριζε ὅτι δὲν ταυτιζότανε, στὴν καλύτερη ἐκδοχή, ἡ Πολιτεία μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Γι' αὐτὸ, ἐνῶ ἀναγνώριζε ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ὑπεύθυνη γιὰ τὴν καλλιέργεια τοῦ λαοῦ μὲ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη ἀγωγή, ὁμως, κατὰ δεύτερο λόγο, ἡ Πολιτεία ἔχει χρέος, ἀφοῦ κυβερνᾷ τὸν λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὄχι μονάχα νὰ μὴ τοῦ ἀφαιρέσῃ αὐτὸ τὸ θησαυρὸ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου πίστεώς του, ἀλλὰ ἀντιθέτως, μὲ κάθε μέσο, ποὺ ἀνήκει στὸ χῶρο της, νὰ τὸν προστατεύῃ καὶ νὰ τὸν αὐξάνῃ. Ὁ εὐλαβέστατος στρατηγὸς δὲν πρόσεχε πολὺ τὶς

μορφὲς τῶν πολιτευμάτων, ὅσο στίς συντεταγμένες τῆς Πολιτείας νὰ εἶναι Ἑλληνορθόδοξες, ὅποτε τὸ ἔθνος θὰ δυνάμωνε καὶ θὰ μεγαλοουργοῦσε, ἐκπληρώνοντας τὴν ἀποστολή του, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Χριστιανοποίηση τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ κατ' ἐπέκταση ἡ αἰώνια σωτηρία τοῦ «στὸν κόρπον τοῦ Θεοῦ».

Ὁ Μακρυγιάννης στ' «Ἀπομνημονεύματά» του καὶ στὰ «Ὁράματα καὶ Θάματα» διδάσκει ξεκάθαρα, ὅτι ἡ Ἑλλάδα δὲν δικαιούται ν' ἀπομακρυνθῇ ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία της, γιατί θὰ καταστραφῇ, ἀφοῦ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸν ὅλα εἶναι σκότος καὶ ἔρεβος βαθὺ καὶ ψηλαφητόν. Ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς, ἀσύνδετος καὶ ἀναχώνεντος ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, παραμένει ἀδύνατος, πτωχός, μυθικός, παγανιστικός, ἀτελής, μὲ ὅλα τὰ αἰσθηματικὰ του κάλλη καὶ μὲ ὅλη τὴ σοφία του.

Καὶ σὲ κάθε περίπτωση, ὁ ἀγαθὸς στρατηγὸς, διεσάλπιζε ὅτι ὁ λαὸς μας, μονάχα ἐνωμένος, ἀποκαθαρμένος, ἐνσωματωμένος στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ φῶς γιὰ τὸν κόσμον, γιατί πίστευε ὅτι «οἱ Ἑλληνες εἶναι εὐλογημένο ἔθνος, ὅταν τοὺς κυβερνᾷ ἡ εἰλικρίνεια μέσα στὰ πλαίσια τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας».

Ὁ πατριωτισμὸς τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη, ἦταν φωτισμένος καὶ δὲν μποροῦσε ν' ἀντιληφθῇ πατρίδα χωρὶς θρησκεία, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἐκήρυττε, ὅτι «δὲν ὑπάρχει γλυκώτερον πράγμα ἀπὸ τὴν πατρίδα καὶ τὴν θρησκείαν». Καὶ ὅσον ἔβλεπε τὴν Ἑλλάδα νὰ ἀποχωρίζεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία της δὲν ἔπαυε νὰ λέγῃ: «Πατρίδα, πατρίδα, ἦσουνε ἄτυχη ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπους νὰ σὲ κυβερνήσουν! Μόνος ὁ Θεός, μόνος ὁ ἀληθινὸς αὐτός καὶ δίκαιος κυβερνήτης σὲ κυβερνεῖ καὶ σὲ διατηρεῖ ἀκόμα!».

Ὁ Μακρυγιάννης ἦταν κυριολεκτικῶς ἐθνικός ἀνὴρ, δέκτης ὅλων τῶν μεταβολῶν τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ ἀδιστακτικῶς θὰ τὸν ὀνόμαζα παιδαγωγὸ καὶ δάσκαλό της. Κι ἀκόμα θυμίζει τοὺς δικαίους στρατηγούς τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, ποὺ ἦσαν στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀξιώνονταν



Ὁ Στρατηγὸς Μακρυγιάννης (1797-1864)

ἀγγελικῶν ὄπτασιῶν, προκειμένου νὰ ὀδηγήσουν τὸν λαὸν πρὸς τὶς βουλὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Σ' ὅλες τὶς ἀνάγκες τοῦ Ἔθνους κατέφευγε μὲ προσευχὴ στὸν Θεόν: «Σηκώθηκα καὶ πῆγα εἰς τὶς εἰκόνες καὶ κάνω τὴν προσευκὴ μου καὶ λέγω: “Κύριε, βλέπεις σὲ τί κατάστασιν ἔφτασα. Ὁ μόνος σωτήρας εἶναι ἡ παντοδυναμία σου καὶ ἡ εὐσπλαγχνία σου σ' ἐμᾶς ὅπου κινδυνεύομεν εἰς τὴν ματοκυλισμένη μας πατρίδα...”». Καὶ σὲ ἄλλη περίπτωση, πού ἀγωνιζόταν κατὰ τῆς πολιτικῆς διαφθορᾶς τοῦ Ὀθωμανικοῦ Κράτους, πάλι ἀναθέτει στὸν Θεὸν τὶς ἐλπίδες του: «Κύριε, ἡ θέλησή σου νὰ γένη καὶ νὰ μᾶς φωτίσης καὶ νὰ μᾶς ἐνώσης τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς, νὰ μὴ μείνωμεν... καὶ χανόμεστε καὶ ζώντως καὶ πεθαμένως. Ἡ ἐσπλαγχνία σου μόνον θὰ μᾶς σώσει, ὄχι ἄλλος ἀπὸ σένα, Βασιλέα Δίκαιε τοῦ παντός...».

Ἀναχωρώντας ὁ διδάχος τῶν πολιτικῶν Μακρυγιάννης ἀπὸ τὴν πεποίθησή του, ὅτι «ἔθνη χωρὶς θρησκείαν καὶ ἠθικὴν εἶναι παλιόψαθες τῶν ἐθνῶν», ὑπενθυμίζει στὸ λαὸ του τὴν παρέμβαση τοῦ Θεοῦ στὶς 3 Σεπτεμβρίου τοῦ 1843, χάρις στὴν ὁμόνοια τῶν Ἑλλήνων. «Ἄν ἔχετε ἀρετὴ καὶ ὁμόνοια, θὰ εὐλογῆσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὰ ἔργα σας καὶ θὰ σᾶς φωτίσῃ εἰς τὸ καλὸ καὶ θὰ σᾶς σώσῃ, αὐτὸς πού σᾶς ἀνάστησε καὶ κάματε τὴν τρίτη Σεπτεμβρίου· κι ἐπιστάτησε μόνος του τόσους μῆνες καὶ δὲ μάτωσε μύτη σὲ ὅλο τὸ Κράτος. Παρακαλέστε τὸν Θεὸν καὶ τώρα νὰ κάμῃ τὸ ἔλεός του σ' ἐμᾶς τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς καὶ νὰ φέρῃ καὶ τώρα τὴν εὐλογία του».

Στὴν ἐποχὴ του ὁ στρατηγὸς Μακρυγιάννης ἦταν ἓνα τραγικὸ πρόσωπο. Γιατί, ἀπὸ τὸν αὐθορμητισμὸ του καὶ τὰ ἀγνὰ ἐλατήριά του, ἀγωνιζότανε στὸ χῶρο τῆς πολιτικῆς, νὰ ἐπιβάλῃ τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία, πράγμα πού δημιουργοῦσε ἀφευκτὴν ἀντινομία, ἀφοῦ ὁ Καῖσαρ ἦταν Καθολικὸς καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς Προτεστάντες. Παρασυρμένος ἀπὸ τὸ ὄραμα τοῦ Βυζαντίου, ἐπέδιωκε αὐτίση Πολιτείας καὶ Ἐκκλησίας, γιατί ἐνόμιζεν ὅτι οἱ δυὸ διακεκριμένες ἐξουσίες μπορούσαν νὰ γίνουν ἓνα, ἀλλὰ νὰ διατηροῦν, φυσικά, τὶς ἰδιάζουσες λειτουργίες τους ξεχωριστά. Εἶχε, βεβαίως, διαισθανθῆ τὴν ὀξεία διάκριση μεταξὺ Καίσαρος καὶ τῆς ἀπροσώπου ἐννοίας τοῦ Ἔθνους, γεγονός ἐκπληκτικὸ γιὰ ἓνα ὀλιγογράμματο. Γι' αὐτὸ ἐταῦτιζεν ὄχι Ὀρθοδοξία καὶ Καίσαρα, ἀλλὰ Ἔθνος καὶ Ὀρθοδοξία.

Ἀπὸ τὰ Μακρυγιαννικὰ κείμενα βγαίνουν πολὺτιμα διδάγματα γιὰ τοὺς πολιτευομένους Ἕλληνες. Καὶ εἶναι ἀπὸ τὶς οὐσιώδεις διδαχὲς του ἡ ἀναγκαιότης ἐνοποιήσεως τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας μὲ τὸ Ἔθνος. Γιατί μέσα στὴ ζωὴ αὐτῆς τῆς ταυτίσεως, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐντονη μεταφυσικὴ αἴσθησι, σὰν ἐνεργητικὴ ἄμεση σχέση τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ τοὺς πιστοὺς, ὑπάρχει τὸ ἦθος τῆς, πού στὴ γλῶσσα τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη ἐσήμαινεν ἠθικὴ, πατριωτισμὸ, δικαιοσύνη καὶ τιμιότητα. Καὶ ἀφοῦ ἡ φυσιογνωμία τοῦ Ἔθνους, οἱ ρίζες του, οἱ πηγές του, ἡ ἰδιομορφία του ἀποτελοῦν δεδομένα καὶ συνιστοῦν τὴ δυνάμη του, τὴ λάμψη του καὶ τὶς σώζουσες παραδόσεις του, θεωροῦσε ἐχθροὺς τοῦ Ἔθνους ἐκείνους, πού περιφρονοῦσαν αὐτὴν τὴν ἐθνικὴ κληρονομία.

Ὁ Μακρυγιάννης ἦταν ὀξυδερκὴς γι' αὐτὸ, ἀνεξαρτήτως πολιτειακῆς μορφῆς, καὶ ἤθελε τὶς κυβερνήσεις νὰ προστα-

τεύουν τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία καὶ τὴν ἠθικὴ τῆς. Βέβαια, ὁ πιστὸς στρατηγός, μὲ ὅλη τὴν εὐλάβειά του, τὶς προσευχὲς του καὶ τὴν ἄσπογη Χριστιανικὴ ζωὴ του, δὲν ἐγνώριζε θεωρητικῶς καὶ ἱεροκανονικῶς τὸ πολίτευμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὅμως, κατανοοῦσε ἀπὸ πείρα καὶ διαίσθησι, ὅτι ἂν δὲν ἦταν δυνατὴ αὐτίση Ὀρθοδοξίας καὶ Κράτους, ἐν τούτοις ἀξίωονε τὸν ἐκχριστιανισμὸ τοῦ Κράτους ὅσον ἐπιτρέπει ἡ φύση του, χωρὶς αὐτὸ νὰ σημαίνῃ ὑπαγωγή τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας σὲ καμμιά μορφή πολιτικῆς. Ὅσοι δὲ φρονοῦν ὅτι δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸς αὐτὸς ὁ ἐκχριστιανισμὸς τῆς Πολιτείας, δὲν ἔχουν παρὰ νὰ ἀνατρέξουν στὸ Βυζάντιο καὶ τὴ νομοθεσία του, ὅπου κάθε νόμος πού ἤρχετο σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τοὺς Ἱεροὺς Κανόνες, ἦταν ἄκυρος, κατὰ τελεία ἀντίθεση μὲ τὶς σύγχρονες ἀσεβεῖς νομοθεσίες...

Αὐτά, ὡς ἐγγιστα, θὰ ἔλεγε καὶ σήμερα ὁ ἀληθινὸς Ἕλληνας πολιτικός, στρατηγὸς Μακρυγιάννης, πού μὲ προφητικὴ διόραση ἐβλεπε τὴ σωτηρία τῆς πατρίδος νὰ ἐξαρτᾶται ἐπὶ ποιὴ καταστροφῆς, μόνον ἀπὸ τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία. Καὶ φώναζε καὶ ἰκέτευε καὶ ἀπειλοῦσε καὶ ἔκλαιε καὶ προσευχότανε νὰ φωτίσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς πολιτικούς, πού ἀπεμακρύνοντο ἀπὸ τὴν πατροπαράδοτη πίστη τους καὶ πλανοῦσαν καὶ τὸν λαόν. Σὲ μιὰ ἐκτεταμένη προσευχὴ του πρὸς τὴν Παναγία, ὁ ἀείποτε προσευχόμενος στρατηγός, ἔλεγε μεταξὺ ἄλλων πρὸς τὴν Ὑπέρμαχον Στρατηγὸν τοῦ Ἔθνους: «Θεοτόκε, μητέρα τοῦ παντός, τὸ καύχημα τῆς παρθενίας, τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῆς ἀγαθότης, προστρέχομεν οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, οἱ ἀδύνατοι, εἰς τὴν ἐσπλαχνίαν τῆς ἀγαθότης σου, νὰ λυπηθῆς τοὺς ἀθῶους ἐκείνους πού φέρνουν τὴν ἁμαρτωλή τους προσευχὴ εἰλικρινῶς εἰς τὸν Πανουργὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν Του... ν' ἀναστηθεῖ διὰ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ Παντοκράτορα ἢ σκλαβωμένη τους πατρίδα καὶ νὰ λαμπρυνθεῖ ὁ σταυρὸς τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας...».

Καὶ χωρὶς νὰ εἶναι θεολόγος ἀκαδημαϊκὸς ὁ Μακρυγιάννης, ἐγνώριζε ἀπὸ τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς ψυχῆς του μεγάλες ἀλήθειες θεολογικῆς ὅπως ὁ Θεὸς «κάνει τ' ἀδύνατα ἀνθρώπου δυνατὰ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ βασιλείαν του, τοὺς μικροὺς κάνει μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς σοφοὺς μωροὺς καὶ τοὺς μωροὺς σοφοὺς, διὰ νὰ μὴ φαντάζεται κανένας ἄνθρωπος καὶ νὰ λέγει “ἐγώ”, ἀλλὰ νὰ λέγει “ὁ Θεὸς τί θέλει”...».

Ἐπομένως, δὲν ὑπάρχουν περιθώρια ἐπιλογῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς πολιτευομένους τῶν Ἀθηνῶν μέσα στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἑλλάδος. Ὅλοι μας εἴμαστε δεσμῶτες στὸ Βράχο τῆς Ἀκροπόλεως, ὅπως τὴν μεταποίησε ὁ Παῦλος μὲ τὸ κήρυγμά του στὴν Πνύκα, καὶ ἡ Ἀθήνα ἐκτόπισε τὸν παγανισμὸ τῆς, γιὰ νὰ ἐνταχθῆ μέσα στὸ φῶς τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας. Τὰ εἰδῶλα ἔπεσαν μπροστὰ στὸ Σταυρὸ καὶ τὴν Ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ Σαρκομένου Λόγου. Ὁ ὕλισμος, ἡ ἀθεΐα δὲν ἔχουν θέση στὴν λουσιμένη στὸ φῶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἑλλάδα. Καὶ ὅλοι αὐτοὶ πού δὲν ἀποδέχονται τὴ λύτρωσι ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ δεινὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπὸ τὸν μόνον καὶ μοναδικὸ Λυτρωτὴν Ἰησοῦν, ἄς ἀκούσουν τουλάχιστον τὸν ἐθνικὸ μας ποιητὴ Κωστὴ Παλαμᾶ, μήπως τοὺς ἀφυπνίσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν ὕλιστικὴ νάρκη. «Μὲ κάλεσαν οἱ

θεοί και τούτα μου είπαν: ... ἄσοφε, σοφέ, δίγνωμε και ἴσιε και ἄθεε, ἀπάνω μας σκοντάφτεις, ὅποιος κι ἂν εἶσα» (Δωδεκάλογος τοῦ Γύφτου).

Λοιπόν, οἱ κύριοι πολιτευτές μας, πρέπει νὰ ἐνοήσουν, νὰ αἰσθανθοῦν ὅτι δὲν ἔχουν δικαίωμα νὰ πειραματίζονται ἐπάνω στὸ ταλαίπωρο σῶμα τῆς Ἑλλάδος, ποὺ τῆς χάρισε ὁ Θεὸς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη. Δὲν δικαιοῦνται νὰ ἐφαρμόζουν τὸν νεκροποιὸ μηδενισμό τους στὸν λαὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος. Πρέπει νὰ συνειδητοποιήσουν, ἐπὶ τέλους, τι εἶναι οἱ ἴδιοι. Καὶ ἐὰν συμφωνοῦν μὲ τὶς παραδόσεις τοῦ Ἑθνους, ἄς φιλοδοξήσουν νὰ τὶς συνεχίσουν μέσα στὰ σύγχρονα δεδομένα, χριστιανοποιῶντες τὸν λαὸν μας. Ἄν, πάλι, καταλαβαίνουν ὅτι εἶναι ἄσχετοι πρὸς τὶς ἐθνικὲς ρίζες μας, ἄς περιορίσουν τὴν ἀξιοδάκρυτη φτώχεια τους στὸν ἑαυτό τους.

Περιττὴ ἢ πολυτέλεια τῆς ἐξαγωγῆς ἀθλιότητων, ἀγριότητος καὶ διαφθορᾶς πρὸς τὸν Θεόπλαστον ἄνθρωπον. Καὶ οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες μας μᾶς ἐδίδαξαν ὅτι «ὁ νοῦς ποὺ ἀπομακρύνεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν, ἢ κτηνώδης γίνεται, γιατί περιπίπτει στὴν ἀκολασία, ἢ δαιμονιώδης, γιατί ἀγριεῖται καὶ ἀποθηριοῦται». Ἔτσι μπορεῖ νὰ ἐρμηνευθῆ καὶ τὸ ἐκτεταμένο φαινόμενο τῆς ἀναρχίας, ἀμαρτίας καὶ διαφθορᾶς μέσα στὴν σημερινὴ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἑλλάδα.

Εἶθε ὁ Σαρκαμένος Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, νὰ μᾶς συντείσῃ καὶ νὰ μᾶς φωτίσῃ, γιατί κατὰ Μακρυγιάννην, «τρέχομεν πρὸς τὸν γκρεμὸν...».



Τὸ Παράπνοιο τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Κύριον,
ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ ὑπακούετε.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Φῶς,
ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ βλέπετε.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Ὀδόν,
ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ ἀκολουθεῖτε.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Ζώην,
ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ ἐπιθυμεῖτε.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Σοφίαν,
ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ συμβουλευέσθε.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Παντοδύναμο,
ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ φοβεῖσθε.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Δίκαιον,
ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ ἐμπιστεύεσθε.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Πατέρα,
ἀλλὰ δὲν γίνεσθε παιδιά μου.
Μὲ ὀνομάζετε Σωτήρα,
ἀλλὰ δὲν θέλετε τὴν σωτηρία σας...

Μεγαλοφυΐα Εὐσεβοῦς Μοναχοῦ

Ἐκ τῆς Ἀγιορειτικῆς Βιβλιοθήκης

Ἔζη κάποτε κάποιος Μοναχός, ὁ ὁποῖος ὄσες φορές ἤρωτᾶτο ὑπὸ τοῦ Καθηγουμένου τῆς Μονῆς, «πῶς ἔχεις εἰς τὴν ὑγείαν ἀδελφέ;», παρεπονεῖτο πάντοτε, ὅτι ἦτο κατάκοπος ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς ἐργασίας.

Ἐπὶ τέλους ὁ Καθηγούμενος, ἀκούων καθ' ἐκάστην τὸ αὐτὸ παράπνοιο, ἠρώτησεν κάποιαν ἡμέραν τὸν Μοναχὸν «τι εἶδους ἐργασίαν ἐκτελεῖς καὶ κοπιᾷζεις τόσον πολύ;» Ὁ δὲ Μοναχὸς ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν:

«Ἄγιε Καθηγούμενε, ἔχω καθ' ἐκάστην τόσας ἐργασίας, ὥστε αἱ δυνάμεις μου δὲν θὰ ἦσαν ἐπαρκεῖς δι' αὐτάς, ἂν ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μὲ ἐνίσχυεν. Καὶ πρῶτον ἔχω δύο ἀγρίους ἰέρακας, τοὺς ὁποῖους προσπαθῶ νὰ κρατῶ δεσμίους καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐξημερώω, κατόπιν ἔχω δύο λαγούς, τοὺς ὁποῖους φυλάττω διὰ νὰ μὴ φύγουν, δύο βόας τοὺς ὁποῖους ἐπιβλέπω διὰ νὰ ἐργάζονται. Ἐνα λύκον, τὸν ὁποῖον προσέχω διὰ νὰ μὴ βλάβῃ κανέναν, ἕνα λέοντα, τὸν ὁποῖο προσπαθῶ νὰ κατανικήσω, καὶ τέλος ἔχω καὶ ἕναν ἀσθενῆ, τὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει πάντοτε νὰ περιποιοῦμαι».

Ὁ Καθηγούμενος, ἀκούσας αὐτά, ἐμειδίασε καὶ λέγει πρὸς τὸν Μοναχόν:

«Αὐτὰ τέκνον μου δὲν γίνονται, διότι εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ ἐκτελεῖ κάποιος τόσας ἐργασίας».

«Καὶ ὅμως, σεβαστέ μου πάτερ», ἀπήντησεν ὁ Μοναχός, «σᾶς εἶπον ὅλην τὴν ἀλήθειαν. Οἱ δύο ἰέρακες εἶναι οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου, τῶν ὁποίων πρέπει νὰ φροντίζω διὰ νὰ μὴ στρέψουν καὶ ἴδουν κάτι, τὸ ὁποῖον θὰ ἤμποροῦσεν νὰ προτρέψῃ νὰ πράξω κάποιαν ἀμαρτίαν. Οἱ δύο λαγῶι εἶναι οἱ πόδες μου, τοὺς ὁποῖους πρέπει νὰ ἐμποδίζω ἀπὸ τοῦ νὰ τρέχουν εἰς τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς ἀμαρτίας. Οἱ δύο βόες εἶναι οἱ χεῖρες μου, τὰς ὁποίας ἐπιβλέπω διὰ νὰ ἐργάζονται. Ὁ λύκος εἶναι ἡ γλῶσσα μου, ἡ ὁποία πάντοτε ἔχει ἀνάγκην χαλινοῦ, διὰ νὰ μὴ διὰ τῆς κατηγορίας δαγκᾶσῃ κάποιον καὶ ἀποθάνῃ. Ὁ λέων εἶναι ἡ καρδιά μου, ἐναντίον αὐτῆς διεξάγω πεισματώδη ἀγῶνα, μὲ ἔλκει μὲ μεγάλην βίαν εἰς ὅλα ὅσα μὲ βλάπτουν καὶ μὲ καταστρέφουν. Ὁ ἀσθενῆς εἶναι τὸ σῶμα μου, τὸ ὁποῖον οὐδέποτε εὐρίσκεται εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν κατάστασιν, ὡς ἐκ τούτου εἶμαι ἠναγκασμένος νὰ ἔχω τὴν προσοχὴν διαρκῶς ἐστραμμένην πρὸς αὐτό, νὰ τὸ περιποιοῦμαι ὅσον εἶναι δίκαιον».

Ὁ δὲ Καθηγούμενος, ἀκούσας τὴν εὐφυστάτην αὐτὴν διήγησιν τοῦ Μοναχοῦ καὶ συγχαρεῖς αὐτόν, εἶπεν:

«Ἐὰν ὅλοι ἐπραττον ὅπως ἐσὺ, τέκνον μου, δηλαδὴ νὰ ἐργάζονται ἀγωνιζόμενοι κατὰ τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ νὰ συκρατοῦν τὰ πάθη των, ἡ γῆ θὰ ἐγένετο οὐρανὸς καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ ἦσαν εὐτυχεῖς καὶ εἰρηνικοί».



“WATCH YOUR HEART!”

Excerpts from “My Life in Christ, the Diary of St. John of Kronstadt,” Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 1971.

Those who are trying to lead a spiritual life have to carry on a most skillful and difficult warfare, through their thoughts, every moment of their life -- that is, a spiritual warfare. It is necessary that our whole soul should be every moment a clear eye, able to watch and notice the thoughts entering our heart from the evil one and repel them. The hearts of such men should be always burning with faith, humility and love; otherwise the subtlety of the Devil finds an easy access to them, followed by a diminution of faith, or entire unbelief, and then by every possible evil, which it will be difficult to wash away even by tears.

Do not, therefore, allow your heart to be cold, especially during prayer, and avoid every cold indifference. Very often it happens that prayer is on the lips, but in the heart cunning, incredulity or unbelief, so that by the lips the man seems near to God, whilst in his heart he is far from Him. And, during our prayers, the evil one makes use of every means to chill our hearts and fill them with deceit in a most imperceptible manner to us. Pray and fortify yourself, fortify your heart!

Watch your heart during all your life -- examine it, listen to it, and see what prevents its union with the most blessed Lord. Let this be for you the science of all sciences, and with God’s help you will easily observe what estranges you from God, and what draws you towards Him and unites you to Him. It is the evil spirit more than anything that stands between our hearts and God; he estranges God from us by various passions, or by the desires of the flesh, by the desires of the eyes, and by worldly pride.

The problem of our life is union with God and sin completely prevents this; therefore flee from sin as from a terrible enemy; as from the destroyer of the soul, because to be without God is death and not life. Let us therefore understand our destination; let us always remember that our common M a s t e r calls us to union with Himself.

Take the trouble to spend only one single day according to God’s commandments, and you will see yourself, you will feel by your own heart, how good it is to fulfill God’s will (and God’s will in relation to us is our life, our eternal blessedness). Love God with all your heart at least as much as you love your father, your mother, and your benefactors. Value with all your strength His love and His benefits to you (go over them mentally in your heart, think how He gave you existence and with it all good things, how endlessly long He bears with your sins, how endlessly He forgives you them; for the sake of your hearty repentance, by virtue of the suffering and death upon the Cross of His only-begotten Son, what blessedness He has promised you in eternity, if you are faithful to Him). Enumerate besides His mercies, which are endlessly great and manifold. Furthermore, love every man as yourself, that is, do

not wish him anything that you would not wish for yourself; think, feel for him just as you would think and feel for your own self.

The purer the heart is, the larger it is, the more able it is to find room within it for a great number of beloved ones; whilst the more sinful it is, the more contracted it becomes, and the less number of beloved it can find room for, because it is limited by self love, and that love is a false one.

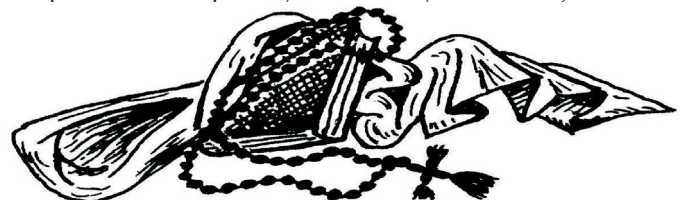
It is pleasing to God when a man begins to notice His action in the heart, because He is the Light and the Truth, whilst the Devil is powerful only through darkness, deceit, and falsehood; reveal his falsehood, place it before the light and all will disappear!

The future life is the perfect purity of the heart, which is now only gradually purified, and which is at present more often shut and darkened by sin and by the Devil’s breathing into it. Only at times, under the influence of God’s grace, brightens and sees God, being united to Him most truly during prayer and in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

You cannot have failed to notice that all our strength lies in the heart. When the heart is light, the whole man feels at ease and happy; whilst when the heart is heavy, he feels wretched. But this relief you can only find in faith, and therefore especially in the Church, as the place where faith predominates. Here God touches your heart through His cleansing grace, and gives you His easy yoke to bear. This is a great mystery which is worth everyone’s knowing. When the heart is light, the man is ready to run and leap. This is why David “danced when he played before the ark” (I Chronicles 12:8).

We possess a true barometer which shows the rise and fall of our spiritual life -- that is, our heart. It may also be called a compass, by means of which we are guided in our voyage over the sea of this life. It shows us whither we are going -- to the spiritual east, to Christ, or to the spiritual west, the dark power that has the power of death -- the Devil. Only watch this compass attentively; it will not deceive, and it will show you the true way.

Remember that you are always walking in the presence of the sweetest Lord Jesus. Say to yourself more often: “I wish so to live that my life may gladden my Beloved, crucified for my sake on the Cross. Above all, I will take for the companion and friend of my life my Holy Beloved, Who instills everything into my heart, making me thirst for the salvation of all, rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep.” This will especially comfort my Comforter, Christ.



The beginning of evil is heedlessness.

Abba Poimen the Great

ON CHARITY

By St. Theophan the Recluse

Give to every man that asketh of thee. (Luke 6:30)

This is one of the first Christian commandments. The Lord and His holy Apostles often remind us of it, and in order that we may be the more earnest to act upon it, they encompass it with the most moving incentives and the most striking admonitions. There is no one who is not familiar with this commandment, and everyone should act in accordance with their conscience to help the needy as far as they are able. If we examine our actions more closely, however, we shall not find any other area of Christian duty which is so shamefully neglected. Certainly, we do a little here and there -- just enough to get rid of the tiresome suppliant; sometimes we refuse altogether -- which is, in fact, more often the case. Our conscience somehow remains calm; it is silent and does not reprimand us for not helping -- or for extending such meager help. Why is this? Our sinful soul has adopted a calculated understanding of poverty which comes to mind in situations calling for our help. It frustrates our good intentions to the extent that not only does our conscience remain silent at our refusal -- or feeble beneficence; we even convince ourselves that we do better in evading the petitioner.

What have we not thought up, in our selfishness and avarice, to justify our coldness and hardheartedness towards those in need! We attribute ulterior motives to the one asking for help; we suspect his needs are not genuine; we think of what we lack, of hard times and the need to store up for a rainy day...All of these thoughts wander through the minds of those who are careless towards their obligations as Christians; they even enter the minds of those who are mindful and often throw them off the right path of action. Do we want to give freedom and space to feelings of tenderhearted compassion, not to allow them to be darkened by falsehoods? Then let us tear away these prejudiced thoughts and restore a healthy Christian attitude towards the giving of alms. Planting this firmly in our mind and keeping it clearly before us, especially when our assistance is called upon, we shall perfect the carrying out of this duty. Then we shall be able to hear the words: "Thou good and faithful servant." Let us do this now, so that once and for all, having rejected what is wrong, we shall settle upon what is right.

The moment we find ourselves called upon to give help, the thought strikes us: Is this person really in need? who knows him? Perhaps this is a routine practice and he isn't needy at all. We believe these thoughts and - either we turn aside altogether, or we help only minimally. Is this right? It's true; there are cases which support our skepticism. But are we sure that the person standing before us with his request is a case in point? If we do not know this for a fact, why do we jump to conclusions and, even worse, act upon our unfounded suspicions? In fact, this may be a mother who has hungry children at home, or a husband whose wife is ill and his children in rags; perhaps

it is the eldest of several homeless and helpless orphans; of a similar unfortunate soul. In such cases, of course, we would be willing to give help. We must regard everyone, who approaches us for the first time, in like manner, and not grieve them with our suspicions. What if the person, whose heart is already burdened, should read in our eyes such distrustful thoughts? This would only add to his misery, and instead of being consoled, he would walk away from us with an even greater burden.

Today there is a widespread attitude of suspicion towards the poor. We must react to this with the following resolve: to make certain about those who have no cause to ask for help, and not to give to such a person; but to deny help to everyone simply because there are those whose demands are unjustified -- this is a sin.

When faced with an opportunity to give, we sometimes ask ourselves: with what? We can barely make ends meet ourselves. When there's nothing to give, how can we feel obligated? The Apostle says we are to give out of our abundance: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened" (II Cor. 8:12). But is it really true that we have nothing left after our own needs are satisfied? And are we being honest in defining what it is we cannot do without? What we consider to be "essential" may easily be reduced or expended. If we eliminate those "needs" which arise out of habit, whim, vainglory, the empty demands of the world, our passions...how much we shall have left for the use of charity. Even if we have already cut down on nonessentials, where there is a desire to give, good will always find means to set aside something for Christ.

One also often hears the criticism: Why are they uselessly loafing about? They should work and earn their daily bread." A reasonable demand. Even the Apostle enjoins us to work with our hands so that we might satisfy not only our own needs but also have something to give away (Eph. 4:28). With this rationale we can easily dissuade ourselves from offering charity. Are we so certain, however, that whoever asks for help is able to work, or can find work? He may work and still be unable to meet his needs, especially if he has many mouths to feed...

People give all sorts of reasons to excuse their lack of charity, their hardheartedness! Some say, "hard times." But if the times are hard for those who have a sufficiency, how much harder are they for the poor?! This pretext alone should lead one to give all the more generously. Another says, "I have to save for a rainy day." Even so, this must have its limits. Otherwise our projected future needs will never allow us to help the poor in their immediate and very real distress. Furthermore, does the future depend on our prudence or on God's Providence? Of course, on Providence. Let us, then, draw upon ourselves God's mercy through extending mercy towards those in need; thereby we shall have real security for the future...Yet another says, "Someone else will meet his needs," and he sends away the suppliant. But will another meet his needs, or will he also say,

“Someone else...” and a third, “Someone else...” and so on? This is to leave the poor to the mercy of fate. No. The Lord sent this needy person to you; it is you who should help him. Do not miss an opportunity which may never repeat itself...

You see how many cunning rationales the devil has devised to deter even well-meaning people from charitable deeds. We have to admit that we have all, to a greater or lesser degree, succumbed to them at times. Let us resolve in our hearts not to give in to them anymore... How will these weak excuses hold up before God’s righteous judgment? The Christian mind and the Christian heart should not look upon poverty and the poor in this way. A true Christian adopts the mind of Christ...and carries the law of God in his heart to guide him in his actions. Such a one regards the poor as Christ’s “lesser” brethren, or as Christ Himself Who draws close to us through them and accepts what is offered to them as being given to Him...

Let us maintain a charitable disposition and chase away all unkind thoughts. Then our heart will not allow us to break God’s commandment, *Give to every man that asks of thee*, and it will always urge us to be gracious, to love our brothers, to be courteous (I Peter 3:8), to be filled with compassion and kindness (Col. 3:12), and zealous to be merciful, even as our heavenly Father is merciful.



OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

By Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotes, from “On the Divine Liturgy: Orthodox Homilies”

What, dear friends, is our purpose for living? According to the inspired teaching of the Holy Scripture, the purpose of our lives is sanctification; that is, to throw away the old man, the evil in us, and put on the new man -- virtue -- to live a Christian life, one as Christ did, and to be awarded the Kingdom of Heaven. This purpose in life is not felt by many people, however.

Most people live for other purposes. Some live for riches, others, for pleasures and amusements, some for fame and worldly glory; and still others for knowledge. There is no thought of sanctification or eternal life. Others, however, believe in Christ and listen to His divine teaching, for they know that beyond any worldly purpose, there is a divine purpose for living, i.e., to become holy. “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Peter 1:16).

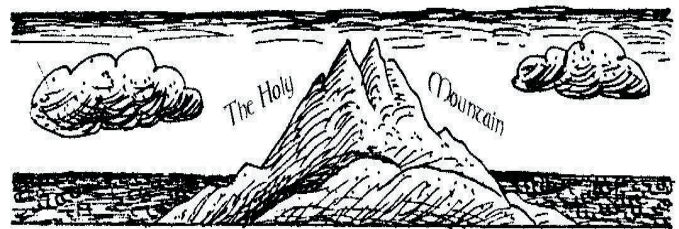
Sanctification is the greatest purpose for living. Without sanctification, everything else is vain and perishable. Life only has meaning when it is intent on this purpose. To be sanctified, to become like a small Christ on earth and be given the Kingdom of Heaven! The beast which lives inside us, the proud ego, has to be annihilated, and we must become Christs to destroy the hells which our lives now are, and make them into heavens.”

ON THE HOLY FORERUNNER ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

By St. Gregory Palamas

August 29: A day to call to remembrance the beheading of the Holy Prophet and Forerunner, St. John the Baptist.

“Herod ... is an example of everything evil and impious, whereas John is the pillar of all virtue and godliness. Herod is the fullness of wickedness, the power of ungodliness, the tool of lawlessness, is absolutely carnal and lives according to the flesh. John, by contrast, is the summit of all the God-bearing men down through the ages, the visible resting place of the gifts of the Spirit, who bears the Name of divine grace [His name in Hebrew literally means Yahweh (God) makes grace], and in whom all piety and virtue dwells. Two images are set before us today --- extreme opposites at odds with each other. The one seems to bring a little enjoyment and honor in the short term, to those inclined to live after its example; then delivers them up to unceasing, unbearable disgrace and affliction. The other gives those who look towards it short-lived suffering; then bestows on them glory and divine enjoyment, which are beyond description --- true and eternal. If we live after the flesh, imitating the carnal Herod, we shall die, as the Apostle says (Romans 8:13). But if, through the divine Spirit and with zeal like John’s, we oppose the body’s evil appetites and deeds, we shall live forever. ... As spiritual pleasures are both everlasting and beyond compare, and the delights of the flesh are pointless and short-lived, let us, brethren, prefer those which are permanent, ineffable and heavenly, rather than those which are swept away and go into ruin. ... We should flee from being like Herod and strive as much as we can to imitate the Forerunner’s grace ...”



THE GRIEVANCE OF JESUS CHRIST

From a sign seen on Holy Mountain (Mount Athos), while walking from one monastery to another

You call me Lord, but you do not obey me.
 You call me Light but you do not see me.
 You call me the Way but you do not follow me.
 You call me Life but you do not desire me.
 You call me Wisdom but you do not take my advice.
 You call me All-Powerful but you do not fear me.
 You call me Righteous but you do not trust me.
 You call me Father but you do not become my children.
 You call me Savior but you do not want your salvation...

A HARVEST OF VIRTUES: SOME THOUGHTS ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

By Fr. Nicholas Karipoff, Holy Protection Cathedral in Melbourne, Australia

Adam was created in the image of God, commanded to grow into His likeness, and was set in Paradise to enjoy the fruits of God's creation. When he was expelled through sin, all creation suffered and the earth began to bring forth thorns and thistles. From this time on man had to toil to bring forth bread in the sweat of his brow. And not only literally, for man's soul was likewise disfigured by sin which he carries like a hereditary disease.

This law of sin acts like the law of gravity, pulling us away from God. The thorns and thistles of our passions find the "ground" of fallen human nature very suitable for growth. Hence, spiritual life involves constant observation to see where the weeds are, and also considerable toil to get rid of them, at the same time making sure that the wheat (our God-given talents) grows properly, for we must produce a harvest of good wheat for God.

Adam fell away from God because of disobedience, but Christ, the new Adam, reunited man with God through obedience to the Father. Obedience is the foundation of spiritual maturity. The Holy Fathers say that obedience is higher than fasting and prayer.

In the psalms we read: "The Lord is my refuge and my Saviour, of whom then shall I be afraid?" This is how a man who is obedient to God thinks. He humbly sees that Christ is his Saviour, and he is obediently willing to allow God to do the work of saving him.

But there is one condition of obedience to Christ: we must carry our own personal cross. Through the mystery of Golgotha, Christ has already taken up most of the burden, but God leaves a little load, according to each individual's strength, for our purification and sanctification. This obedient carrying of our own cross is one of the means by which we begin to regain the image and likeness of God, lost by our first parents in the Garden of Eden. When man fell, it shattered the whole universe, the present beauty of which is akin to that of a broken vase.

Both righteous and sinners leave a mark for many generations. By learning about our weaknesses and passions as well as our strengths, we arrive at a general picture of our own "inner man," our real self that is usually hidden behind the facades of our passions, the different faces we display to other people. Passion brings suffering and pain, severely disturbing the soul. And it is when we try to keep God's commandments, especially His words about learning meekness and humility from Him, that we find some rest from our passions.

Our interactions with others, beginning with the family (the "little church"), will gradually help us to see the inner man. By experiencing unpleasant things inflicted upon us by other people, and by accepting everything in a spirit of faith,

obediently striving to fulfill the Commandments, we begin to mature spiritually. The signs of this obedient maturity are meekness and humility.

Meekness is non-aggression. It is behaving in such a way that one would rather suffer, even innocently, rather than let someone else suffer because of us. This, too, was God's "justice": man sinned, Christ suffered.

Humility is realizing with our whole being (not just with the mind) that God is everything and without Him we are absolutely nothing. He is the source of all life and all goodness, just as the sun is the source of all energy and life on earth. When we accomplish anything worthwhile we should attribute it to God and thank Him, because without Him we could not have done it; as He Himself said, "Without Me you can do nothing."

Let us toil diligently to weed out the tares of the passions and to acquire the spirit of obedience to Christ. Only in this way will the garden of our souls produce virtues: humility and meekness. When the Lord thrusts in His sickle, may He find an abundant harvest unto the salvation of our souls.



BEFORE THE SHIP SINKS

By Saint Basil the Great, from his Commentary on Psalm 1

An illness that has become chronic, like the habit of wrongdoing that has become ingrained, is very hard to heal. If after that, as very often happens, the habit turns into second nature, a cure is out of the question.

So the ideal would be to have no contact with evil. But there is another possibility: to distance yourself from evil, to run away from it as from a poisonous snake, once you have experienced it.

I have known some unfortunate people who in their youth let themselves slide into evil habits which have held them enslaved all their lives. Like pigs wallowing continually in the mire and becoming increasingly filthy, such sinners as these multiply their shame every day with fresh sins.

So blessed is the one who has never thought of evil. However, if through his wiles, the suggestions of the Enemy have found a foothold in your heart, do not remain inactive in the toils of sin.

Be careful not to be utterly overcome by it. If the sin is already weighing you down, if the dust of riches has already settled on you, if your soul has been dragged right down by attachment to material things, then before you fall into utter ruin get rid of the heavy burden. Before the ship sinks, follow the example of sailors and cast overboard the possessions you have accumulated overmuch.

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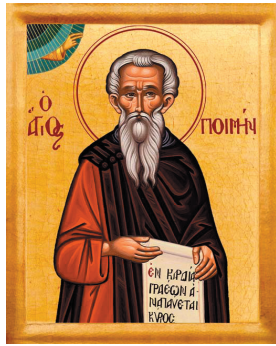
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ON APOSTASY

By Archbishop Averky of Syracuse, From Stand Fast in Truth, the Works of Archbishop Averky, published by St. John of Kronstadt Press

We have neither the strength nor the authority to stop Apostasy. As Bishop Ignatius stresses: "Do not attempt to stop it with your weak hand..." But what then should we do? "Avoid it, protect yourself from it, and that is enough for you. Get to know the spirit of the times, study it so that you can avoid its influence whenever possible." This is what the same Bishop Ignatius teaches us.

And do not his words, written more than 100 years ago and so obviously related to our time, exude genuine prophetic inspiration and undoubted enlightenment from on high: "Judging by the spirit of the age and the intellectual ferment, one must suppose that the structure of the Church, which has long been wavering, will collapse terribly and quickly. There is no one to stop or oppose this. The means adopted to support it are borrowed from the elements of the world which are hostile to the Church and will hasten its fall rather than prevent it. May the merciful Lord defend the remnant of those who believe in Him. But this remnant is tiny, and it becomes more and more so."

Thus we evidently have lived to see this "terrible and quick collapse of the structure of the Church!" The enemy of the human race is employing all his efforts and all his means to pull it down, and he is widely supported in this by open and secret apostates from the true faith and Church, including even those

who have betrayed their high vocations and oaths as clergymen and even as hierarchs heading certain individual churches.

In truth, we are experiencing a terrible time, a time such as has never before been seen in the history of Christianity, in the history of mankind! A time of almost total instability! And insofar as we wish to remain faithful to true Orthodoxy, many obligations are placed upon us. We must, as Bishop Ignatius instructs us, avoid and protect ourselves from the Apostasy which is growing so rapidly in the world. We must defend ourselves against the corrupting spirit of the times to avoid its influence.

And to this end we must first of all understand and never forget: that at the present time not everything that bears the most holy and most dear name of Orthodoxy really is Orthodoxy; that there now also exists pseudo-Orthodoxy, which we must fear and from which we must flee as from fire; that true Orthodoxy is only that which does not accept and does not permit in anything, either in teaching or in church practices, any sort of innovations opposed to the Word of God and the decrees of the Universal Church; that true Orthodoxy does not bless and does not indulge modern fashion -- the morality and customs of the modern, corrupt world, which, even more than in Apostolic times, is lying in evil, for it is a world which has abandoned God; that true Orthodoxy considers only pleasing God and saving souls, not arrangements for temporary, earthly happiness, a career, and earthly advantages and possessions; that true Orthodoxy is spiritual, not natural and carnal, not attached to the earth -- to earthly feelings and experiences.

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

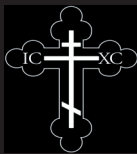
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THE DIFFERENCES AMONG TRIALS

A section taken from "Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles, Experiences, Teachings," by Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi

Trials, or temptations (*πειρασμοί, peirasmoi*) are so called because they engender experience (*πειρα, peira*), since in the unseen warfare they do indeed afford spiritual knowledge to those who are mindful. Anything is called a temptation if it is in opposition to our struggle for faith and true piety as we press on towards submission to God, but they are sub-divided into various kinds, according to the understanding of the Fathers. There are the trials of those actively engaged in the struggle, so that they may make additional gains and progress in their struggle. There are the trials of the slothful and unwilling, to make them beware of things that are harmful and dangerous. There are the trials of those who are drowsy or sleeping, in order to wake them up. Then again there are the trials of those who have distanced themselves and gone astray, to make them draw near to God. Different again are the trials of the righteous and friends of God, so that they may inherit the promise. There are also trials of the perfect, which God permits in order to bring them forward in the Church for the strengthening of the faithful and as an example to be emulated. There is also another kind of trial, again of the perfect, such as those endured by our Lord and the Apostles, who fulfilled the law of communion with the world by taking up the trials which are ours.

Spiritual fathers also participate in this law of 'communion' by bearing the burdens and the weaknesses of their spiritual children through prayers and other strug-

gles, supplementing what is lacking in others. There is also another way, according to the Fathers, in which one person may be a sharer in someone else's trials, and this is as follows: the accuser shares in the trials of the accused, the slanderer in those of the slandered, the wrongdoer in those of the wronged -- especially when those who are wronged endure the harm done to them without a murmur.

We shall speak at this point of the trials of those who are making progress as a result of their attentiveness and willingness to struggle, which -- again in the judgment of our Fathers -- are usually the following: indolence, heaviness of body, languor of the limbs, listlessness, confusion of the mind, suspicion of bodily sickness -- faintheartedness, in other words -- darkening of the thoughts, being abandoned by human help, deprivation in their external needs and the like. All these things, when -- by God's consent -- they befall participants in the struggle, give rise to a sense of dereliction. Their faith then begins to waver, as if the hope which had given them heart up till then had been cut off. But secretly grace consoles them so that they do not change their regime, because it convinces them that the trial has not come from themselves, since everything testifies that they have not abandoned their consistent good practice. After facing this difficulty and receiving the mystical consolation of grace, they turn with faith and yearning towards God who has power to save them, and fall down in humility asking His salvation, which is the end to which they have endured these trials. Such, according to the Fathers, are the trails of those who are advanced and making progress in spiritual matters.

In those who chance to neglect their duties or, which is the most terrible, fall into self-conceit and pride, the trials are

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different and harsher, in the same way as surgical operations and excisions are called for in cases of serious illness. The demons at first make war on them openly and quite shamelessly and insistently, and beyond their strength (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13). They experience a darkening of the mind so that they lose the power of discrimination altogether, and imbecility and idiotic thoughts abound; an intense war of the flesh, pressing their will to go contrary to nature; anger for no reason and intractability in whatever concerns their own will; quarrelling on the spur of the moment and rebuking people at random; blasphemous thoughts against God; a loss of courage in the heart; being mocked by the demons, secretly and openly; lack of restraint in idle talk and, in general, a desire for the world and for idle vanities. After that, trials which are severe and hard to dispel: strange and unusual symptoms of illness and painful wounds, a poverty and dereliction that is extraordinary and defies consolation, and all other things that seem impossible and insoluble, giving rise to despair and fear because the heart is devoid of hope. All these things are consequences mainly of pride, and come upon the person who has been led astray into believing in himself; these are all also the medicines for his healing, to make him sober up and humble himself and vomit out the bile of this devastating perversion.

Just as in matters of grace there are means of assistance which augment our progress both in time and in quantity, so also on the side of error there are factors which contribute to its

fluctuation. On the side of grace, when by the grace of Christ someone treads the strait and narrow way (Mt. 7:14) of the commandments according to the measure of his understanding and accompanied by humility and compassion in the service of love, he increases the aid and illumination given by grace.

Something comparable happens on the side of deception. If impatience and grumbling are added to it, one's cross becomes twice as heavy, if not more. Faintheartedness and lack of hope are the most excruciating horrors of the unseen warfare, and are reserved for hard and un-humbled characters as the harshest lesson, which is a taste of hell itself and of punishment, a palpable sign of desertion and dereliction. Here it takes the prayers of saints and the intervention of a miracle for the heart to be softened. Many prayers and tears are needed for this sick soul to be reunited with grace and to be healed: otherwise it is inevitable that error will conquer, and that way lies madness and destruction.

O blessed humility and gratitude! Who is wise and will keep thy ways and understand thy statutes, that he may win thee totally

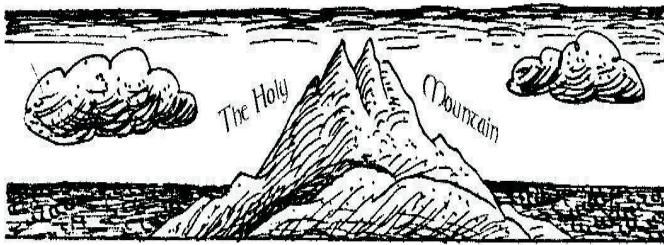
and have thee as his intimate companion: that thou mayest go before him and follow him in all his ways, until thou presentest him to thy Master and King, who has taken thee as His delight and sharer of His throne and has revealed thee to us! For he says, 'Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart' (and not just in appearance) 'and you will find rest for your souls!' (Mt. 11:29).



St. Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

It was not our intention to repeat so many problems and explanations that are familiar to us from the Fathers; we were carried away by our train of thought, since almost unintentionally we found ourselves amidst the whirlwinds of trials to which we so often fall victim through our many deficiencies and lapses in attention.

The ever-memorable Elder [Joseph] never stopped explaining to us at every stage of our life, in his own winsome way, the aim and purpose of these misfortunes that befall us. We understood the movement and functioning of these misfortunes constantly within the framework of the spiritual law which regulated everything in our lives in detail. Indeed, how much wisdom is concealed here for those who have understanding in the science of the spiritual life, when they chart their course over this ocean of life using nothing but this lodestone of the spiritual law, 'the law of the spirit of life' (Rom. 8:2).



CHURCH IN THE END TIMES

By Alexander Kalomiros, from his book "Against False Union"

The world and the devil are leading the Church to such frightening trials that the day might come when all the bishops of the land will enter into communion with the heretics. What will the faithful do then? What will the few do who have the heroism not to follow the masses, not to follow their kin, their neighbors, and their fellow citizens?

All the faithful will have to understand that the Church is not there where it appears to be. Liturgies will continue to be performed, and the churches will be filled with people, but the Church will have no relation with those churches or those clergy and those faithful. The Church is where the truth is. The faithful are those who continue the unbroken tradition of Orthodoxy, that work of the Holy Spirit. Those real priests are those who think, live, and teach as the Fathers and the Saints of the Church did, or at least do not reject them in their teaching. Where that continuity of thought and life does not exist, it is a deception to speak of the Church, even if all the outward marks speak of it.

There will always be found a canonical priest, ordained by a canonical bishop, who will follow the Tradition. Around such priests will gather the small groups of the faithful who will remain until the last days. Each one of these small groups will be a local Church of God. The faithful will find in them the entire fullness of the grace of God. They will have no need of

administrative or other ties, for the communion that will exist among them will be the most perfect there can be. It will be communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, communion in the Holy Spirit. The golden links of the unalterable Orthodox Tradition will connect those Churches among themselves as well as with the Churches of the past, with the Church triumphant of heaven. In these small groups the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church will be preserved intact.

Of course, it is wonderful that order and coordination should exist in the outward functionings of the various churches, and that the less important churches should receive their direction and guidance from the more important churches, the way it is now between dioceses, metropolises, archdioceses, and patriarchates, but in the last days, such outward relations and contacts will be impossible most of the time. When the age of the Antichrist approaches, even the Ark of the Church will be difficult to discern. There will be such confusion in the world that one Church will not be able to be certain of the orthodoxy of another because of the multitude of false prophets who will fill the world and who will be saying, "here is Christ," and "there is Christ." Whatever will be accepted officially as the Church, having little by little already betrayed the treasures of the Faith, will have been assimilated by the indescribable, unifying marmalade which will retain most of the outward signs of the Church with satanic cleverness. Here and there small groups of faithful with some priest will still preserve the true Tradition alive. However, there might even be misunderstandings among the really Orthodox churches because of the confusion of tongues which exists in the contemporary Babel. But none of that will ever sever the essential unity of the Church.

But who will be able to recognize the Church of Christ in those small, scorned groups of faithful that lack all worldly splendor? Yet at the end of time, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church will be just those forgotten and outwardly disunited little parishes which may even be ignorant of the others' existence, but will be united among themselves by the mystical bonds of the Body and Blood of the Lord, in the Holy Spirit, with the common Faith and Tradition which will remain undefiled.



We must not be deceived by the smiling mask of ecumenism. Ecumenism is opposed, at every single step, to those who seek the Truth and strive to enter the Church of Christ.

Alexander Kalomiros

THE EVIL OF ABORTION: A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

*By Vera Lord, from Rachel's Children, Spring / Summer / Fall 1999,
Vol. 12, No. 1.*

I have a small ghost who follows me everywhere. He changes. Sometimes he's an infant, sometimes a toddler, sometimes -- mostly now -- he's a teenage boy.

I was thirty-four when I killed my child. If I had allowed him to live, he would have been born in August, just like his mother. There is not a moment of my life that he is not with me. Our relationship has changed. In the past, I always saw him as my accuser or my judge. Today, my murdered child is no longer my judge, but a sad regretful ghost, whose smile I have never seen.

I was twenty-one weeks pregnant. I had felt movement. There is no easy "it was just a piece of tissue" argument for me. One more week, and I would have been beyond the "legal" limit for abortion in the state where I lived.

There are many so-called "mitigating factors" that led to my killing my baby at twenty-one weeks of life: Until three days before the abortion, I did not know I was pregnant. I had three negative pregnancy tests and thought my growing stomach was a tumor similar to those that had killed several in my family. The movement I felt I dismissed as gas. Having no idea of my condition, I had continued to smoke three packs of cigarettes a day and abuse alcohol and drugs -- mostly methamphetamines. I was in a dysfunctional abusive marriage and my baby was not conceived in love -- he was conceived in extreme violence.

I was going to leave out all three of the above, but I have told you about them for a very important reason: The abortion industry would cite any and all of the above as reason enough to kill my child, since they consider any "inconvenient" pregnancy abortable, and, although mine was not life-threatening to me, it went far beyond "inconvenient." Those who practice abortion would have you believe that all three of these factors absolve me of guilt and make the murder of my child perfectly all right -- rather like the extraction of an impacted wisdom tooth -- painful and regrettable and stressful, but totally necessary.

Well-meaning friends have all at one time or another said things like this: "With all the nicotine, alcohol, and drugs, you would have had a seriously damaged child; abortion was the kind thing to do." "Considering who the father was, the child could've been a serial killer; better to abort." "It was the result of a near-rape in a violent, abusive marriage; better to abort." "You were forced into it by your crazy ex when you were in a weakened condition; you're not responsible anyhow." "You did the best and only thing you could do; get on with your life."

You see, I have to tell you my story, because if any case exemplifies a supposed guilt-free abortion, it is mine. I've heard

every rationalization -- every single one. I have lived behind the feel-good, warm and fuzzy walls of public opinion, political correctness, and conventional wisdom -- and I am here to tell you it is all unmitigated [absolute nonsense].

I believe that on a primal gut level we all know -- really know -- that abortion is murder at its most horrific. Telling ourselves that it is anything else is pure denial. All the careful layers of makeup we blend over it are for naught. We know it for what it is. And that pure soul-knowledge cannot be erased or eradicated by all the feel-good rationalizations on earth. Self-hatred may be the worse sin -- I know it is certainly the worst feeling. After I killed my baby, self-hatred became my whole life. Subconsciously I thought suicide to be too easy an out (much like the notion that lethal injection is too easy a punishment for many really brutal murderers). So I did not kill my physical body as I had killed my child; instead I committed emotional and spiritual suicide. I created a whole new personality. Since then, I have had psychiatrists tell me that what I did was not unusual -- very similar to child abuse victims, who "split-off," and become another personality in order to deal with the abuse.

During the next sixteen years, there were many times when I literally did not know the person in the mirror. Self-hatred colored my every waking and sleeping moment. It was as if I had pushed an invisible self-destruct button. I divorced my husband only to enter into a disastrous marriage with a man I did not love, whom I knew to be totally dependent and incapable of honest work, and proceeded to allow myself to be used by him and his family for thirteen years. Deep inside, I was convinced I deserved all of it. My self-worth had totally disappeared. All the things I had loved to do in my old life were now off-limits; I would not allow myself enjoyment. Dreamless sleep was my only respite, and it did not come often. When I did pray, it was a secret prayer: I prayed to die, to simply cease. I believed in an after-life, and I knew that hell itself could not be any worse than the life I was experiencing.

The pain would lie in wait and ambush me at unexpected times. A scene on TV, a passage in a book -- always about someone's missed chance at being a mother. I would be overcome by the kind of racking sobs that are more like spasms than crying. I wanted to just lie down and go to sleep and never get up. I lived in this self-imposed hell for sixteen years.

Then, in 1997, a heart condition I'd had since childhood became suddenly worse, and I decided to move back to the East Coast to die. As always, I was last on my own priority list. My main reason for the move was so that the leech I'd married would have a better chance at getting work after I was gone. Living again on the East Coast and in the same state where I'd had a happy youth was like sprinkling water on a nearly-dead plant. The total change in environment created the first crack in my shell of self-hatred. I slowly began to feel like me again. In the fall of 1997 came the event that finally set me free. I was taken as a guest to the All-Saints Greek Orthodox Church. Although in my youth I had studied nearly every major religion, I had never entered an Orthodox Christian church. Suddenly,

I was home. All the pieces of my life fell into place. Although I really knew no one there except my host, it was undeniably my home. I took instruction with my spiritual father for the next ten months, and on August 28, 1998, I was baptized. At the confession before my baptismal, I finally, after nearly two decades of wandering in hell, laid down my burden. My spiritual father, an Orthodox priest who can trace his priesthood in a direct line to the Apostles, in much the same ceremony performed in the catacombs, laid his hand on my head and, in Christ's name, forgave me of the murder of my child. I was free. Regaining my self-love has led to my regaining something else that I thought was lost forever. I have entered into a loving relationship with the most wonderful man in the world, and I am truly blessed. I am indeed free.

This brings me to the reason I am telling you my story. When I first began classes in the Orthodox religion, I read everything I could about Orthodox views on everything. All that I read said that Orthodox Christians were anti-abortion. I asked when and where does the local Orthodox Right-to-Life group meet. Huge faux pas, vaguely akin to a loud burp at a sophisticated cocktail party. I am a very fast learner; I never make the same social error twice. I circled warily around the issue and, by bits and pieces, I learned that the charitable organizations, the food festival committees, the fund-raisers, were all politically correct. Even the occasional weekend retreat at the monastery, as I was in the habit of doing, was just fine. But, abortion? "It's no one's business and each woman's private choice." Now, tell me again, which food festival committee are you joining? Excuse me, but it is my business. It is **not** your private choice to kill your baby, and, if I can persuade you not to commit the same, awful, life-ruining act that I did, it is my duty to do so.

There is a huge echoing silence from the Orthodox Church on abortion. Strange, but everyone who tells me that "it's a woman's private choice" is a mother and/or grandmother. Perhaps they fear their daughters or granddaughters may be faced with a life-disrupting pregnancy and want an escape hatch.

I'm not asking you to march in parades and wave placards and sign petitions or even to put a bumper sticker on your car. I can't do any of those things. I am not a placard-waving, in-your-face activist. Here it is: The next time anyone, even a dearly-valued friend or family member tells you, "It's a woman's choice," don't say anything. Just give them a copy of this article. If reading this can make one person even just begin to reconsider their "Pro-Choice" position, I have succeeded.

I would give my own life to be able to go back in time and allow my child to live. I cannot. I pray that your showing someone -- just one person -- this story will cause her to stop and reconsider before she performs the same horrible act that killed my child and nearly killed me. I need no perfect, logical arguments. You know in your soul that abortion is the murder of your baby. In the name of 2,000 years of Orthodox Christianity, I say now, break your silence and speak -- not in parades and demonstrations, but quietly, as you are reading this now, one child of God at a time...

TURNING TALENTS TO PROFIT

By Saint Gregory the Great, excerpted from "Pope Saint Gregory the Great: Parables of the Gospel"

For even as a man going into a far country called his servants and delivered to them his goods; and to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability... (Matt. 24:14-30)

The reading of this Gospel, dearly beloved, would have us consider that those of us who receive more gifts than others in this world will be judged more strictly by its Creator. For, according as the gifts increase, the account demanded will be more exacting; therefore, a man should be more humble and use his gift more diligently in God's service, the more heavily he sees himself indebted. Here, then, is a man about to set out on a journey. He calls his servants and distributes some talents among them, so that they may trade with them. After a long time, he returns to ask those servants for an account of their doings. He rewards those who have worked well and gained profit but he condemns the slothful forever.

Who is this man who sets out on a journey but our Redeemer, Who ascended into heaven in that same flesh which He had assumed? The earth is the proper home of the flesh, but it travels, as it were, to foreign lands, when our Redeemer ascends with it to heaven. This man, on the eve of his journey, entrusted his goods to his servants because he left spiritual gifts to the faithful who believed in him. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another only one. There are five senses of the body: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell; so the five talents represent the gift of the five senses, that is to say, external knowledge. The gifts of understanding and action are signified by the two talents, and the single talent represents the understanding alone. But he who received the five talents gained another five, for there are some people who, although they cannot understand interior and mystical things, nevertheless, by their desire for their heavenly home, teach sound doctrine to all whom they meet, doctrine concerning those exterior matters which they can understand. As they themselves refrain from the caprices of the flesh, they are freed from the fetters of earthly things and from the desire of visible delights, and by their counsel, they free others also. Likewise, there are some who, as if endowed with two talents, have a good grasp of what refers to intellect and action; they understand the subtleties of the interior life and outwardly they work wonders. When they teach others by their learning and example, they derive, as it were, a double portion from their trading. But he who received only one talent, going his way, made a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. To hide one's talent in the earth is to occupy the intelligence God gives us in purely earthly matters, not to seek spiritual profit, never to lift our heart above worldly considerations. /.../

Listen to the sentence passed upon the idle servant: Take ye

away therefore the talent from him and give it him that hath ten talents. It would have seemed more natural to give the talent taken from the worthless servant to him who had received two talents rather than to him who had received five, that is, to him who had less rather than to him who had more. But, as we said before, by the five talents the five senses are signified, that is to say, the knowledge of exterior things, while the two talents represent understanding and action. Then he who had received the two talents had more than him who received five because the latter, who merited the praise of his master by his stewardship of the exterior things he had been given, was as yet without the interior gift of understanding. The one talent, then, representing intellect, was rightly given to him who looked well to his outward responsibilities. We see this occur every day in the Church: many who are faithful servants in external things, who put to profitable use the outward benefits which God's grace confers on them, attain a mystical understanding which produces also their inward enlightenment.

Immediately we hear that other sentence which is passed upon mankind in general: To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound: but, from him that hath not that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away. It will be given to him who already has and he shall abound, for everyone who has the gift of charity receives other gifts besides. But he who has not the gift of charity will lose even those gifts which he seemed to have. So it is necessary, brethren, that charity should be the motive of all your actions. It is true charity to love your friend in God and your enemy for God's sake. He who has not charity loses all the good he had; he is deprived of the talent he was given and, in the words of Christ Himself, he is cast into exterior darkness. The punishment of him who voluntarily lived in interior darkness is to be thrust into exterior darkness; there, against his will, he must suffer the darkness of punishment because here he willingly enjoyed the blindness of his passion.

We should observe that no idler is completely deprived of talent. There is no one who can say truly: I have received no talent and therefore I cannot be called to account for it. We have all received something, however small, for which we shall have to render an account. One received the gift of intelligence and with it the duty of preaching. Another receives worldly wealth, and with it the obligation of using it well. Another received neither intelligence nor wealth but he learned the craft with which he earns his livelihood, and this same skill will be accounted to him as the talent given. A fourth possesses none of these things, but it chanced that he enjoys the friendship of some rich man, and this familiarity is his talent. If he neglects to mediate with his friend on behalf of the poor, he is condemned for burying his talent.

...The judge, when he comes, will demand from each of us in accordance with the gifts he gave us. So that each one may be sure that his account will be an acceptable one he should

think continually, and with fear, of the gifts he has received. For now the time is near when He who left us will return. For when He, having been born on this earth, went far away from it, it was as if He went on a journey. But soon He will return to call us to account. If we slacken in our good works, he will judge us all the more severely for those talents which he gave us. Think, then, of what you have received, and try to profit by its use. No earthly cares must distract us from spiritual works lest, if we hide the talent we have been given, we arouse the anger of the Lord to Whom it belongs.



ADMONITIONS FOR PARENTS

By our Holy Father, St. John Chrysostom

- Having children is a matter of nature; but raising them and educating them in the virtues is a matter of mind and will. By the duty of raising them I mean not only not allowing them to die of hunger, as people often limit their obligation toward their children to doing. For this is needed neither books nor rubrics, for nature speaks of it quite loudly. I am speaking of the concern for educating children's hearts in virtues and piety -- a sacred duty which cannot be transgressed without thereby becoming guilty of the children's murder, in a certain sense.

- Your children will always be sufficiently wealthy if they receive from you a good upbringing that is able to order their moral life and behavior. Thus, strive not to make them rich, but rather to make them pious masters of their passions, rich in virtues. Teach them not to think up illusory needs, reckoning their worth according to worldly standards. Attentively watch their deeds, their acquaintances and their attachments -- and do not expect any mercy from God if you do not fulfill this duty.

- The youth to whom you give a good upbringing will not only enjoy general respect, he will also become dearer to you yourselves! Your attachment to him will not be a mere natural attraction -- it will be the fruit of his virtue. For this, during your old age, you will in turn receive from him the services of his filial love. He will be your support. For just as those who do not revere the Lord also have contempt for their own parents, those who revere God, the Father of all men, will have every respect for those who gave them life.

- Children who are submissive and faithful to God in their obedience to His law will have found an abundant source of happiness, even in this temporal life. A poor man with Christian morals inspires respect and love from others. Meanwhile, with an evil and depraved heart, all your riches will not save you from the displeasure and aversion of everyone around you.

Από την Τραγωδία της Μικράς Ασίας

*Του Παναγιώτη Μελικίδη, από την «Εκκλησιαστική Παρέμβαση»
(Μηνιαία Έκδοση της Ίερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Ναυπάκτου και
Αγίου Βλασίου)*

Στις 27 Αυγούστου του 1922 τὰ κεμαλικὰ στρατεύματα, ἄφοϋ διέσπασαν τὴν ἀμυντικὴ γραμμὴ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν στρατευμάτων στὴν περιοχὴ Ἑσκί Σεχίρ-Κιουτάχεια-Αφιδόν-Καραχισάρ, εἰσέβαλαν στὴν πόλη τῆς Σμύρνης, ὅπου καὶ πλειοψηφοῦσε τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ στοιχεῖο. Τὰ θύματα ἦταν πολλὰ ὅπως πολλές ἦταν καὶ οἱ καταστροφές, βιασμοὶ καὶ ληηλασίες τῶν βαρβάρων Τούρκων, τοὺς ὁποίους σωστὰ ἀποκαλεῖ ὁ George Horton, φημισμένος Ἀμερικανὸς συγγραφεὺς τῆς ἐποχῆς ἐκείνης, ὡς τὸ «στίγμα τῆς Ἀσίας».

Ἀνάμεσα στὰ πολλὰ αὐτὰ θύματα τῆς τουρκικῆς θηριωδίας ἀνήκει καὶ ὁ Μητροπολίτης Σμύρνης καὶ Ἐξάρχος πάσης Ἀσίας, Χρυσόστομος Καλαφάτης. Τὸ μαρτυρικὸ τέλος τοῦ Ἱεράρχη θεωρεῖται τὸ ἐπιστέγασμα τῶν φρικαλεοτήτων ποὺ διέπραξαν οἱ Τοῦρκοι σὲ βάρος τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ στοιχείου.

Τὸ Σάββατο τῆς 27ης Αυγούστου, καὶ ἐνῶ ὁ Χρυσόστομος φρόντιζε νὰ ἀνακουφίσῃ τοὺς πρόσφυγες ποὺ εἶχαν συρρεῦσει ἀπὸ τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῆς Μ. Ἀσίας στὸ προαύλιο τοῦ Μητροπολιτικοῦ Ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας Φωτεινῆς, κλήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν φρούραρχο Σαλὴ Ζεκὴ, ὁ ὁποῖος τὸν ὑποχρέωσε νὰ ἐκδώσῃ ἀνακοίνωση, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ὁποία οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ἔπρεπε νὰ παραμείνουν στὰ σπίτια τους καὶ νὰ παραδώσουν τὸν ὄπλισμό τους. Τὸ ἴδιο βράδυ, στὶς 8 περίπου, κλήθηκε νὰ παρουσιαστῇ στὸν Ὑποστράτηγο Νουρεντίν πασά, μαζί μὲ τοὺς δημογέροντες Τσουρουκτσόγλου καὶ Κλιμάνογλου. Δὲν γνωρίζουμε ἐπακριβῶς τί διαμείφθηκε μεταξὺ τοῦ Μητροπολίτη καὶ τοῦ Νουρεντίν. Πιθανότατα ὁ Τοῦρκος Ὑποστράτηγος κατηγόρησε τὸν Χρυσόστομο γιὰ τὴν στάση ποὺ κράτησε κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς κατοχῆς τῆς Σμύρνης καὶ γιὰ τὴν ὑποστήριξη ποὺ παρεῖχε στὴν Μικρασιατικὴ ἄμυνα. Αὐτὲς οἱ πράξεις ἰσοδυναμοῦσαν μὲ προδοσία ἐναντι τῆς Ὄθωμανικῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας ἐφ' ὅσον ὁ Χρυσόστομος ἦταν Τοῦρκος ὑπῆκοος.

Αὐτόπτες μάρτυρες εἶδαν τὸν Χρυσόστομο νὰ φεύγῃ ἀπὸ τὸ Διοικητήριο. Τότε ὁ Νουρεντίν πραγματοποιήσε τὴν μεσαιωνικὴ του ἰδέα, νὰ παραδώσῃ τὸν Μητροπολίτη στὸν φανατισμένο τουρκικὸ ὄχλο. Ἐμφανίστηκε στὸ μπαλκόνι καὶ φώναζε στὸ πλῆθος ποὺ εἶχε συγκεντρωθεῖ στὴν πλατεία ὅτι ὁ Ἱεράρχης ἦταν δικὸς τους καὶ νὰ τὸν

δικάσῃ ὁ τουρκικὸς λαός. Ὁ R. Ruaux ἀναφέρει ὅτι πρὶν τὸν παραδώσει στὸ τουρκικὸ πλῆθος ὁ Νουρεντίν εἶπε: «Ἄν σᾶς ἔκανε καλὸ, κάντε του καλὸ, ἂν σᾶς ἔκανε κακὸ, κάντε του κακὸ».

Ἐπακολούθησε φριχτὴ κακοποίηση τοῦ Μητροπολίτη ἀπὸ τὸν φανατισμένο ὄχλο μέχρι τὴν στιγμή ποὺ κάποιος Τουρκοκρητικὸς σπλαχνίστηκε τὸν Ἱεράρχη καὶ τὸν πυροβόλησε, γιὰ νὰ θέσῃ τέρμα στὸ μαρτύριό του.

Εἶναι γνωστὸ στοὺς περισσότερους ὅτι ὁ Χρυσόστομος εἶχε ἀρνηθεῖ νὰ φύγῃ μαζί μὲ τὶς ἄλλες Ἑλληνικὲς Ἀρχές. Εἶχε ἀρνηθεῖ νὰ φύγῃ ἀκόμη καὶ μετὰ τὴν εἴσοδο τῶν τουρκικῶν δυνάμεων στὴ Σμύρνη, ἐνῶ ξένοι διπλωμάτες προθυμοποιήθηκαν νὰ τὸν βοηθήσουν. Ἦταν μάλιστα ἡ μοναδικὴ Ἑλληνικὴ ἀρχὴ ποὺ παρέμεινε στὴν πόλη. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ αὐτὸ ποὺ σημειώνει ὁ George Horton, ὁ ὁποῖος ἦταν ἐπίσης καὶ ὁ Ἀμερικανὸς πρόξενος τῆς περιοχῆς, στὸ βιβλίο του «Μάστιγα τῆς Ἀσίας» (“The Blight of Asia”): «Τοῦ προσφέρθηκε καταφύγιο στὸ Γαλλικὸ



Προξενεῖο καὶ συνοδεία ἀπὸ Γάλλους ναῦτες, ἀλλὰ ἀρνήθηκε λέγοντας πὼς τὸ καθῆκον του ἦταν νὰ παραμείνῃ μὲ τὸ ποίμνιό του: “Εἶμαι βοσκὸς καὶ πρέπει νὰ μείνω μὲ τὸ κοπάδι μου.” »

Πρέπει νὰ σημειώσουμε ἐδῶ ὅτι ἀπὸ τοὺς 459 Ἱερεῖς τῆς περιφέρειας Σμύρνης, οἱ 347 βρῆκαν οἰκτρὸ θάνατο ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους. Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Χρυσόστομο, καὶ

πολλοὶ ἄλλοι Ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ Ἱερεῖς εἶχαν μαρτυρικὸ τέλος: τῶν Μοσχονησίων Ἀμβρόσιο Πλειανθίδη τὸν πετάλωσαν, τῶν Κυδωνιῶν Γρηγόριο τὸν ἔθαψαν ζωντανό, τὸν Ἰκονίου Ζήλωνα τὸν ἔσφαξαν, τὸν Ἀρχιερατικὸ Ἐπίτροπο Μπουτζᾶ Ἀρχαντζικᾶκη τὸν σούβλισαν, τὸν Διάκονο Γρηγόριο τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Ναοῦ Ἁγίας Ἄννης Κορδελιῶ τὸν στραγγάλισαν, τὸν Ἱερέα τῆς Ἁγίας Μαρίας τοῦ Κοκάργιαλι τὸν περιέλουσαν μὲ ζεστὸ λάδι, τὸν Ἱερέα Νεῖλο τοῦ Ναοῦ τῆς Κοιμήσεως τοῦ Μπουρνόβα τὸν κατακρεοῦργησαν, τὸν Διάκονο Μελέτιο τοῦ Ναοῦ τῆς Εὐγγελιστρίας τὸν κάρφωσαν σὲ πεῦκο!

Ἀπὸ τὶς 46 Ἐκκλησίες τῆς Σμύρνης καὶ τῶν Προαστίων, διασώθηκαν μόνον τρεῖς καὶ αὐτὲς μέσα στὴν Σμύρνη: τοῦ Ἁγίου Βουκόλου, τοῦ Ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου. Σὲ 2.000 ἀνέρχονται οἱ κατεστραμμένοι ναοὶ ἢ αὐτοὶ ποὺ μετατράπηκαν σὲ τζαμιά, σὲ ἀποθήκες καὶ σὲ στάβλους σὲ ὅλη τὴν Μικρὰ Ἀσία καὶ 800 ναοὶ στὴν Θράκη.

Οἱ Ἑλληνες τῆς πάσης Οἰκουμένης ὀφείλουν νὰ ἐνθυμοῦνται πάντα αὐτὲς τὶς πικρὲς ἀλήθειες, ὅπως καὶ ὀφείλουν νὰ τὶς διδάξουν στὶς ἐπόμενες γενεές μας!

Μὲ τὸ Λάδι τῆς Παναγίας

Πρεσβύτερος Διονύσιος Τάτσης, ἀπὸ τὴν ἡμερίδα «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος»

Μπροστὰ ἀπὸ μισὸ περίπου αἰῶνα, ζοῦσε ἓνας γναφούλακας πὸν ἔλεγαν Ἀντώνη καὶ ἦταν γνωστὸς σὲ πολλὰ χωριά τῆς Κόνιτσας, ἰδίως γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη του οἰκογένεια. Εἶχε ἑννιά παιδιά, ἀπὸ δυὸ ἕως δέκα-ἑπτὰ χρονῶν. Ἐξί ἦταν κορίτσια καὶ τρία ἀγόρια. Ἦταν ἄνθρωπος διαφορετικὸς, μὲ ξεχωριστὸ ἦθος καὶ ἀσυνήθιστη συμπεριφορά. Ὅσοι τὸν γνώριζαν, τὸν περιέγραφαν μὲ ὑπερβολικὰ λόγια. Οἱ περισσότεροι τὸν ἐπαινοῦσαν καὶ τὸν συμπαθοῦσαν. Ὑπῆρχαν, βέβαια, καὶ ἐκεῖνοι, πὸν τὸν ἀντιπαθοῦσαν, χωρὶς αἰτία, καὶ μιλοῦσαν περιφρονητικὰ. Ὁ ἴδιος, ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ τὸ τί λένε οἱ ἄλλοι, ἦταν ὀρμητικὸς στὴ ζωὴ του. Ἀπ' τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δὲν ζητοῦσε βοήθεια.

Προσπαθοῦσε μὲ τὶς δικές του δυνάμεις νὰ καλύπτει τὶς βασικὲς ἀνάγκες τῆς οἰκογένειάς του. Εἶχε τὸ μικρὸ μισθὸ του, τὰ χωράφια, τὸ κυνήγι καὶ μερικὰ εὐκαιρικὰ μεροκάματα.

Ἡ γυναῖκα του, ἡ Δέσπω, ἦταν ἀπλή καὶ προσπαθοῦσε νὰ μεγαλώσει τὰ παιδιά της μὲ ἀξιοπρέπεια, χωρὶς γογγυσμοὺς καὶ θορύβους. Ἦταν καὶ ἀπερίεργη. Δὲν ἠθελε νὰ μαθαίνει τί συνέβαινε στοὺς ἄλλους, στὰ ξένα σπίτια. Ἀπέφυγε τὸ κουτσομπολιὸ καὶ τὶς φιλονικίες. Ὡστόσο, οἱ ἄλλοι ἀσχολοῦνταν καθημερινὰ μὲ τὸ σπίτι της. Τὴν σχολίαζαν μὲ τρόπο σκληρὸ καὶ τὴν χαρακτήριζαν καθυστερημένη, γιατί δὲν ἔκανε ἐκτρώσεις... Ἡ Δέσπω δὲν ἔβγαине ἀπ' τὸ σπίτι. Εἶχε πάντα δουλειὲς καὶ ἦταν μόνιμα κουρασμένη.

Ἡ φτώχεια της ἦταν ἐμφανὴς καὶ δικαιολογημένη. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀδιαφορία τῶν εὐπόρων μεγάλη. Δὲν θυμόταν ἡ Δέσπω ποτὲ νὰ τῆς ἔχει συμπαρασταθεῖ κάποιος. Οὔτε μία δραχμὴ, οὔτε μία καραμέλα γιὰ τὰ παιδιά της!

Ὁ Ἀντώνης, κάθε φορά, πὸν γυρνοῦσε ἀπ' τὰ χωριά στὰ ὁποῖα ὑπηρετοῦσε, κάτι εἶχε στὸν τορβά του. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι πάντα τοῦ ἔδιναν, γιατί τὸν θαύμαζαν καὶ τὸν ἀγαποῦσαν. Τὰ παιδιά του ἀνοίγαν τὸν τορβά γιὰ νὰ δοῦν τί εἶχε μέσα. Τὰ λουκούμια, οἱ καραμέλες καὶ τὰ φρούτα ἐξαφανίζονταν ἀμέσως. Μερικὲς φορές, ὅταν ἔβρισκε εὐκαιρία, τὰ καταβρόχθιζε μόνος του ὁ ζωηρὸς καὶ σωματώδης Νικόλας, τὸ τρίτο παιδί τῆς οἰκογένειας.

Στὸ σχολεῖο τὰ παιδιά τοῦ Ἀντώνη καὶ τῆς Δέσπως ἦταν καλοὶ μαθητές. Δὲν ἀντιμετώπιζαν δυσκολίες καὶ δὲν δημιουργοῦσαν προβλήματα στ' ἄλλα παιδιά, ἦταν κοινωνικοποιημένα καὶ δὲν εἶχαν ἀπαιτήσεις. Ὅχι πῶς

ὑποχωροῦσαν συνέχεια καὶ δέχονταν νὰ τοὺς κοροϊδεῦουν οἱ ἄλλοι, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶχαν ἐγωϊσμὸ καὶ πονηριά.

Ὁ Ἀντώνης ἦταν ἄγνος ἄνθρωπος. Ὁ χαρακτήρας του τραχὺς, ντόμπρος καὶ ἀποφασιστικὸς. Ἀγωνιζόταν ἀδιάκοπα γιὰ τὴν οἰκογένειά του, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ βρισκόταν σὲ διαρκὴ κίνηση, ὅλες τὶς ἐποχές. Ἀκόμα καὶ μέσα στὸ χειμῶνα, πὸν δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανένας λόγος νὰ τρέχει ἀπὸ χωριὸ σὲ χωριὸ γιὰ τυχόν ἀγροτοζημιές. Ἦθελε νὰ γεμίζει καθημερινὰ τὸν τορβά του, γιατί καθημερινὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ θρέφει δέκα στόματα. Μία φορά τὸ μήνα πῆγαινε καὶ στὴ χαράδρα τοῦ Ἀώου, ὅπου ὑπῆρχαν πολλὰ γιδοπρόβατα. Ἐφτανε μέχρι τὴν τοποθεσία Μύγα. Περνοῦσε πάντα ἀπ' τὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Στομίου, ὅπου ἔκανε στάση, ἰδίως ὅταν γύριζε. Τότε βρισκόταν ἐκεῖ ὁ μοναχὸς Παῖσιος, νέος μοναχός, πὸν εἶχε ἔρθει ἀπ' τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος. Ὁ Ἀντώνης γνώριζε τὸ μοναχὸ καὶ συχνὰ τοῦ ἐκμυστηρευόταν ὅτι τὸν ἀπασχολοῦσε. Ἐκεῖνος



ἦταν πρόθυμος πάντα καὶ προσπαθοῦσε μὲ πολλοὺς τρόπους νὰ βοηθᾷ τὸν πολύτεκνο ἀγροφούλακα.

Στὸ μοναστήρι ὁ Ἀντώνης ἠθελε νὰ ἀνάβει μόνος του τὰ καντήλια καὶ νὰ προσεύχεται μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας γιὰ τὴν οἰκογένειά του. Ὁ μοναχὸς Παῖσιος ἄφηνε τὸν Ἀντώνη ἐλεύθερο, γιατί γνώριζε τὴν καλὴ του προαίρεση καὶ τὴ βαθιὰ του πίστη. Δὲν μπορούσε, ὅμως, νὰ ἐξηγήσει τὸν πυροβολισμό πὸν ἄκουγε κάθε φορά πὸν ἀπομακρυνόταν ἀπ' τὸ μοναστήρι ὁ Ἀντώνης. Ἦξερε ὅτι εἶχε πάντα τὸ δίκαννο κοντὰ του, ἀλλὰ δὲν γνώριζε τί σημάδευε. Δὲν τὸν εἶχε ρωτήσει, γιατί δὲν ἠθελε νὰ φανεῖ περίεργος. Συνεχιζόταν αὐτὴ ἡ τακτικὴ γιὰ ἄρκετους μῆνες. Κάποτε, ὅμως, ὁ

μοναχός, ἐτοιμάζοντας καφέ στὸν Ἀντώνη, βρῆκε τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή καὶ τὸν ρώτησε:

- Βρὲ Ἀντώνη, κάθε φορά, πὸν φεύγεις ἀπ' τὸ μοναστήρι, ἀκούω καὶ μία ντουφεκιά· τί βρίσκεις καὶ σημαδεύεις;

Ὁ Ἀντώνης, λίγο ἀνήσυχος, ἀποκάλυψε:

- Ἐέρεις, παππούλη, ἐγὼ ἔχω μεγάλη οἰκογένεια καὶ τὰ οικονομικά μου εἶναι λιγοστὰ. Δὲν φτάνουν ν' ἀγοράσω κρέας γιὰ τὰ παιδιά μου. Ἐτσι παίρνω κοντὰ καὶ τὸ δίκαννο καὶ ὅταν βρῶ κάτι στὸ βουνό, τὸ σκοτώνω.

- Μὰ ἐσὺ ντουφεκᾷς κάθε φορά πὸν ἔρχεσαι ἐδῶ!

- Πρέπει νὰ στὸ φανερώσω, παππούλη, τί κάνω. Ὅταν ἀνάβω τὰ καντήλια, κάνω τὴν προσευχή μου καὶ ζητάω ἀπ' τὴν Παναγία νὰ μὲ βοηθήσει νὰ πάω στὰ παιδιά μου λίγο κρέας. Κι ἐκεῖνη πάντα βοηθᾷ. Ἐγὼ παίρνω λάδι ἀπ' τὸ καντήλι της καὶ ἀλείφω κάθε φορά τὸ στόχαστρο, πὸν εἶναι πάνω στὴν κἀνη, καὶ ὅλο κάτι βρίσκω.

- Πιστεύεις ότι σέ βοηθάει ή Παναγία σ' αυτό;
- Βέβαια, παππούλη. Σέ μιὰ συγκεκριμένη μεριά, ἐκεῖ κοντά στόν Ἀσπρόλακκο, τίς περισσότερες φορές μέ περιμένει κάποιο ἀγριοκάτσικο, σταλμένο ἀπ' τήν Παναγία. Τό σκοτώνω καί τό παίρνω.

Ὁ μοναχός Παῖσιος εἶχε μείνει κατάπληκτος ἀπ' αὐτό, πού ἄκουσε. Ζήλευε τόν Ἀντώνη γιά τήν πίστη του, ἀλλά καί τόν καθαρό του νοῦ. Τόν θαύμαζε, πού μέ τήν προσευχή ἐξασφάλιζε τό κρέας τῶν παιδιῶν του.

Ὁ Ἀντώνης, ὅταν σκότωνε τό ἀπαγορευμένο ἀπ' τό νόμο ζῶο, τό σήκωνε στήν πλάτη του καί κατηφόριζε ἀπό ἓνα δικό του μονοπάτι κοντά στή ὄχθη τοῦ ποταμοῦ Ἀώου, σ' ἓνα κρυφὸ σημεῖο, ὅπου κανένας δέν μπορούσε νά τόν δεῖ. Ἦταν δυὸ μεγάλες πέτρες, πού εἶχαν σχηματίσει μία πυραμίδα κι ἓνα μικρὸ σπήλαιο, ἐνῶ γύρω-γύρω ὑπῆρχαν ἱτιές καί διάφοροι θάμνοι. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Ἀντώνης ἔγδερνε τό ἀγριοκάτσικο, τό κομμάτιαζε καί τό ἔβαζε μέσα στοὺς τορβάδες του. Κι ὅταν ἐκεῖνος ἔφευγε ἀπ' τό σπήλαιο, ἐμφανίζονταν οἱ ἀλεποῦδες καί τὰ τσακάλια, πού ἔτρωγαν ὅτι ἄφηνε ὁ λαθροκυνηγός. Συγχρόνως κατέβαιναν καί τὰ κοράκια, πού ζητοῦσαν κι αὐτὰ τό δικό τους μερίδιο.

Ὁ Ἀντώνης, φορώντας τήν ὑπηρεσιακή του στολή, φορτώνονταν τό κρέας, πού κάποτε ἔφτανε καί τὰ εἴκοσι κιλά, καί ὁδοιποροῦσε πολλές ὥρες γιά νά φτάσει στό σπίτι του. Ἡ ἱκανοποίηση του ἦταν βαθιά καί ἡ εὐχαριστία πρὸς τήν Παναγία ἀδιάκοπη.

Ὅταν ὁ μοναχός Παῖσιος ἔφυγε ἀπ' τό μοναστήρι τοῦ Στομίου, ὁ Ἀντώνης συνέχισε γιά λίγα χρόνια τήν ἴδια διαδρομή, ὅσο ἄντεχαν οἱ σωματικές του δυνάμεις. Πολὺ ἀργότερα, συνταξιούχος πιά, ἔμαθε ὅτι ὁ γνωστός του μοναχός Παῖσιος βρισκόταν στό Ἅγιον Ὄρος καί θέλησε νά τόν ἐπισκεφθεῖ. Ἡ συνάντηση ὑπῆρξε συγκινητική. Ὁ φημισμένος πιά μέγας Γέροντας θυμήθηκε τὰ παλιά καί συμβούλεψε τό γερασμένο Ἀντώνη:

- Να διατηρήσεις τήν ἐμπιστοσύνη σου στήν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ καί νά 'σαι σίγουρος ὅτι ὅλα θά πηγαίνουν καλά!



Ἡθεϊκή πληροφορία τῆς εὐπρόσδεκτης προσευχῆς εἶναι ἡ θεία παρηγοριά πού νιώθει μετά τήν προσευχή ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Ἀνάλογα μέ τήν θυσία καί τήν προσευχή πού κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιά τόν ἑαυτό του ἢ γιά τόν συνάνθρωπό του, θά δεχθεῖ καί τήν θεία βοήθεια. Ὅποιος κουράζεται γιά τόν πλησίον του ἀπό καθαρή ἀγάπη, ξεκουράζεται μέ τήν κούραση. Ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνος πού ἀγαπάει τόν ἑαυτό του καί τεμπελιάζει, κουράζεται καί μέ τό νά κάθεται. Ὁ σωστός ἄνθρωπος δέν εἶναι αὐτός πού λέει σωστὲς κουβέντες, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος πού ζεῖ καί σωστά καί Εὐαγγελικά.

Γέρων Παῖσιος

«Καρδίαν Συντετριμμένην καὶ Τεταπειωμένην»

Ἅγιος Συμεὼν ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος

Δέν χρειάζεται νά δώσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἄλλο τίποτε σὰν ἀντάλλαγμα γιά τήν ψυχή του παρὰ τό νά γνωρίζη τόν ἑαυτό του πὼς εἶναι μηδέν. Καί μέ αὐτό θά προσφέρει στόν Θεὸ «καρδίαν συντετριμμένην καὶ τεταπειωμένην», ἢ ὅποια εἶναι ἡ μόνη θυσία πού ἀρμόζει νά προσφέρεται στό Θεὸ ἀπὸ κάθε εὐσεβῆ ἄνθρωπο. Καί αὐτὴν μόνο τὴν θυσία δέν πρόκειται νά ἐξουδενώσει ὁ Θεός, ὁ ὅποιος γνωρίζει τόν ἄνθρωπο πὼς δέν ἔχει ἄλλο τίποτε δικό του νά τοῦ προσφέρει σὰν θυσία, καθὼς λέγει καί ὁ Δαυὶδ: «Ὅτι εἰ ἠθέλησας θυσίαν, ἔδωκα ἄν' ὀλοκαυτώματα οὐκ εὐδοκήσεις. Θυσία τῷ Θεῷ πνεῦμα συντετριμμένον, καρδίαν συντετριμμένην καὶ τεταπειωμένην ὁ Θεὸς οὐκ ἐξουδενώσει».

Μέ αὐτὴν τὴν θυσία καί σώθηκαν καί σώζονται καί θά σωθοῦν βασιλεῖς, δυνάστες, εὐγενεῖς, δυσγενεῖς, σοφοί, ἀμαθεῖς, πλούσιοι, φτωχοί, ζητιάνοι, ἄδικοι, πλεονέκτες, ἄνομοι, ἀσελεγεῖς, φονηᾶδες καί κάθε εἶδος ἀμαρτωλῶν. Καί τό βάθος αὐτῆς τῆς θυσίας πρέπει νά μετῶνται μέ τό μέτρο τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων· δηλαδή, κατὰ τίς ἀμαρτίες πού ἔκανε ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀνάλογη νά ἔχη καί τὴν ταπείνωσι καί τὴν συντριβή.

Ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη καί ὄσιοι καί δίκαιοι καί καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ καί ὅλοι γενικὰ διὰ μέσου αὐτῆς μόνο τῆς θυσίας σώζονται. Καί ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη καί ἡ πίστις καί ἡ φυγὴ τοῦ κόσμου καί αὐτὸς ὁ μέγας ἀγώνας τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἀπὸ τὰ κάρβουνα αὐτῆς τῆς θυσίας, δηλαδή τῆς συντριβῆς, παίρνουν φωτιά. Καί αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θυσία στήν ὅποια δέν βρίσκεται ἀμαρτία καί ἡ ὅποια νικά τὴν φιλανθρωπία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὴν τὴν θυσία μόνο ἔρχονται οἱ ἀρρώστιες, οἱ θλίψεις, οἱ στενοχώριες, τὰ πταίσματα, τὰ πάθη τὰ ψυχικά καί τὰ συνακόλουθα σωματικά: γιά νά προσφέρει αὐτὴν τὴν θυσία στόν Θεὸ κάθε θεοσεβῆς. Διότι ἐκεῖνος πού θά ἀποκτήσῃ αὐτὴν τὴν θυσία, τὴν συντριβὴ καί ταπείνωσι, δέν εἶναι δυνατὸν νά πέσῃ ἀπὸ κανένα μέρος, γιατί βρίσκεται πῶς κάτω ἀπὸ ὅλους. Καί ὁ Θεὸς δέν κατέβηκε στήν γῆ καί δέν ταπείνωσε τόν ἑαυτό του μέχρι θανάτου γιά τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ μόνο γιά νά ἐμφυτεύσῃ σέ ὅσους πιστεύουν σ' αὐτὸν «καρδίαν συντετριμμένην καὶ τεταπειωμένην».

Ἄν ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι κάποιος σκορπίζει ὅλα του τὰ ὑπάρχοντα καί τὰ δίνει σέ πτωχοὺς καί νηστεύει καί ἀγρυπνεῖ καί χαμευνεῖ καί προσεύχεται στό Θεὸ νύκτα καί μέρα, καί δέν ζητήσῃ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ νά ἀποκτήσῃ καρδιά ἀπὸ φυσικοῦ τῆς συντετριμμένη καὶ τεταπειωμένη (διότι «πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθεν ἐστὶ καταβαῖνον ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς τῶν φώτων»), αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος δέν πρόκειται νά ὠφελήσῃ καθόλου τόν ἑαυτό του. Πρέπει λοιπὸν νά ἐπιζητοῦμε ἐκείνη καί μόνο τὴν ὁδὸ διὰ τῆς ὁποίας ἐμφυτεύεται μέσα μας καρδιά ἀπὸ φυσικοῦ τῆς συντετριμμένη καὶ τεταπειωμένη.

Ἡ Ἀπομύθευση τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ

Πρωτοπρεσβύτερος Θεόδωρος Ζήσης, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Θεοδρομία», ἔτος στ΄, Ἰούλιος - Σεπτέμβριος 2004

Ὁ 20^{ος} αἰώνας στὸ χῶρο τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ χαρακτηρίσθηκε ὡς αἰώνας τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ, γιατί ποτὲ ἄλλοτε στὰ προηγούμενα ἔτη δὲν ἀναλήφθηκε τόσο ἐργώδης καὶ ἐκτεταμένη προσπάθεια γιὰ τὴν ἀποκατάσταση τῆς ἐνότητας τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ κόσμου. Κατὰ τὴν πρώτη χιλιετία ἡ Ἐκκλησία, παρὰ τὴν ἐμφάνιση αἱρέσεων καὶ σχισμάτων, διατήρησε τὴν ἐνότητά της. Στὶς οἰκουμενικὲς συνόδους, πού ἐκφράζουν τὸ ἀληθὲς οἰκουμενικὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, τὴν γνήσια οἰκουμενικότητα, ὑπῆρχε ἡ δυνατότητα γιὰ τὴν ἐγκαιρὴ καὶ ἀποτελεσματικὴ θεραπεία καὶ ἀποκατάσταση τῶν τραυμάτων πού προκαλοῦσαν οἱ παρανοήσεις καὶ παραχαράξεις τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ δόγματος καὶ ἡ διασάλευση τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς τάξεως. Μέσα στὸ θεσμὸ τῆς πενταρχίας τῶν πατριαρχῶν, πού περιελάμβανε τοὺς θρόνους Ρώμης, Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, Ἀλεξανδρείας, Ἀντιοχείας καὶ Ἱεροσολύμων, ὁ πάπας λειτουργοῦσε ὡς πρῶτος μεταξὺ ἴσων, καὶ μολοντί εἶχαν φυτρώσει οἱ τάσεις καὶ προβάλλονταν συχνὰ οἱ διεκδικήσεις γιὰ παγκόσμια δικαιοδοσία, γιὰ πρωτεῖο ἐξουσίας, ἀντὶ τοῦ προηγούμενου πρωτείου τιμῆς, ἐν τούτοις οἱ ἱστορικὲς συγκυρίες καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησιολογικὴ εὐαισθησία ἀπέτρεπαν τὴν διαίρεση Ἀνατολῆς καὶ Δύσεως, ἡ ὁποία σχεδιαζόταν καὶ τότε καὶ ἦταν ἐμφανὴς στὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ γίγνεσθαι.

Δυστυχῶς ἡ ἐνότητα ἔπαυσε νὰ ὑπάρχει στὶς ἀρχὲς τῆς δευτέρης χιλιετίας, μὲ ἀποκλειστικὴ τὴν εὐθύνη τοῦ Παπισμοῦ γιὰ τὴν μεγάλη αὐτὴ ἀμαρτία καὶ πτώση, τὴν τρίτη μετὰ ἀπὸ ἐκείνες τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ τοῦ Ἰούδα κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιον Ἰουστῖνο Πόποβιτς. Ἡ μοναρχία τοῦ πάπα στὴ Δύση μὲ τὴν ὑποβάθμιση καὶ κατάργηση τοῦ συνοδικοῦ συστήματος, σὲ συνδυασμὸ μὲ τὶς κοσμικὲς καὶ ἐξουσιαστικὲς ἐπιδιώξεις, διέστρεψαν τὸ γνήσιο χριστιανικὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ὁδήγησαν σὲ περαιτέρω διαιρέσεις τὸν Δυτικὸ Χριστιανισμὸ, μὲ συνέπεια τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Προτεσταντισμοῦ τὸν 16^ο αἰώνα ὁ ὁποῖος ὀρθῶς κατενόησε τὴν παραποίηση καὶ διαστροφή τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου ἐκ μέρους τῶν πάπων, κινήθηκε ὁμως καὶ αὐτὸς ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐγγυημένη καὶ κατασταλαγμένη ἐμπειρία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας σὲ ἀτραπούς ἀτομικῶν καὶ ἐγωιστικῶν ἐρμηνειῶν καὶ πλήθυνε τὶς διαιρέσεις.

Δημιουργήθηκε πάντως τώρα ἓνας τρίτος πόλος καὶ ἐταῖρος μεταξὺ Ρώμης καὶ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Οἱ δύο μεγάλοι ἱστορικοὶ θρόνοι, ὅσο ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη ἦταν πολιτικὰ ἐλεύθερη, παρὰ τὶς ἐπανεπιλημμένες ἐνωτικὲς προσπάθειες μέχρι καὶ τῶν τελευταίων πρὸ τῆς ἀλώσεως χρόνων, δὲν κατόρθωσαν νὰ ἀποκαταστήσουν τὴν ἐνότητα. Ἡ πολιτικὴ ὑποβάθμιση καὶ αἰχμαλωσία τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης κατὰ τοὺς αἰῶνες τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας, μέσα στὴν ἄβυσσο τοῦ ἐλέους καὶ τῶν κριμάτων τοῦ Θεοῦ, μὲ τὸν σταυρὸ τοῦ μαρτυρίου καὶ τῆς θυσίας, βοήθησε στὴν ἐμβάθυνση καὶ ἐμπέδωση τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως στὴν ἀναγκαστικὴ ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ τὶς κοσμογονικὲς διεργασίες στὸ χῶρο τῆς Δύσεως, ὅπου ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς, διηρημένος τραγικὰ, ἐτίθετο στὸ περιθώριο τῶν πνευματικῶν καὶ πολιτιστικῶν διεργασιῶν.

Μετὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ κυριαρχία τοῦ Διαφωτισμοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων τῆς Γαλλικῆς Ἐπανάστασης, ὁ Προτεσταντισμὸς φαινόταν περισσότερο κατάλληλος καὶ ἔτοιμος νὰ ἐκπροσωπήσει τὸ μήνυμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου ἀπέναντι στὴν μεσαιωνικὴ παρακμὴ τοῦ Παπισμοῦ. Παπισμὸς καὶ Προτεσταντισμὸς, γεννήματα ἀμφοτέροι ἀνθρωποκεντρικῶν τάσεων καὶ ἐπιδιώξεων, στὴν μεταξύ τους ἄγρια καὶ ἐξοντωτικὴ ἀντιπαράθεση, ἀναζητοῦσαν συμμάχους, ἱστορικὰ καὶ θεολογικὰ ἐρείσματα. Ἡ Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, ἡ Μία, Ἁγία, Καθολικὴ καὶ Ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, ἦταν καὶ παρέμενε γιὰ τὶς δύο πλευρὲς ὁ γνωμῶν, ἡ λύδια λίθος γιὰ τὸν ἔλεγχον τῆς ἐκκλησιολογικῆς τῆς ταυτότητος.

Δυστυχῶς, ὅταν κατὰ τὸν 20^ο αἰώνα τὰ ἀδιέξοδα τοῦ Δυτικοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ ἦσαν πλέον ἐμφανῆ στὴν ἀδυναμία του νὰ ποδηγετῆ τὸν Δυτικὸ κόσμον καὶ στὴν οὐσιαστικὴ ἀποχριστιάνιση τῆς Εὐρώπης ἡ διαφυλαχθεῖσα ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ ἀμέτοχη σ' αὐτὴν τὴν πορεία Ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, ἔκανε τὸ ΜΕΓΑΛΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟ ΚΑΙ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΟ ΛΑΘΟΣ ἀντὶ νὰ παραμείνει οὐδέτερη ἀπέναντι στὸν Παπισμὸ καὶ στὸν Προτεσταντισμὸ, ὡς ἐλπίδα καὶ κριτήριον ἀληθείας γιὰ ἀμφοτέρους, ταυτίσθηκε μὲ τοὺς Προτεστάντες, ἔγινε μέλος τοῦ Προτεσταντικοῦ Παγκοσμίου Συμβουλίου τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν, μὲ βαρύτερες συνέπειες καὶ ἀπώλειες. Ἡ Ρώμη διεκδικεῖ τώρα μόνη τῆς τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ τῆς UNASANCTA καὶ οἱ Προτεστάντες ἀντιμετωπίζουν τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία ὡς μία ἀπὸ τὶς πολλὰς δικὲς τοὺς ὁμολογίες καὶ «ἐκκλησίες».

Δὲν προτιθέμεθα στὸ παρὸν ἄρθρον νὰ προχωρήσουμε σὲ περαιτέρω ἀναλύσεις καὶ ἐμβυθύνσεις. Στόχος μας ἐδῶ ἀποκλειστικὸς εἶναι νὰ ἐπισημάνουμε ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ ἄνοιγμα τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας γιὰ τὴν ἐπίτευξη τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἐνότητας, πού ἐπισυνέβη μὲ ἔκπτωση ἀπὸ βασικὲς ἀρχὲς τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, καὶ πού κατέστησε τὴν Μία, Ἁγία, Καθολικὴ καὶ Ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία μέρος καὶ μέλος τοῦ συστήματος τῶν αἱρέσεων καὶ τῶν πλανῶν καὶ συνυπεύθυνη γιὰ τὰ τραγικὰ ἀδιέξοδα τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ κόσμου, παρουσιάζεται μὲ καύχηση ὡς μεγάλο ἐπίτευγμα, ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὀρθόδοξους Οἰκουμενιστές. Διοργανώνονται ἐπετειακὲς ἐκδηλώσεις, ἐνισχύονται οἱ συμπροσευχὲς καὶ τὰ συλλεῖτουργα, συνεχίζονται οἱ θεολογικοὶ διάλογοι. καὶ ἐνῶ ὠριμάζει στὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνείδηση ἡ αἴσθησις τοῦ λάθους καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη τῆς ἐξόδου ἀπὸ τὴν οἰκουμενιστικὴ αἰχμαλωσία, ἐνισχύεται στὴν θεολογικὴ παιδεία καὶ στοὺς κύκλους τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν ἡγετῶν ἡ οἰκουμενιστικὴ, ἰσοπεδωτικὴ καὶ συγκρητιστικὴ τάση. Ἡ ἀλήθεια ὁμως δὲν ἀλλάζει, ὅσο καὶ ἂν αὐξάνει τὸ ψεῦδος. Αὐτὴν τὴν ἀλήθεια ἐξέφρασε τὸ «Διορθόδοξο Θεολογικὸ Συνέδριον» πού ὀργάνωσαν στὴν Θεσσαλονικὴ τὸ Τμῆμα Ποιμαντικῆς καὶ Κοινωνικῆς Θεολογίας καὶ ἡ Ἐταιρεία Ὀρθοδόξων Σπουδῶν, ἀπὸ 20-24 Σεπτεμβρίου, μὲ θέμα «Οἰκουμενισμὸς: Γένεσις - Προσδοκίαι - Διαψεύσεις». Ἡ ἐπιτυχέστατη διεξαγωγὴ τοῦ συνεδρίου μὲ τὸν μεγάλο ἀριθμὸ εἰσηγητῶν καὶ τὴν σημαντικότερη θεματολογία, ὡς καὶ ἡ ἀπήχησις στὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ πλήρωμα, δικαιώνουν τὴν διαπίστωση, πού θὰ φανεῖ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν δημοσίευση τῶν πορισμάτων, ἀργότερα δὲ καὶ τῶν πρακτικῶν, ὅτι ἀποτελεῖ τὴν πρώτη σοβαρὴ ἐπιστημονικὴ καὶ συλλογικὴ ἀπομύθευση τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ.

WE CALL OURSELVES CHRISTIAN

By Saint John Maximovitch

Soon after the teaching of Christ began to spread among the Gentiles, those who came to believe in Christ and became His followers began in Antioch to be called Christians (Acts 2:26). The word "Christian" indicated that the bearer of that name had given himself to Christ, with all his heart he belonged to Him, and he followed His teaching. The name "Christian" -- which defines well the essence of the followers of Christ -- was pleasing to them, and from Antioch the practice of calling them by that name spread rapidly to other parts. Christians prized the name. They were glad to call themselves by the name of their beloved Teacher and Lord. It often happened that, when asked their name, Christians would answer that their name was "Christian."

The Jews and pagans also began to call them by that name, attaching to it all the malice and hatred which they vented against Christ. "Where were you born, what is your name, your father's name?" the torturer Latronius asked the elderly presbyter Epictetus and his young disciple Astion (commemorated 7 July). "We are Christians, born of Christian parents," they replied. "I'm not asking you that. Tell me your names," demanded the torturer. "I know your confession." "We are Christians. We worship the One Lord Jesus Christ. As for the idols, we abhor them," continued the holy martyrs. The torturer commanded that they be beaten, scraped with iron hooks, scorched with flaming torches, and still nothing was heard from them but, "We are Christians; may the will of our Lord God be done in us."

This so impressed one of the pagans, Vigilantius, that for three days he found himself constantly repeating in his mind the words of the martyrs. On the fourth day he declared before everyone: "I am a Christian," and he received holy baptism. The holy Epictetus and Astion were subject to many more tortures, but they never ceased confessing, "We are Christians." Granted a martyric death, they were beheaded with a sword and departed to Christ, Whom they loved and for Whom they had suffered.

However, as dear as their name was to Christians, it was not long after the inception of Christianity that it often began not to correspond to its essence. There were people who, while calling themselves Christian, did not belong to Christ in spirit. Christ Himself declared, "Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father, which is in Heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Christ even foretold that many would try to pass for Him, calling themselves by His Name: "Many will come in My Name, saying, I am Christ" (Matt. 24:5).

The Apostles, in their divinely-inspired epistles, pointed out that false bearers of the name of Christ had appeared already in their time, and they warned the faithful not to have anything

to do with them: "...as ye have heard that Antichrists shall come, even now there are many Antichrists... They went out from among us, but they were not of us" (I John 2:18-19), writes the holy evangelist John the Theologian. Enjoining their disciples to avoid by all means arguments and disagreements over questions that had no bearing on salvation (cf. I Cor. 1:10-14), the Apostles at the same time commanded them to shun those who did not present the true teaching. They pointed out that a genuine servant of God is known not by his name but by his faith and by his works (Rom. 2:17-29); if the name does not correspond to a man's faith and works, it is false. The Lord Himself, in the Revelation granted to St. John the Theologian, speaks sternly about those who falsely appropriated to themselves the name of the descendants of the Old Testament: "[they] say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9).

Similarly, a Christian in the strict sense is only one who confesses the true teaching of Christ and who lives in accordance with it. "Christ is become of no effect unto you... you have become estranged from Christ" (Gal. 5:4), writes the holy Apostle Paul concerning those who distorted the true teaching. Many such corruptors of the true faith, continuing fraudulently to bear the name of Christian, lived at the time of the Apostles, and still more appeared in the centuries that followed.

In contrast to such false Christians, those who confessed the true faith began to call themselves "Orthodox," (from the Greek, meaning "right belief," and "right worship," or "right glory"), because true Christianity consists in glorifying God with one's life. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven" (Matt. 5:14), commands Christ. To glorify God with one's life is possible only then, when we hold to the right faith, and when we express such faith in words and deeds. Therefore, in the present meaning of the word, an Orthodox person is he who confesses the right, i.e., the true faith and lives in accordance with it. By calling our confession "Orthodox," we distinguish it from false Christianity, and in calling ourselves "Orthodox" we indicate that our faith is the true, authentic and untarnished Christianity, and it is our duty to fulfill precisely its teachings.

That Orthodoxy is justifiably so-called, that it is the real truth, admitting no possible existence of any other truth, and that the Orthodox Church is the very one Christ spoke about when He said, "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18), is attested and confirmed by the many signs evinced from the Church's foundation and which to this day continue to manifest in the Orthodox Church, as, for example, the miracles wrought not only by saints of ages past, but also by those God-pleasers close to us in time. Therefore, we have every reason as Orthodox to joyously proclaim: "Confirm, [O Lord], this apostolic faith, this faith of the fathers, this Orthodox faith, this catholic faith."

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

By Fr. Michael Pomazansky, from Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press, 1994, pp. 234-237

In the Greek text the word “in One,” is expressed as a numeral (*ἐν μίᾳ, en mian*). Thus the Symbol of Faith confesses that the Church is one: (a) it is one as viewed from within itself, not divided, (b) it is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself. Its unity consists not in the joining together of what is different in nature, but in inward agreement and unanimity. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock, of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ comprised the subject of His High-Priestly prayer before His sufferings on the Cross; the Lord prayed that they all may be one (John 17:21).

The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which comes in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order.

The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is: that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the inward mystical life in sanctity of the more perfect of its members. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of men in the body; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly, by means of words, the faith of Christ.

The Church does not lose its unity because side by side with the Church there exist Christian societies which do not belong to it. These societies are not in the Church, they are outside of it.

The unity of the Church is not violated because of temporary divisions of a non-dogmatic nature. Differences between Churches arise frequently out of insufficient or incorrect information. Also, sometimes a temporary breaking of communion is caused by the personal errors of individual hierarchs who stand at the head of one or another local Church, or it is caused by their violation of the canons of the Church, or by the violation of the submission of one territorial ecclesiastical group to another in accordance with anciently established tradition. Moreover, life shows us the possibility of disturbances within a local Church which hinder the normal communion of other Churches with the given local Church until the outward manifestation and triumph of the defenders of authentic Orthodox truth. Finally, the bond between Churches can

sometimes be violated for a long time by political conditions, as has often happened in history. In such cases, the division touches only outward relations, but does not touch or violate inward spiritual unity.

The truth of the One Church is defined by the Orthodoxy of its members and not by their quantity at one or another moment. St. Gregory the Theologian wrote concerning the Orthodox Church of Constantinople before the Second Ecumenical Council as follows:

“This field was once small and poor... This was not even a field at all. Perhaps it was not worth granaries or barns or scythes. Upon it there were no stacks or sheaves, but perhaps only small and unripe grass which grows on the housetops, with which the reaper filleth not his hand, which do not call upon themselves the blessing of those who pass by (Ps. 128:6-8). Such was our field, our harvest? Although it is great, fat, and abundant before Him Who sees what is hidden... still, it is not known among the people, it is not united in one place, but is gathered little by little as the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat (Micah 7: 1). Such was our previous poverty and grief” (Farewell Sermon of St. Gregory the Theologian to the Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council).

“And where are those,” says St. Gregory in another Homily, “who reproach us for our poverty and are proud of their wealth? They consider great numbers of people to be a sign of the Church, and despise the small flock. They measure the Divinity (the Saint has in mind here the Arians, who taught that the Son of God was less than the Father) and they weigh people. They place a high value on grains of sand (that is, the masses) and belittle the luminaries. They gather into their treasure-house simple stones, and disdain pearls” (St. Gregory the Theologian, Homily 33, Against the Arians).

In the prayers of the Church are contained petitions for the ceasing of possible disagreements among the Churches: “Cause discords to cease in the Church; quickly destroy by the might of Thy Holy Spirit all uprisings of heresies” (Eucharistic Prayer at the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great). “We glorify Thee ... Thou one rule in Trinity, and beg for forgiveness of sins, peace for the world, and concord for the Church ... Grant peace and unity to Thy Church, O Thou Who lovest mankind!” (Sunday Canon of Nocturne, Tone 8, Canticle 9).

There exist two examples from recent church history may serve to illustrate the character of these temporary divisions. In the early 19th century, when Greece proclaimed its independence from the Turkish Sultan, the parts of the Greek Church in Greece itself and in Turkey became outwardly divided. When the Patriarch of Constantinople, who was still under Turkish authority, was forced by the Sultan to excommunicate the “rebels” in Greece, the Orthodox in Greece refused to accept this act as having been performed under political coercion, but they did not cease to regard the Patriarch as a member of the same Orthodox Church as themselves, nor

did they doubt that his non-political sacramental acts were grace-giving. This division led to the formation today of two separate local Churches (in full communion with each other): those of Greece and Constantinople.

In the 20th century Russian Orthodox Church, a church administration was formed in 1927 by Metropolitan Sergius (the Moscow Patriarchate) on the basis of submission to the dictation of the atheist rulers. Parts of the Church in Russia (the Catacomb or True Orthodox Church) and outside (the Russian Church Outside of Russia) refuse up to now to have communion with this administration because of its political domination by Communists; but the bishops of the Church Outside of Russia (about the Catacomb Church it is more difficult to make a general statement) do not deny the grace of the Mysteries of the Moscow Patriarchate and still feel themselves to be one with its clergy and faithful who try not to collaborate with Communist aims. When Communism falls in Russia, these church bodies can once more be in communion or even be joined together, leaving to a future free council all judgments regarding the "Sergianist" period.



HAVE FAITH, HOPE AND PATIENCE

Why do you worry and grieve more than necessary for the various incidents? We are not outside of Divine Providence, so as to be directed by mere chance. Therefore, whatever happens to us happens with God's knowledge, and so nothing will happen to us beyond our strength!

Let those who do not believe in Divine Providence drown in worry; they are certainly justified. But we, who believe that God is present everywhere and that there is no creature outside His providence, are not justified when we worry more than necessary, for through this action we show a lack of faith and illumination.

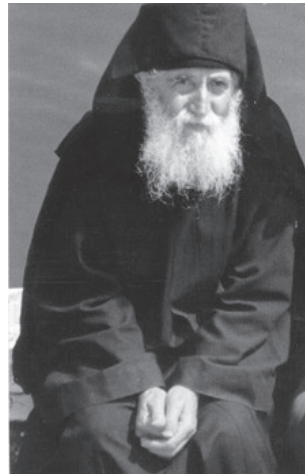
"Blessed is the man who hopes in God, for as a lion he will trust in Him." (Prov.28:1). If God is the One Who permits it, Thy will be done, Lord. "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" (Rom.11:34). Who is able to search out the will of the Lord! "If you do not become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven," (Mt.18:3) that is through faith and innocence.

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

[From the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim]

ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

By Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain (+1994)



Theology is the word of God, which is apprehended by pure, humble and spiritually regenerated souls, and not the beautiful words of the mind, which are crafted with literary art and expressed by the legal or worldly spirit. Just as a beautiful statue cannot talk, manufactured words are unable to speak to the soul of a man, except if the listeners are very worldly, and pleased simply by charming conversation.

Theology that is taught like a science usually examines things historically and, consequently, things are understood externally. Since patristic ascesis and inner experience are absent, this kind of theology is full of uncertainty and questions. For with the mind one cannot grasp the Divine Energies if he does not first practice ascesis and live the Divine Energies, that the Grace of God might be energized within him. Whoever thinks that he can come to know the mysteries of God through external scientific theory, resembles the fool who wants to see Paradise with a telescope.

Those who struggle patristically become empirical theologians through the visitation of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. All those who have an external education, in addition to the internal enlightenment of the soul, may describe the divine mysteries and interpret them correctly, as did many Holy Fathers. If, however, one does not become spiritually related to the Holy Fathers and wants to take up translating or writing, he will wrong both the Holy Fathers and himself, as well as the people, with his spiritual cloudiness.

Neither is it right for someone to theologize using someone else's theology, because he will resemble an impotent man who adopts others' children, presents them as his own and pretends to be the father of a large family. The Holy Fathers took the divine word or personal experiences from their hearts: the result of spiritual battles against evil and the fire of temptations, which they confessed humbly or, out of love, wrote down in order to help us. They never kept this love for themselves, acknowledging, likewise, that humility and all the divine gifts are of God.

Those who present the gifts of God as their own are the most insolent and most unjust in the world, for they wrong God and, even more, their own selves. In this way they cause themselves to be deprived of Divine Grace so that they won't be judged as being more ungrateful and so that they won't be destroyed due to their great vainglory.

Those who are grateful towards God for everything and constantly attend to themselves humbly and look after God's creatures and creation with kindness, theologize and thus become the most faithful theologians, even if illiterate. They are like the illiterate shepherds who observe the weather in the countryside, day and night, and become good meteorologists.

Those who live simply, with kindness and good thoughts, and have acquired inner simplicity and purity, regard the supernatural very simply, as natural, for everything is simple to God. God does not use greater power for the supernatural and less for the natural, but the same power for everything. He Himself is very simple and His Son revealed it to us on earth with His holy simplicity.

When purity comes to man and simplicity with its fervent faith and devotion arrives as well, then the Holy Trinity takes up His abode within us. With this divine enlightenment one easily finds the keys to divine meanings, so as to interpret the Spirit of God in a very simple and natural way, without causing an intellectual headache.

Depending on the purity or guile that one possesses, analogous interpretations are made, and one is benefited or harmed accordingly. Oftentimes, one may cause harm due to one's inexperience, even if acting with good intentions. For example, a person does not know that white wine also exists apart from red, and pours red paint into it to seemingly make it better, and in this way he poisons people. But even if he is not inexperienced or deceitful, but works only from human justice and logic, he will once again wrong the Spirit of God, and, as a result, harm himself and others.

With human logic and justice we also hear the complaints of the laborers of the first and third hour in the Gospel (Matthew 20:1-15), who believed that they were unjustly treated. God, however, the beholder of the hearts of men, with the subtlety of His divine justice, also rewarded the laborers of the eleventh hour for the anguish they suffered before finding work. God would have even given to the laborers of the eleventh hour a greater reward, out of His divine righteousness, full of mercy and love, because the poor ones suffered greatly in soul and were more fatigued than those who, for more hours, were exhausted physically. But we, wretched people that we are, cannot fit God's divine justice into our limited minds, just as His infinite kindness cannot fit inside our limited love. Therefore, God's love was limited to giving everyone the same agreed reward, so as not to scandalize more those who loved their self more than their fellow men. If He told them, "I am not doing you wrong; we agreed on this amount..." He meant, "I am a boss with noble love and divine justice which you cannot understand," and not, "I am boss and I take no one into consideration." For God is our Father and we are His children, and all people know of His fatherly love; He was crucified in order to redeem us and restore us to Paradise.

If we could go out of our self (the love for our self), we would also escape from the gravity of the earth and see everything

in reality, with a divine eye, clearly and profoundly. That is why it is necessary for one to leave the world for the desert, struggle with humility, repentance and prayer, be deserted by his passions, remove his spiritual "rust" and turn into a good conductor in order to receive Divine Grace and become a true theologian.

If we don't remove the rust from our spiritual cables, we will constantly be short-circuited, full of worldly theories, doubts and questions. Then we cease to theologize, being found in a condition of worldliness, but will speak historically, or examine things legally and mathematically. Namely, we will examine how many nails were used to crucify Christ and how many soldiers were present when He was crucified without proceeding to the essence of things: that Christ was crucified for our own sins, in order to redeem us, and suffered more than all of the Holy Martyrs put together. Although He helped the Martyrs with His divine power, He did not employ His divine power for Himself at all and suffered terrible pains out of love, having His two hands and His two legs pierced with nails. Whether they crucified His two legs with one or two nails has no importance, inasmuch as both were nailed and He suffered the pain and drank the vinegar, that He might sweeten us again in Paradise, eternally close to Him, as our Loving Father.



Wherever Orthodox monasticism is absent, the Church does not exist -- just as there cannot be a government without an army and a well-governed state without gendarmes. The monastics guard the boundaries of our Church and protect Her from Her enemies, who, in our contemporary materialistic age, rush to mangle Her like wolves.

The priest's cassock is the flag of the Church of our Christ. For this reason, we who wear it must try hard to honor it with a holy life; so that those who don't wear it will honor it and respect it.

I am proud of the cassock I wear and consider it more valuable and seemly than every other kind of garment, even than the royal purple robes of kings. I consider myself unworthy to dress in such a modest, honorable and holy garb, which was honored by numberless monastic Saints, monk martyrs, confessors and Saints. I am saddened by and pity those clerics who reject the cassock and who shave their beards.

Pay no attention to things earthly and passing. Be concerned about the union of your soul with God. You should be joyful! Jesus holds a sculptor's chisel in His hands. He wants to make you into a statue for His heavenly palace.

Blessed Elder Amphilochios of Patmos (+1971)

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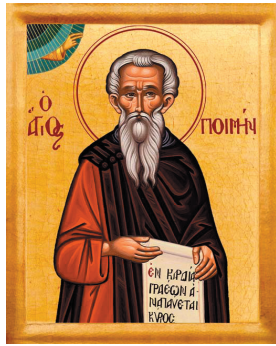
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ON THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

By St. Cyprian of Carthage, from a letter to a new convert, 246 A.D.

I promise to share with you the grace God in His great mercy has shown me, and to tell you as simply as I can what I have experienced since I was baptized. Until that time, I was still living in the dark, knowing nothing of my true life. I was completely involved in this world's affairs, influenced by all its changing moods and troubles, and exiled from the light of truth.

I had indeed been told that God offered men and women a second birth, by which we could be saved, but I very much doubted that I could change the kind of life I was then living. Frankly, I could not see how a person could cast off his fallen nature, and be changed in heart and soul while he still lived in the same body as before. How was it possible, I asked myself, to change the habits of a lifetime instantaneously.

How can one suddenly rid oneself of accumulated guilt and break with sin that has become so deeply rooted in one's life? Can a man, whose life has been characterized by feasting and luxury, learn frugality and simplicity in a single moment? A person who craves public distinction and honor cannot bear to be passed over and unnoticed. Another who is accustomed to throngs of flattering attendance takes it a terrible penance to be left alone. Is every species of temptation suddenly to lose its force? Should we no longer feel the enticement of wine and good living, where pride no longer swells our heads or anger blazes our breasts? Shall we no longer be troubled by covetousness or cruelty or ambition or lust?

These were my thoughts. My past life was so burdened with so

many sins, that I saw no way ever to be rid of, that I had grown accustomed to giving way to my weakness. I despaired of ever being any better. Consequently, I simply humored my evil inclinations, and made no attempt to combat them.

But at last I made up my mind to ask for Baptism. I went down into those life-giving waters, and all the stains of my past were washed away. I committed my life to the Lord. He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I was born again, a new man.

And then in a most marvelous way, all my doubts cleared up, I could now see what had been hidden from me before. I found that I could do things that had previously been impossible.

I saw that as long as I had been living according to my lower nature, I was at the mercy of sin, and my course was set for death. But that by living according to my new birth in the Holy Spirit, I had already begun to share God's eternal life. You know, as well as I do what sins I died to at that moment, just as you know the gifts the Holy Spirit gave me with my new life. I have no desire to boast, but it is surely right to thank God for His free gift. It was through faith in Him, that I received the power to break with the sins into which my own folly had led me. We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet, and can never again know the pinch of poverty.

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

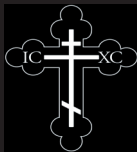
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE THREE METHODS OF PRAYER

By St. Symeon the New Theologian from "The Philokalia: Volume IV," edited and translated by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Bishop Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 67 - 73.

St. Symeon the New Theologian is an 11th century saint and one of the most beloved Holy Fathers. He is one of three great Fathers whom the Orthodox Church has granted the title of "Theologian." The other two are St. John the Evangelist, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus (390 AD).

St. Symeon was born in Galatia, Asia Minor in 949 AD. He received only the basics of a primary Greek school education until he was about eleven years old. He finished his secondary education at the age of 14 in the court of the two brother emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenetes. At 14, he met St. Symeon the Studite, who became his spiritual father and led him into the life of asceticism and prayer. Although he wanted to enter the famous monastery of the Stoudion at the age of 14, his spiritual father had him wait until he turned 27. During this period of preparation, St. Symeon's elder continued to counsel and guide him, preparing him gradually for the monastic life even in the midst of worldly cares. St. Symeon occupied himself with the management of a patrician's household and possibly entered the service of his emperor as a diplomat and a senator. While 'busy in the world' he also strove to live a monk's life in the evenings, spending his time in night vigils and reading spiritual works. One of his elder's advice was, "if you desire to have always a soul-saving guidance, pay heed to your conscience and without fail do what it will instil in you."

St. Symeon's words still speak to us today, even though he lived a thousand years ago. Of special note is his emphasis for the return to the essence or spirit of the early Orthodox Church, and not merely depend on or shel-

ter under the outward forms of Church life. His burning conviction is that the Christian life must be more than just a routine or habit, but rather it should be a personal experience of the living Christ. He urges both monks and laity back to a living spiritual experience of the Triune. St. Symeon entered the Kingdom of Heaven in 1022 and is commemorated on March 12th.

+ + +

There are three methods of prayer and attentiveness, by means of which the soul is either uplifted or cast down. Whoever employs these methods at the right time is uplifted, but whoever employs them foolishly and at the wrong time is cast down. Vigilance and prayer should be as closely linked together as the body to the soul, for the one cannot stand without the other. Vigilance first goes on ahead like a scout and engages sin in combat. Prayer then follows afterwards, and instantly destroys and exterminates all the evil thoughts with which vigilance has already been battling, for attentiveness alone cannot exterminate them.

This, then, is the gate of life and death. If by means of vigilance we keep prayer pure, we make progress; but if we leave prayer unguarded and permit it to be defiled, our efforts are null and void.

Since, then, as we said, there are three methods of attentiveness and prayer, we should explain the distinctive features of each, so that he who aspires to attain life and wishes to set to work may with firm assurance select what suits him best; otherwise through ignorance he may choose what is worse and forfeit what is better.

The First Method of Prayer

The distinctive features of the first method of prayer are these. When a person stands at prayer, he raises hands, eyes and intellect heavenwards, and fills his intellect with divine thoughts, with images of celestial beauty, of the angelic hosts, of the abodes of the righteous. In brief, at the time of prayer he assembles in his intellect

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His TRUTH be brought forth.

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all that he has heard from Holy Scripture and so rouses his soul to divine longing as he gazes towards heaven, and sometimes he sheds tears. But when someone prays in this way, without him realizing it his heart grows proud and exalted, and he regards what is happening to him as the effect of divine grace and entreats God to allow him always to be engaged in this activity. Such assumptions, however, are signs of delusion, because the good is not good when it is not done in the right way.

If, then, such a person is pursuing a life of stillness and seclusion, he will almost inevitably become deranged. And even if this does not happen to him, it will be impossible for him to attain a state of holiness or dispassion. Those who adopt this method of prayer have also been deluded into thinking that they see lights with their bodily eyes, smell sweet scents, hear voices, and so on. Some have become completely possessed by demons and wander from place to place in their madness. Others fail to recognize the devil when he transforms himself into an angel of light (II Corinthians 2:14); and, putting their trust in him, they continue in an incorrigible state of delusion until their death, refusing to accept the counsel of anyone else. Still others, incited by the devil, have committed suicide, throwing themselves over a precipice or hanging themselves.

Indeed, who can describe all the various forms of deception employed by the devil? Yet from what we have said any sane person can understand the kind of harm that may result from this method of attentiveness. Even if someone who has adopted this method may perhaps avoid the evils we have mentioned because he lives in a community -- for it is solitaries who are especially subject to them -- none the less he will pass his entire life without making any progress.

The Second Method of Prayer

The second form of prayer is this. A person withdraws his intellect from sensory things and concentrates it in himself,

guards his senses, and collects all his thoughts; and he advances oblivious of the vanities of this world. Sometimes he examines his thoughts, sometimes pays attention to the words of the prayer he is addressing to God, and sometimes drags back his thoughts when they have been taken captive; and when he is overcome by passion he forcefully strives to recover himself.

One who struggles in this way, however, can never be at peace or win the crown of victory. He is like a person fighting at night: he hears the voices of his enemies and is wounded by them, but he cannot see clearly who they are, where they come from, and how and for what purpose they assail him. Such is the damage done to him because of the darkness in his intellect. Fighting in this manner, he cannot ever escape his noetic enemies, but is worn out by them. For all his efforts he gains nothing. Falsely imagining that he is concentrated and attentive, he falls victim unawares to self-esteem. Dominated and mocked by it, he despises and criticizes others for their lack of attentiveness. Imagining that he is capable of becoming the shepherd of sheep, he is like the blind man who undertakes to lead the blind (Matthew 15:14).

Such are the characteristics of the second method of prayer, and everyone striving after salvation can see what harm it does. Yet this second method is better than the first, just as a moonlit night is better than a night that is pitch-dark and starless.

The Third Method of Prayer

Let us now begin to speak about the third method of prayer, which is truly astonishing and hard to explain. For those ignorant of it, it is not only difficult to understand but virtually incredible, and there are very few to be found who practice it. It seems to me that it has deserted us along with the virtue of obedience. For it is the love of obedience that delivers us from entanglement with this evil world, rendering us free from anxiety and impassioned craving. It makes us wholehearted

and unflagging in pursuit of our aim -- provided, of course, that we find an unerring guide. For if through obedience you make yourself dead to every worldly and bodily attachment, how can anything transient enslave your intellect? If you entrust all the care of your soul and body to God and to your spiritual father, no longer living for yourself or desiring the good opinion of others, what anxiety can distract you?

This third method, then, destroys the invisible wiles of the demons, with which as with ropes they seek to drag down the intellect into all manner of devious thoughts. Set at liberty, the intellect wages war with its full strength, scrutinizing the thoughts insinuated by the enemy and with masterful dexterity expelling them, while the heart in its purity offers prayers to God. This is the beginning of a life of true seclusion, and those who fail to make such a beginning exhaust themselves in vain.

The starting point of this third method of prayer is not to gaze upwards, to raise one's hands aloft, to concentrate one's thoughts and to call down help from heaven. These, as we said, are the marks of the first form of delusion. Nor does it begin, as the second method does, by keeping guard over the senses with the intellect, while failing to observe the enemies who attack from within. In such a case, a person is struck by the demons instead of striking them; when wounded he is unaware of it; taken captive, he cannot retaliate against his captors. His enemies constantly attack him, from behind and even face to face, and fill him with self-esteem and arrogance.

If you desire to embark on this light-giving and joyful task, begin as follows. You must first practice exact obedience, as described above, and so act always with a pure conscience; for without obedience it is impossible for your conscience to be pure. And you must keep your conscience pure in three respects: first, with respect to God, you must keep your conscience pure by refraining from doing anything that conflicts with the worship due to Him. With respect to your spiritual father do everything he tells you to do, neither more nor less, and be guided by his purpose and will. With respect to other people, you must keep your conscience pure by not doing to them anything that you hate (Tobit 4:15) and that you do not want them to do to you. With respect to material things, you must take care not to misuse them, whether food, drink, or clothing. In brief, do everything as if you were in the presence of God, so that your conscience does not rebuke you in any way.

...In short, if you do not guard your intellect you cannot attain purity of heart, so as to be counted worthy to see God (Matthew 5:18). Without such watchfulness you cannot become poor in spirit, or grieve, or hunger and thirst after righteousness, or be truly merciful, or pure in heart, or a peacemaker, or be persecuted for the sake of justice (Mat-

thew 5:3-10). To speak generally, it is impossible to acquire all the other virtues except through watchfulness. For this reason you must pursue it more diligently than anything else, so as to learn from experience these things, unknown to others, that I am speaking to you about. Now if you would like to learn also about the method of prayer, with God's help I will tell you about this too, in so far as I can.

Above all else you should strive to acquire three things, and so begin to attain what you seek. The first is freedom from anxiety with respect to everything, whether reasonable or senseless -- in other words, you should be dead to everything. Secondly, you should strive to preserve a pure conscience, so that it has nothing to reproach you with. Thirdly, you should be completely detached, so that your thoughts incline towards nothing worldly, not even your own body.

Then sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you. Close the door, and withdraw your intellect from everything worthless and transient. Rest your head on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the center of your belly or your navel. Restrain the drawing-in of breath through your nostrils, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside. To start with you will find there darkness and an impenetrable density.

Later, when you persist and practice this task day and night, you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees the open space within the heart and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination. From then on, from whatever side a distractive thought may appear, before it has come to completion and assumed a form, the intellect immediately drives it away and destroys it with the invocation of Jesus Christ. From this point onwards the intellect begins to be full of rancor against the demons and, rousing its natural anger against its noetic enemies, it pursues them and strikes them down.

The rest you will learn for yourself, with God's help, by keeping guard over your intellect and by retaining Jesus in your heart. As the saying does, "Sit in your cell and it will teach you everything."

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Editor's Note: Our readers may wish to also refer to related articles within previous *Orthodox Heritage* issues: "The Stages of the Jesus Prayer" from our October 2003 issue; "Pray without Ceasing" from our December 2003 issue; and "St. Theophan the Recluse on Prayer, parts I, II, and III" from our November 2004, December 2004 and January 2005 issues.



ARE THE TERMS “CHRISTIAN” AND “ORTHODOX” ACCURATE IN OUR TIMES?

By Archbishop Averky (Taushev), from Orthodox Life, St. Job of Pochaev Press, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York., Vol. 25, No. 3, May-June, 1975., pp. 4-8.

Until recently, the concepts and terms “Christian” and “Orthodox” were unambiguous and meaningful. Now, however, we are living through times so terrible, so filled with falsehood and deception, that such concepts and terms no longer convey what is significant when used without further clarification. They do not reflect the essence of things, but have become little more than deceptive labels.

Many societies and organizations now call themselves “Christian,” although there is nothing Christian in them, insofar as they reject the principal dogma of Christianity -- the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, as do several of the newest sects, to which the very spirit of true Christianity, which follows so naturally and logically from the teaching of the Gospels, is generally quite foreign.

Of late, the term “Orthodox” also has ceased in large measure to express what it should, for even those who in fact have apostatized from true Orthodoxy and become traitors to the Orthodox Faith and Church continue to call themselves “Orthodox.” Such are all the innovators, who reject the true spirit of Orthodoxy, all those who have started down the path of mutual relations with the enemies of Orthodoxy, who propagandize for common prayer and even liturgical communion with those who do not belong to the Holy Orthodox Church. Such are the “renovationists” and contemporary “neo-renovationists,” the “neo-Orthodox” (as some of them openly style themselves!), who are clamoring about how essential it is to “renew the Orthodox Church,” about some sort of “reforms in Orthodoxy,” which allegedly has become “set in its ways” and “moribund.” They harp on such things instead of focusing their prayerful attention on the truly essential renewal of their own souls and the fundamental reform of their own sinful nature with its passions and desires. They insistently proclaim union with heretics, with non-Orthodox, and even with non-Christians. They proclaim “the union of all,” but without the unity of spirit and truth which alone makes such union possible. Such are all those who actively participate in the so-called Ecumenical Movement, which is striving so blatantly to create some sort of new pseudo-church out of all the denominations now existing. Such, too, are those many others who are not completely faithful to our Lord and Saviour and His Holy Church, but serve His vicious enemies or please them in one way or another by helping them to realize their anti-Christian goals in a world which has turned away from God.

Who will dare to deny us our lawful right not to recognize such people as Orthodox, even though they may persist in using that name and in bearing various high ranks and titles? From church history we know that there have been not a few heretics and even heresiarchs of high rank who were solemnly condemned by the Universal Church and removed from their offices.

But what do we see today? This, sadly, is an age of unlimited concessions and sly collaboration, when even the most scandalous heretical actions or statements disturb hardly anyone. Very few react to this manifest apostasy from Orthodoxy as they should, and as for condemning these new heretics and apostates -- there is no point in even thinking about it. Today everything is permitted for everyone and nothing is prohibited for anyone, except in cases where someone is personally hurt, offended and insulted when their own folly is pointed out. Oh, in such cases, this is unforgivable! Then threats make their appearance, based on those forgotten canons, which otherwise are “obsolete, outdated and unacceptable” in our advanced, progressive age!

The truth is readily ignored and brazenly flouted, while evil, just as readily, celebrates its triumphant victory and gloatingly mocks the truth which it has overthrown and trampled upon. Is it possible to reconcile one’s conscience to this contemporary situation? Can one close one’s eyes to all these lies and falsehoods and calmly act as if one saw nothing wrong?

Only individuals whose consciences are burned out or completely lost can do so! That is why it is more than strange to hear some, imagining themselves to be Orthodox, call the traditionally-bound Orthodox, “Old Believer,” “schismatic,” “retrograde,” “obscurantist,” and so on, simply because we will not walk in step with these times and dare not to apostatize in anything from Christ’s Gospel and the original teaching of the Holy Church, and therefore consider it an obligation of conscience to condemn this clear and obvious evil of contemporary life which has already penetrated into the Church. In fact, it is not we who are schismatic, but all those who follow the spirit of these times and by that act cut themselves off from the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, apostatizing from the apostolic faith, from the faith of the Fathers, from the Orthodox faith, which established the whole world... These people are obviously hurtling over the precipice of apostasy -- into the abyss of perdition, together with the whole contemporary world, burying themselves in their apostasy from the life-creating God.

Do you hear the Apostle’s divinely inspired words, modernists, attempting to distort Christ’s Gospel and becoming so readily and zealously “conformed to this world,” evil and alluring as it is? We readily accept your indictment that we are “old believers,” considering it an honor to our traditionalism; but how does your Christian conscience get on with your innovating, which overthrows essentially the ancient, true faith

and Christ's unchanging Church? Was it not the Apostle who warned all Christians: "Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

We are "old believers," but not schismatics, for we have never cut ourselves off from the true Church of Christ. We are in union with our Head, Christ the Saviour, with His holy Disciples and Apostles, with the Apostolic Fathers, with the great Fathers and Teachers of the Church, and with the great luminaries and pillars of the Orthodox faith and piety. But you are in union with some sort of innovating, self-appointed teachers, whom you advertise everywhere so unlawfully and obstinately, disparaging and at times even daring to criticize the genuine luminaries of our Holy Church, who have pleased God and been glorified in many ascetic struggles of piety and miracles throughout the course of her two-thousand year history.

This being the case, which of us is really the schismatic? Of course it is not those in the spirit of traditional Orthodoxy, but those who have apostatized from the true faith of Christ and rejected the genuine spirit of Christian piety; even though all the contemporary patriarchs, who have altered our age-old, patristic Orthodoxy, may be on the latter's side, as well as the majority of contemporary, so-called Christians.

Indeed, Christ the Saviour did not promise eternal salvation to the majority, but quite the contrary, He promised it to His "little flock," which will remain faithful to Him to the end, in the day of His Glorious and Terrible Second Coming, when He will come "to judge the living and the dead." "Fear not, little flock," He said, painting the frightening picture of the last times of apostasy from God and persecution of the Faith before our mind's eye, "For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (St. Luke 12:32).

This is why all we have said above prompts us to re-examine the terminology that has been accepted up to the present. It is insufficient in our time to say only "Christian" -- now it is necessary to qualify this by saying "true-Christian." Similarly it is insufficient to say "Orthodox" -- it is essential to emphasize that one is not referring to an innovating modernist "Orthodox," but to a true Orthodox.

All genuine zealots of the true faith, serving Christ the Saviour alone, have already begun to do this. They have a special veneration for that champion of Holy Orthodoxy, St. Mark, Metropolitan of Ephesus, thanks to whose steadfastness the impious Union of Florence with papal Rome in 1439 failed.

In our firm stand for the true Faith and Church it is essential to avoid everything personal -- pride and self-exaltation, which inevitably lead to new errors, and eventually even to a fall; we have already witnessed this in several cases. It is not ourselves we should praise, but the pure and immaculate Faith of Christ. No fanaticism is admissible here because it is capable of blinding the spiritual eyes of such who are "zealous not according

to knowledge." Rather than confirming one in the Faith, this blind fanaticism can sometimes lead one away from it.

It is important to know and to remember that a true Orthodox Christian is not someone who just accepts the dogmas of Orthodoxy formally, but a person who thinks in an Orthodox way, feels in an Orthodox way, and lives in an Orthodox way, incarnating the spirit of Orthodox -- is most sharply and boldly denied by the modernists, the "neo-Orthodox," who want in everything to keep in step with the spirit of this world lying in evil, whose prince, in the words of the Lord Himself, is none other than the devil (St. John 12:31). Thus it is not God Whom they desire to please, but the "prince of this world," the devil; and thereby they cease to be true Orthodox Christians, even if they call themselves such.

If we consider all this more seriously and deeply, then we will see that this is precisely the case and that modernism with its innovations is leading us away from Christ and His true Church. Let us be horrified at how rapidly apostasy has proceeded, although the modernists do not see it or feel it, inasmuch as they themselves are taking an active part in it. And so let us not fear to remain in the minority -- far from all their high-sounding titles and ranks. Let us always remember that even Caiaphas was a high priest of the true God, and to what depths he sank -- to the horrible sin of deicide! While living in this world which has apostatized from God, let us strive not for specious human glory and cheap popularity, which will not save us, but only to be within Christ's "little flock." Let us instead be True Orthodox Christians, and not modernists!



We spare neither labors nor means in order to teach our children secular sciences, so that they can serve well the earthly authorities. Only the knowledge of the Holy Faith, the service of the Heavenly King are a matter of indifference to us. We allow them to attend spectacles but we care little whether they go to Church and stand within it reverently. We demand an account from them of what they learned in their secular institutes -- why do we not demand an account from them of what they heard in the Lord's house?

We are so concerned with our children's schooling; if only we were equally zealous in bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord! And then we wonder why we reap such bitter fruit when we have raised our children to be insolent, licentious, impious, and vulgar. May this never happen; instead, let us heed the blessed Paul's admonition to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom

HOW TO PARTAKE OF FOOD

By St. Gregory of Sinai from "The Philokalia: Volume IV," edited and translated by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Bishop Kallistos Ware, (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 280 - 281.

St Gregory of Sinai is a later saint of the 13th century who lived fully in the spirit and teachings of the early Desert Fathers. As a young man he was captured by the Turks in the late 1200, and was eventually ransomed to Cyprus where he was tonsured a monk and then went to Mount Sinai shortly after where he became a full monk. He then went to Crete where he learned the art of prayer in obedience to the monk Arsenios. After some time, Gregory went to Mount Athos where he spent the next twenty-five years. The "Philokalia" includes five works by St. Gregory of Sinai.

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What shall I say about the belly, the queen of the passions? If you can deaden or half-deaden it, do not relent. It has mastered me, beloved, and I worship it as a slave and vassal, this abettor of the demons and dwelling-place of the passions. Through it we fall and through it – when it is well-disciplined – we rise again. Through it we have lost both our original divine status and also our second divine status, that which was bestowed on us when after our initial corruption we are renewed in Christ through baptism, and from which we have lapsed once more, separating ourselves from God through out neglect of the commandments, even though in our ignorance we exalt ourselves. We think that we are with God, but it is only by keeping the commandments that we advance, guarding and increasing the grace bestowed upon us.

As the fathers have pointed out, bodies vary greatly in their need for food. One person needs little, another much to sustain his physical strength, each according to his capacity and habit. A hesychast, however, should always eat too little, never too much. For when the stomach is heavy the intellect is clouded, and you cannot pray resolutely and with purity. On the contrary, made drowsy by the effects of too much food, you are soon induced to sleep; and as you sleep the food produces countless fantasies in your mind. Thus, in my opinion, if you want to attain salvation and strive for the Lord's sake to lead a life of stillness, you should be satisfied with a pound of bread and three or four cups of water or wine daily, taking at appropriate times a little from whatever victuals happen to be at hand, but never eating to satiety. In this way you will avoid growing conceited, and by thanking God for everything, you will show no disdain for the excellent things He has made. This is the counsel of those who are wise in such matters. For those weak in faith and soul, abstinence from specific types of food is most beneficial; St. Paul exhorts them to eat herbs (Romans 14:2), for they do not believe that God will preserve them.

What shall I say? You are old, yet have asked for a rule, and an extremely severe one at that. Younger people cannot keep to a strict rule by weight and measure, so how will you keep to

it? Because you are ill, you should be entirely free in partaking of food. If you eat too much, repent and try again. Always act like this -- lapsing and recovering again, and always blaming yourself and no one else -- and you will be at peace, wisely converting such lapses into victories, as Scripture says. But do not exceed the limit I set down above, and this will be enough, for no other food strengthens the body as much as bread and water. That is why the prophet disregarded everything else and simply said, "Son of man, by weight you will eat your bread and by measure you will drink water" (Ezekiel 4:16).

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which un-chastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).



"If it be Thou, bid me to come unto Thee. And He said: 'Come.' And when Peter was come down out of the ship he walked on the water, to go to Jesus" As far as his faith took him, thus far Peter walked on the water; but as soon as he let doubt in, he began to sink, for doubt calls forth fear. The inner meaning of leaving the ship and walking on the water to the Lord Jesus means keeping one's soul from bodily cares and bodily love, and setting out on the dangerous path to the spiritual world, to the Saviour. Such moments occur with ordinary believers, with the fainthearted to whom joy in Christ is mingled with doubt. They often desire to free themselves from the flesh and follow Christ, the King of the spiritual world, but they quickly feel that they are falling and return to their fleshly preoccupations, as to the ship on the waves.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

Wherever there is hardness and pride, there also are disobedience and scandals. Wherever there is obedience and humility, God rests. The Holy Fathers say, "Pride goeth before a fall, and humility before grace." Whereas faintheartedness is the mother of impatience. Have you seen a man, and especially a monk, without patience? He is a lamp without oil whose light will soon go out.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast

Περὶ Ἡδονῆς

Ὅσιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἀγιορείτης

Δὲν ὑπάρχουν ἰσχυρότεροι μαγνήτες καὶ θελκτικότεροι ἄξουσιαστές καὶ ποθεινότερες ἄλυσίδες γιὰ τὴν καρδιά τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀπὸ τὶς ἡδονές τῶν πέντε αἰσθήσεων. Πόσο ἄρεστοι καὶ πόσο βλαβερές εἶναι! Καὶ ὁ καλύτερος ρήτορας δὲν θὰ μπορούσε νὰ παρουσιάσῃ ποτὲ τὴν κακία τους καὶ τὴν βλάβη ποὺ προξενοῦν στὴν ψυχή. Ἄν ὁ διάβολος μᾶς ἔδινε τὸ φαρμάκι του μὲ κάποιο πικρὸ βότανο, δὲν θὰ τὸ πίναμε. Ἐπειδὴ ὁμως μᾶς τὸ δίνει μὲ τὸ μέλι τῶν ἡδονῶν, τὸ παίρνουμε εὐχάριστα.

Ἀπὸ τὶς ἡδονές, οἱ σαρκικές – δηλαδή ἡ πορνεία, ἡ μοιχεία καὶ ὅλα τὰ σχετικά πάθη – τυφλώνουν τὴν καρδιά καὶ κολλᾶνε τὴν καρδιά μας στὰ παρόντα πράγματα περισσότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλη ἁμαρτία, γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀπὸ τὰ μεγαλύτερα ἐμπόδια τῆς σωτηρίας μας. Καὶ ἀληθεύει ἐκεῖνο ποὺ εἶπε ἕνας ἄγιος, ὅτι, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὰ βρέφη, λίγοι μόνο φτάνουν στὸν παράδεισο, ἐξαιτίας τῶν σαρκικῶν ἁμαρτημάτων. Ἄλλες μορφές ἡδονῶν εἶναι ὁ πολὺς ὕπνος, τὰ καλὰ φαγητά, τὰ ὠραῖα φορέματα, τὰ μαλακὰ στρώματα καὶ γενικὰ ὅλες οἱ ἱκανοποιήσεις τῶν αἰσθήσεων.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῶν ἡδονῶν, ἀφοῦ χορτάσουν τὸν ὕπνο καὶ τὴν ἀνάπαυση, τρέχουν στὰ συμπόσια καὶ στὰ ξεφαντώματα, στὰ τραγούδια τὰ ἄσεμνα, στὶς κακὲς συναναστροφές, στὶς κωμωδίες καὶ στὰ πανηγύρια. Γενικὰ, δὲν ἀφήνουν ποτὲ νὰ τοὺς ξεφύγει καμία εὐκαιρία ἀπολαύσεως. Κι ἐνῶ ἡ ζωὴ τους εἶναι γεμάτη ἀπὸ ἀσωτίες καὶ ματαιότητες, αὐτὴ τὴν θεωροῦν καλὴ καὶ ἀθάλα.

Ἄν μάλιστα κατακρίνει τὴν πολιτεία τους, τὸν κατηγοροῦν σὰν ἄξεστο καὶ χωριάτη, καὶ λένε πὼς θέλει νὰ μεταβάλλει τὶς πόλεις σὲ ἐρήμους καὶ τοὺς κοσμικοὺς σὲ καλόγερους. Αὐτὰ ὁμως τὰ λένε γιὰ νὰ δικαιολογηθοῦν. «Μετὰ γὰρ κιθάρας καὶ ψαλτηρίου καὶ τυμπάνων καὶ αὐλῶν τὸν οἶνον πίνουσι, τὰ δὲ ἔργα Κυρίου οὐκ ἐμβλέπουσι», κατὰ τὸν προφήτη (Ἠσ. 5:12). Τὸ μόνο ποὺ γνωρίζουν καλά, εἶναι νὰ ζοδεῦουν τὸν καιρὸ τους σὲ ξεφαντώματα. Ἀπὸ τὸ κρεβάτι πηγαίνουν στὸ τραπέζι, ἀπὸ τὸ τραπέζι στὶς παρέες, ἀπὸ τὶς παρέες στὰ σεργιάνια· μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο γίνεται ἡ ζωὴ τους σὰν μία ἄλυσίδα, ὅπου ἡ μία ἀπόλαυση εἶναι δεμένη μὲ τὴν ἄλλη, ὅπως οἱ κρίκοι μεταξύ τους.

Τὸ πανάγιο Πνεῦμα δὲν μᾶς λέει ὅτι ὅποιος κυνηγᾷ τὶς κοσμικὲς ἡδονές γκρεμίζεται ἀμέσως στὸν Ἄδη. Ἀλλὰ τί λέει μὲ τὸ στόμα τοῦ Δαβὶδ; Ὅτι κατεβαίνει στὸν Ἄδη, πλησιάζει δηλαδή σιγά-σιγά: «πάντες οἱ καταβαίνοντες εἰς Ἄδου» (Ψαλμ. 113:25). Γιατί ἡ μαλθακὴ καὶ ἡδονικὴ ζωὴ ποὺ ζεῖ, τὸν προετοιμάζει ἀργὰ ἀλλὰ σταθερὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀπώλεια.

Οἱ τρυφές καὶ οἱ ἡδονές φθείρουν καὶ ἀδυνατίζουν καὶ τοὺς πιὸ δυνατοὺς. Γι' αὐτὸ μερικοὶ κατανοοῦν σὲ τέτοια ἀδυναμία, ποὺ καὶ ὁ ἴσκιος ἀκόμα τῶν πειρασμῶν εἶναι ἀρκετὸς γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ρίξει. Κι ἀφοῦ ἐξομολογηθοῦν, μὲ τὸν πρῶτο πειρασμὸ ξεχνοῦν τὴν καλὴ τους ἀπόφαση νὰ μὴν ζαναμαρτήσουν, καὶ πέφτουν ἀμέσως πάλι στὴν ἁμαρτία.

Λοιπὸν, μὲ τὸ νὰ λές ὅτι δὲν εἶναι ἁμαρτίες ὁ πολὺς ὕπνος

καὶ τὰ φαγοπότια καὶ οἱ διασκεδάσεις καὶ τὰ ξεφαντώματα, προσπαθεῖς ἀπλὰ νὰ δικαιολογηθῆς. Γιατί μπορεῖ αὐτὰ καθεαυτὰ νὰ μὴν εἶναι ἁμαρτίες, ἀλλὰ προετοιμάζουν γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες καὶ σ' ἐμποδίζουν νὰ γευθῆς τὰ πνευματικὰ ἀγαθὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ θὰ πάθῃς κάτι ἀνάλογο, μ' ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔπαθε ὁ Σολομῶν: Νομίζοντας πὼς μπορούσε ν' ἀπολαμβάνῃ χωρὶς κίνδυνο τὶς ἡδονές, κατάντησε στὴν εἰδωλολατρία. Καὶ μ' ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔπαθαν οἱ Σοδομίτες: Γιὰ νὰ τρῶνε καὶ νὰ πίνουν μὲ τρυφές καὶ ξεφαντώματα, ἔφτασαν νὰ πέσουν σὲ παρά φύση πάθη καὶ ἀσέλγειες. Πολὺ σωστὰ εἶπε ὁ Τερτυλλιανός, ὅτι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ πρέπει ν' ἀποφεύγουν τὶς τρυφές, γιατί αὐτὲς ἀδυνατίζουν τὴν πίστη καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴ τους.

Ἡ χαυνότητα καὶ ἡ ἀδυναμία, ποὺ προξενοῦνται στὴν ψυχή ἀπὸ τὶς ἡδονές, δὲν ταιριάζουν στὸν προορισμὸ μας, ποὺ εἶναι νὰ μοιάσουμε στὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό. Ὅπως διδάσκει ὁ ἀπόστολος, ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς «προώρισε συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ Υἱοῦ Αὐτοῦ» (Ρωμ. 8:29). Καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς, γιὰ νὰ φτάσῃ στὴν δόξα, πέρασε τὴν ἐπίγεια ζωὴ Του μέσα στὴν φτώχεια, τὴ θλίψη καὶ τὴν καταφρόνηση. Οἱ τρυφηλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ὁμως φοβοῦνται τὴ σκληραγωγία καὶ τὴν μετάνοια. Μήπως βρῆκαν ἄλλο Εὐαγγέλιο ἢ μήπως κατέβηκε γι' αὐτοὺς κανένας ἄλλος Χριστὸς, ποὺ νὰ τοὺς ὑπόσχεται ἀνέσεις, ὠραῖα ἐνδύματα, ἀπολαύσεις, διασκεδάσεις καὶ δόξες; Ξεχνοῦν ὅτι «διὰ πολλῶν θλίψεων δεῖ ἡμᾶς εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ» (Πράξ. 14:22), καὶ ὅτι «στενὴ ἡ πύλη καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς ἢ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν» (Ματθ. 7:14)

Ἄκου καὶ τοῦτο τὸ ὠφέλιμο: Κάποτε ἕνας εὐγενῆς καὶ πλούσιος ἄρχοντας, παραδομένος στὶς ἡδονές, ἄκουσε πολλὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀρετὴ ἑνὸς πνευματικοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πῆγε νὰ τὸν συμβουλευθῆ. Ὁ πνευματικὸς ἐκεῖνος ἄνδρας τοῦ εἶπε τοῦτα μόνο: «Ὁ Χριστὸς ἦταν φτωχός, ἐνῶ ἐσὺ πλούσιος. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἦταν νηστικός, ἐνῶ ἐσὺ χορτασμένος. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἦταν σχεδὸν γυμνός, ἐνῶ ἐσὺ καλὰ ντυμένος. Ὁ Χριστὸς ὑπέμεινε θλίψεις καὶ πάθη, ἐνῶ ἐσὺ ἀπολαμβάνεις τρυφές, ἀναπαύσεις καὶ μαλακὰ στρώματα». Ὅταν τ' ἄκουσε αὐτὰ ὁ ἄρχοντας, ἤρθε σὲ κατάνυξη, μετανόησε, ζήτησε μὲ δάκρυα συγγνώμη ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ γιὰ τὴν ζωὴ ποὺ ἔκανε, καὶ ἀποφάσισε νὰ ζήσει πιά μὲ μετάνοια. Κατάλαβε καλά, πὼς ὅποιος ἔχει ἀνάπαυση σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον, δὲν θὰ γευθῆ τὴν αἰώνια ἀνάπαυση τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν. Αὐτὸ τονίζει καὶ ὁ Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος: «Ὁ ἔχων ἀνάπαυση ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ, τὴν αἰώνιον ἀνάπαυσην μὴ ἐλπίζετω λαβεῖν· ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐκ ἐστὶ τῶν ἀναπαυομένων ἐνθάδε, ἀλλ' ἐκείνων ἐστὶ τῶν ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ καὶ στεναχωρίᾳ διαγόντων τὸν βίον τοῦτον» (Λόγ. περὶ παρθενίας). Πρόσεξε λοιπὸν, μὴν ἀκούσεις τότε τὸ φοβερὸ λόγον τοῦ Χριστοῦ: «Τέκνον, μνήσθητι ὅτι ἀπέλαβες σὺ τὰ ἀγαθὰ σου ἐν τῇ ζωῇ σου» (Λουκ. 16:25).

Τέλος πάντων, νὰ μάθῃς πὼς ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δὲν κερδίζεται μὲ τὴν ἀργία καὶ τὴν ἄνεση, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὸν κόπο καὶ τὴν βία, ὅπως εἶπε ὁ Κύριος: «Ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν βιάζεται καὶ βιαστὲς ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν» (Ματθ. 11:12).

Η ΦΕΥΓΩΝ ΦΕΥΓΕ, Η ΕΜΠΑΙΖΩΝ ΕΜΠΑΙΖΕ ΤΟΝ
ΜΑΤΑΙΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΠΑΤΕΩΝΑ ΚΟΣΜΟΝ

Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν ἔχει... Ταλιμπάν!

ΠΗΓΗ: Τοῦ π. Ἀθανασίου Γιουσιμᾶ, ἐδημοσιεύθη στίς ἐφημερίδες «Στύλος Ὁρθοδοξίας», Ὀκτώβριος 2004 καί «Ἐμπρός», 29 Σεπτεμβρίου 2004

Υπάρχουν στιγμές πού ἀναλογίζομαι ἐάν εἶναι ὑποχρέωση ἐνός ἱερωμένου νά κηρύττει στηλιτεύοντας μὲ ἀνιδιοτέλεια καὶ εὐθύτητα τὴν ὑποκρισία καὶ τὴν ἀδικία. Καὶ ἂν υἰοθετήσω τὴν ἄποψη νά μὴν καυτηριάζω τὰ «κακῶς κείμενα», φαντάζομαι πὼς τότε τὸ κήρυγμά μου θὰ ἔμοιαζε σὰν ξαναζεσταμένο φαγητὸ καὶ μάλιστα σὲ φούρνο μικροκυμάτων! Δὲν μπορῶ νά φαντασθῶ ἓνα Ὁρθόδοξο κήρυγμα ἢ ἓνα ἐκκλησιαστικὸ κείμενο μὲ ὠραιοποιημένες ἐκφράσεις καὶ γλυκύτατους χαρακτηρισμούς. Δὲν εἶναι τοῦ χαρακτήρα μου κι οὔτε εἶναι κάτι πού μὲ ἔλκει. Τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο κήρυγμα θεωρῶ πὼς πρέπει νά εἶναι πικρὸ φάρμακο στὸ στομάχι τῶν ἀσθενῶν καὶ ὄχι καραμέλα πού τελικὰ προκαλεῖ οὐλίτιδα καὶ χαλάει τὰ δόντια τῶν μικρῶν παιδιῶν. Ἄλλωστε τὰ κηρύγματα τοῦ Ἰωάννη τοῦ Προδρόμου στὴν ἔρημο τοῦ Ἰορδάνη, ὁ ἐλεγκτικὸς λόγος τοῦ Θεανθρώπου πρὸς τοὺς Γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαίους ἢ τοῦ Πρωτομάρτυρα Στεφάνου στὰ μέλη τοῦ Μεγάλου Συνεδρίου καὶ τὰ τόσα καὶ τόσα κηρύγματα τῶν Πατέρων ἀποδεικνύουν ὅτι τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο κήρυγμα πρέπει νά εἶναι ἀλάτι σὲ πληγή.

Ὅμοια κι ἓνα ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ἄρθρο ἀξίζει, κατὰ τὴν προσωπική μου καὶ ὑποκειμενική κρίση, μόνο ὅταν ὠφελεῖ πνευματικὰ τὸν ἀναγνώστη καὶ δὲν τὸν κάνει νά μετανιώνη πού ἔχασε τὸ χρόνο γιὰ νά τὸ διαβάση. Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο, μὲ πόνου ψυχῆς συχνά-πυκνά, φτάνω στὸ σημεῖο νά στηλιτεύω μὲ εὐθύτητα τίς ὑποκριτικὲς καὶ ἰδιοτελεῖς ἐνέργειες ἀκόμη καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῶν προσώπων.

Διάβασα στὸν ἡμερήσιο τύπο τὴ δῆλωση τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀθηνῶν κ.κ. Χριστοδούλου σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ὁποία χαρακτηρίζει ὅσους ἀντιδρῶν στὸ πιλοτικὸ πρόγραμμα μετάφρασης τῶν Ἀποστολικῶν καὶ Εὐαγγελικῶν κειμένων στίς Κυριακάτικες Θεῖες Λειτουργίες ὡς «Ταλιμπάν (sic!) τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας». Ἡ μετάφραση λειτουργικῶν κειμένων εἶναι ἓνα τεράστιο θέμα πού δὲν καλύπτεται στὸ πλαίσιο ἐνός ἄρθρου. Νομίζω πὼς δὲν πρέπει νά γίνονται βεβιασμένες κινήσεις ἐντυπωσιασμοῦ, ἀλλὰ συντονισμένες καὶ προσεκτικὲς ἐνέργειες.

Ἡ πολὺχρονη προσωπική μου ἐπαφή μὲ νέους ἀνθρώπους μοῦ δίνει τὴ σιγουριά νά ὑποστηρίξω ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ καινοτομία τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου δὲν θὰ ὀδηγήσῃ τοὺς νέους στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη μεριά σκέφτομαι ὅτι ἐάν ἐπιχειρήσω νά διαφωνήσω, κινδυνεύω νά αὐτοχαρακτηρισθῶ ὡς «Ταλιμπάν τῆς Ἑλλαδικῆς Ἐκκλησίας». Ὅμως, τρομάζω μὲ τὴν σκέψη ὅτι ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος χρησιμοποιεῖ ἐντεχνα στοιχεῖα τῆς πολιτικῆς, ὅπου συκοφαντοῦνται ὅσοι ἐκφράζουν διαφορετικὴ ἄποψη! Εἶναι τραγικὸ νά διαπιστώνη κανεὶς ὅτι ὁ στεῖρος κοινοβουλευτισμὸς

μπῆκε στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Κατὰ τὴ θητεία τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Χριστοδούλου, ἡ Ἑλλαδικὴ Ἐκκλησία ἐκκοσμικεῖται σὲ σημεῖο νά διώκει γηραιούς Ἐπισκόπους, ὅπως τὸν Αἰτωλίας καὶ Ἀκαρνανίας, μὲ τὸ πρόσχημα τῆς προχωρημένης ἡλικίας τους! Εἶναι προφανές ὅτι διώκονται ὄχι ἐπειδὴ δὲν μποροῦν νά ἀσκήσουν τὰ ποιμαντικά τους καθήκοντα, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νά ἀντικατασταθοῦν – μὲσω τοῦ κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα συνοδικοῦ συστήματος τῶν παντελονάδων ἐπικοινωνιολόγων – ἀπὸ δικούς του ἐπισκόπους-μαριονέτες. Κι ὅλα αὐτὰ γιὰ νά ὑπάρχη ἡ πλειοψηφία στὴν Ἱεραρχία καὶ ἔτσι νά δρᾷ ἀνεξέλεγκτα.

Ταπεινὰ πιστεύω – συγχωρέστε με ὅσοι διαφωνεῖτε – πὼς ἡ ἐξάχρονη θητεία τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀθηνῶν εἶναι μία περίοδος: α) ὑποκριτικῆς σύγκρουσης μὲ τὴν Πολιτεία γιὰ τὴν ἀναγραφή τοῦ θρησκευματοῦ στίς ἀστυνομικὲς ταυτότητες, (ἀλήθεια, ἡ Νέα Δημοκρατία πόσο παραπλανητικὰ χρησιμοποίησε τὸ θέμα προεκλογικὰ καὶ τώρα ὡς κυβέρνηση «νίπτει τὰς χεῖρας» τῆς Ὑπουργοῦ Παιδείας!), β) ἀνεξήγητης σύμπλευσης μὲ τὸν Παπισμὸ μὲσα ἀπὸ τὸν διαχριστιανικὸ συγκρητισμὸ, γ) σφοδρῆς ἀντιπαράθεσης μὲ τὸ ἀδύναμο καὶ πανταχόθεν βαλλόμενο Οἰκουμενικὸ μας Πατριαρχεῖο, δ) ἐνοχῆς ἀδράνειας τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν δικαστηρίων γιὰ ἠθικὰ παραπτώματα κληρικῶν, καὶ ε) παράλογης κατασκευοφάντησης ὅσων ἀντιδρῶν στὴν ἐκκοσμικεῖση πού πρεσβεύει ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος καὶ οἱ ὁμόφρονές του κόλακες!

Φίλοι ἀναγνώστες, δυστυχῶς, δὲν ἀποτελοῦμε, κληρὸς καὶ λαός, «τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (Μαθθ. 5, 13) Ἡ ἐκκοσμικεῖση, ὁ ἐπαγγελματισμὸς καὶ ἡ ἀκηδία εἶναι τὰ κύρια χαρακτηριστικά μας. Ἄς κλείσω ὅμως μὲ μία φράση τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Χρυσοστόμου: «Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔχει μεγάλη ἀνάγκη ὄχι μόνο ἀπὸ αὐθεντικούς Χριστιανούς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ καλῆς ποιότητας ἐκκλησιαστικούς ἡγέτες».



Στὸ σπίτι μου ἔρχονται, ἄνθρωποι ὅπως ὁ πάτερ Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τὴν Νάξο, ὁ πάτερ Γερόντιος ἀπὸ τὴν Κονία, ὁ πάτερ Ἀμφιλόχιος ἀπὸ τὴν Πάτμο κι ἄλλοι ἀσκητές. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ φίλοι μου, οἱ δικοί μου. Εἶναι «οἱ μηδὲν ἔχοντες καὶ τὰ πάντα κατέχοντες». Ζοῦνε κρυφὰ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο. Κανένας σπουδαῖος δὲν τοὺς ξέρει καὶ κανένα σπουδαῖο δὲν γνωρίζουν. Πολλές φορές κάθουμαι καὶ συλλογίζομαι καὶ λέγω: Νὰ, αὐτοὶ δὲν ζοῦνε μὲ τόση ἀπλότητα καὶ μὲ ἓνα τίποτα; Ναι, ζοῦνε καὶ μάλιστα εἶναι πιὸ φχαριστημένοι ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ. Τί χρειάζεται λοιπὸν τόση φασαρία πού κάνουμε;

Φώτης Κόντογλου

Ω Θεία Αγάπη

Αγίου Νεκταρίου



Ο Άγιος Νεκτάριος συνέθεσε χιλιάδες ιερών στροφών. Έδω παρατίθεται ἓν ποίημα, κραυγή βαθυτάτης προσευχῆς, τὴν ὁποῖαν ἀσφαλῶς ἀπαύστως καὶ σήμερον ἀναπέμπει ὁ θαυματουργὸς Άγιος πρὸ τῆς Θείας Αἰγάτης. Ἡ Αἰγιαστική τῶν πάντων, ἡ αἰωνία καὶ ἀκατάλυτος αὐτῆ ἀγάπη ἄς πληροῖ καὶ ἄς ἀγιάζη τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν εὐβλαβῶν προσκυνητῶν τοῦ Άγίου Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ δοξασθέντος καὶ δοξαζομένου Άγίου Του.

Αἰ ἐντεύξεις, αἰ δεήσεις, αἰ προσευχαὶ αἰ ὁποῖα διὰ τῶν ἱερωτάτων ὡδῶν τῶν ἁσματικῶν ἀκολουθιῶν τοῦ Άγίου ἄς ἀναπεμφθοῦν, ἵνα ἀνοίξουν τὰς πύλας τοῦ θεοῦ ἑλέους, διὰ νὰ πνεύση, πρεσβεῖαις τοῦ Άγίου, «γαληνὸν καὶ ζεφύριον», τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Άγιον, «λαλοῦν, ἐνεργοῦν, διαίρουν τὰ χαρίσματα», ποιοῦν θαυμάσια καὶ δυνάμεις πολλὰς, θεραπεῦον νόσους καὶ ἀσθενείας χαλεπάς τοῖς ἐκζητοῦσιν ἐκ βαθέων τὴν Θεῖαν Αἰγάτην.

+ + +

Ω Θεία Αἰγάτη, ἐλθέ, ἱκετεύω,
ἐξ ὅλης ψυχῆς μου καὶ μέσης καρδίας,
καὶ σκῆνωμα θεῖον, Χριστέ, ποίησόν με
καὶ πάσης κηλῖδος, ὦ καθάρισόν με.

Ω Θεία Αἰγάτη, ἀγάτης ἐνθέου
τὴν Σὲ ἐκζητοῦσαν ψυχὴν ἐμπλησόν μου
καὶ ἔρωτα θεῖον, Ω Θεία Αἰγάτη,
θερμῶς ἱκετεύω, τῷ δούλῳ Σου δός μοι.

Ω Θεία Αἰγάτη, τὴν Σὴν ἱκετεύω,
ἀγάτην παράσχου τοῖς Σὲ ἐκζητοῦσι·
ἡ γὰρ Σὴ ἀγάτη τὸ πλήρωμά ἐστὶ
τοῦ Θεοῦ Σου Νόμου, Αἰγάτη γλυκεῖα.

Ω Θεία Αἰγάτη, ἡ μόνη πληροῦσα
τὸν σύμπαντα κόσμον καὶ ἡ συντηροῦσα,
Σὺ πέλεις ὁ νόμος τῶν ἐπουρανίων,
Σὺ πέλεις ὁ νόμος καὶ τῶν ἐπιγείων.

Ἡ Σὴ Βασιλεία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάτη,
ἐν ἣ βασιλεύει χαρὰ καὶ εἰρήνη,
ἐν ἣ βασιλεύει ἡ μακαριότης,
ὁ ἔρωτος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ εὐφροσύνη.

Ἡ Ἱεραρχία καὶ ὁ Πάπας

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Θεοδώρου Ζήση, Καθηγητοῦ τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Ἀριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης (Α.Π.Θ.)

Παρ' ὀλίγον κατηγορούμενοι...

Τὸ θέμα τοῦ πάπα ἀπασχολεῖ τὰ πιστὰ καὶ συνειδητὰ μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐδῶ καὶ πολὺ καιρὸ. Κανεὶς δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ διανοηθῆ ὅτι θὰ φθάναμε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο. Ἀγωνιούσαμε καὶ ἀνησυχούσαμε, γιὰ τὴν ἀμβλυνση τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου αἰσθητηρίου, γιὰ τὴν ἐντεχνη μέσῳ τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ ἄλωση ἐκ τῶν ἔνδον καὶ αἰχμαλωσία μας. Οἱ Θεολογικὲς Σχολές, μὲ ἐλάχιστες καὶ ἐπαινετὲς ἐξαιρέσεις, ἐκτρέφουν καὶ παράγουν οἰκουμενίζοντες θεολόγους καὶ κληρικούς. Ἄν κατὰ θεῖα ρύθμιση δὲν εἶχαν ἐπισυμβεῖ τίς τελευταῖες δεκαετίες ἡ ἀναγέννηση τῶν πατερικῶν σπουδῶν καὶ ἡ ἄνθηση τοῦ Μοναχισμοῦ θὰ εἶχε ἦδη πραγματοποιηθῆ, χωρὶς ἀντίσταση καὶ ἀντίδραση, ἡ πλήρης ἐνσωμάτωσή μας στὴ Δύση, θὰ εἶχαμε φραγκέψει καὶ ὡς πρὸς τὴ θρησκεία, καὶ ὡς πρὸς τὴν πίστη.

Δὲν εἶναι γι' αὐτὸ δύσκολο νὰ ἐξηγήση κανεὶς τὴν στάση τῆς πλειοψηφίας τῶν ἱεραρχῶν ἀπέναντι στοῦ θέμα τῆς ἐπισκέψεως τοῦ πάπα στὴν Ἑλλάδα. Ἡ κατάσταση μάλιστα αὐτὴ θὰ χειροτερεύη, ὅσο θὰ ἀποχωροῦν οἱ παλαιοὶ ἱεράρχες καὶ θὰ ἀναδεικνύονται νέοι μὲ οἰκουμενιστικὴ καὶ ἐκκοσμικευμένη νοοτροπία, καρπὸν τῆς οἰκουμενίζουσας καὶ αἰρετίζουσας θεολογίας καὶ ἐκκλησιολογίας. Ἡ τωρινὴ σύνθεση τῆς Ἱεραρχίας ἀπέτρεψε τὴν ἐπιθυμία καὶ πρόταση μερικῶν Ἱεραρχῶν νὰ κληθοῦν καὶ νὰ ἀπολογηθοῦν οἱ δυὸ πρωτοπρεσβύτεροι καθηγητὲς τῶν δυὸ Θεολογικῶν Σχολῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι, σταθεροὶ στὴν παράδοση, ἀγωνίστηκαν, ὅσο μποροῦσαν νὰ πείσουν τὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπο καὶ τὴν Διαρκὴ Ἱερὰ Σύνοδο νὰ μὴ μετάσχη ἡ Ἐκκλησία στὴν ὑποδοχὴ τοῦ πάπα, γιὰ αὐτὸ θὰ ἀποτελοῦσε κατὰλυση καὶ παράβαση τῆς διδασκαλίας τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν κανόνων.

Οἱ ἐπίσκοποι εἶναι διάδοχοι ὄχι μόνο τῶν θρόνων ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν τρόπων

Εὐχαριστοῦμε θερμὰ ὅσους ἀρχιερεῖς κατανοοῦν καὶ συμμερίζονται τοὺς ἀγῶνες μας, γράφοντας μάλιστα σὲ ἐπιστολές τους ὅτι ἐνισχύονται πνευματικά διότι στίς μέρες μας ὑπάρχουν ἀκόμη φύλακες τῆς πίστεώς μας καὶ ἄνθρωποι ἔτοιμοι νὰ θυσιάστον ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς. Λυπούμαστε μόνον, γιὰ τὴν πρῶτον ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, φύλακες ἄγρυπνοι τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου πίστεως μὲ πνεῦμα θυσίας, ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι ἐξ ὀρισμοῦ, ex officio, ἐκ θείας ἐντολῆς καὶ ἐκ καθήκοντος, ὄχι δυὸ καὶ τρεῖς ἐπίσκοποι μεταξὺ τῶν ὀγδόντα, ἀλλὰ ἀντίστροφα ὀγδόντα στοὺς ὀγδόντα καὶ ἐμεῖς νὰ τοὺς ἀκολουθοῦμε.

Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ ἐννοηθῆ ἐπίσκοπος, ποὺ ἀρνεῖται ἢ ποὺ ἀδιαφορεῖ νὰ ὑποστηρίξη καὶ νὰ στηρίξη τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον πίστη καὶ παράδοση, νὰ σκέπτεται καὶ νὰ ἐνεργῆ διαφορετικά, ὡς πρὸς τοὺς αἰρετικούς, ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους καὶ τοὺς

Ἁγίους Πατέρες; Τὸ γράφουμε, γιὰ μία ἀκόμη φορά, ἡ ἀποστολικὴ διαδοχὴ καὶ ἡ νομιμοποίησις ἐνὸς ἐπισκόπου δὲν διασφαλίζονται μόνον ἀπὸ τὴν κανονικότητα καὶ χρονικὴ συνέχεια τῆς ἱεροσύνης, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὴ συνέχισις τῆς ἀλήθειας καὶ τῆς παραδόσεως. Οἱ ἅγιοι ἱεράρχες ἐξυμνοῦνται καὶ τιμῶνται ὄχι μόνον ὡς διάδοχοι τῶν θρόνων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς διάδοχοι τῶν τρόπων. Δυστυχῶς, πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς ἐπαναπαύονται στὴ δόξα καὶ στὶς ἀνέσεις τῶν θρόνων καὶ ἀδιαφοροῦν γιὰ τὴ μίμησις τῶν τρόπων, τῆς συμπεριφορᾶς τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν Ἁγίων.

Νὰ μᾶς καλέσῃ ἡ Σύνοδος νὰ δώσουμε ἐξηγήσεις

Θὰ θέλαμε γι' αὐτὸ πολὺ νὰ μᾶς καλέσῃ ἡ Ἱεραρχία ἢ ἡ Διαρκὴς Ἱερά Σύνοδος νὰ δώσουμε λόγο γιὰ τὴ στάσιμα μας, νὰ συζητήσουμε ἀκόμη καὶ δημοσίως γιὰ τὰ δυὸ βασικὰ θεολογικὰ θέματα, ποὺ προέκυψαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπίσκεψις τοῦ πάπα καὶ ἔγιναν ἀντικείμενο ζωντανῶν συζητήσεων καὶ ἀντιπαραθέσεων. Γιὰ τὸ ἂν δηλαδὴ ὁ Παπισμὸς εἶναι αἵρεσις καὶ ὡς ἐκ τούτου εἶναι ἄκυρα καὶ ἀνυπόστατα τὰ μυστήριά τους καὶ δεύτερον, γιὰ τὸ ποῖα πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἡ στάσιμα τῶν πιστῶν, πολὺ περισσότερο τῶν ποιμένων, ἀπέναντι τῶν αἰρετικῶν. Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ σιωπᾶ, νὰ ἀρνεῖται νὰ πάρῃ θέσιμα ἢ Ἱεραρχία ἀπέναντι σταῖ βασικὰ αὐτὰ θέματα πίστεως, ποὺ εἶναι λελυμένα καὶ ἀποσαφηνισμένα πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως, ἀπὸ τὴν διδασκαλία Πατέρων καὶ Συνόδων;

Ἀπευθύνθηκαν πολλοὶ πιστοὶ καὶ μάλιστα νέοι, καὶ ζήτησαν νὰ ἔχουν ἀπάντησις ἐπίσημη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, περὶ τοῦ ἂν ὁ Παπισμὸς εἶναι ἐκκλησία ἢ αἵρεσις. Καὶ ἀπάντησις δὲν πῆραν, ἀλλὰ μόνον ὑπεκφυγὴ στὴ θέσιμα ὅτι εἶναι δύσκολο θέσιμα καὶ δὲν ἔχει ἀκόμη ἐπιλυθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Καλὰ, ποιοὶ εἶναι Ἐκκλησία; Οἱ σήμερα μόνον ζῶντες ἐπίσκοποι καὶ θεολόγοι ἢ καὶ ἡ θριαμβεύουσα Ἐκκλησία τῶν Ἁγίων; Ἄν δὲ μένει καιρὸς σὲ πολλοὺς πολυπραγμονοῦντες ἢ ραθυμοῦντες νὰ μελετήσουν καὶ νὰ ἐρευνήσουν τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὴ διδασκαλία τῶν Ἁγίων, ἃς ρωτήσουν καὶ ἃς μάθουν ἀπὸ τοὺς εἰδότες καὶ ἀγρυπνοῦντες.

Ὁ Παπισμὸς δὲν εἶναι ἐκκλησία. Εἶναι αἵρεσις!

Δὲν εἶναι πάντως οὔτε μόνον ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος, οὔτε μόνον ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς οἱ διδάσκοντες πῶς ὁ Παπισμὸς εἶναι αἵρεσις. Λυπᾶται κανεὶς ὅταν ἀκούει ἀρχιερεῖς νὰ ὑποτιμοῦν ὅσα λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόλαος, γιὰ τοὺς Λατίνους καὶ νὰ ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος δὲν εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἀσφαλῶς ἓνας ἅγιος μόνος δὲν ἀποτελεῖ κριτήριον καὶ κανόνα, ἀλλὰ ἡ συμφωνία τῶν Ἁγίων, ἢ Consensus Patrum. Ἐκτὸς ὅμως τοῦ ὅτι ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος ἀκολουθεῖ πάντοτε τοὺς Ἁγίους Πατέρες στὸ συγκεκριμένο θέσιμα περὶ τοῦ ὅτι οἱ Λατῖνοι εἶναι αἰρετικοί, ὑπάρχει τέτοιας ἐκτάσεως συμφωνία ἀνά τοὺς αἰῶνες, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Μ. Φωτίου, καὶ τόσα πολλὰ κείμενα, ὥστε νὰ ἀπορῇ κανεὶς πῶς ὑπάρχουν ἐπίσκοποι ἰσχυρίζομενοι καὶ μάλιστα πῶς τολμᾷ ἢ ἐπίσημη, ἢ διοικοῦσα Ἐκκλησία νὰ ἀποφαίνεται ὅτι δὲν ἔχει ἐπιλυθεῖ τὸ θέσιμα. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει δυὸ πράγματα: ἢ ἀμάθεια καὶ ἄγνοια ἢ συνεσκιασμένη παποφιλία καὶ παποδουλεία. Μποροῦν νὰ ὑποδείξουν ἓναν Ἅγιο, ποὺ νὰ διδάσκῃ ὅτι ὁ Παπισμὸς δὲν εἶναι αἵρεσις, ἀλλὰ ἐκκλησία, ὥστε τὸ πρᾶγμα νὰ καθίσταται ἀμφιλεγόμενο, θεολογοῦμενο;

Τόλμησε, ὅπως πληροφορηθήκαμε, νὰ θέσιμα τὰ θέσιμα αὐτὰ στὴν Ἱεραρχία ἐπίσκοπος μὲ ἄριστη θεολογικὴ συγκρότησις καὶ μάλιστα ἠσυχαστικὴ. Καὶ ὄχι μόνον δὲ βρῆκε τὴ δέουσα ἀνταπόκρισις, ἀλλὰ εἰσέπραξε ἀπὸ ἄλλον ἀρχιερέα τὴν ἐρώτησις – ἐνστασις: «Καλὰ μὲ τὴ θεολογία θὰ ἀσχολούμαστε ἐδῶ μέσα;». Ποῦ ἄλλοῦ, ἂν ὄχι σὲ σύνοδο ἐπισκόπων, θὰ ἀναπτύσσονται καὶ θὰ ἐπιλύονται θεολογικὰ θέσιμα καὶ προβλήματα; Σύνοδοι ἐπισκόπων μὲ μακρὲς συζητήσεις διασάφησαν καὶ διαμόρφωσαν τὰ δόγματα τῆς πίστεως, θεολόγησαν, χριστολόγησαν καὶ εἰκονολόγησαν, ἀποκρούοντας τὶς τριαδολογικὲς, χριστολογικὲς, εἰκονομαχικὲς καὶ ἄλλες αἱρέσεις. Τὸ πλῆθος τῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων μᾶς παρέδωσε τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θεολογίας. Δὲν ἔχει καμιά σχέσιμα μὲ τὶς συνόδους τῶν Πατέρων ἐκεῖνη ἢ σύνοδος, ποὺ δὲν ξέρεῖ ἢ ἀδιαφορεῖ ἢ ἀποφεύγει σκόπιμα νὰ θεολογήσῃ καὶ νὰ ὀριοθετήσῃ τὴ θέσιμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπέναντι τῶν αἰρετικῶν.

Ἔθαψαν τὸ θέσιμα τοῦ πάπα καὶ ἐπιβάλλουν ποινές, γιὰ νὰ σιωπήσουμε...

Τὸ εὐσεβὲς πλῆρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ποὺ συζήτησε καὶ συζητᾷ καὶ θὰ ἐξακολουθήσῃ νὰ συζητᾷ γιὰ τὸν Παπισμὸ ἀποδεικνύεται ἄξιο τῶν Πατέρων, ἀναβιώνει πατερικὲς ἐποχές, κατὰ τὶς ὁποῖες τὰ θέσιμα τῆς πίστεως ἦταν θέσιμα καθημερινῆς ζωῆς. Συζητᾷ καὶ ἀγωνιᾷ γιὰ τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῶν Πατέρων, γιὰ τὴν κληρονομία του, γιὰ τὴν ἐξασφάλισις τῆς σωτηρίας του· ζεῖ καὶ κινεῖται μέσα στὴ συνεχιζόμενη πάλη ἀληθείας καὶ πλάνης, Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ αἱρέσεως. Βλέπει τοὺς φύλακες νὰ νυστάζουν, τοὺς ποιμένες νὰ ἀδιαφοροῦν μπροστὰ στοὺς λύκους, νὰ μετακινοῦνται καὶ νὰ καταστρέφονται τὰ ὄρια ποὺ ἔθεσαν οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες. Ἦταν μεγάλη καὶ μοναδικὴ εὐκαιρία, γιὰ τὴν Ἱεραρχία νὰ συμφωνήσῃ μ' αὐτὴν τὴ διαχρονικὴ συνείδησις τοῦ πληρώματος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ νὰ τὴν ἐκφράσῃ. Ἀποδείχθηκε κατώτερη τῶν περιστάσεων, καὶ ἐκτὸς μερικῶν ἐξαιρέσεων, δὲ συντάχθηκε μὲ τοὺς Ἁγίους Πατέρες. Ἐνιψε τὰς χεῖρας, ὅπως ὁ Πόντιος Πιλάτος, καὶ ἄφησε τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Πίστις σὲ χεῖρα νέων σταυρωτῶν. Ἐπραξε ὄχι τὰ θεάρεστα, ἀλλὰ τὰ εὐάρεστα. Ἐρριψε βαρῖα πλάκα καὶ ἔθαψε τὸ θέσιμα τοῦ πάπα, συνιστώντας σὲ ὄλους σιωπῇ. Ἐβαλε καὶ κουστωδία νὰ φυλάσῃ, μήπως βρεθοῦν μερικοὶ τολμηροὶ καὶ ἀναστήσουν τὸ θέσιμα καὶ συναναστήσουν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Ἦδη ἡ Ἀρχιεπισκοπὴ Ἀθηνῶν, γιὰ ἐκφοβισμό, διενεργεῖ ἀνακρίσεις καὶ στέλνει σὲ συνοδικὸ δικαστήριον πολύτεκνο ἀγωνιστὴ ἱερέα, γιὰτὶ μίλησε ἐναντίον τῆς ἐπισκέψεως τοῦ πάπα. Καὶ σὲ ἄλλες μητροπόλεις ἔχουν ἐπιβληθεῖ ποινὲς σὲ ἀγωνιστὲς ἱερεῖς καὶ μοναχοὺς.

Ὅσοι σιωποῦν καὶ συνιστοῦν νὰ σιωπήσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς, λησμονοῦν τὴ δύναμις τοῦ Ἀναστάντος. Θέλουν νεκρῇ, ἀδύναμις τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἂν ἐμεῖς σιωπήσουμε, οἱ λίθοι κεκράζονται. Θὰ φωνάζουν τὰ ἁγιασμένα χῶματα ἀπὸ τὰ αἵματα καὶ τὶς θυσίες, ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀσκητικὸς ἀγῶνες, τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ τῶν ὁσίων, ποὺ ἀγωνίσθηκαν ἐναντίον τῶν αἰρετικῶν, θὰ κραυγάζουν οἱ εἰκόνες τῶν ἁγίων ἀπὸ τὰ τέμπλα καὶ τὰ εἰκονοστάσια, θὰ τρυποῦν τὰ αὐτιά καὶ τὶς καρδιές οἱ ὕμνοι τῶν λειτουργικῶν βιβλίων ποὺ ἐξυμνοῦν τοὺς ἁγίους...

THE PURPOSE OF THE ORTHODOX PARISH

By Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, based on an article in Pravoslavnaya Rus, No. 11, 1955, translated from Blagovestnik, a parish bulletin of the Holy Virgin Cathedral, San Francisco, CA, November 1991 (edited for length)

What is the purpose of the Church and also of the parish within her? The word of God gives the answer. The Apostle writes: *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* (Eph 4:11-13). Here, then, is the purpose: the perfecting of the saints, the work of ministry, the building up of the Body of Christ -- a triple task of the Church and, consequently, also the task of each parish.

The first point, the perfecting of the saints is the moral perfecting of the members of the Church. The salvation of souls in Christ is first and foremost; one must never relegate it to second place. They are wrong who set as the basis of the Church's activity the social task, i.e., the transformation of social relationships through the Church and through this the Christian elevation of the individual. Salvation in Christ is attained through prayer, the divine service, the regulations of the Church, deeds of love and beneficence, spiritual struggle. A pastor's main concern is and must always be the salvation of the souls entrusted to him. This is also the personal concern of each member of the Church. It is accomplished within the common body of the Church -- not in isolation, but by way of mutual spiritual support, and thereby the self-loving thought only for oneself is overcome. A personal, worthy life in Christ is a responsibility before the Church as a whole.

The second task is the work of ministry -- to God and to men. It opens up before each member of the Church and of the parish a broad field of church social activity. Ministry to God: participation in the divine services, in church reading and chanting, in constructing churches, in caring for the beauty and cleanliness of the church -- these are particular examples of works, as they say, "for God." Ministry to men: every kind of benefaction for the needy, help for the sick, disinterested efforts on behalf of others, as have been expressed recently in the sending of spiritual books, foodstuffs, clothing and medicines to needy areas overseas. In some parishes, this duty of ministering to one's neighbor has brought to life auxiliary parish organizations. A special, very important task is the churchly upbringing of children and youth. This is a matter of exceptional importance. We are threatened with the loss of the younger generation for the Church. The duty of the parish leadership, on the one hand, is to influence families in this regard, that they not forget their duty towards their children, and, on the other hand, to form centers, Saturday and Sunday schools, children's church choirs, and to take other measures

for keeping the younger generation attached to the Church and under the Church's influence.

One should not complain about our parishes, that they are inert in this regard. Under our meager conditions, they have displayed appropriate work, diligence and sacrifice. But here precisely is that point over which the interests of the pastorate clash with social interests. The difficulty of the priest's position lies in not snuffing out spontaneous social activity in the parish and initiative that not infrequently comes from the laity. A priest cannot do everything himself, by himself, for everyone; he needs cooperation. But here the cooperation of individual persons with the pastor often turns into an urge to lead, to criticize, to create opposition, etc. A priest can calmly make use of the broad cooperation of the members of the parish when he has confidence in the preservation of church policy. Then there is no fear that the rights of the pastor will be usurped, there is no fear that the work will turn aside from the Church, and even do her harm. Then, too, every kind of assistance rendered to the priest, in case of his weakness, ignorance, inability, etc., cannot disturb the correct relationships in the parish.

The common Church task: The third task, the building up of the body of Christ, is the ministry for the Church as a whole, a task that expresses to the greatest extent the unity of the part with the whole, of the parish with the Church. In our church consciousness, we should never extinguish thought for the whole Orthodox Church, love for her, zeal for the Church, and more concretely and first of all, for the Orthodox Church at large to which we belong. And so, in fulfilling this third task, we are hardly equal to it.

Ministry to the Church as a whole is, practically speaking, concern for church centers. It requires, first of all, an awareness of how many ways we at the local level are indebted to these church centers. The Church administration takes care for the correct observance of the order of the services, for the printing of divine service books and the supplying of churches with them; it safeguards the succession of episcopal and priestly ordination; it takes care for the education and preparation of sacred ministers, and provides pastors for church communities. It guards the Church against arbitrariness and against those people who introduce scandal into the Church; it safeguards the external dignity of Orthodoxy as well. It cuts off overt moral temptations, wards off attacks on the faith and the Church, wherever they might come from. It is responsible for both the ideological defense of the Church and her juridical defense.

The fullness of general church life and the many-sided, fruitful activity of ecclesial, episcopal centers is direct evidence of the well-being of life within numerous individual Orthodox parishes. And conversely, an episcopal center laboring under difficulties and having a weak range of activity invariably speaks of difficult conditions in the life of a parish.

The task of building up the body of Christ's Church is great and many-sided. Insofar as it touches the parish, it consists in the parish community not shutting itself up in its own narrow sphere, but in being a beneficial and necessary, conscious part of the whole church body.

HALLOWEEN AND THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

By Archpriest Victor Potapov

Because many of us are either newly Orthodox or newly aware of our Orthodoxy, we must carefully examine every aspect of our involvement in the world -- its activities, festivals, associations, and societies -- to be certain whether or not these involvements are compatible with our Holy Orthodox Faith. This difficult task can lead to some pain when we realize that we cannot take part in some popular organizations and activities.

Most of our schools, local community organizations, television, radio, and the general press will share in and capitalize upon the "festival of Halloween." But Orthodox Christians cannot participate in this event at any level. The simple issue is our fidelity to God and the Holy Orthodox Christian Faith. Halloween has its roots in paganism, and it continues as a form of idolatry to worship Satan, the angel of death. As we know, the very foundation of our Holy Church is built upon the blood of martyrs who refused, despite painful penalties, to worship, venerate, or pay obeisance in any way to the idols who are Satan's angels. Because of the faithfulness, obedience, and self-sacrifice of the Holy Martyrs, God poured out abundant Grace upon His Holy Church, whose numbers increased daily. The persecution did not stem the spread of faith. Differing from the world's values, humble faithfulness and obedience to God were the very strength of their life in Christ, Who gave them true spiritual peace, love and joy, and participation in the miraculous workings of His Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Church calls us to faithfulness by our turning away from falsehood toward Truth and eternal life.

We can easily stay away from the pagan festival of Halloween if we gain an understanding of the spiritual danger and history of this anti-Christian feast.

The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Britain, Ireland, and northern France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall (on the eve of October 31 and into the day of November 1), when, as they believed, the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. The Celts believed that a certain deity, whom they called Samhain, was the Lord of Death. To him they gave honor at their New Year's festival.

From an Orthodox Christian point of view, many diabolical beliefs and practices were associated with this feast, which have endured to this current time. On the eve of the New Year's festival, the Druids, who were the priests of the Celtic cult, instructed their people to extinguish all hearth fires and lights. On the evening of the festival they ignited a huge bonfire built from oak branches, which they believed to be sacred. Upon this fire, they offered burnt sacrifices of crops, animals, and even human beings to appease and cajole Sam-

hain, the lord of Death. They also believed that Samhain, being pleased by their faithful offerings, allowed the souls of the dead to return to homes for a festal visit on this day. This belief led to the ritual practice of wandering about in the dark dressed in costumes indicating ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, fairies and demons. The living entered into fellowship and communion with their dead by this ritual act of imitation, through costume and the wandering about in the darkness, even as the souls of the dead were believed to wander.

The dialogue of "trick or treat" is integral to Halloween beliefs and practices. The souls of the dead had -- by Celtic tradition -- entered into the world of darkness, decay, and death, and made total communion with and submission to Samhain the Lord of Death. They bore the affliction of great hunger on their festal visit. This belief brought about the practice of begging as another Celtic ritual imitation of the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. The implication was that any souls of the dead and their imitators who are not appeased with "treats", i.e., offerings, will provoke the wrath of Samhain, whose angels and servants (the souls and human imitators) could retaliate through a system of "tricks" or curses.

The Orthodox Christian must understand that taking part in these practices at any level is an idolatrous betrayal of our God and our Holy Faith. For if we imitate the dead by dressing up in or wandering about in the dark, or by begging with them, then we have wilfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose Lord is not a Celtic Samhain, but is Satan the Evil One, who stands against God. Further, if we submit to the dialogue of "trick or treat," our offering goes not to innocent children, but rather to Samhain, the Lord of Death whom they have come to serve as imitators of the dead, wandering in the darkness.

We must stay away from other practices associated with Halloween, the eve of the Celtic New Year festival. The Druid priests used to instruct their faithful to extinguish their hearth fires and lights and to gather around the fire of sacrifice to make their offerings and to pay homage to the Lord of Death. This sacred fire was the fire of the New Year, to be taken home to rekindle lights and hearth fires. The sacred New Years fire developed into the practice of the Jack O' Lantern (in the U.S.A., a pumpkin, in older days other vegetables were used), which was carved in imitation of the dead and used to convey the new light and fire to the home, where the lantern was left burning throughout the night. Even the use and display of the Jack O' Lantern honors the Samhain, the Celtic god of death. Orthodox Christians cannot share in this Celtic activity, but must counter the secular customs by instead burning candles to the Savior, the Most Holy Mother of God, and to all the Holy Saints.

Divination was also part of this ancient Celtic festival. After the fire had died out the Druids examined the remains of the main sacrifices, hoping to foretell the coming years events. The Halloween festival was the proper night for sorcery, fortune

telling, divination, games of chance, and Satan worship and witchcraft in the later middle Ages.

In the strictly Orthodox early Celtic Church, the holy Fathers tried to counteract this pagan New Year festival that honored the Lord of Death, by establishing the Feast of All Saints on the same day. (It differs in the East, where the Feast of All Saints is celebrated on the Sunday following Pentecost). The custom of the Celtic Church was for the faithful Christians to attend a vigil service and a morning celebration of the Holy Eucharist. This custom created the term Halloween. The Old English of "All Hallow E'en", i.e., the eve commemorating all those who were hallowed (sanctified) became Halloween.

The remaining pagan and therefore anti-Christian people, whose paganism had become deeply intertwined with the Occult, Satanism and Magic, reacted to the Church's attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervour on this evening. The early medieval Halloween became the supreme feast of the Occult, a night and day of witchcraft, demonism, sorcery and Satanism of all kinds. Many practices involved desecration and mockery of Christian practices and beliefs. Costumes of skeletons developed as a mockery of the Church's reverence for Holy Relics; Holy things were stolen, such as crosses and the Reserved Sacrament, and used perversely in sacrilegious ways. The practice of begging became a system of persecution to harass Christians who were, by their beliefs, unable to participate with offerings to those who served the Lord of Death. The Western Church's attempt failed, to supplant this pagan festival with the Feast of All Saints.

Paganism, idolatry and Satan worship: How then did things so contradictory to the Holy Orthodox Faith gain acceptance among Christian people? The answers are spiritual apathy and listlessness, which are the spiritual roots of atheism and turning away from God. In society today, one is urged to disregard the spiritual roots and origins of secular practices when the outward practices or forms seem ordinary, entertaining, and harmless. The dogma of atheism underlies many of these practices and forms, denying the existence of both God and Satan. Practices and forms of obvious pagan and idolatrous origin are neither harmless nor of little consequence. The Holy Church stands against them because we are taught by Christ that God stands in judgment over everything we do and believe, and that our actions are either for God or against God. Therefore, the customs of Halloween are not innocent, but are demonic, precisely as their origins prove.

There are evil spirits. Devils do exist. Christ came into the world so that, through death, He might destroy him that had the dominion of death, that is, the Devil (Hebrews 2:12). Christians must see that our greatest foe is the Evil One who inspires nations and individuals to sin, and who keeps them from coming to the truth. Until we know that Satan is our real enemy, we can make little spiritual progress. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).

Today we witness a revival of Satanist cults and special satanic ceremonies on Halloween night. Everywhere Satan reaches out to ensnare more innocent people with spiritualism, supernatural phenomena, séances, prophesies and all sorts of demonically inspired works. Divine Providence ensured that Saints Kosmas and Damian, these physicians of our souls and bodies, should have their feast day on the very day of Halloween, a day the world dedicated to the destroyer, corrupter, and deceiver of humanity. God has provided us with this powerful counterpoise and weapon against the snares of Satan, and we should take full advantage of this gift, for truly God is wonderful in His Saints!



HOLY BROTHERS AND FATHERS: In our days, the faithful are being tried in many ways. The world, the world-ruler and his agents oppose the truth of the Gospel, provoke the faithful, and rage against those who keep the faith. The triumphs of the adversary are legion, and we, the priests of God, full of sorrow, spot His children at the *wide gate* and on the *easy way that leads to destruction*. The devil's greatest victory today is that he creates spiritual confusion in the hearts and minds of the believers. The hater of good has succeeded in changing the thinking of many teachers and pastors, so that in the sacred ministry of the word, both from the pulpit and in the confessional, they no longer teach the truths of the Gospel, but their own personal views and opinions. Thus, on one and the same issue, the believer is taught differing positions, one day these and the next day the exact opposite, from one priest this and from another that.

The words *thus saith the Lord* of the Prophets and the God-bearing Fathers of the Church have been replaced by the words *I think*. These pastors have changed their role from being a preacher of the counsels and statutes of God to being a lawmaker, thereby usurping divine prerogatives.

Behold why we said that this policy is the devil's greatest victory. This spiritual Babel aims at altering the very conscience of the faithful, who are better informed of the will of God by listening to their conscience (which is the voice of God) rather than to such pastors. But, if we clergy come to our senses and confess that *we have sinned, we have transgressed, we have committed unrighteousness*, and resolve from now on to *rightly divide the word of truth* in our teaching and in the ministry of the sacred Mystery of Confession, then, and only then, will we see our people faithfully coming to Holy Communion with a longing for salvation and theosis, and living in true spiritual resurrection and elation.

Archimandrite Nikodemos Aerakis
[Metropolitan See of Hydra, Spetsae and Aegina]

A GREAT MYSTERY

By Fr. Andrew Phillips, from "The Orthodox Family," Issue no. 9, Spring 1995

Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it. (Eph 5,24-25)

There are many who are surprised and even shocked on hearing this epistle read at weddings. The idea of the obedience of the wife to her husband seems to disturb modern ears. On hearing these words, many probably think of the feminist stereotype of the tyrannical husband exploiting, abusing, stifling and frustrating a submissive wife, who is bound to him in obedience whatever his unreasonable demands. This stereotype has, however, nothing at all to do with what the Apostle Paul means. Let us look more closely.

The ascetic purpose of marriage is to reconstitute in some small degree that paradisiac life of Adam and Eve in Eden before the Fall. Therefore to understand this purpose, we must first of all bear in mind what caused them to fall from grace. Eve's sin was disobedience, disobedience to God caused through the flattery of the serpent which provoked her vanity and pride. But Adam also sinned through selfishness and pride. First he did not look after his wife, he allowed her to fall into sin through the serpent. Second he fell into sin through Eve's suggestion that he too partake of the forbidden fruit. And third when God spoke to him, he blamed everything on Eve.

In other words Adam's sin consisted of not sacrificing himself for Eve. First he failed to fight off the serpent's temptation, failing to protect Eve, then he himself went along with the temptation and finally, instead of protecting Eve and assuming blame in humility for the one for whom he was responsible, he blamed the fault on her. Therefore the punishment that both received, ascetically speaking, 'fitted the crime.' Adam was to toil 'by the sweat of his brow,' to sacrifice himself in order to live, thus humbling him into repentance for his selfishness through which he allowed Eve to fall. And Eve was to suffer in childbirth, thus humbling her into repentance for her vanity through which the serpent flattered her.

Adam and Eve's state in Eden can therefore be restored if both repent of their sins, cultivating the virtues opposed to the sins into which they originally fell. To combat her disobedience, woman must seek obedience. And to combat his lack of care and self-sacrifice for woman, his lack of responsibility, man must sacrifice himself for her. This is the attempt to reconstitute that first paradisiac state. Moreover St. Paul compares the relationship between man and woman with that between Christ and the Church. The Church owes obedience to Christ, Her Head, but Christ sacrifices Himself for the Church, even unto death - this is a great mystery (Ephesians 5,32).

Is there a woman who would not obey a husband who was willing to sacrifice everything for her, being prepared even to die for her, as Christ on the Cross? Greater love hath no man

than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15,13). Woman will not obey man if she is not loved, and a man who expects obedience but gives no love deserves no obedience. For obedience to one who loves is not tyranny, but freedom, for love exists only where there is freedom.

Thus through woman's obedience to man and man's loving self-sacrifice for woman, some small part of that blessed state of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden can be restored. And this is the ascetic struggle which gives meaning to marriage. And when man overcomes his selfishness and woman her vanity, then we shall glimpse that Eden once more.



THE TWENTY-SIX VENERABLE-MARTYRS OF ZOGRAPHOU

Source: "Parish Life," October, 1996

In the year 1274, at the Council of Lyons, the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Paleologus decided to strengthen his dominion, which was close to falling, at the expense of union -- *unia* -- with Catholic Rome. This step provoked general discontent in the land, and in the year 1278, the Emperor issued an edict to introduce the *unia* in Byzantium, even if by forceful means. The Holy Mountain of Athos firmly resisted the *unia*. The Athonite monks dispatched an epistle to Michael, in which they solidly proved that the supremacy of the pope, his commemoration in the churches, the performance of the Eucharist on unleavened bread, the addition of the phrase *and the Son* (Filioque) cannot be accepted by the Orthodox, and they called on the Emperor to bethink himself. *We see clearly*, it was said in the epistle, *that thou art a heretic, but we implore thee: leave all this and abide in that teaching which thou hast received. Reject the unholy, new teachings of false knowledge, which adds conjectures to the faith.*

Crusaders expelled from Palestine and now in Romania, declared to the Emperor their readiness to establish the authority of the pope by fire and the sword. Michael employed Turks and Tatars as well. When the troops approached Athos, which was so hateful to the Emperor, he decided to vent his malice on the Athonite Slavs. At Michael's order, the servants of the pope fell upon the Bulgarian Monastery of Zographou.

When the demand to accept the *unia* was presented to the monks of Zographou, none of them wanted even to hear of Catholicism. The majority of the Zographans left the monastery, while the most steadfast, to the number of twenty-six, remained in the monastery tower. They were: Hegumen Thomas, monks Barsanuphius, Cyril, Michzas, Cosmas, Hilarion, James, Job, Cyprian, Sabbas, James, Martinian, Cosmas, Sergius, Minas, Joasaph, Ioannicius, Paul, Anthony, Euthymius, Dometian Parthenius and four laymen. The holy martyrs for the Orthodox faith were burned alive in the monastery tower on the 10th of October 1284.

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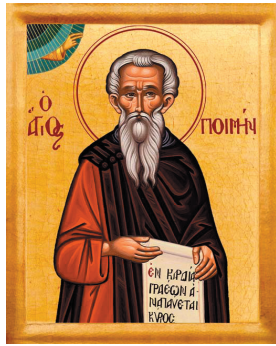
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IS JESUS YOUR PERSONAL SAVIOR?

By an Orthodox Priest

Coming from a Protestant background, I was always taught to think of Jesus as my “personal savior.” Is this view based on scripture and Christian tradition? What is the relationship of the individual believer to Jesus? How does it work?

As one from a strong evangelical Protestant background, the idea of Jesus Christ as my personal Savior is strong in my upbringing. I think the Protestant emphasis comes from the recognition that just a simple acknowledgment of Jesus as Messiah or as Son of God or even as the Accomplisher of Salvation is not enough, but that there must also be some type of commitment involved.

In the Orthodox Church the understanding is much more organic than in the Protestant confessions. In Protestantism, the individual is saved by a personal (meaning relating to me alone) action of God and the Church is the collection of all of those saved individuals. Salvation is an individual state, according to this view. The Orthodox Faith teaches us that salvation is not individual but corporate -- the whole Church is saved together and apart from the Church we cannot be saved. The conversion experience as a *saving act* is not a part of Orthodox faith -- rather this conversion experience (accomplished by baptism) is only the door into the saving ark of the Church. Jesus, by His death and (more importantly) resurrection, has defeated sin, death, and the devil and has unlocked the door to Paradise (it had been closed against fallen man and guarded by an angel with a flaming sword)

and He thus leads us in. Will we follow? -- that is what *salvation* is all about; following Christ into Paradise.

The words individual and personal bring up another interesting and important aspect. Within Orthodox teaching, we can say that Jesus is our personal Savior in that He takes individuals (a being that is independent and separated from all others) and makes them persons (a separate being that is united to other beings in a larger whole, in this case the Church). This contrast between individuals and persons is a little bit of an extrapolation from the doctrine of the Trinity. We worship One God (individual) in three persons. Similarly there is only One Church (individual) which is made of many persons. The emphasis on individuality in western and especially American culture is in this sense anti-Christian and is derived from an incorrect understanding of the Church which is the result of the reformation in Western Europe and the resulting theology which had to justify salvation apart from the Church. We must remember that salvation is corporate -- the whole Church is saved together and will be presented as a single entity as the Bride of Christ (there is only one Bride -- Jesus is not a polygamist) at the second coming. Our individual judgment is not whether we are saved or not, but rather we are part of the Church and following Christ. If we are part of the Church following Christ then we are saved along with the whole Church but if we cease to follow Christ and separate ourselves from the Church by placing our own judgment and will as higher and more important than that of the Church, then we are not saved because we have *jumped out of the ark*.

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD PRAY 'UNCEASINGLY'

From "Early Fathers from the Philokalia," pp. 412 - 415.

Let no one think, my brother-Christians, that it is the duty only of priests and monks to pray without ceasing, and not of laymen. No, no; it is the duty of all of us Christians to remain always in prayer. For look what the most holy Patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheus, writes in his life of St. Gregory of Thessalonica. This saint had a beloved friend by the name of Job, a very simple but most virtuous man. Once, while conversing with him, His Eminence said of prayer that every Christian in general should strive to pray always, and to pray without ceasing, as Apostle Paul commands all Christians, "Pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17), and as the prophet David says of himself, although he was a king and had to concern himself with his whole kingdom: "I foresaw the Lord always before my face" (Psalms 15:8), that is, in my prayer I always mentally see the Lord before me.

Gregory the Theologian also teaches all Christians to say God's name in prayer more often than to breathe... So, my Christian brethren, I too implore you, together also with St. Chrysostom, for the sake of saving your souls, do not neglect the practice of this prayer. Imitate those I have mentioned and follow in their footsteps as far as you can. At first it may appear very difficult to you, but be assured, as it were from Almighty God, that this very name of our Lord Jesus Christ, constantly invoked by you, will help you to overcome all difficulties, and in the course of time you will become used to this practice and will taste how sweet is the name of the Lord. Then you

will learn by experience that this practice is not impossible and not difficult, but both possible and easy.

This is why St. Paul, who knew better than we the great good which such prayer would bring, commanded us to pray without ceasing. He would not have imposed this obligation upon us if it were extremely difficult and impossible, for he knew beforehand that in such cases, having no possibility of fulfilling it, we would inevitably prove to be disobedient and would transgress his commandment, thus incurring blame and condemnation. The Apostle could have had no such intention.

Moreover, bear in mind the method of prayer – how it is possible to pray without ceasing, namely by praying in the mind. And this we can always do if we so wish. For when we sit down to work with our hands, when we walk, when we eat, when we drink we can always pray mentally and practice this mental prayer – the true prayer pleasing to God.

Let us work with the body and pray with the soul. Let our outer man perform his bodily tasks, and let the inner man be entirely dedicated to the service of God, never abandoning this spiritual practice of mental prayer, as Jesus, God and Man, commanded us, saying: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret" (Matthew 6:6).

The closet of the soul is the body; our doors are the five bodily senses. The soul enters its closet when the mind does not wander hither and thither, roaming among things and affairs of the world, but stays within, in our heart. Our senses become closed and remain closed when we do not let them be attached to external sensory things, and in this way our mind remains free from every worldly attachment, and by secret mental prayer unites with God its Father. "And thy Fa-

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ther which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly,” adds the Lord. God who knows all secret things sees mental prayer and rewards it openly with great gifts. For that prayer is true and perfect which fills the soul with Divine grace and spiritual gifts. As chrism perfumes the jar the more strongly the tighter it is closed, so prayer, the more fast it is imprisoned in the heart, abounds the more in Divine grace.

Blessed are those who acquire the habit of this heavenly practice, for by it they overcome every temptation of the evil demons, as David overcame the proud Goliath. It extinguishes the unruly lusts of the flesh, as the three men extinguished the flames of the furnace. This practice of inner prayer tames passions as Daniel tamed the wild beasts. By it the dew of the Holy Spirit is brought down upon the heart, as Elijah brought down rain on Mount Carmel. This mental prayer reaches to the very throne of God and is preserved in golden vials, sending forth their odors before the Lord, as John the Divine saw in the Revelation, “Four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints” (Revelation 5:8). This mental prayer is the light which illumines man’s soul and inflames his heart with the fire of the love of God. It is the chain linking God with man and man with God.

Oh the incomparable blessing of mental prayer! It allows a man constantly to converse with God. Oh truly wonderful and more than wonderful – to be with one’s body among men while in one’s mind conversing with God. Angels have no physical voice, but mentally never cease to sing glory to God. This is their sole occupation and all their life is dedicated to this.

So, brother, when you enter your closet and close your door, that is, when your mind is not darting hither and thither but enters within your heart, and your senses are confined and

barred against things of this world, and when you pray thus always, you too are then like the holy angels, and your Father, Who sees your prayer in secret, which you bring Him in the hidden depths of your heart, will reward you openly by great spiritual gifts.

But what other and greater rewards can you wish from this when, as I said, you are mentally always before the face of God and are constantly conversing with Him – conversing with God, without Whom no man can ever be blessed either here or in another life? Finally, my brother, whoever you may be, when you take up this book and, having read it, wish to test in practice the profit which mental prayer brings to the soul, I beg you, when you begin to pray thus, pray God with one invocation, “Lord have mercy,” for the soul of him who has worked on compiling this book and of him who helped to give it to the public. For they have great need of your prayer to receive God’s mercy for their soul, as you for yours. May it be so! May it be so!



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

ON ACQUIRING TRUE FAITH

By St. Peter of Damascus, from G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Bishop Kallistos Ware, "The Philokalia: vol. III," (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 164-167

St. Peter of Damascus, after St. Maximos the Confessor, has more writings in the five-volume "Philokalia" than any other writer. However, very little is known about his biography other than textual indications that he lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. He was apparently a monk, living in a "skete," and wrote his texts mainly for the edification of other monks.

+ + +

If we desire to acquire faith -- the foundation of all blessings, the door to God's mysteries, unflagging defeat of our enemies, the most necessary of all the virtues, the wings of prayer and the dwelling of God within our soul -- we must endure every trial imposed by our enemies and by our many and various thoughts. Only the inventor of evil, the devil, can perceive these thoughts or uncover and describe them. But we should take courage; because if we forcibly triumph over the trials and temptations that befall us, and keep control over our intellect so that it does not give in to the thoughts that spring up in our heart, we will once and for all overcome all the passions; for it will not be we who are victorious, but Christ, who is present in us through faith. It was with regard to this that Christ said, "If you have faith no bigger than a mustard-seed . . ." (Luke 17:6). Yet even if our thought, in a moment of weakness, should succumb, we should not be afraid or despair, or ascribe to our own soul what is said to us by the devil. On the contrary, we should patiently and diligently, to the limit of our strength, practice the virtues and keep the commandments, in stillness and devotion to God, freeing ourselves from all thoughts subject to our volition.

PRACTICING THE VIRTUES DEFEATS THE DEVIL

In this way the enemy, who day and night promotes every kind of fantasy and deceit, will not find us worried about his tricks and illusions and all the thoughts within which he lurks, presenting to us as truth what are really deceits and falsehoods; and so he will lose heart and go away.

Through such experience of the devil's weakness, the man who practices Christ's commandments will no longer be alarmed by any of his tricks. On the contrary, he will do whatever accords with God's will joyfully and without hindrance, strengthened by faith and assisted by God in whom he has believed. As the Lord Himself has said, "All things are possible for the person who believes" (Mark 9:23). For it is not he who fights the enemy, but God, who watches over him on account of his faith. As the Prophet said, "You have made the Most High your refuge" (Psalms 91:9). Such a person no longer feels anxiety about anything, for he knows that "though the horse is made ready for battle, salvation comes from the Lord" (Proverbs 21:31). Because of his faith he faces everything boldly. As St. Isaac says, "Acquire faith within you and you will trample on your enemies."

The man of faith acts, not as one endowed with free will, but as a beast that is led by the will of God. He says to God: "I became as a beast before Thee; yet I am continually with Thee" (Psalms 73:22 - 23). If Thy desire is that I should be at rest in Thy knowledge, I shall not refuse. If it is that I should experience temptation so as to learn humility, again I am with Thee. Of myself, there is absolutely nothing I can do. For without Thee I would not have come into existence from non-existence; without Thee I cannot live or be saved. Do what Thou wilt to Thy creature; for I believe that, being good, Thou bestowest blessings on me, even if I do not recognize that they are for my benefit. Nor am I worthy to know, nor do I claim to understand, so as to be at rest: this might not be to my profit.

ONE PRAYS FOR VICTORY -- NOT RELIEF

I do not dare to ask for relief in any of my battles, even if I am weak and utterly exhausted; for I do not know what is good for me. "Thou knowest all things" (John 21:17); act according to Thy knowledge. Only do not let me go astray, whatever happens; whether I want it or not, save me, though, again, only if it accords with Thy will. I, then, have nothing; before Thee I am as one that is dead; I commit my soul into Thy pure hands, in this age and in the age to be. Thou art able to do all things; Thou knowest all things; Thou desirest every kind of goodness for all men and ever longest for my salvation.

This is clear from the many blessings that in Thy grace Thou hast bestowed and always bestowest on us, visible and invisible, known to us and unknown; and from that gift of Thyself to us, O Son and Logos of God, which is beyond our understanding. Yet who am I that I should dare to speak to Thee of these things, Thou searcher of hearts? I speak of them in order to make known to myself and to my enemies that I take refuge in Thee, the harbor of my salvation. For I know by Thy grace that "Thou art my God" (Psalms 31:14).

DEPEND ON GRACE -- NOT ON THE MIND

I do not dare to say many things, but only wish to set before Thee an intellect that is inactive, deaf and dumb. It is not myself but Thy grace that accomplishes all things. For, knowing that I am always full of evil, I do not attribute such things to my own goodness; and because of this I fall down as a servant before Thee, for Thou hast found me worthy of repentance, and "I am Thy servant, and the son of Thy handmaid" (Psalms 116:16). But do not allow me, my Lord Jesus Christ, my God, to do, say or think anything contrary to Thy will: the sins I have already committed are enough. But in whatever way Thou desirest have mercy on me. I have sinned: have mercy on me as Thou knowest. I believe, Lord, that Thou hearest this my pitiable cry, "Help Thou my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Thou who has granted me, not only to be, but also to be a Christian. "It is a great thing," St. John of Karpathos has said, "for me to be called a monk and a Christian." As Thou has said, Lord, to one of Thy servants, "It is no light thing for you to be called by My name" (Isaiah 49:6). This is more to me than all the kingdoms of heaven or of earth. Let me always be called by

Thy most sweet name. O Master, full of compassion, I give thanks to Thee.

THE SUPERIOR FAITH BORN OF STILLNESS

Just as certain readings and certain words, tears and prayers are appropriate for one engaged in ascetic practice, so his is a different kind of faith from that superior faith which gives birth to stillness. The former is the faith of hearsay, the latter is the faith of contemplation, as St. Isaac says. Contemplation is more sure than hearsay. For the ordinary initial faith of the Orthodox is born of natural knowledge, and from this faith are born devotion to God, fasting and vigil, reading and psalmody, prayer and the questioning of those with experience. It is such practices that give birth to the soul's virtues, that is, to the constant observance of the commandments and of moral conduct. Through this observance come great faith, hope, and the perfect love that ravishes the intellect to God in prayer, when one is united with God spiritually, as St. Neilos puts it.

WRITTEN PRAYERS FREE THE MIND

The words of prayer are written once and for all, so that he who wishes to present his intellect motionless before the Holy and Life-giving Trinity may always pray one and the same prayer. The intellect itself has the sense that it is seen, even though at that time it is utterly impossible for it to see anything, for it is imageless, formless, colorless, undisturbed, undistracted, motionless, matterless, entirely transcending all the things that can be apprehended and perceived in the created world. It communes with God in deep peace and with perfect calm, having only God in mind, until it is seized with rapture and found worthy to say the Lord's Prayer as it should be said.

This is what we are told by St. Philemon and St. Irene, as well as by the Holy Apostles, the martyrs and other holy men. Anything other than this is illusion born of self-conceit. For the Divine is infinite and uncircumscribed, and the intellect that returns to itself must be in a similar state, so that through grace it may experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "For we walk by faith, not by sight," says St. Paul (II Corinthians 5:7).

ASCETICISM WITH FAITH LEADS TO GOD

For this reason, we should persist in our ascetic practice, so that through this enduring persistence our intellect is drawn in longing towards the Divine. For if the intellect does not find something that is superior to sensible realities it cannot direct its desire towards it, abandoning the things to which it has been so long accustomed. Just as the compassionate and the dispassionate are not greatly harmed by the affairs of this life, since they manage them well, so those who have received great gifts of grace are not harmed, since they ascribe their achievements to God.

THE LADDER OF DIVINE GRACES

By Theophanis the Monk, from G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Bishop Kallistos Ware, "The Philokalia – Vol. III," pp. 67 – 69

The first step is that of purest prayer. From this there comes a warmth of heart, and then a strange, a holy energy, Then tears wrung from the heart, God-given. Then peace from thoughts of every kind.

From this arises purging of the intellect, and next the vision of heavenly mysteries. Unheard-of light is born from this ineffably, and thence, beyond all telling, the heart's illumination.

Last comes – a step that has no limit though compassed in a single line – perfection that is endless. The ladder's lowest step prescribes pure prayer alone. But prayer has many forms: My discourse would be long were I now to speak of them: and, friend, know that always experience teaches one, not words.

A ladder rising wondrously to heaven's vault: Ten steps that strangely vivify the soul. Ten steps that herald the soul's life. A saint inspired by God has said: Do not deceive yourself with idle hopes That in the world to come you will find life If you have not tried to find it in this present world. Ten steps: a wisdom born of God. Ten steps: fruit of all the books. Ten steps that point towards perfection. Ten steps that lead one up to heaven. Ten steps through which a man knows God.

The ladder may seem short indeed, but if your heart can inwardly experience it you will find a wealth the world cannot contain, A god-like fountain flowing with unheard-of life. This ten-graced ladder is the best of masters, clearly teaching each to know its stages. If when you behold it you think you stand securely on it, ask yourself on which step you stand, So that we, the indolent, may also profit.

My friend, if you want to learn about all this, detach yourself from everything, From what is senseless, from what seems intelligent. Without detachment nothing can be learnt. Experience alone can teach these things, not talk. Even if these words once said by one of God's elect strike harshly, I repeat them to remind you: He who has no foothold on this ladder, Who does not ponder always on these things, when he comes to die will know terrible fear, terrible dread, will be full of boundless panic. My lines end on a note of terror.

Yet it is good that this is so: Those who are hard of heart – myself the first – are led to repentance, led to a holy life, less by the lure of blessings promised than by fearful warnings that inspire dread. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

You who have written this, hear, then, and take note: Void of all these graces, how have you dared to write such things? How do you not shudder to expound them? Have you not heard what Uzzah suffered when he tried to stop God's ark from falling? (II Samuel 6:6-7) Do not think that I speak as one who teaches: I speak as one whose words condemn himself, knowing the rewards awaiting those who strive; knowing my utter fruitlessness.

ON THE EVIL SPIRIT OF ANGER

By St. John the Cassian, "The Institutes," New York: The Newman Press, 2000, pp. 193 - 204

One of the best known of the Desert Fathers is the fourth century writer, St. John Cassian, whose "Institutes" and "Conferences" comprise two of the most comprehensive collections of sayings from the holy men and women of the ancient deserts. These books are a must for all serious students of Orthodox spirituality; like the "Philokalia," they will supply the serious student with many years of pleasant study and inspiration.

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We have heard that some people try to excuse this most destructive disease of the soul by attempting to extenuate it by a rather detestable interpretation of Scripture. They say that it is not harmful if we are angry with wrongdoing brothers, because God Himself is said to be enraged and angered with those who do not want to know Him or who, knowing Him, disdain Him. For example: "The Lord was angry and enraged against His people" (Psalms 106:40). And when the prophet prays and says: "Lord, do not rebuke me in your fury, nor in your anger correct me" (Psalms 6:1). They do not understand that, in their eagerness to concede human beings the opportunity for pernicious vice, they are mixing the injustice of fleshly passion into the divine limitlessness and the source of all purity.

And so the faithful who is on the way to perfection and who wishes to engage lawfully in the spiritual struggle must in every respect be free of the vice of anger and wrath. He should listen to what the vessel of election (Acts 9:15) commands of him: "All anger and indignation and uproar and blasphemy should be removed from you, as well as all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). When he says: "All anger should be removed from you," he makes no exception at all for us as to necessity and utility. He should strive to cure a wrongdoing brother, if need be, in such a way that, while bringing relief to one who is perhaps laboring under a rather slight fever, he does not get angry and bring upon himself the more baleful malady of blindness, so that as he sees the speck in his brother's eye he does not see the beam in his own eye (Matthew 7:3-5). For it behooves the one who wishes to heal someone else's wound to be healthy and untouched by any disease or illness, lest the Gospel saying be applied to him: "Physician, heal yourself first" (Luke 4:23). And how will a person see to remove the speck from his brother's eye if he carries about a beam of wrath in his own eye?

For any reason whatsoever the movement of wrath may boil over and blind the eyes of the heart, obstructing the vision with the deadly beam of a more vehement illness and not allowing the Sun of Righteousness to be seen. It is irrelevant whether a layer of gold or one of lead or of some other metal is placed over the eyes; the preciousness of the metal does not change the fact of blindness.

Yet we have a function for anger placed quite appropriately within us, and for this purpose alone it is useful and beneficial

for us to take it up -- when we wax indignant against the wanton movements of our own heart and are angered at things that we are ashamed to do or to say in the sight of human beings but that have found their way into the recesses of our heart, as we tremble with utter horror before the presence of the angels and of God Himself, whose eye penetrates everywhere and everything and from whom our consciences can hide no secrets at all.

And so we are commanded to get angry in a healthy way, at ourselves and at the evil suggestions that make an appearance, and not to sin by letting them have a harmful effect. The following verse opens itself to this same understanding in clearer fashion: "Be struck with compunction on your beds for what you say in your hearts" (Psalms 4:5). That is, whatever you think in your hearts when unexpected and deceitful suggestions rush in upon you, amend and correct with the most salutary compunction, removing all the noise and disturbance of wrath by means of moderate counsel, as if you were peacefully in bed.

When the blessed Apostle made use of the text of this verse and said: "Be angry, and do not sin," he added: "The sun should not go down on your anger, and you should not give room to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26). If it is dangerous to let the Sun of Righteousness go down on our anger, and if we immediately give room to the devil in our heart when we are angry, why did he previously command us to get angry, when he said: "Be angry, and do not sin"? Does he not clearly mean that you should be angry at your vices and your rage lest you grow dark on account of your wrath and Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, begin to go down in your dusky minds and, once He departs, you offer room in your hearts to the devil?

But what is to be said of those persons (and this I am unable to mention without shame) on whose implacability even sundown itself places no limits and who draw it out for days on end? They maintain a rancorous spirit against those with whom they are upset and, although they deny orally that they are angry, they manifest the deepest anger by their actions. They neither approach them with an appropriate word nor speak to them with ordinary civility, and in this regard they do not consider themselves in the wrong because they do not demand vengeance for their annoyance. Yet, because they do not dare to or at any rate cannot bring it out into the open, they turn the poison of their wrath back to their own destruction, brooding over it in their hearts and in glum silence digesting it within themselves. They do not at once and with strength of mind cast out their bitter sadness; instead they mull it over, and eventually as time goes on they deal with it equably.

How could the Lord wish to be held onto for even a moment when in fact he does not even allow the spiritual sacrifices of our prayers to be offered if we know that someone else is angry with us? As he says: "If, then, you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). How, then, are we permitted

to be annoyed with our brother even until sundown -- not to mention for several days -- when, if he has something against us, we are not allowed to offer our prayers to God? We are commanded by the Apostle: "Pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17). And: "In every place lifting up pure hands without anger and dissension" (I Timothy 2:8). It follows, therefore, that either we keep this kind of poison in our hearts and never pray, thus disobeying the apostolic and Gospel precept by which we are commanded to pray ceaselessly and everywhere, or, if we deceive ourselves and dare to make prayer contrary to his prohibition, we realize that it is not prayer that we are offering to the Lord but a stubborn and rebellious spirit.

But why do we tarry for so long over Gospel precepts and those of the Apostle when even the old law, which seems to be somewhat less demanding, warns of the very same thing? As it says: "you shall not hate your brother in your heart" (Leviticus 19:17). And again: "you shall not be mindful of the offense of your fellow citizens" (Leviticus 19:18). And again: "The ways of those who preserve the memory of a misdeed lead to death" (Proverbs 12:28). There as well you see that wickedness is checked not only in deed but even in secret thoughts, when not only hatred and vengefulness but even the recollection of an offense are commanded to be uprooted and cast out of the heart.

Sometimes, when we have been overcome by pride or impatience and are unwilling to correct our unseemly and undisciplined behavior, we complain that we are in need of solitude, as if we would find the virtue of patience in a place where no one would bother us, and we excuse our negligence and the causes of our agitation by saying that they stem not from our own impatience but from our brothers' faults. But, as long as we attribute our own wrongdoing to other people, we shall never be able to get near to patience and perfection.

The sum total of our improvement and tranquility, then, must not be made to depend on someone else's willing, which will never be subject to our sway; it comes, rather, under our own power. And so our not getting angry must derive not from someone else's perfection but from our own virtue, which is achieved not by another person's patience but by our own forbearance.

It is right, on the other hand, for those who are perfect and cleansed of all vice to search out the desert and, having been purged of vice in the community of the brothers, to go into it not as a refuge for their weakspiritedness but with a view to divine contemplation and out of a desire for that deeper insight which can be grasped in solitude only by the perfect. For if we have brought any vices into the desert that we have not attended to, they will not be abolished but will lie hidden in us. For just as solitude can disclose the purest contemplation to those whose behavior has been corrected and from its unclouded perspective reveal a knowledge of spiritual mysteries, it is likewise accustomed not only to

preserve but even to exaggerate the vices of those who have not corrected themselves. A person may seem patient and humble to himself as long as he has nothing to do with anyone else, but he will soon revert to his former nature should some disturbing event occur. Indeed, vices that have lain hidden emerge at once there, and like unbridled horses nourished by a long period of quiescence they eagerly break out of their restraints, all the more violently and savagely endangering their charioteer. For when contact with other human beings ceases, along with the discipline that that provides, the vices grow wilder in us if they have not previously been purged, and through slothful security we lose even the pretense of patience that we gave the appearance of possessing at least for the sake of our brothers' respect and our own good reputation when we lived among them.

It should be known, however, that in those manuscripts where it reads: "Whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be liable to judgment," the phrase "without cause" is superfluous and was added by persons who did not think that anger needed to be cut off for a just cause, since in fact no one, however irrationally upset he was, would say that he had no cause for anger. It appears, therefore, that this was added by those who did not understand the intention of Scripture, which seeks to cut off completely the growth of anger and to maintain no occasion for indignation whatsoever lest, in ordering us to get angry with cause, an occasion for getting angry without cause also be offered us. For patience does not achieve its goal in righteous anger; it consists, rather, in not getting angry at all. I know, though, that the phrase "without cause" is interpreted in such a way as to mean that he is angered without cause who, when he is angry, is not allowed to seek revenge. Yet it is better to take it as it is found to be written both in many new manuscripts and in all the old ones.

Hence it behooves the athlete of Christ, who is contending lawfully, to root out the movements of wrath. The perfect medicine for this disease is that we realize, first, that in no way are we permitted to get angry, whether for an unjust or a just cause, knowing that we shall at once lose the light of discretion and firm and correct counsel, as well as goodness itself and the restraints of righteousness, if the guiding principle of our heart is obscured by darkness; and then, that the purity of our mind will soon be driven out and that it can never become a temple of the Holy Spirit as long as the spirit of wrath dwells in us. Lastly, we should understand that we are never allowed to pray or to make petition to God when we are angry. Above all, we should keep before our eyes the uncertain state of our human condition, daily realizing that we shall depart from our bodies and that our chaste abstinence, the renunciation of all our property, the contempt of wealth, and the toil of fasting and keeping vigil will confer nothing on us if eternal punishment is being readied for us by the Judge of all on account of wrath and hatred alone.

Πνευματικές Νουθεσίες

Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ Φιλοθεΐτου, ἀπὸ ὁμιλία στὸ Σικάγο, 20 Μαρτίου 1994

Αἱ συμβουλαὶ ποὺ ἀκολουθοῦν, ἂν καὶ κατευθύνονται πρὸς αὐτοὺς οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔχουν ἐπιλέξει τὸν μοναχικὸν βίον, εἶναι ἐν τούτοις ἐφαρμόσιμες καὶ ἀπὸ ὄλους τοὺς Ὀρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς.

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Εὐλογημένα μου παιδάκια, Εὐχομαι ἐγώ, ὁ ταπεινὸς καὶ ἀνάξιος πατέρας σας, ἀπὸ τὰ βάρη τῆς ἐλευσίνης μου ψυχῆς, τὸ ἔλεος καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Τρισαγίου Θεοῦ μας, νὰ μὴ σᾶς ἐγκαταλείψω ποτὲ ἕως ὅτου φθάσετε στὴν Ἁγία Ἱερουσαλὴμ στὴν πόλη τῶν τέκνων τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀμήν.

Ὅλοι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ δίνουν ὑποσχέσεις στὸ Θεὸ κατὰ τὴν τέλεση τοῦ Μυστηρίου τοῦ Βαπτίσματος. Ὅσοι ὅμως ἀσπάζονται τὸ μοναχισμό, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τίς κοινὲς γιὰ ὄλους τοὺς Χριστιανούς ὑποσχέσεις, προσθέτουν κι ἄλλες ποὺ ἀφοροῦν ἀποκλειστικὰ τῇ μοναχικῇ ζωῇ. Γνωρίζετε, παιδιά μου, τίς ὑποσχέσεις αὐτές. Τὶς δώσατε μπροστὰ σὲ πολλούς, μοναχοὺς καὶ λαϊκοὺς. Ἀκούσατε μάλιστα τότε τὸ λόγο τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ σας Πατέρα «Ὁ Κύριος θὰ σᾶς ἀμείψει ὄχι σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ λόγια τῶν ὑποσχέσεων, ἀλλὰ σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν πιστὴ τήρησή τους».

Δὲν σᾶς ὑπενθυμίζω αὐτὰ ἐπειδὴ φοβάμαι μήπως ἀδιαφορεῖτε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία σας. Κάθε ἄλλο. Εἶμαι, ὁ ταλαίπωρος, πεπεισμένος ὅτι φροντίζετε γιὰ τὴν ἀπολογία ποὺ θὰ δώσετε στὴ μέλλουσα κρίση. Εἶμαι ἐπίσης πεπεισμένος ὅτι ὁ καθένας ἀγωνίζεται καὶ κοπιᾶζει ἀνάλογα μὲ τίς δυνάμεις του. Ὅπως ἡ ἐπιμελής κλώστρια κλώθει ὁμοίμορφα τὸ νῆμα ὅσο μακρὸν κι ἂν εἶναι, ἔτσι κι ἐσεῖς πρέπει νὰ κλώθετε τὸ νῆμα τῆς μοναχικῆς ζωῆς μὲ τὸν ἴδιο ζῆλο ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμή ποὺ πατήσατε τὸ κατώφλι τοῦ κοινοβίου μέχρι τὴν ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου. Ὁ ζῆλος ποὺ δὲ χαλαρώνει ἔχει μεγάλη σημασία. Παρακολουθήσατε ποτὲ τὴ λειτουργία τῆς ἀτμομηχανῆς; Κινεῖται ὅταν ὑπάρχει ἀτμός. Κι ὅσο περισσότερος ἀτμός ὑπάρχει, τόσο γρηγορότερα κινεῖται. Ὅταν ὅμως ἐξασθενεῖ ἡ πίεση τοῦ ἀτμοῦ, μικραίνει καὶ ἡ ταχύτης τῆς κινήσεως. Ἡ ἀτμομηχανὴ τελικὰ σταματᾷ. Ὅτι εἶναι ὁ ἀτμός γιὰ τὴ μηχανή, εἶναι ὁ ἐνθεὸς ζῆλος γιὰ τὴν ἀφιερωμένη ζωῇ. Ὅταν ὑπάρχει ὁ ζῆλος, ὅλα προχωροῦν κανονικά. Ὅταν ὅμως ἀτονήσει ὁ ζῆλος, τότε ἡ πρόοδος σταματᾷ. Ὅλα ὀδηγοῦνται στὴ διάλυση.

Μὴν ψυχραίνετε τὴν πνευματικὴ σας θερμὴ καὶ μὴν ἀποκάμειτε ἀπὸ τοὺς κόπους τῆς μοναχικῆς ζωῆς. Νὰ ἐλέγχετε διαρκῶς τὴν ψυχὴ σας, γιὰ νὰ μὴ πέσετε σὲ ἀμέλεια καὶ δώσετε εὐκαιρία στὸν ἐχθρὸ νὰ σᾶς ἐμπαίξει. Ἀγωνισθεῖτε μὲ κάθε τρόπο, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀδυνατίσουν τὰ τεῖχη τῆς καρδιάς. Συχνὰ νὰ ἐνθυμηθετὸν πρῶτο σας ἐνθουσιασμό, τότε ποὺ ἤλθατε ἐδῶ, ἀφήνοντας τὴν οἰκογένειά σας, τοὺς συγγενεῖς καὶ τὰ φιλικὰ σας πρόσωπα... Ὅταν περάσατε τὸ κατώφλι τῆς Μονῆς, ἐπιθυμοῦσατε μόνο νὰ προσεύχεσθε, ν' ἀπασχολεῖτε τὸ νοῦ σας μόνο

μὲ θεῖες σκέψεις, νὰ συνομιλεῖτε μόνο πνευματικῶς, νὰ μελετᾶτε μόνο τὸ λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὰ βιβλία τῶν Ὁσίων, νὰ ἀπωθεῖτε κάθε κοσμικὸ, νὰ ζητετε μὲ εἰρήνη πρὸς ὄλους καὶ μὲ ἀδιάκριτη ὑπακοή στὸν Πνευματικὸ Πατέρα καὶ σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀδελφότητα. Ἀσφαλῶς ἦσαν εἰλικρινεῖς αὐτές σας οἱ ἐπιθυμίες. Φέρνετε λοιπὸν, συχνὰ στὴ μνήμη τὸν πρῶτο σας ἐνθουσιασμό. Θὰ τὸν ἀνανεώνετε ἔτσι μέσα σας, ὅπως ἀνανεώνετε τὴν ἀτμόσφαιρα σ' ἓνα δωμάτιο ἀνοίγοντας τὰ παράθυρα.

Μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ἀφυπνιστικὴ αὐτὴ προσπάθεια, νὰ φέρνετε πρὸ συχνά, τὰ παραδείγματα ζήλου τῶν μεγάλων Ὁσίων. Νὰ ἐντυφᾶτε στὰ Μηναῖα καὶ στὰ Συναξάρια. Νὰ συλλογίζεσθε μὲ πόση θέρμη εὐαρεστοῦσαν τὸ Θεὸ οἱ Ἅγιοι, ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες. Θυμηθεῖτε τοὺς θαυμαστοὺς ἀσκητικούς ἀγῶνες τους. Μὴν ἀρκεσθεῖτε ὅμως, σὲ μιὰ ἀπλή ἐνθύμηση. Σκεφθεῖτε πῶς εἶστε ὑποχρεωμένοι νὰ μοιάσετε τοὺς ἥρωες τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὅπως στὰ διάφορα ἀθλήματα ὁ ἓνας ἀθλητὴς παρακινεῖται κι ἐνθαρρύνεται ἀπὸ τὴν προσπάθεια τοῦ ἄλλου, ὅπως ἐπίσης στὶς διάφορες ἐργασίες σας, δηλαδὴ στὰ διακονήματα, ὁ ἓνας συναγωνίζεται τὸν ἄλλο, ἔτσι ἂς θερμαίνεται κι ὁ ζῆλος σας καθὼς θὰ παραδειγματίζεσθε ἀπὸ τὰ κατορθώματα τῶν Ἁγίων ἐκείνων ἀγωνιστῶν.

Πολὺ καλὸ κι ἅγιο εἶναι τὸ ὅτι ἐγκαταλείψατε τὸ μάταιο κόσμο καὶ φθαρτὸ καὶ ἀφιερωθήκατε στὸ Χριστὸ μας. Προσπαθήσατε ὅμως, Πατέρες μου καὶ παιδιά μου, νὰ ὀλοκληρώσετε τὸ ἔργο αὐτό. Δὲν εἶναι μοναχὸς (ὅπως δὲν εἶμαι καὶ ἐγώ) ὁποῖος φορᾷ τὰ ράσα καὶ βρίσκεται στὴ μάνδρα τῆς Μονῆς. Μοναχὸς εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἀγωνίζεται νὰ οἰκοδομήσῃ μέσα του τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς μοναχικῆς ζωῆς. Σ' αὐτὴν λοιπὸν τὴν πνευματικὴν προσπάθεια χρειάζεται πολὺ ὑπομονή, προσευχὴ καὶ ταπεινὴ ἄνωση. Αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴ ἡ Μονὴ σας μοιάζει μὲ ἰαματικὴ κολυμβήθρα... Νὰ θεωρεῖτε τὸν ἑαυτὸ σας γεμάτο ἀπὸ ἀδυναμίες, τυφλὴ ἄναπληρία.

Παιδιά μου φίλτατα, ἀσφαλῶς σεῖς γνωρίζετε πολλὰ μέσα θεραπείας. Γνωρίζετε καὶ τίς πνευματικὲς ἀσθένειες, δηλαδὴ τὰ πάθη. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι παραδομένος στὰ πάθη, δυσκολεῖται νὰ κατανοήσῃ τὴν κατάστασή του καὶ νὰ ἐλευθερωθῇ. Ὅταν ὅμως δεχθεῖ τὴν ἐπίσκεψη τῆς Θεῖας Χάριτος, τότε ἀρχίζει νὰ ξεχωρίσῃ μέσα του τὰ φρικτὰ συμπτώματα τῶν παθῶν, μετανοεῖ καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ καθαρθεῖ. Ἀρχίζει λοιπὸν ὁ ἀγῶνας, ὁ πόλεμος. Πρῶτα ἐναντίον τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν πράξεων καὶ κατόπιν ἐναντίον τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν σκέψεων καὶ αἰσθημάτων.

Ὁ πνευματικὸς πόλεμος ἔχει πολλὰ φάσεις. Ὅταν ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς χριστιανὸς σταματήσει τὴν ἔμπρακτὴ ἀμαρτία, διακρίνει ὅτι ὁ νοῦς του ἀσχολεῖται μὲ ἄπρεπες σκέψεις κι ἡ καρδιά του ἰκανοποιεῖται μὲ ἀθέμιτα αἰσθήματα. Στρέφοντας τὴν προσοχή του στὸ ἔργο τῆς ἐσωτερικῆς πλέον κάθαρσης ἀρχίζει νὰ ἐπισημαίνῃ πῶς ἐπιτίθεται ὁ ἐμπαθὴς λογισμὸς, πῶς κρύβεται, πῶς σαγηνεύει καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζει τὴν ψυχὴ. Συνηθίζει ὅμως, ταυτόχρονα καὶ νὰ πολεμᾷ καὶ νὰ διώχνῃ τὸν πειρασμό.

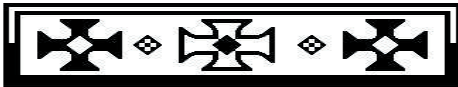
Ὅσο ὁ ἀγῶνας συνεχίζεται, τόσο περισσότερο τὰ πάθη ξεριζώνονται, ἕως ὅτου τὸ ἔδαφος τῆς καρδιάς τελείως

καθαρισθεῖ. Σημεῖο καθάρσεως εἶναι ἡ ἀποστροφή, ἡ ἀντιπάθεια, τὸ μῖσος πρὸς τὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς ἀφορμές τους. Οἱ προσβολές τοῦ πονηροῦ εὐκόλα τότε ἀποκρούονται, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλι δὲ σταματοῦν. Τὰ πάθη ἀπομακρύνθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῆς καρδιάς, μένουν ὁμως στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς καὶ ὅποτε βροῦν εὐκαιρία, προσπαθοῦν πάλι νὰ κυριαρχήσουν.

Ἔτσι, ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς ἐπισημαίνει διαρκῶς τὴν παρουσία τῆς φιλαυτίας, τῆς κατακρίσεως, τῆς ραθυμίας, τῆς ζηλοτυπίας, τῆς φιληδονίας, τῆς φιλαργυρίας κι ἂν καὶ νικητὴς στὸν ἀγώνα, νιώθει ὅτι εἶναι ἀκάθαρτος. Οἱ προσβολές καὶ μόνο τῶν αἰσχυρῶν λογισμῶν, τὸν κάνουν νὰ θεωρῆ αἰσχυρὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του.

Θυμηθεῖτε τέκνα μου, τὴν περίπτωση ἐκείνου τοῦ ἀσκητοῦ ποῦ κατέκρινε διαρκῶς τὸν ἑαυτὸ του καὶ ἀπαριθμοῦσε πλήθη ἁμαρτιῶν σὰ νὰ τὶς εἶχε κάνει. Ἐνῶ ἀπλῶς μόνο δοκίμαζε τὶς προσβολές τῶν λογισμῶν, θεωροῦσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ἔνοχο κι ἁμαρτωλό. Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸν προόδευσε καὶ στὴν κάθαρση καὶ στὴν ταπεινοφροσύνη. Ὅσο τελειώτερος γίνεται κανεὶς, τόσο ἁμαρτωλότερο θεωρεῖ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του. Ἀντίθετα, ἐκεῖνος ποῦ εἶναι γεμάτος πάθη, δυσκολεύεται πολὺ ν' ἀναγνωρίσῃ τὴν κατάστασή του.

Εὐχομαι παιδιὰ μου, ἀπὸ τὰ βάθη τῆς ἐλεεινῆς μου καρδιάς, κάθε πρόοδο στὸν πανέμορφο αὐτὸν ἀγώνα τῆς μοναχικῆς ζωῆς καὶ πολιτείας καὶ ἄξιοι νὰ γίνετε τῶν σωζομένων στὴ Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν.



Τὸ Μυστικὸ τῆς Ἀγάπης πρὸς Τὸν Θεόν

Συμεὼν ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος, μεταφρασμένο καὶ ἐμπλουτισμένο ἀπὸ τὸν Γέροντα Πορφύριο

Ὅλους τοὺς πιστοὺς ὀφείλομε νὰ τοὺς βλέπομε σὰν ἕνα καὶ νὰ σκεπτόμαστε ὅτι στὸν κάθε ἕνα ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός. Καὶ νὰ ἔχομε γιὰ τὸν καθένα τέτοια ἀγάπη, ὥστε νὰ εἴμαστε ἔτοιμοι νὰ θυσιάσουμε γιὰ χάρι τῆς ζωῆς μας. Γιατί ὀφείλομε νὰ μὴ λέμε, οὔτε νὰ θεωροῦμε κανένα ἄνθρωπο κακό, ἀλλὰ ὅλους νὰ τοὺς βλέπομε ὡς καλοὺς. Κι ἂν δεῖς ἕναν ἀδελφὸ νὰ ἐνοχλεῖται ἀπὸ πάθη, νὰ μὴν τὸν μισήσῃς αὐτόν, μίσησε τὰ πάθη ποῦ τὸν πολεμοῦν. Κι ἂν τὸν δῆς νὰ τυραννεῖται ἀπὸ ἐπιθυμίες καὶ συνήθειες προηγούμενων ἁμαρτιῶν, περισσότερο σπλαχνίσου τον, μὴν τυχὸν δοκιμάσεις καὶ σὺ πειρασμό, ἀφοῦ εἶναι ἀπὸ ὑλικὸ ποῦ εὐκόλα γυρίζει ἀπὸ τὸ καλὸ στὸ κακό. Ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸ σὲ προετοιμάζει νὰ ἀγαπήσεις περισσότερο τὸν Θεό. Τὸ μυστικὸ, λοιπόν, τῆς ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφό. Γιατί, ἂν δὲν ἀγαπᾷς τὸν ἀδελφὸ σου ποῦ τὸν βλέπεις, πῶς εἶναι δυνατόν ν' ἀγαπᾷς τὸν Θεὸ ποῦ δὲν τὸν βλέπεις; «Ὁ γὰρ μὴ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸ αὐτοῦ, ὃν ἑώρακε, τὸν Θεόν, ὃν οὐχ ἑώρακε, πῶς δύναται ἀγαπᾶν;»

*Ο, ΤΙ ΘΕΛΕΙΣ ΘΕΕ ΜΟΥ ΘΕΛΩ ΚΑΙ ΕΠΕΙΔΗ ΤΟ
ΘΕΛΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΘΕΛΩ*

Ἑλληνοτουρκικὴ Φιλία καὶ Μικτοὶ Γάμοι

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Ἀθανασίου Γιουσμᾶ, ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», 16 Σεπτεμβρίου 2005

Προβληματίζομαι καθὼς ἡ βασικὴ ὑπόθεση τῶν Πηλεοπτικῶν σειρῶν, τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς «Μὴ Μοῦ Λὲς Ἀντίο» καὶ τῆς Τουρκικῆς «Τὰ Σύνορα τῆς Ἀγάπης», σιγά-σιγά γίνονται πραγματικότητα. Οἱ ἐναλλαγές παιδιῶν σὲ κατασκηνωτικοὺς ἐκατέρωθεν χώρους, τὰ καθημερινὰ μας ταξίδια ἀπέναντι, ὄχι μόνο γιὰ ἐμπορικοὺς λόγους ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ ἐρωτικὲς περιπέτειες, εἶναι πολὺ φυσικὸ νὰ μᾶς ὀδηγήσουν ἢ νὰ μᾶς ὀδηγοῦν στοὺς μικτοὺς λεγόμενους γάμους. Εἶναι κακό; Εἶναι εὐχάριστο; Δὲ θέλω παπικὰ ν' ἀποφανθῶ. Ἔγιναν καὶ γίνονται συζητήσεις ἐπὶ τῶν συζητήσεων μὲ ἀρνητικοὺς καὶ θετικοὺς σχολιασμοὺς. Ἐγὼ ἀπλᾶ ὡς Ἱερεὺς, κι ἄρα ταπεινὸς κι ἐλάχιστος ἐκφραστὴς τῆς Ἀγιογραφικῆς μας Παραδόσεως, λίγες ἀσχολίαστες σκέψεις θὰ καταθέσω. Δὲν ἔχω τὴν πρόθεση νὰ θίξω κανέναν, πολὺ δὲ περισσότερο τὴν παρατηρούμενη τελευταία τάση τῆς συμφιλίωσης τῶν δυὸ λαῶν, τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ τῆς Τουρκίας. Τὸ ἔχω γράψει καὶ τὸ ἔχω πεῖ πολλές φορές, πῶς οἱ λαοὶ μποροῦν νὰ συμβιώσουν, ἂν αὐτὸ τὸ ἀποφασίσουν οἱ Μεγάλες Δυνάμεις, ποῦ συνήθιζαν καὶ συνηθίζουν νὰ σκορποῦν τὸν τρόμο, τὸ φόβο καὶ τὸ μῖσος μὲ τὶς ἀπάνθρωπες καὶ μισητὲς δολοφονικὲς τοὺς ἐνέργειες.

Γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας ἀποτελεῖ κώλυμα σύναψης θρησκευτικοῦ γάμου ἢ διαφορὰ θρησκευματοῦ τῶν μελλονύμφων. Κατὰ συνέπεια, ὅπως ἴσως θὰ γνωρίζετε, δὲν εὐλογεῖ τὸ γάμο λ.χ. Χριστιανοῦ Ὁρθοδόξου μὲ ἀλλόδοξη ἢ ἀλλόθρησκη, ἐκτὸς κι ἂν τὸ πρόσωπο αὐτὸ ἀποδεχθεῖ τὶς ἀλήθειες τῆς Πίστεώς μας κι ἀποφασίσει νὰ ἐνταχθῇ μὲ τὸ Μυστήριον τοῦ Βαπτίσματος στὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Αὐτὴν τὴν πάγια τακτικὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας τὴν στηρίζει στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης θεωρεῖτο γιὰ τὸ λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν Ἰσραὴλ, «ἀνομία» ὁ γάμος μὲ «ἀλλογενεῖς» καὶ εἰδωλολάτρες· κι αὐτὸ γιὰ νὰ μὴ νοθευτῇ ἡ ἀληθινὴ πίστη στὸν ἕνα Θεό. Ἐπίσης, στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος συμβουλεύει: «Μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις· τίς γὰρ μετοχὴ δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἀνομίας; τίς δὲ κοινωνία φωτὸς πρὸς σκότος; τίς δὲ συμφώνησις Χριστῷ πρὸς Βελίαλ; ἢ τίς μερίς πιστῶ μετὰ ἀπίστου; τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῶ Θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων; ὑμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς Θεοῦ ἐστε ζῶντος, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ Θεὸς ὅτι ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω, καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῶν Θεός, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι λαός. Διὸ ἐξέλθετε ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν καὶ ἀφορίσθητε, λέγει Κύριος, καὶ ἀκαθάρτου μὴ ἄπτεσθε, κἀγὼ εἰσδέξομαι ὑμᾶς» («Μὴν κάνετε ἀταίριαστους δεσμοὺς γάμου μὲ ἀπίστους. Γιατί, ποιά σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχη ἡ δικαιοσύνη μὲ τὴν ἀνομία; Ἡ τι κοινὸ ὑπάρχει ἀνάμεσα στὸ φῶς καὶ στὸ σκοτάδι; Ποιά συμφωνία μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ ἀνάμεσα στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ στὸ διάβολο; Ἡ τι ἔχει νὰ μοιράσῃ ὁ πιστὸς μὲ τὸν ἄπιστο; Μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχουν στὸν ἴδιο τόπο ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ -- ποῦ εἶστε ἐσεῖς -- καὶ ὁ ναὸς τῶν εἰδώλων; Γι' αὐτὸ, λέει

ὁ Κύριος: Φύγετε μακριὰ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ξεχωρίστε») (Β' Κορ. 6, 14-17).

Στηριγμένοι οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὅπως ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος, σ' αὐτὲς κυρίως τὶς δυὸ ἀγιογραφικὲς προτάσεις ὄρισαν πῶς: «Δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται σὲ Ὁρθόδοξο ἄνδρα νὰ συνάψη γάμο με αἰρετικὴ γυναίκα ἢ καὶ τὸ ἀντίθετο» (Μέγ. Βασίλειος, Στ' 72). Κανόνες Οἰκουμενικῶν Συνόδων κὶ ὄχι μόνο, κατηγορηματικὰ ἀποφαίνονται: Οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, κληρικοὶ καὶ λαϊκοί, δὲν θὰ πρέπει νὰ παντρεύουν τὰ παιδιά τους με αἰρετικούς. «Μὴ δεῖν τοὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀδιαφόρως πρὸς Γάμου κοινωνίαν συνάπτειν τὰ ἑαυτῶν παιδιά αἰρετικοῖς» (Δ' Οἰκουμ. Σύνοδος Κανὼν 14· Σύνοδος Λαοδικείας Κανόνες 10, 31, 33, 37· ΣΤ' Οἰκουμ. Σύνοδος Κανὼν 72· καὶ Σύνοδος Καρθαγένης Κανὼν 29). Τελευταῖα, «κατ' οἰκονομίαν», εὐλογεῖται ὁ γάμος Ὁρθόδοξου με αἰρετικό-σχισματικό, ἂν ὁ δεύτερος εἶναι βαπτισμένος Χριστιανὸς καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον ἡ Χριστιανικὴ ὁμολογία στὴν ὁποία ἀνήκει ἀποδέχεται τὸ Ἱερὸ Βάπτισμα ὡς Μυστήριον. Κατὰ τὴν ἐκδοσὴ τῆς ἀδειας τῆς τέλεσης αὐτοῦ τοῦ γάμου, μ' ἓναν προτεστάντη ἢ με ἓναν ρωμαιοκαθολικὸ λ.χ., ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος μέλλων ἢ μέλλουσα σύζυγος, διαβεβαιώνει ἐγγράφως τὴν Ἱερὴ Μητρόπολη, ἐκεῖ ὅπου θὰ γίνῃ ὁ γάμος, πῶς τὰ παιδιά ποὺ θὰ προέλθουν ἀπὸ αὐτὸν τὸ μικτὸ γάμο, θὰ τὰ μεγαλώσῃ σύμφωνα με τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο δόγμα. Κάτι βέβαια ποὺ σὲ καμία περίπτωση δὲν ἐλέγχεται ἢ δὲν πιέζεται ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος στὴ συνέχεια νὰ κάνῃ.

Ἐν κατακλείδι, ἀφήνοντας κὶ αὐτὸ ἀσχολίαστο, θυμίζω ἓνα παλιὸ μικρασιάτικο τραγούδι με τίτλο «Ἡ Ἑλλη». Ἡ ὑπόθεσις ἔχει ὡς ἐξῆς: Ἡ ὁμορφὴ Ἑλληνοπούλα, ἢ Ἑλλη, ἀγάπησε ἓναν Τοῦρκο ἀξιωματικό. Παράτησε τὰ παιδιά της καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα της καὶ ἔφυγε μ' αὐτόν. Κανένας δὲν τὴν ἤθελε ἀπὸ τοὺς συμπατριῶτες της καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς συγγενεῖς της, ὥσπου μία μέρα, «ἀνήμερα Χριστοῦγεννα», καθὼς χτυποῦσαν οἱ καμπάνες, τὴν σκότωσε ὁ ἀδελφός της... Μονολογῶ: Ἀκρότητες, ὑπερβολές! Ἄλλαξαν κὶ ὀλοένα ἀλλάζουν οἱ καιροί, οἱ νοοτροπίες, τὰ ἦθη καὶ τὰ ἔθιμα. Ἀλλάζουμε κὶ ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Μετασχηματίζεται κὶ ἀλλοιώνεται δυστυχῶς κὶ ἡ πίστις μας. Ὁ λόγος ὁμοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ κὶ οἱ θέσεις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γιὰ τὸν συνειδητὰ ἐνσωματωμένο σ' Αὐτὴν Χριστιανό, ἀξίζει νὰ παραμένουν ἀναλλοίωτες...

Τελικά, ἡ ζωὴ μας καὶ ἡ πορεία μας, ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ ἔχει ὀρισθεῖ νὰ εἶναι, καὶ εἶναι, μιὰ ἐλεύθερη ἐπιλογή. Κάθε ἐπιλογή ἔχει καὶ τὶς ἀνάλογες θετικὲς κὶ ἀρνητικὲς συνέπειες. Εἴμαστε ὁμοῦ, ἐλεύθεροι νὰ φροντίσουμε γιὰ τὴ διατήρησι τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης πίστεως μας ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ νὰ τὴν πουλήσουμε ἀντὶ “πινακίου φακῆς” ἢ γιὰ τὰ ὁμορφία μάτια μίας... Ναζλι ἢ ἐνός... Μουράτ.



Σωτηρία Ἀλλοδόξων καὶ Ἀλλοθρήσκων

ΠΗΓΗ: Πρ. Ἰωάννης Κοστόφ: «Πίστις καὶ Λογική», ἐκδοσὴ τοῦ Μανώλη Μελινοῦ, Ἀθήνα 2002, σέλ. 19-23 (προσαρμοσμένο)

Πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ἀναρωτιοῦνται: «Καλά, ἐμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοί, ἔχουμε τὴν πίστιν μας, τὴν ὀρθὴν πίστιν, τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν μας, τὴν Ἀποκάλυψιν τοῦ Κυρίου, εἴμαστε μέσα στὸ αὐλάκι τῆς σωτηρίας, τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν – Εἴναι βέβαια εἴμαστε προσεκτικοὶ στὴ ζωὴ μας. Ὅμως τί γίνεται με τοὺς ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἀνήκουν σὲ κάποιο ἄλλο θρησκεῦμα; Τί γίνεται με τοὺς Βουδιστὲς, τί γίνεται με τοὺς Μουσουλμάνους, γιὰ νὰ μὴν πάω σὲ ἄλλες ὁμολογίες Χριστιανικὲς, ἄς μιλήσουμε γι' ἄλλες θρησκείες. Αὐτοὶ δὲν θὰ πᾶνε στὸν Παράδεισο; Τί κριτήρια θὰ ᾗ ὁ Θεὸς γι' αὐτούς; Μόνον ἐμεῖς θὰ κριθοῦμε καὶ ἀνάλογα ἢ θὰ προαχθοῦμε, νὰ τὸ πῶ ἔτσι ἢ θά... κοποῦμε; Μ' αὐτούς τί γίνεται; Δὲν ὑπάρχει σωτηρία;»

Ἡ ἀπάντησις εἶναι πῶς βεβαίως καὶ μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρξῃ σωτηρία. Τὸ θέμα τοποθετεῖται ὡς ἐξῆς: Κάποιος ποὺ γνώρισε τὸ Χριστιανισμὸ καὶ βαπτίσθηκε, θὰ κριθῇ βάσει τοῦ νόμου τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, τοῦ νόμου τῆς Χάριτος. Κάποιος ὁμοῦ ποὺ ζεῖ στὴ Μαδαγασκάρη, γιὰ παράδειγμα, στὴ Σουμάτρα ἢ στὸ Βόρνεο, στὴ Νότιο Ἀμερικὴ, στὸ Β. Πόλο, ὅπουδὴποτε δὲν ἔχει κηρυχθεῖ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, αὐτὸς θὰ κριθῇ σύμφωνα μ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὅποιο ἀναφέρει ὁ Ἄπ. Παῦλος στὴν πρὸς Ρωμαίους Ἐπιστολή: θὰ κριθῇ βάσει τοῦ νόμου τῆς συνειδήσεώς του: «Ὅταν γὰρ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῇ, οὗτοι νόμον μὴ ἔχοντες ἑαυτοῖς εἰσι νόμος, οἵτινες ἐνδείκνυνται τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν, συμμαρτυροῦσης αὐτῶν τῆς συνειδήσεως καὶ μεταξὺ ἀλλήλων τῶν λογισμῶν κατηγορούντων ἢ καὶ ἀπολογουμένων» (Ὅταν οἱ ἔθνη -- δηλαδὴ ὅλοι αὐτοὶ ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν γραπτὸ ἠθικὸ νόμο - - τηροῦν ἐκ φύσεως τὶς διατάξεις τοῦ νόμου, σ' αὐτούς, μολοντί δὲν ἔχουν γραπτὸ νόμο, νόμος εἶναι ὁ ἑαυτὸς τους. Αὐτοὶ ἀποδεικνύουν ὅτι ἔχουν τὸ ἔργο τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸ στὶς καρδιὰς τους) (Ρωμ. β' 14-15).

Ὁ Θεὸς ἔχει βάλει, λοιπόν, σὲ ὅλους ἀνεξαιρέτως τοὺς ἄνθρωποι, ὅπουδὴποτε καὶ ἂν βρίσκονται πάνω στὴν γῆ, αὐτὸ τὸ ἀδέκαστο δικαστήριον, τὸν ἔμφυτον ἠθικὸ νόμον, καὶ βάσει αὐτοῦ θὰ κριθοῦν. Ἄν πορευθῆκαν σύμφωνα με τὸν ἔμφυτον ἠθικὸ νόμον σωστά, θὰ μποῦν στὸν Παράδεισον, ἂν ὄχι, δὲν θὰ μποῦν στὸν Παράδεισον.

Βέβαια θὰ ὑπάρξῃ -- σύμφωνα με τὸ «ἀστὴρ ἀστέρος διαφέρει ἐν δόξῃ» (Α' Κορ. ιε' 41) -- διαβάθμισι στὸν Παράδεισον, ὅπως ἐξάλλου καὶ στὴν Κόλασιν. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἄλλων θρησκευμάτων, λόγω τῶν καλῶν πράξεων τὶς ὁποῖες θὰ πράξουν, θὰ μποῦν στὸν Παράδεισον, ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ ἀπολαύσουν αὐτὰ τὰ ὅποια θὰ ἀπολαύσῃ π.χ. ὁ Ἄπ. Παῦλος ἢ ὁ Ἅγιος Μακάριος.

Κάποιοι ἴσως νὰ σκεφτοῦν: Δὲν εἶναι «ἄδικο» αὐτὸ γι' αὐτούς; Ὁχι, δὲν εἶναι ἄδικο γι' αὐτούς, διότι κρίνονται καὶ εὐκολότερα. Ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολος με τὶς ἐντολὰς τὶς ὁποῖες ἔχει. Αὐτὸ ἐξάλλου -- γιὰ νὰ κάνουμε

μία παρέκβαση -- αποδεικνύει λόγω και της πληθούς των πιστών και την αλήθειά του. Αν κάποιος θέλει να τραβήξει όπαδούς, δέν τους λέει αρνητικά πράγματα. Αντιθέτως, τους τάζει «λαγούς με πετραχήλια», τους κολακεύει, τους κανακεύει. Αυτά, όμως, τα όποια είπε ο Χριστός στους μαθητές Του ήταν: «Εν τῷ κοσμῷ θλίβην ἔξετε» (Ιω. ις' 33), «Εἰ ἐμὲ ἔδιωξαν καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν» (Ιω. ιε' 20), κι ἕνα σωρὸ τέτοια πράγματα, πὸ εἶναι ἀποτρεπτικά νὰ τραβήξῃς τὸν κόσμον κοντά σου. Τὸ ὅτι λέει τέτοια πράγματα καὶ παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ἔρχονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι κοντά του, αὐτὸ ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὁ Χριστιανισμός.

Ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ ἐπανεέλθουμε στὸ θέμα μας σχετικὰ με τοὺς ἀλλόθρησκους. Δὲν εἶναι τόσο «τυχερός» ὁ Χριστιανός, διότι ἀπὸ τοὺς Χριστιανούς ζητάει πολὺ περισσότερα ὁ Χριστός! Καὶ θὰ πᾶνε σὲ ΚΑΤΩΤΕΡΗ θέση ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀλλόθρησκους, ἂν δὲν πράττουν αὐτὰ τὰ ὅποια ζητάει ὁ Χριστός. Οἱ ἄλλοι δὲν θὰ κριθοῦν σύμφωνα με τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἀλλὰ εὐκολότερα.

Δεῖτε τὴ διαφορά: ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου, ὁ ὅποιος θὰ κριθῆ σύμφωνα με τὸν ἔμφυτο ἠθικὸ νόμο, τὸ πολὺ-πολὺ νὰ τοῦ καταλογίσῃ ὁ Θεός, τὴν πράξη τῆς μοιχείας, γιὰ παράδειγμα. Ἐνῶ ὁ Χριστιανός θὰ κριθῆ πολὺ πιὸ ἀυστηρά, ἀκόμα καὶ γιὰ ἕνα πονηρὸ βλέμμα π.χ., θὰ κριθῆ «ἐν λόγῳ, ἔργῳ καὶ ἐν διανοίᾳ»). Θὰ εἶναι περισσότερα τὰ ὀφέλη γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανό, ἀλλὰ θὰ εἶναι καὶ ἀυστηρότερο τὸ κριτήριον καὶ δυσκολότερος ὁ ἀγὼνας του. Ὅλα εἶναι δίκαια. Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι ἀκριβοδίκαιος. Ὅπως λέει ὁ π. Παῖσιος ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, «ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἔχει οὔτε δυὸ ζυγαριὲς ὁμοῖες. Τὸν κάθε ἄνθρωπο θὰ τὸν ζυγίσει με τὴν δική του ζυγαριά». Ἀνάλογα με τὸ πὸυ γεννήθηκε, σὲ τί περιβάλλον βρέθηκε, τοὺς γονεῖς δηλαδή, τὸ σχολεῖο, τὸ κράτος, τὸ θρησκευμα, τὴν ἰδιαιτερότητα τοῦ καθενὸς προσώπου. Ὁ Θεὸς δὲν κάνει λάθη.

Ὁ μακαρίτης ὁ Χρῆστος Ἀνδρούτσος, καθηγητῆς τῆς Δογματικῆς, ἔλεγε ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι ἡ μόνη ἀσφαλῆς ὁδὸς σωτηρίας, δὲν εἶναι ἡ μόνη ὁδὸς σωτηρίας, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἡ μόνη ἀσφαλῆς ὁδός.

Καὶ ὁ π. Ἰωὴλ Γιαννακόπουλος μᾶς δίνει ἕνα ἐποπτικὸ παράδειγμα, γιὰ νὰ κατανοήσουμε καλύτερα τὴ ρήση αὐτῆ τοῦ Ἀνδρούτσου. Μᾶς λέει: Στὸν πόλεμο ὑπῆρχε μία ἀσφαλῆς ὁδὸς πὸυ ἔνωσε τὴν Καλαμάτα με τὴν Ἀθήνα: ἐκεῖνη με τὴν τεθωρακισμένη φάλαγγα. Ὑπῆρχαν βέβαια καὶ ἄλλα μονοπάτια, ἀπὸ τὰ ὅποια μετέβαιναν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπ' τὴ μία πόλη στὴν ἄλλη. Δὲν ἦσαν ὁμοῖες ἀσφαλῆς. Ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς καὶ με τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ τοὺς ἀλλόδοξους καὶ ἑτεροθρήσκους.

Νὰ τονίσουμε, ὁμοῖως, ὅτι, ἂν κάποιος ἔχει βαπτισθεῖ Ὁρθόδοξος καὶ γίνῃ ἐκ τῶν ὑστέρων αἰρετικὸς ἢ, πολὺ περισσότερο, ἀλλόθρησκος, αὐτὸς δὲν πρόκειται ἐπ' οὐδενὶ νὰ σωθῆ παραμένοντας στὴ νέα αὐτὴ πίστη, ὅσα καλὰ ἔργα κι ἂν κάνει. Ἄλλο πράγμα νὰ εἶσαι Βουδιστῆς ἢ Μουσουλμᾶνος καὶ νὰ μὴ γνωρίσεις τὸ Χριστὸ κι ἄλλο πράγμα νὰ ἀρνηθῆς τὸ Χριστὸ, γιὰ χάρι τοῦ Βούδα ἢ τοῦ Σίβα ἢ τοῦ Ἀλλάχ.

Αὐτά, σχετικὰ με τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ἄλλων. Τὸ κύριο, ὡστόσο, εἶναι νὰ προσέξουμε πῶς θὰ σωθοῦμε ΕΜΕΙΣ... Τὸ

«οὗτος δὲ τί;» τὸ ὅποιο εἶπε ὁ Πέτρος γιὰ τὸν Εὐαγγελιστῆ Ἰωάννη (Ιω. κα' 21) -- τί θὰ γίνῃ, δηλαδή, μ' αὐτόν; - - τὸ εἶπε «δεικνύων τὸ φιλόστοργον», ἐξωτερικεύοντας τὴν ἀγάπη του γι' αὐτόν. Ἐμεῖς, ὁμοῖως, τὸ παίρνουμε καὶ τὸ χρησιμοποιοῦμε ἀπλῶς πληροφοριακὰ, γνωσιολογικά: «Τί θὰ γίνῃ με τοὺς ἀλλόδοξους ἢ τοὺς ἀλλόθρησκους;», χωρὶς νὰ ἐνδιαφερόμαστε οὔτε γιὰ τὴν δική μας σωτηρία! Ἡ σωστὴ τοποθέτηση, λοιπόν, εἶναι: Με κάθε ἐπιμέλεια νὰ φροντίζουμε νὰ σώσουμε τὴν ψυχὴ μας καὶ παράλληλα νὰ ἐνδιαφερόμαστε νὰ σωθοῦν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι εἰσερχόμενοι (ἐλεύθερα) στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, καὶ ὄχι ἀπλῶς νὰ μάθουμε ἐγκεφαλικά τί θὰ γίνῃ μ' αὐτούς.



Τὸ Παράδειγμα τῆς Ὑπακοῆς

Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Κανσοκαλυβίτου

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ χαρίσματα πὸυ κοσμοῦσαν τὸν Ἐκκλησιαστή τὸν Πατρὸς Πορφυρίου, ἦταν ἡ ὑπακοή.

Κάποια μέρα ἀντὶ νὰ μοῦ μιλήσει εὐθέως γιὰ τὴν ἀξία τῆς ὑπακοῆς πὸυ ἐγὼ κάθε ἄλλο, παρὰ τὰ εἶχα... καλὰ μαζί της ἄρχισε νὰ μοῦ λέη τὰ ἑξῆς:

Ὅταν ἀκόμη ἦμουν μοναχὸς καὶ εἶχα σχεδὸν τὴν ἡλικία σου πληροφορήθηκα ὅτι σὲ ἕνα κελὶ ζοῦσε ἕνας παράξενος γέροντας. Ὅποιος ὑποτακτικὸς πῆγαινε νὰ τὸν ὑπηρετήσῃ δὲν ἄντεχε τὴν γκρίνια του καὶ τὴν ἰδιοτροπία του καὶ μέσα σὲ 2-3 μέρες τὸν ἐγκατέλειπε καὶ ἔφευγε. Αὐτὸ συνέβαινε γιὰ πολὺ καιρὸ. Στὸ τέλος δὲν ἐδέχτο κανεὶς νὰ πάει νὰ τὸν ὑπηρετήσῃ. Τότε ἀποφάσισα νὰ πάω ἐγὼ. Ἐκανα τὴν πρόθεσή μου γνωστὴ στοὺς ἄλλους μοναχοὺς καὶ ἐκεῖνοι προσπάθησαν νὰ με ἐμποδίσουν. Μὴν τολμήσεις, μοῦ εἶπαν, γιὰ τὴν ἀποτύχη καὶ θὰ ἀπογοητευτῆς καὶ εἶσαι πολὺ νέος καὶ δὲν κάνει νὰ ἀρχίσῃς τὴν μοναχική σου ζωὴ με μία τόση κακὴ ἐμπειρία. Ἐδῶ προσπάθησαν τόσοι καὶ τόσοι μοναχοὶ με ὑπομονὴ πρωτόγνωρη καὶ καλοσύνη πρωτοφανή καὶ ἀπέτυχαν καὶ θὰ κατορθώσεις ἐσὺ νὰ συνεργαστεῖς με τὸν γεροπαράξενον; Μὴ προσπαθεῖς. Ἄδικα θὰ ὑποβληθῆς σὲ μία ταλαιπωρία πὸυ δὲν θὰ διαφέρει σὲ τίποτα ἀπὸ τὴ δική μας ἀφοῦ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμά της θὰ εἶναι ἀρνητικὸ. Μάταια, ὁμοῖως προσπάθησαν νὰ με πείσουν. Ἐγὼ, τοὺς εἶπα, θὰ πάω καὶ ἂς ἀποτύχω.

Πράγματι! Χωρὶς νὰ χάσω καιρὸ ξεκίνησα γιὰ τὸ κελλί, πὸυ ἔμενε ὁ Γέροντας. Χτύπησα τὴν πόρτα καὶ μοῦ εἶπε νὰ περάσω. Τὸν καλημέρισα καὶ συγχρόνως ὑποκλίνομαι. Τὴν εὐχή σας γέροντα.

- Τί θέλεις ἐσὺ ἐδῶ;

- Νά, ἔμαθα, ὅτι εἶσαι μόνος σου καὶ ἀνήμερος καὶ ἤλθα νὰ σὲ ὑπηρετήσω...

- Νά πᾶς ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ πὸυ ἦρθες! Φύγε γρήγορα.

- Λέγοντας αὐτά μου ἔδειξε τὸ παράθυρο. Νὰ φύγω δηλαδή ἀπὸ τὸ παράθυρο καὶ ὄχι ἀπὸ τὴν πόρτα. Καὶ ἐγὼ ὅπως πάντα ἔκανα ἄκρα ὑπακοή! Βγήκα ἀπὸ τὸ παράθυρο! Αὐτὸ θὰ πῆ ὑπακοή!

THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE

By St. Justin Popovich

The invisible is the heart of the visible, the kernel of the visible. The visible is nothing compared to the invisible. Countless are the forms in which the invisible appears; it appears and disappears. The sun is visible, but the force that gives it its warmth is invisible. The numerous constellations are visible, but the force that wisely guides them through the infinity of space, which prevents them from colliding, is invisible. A magnet is visible, but its force is invisible. The earth is visible, but its gravitational field is invisible. The nightingale is visible, but the life force that gives it its being is invisible. Many creatures on the earth are visible, but the force that from the same earth brings forth a variety of herbs, a diversity of flowers and different fruits is invisible.

The earth! The most interesting and most mysterious workshop, and at the same time the most ingenious creator. She unceasingly produces from herself animals, and plants, and minerals. In her are simultaneously produced roses and thorns, wheat and tare, basil and wormwood, incense and stinkweed. This is evidently so. But, that same obviousness raises a question: who works through her, and who creates through her, who acts through her? There, basil and wormwood grow side by side on the same square of land. And while the earth produces in the seed of basil its pleasant smell, at the same time the earth enacts in the seed of wormwood its own unpleasant odor. The same holds true for physical laws, the same conditions, the same; and the sun, and moon, and the stars, and the earth, and snow, and wind, and rain, and frost, and droughts, all the same and the results are all diametrically opposed. How is it that sunlight and drops of rain should become a pleasing aroma in basil but a foul odor in stinkweed? And furthermore: how is it that the earth's fluids become sweet in a cherry and bitter in wormwood? Who performs this unusual differentiation? On the same ground, under the same conditions, a vast variety of fruits and vegetables sprout, grow, and ripen, a diversity of animals live, and the most adverse things coexist. Who infuses this vast secret of life and existence into all creatures and all things? In one and the same, there exist opposites; in one, there are many.

Any of the thoughts of man cannot but be humbled before the truth of the Holy Bible; "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind... and God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creatures after his kind, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after his kind: and it was so" (Genesis 1:11-12, 24).

It is clear: the earth received its creative, life-giving power from God. God has transferred to the earth one part of his divine omnipotence, and the earth in a mysterious way extends

God's creative, life-giving work. Hence, the many inexhaustible forces and supremely wise adaptations in the earth's creations. The word of God has fertilized the earth and has granted it creativeness, fertility, and life-giving power for all time. Not only in the beginning but now and forever the earth creates, produces, and gives life according to the word of God.

There is a fact that holds true in the visible world; the things that are most important in life are invisible. The air is invisible. Yet is there anything more essential for the life of men, animals, and plants? Molecules are invisible, as are atoms and electrons. And is not the visible world built up from these invisible elements?

Invisible particles make up the visible world. How does the invisible become the visible? In what manner does the invisible become the visible? How is it that these invisible particles become objective and appear as the visible material world? From where do these invisible particles receive their visible, tangible, and numerous forms? Visible matter is composed of invisible particles. This is a paradox, yet it is also a fact. And on that paradox rest the world and its existence. The visible rests on the invisible and is composed of the invisible. The fact of the matter is that in the visible we ceaselessly observe and look up the objectification and manifestation of the invisible. Such is the law that governs the visible world; at the same time it is an endless enigma and an infinite mystery.

Man is the best example of how the invisible is transformed into the visible; his invisible thoughts, his invisible feelings, his invisible desires and wishes are transformed into visible works, visible actions, and visible achievements. No matter from what angle he is observed, man, every man, is a miracle-worker simply because he is a man. He endlessly works miracles; he transforms the invisible into the visible. If he defends his honor, look! He defends something that is invisible, and he is ready to sacrifice for that invisible thing that which is visible in him; his own body.

Like all feelings, love is something invisible, yet how many lives have been sacrificed for her, the invisible? In its own nature, conscience is the most inner and most invisible thing; but by the reality of its manifestation, what is more evident and tangible?

Men hold to their convictions, suffer death for them; but are they not something invisible? And in general, all of man's thoughts and feelings, desires and beliefs are essentially invisible, even though their manifestations may be evidently perceptible. The visible man is just a manifestation, a projection of the invisible man: the outer man a projection of the inner. The visible man rest on the invisible, he exists through the invisible and of the invisible.

The bottom line is that the foundation of everything that is visible is the invisible; of man, his invisible soul; of the world, the invisible God. The invisible is the hypostasis of everything, the basis of everything, the substance of all things, that is, it is that upon which the world and everything in it rests. Every man who seriously inquires into the mysteries of this world

and this life has to feel this. At the bottom of all that is visible an invisible force is at work. The invisible is the strongest thing in our world of earthly perception; electricity, radium. The gravitational force is invisible, yet is stronger than all of the planets. It moves them like children move marbles.

The law that presides over all other laws in this world is the following: the invisible is the core of the visible; the invisible governs the visible. This world is God's laboratory in which the invisible is manufactured into the visible, but only up to a certain point. For there are limits to the transformation of the invisible into the visible. This is because the invisible is always larger, infinitely and profoundly broader, than the visible. Just as the spirit is incomparably wider and larger and more profound than the body it inhabits, so too the invisible core of every substance is wider, larger, and more profound than the matters it finds itself in. In fact, the visible is the materialization of the invisible. But around the visible, and behind the visible, there extends the endless sea of the invisible.



ADMONITIONS FOR PARENTS

By Holy Father John Chrysostom

Neglect of children is one of the greatest sins, and it is the highest degree of impiety. And so that I might not seem to draw an unfounded conclusion, I will demonstrate this with experience itself, so that you will know that even though we may have everything we need, and all is beautifully arranged, we will nevertheless be subjected to the most extreme punishment if we do not take care for the salvation of our children. You know the story of the high priest Eli, written in the Holy Scriptures. He was an aged, well-known priest, who governed the Jewish nation faultlessly for twenty years, living during a time that did not demand great strictness (in life). Nevertheless he could not justify himself, but to the contrary, perished horribly and disastrously because he did not concern himself enough with his sons' behavior; and the guilt of his neglect, like a great fault, overshadowed all of Eli's qualities and good works. How then shall we be judged, who live in a time full of much more love of wisdom, but who do not have his virtues? We not only do not instruct our children ourselves, but even take revenge upon those who wish to do so, and treat our own children more cruelly than any barbarians. For the cruelty of the barbarians leads only to slavery, to the razing and captivity of one's homeland -- in general it is only a physical misfortune. But you enslave the very soul and, binding it like some kind of captive, thus commit it to the evil and fierce demons and their passions. You do this and nothing else when you yourselves do not prompt your children in anything spiritual, nor let anyone else do so.

CHRISTIANITY OR THE CHURCH

By the New Hieromartyr Hilarion

Usually, people prefer to remain silent concerning a matter which they know nothing about and do not understand. This, of course, is completely sensible. Let us imagine, for example, a person who knows nothing about chemistry but who, nevertheless, constantly insists upon interfering in the affairs of chemists. He corrects their scientific formulae which have been obtained with great difficulty, changing their order or replacing one with another. We would agree that such a person is acting with the highest degree of imprudence and that we can only have pity for him.

There is one field, however, in which too many people consider themselves to be complete masters, in fact, almost legislators; that is the area concerning the Christian faith and the Church. In this field also, clear and definite formulae have been established with a great effort of theological thought, spiritual guidance, faith, and piety. These formulae are established and must be accepted on faith.

Regardless of this fact, a great many people enter into the questions of faith and the Church solely as bold and decisive reformers who want to remake everything according to their own personal desires. In cases where such people have insufficient knowledge or understanding, they are especially averse to remaining silent. To the contrary, they begin not only to speak, but to shout. Such shouting on the questions of faith and the Church usually finds the columns of newspapers and the ordinary conversations of people who, in general, very seldom think of faith and the Church at all. If they do think of such things, they prefer to voice themselves exclusively in an authoritative and accusatory tone.

In such an atmosphere a great multitude of various perverse opinions are born which then become fashionable because no one will trouble himself to consider and examine them. In the prevalence of such opinions it can easily occur that they are unconsciously assimilated even by people who are dedicated in their souls to the faith and the Church. One of the greatest of these prevalent and "accepted" opinions is what we would call "the separation of Christianity from the Church." We would like to examine it with the help of the word of God and the writings of the Holy Fathers.

The Church was designed to reflect the perfect unity of the Three-One God. The life of Christ the Savior presents the reader of the Holy Gospels with numerous great moments which fill the soul with some special sense of grandeur. But perhaps the greatest moment in the life of all mankind was that occasion when, in the darkness of a southern night, under the hanging arches of trees just turning green, through which heaven itself seemed to be looking at the sinful earth with twinkling stars, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His High Priestly prayer, proclaimed: "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one,

as We are... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:11; 20-21).

Special attention must be focused upon these words of Christ, for in them the essence of all Christianity is clearly defined. Christianity is not some sort of abstract teaching which is accepted by the mind and found by each person separately. To the contrary, Christianity is a life in which separate persons are so united among themselves that their unity can be likened to the unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Christ did not pray only that His teaching be preserved so that it would spread throughout all the universe. He prayed for the unification of all those believing in Him. Christ prayed to His Heavenly Father for the establishment, more correctly, for the restoration, on earth of the natural unity of all mankind. Mankind was created from one common origin and of one source (cf. Acts 17:26).

According to the words of Saint Basil the Great, "Mankind would not have had divisions, nor discord, nor wars if sin had not divided its nature"; and, "this is the main point of God's saving economy of His incarnation -- to bring human nature into unity with Himself and with the Savior. Then, having destroyed the evil part, to re-establish the original unity as the finest physician, through curative treatment, again mends the body which had been cut up in pieces." The Church is formed of this unification of individuals; not of the apostles only, but of all those who believe in Christ according to their words. No earthly thing has ever been found which could be compared to the new community of saved people. There is no form of unity on earth with which one could compare the unity that is the Church. Such unity was found only in Heaven. In Heaven, the incomparable love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit unites three Persons into one Being so that there are not three Beings, but One God living a triune life. Those people about whom Christ prayed to the Heavenly Father: "that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26) are also called to such a love which could fuse many into a state of oneness.

In the aforementioned words of Christ, the truth of the Church is placed into the tightest union with the mystery of the All-holy Trinity. People who enter the Church and love Her become like the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, whose love unites them into one being. The Church is like a one-essence of many persons, created by the moral beginning of love. This is precisely the theme which is perceived in the first sacred prayer of Christ the Savior by very many of the eminent Fathers and Teachers of the Church -- Saint Cyprian of Carthage, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint Ambrose of Milan, Saint Hilary of Poitiers, Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint John Cassian. I have allowed myself to introduce short excerpts on this subject from the writings of some of this great and renowned assembly of fathers.

Saint Cyprian of Carthage, in his letter to Magnus, says: "The Lord, teaching us that unity comes from divine authority, affirms and says: "I and the Father are One" (John 10:30). In his composition "The Lord's Prayer," Cyprian also says: "Not being satisfied that He expiated us by His blood, He also interceded for us. While interceding for us, here is what He desired: that we will live in the very same state of unity in which the Father and the Son are one."

Here is what Saint Cyril of Alexandria writes: "Christ, having taken as an example and image of that indivisible love, accord and unity which is conceivable only in unanimity, the unity of essence which the Father has with Him and which He, in turn, has with His Father, desires that we too should unite with each other; evidently in the same way as the consubstantial, Holy Trinity is united so that the whole body of the Church is conceived of as one, ascending in Christ through the fusion and union of two people into the composition of the new perfect whole. The image of Divine unity and the consubstantial nature of the Holy Trinity as a most perfect interpenetration must be reflected in the unity of the believers who are of one heart and mind." Saint Cyril also points out "the natural unity by which we are all bound together, and all of us to God, cannot exist without bodily unity."

All the earthly works of Christ, therefore, must not be thought of as teaching alone. Christ did not come to earth to announce some novel theoretical propositions to mankind. No! He came in order to create a completely new life for mankind, that is, the Church. Let us in closing recall that Christ Himself said that He would build the Church (cf. Matt. 16:18).



HUMILITY: A KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURE

One elder passed seventy weeks in fasting, eating food only twice a week, as he begged the Lord to reveal to him the meaning of a passage in Holy Scripture. But God would not reveal it to him. Seeing this, the elder said to himself, "I have labored long and hard, and I have accomplished nothing. I will go to my brother and ask him."

When he had left his cell and locked the door behind him, an angel from the Lord appeared and said to him: "Seventy weeks of fasting did not bring you nearer to God. Now, however, when you have humbled yourself and resolved to go to your brother with your question, I have been sent to you to explain the meaning of this passage." And fulfilling this, the angel departed.

[From the Paterikon of Bishop Ignatius]

ON THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

From the teaching of St. Cosmas Aitolos (+1794)

The Sign of the Cross

Listen, my brethren, how the sign of the Cross is made and what it means. First, just as the Holy Trinity is glorified in heaven by the angels, so should you join your three fingers of your right hand. And being unable to ascend into heaven to worship, raise your hand to your head (because the head means heaven) and say: "Just as the angels glorify the Holy Trinity in heaven, so do I, as a servant, glorify and worship the Holy Trinity. And as the fingers are three and separate, and are together, so is the Holy Trinity three persons but one God." Lowering your hand to your stomach, say: "I worship you and adore you, my Lord, because you condescended and took on flesh in the womb of the Theotokos for my sins." Place your hand on your right shoulder and say: "I beg you, my God, to forgive me and to put me on your right with the just." Placing your hand again on your left shoulder, say: "I beg you, my Lord, don't put me on the left with the sinners." Then bending down to the ground, say: "I glorify you, my God; I worship and adore you, for just as you were put into the grave, may I also be." And when you stand up straight, you reveal the resurrection and say: "I glorify and worship you, my Lord, for you rose from the dead to grant us eternal life."

The Meaning of the Cross

The holy Cross, my brethren, is the wellspring of the whole earth. The holy Cross blesses the entire world, all that is divine and holy in the churches. The Cross blesses the Divine Liturgy and every service. The Cross blesses the saints. The Cross blesses and strengthens baptism. The Cross blesses couples. The Cross chases away demons who flee like lightning. The Cross is a bright weapon, and whoever makes the sign of the Cross is illuminated and is blessed. It is like a double-edged sword to which the demons don't draw near to urge people to commit sin.

Wherever a person set out to travel, he should make the sign of the Cross and say the prayer: "Jesus Lord Christ." Whether you go to the fair or to the field, or to the vineyard, or when you eat bread of fruit, or drink wine or water, when you go to sleep, worship God. Make the sign of the Cross over your body and then lie down to sleep. You will then sleep and will rise in the morning strong and happy. So, my brethren, you have understood and now know.

The Jesus Prayer and the Sign of the Cross

Now I tell you to do this. Let all of you take a prayer rope. Let it have thirty knots, and pray, saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son and Logos of the living God, through the intercessions of the Theotokos and of all your saints, have mercy upon me a sinner and an unworthy servant." What does one see in the "Lord Jesus Christ," my brethren? The Holy Trinity, our God, the incarnate dispensation of our Christ and all of the saints. With the Cross and the "Lord Jesus Christ" they went

to paradise. And whoever says this prayer and makes the sign of the Cross, whether man or woman, he blesses the sky, the earth, and the sea. With the sign of the Cross and with the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ," all illnesses are cured. With the Cross and the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ," the Apostles raised the dead and cure every illness. With the Cross and the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ," a person is blessed and goes to paradise to rejoice and be glad as angels.

So you see, my brethren, how much the honorable and holy Cross helps a person. Whoever makes the sign of the Cross never suffers a loss but is protected from every kind of poisonous thing and from every demonic temptation. And a person has the Cross marked on him. Let him unite the three fingers of his right hand and place them first on his forehead, then on his navel, then on his right breast, then on the left breast, and bow low and then rise.



BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

By St. Symeon the New Theologian

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is to attribute His operations to the opposite spirit, as says St. Basil the Great. How does one do this? Whenever one sees miracles brought about by the Holy Spirit or any other divine gifts in any of His brethren -- that is compunction or tears, or humility, or divine knowledge, or a word of wisdom from on high, or anything else that is bestowed by the Holy Spirit on those who love God -- and says that this comes from the deceit of the devil. But he also blasphemes against the Holy Spirit who works in them, who says that those who as sons of God are led by a divine Spirit and perform the commandments of their God and Father, are being deceived by the demons. This is what the Jews of old said against the Son of God... Like unbelievers did and those completely uninitiated into divine mysteries, when they hear anything about divine illumination, or of the enlightenment of soul and mind, or of contemplation and freedom from passions, or of humility and tears that are poured out by the working of grace of the Holy Spirit, straightaway the eyes of their hearts are darkened rather than enlightened... They audaciously aver that those things come from the deceit of demons. To deny that at this present time that there are some who love God, and that they have been granted the Holy Spirit... and that they became gods by knowledge... and contemplation, this then wholly subverts the Incarnation of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. It denies the renewal of the image that had been corrupted and put to death, and its return to incorruption and immortality.

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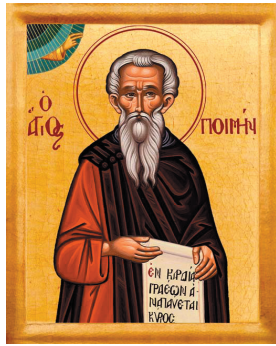
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ADDRESS OF ST. MARK OF EPHESUS ON THE DAY OF HIS DEATH

St. Mark of Ephesus

On the final day of his earthly life, the last thoughts of St. Mark were not for himself, but for Orthodoxy, to which he had devoted his whole life. Appealing to his followers to stand firm in the battle for Orthodoxy, he turned especially to one man in whom he hoped to find a successor to himself as leader in this battle. This hope was richly fulfilled in the person of George Scholarios, who became an ardent champion of Orthodoxy and, as first Patriarch of Constantinople after the fall of Byzantium, was instrumental in freeing the Church from the yoke of the false Union. He was subsequently canonized under his monastic name of Gennadios and is commemorated on August 31.

I WISH TO EXPRESS MY OPINION in more detail, especially now that my death is approaching, so as to be consistent with myself from beginning to end, and lest anyone should think that I have said one thing and concealed another in my thoughts, for which it would be just to shame me in this hour of my death. Concerning the Patriarch, I shall say this, lest it should perhaps occur to him to show me a certain respect at the burial of this my humble body, or to send to my grave any of his hierarchs or clergy or in general any of those in communion with him in order to take part in prayer or to join the priests invited to it from amongst us, thinking that at some time, or perhaps secretly,

I had allowed communion with him.

And lest my silence give occasion to those who do not know my views well and fully to suspect some kind of conciliation, I hereby state and testify before the many worthy men here present that I do not desire, in any manner and absolutely, and do not accept communion with him or with those who are with him, not in this life nor after my death, just as (I accept) neither the Union nor Latin dogmas, which he and his adherents have accepted, and for the enforcement of which he has occupied this presiding place, with the aim of overturning the true dogmas of the Church.

I am absolutely convinced that the farther I stand from him and those like him, the nearer I am to God and all the saints; and to the degree that I separate myself from them am I in union with the Truth and with the Holy Fathers, the Theologians of the Church; and I am likewise convinced that those who count themselves with them stand far away from the Truth and from the blessed Teachers of the Church. And for this reason I say: just as in the course of my whole life I was separated from them, so at the time of my departure, yea and after my death, I turn away from intercourse and communion with them and vow and command that none (of them) shall approach either my burial or my grave, and likewise anyone else from our side, with the aim of attempting to join and concelebrate in our Divine services; for this would be to mix what cannot be mixed. But it befits them to be absolutely separated from us until such time as God shall grant correction and peace to His Church.

Orthodox Heritage

So therefore, brethren, persevere, and grasp the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or by our epistle [2 Thess. 2:15]

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Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ARE WE SEEKING CHRIST?

A sermon by St. John of Kronstadt on the Feast of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called, translated on Mt. Athos, 11/99

The holy Apostle of Christ, Andrew the first-called, was originally a disciple of St. John the Baptist who prepared the people to receive the Messiah. When the Saviour came out of the wilderness, the Forerunner told the people: "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). Immediately Andrew followed after Him. Turning round and seeing him together with St. John's other disciples, the Lord asked them: "What do ye seek?" They answered: "Master, where dost Thou dwell?" He said to them: "Come and see."

The disciples saw where He lived and spent the day there with Him. Soon after this the Lord called Andrew and his brother Peter to follow after Him and told them that they were to become fishers of men unto the salvation of many. From that time forth, they remained with Christ; they were faithful to Him to the end and gave their very lives out of love for Him.

Dear brothers and sisters on this day I would ask you the same question: What are you seeking? Why did you come to church today? What are we all seeking in our lives? Are we seeking Christ, as He was first sought by those humble fishermen, among who was the Apostle Andrew?

What is it that people seek in life? They seek health, riches, success, acquaintances, friends, prestige, various world-

ly pleasures, vain knowledge... Only a few seek Christ the Saviour. Some may even think it strange to seek Christ. They say, "we call ourselves Christians after Christ, we see His holy image both in our homes and at church; we pronounce His sweetest name and hear it in God's temple." It appears we have no need to seek Christ. People seek that which they don't have, that which they need. But we seem to have Christ; at least that is what we think...

It's true, we have icons of Christ, but we do not have Christ Himself; we have His name, but only on our lips -- not in our hearts; we know Him, but only in word -- not in deed. Here, beloved, is a big difference; it is the same difference as between a shadow and the object which casts the shadow. It is, however, precisely with the heart that Christ is truly known, that is, in our inner man -- in our soul; because Christ, as God, is Spirit, "Who is everywhere and filleth all things."

"The kingdom of God is within You" (Luke 17:21), says the Lord. The

holy Apostle Paul earnestly desired that, through faith, Christ would dwell in the hearts of Christians. He wrote: "May God grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." (Eph. 3:16-17)

We have to admit that most of us do not have Christ in our hearts. Instead, our hearts are occupied with that which is opposed to Christ -- our God and Saviour, that which is opposed to our own good, which hinders the salvation of our souls. And because of this we do not lead a genu-



St. John of Kronstadt (+1909)

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ine Christian life. What is it that occupies our hearts? God "alone, Who searchest out the hearts and reins" (Ps. 7:9), sees what is in our hearts, its attachments. If the Lord granted us to see the full depths of our hearts, we would turn our eyes away in horror from such an overwhelming accumulation of filth. Let each of us look into his heart and say before the witness of our conscience what it is that occupies our hearts most of all.

Passions, sins, voluntary and involuntary -- are these not our heart's constant inhabitants? But where does Christ dwell? He dwells in pure hearts, hearts that are humble and contrite, there where He is not grieved by doubt or unbelief, by indifference towards Him Who is God and Saviour; there where men do not prefer the temporal sweetness of sin; where the idols of the passions have been chased out; where crude materiality is not preferred to the Kingdom of God; where Christians often turn their thoughts to the heavenly, as those created for heaven, for eternity; there where they seek God's truth, where every day and every hour they are attentive to His commandments. Therein is where Christ dwells. And what does He do there? If only we knew (some, of course, do know) what He does in souls worthy of His abiding presence -- what rest, comfort and joy He imparts, what paradisaic bliss He gives them to experience while still on this earth...

Having once embraced Christ, the holy Apostle Andrew became entirely committed to Him, and no matter what difficulties, sorrows, misfortunes and persecutions -- unavoidable in preaching the Gospel -- came his way, he remained faithful to Christ, enduring everything out of love for Him, even crucifixion. It is of utmost importance that we seek after Christ and that we find Him. Without Christ, who will save us from our sins which ensnare us every day and hour, and from the eternal torments? Only the Son of God has power on earth to forgive sins; He alone has the keys to hell and death, the

keys to the Kingdom of Heaven and life.

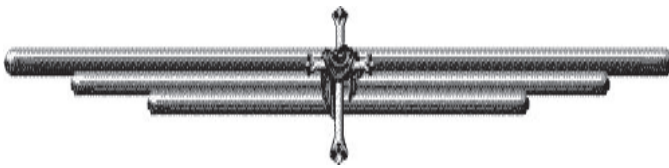
To find Christ is not difficult. He is everywhere, filling the world with Himself. God says to us through His prophet Jeremiah: "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?" (Jer. 23:23) As soon as He sees our hearts incline to receive His grace, He immediately enters, bringing with Him peace and comfort. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20), says the Lord. Oh, how often He converses with His faithful servants, as with true friends. Christ Himself is seeking you: if you but incline your heart toward Him, you will surely find Him.

But how are we to know if we have found Christ and are close to Him? Those close to Christ often turn to Him in prayer with faith and love; they often pronounce from their heart His sweetest name, often call upon Him for help; they often read or listen to His word with childlike simplicity and love; they seek frequent union with Him in His life-giving Mysteries; they are satisfied with whatever they have and accepting of what happens to them; they strive according to their strength to fulfill Christ's commandments... It happens that they also experience trials which are allowed by the loving Master, in order that their hearts be cleansed of every sinful impurity. Those who desire to be with Christ must not run away from trials, but even in times of joy, they must not forsake the carrying of their cross.

My dear brothers and sisters! Seek Jesus Christ with faith and love. Do not forget that He gave His life on the Cross for our sakes, to deliver us from sin and eternal torment, and to dwell in our hearts, that we might have great joy. Do not forget, we have all been bought with the price of His blood, and we should belong to Him, as to our Redeemer.

Our days are numbered. Every stroke of the clock reminds us to seek Him Who created time and Himself stands above the measure of time. He alone is able to pluck us out from the ravaging torrent of time... Every stroke of the clock tells us: Be watchful! You now have one hour less until you must cross the threshold into life after death which knows neither days nor hours. Do not be seduced by the momentary sweetness of sin which vanishes like a dream, leaving the soul empty, ailing, anguishing; it steals away precious time and ruins it forever. Do not waste time in useless occupations or idleness. Every one of you has a God-given talent to put to use. Busy yourselves in acquiring incorruptible wealth in the Kingdom of Heaven. Take the example of the thousands who have gone before you, having attained eternal rest and joy through their ceaseless labors in this temporal life, through sweat and tears.

Make haste to uproot from yourselves sin in all its various manifestations, through the help of Christ the Saviour. Remember, man sows what he reaps (Gal. 6:7), according to the immutable law of God's righteousness. While there is still time, therefore, let us hasten to find Christ and in faith create for Him an abode in our hearts that we not fall prey to the fire of gehenna, as it is written: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). Amen.



THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

By St. Isaac the Syrian

This Christmas night bestowed peace on the whole world -- so let no one threaten.

This is the night of the Most Gentle One -- let no one be cruel.

This is the night of the Humble One -- let no one be proud.

Now is the day of joy -- let us not revenge.

Now is the day of Good Will -- let us not be mean.

In this Day of Peace -- let us not be conquered by anger.

Today the Bountiful impoverished Himself for our sake -- so, rich one, invite the poor to your table.

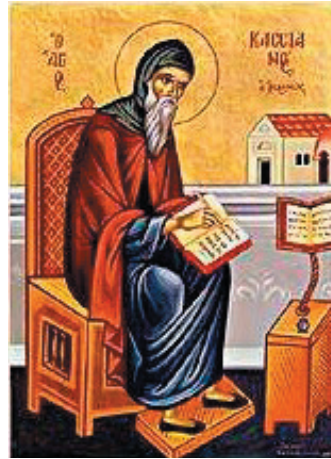
Today we receive a Gift for which we did not ask -- so let us give alms to those who implore and beg us.

This present Day cast open the heavenly doors to our prayers -- let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.

Today the DIVINE BEING took upon Himself the seal of our humanity -- in order for humanity to be decorated by the Seal of DIVINITY.

ON THE EIGHT DEADLY SINS, PART 1 OF 2

From St. John Cassian, "The Conferences," (New York: Newman Press, 1997), pp. 183 – 196



Our venerable and God-bearing Father John Cassian was a 4th/5th century monastic saint known for his writings on the monastic life and for his correctives of the anti-Pelagian writings of St. Augustine of Hippo. His feast day in the Orthodox Church is February 29th (celebrated on February 28th in non-leap years), and it is also kept locally in Marseilles, France, on July 23rd.

St. John was born in the Danube Delta in what is now Dobrogea, Romania, in about 360. In 382 he entered a monastery in Bethlehem and after several years there was granted permission, along with his friend St. Germanus of Dobrogea, to visit the Desert Fathers in Egypt. They remained in Egypt until 399 except for a brief period when they returned to Bethlehem and were released from the monastery there. Upon leaving Egypt they went to Constantinople where they met St. John Chrysostom, who ordained St. John Cassian as a deacon. He had to leave Constantinople in 403 when St. Chrysostom was exiled, and eventually settled close to Marseilles where he was ordained priest and founded two monasteries, one for women and one for men.

St. John's most famous works are the Institutes, which detail how to live the monastic life, and the Conferences, which provide details of conversations between St. John and St. Germanus and the Desert Fathers. He also warned against some of the excesses in St. Augustine of Hippo's theology whilst refraining from criticising him by name. For this reason he has sometimes been accused of Semi-Pelagianism by the Latins and some Protestant commentators. St. John died peacefully in 435.

In a community of very old men there was a man by the name of Serapion who was particularly adorned with the grace of discretion and whose conference I think is worth the effort to put down in writing. When we had begged him to say something about the assault of the vices that would cast light on their origins and causes, he began in this way:

There are eight principal vices that attack humankind. The first is gluttony, which means the voraciousness of the belly; the second is fornication; the third is filargyria, which is avarice or love of money; the fourth is anger; the fifth is sadness; the sixth acedia, which is anxiety or weariness of heart; the seventh is cenodoxia, which is boastfulness or vainglory; and the eighth is pride.

Of these vices there are two kinds. They are either natural like gluttony or unnatural like avarice. But they have four kinds of operation. Certain ones cannot be consummated without

bodily action, such as gluttony and fornication. Certain others, however, can be completed without any bodily action whatsoever, such as pride and vainglory. Some take their motivating causes from without, such as avarice and anger. Others, however, are aroused from within, such as acedia and sorrow.

Let us make this still clearer not only by a short discussion as well as we are able, but also by scriptural texts.

Gluttony and fornication, although they are in us naturally (for sometimes they also arise without any provocation from the mind but solely due to the instigation and itching of the flesh), nonetheless require external matter in order to be consummated, and thus they operate through bodily action. For everyone is tempted by his own lust. When lust has been conceived it gives birth to sin, but when sin has been consummated it brings forth death – “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” (James 1:14-15)

The first Adam would not have been able to be deceived by gluttony had he not had something to eat and immediately and lawlessly misused it, nor was the second tempted without the enticement of some substance, when it was said to him: “And when the tempter came to him, he said, if thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” (Matthew 4:3). It is clear to everyone that fornication also is not committed except by means of the body, as God says to the blessed Job with reference to this spirit: “Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly.” (Job 40:16).

Therefore these two in particular, which are exercised by means of the flesh, more especially require not only the spiritual concern of the soul but also bodily abstinence, since the mind’s attentiveness is not enough of itself to check their urgings (as it sometimes does in the case of anger or sadness and other passions, which it can expel by mental effort alone and without chastising the flesh). Bodily discipline must come to its assistance, and this is accomplished by fasting, vigils, and works of penance, and to these is added living in a remote place, because just as they are generated through the fault of both soul and body, so they cannot be overcome except by the toil of both.

Although the blessed Apostle has declared that all the vices in general are carnal, since he has numbered enmity (hostility) and anger and heresies among the other works of the flesh (Galatians 5:18-21 – “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”), nonetheless we make a distinction based on a twofold division for the sake of a more refined understanding of their remedies and their natures.

For we say that some of them are carnal, while some others are spiritual.

The carnal ones pertain especially to the enjoyment and feelings of the flesh; by them it is so delighted and gratified that it sometimes even arouses peaceful minds and drags them reluctantly to acquiesce in its will. About these the Apostle says: “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” (Ephesians 2:3).

But we call spiritual those that, having arisen at the prompting of the soul alone, not only give no pleasure to the flesh but even inflict it with serious sufferings and merely provide the sick soul with the food of a miserable enjoyment. Therefore these have need of the medicine of a simple heart, whereas those that are carnal are only remedied by a twofold cure, as we have said. Hence it is important to those who strive for purity first of all to remove from themselves the very stuff of these carnal passions, by which either an occasion for or the memory of those same passions can be aroused in the soul that is still sick.

For a twofold sickness necessarily requires a twofold cure. Seductive images and matter need to be removed from the body, lest lust attempt to break out into deeds, and by the same token a more careful medication on Scripture, constant watchfulness, and solitude must be applied to the soul, lest it so much as conceive this in thought. In the case of the other vices, however, human companionship is of no harm, and indeed it is even of great help to those who really want to be rid of them, since they are frequently rebuked by the presence of other people, and although aggravations more readily appear, they are quickly remedied.

Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ, although he was declared by the Apostle to have been tempted in every respect as we are, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15). That is, he was without the contagion of this passion, having had no experience whatsoever of the pricks of fleshly lust by which we are inevitably stung, even unwittingly and unwillingly, for in his regard there was nothing like our own insemination and conception, as the Archangel said in announcing how his conception would take place: “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Although these eight vices, then, have different origins and varying operations, yet the first six -- namely, gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, and acedia (anxiety, or weariness of the heart) -- are connected among themselves by a certain affinity and, so to speak, interlinking, such that the overflow of the previous one serves as the start of the next one. **For from an excess of gluttony there inevitably springs fornication;**

from fornication, avarice; from avarice, anger; from anger, sadness; and from sadness, acedia. Therefore these must be fought against in a similar way and by the same method, and we must always attack the ones that follow by beginning with those that come before. For a tree whose width and height are harmful will more easily wither up if the roots which support it are exposed and cut beforehand, and pestilential waters will dry up when their rising source and rushing streams have been stopped up with skillful labor.

In order to conquer acedia, sadness must first be overcome; in order to drive out sadness, anger must be cast out beforehand; in order to extinguish anger, avarice must be trampled on; in order to eradicate avarice, fornication must be repressed; in order to overthrow fornication, the vice of gluttony must be disciplined.

But the two remaining ones, vainglory and pride, are linked in similar fashion, like the vices that we have spoken of, such that growth in the first becomes the start of the second, for an overflow of vainglory begets the beginnings of pride. But these differ wholly from those first six vices and are not leagued with them since they are not only not generated by them but even arise in a contrary manner and order. For when the former have been rooted out these sprout forth all the more, and at the death of the former these spring up and grow more vigorously.

Hence we are also attacked by these two vices in a different way. We fall into one of those six vices when we have been seduced by the one that comes before it, but we are in danger of falling into these two when we are victorious and, indeed, particularly after triumphs. Each vice, then, since it is begotten by an increase in the one that comes before it, is purged away when the one before it is diminished. Therefore vainglory must be suffocated in order for pride to be driven out. Thus, whenever the preceding ones have been overcome, those that follow fall idle, and, with the extinction of the ones that go before, the remaining passions wither away without any effort.

And although the eight vices that we have spoken about are connected and joined among themselves according to the scheme that we have mentioned, yet they are divided more particularly into four couplets. Fornication is allied by a special relationship to gluttony, anger is closely yoked to avarice, acedia to sadness, and pride to vainglory.

[To be continued in our next issue]



As long as you have bad habits do not reject hardship, so that through it you may be humbled and eject your pride.

Saint Maximos the Confessor

THE DIVINE SERVICES ON THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

By Bishop Alexander Mileant (+2005)

Next to Pascha, the Nativity of Christ is the most joyous festival, and may justly be called the *Winter Pascha*. The celebration of the Nativity of Christ was established very early, possibly already in the first century. But until the end of the fourth century, the Nativity of Christ was celebrated with His Baptism on the 6th of January and was called Theophany. Beginning in the fourth century, the Nativity of Christ began to be celebrated on the 25th of December (on the day of the pagan festival in honor of the *Invincible Sun*). At present, this takes place on the 7th of January according to the Gregorian Calendar. The Church prepares the faithful for a worthy celebration of the Nativity of Christ by a forty-day fast, which begins on the 15th /28th of November, on the day after the commemoration of the Apostle Philip (hence *Philip's Fast*). Furthermore, Orthodox Christians spend the Eve of the Nativity of Christ in strict fasting; it is not uncommon to observe several Orthodox Christians eating on this day only boiled wheat with honey.

On the Eve of the Nativity of Christ, the *Royal Hours* are performed. This divine service differs from the usual *Hours* by the reading of special *paremias* (readings from the Bible, primarily from the Old Testament) corresponding to the feast. Furthermore, the Apostle and Gospel are read.

The Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is then performed with Vespers. At this Vespers, the *stichera* on *Lord, I have cried*, depict both the inner significance and the outward picture of the Nativity of Christ. Thus, we hear how, with the Incarnation of the Son of God, the strife between God and men ceases, the fiery sword of the angel (blocking the entry to Paradise) is turned back, and we receive access to Paradise. We also hear of the doxology of the angels, of Herod's confusion, and of the unification of all men under the authority of the Roman emperor Augustus.

Additional *paremias* are read at Vespers. The first *paremia* (Gen. 1:1-13) speaks of the creation of man by God. The second (Num. 24:2-9, 17-18) speaks of the prophetic significance of the star out of Jacob and the birth of the Messiah, to whom all men will submit. The third (Micah 4:6-7, 5:2-4) speaks of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. The fourth (Isaiah 11:1-10) speaks of the Rod (i.e., the Messiah) that would come forth from the root of Jesse and of the fact that the Spirit of God would rest upon Him. The fifth (Baruch 3:36-38; 4:1-4) speaks of the appearance of God on earth and of His life among men. The sixth (Dan. 2:31-36, 44-45) prophecies the restoration of the Heavenly Kingdom by God. After the conclusion of the Liturgy, the priests stand before the icon of the feast in the middle of the Church, and glorify Christ with the singing of the *troparion* and the *kontakion* of the feast.

In the evening, on the Eve of the Nativity of Christ, a solemn All-night Vigil is served. This begins with Great Compline and the triumphant singing of the verses: *God is with us*, containing a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah (see Isaiah 7:14, 8:8-15 and 9:6-7). The *stichera* express the triumph of heaven and earth, of angels and men, who rejoice over the descent of God to the earth and the spiritual and moral change in men that followed. The *stichera* for the Aposticha proclaim that a most glorious miracle has been performed: the Word is born incorruptibly from a Virgin and is not separated from the Father. After *Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart*, the following is sung.

Troparion

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, shined the light of knowledge upon the world: for therein they that adored the stars were taught by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high: O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Before the reading of the Six Psalms, the chantor sings: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will among men.*

In the Canon, the thought is expressed that He Who was born of the Virgin is not a simple man, but God, Who has appeared in the flesh on earth for the salvation of men, as was foretold concerning Him in the Old Testament. In the Canon, Jesus Christ is called the Benefactor Who has reconciled us with God, and the Father Who has freed us from the authority of the devil and saved us from sin, the curse and death (see the Canon of Matins below). After the sixth ode of the Canon and the Small Litany is sung the following *kontakion*.

Kontakion

Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is beyond being, and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable; angels doxologize with shepherds, and Magi journey with a star; for a young Child, the pre-eternal God, is born for our sake.

On the very feast of the Nativity, at the beginning of the Liturgy, instead of the psalms *Bless the Lord, O my soul* and *Praise the Lord, O my soul*, special antiphons are sung. The prokeimenon before the Apostle expresses the worship of Jesus Christ by all creation: *Let all the earth worship Thee and chant unto Thee; let them chant unto Thy name, O Most High*. The reading from the Apostle explains how, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, we have become children of the Heavenly Father: *But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ* (Gal. 4:4-7). The Gospel reading tells of the adoration by the Magi of the Lord Who had been born. Instead of *It is truly meet*, the following is sung:

It would be easier for us, because free from all danger, to keep silence in fear: while it is hard indeed, O Virgin, in love to devise songs harmoniously put together. But do thou, O Mother, give us strength so that we may fulfill our good intent.

In the history of mankind, there is no event greater than the incarnation and coming of the Son of God into the world. It is an act of the endless love of God the Father, *Who so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*. The incarnation of the Son of God from the Virgin Mary changed the world for the better in a radical way: It gave men a new way of thinking, ennobled their morals and directed world events along a new course. It brought men power to struggle against sin, reconciled men to God, brought about the adoption of men by the Father, and regenerated their whole nature. For these reasons, the incarnation of the Son of God proved to be at the very center of world events, and chronology is reckoned relative to it - before and after the Nativity of Christ.

Let all of us thus approach the Advent season and the upcoming celebration of our Lord's Nativity with the seriousness, humility, gratitude and meekness that it warrants and not with the worldly outpour of materialism that one observes in these spiritually dark days of 21st century life.



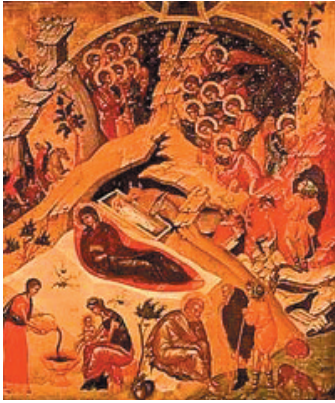
As soon as the Immaculate one brought these petitions (of Adam and Eve who had just entreated the Theotokos for help) to the God lying in the cradle, at once He received them... [and said]: "O mother, I save them because of thee and through thee. Had I not willed to save them, I should not have dwelt in thee -- I should not have allowed My light to shine from thee, and thou wouldst not have heard thyself called My mother. It is for thy race that I lie in the crib. At My will, I now give milk to thy breasts. Thou didst bear Me in thy arms for their sake. The Cherubim do not see Me, but thou dost behold me and carry me and cherish me as Son..."

"I, the creator of the universe, have taken thee as mother; and, as a child, I grow, I -- perfect -- from thee, without stain. I am swathed in swaddling clothes, for the sake of those who long ago wore covering of skin. The cave is beloved by Me, for the sake of those who hated the pleasures of Paradise and loved corruption; and transgressed my life-bearing command. I came down to earth in order that they might have incorruptible life..."

St. Romanos the Melodist

«Χριστός Γεννᾶται, Δοξάσατε...»

Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Χ. Κυριακοπούλου, ἐφημερίου Ι. Ναοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου, Κηφισιάς



Προετοιμάζεται ὁλόκληρη ἡ Χριστιανοσύνη νὰ ἐορτάσῃ σὲ λίγες ἡμέρες «τὴν μητρόπολιν τῶν ἐορτῶν», τὸ ἱστορικό καὶ κοσμοχαρμόσυνο γεγονός τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Θεανθρώπου. Ἐορταστικὴ ἀτμόσφαιρα ἐπικρατεῖ παντοῦ, ποῦ πολλές φορές λαμβάνει ἕναν εἰδυλιακὸ χαρακτήρα. Δίδεται ἡ εὐκαιρία στοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ ἀνταλλάξουν δῶρα, νὰ κάνουν ὀλιγοήμερες διακοπές, νὰ ἀπολαύσουν τὰ υλικά ἀγαθὰ καὶ νὰ διασκεδάσουν. Ἀσφαλῶς, τὰ ἔχει καὶ αὐτὰ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀνάγκη. Ὁ συνειδητὸς Χριστιανός, ὅμως, δὲν πρέπει νὰ δώσῃ βαρῦτητα μόνο σὲ αὐτά, γιατί θὰ προσδώσῃ στὰ Χριστούγεννα ἕναν ἐκκοσμικευμένο τρόπο, ξένον πρὸς τὶς Χριστιανικὲς μας παραδόσεις καὶ τὰ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικά ἦθη καὶ ἔθιμά μας.

Μὲ τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Θεανθρώπου, ἀρχίζει μιὰ καινούρια ζωὴ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ποῦ θὰ ἀκολουθήσῃ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ θὰ ζήσῃ μὲ ἕναν καινούριο τρόπο, ποῦ θὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσῃ στὴ σωτηρία καὶ στὴ λύτρωση. Γι' αὐτὸ χαίρομαστε ὡς Χριστιανοί, γιατί ὁ Θεὸς γίνεται Ἄνθρωπος («βρέφος ἐσπαργανωμένον») γιὰ νὰ σώσῃ τὸν πεπτωκότα ἄνθρωπο καὶ νὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσῃ στὴ θέωση, «ἐνηνθρώπισεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν» (Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος). Στὸ πρόσωπό Του θὰ ἐπέλθῃ ἡ συμφιλίωση ἀνάμεσα στὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ στὸ Θεό, ἡ ὁποία εἶχε διασαλευθεῖ μὲ τὴν πτώση τοῦ πρώτου ἀνθρώπου.

Ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν γεννήθηκε μόνον τότε. Στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας ἀκοῦμε τὶς ἐνεστωτικὲς ἐκφράσεις: «Σήμερον γεννᾶται ἐκ Παρθένου...», «Ἡ Παρθένος σήμερον τὸν ὑπερούσιον τίκτει...», «Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε...». Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, μὲ αὐτὲς τὶς ἐκφράσεις, μᾶς προτρέπει νὰ ζήσουμε τὸ γεγονός τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὡς συνεχὲς παρόν, ὅτι δηλαδή τώρα γεννιέται γιὰ τὸν καθένα μας. Ἔτσι, σπάζει τὰ τοπικά καὶ χρονικά ὄρια. Ὅσοι δὲν παρασύρθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴ μέθη τοῦ εὐδαιμονισμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἐκκοσμικευμένης ζωῆς θὰ γιορτάσουν Χριστούγεννα μὲ Χριστὸ ἀναγεννημένοι μέσα στὴν «κιβωτὸ» τῆς σωτηρίας μας, μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μέσα στὸν Παράδεισο ποῦ ἔφερε ὁ σαρκωμένος Θεὸς μὲ τὴ γέννησή Του.

Σήμερα ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα ἀπειλεῖται ἀπὸ τὴν κλαγγὴ τῶν ὀπλων, αἱματοκυλίσματα, ἐγκλήματα, βιαιότητες, ἢ εἰρήνη διασαλεύεται, καὶ τοῦτο γιατί ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν στηρίζεται ἐπὶ τὴν ἐλπίδες του στὸν Ἄρχοντα τῆς εἰρήνης, ποῦ μὲ τὴ γέννησή

Του ἔφερε στὸν Κόσμο, ἀλλὰ στὸν ἑαυτό του. Τὸ διάγγελμα ποῦ στέλνει σὲ ὅλους ὁ «Τεχθεὶς Βασιλεὺς» εἶναι ἀπλὸ καὶ ξεκάθαρο: «Δεῦτε πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι κἀγὼ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς» καὶ «Μὴ πεποιθατε ἐπ' ἄρχοντας, ἐπὶ υἱοὺς ἀνθρώπων οἷς οὐκ ἔστι σωτηρία». Τὸ Θεῖο Βρέφος μᾶς χτυπᾷ τὴ θύρα τῆς ψυχῆς μας γιὰ νὰ εἰσέλθῃ καὶ νὰ κατοικήσῃ, ἀρκεῖ νὰ Τοῦ ἀνοιξοῦμε. Χρειάζεται, ὅμως, νὰ ἔχει προηγηθῇ ἡ ἀγάπη γιὰ νὰ μείνῃ καὶ νὰ κατασκηνώσῃ μέσα μας. Ὁ Χριστὸς, κατὰ τὴν ἔκφραση ἐνὸς σύγχρονου θεολόγου καὶ στοχαστοῦ, «εἶναι ὁ Ζητιάνος τῆς σωτηρίας μας, χτυπᾷ τὴν πόρτα τῆς καρδιάς μας καὶ μᾶς καλεῖ νὰ συνδειπνήσουμε στὸ τραπέζι τῆς Βασιλείας Του», μὲ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὸ αἷμά Του νὰ μᾶς θρέψῃ καὶ νὰ μᾶς ἀναγεννήσῃ. Τότε, πραγματικά, θὰ νοιώσουμε Χριστούγεννα καὶ ἡ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ θὰ ἀποβῇ ἀναγέννηση δική μας!

Καλὰ καὶ εὐλογημένα Χριστούγεννα!



Ἐνα Θαῦμα τῆς Παναγίας

Ὁ Τάσος Ρηγοπούλας, στρατευμένος στὴν Ἀλβανία τὸ 1940, ἔστειλε ἀπὸ τὸ μέτωπο τὸ παρακάτω γράμμα στὸν ἀδελφό του.

«Ἀδελφέ μου Νίκο.

Σοῦ γράφω ἀπὸ μία ἀετοφωλιά, τετρακόσια μέτρα ψηλότερη ἀπὸ τὴν κορυφὴ τῆς Πάρνηθας. Ἡ φύση τριγύρω εἶναι πάλλευκη. Σκοπὸς μου ὅμως δὲν εἶναι νὰ σοῦ περιγράψω τὰ θέλητρα μίας χιονισμένης Μόροβας, μὲ ὄλο τὸ ἄγριο μεγαλεῖο της. Σκοπὸς μου εἶναι νὰ σοῦ μεταδώσω αὐτὸ ποῦ ἔζησα, ποῦ τὸ εἶδα μὲ τὰ μάτια μου καὶ ποῦ φοβᾶμαι μήπως, ἀκούγοντάς το ἀπὸ ἄλλους, δὲν τὸ πιστέψεις.

Λίγες στιγμὲς πρὶν ὀρμήσουμε γιὰ τὰ ὄχυρά τῆς Μόροβας, εἶδαμε σὲ ἀπόσταση περίπου δέκα μέτρων μιὰ ψηλὴ μαυροφόρα νὰ στέκῃ ἀκίνητη.

- Τὶς εἶ; Μιλιά...

Ὁ σκοπὸς θυμωμένος ξαναφώναξε:

-Τὶς εἶ;

Τότε, σὰν νὰ μᾶς πέρασε ὅλους ἠλεκτρικὸ ρεῦμα, ψιθυρίσαμε: Ἡ ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑ!

Ἐκείνη ὄρμησε ἐμπρὸς σὰν νὰ εἶχε φτερά ἀετοῦ. Ἐμεῖς ἀπὸ πίσω της. Συνεχῶς τὴν αἰσθανόμασταν νὰ μᾶς μεταγγίξῃ ἀντρευσύνῃ. Ὁλόκληρη ἑβδομάδα παλέψαμε σκληρά, γιὰ νὰ καταλάβουμε τὰ ὄχυρά Ἰβάν-Μόροβας.

Ἐπογραμμίζω πὼς ἡ ἐπίθεσή μας πέτυχε τοὺς Ἰταλοὺς στὴν ἀλλαγὴ τῶν μονάδων τους. Τὰ παληὰ τμήματα εἶχαν τραβηχτεῖ πίσω καὶ τὰ καινούργια... κοιμοῦνταν! Τὸ τί ἔπαθαν δὲν περιγράφεται. Ἐκείνη ὄρμωσε πάντα μπροστά. Κι ὅταν πιά νικητὲς ροβολούσαμε πρὸς τὴν ἀνυπεράσπιστη Κορυτσά, τότε ἡ Ὑπέρμαχος ἐγίνε ἀτμός, νέφος ἀπαλὸ καὶ χάθηκε...»

Μέγας Βασίλειος ἢ Σάντα Κλάους – Τὸ Καίριο Δίλημμα τῶν Χριστουγέννων

Αρχιμ. π. Σωτήριου Κοσμόπουλου, πρωτοσύγκελλου Ι. Μητροπόλεως Σάμου καὶ Ἰκαρίας

Τὰ ἔθιμα τῶν Χριστουγέννων εἶναι ἕνας ἐξωτερικὸς παράγοντας, πού μᾶς ἐντάσσει στὴν ἑορταστικὴ ἀτμόσφαιρα καί, ἴσως, μᾶς βοηθήσει νὰ κατανοήσουμε τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἑορτῆς. Ἀποτελεῖ πηγαία ἔκφραση τοῦ λαοῦ, ὄχι ὅμως καὶ ἀπαραίτητη προϋπόθεση γιὰ τὸν ἀληθινὸ ἑορτασμὸ τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Ἡ τήρησή τους, βέβαια, ἔχει ἰδιαίτερη σημασία τόσο γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνορθόδοξη παράδοσή μας, ὅσο καί, ὀρισμένες φορές, γιὰ τὴν ἀνάπτυξη τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ συναισθήματος τοῦ πιστοῦ λαοῦ. Ἄρκει νὰ μὴν ἀποτελοῦν τὸν στόχο ἀλλὰ τὸν τρόπο γιὰ τὴν ἐπίτευξη τοῦ στόχου, πού δὲν εἶναι ἄλλος ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ ἀντιληφθοῦμε καὶ νὰ πραγματώσουμε τὸ ἀληθινὸ καὶ βαθύτερο νόημα τῆς ἑορτῆς τῶν Χριστουγέννων, χωρὶς μονόπλευρη καὶ μοναδικὴ ἔμμομη σ' αὐτά.

Οἱ στολισμένες βιτρίνες, οἱ ὀλοφώτιστοι δρόμοι, τὰ καθαρὰ σπίτια, τὰ ἐόρτια γλυκὰ καὶ ἐδέσματα καὶ αὐτὸς ἀκόμη ὁ «Ἅγιος» Βασίλης, προσπαθοῦν νὰ ἀντικατοπτρίσουν τὴν δέουσα καθαρότητα καὶ φωτεινότητα τοῦ ἐσωτερικοῦ μας κόσμου, μὲ τὴν ὁποία πρέπει νὰ ὑποδεχόμαστε τὸν Χριστό, προσπαθώντας αὐτὴ ἢ ἰδανικὴ ψυχικὴ προετοιμασία, νὰ εἶναι πλέον κύριο μέλημά μας, σὲ κάθε στιγμὴ τῆς ζωῆς μας.

Ἰδιαίτερος ἀγαπητὸς κυρίως στὰ παιδιά ἀλλὰ καὶ στοὺς μεγάλους εἶναι ὁ «Ἅγιος Βασίλης». Πάντως, μὲ τὴν προβολὴ ἑνὸς τέτοιου εἶδους ψεύτικου ἀγίου, ἀναιρεῖται ἡ μορφή τῆς ἀσκήσεως στὴν ζωὴ, τὴν ὁποία προτείνει ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Διαφημίζεται τὸ εὐκόλο καὶ ἄνευ κόπου κέρδος, ἢ προσωρινὴ εὐτυχία, ἢ μοναδικότητα τῆς εὐμάρειας καὶ τοῦ πλοῦτου καὶ κάθε εἶδους ὑλικὸς εὐδαιμονισμὸς. Ἕνας τέτοιος «Ἅγιος» Βασίλης, μὲ φανταχτερὴ κόκκινη ἐνδυμασία, πού ζεῖ σὲ μακρινὸ χιονισμένο τόπο μὲ ἄνεση καὶ καλοπερνᾶ, πού ἐτοιμάζει πακέτα μὲ δῶρα, πού χαρίζει εὐτυχία καὶ χαρὰ ὅσους ἐπισκέπτεται μὲ τὸ συρόμενο ἀπὸ ταρανδούς ἔλκηθρό του, πού..., γρήγορα καταλαβαίνουμε ὅτι ἀποτελεῖ ἕναν καλοφτιαγμένο μῦθο, ὁ ὁποῖος μπήκε εὐκόλα στὴ ζωὴ μας, γιατί μᾶς χαρίζει μιὰ στιγμιαία γαλήνη καὶ εὐχαρίστηση, ἀποτελώντας μιὰ ἀνάπαυλα ἀπὸ τὴν καθημερινότητα. Ἐξαιτίας ὅμως τοῦ ὅτι εἶναι τόσο προσωρινὸς καὶ ἐφήμερος, δὲν μᾶς οἰκοδομεῖ πνευματικά, δὲν μᾶς χαρίζει ὁποιαδήποτε πνευματικὴ, μὰ οὔτε καλὰ - καλὰ ὑλικὴ ὠφέλεια. Δὲν μᾶς πείθει, γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν προσφορά του, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν τὸν ἐκλαμβάνουμε ποτὲ σάν παράδειγμα παρὰ μόνο σάν ἕνα φολκλορικὸ στοιχεῖο, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ συναντηθοῦμε γιὰ λίγο πάλι τὸν ἐπόμενο χρόνο, κατὰ τὴν περίοδο τῶν Χριστουγέννων.

Ἕνας τέτοιος «Ἅγιος» Βασίλης, σὲ τίποτα δὲν θυμίζει τὴν μεγαλειώδη καὶ λαμπρὴ μορφή, πού ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας προβάλλει καὶ τιμᾷ μέσα στίς ἑορτὲς τοῦ δωδεκαημέρου τὴν 1ην Ἰανουαρίου, τὸν ἀληθινὸ Ἅγιο Βασίλειο τὸν Μεγάλο, τὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπο Καισαρείας τῆς Καππαδοκίας. Ἐκεῖνος ἦταν ἀσκητικὸς, ὀλιγαρκής, ταλαιπωρημένος καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν

φύση του ἀσθενικὸς, πού στὰ μόλις 49 χρόνια πού ἔζησε στὴ γῆ, προσέφερε πάρα πολλά. Ἡ κάθε μορφῆς προσφορά του καὶ ἰδιαίτερα ἡ κοινωνικὴ, ἀποτελοῦσε τὸ ἀπαύγασμα τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς του καὶ ἔκφραση τῆς ἀγνῆς καὶ ἀμέτρητης ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ πρὸς τὸν πλησίον συνάνθρωπό του. Καὶ μόνο αὐτὸ ἄρκει γιὰ νὰ ὀριστῆ ἡ μεγάλη διαφορὰ καὶ τὸ χάος ἀνάμεσα στὸν ἀληθινὸ Ἅγιο Βασίλειο καὶ στὸν ψεύτικο Σάντα Κλάους.

Ἡ προσωπικότητα τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου θὰ μπορούσε κάλλιστα νὰ ἀποτελέσει πρότυπο ζωῆς γιὰ ἐμᾶς. Αὐτὸ μᾶς προτείνει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας καὶ ἡ παράδοση πού πηγάζει μέσα ἀπὸ αὐτήν, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ προβάλλει τοὺς ἀγίους. Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος, ἀνάμεσα στ' ἄλλα, εἶχε ἐπιδείξει θαυμαστὸ ζῆλο στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ συνανθρώπου πού εἶχε ἀνάγκη, μὲ θαυμαστὰ ἀποτελέσματα. Καὶ μόνο ἡ λέξη «Βασιλειάδα» ἄρκει γιὰ νὰ φέρουμε στὴν σκέψη μας ἐκεῖνη τὴν πολιτεία μὲ τὰ εὐαγέστατα ἰδρύματα τῆς ἐποχῆς, πού ἀνακούφιζαν τὸν ἀνθρώπινο πόνο, ἀπ' ὅπου καὶ ἂν προερχόταν, καὶ ἔδιναν χαρὰ καὶ ἐλπίδα ζωῆς, φανερόντας τὴν ποιότητα τῆς ἔμπρακτης ἀγάπης πού πηγάζει ἀπὸ μιὰ ἀληθινὴ, πραγματικὴ ἐν Χριστῷ (Χριστιανικὴ) ζωὴ.

Διδασκόμαστε λοιπὸν, πὼς ἡ προσφορά μας στὸν συνάνθρωπο πρέπει νὰ ὑπαγορεύεται ὡς ἐσωτερικὴ ἀνάγκη, πού θὰ πηγάζῃ ἀπὸ τὴν Χριστιανικὴ καρδιά μας καὶ θὰ εἶναι ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς ἀγάπης μας γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, ὁ ὁποῖος μᾶς διαβεβαίωσε πὼς ἂν κάνουμε κάτι γιὰ νὰ ἀκουφίσουμε τὸν πόνο τοῦ τελευταίου συνανθρώπου μας, εἶναι σάν νὰ τὸ κάνουμε γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Χριστό (βλ. Ματθ. 25, 40). Αὐτὸ βέβαια εἶναι κάτι πού στίσιήμερες μας ὑπάρχει μόνο σάν ἐπιφανειακὸ γνῶρισμα, πού χρωματίζεται τίς γιορτινὲς μέρες καὶ φυσικὰ ἔχει ἡμερομηνία λήξης. Χαρίζει δὲ μιὰ ὑποκριτικὴ ἰλαρότητα, ἀφοῦ δὲν εἶναι «ξεχειλίσμα» τῆς καρδιάς, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀθεμελίωτη προβολὴ ἑνὸς ἐξωτερικοῦ δείγματος τυπικῆς - πλαστῆς ἀγάπης, πού δὲν εἶναι ἀγάπη, ἀλλὰ ἀνάγκη «καθωσπρεπισμοῦ» καὶ γέννημα μιᾶς ἀσθενοῦς ἠθικιστικῆς νοοτροπίας.

Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος Μέγας Βασίλειος, αἰῶνες τώρα μᾶς ἔρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν Καισαρεία, φορτωμένος μὲ τὰ δῶρα τῆς ἔμπρακτης Χριστιανικῆς ἀγάπης καὶ ἀποτελεῖ ὁδοδείκτη, πού καθοδηγεῖ ὅποιον τὸν ἀκολουθεῖ στὴν Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Ὁ μὴ παραδοσιακὸς γιὰ τὰ δικά μας δεδομένα Σάντα Κλάους, ὅμως, φαίνεται ὅτι μονοπωλεῖ σ' αὐτὲς τίς ἑορτὲς. Αὐτὸ φανερόναι τὴν ἠθικὴ καὶ κοινωνικὴ μας σήψη καὶ εἶναι συνέπεια τῆς μὴ τήρησης τῶν ὄσων παραλάβαμε ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους Πατέρες μας.

Θέλουμε νὰ πιστεύουμε ὅτι ἀπὸ λάθος συνταυτίστηκε μὲ τὸν μεγάλο Πατέρα, διδάσκαλο καὶ ἀσκητὴ Ἅγιο Βασίλειο, ἴσως ἐπειδὴ ἑορτάζει αὐτὲς τίς ἡμέρες. Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἴσως ἀντιπροβάλλεται, ὡς παράδειγμα, κατὰ γελοῖο τρόπο στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Σάντα Κλάους, μιὰ τυπικὴ, ἀνεικονικὴ καὶ ὑποκριτικὴ δῆθεν ἀδελφικὴ συμπεριφορὰ, πού πετυχαίνει μόνο μιὰ κατ' ἐπίφασιν χαρὰ καὶ φαινομενικὴ ἀγάπη, πού εἶναι καταδικασμένη νὰ χαθῆ μέσα στὴν ὑποκρισία, πού τὴν στηρίζει καὶ τὴν προωθεῖ. Καὶ αὐτὸ σὲ τίποτα δὲν θυμίζει, οὔτε τὴν πολιτεία τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, οὔτε τὴν βίωση τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς, ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀληθινὸ πνεῦμα

τῶν Χριστουγέννων, ἀφοῦ δὲν εἶναι μόνιμη κατάσταση ἀλλὰ παροδική καὶ κάλπικη.

Ὁ Θεὸς θέλει τὴν ψυχική μας προετοιμασία καὶ τὴν ἐμπρακτὴ ἀγάπη, πού θά πηγάζει ἀπὸ τὴν Χριστιανική μας καρδιά. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ μεταθέτουμε τὸ βᾶρος τῶν ὑποχρεώσεων μας σὲ ἓναν κάλπικο: «ἅγιο», τόσο κάλπικο πού ὑπάρχουν χιλιάδες μιμητές του, προερχόμενοι καὶ ἀπὸ εἰδικές σχολές ἀκόμη, ὅπως συμβαίνει στὸ ἐξωτερικό, οἱ ὅποιοι παίρνουν ὁδηγίες ὥστε νὰ ὑποδυθοῦν - ὑποκριθοῦν, ὅσο τὸ δυνατόν καλλίτερα, γιὰ λίγες ἡμέρες, τὸν Σάντα Κλάους. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ κλείνουμε τὰ μάτια στὴν πραγματικότητα, στερώντας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἴδιους μας τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς πρῶτα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀναξιοπαθοῦντες συνανθρώπους μας, τὴν χαρὰ τῆς προσφοράς καὶ τῆς ἀνάλωσής μας γι' αὐτοὺς καὶ κατ' ἐπέκτασιν γιὰ τὸν Χριστό. Ἔτσι θά ζοῦμε Χριστιανικά, δημιουργώντας τις προϋποθέσεις καὶ θεμελιώνοντας τὴν σωτηρία μας, ἀκολουθώντας ἐκείνους τοὺς τρόπους καὶ ἐκείνους τοὺς δρόμους πού ὁδηγήσαν καὶ μέχρι συντελείας τῶν αἰώνων θά ὁδηγοῦν τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ φθάσει στὸ ποθητὸ «καθ' ὁμοίωσιν».

*Χριστὸς γεννᾶται δοξάσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐξ Οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς ὑψώθητε.
Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ,
καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ ἀννυμήσατε λαοί
ὅτι δεδόξασται.*

Ἄβατον: Τὸ Δέος Μπροστὰ στὴ Χαρismaticὴ Ὑπαρξη

Τοῦ Πανιερωτάτου Μητροπολίτου Ἀχελώου κ. Εὐθυμίου, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸν «Τύπος τῆς Κυριακῆς», 16 Φεβρουαρίου, 2003

Τὸ ἄβατον τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους γιὰ τὸ ὅποιο τόσος λόγος καὶ θόρυβος γίνεται, ἀντιμετωπίζεται ἀπὸ ὅλες τις πλευρὲς ὡς θέμα ἀνθρωπίνων δικαιωμάτων ἢ ὡς ἱστορικὸ καὶ πολιτιστικὸ κειμήλιο («τζοβαῖρι») κ.λ.π. Τὸ ἄβατον, ὅμως, θεωρούμενο μέσα σὲ πλαίσιο ἐνδοκοσμικὸ, δηλαδή ἀνθρώπινο, εἶναι ἀκατανόητο, ἀκόμη δὲ καὶ ἀδιανόητο. Πολὺ περισσότερο θεωρούμενο μέσα στὸ πλαίσιο τῆς ἐκκοσμικεύσεως (θρησκευτικὸ ἀποχρωματισμοῦ) τῆς σύγχρονης ἐποχῆς, ἔξω δηλαδή ἀπὸ τις προϋποθέσεις τῆς εὐαγγελικῆς θείας ἀποκάλυψης, τῆς Χριστιανικῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης θεολογίας, τὸ ἄβατον εἶναι σκάνδαλον καὶ μορία: «Ἰουδαίους μὲν σκάνδαλον, Ἕλλησι δὲ μορίαν» (Α΄ Κορ. 1, 23). Τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος ἐπίσης, δὲν ξεφύτρωσε ἔτσι αὐθαίρετα ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς ἀποκοτιᾶς κάποιων φανατικῶν «καλογῆρων» τοῦ... «σκοτεινοῦ Μεσαίωνα»! Τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος, τὸ ἄβατον, ἡ γεωγραφικὴ δηλαδή ἀποκλειστικότητά του, ὁ κανονισμὸς τῆς λειτουργίας του, ὁ τρόπος ζωῆς καὶ πολιτείας τῶν μοναχῶν κατοίκων του ἔχουν ρίζες καθαρὰ θεολογικὲς καί, εἰδικότερα, ἐσχατολογικὲς.

Τὸ Ἀγιογραφικὸ «Ἄβατον»

Ὄταν ὁ Μωσῆς πλησίασε τὸ παράδοξο φαινόμενο τῆς φλεγόμενης καὶ μὴ καιομένης βᾶτου, ἄκουσε τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ πού τοῦ εἶπε: «Μὴ ἐγγίσης ὧδε. Λῦσαι τὸ ὑπόδημα ἐκ

τῶν ποδῶν σου· ὁ γὰρ τόπος, ἐν ᾧ σὺ ἕστηκας, γῆ ἁγία ἐστί.» (Ἐξοδ. 3, 5) Καὶ τοῦτο, λόγω τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῆς ἀπόλυτα τέλειαις καὶ θείας ὑπαρξῆς καὶ φύσης. Ἡ παρουσία Θεοῦ δημιουργεῖ ἓνα ἄβατον ἀνάμεσα στὴν ἀπόλυτα τέλεια Θεϊκὴ Ὑπαρξη καὶ τὴ σχετικὴ καὶ ἀτελὴ ἀνθρώπινη ὑπαρξη: «Οὐ γὰρ μὴ ἴδι (ὁ μεταπτωτικὸς) ἄνθρωπος τὸ πρόσωπόν μου καὶ ζήσεται.» (Ἐξοδ. 33, 20). Ὄταν ὁ Μωσῆς κατέβηκε ἀπὸ τὸ ὄρος Σινᾶ, ὅπου εἶχε παραλάβει ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ τις Πλάκες τοῦ Δεκαλόγου, ἡ ὄψη τοῦ προσώπου του ἀκτινοβολοῦσε σάν τὸν ἥλιο (Ἐξοδ. 34, 29) καὶ «καὶ εἶδεν Ἄαρων καὶ πάντες οἱ πρεσβύτεροι Ἰσραὴλ τὸν Μωσῆν καὶ ἦν δεδοξασμένη ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ, καὶ (οἱ Ἰσραηλίτες) ἐφοβήθησαν ἐγγίσει αὐτῷ» (στίχ. 30). Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Μωσῆς «ἐπέθηκεν ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ κάλυμμα» (στίχ. 33). Ὁ Χριστὸς μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασή του, ἔχοντας τελειοποιήσει καὶ θεώσει τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φύση του, ἀποθάρρυνε τὴ Μαγδαληνὴ Μαρία νὰ τὸν ἐγγίση: «Λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· μὴ μου ἄπτου· οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου», τῆς εἶπε (Ἰωάν. 20, 17).

Τὸ «Ἄβατον» τοῦ Μοναχοῦ

Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος μοναχὸς ἢ μοναχή, ὡς χαρισματικὲς ὑπάρξεις, ὑπερβαίνουν ἐδῶ καὶ τώρα τὴ βιολογικὴ διάκριση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσης. Αὐτὴ καθεαυτὴ ἢ ὑπαρξιακὴ κατάσταση τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου μοναχοῦ ἐγκαθιστᾷ αὐτόματα ἓνα ἄβατον γιὰ τὸ βιολογικὸ ἄνθρωπο. Ὁ χώρος διαμονῆς τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου μοναχοῦ (τὸ κελί του), ἢ προσωπικὴ του ζωὴ εἶναι ἓνα ἄβατο γιὰ τὸ διαφυλικὸ βιολογικὸ ἄνθρωπο. Κανένα ἀνθρώπινο μάτι δὲν εἶδε ποτὲ τις προσωπικὲς στιγμὲς τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀντωνίου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Ἁγίων Πατέρων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Τὸ «Ἄβατον» τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων Μοναστηριῶν

Τὸ ἄβατον τῶν μοναστηριῶν λειτουργεῖ μέσα στὸ πλαίσιο αὐτῆς τῆς χαρισματικῆς ὑπαρξιακῆς κατάστασης τῶν μοναχῶν. Τὸ ἄβατον τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων μοναστηριῶν καὶ ὅταν ἀποκλείει τὴν ἐπίσκεψη ἐτερόφυλων προσώπων καὶ ὅταν ἐπιτρέπει τὴν ἐπίσκεψη ὁμόφυλων προσώπων, δίνει ἓνα θετικὸ μήνυμα καὶ μία σημαντικὴ μαρτυρία: τὴ μαρτυρία τῆς χαρισματικῆς ὑπέρβασης τῆς διαφυλικῆς διάκρισης τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσης καὶ τῆς ἐσχατολογικῆς καὶ ὀριστικῆς κατάργησής της. Τὸ ἄβατον τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου ἀνδρικοῦ μοναστηρίου δίνει τὴ μαρτυρία τῆς ὑπέρβασης τῆς διαφυλικῆς φύσης, τόσο στοὺς ἄνδρες πού δέχεται ὅσο καὶ στὶς γυναῖκες πού ἀποκλείει. Τὴν ἴδια μαρτυρία δίνει καὶ τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο γυναικεῖο μοναστήρι τόσο στὶς γυναῖκες πού δέχεται ὅσο καὶ στοὺς ἄνδρες πού ἀποκλείει.

Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτό, τόσο οἱ ἄνδρες ἐπισκέπτες μοναστηριῶν, ὅπου μονάζουν ἄνδρες, ὅσο καὶ οἱ γυναῖκες ἐπισκέπτριες, ὅπου μονάζουν γυναῖκες, στὰ πρόσωπα τῶν μοναχῶν, πού βιώνουν χαρισματικὰ τὴν ὑπέρβαση τῆς βιολογικῆς φύσης τους, παίρνουν τὸ μήνυμα τῆς ἐσχατολογικῆς κατάργησής της βιολογικῆς διάκρισης τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσης.

Ἀπὸ τὸ ἄλλο μέρος, τὸ ἄβατον δίνει τὴν εὐκαιρία στὸ σύγχρονο ἐκκοσμικευμένο ἄνθρωπο, πού ἔχει ἀπολυτοποιήσει καὶ θεοποιήσει τὴ διαφυλικὴ διάκριση καὶ εἰδικότερα τὴ σεξουαλικότητα, νὰ συνειδητοποιήσει τὴ σχετικότητα καὶ προσωρινότητα τῆς βιολογικῆς κατάστασης

της φύσης του. Τὸ σὲξ δὲν εἶναι τὸ πᾶν καὶ τὸ μήνυμα αὐτὸ ἂν δὲν τὸ δώσουν τὰ Ὁρθόδοξα μοναστήρια, τότε ποιὸς θὰ τὸ δώσει, ὅταν μάλιστα στὴν ἐποχὴ μας βιώνουμε μίᾶ παγκόσμια πανσεξουαλικὴ τυραννία;

Πρέπει ἐπίσης νὰ τονισθῆ ἡ μεγάλη σημασία πού ἔχει καὶ ἡ ἀπαγορευτικὴ λειτουργία τοῦ ἄβατου, πάντοτε, ιδιαίτερα δὲ στὴ σύγχρονη ἐποχὴ, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία ὁ ἄνθρωπος κάνει ὅτι θέλει καὶ ὅτι τοῦ ἄρέσει καὶ κανένας καὶ τίποτε δὲν τὸν σταματᾷ. Τὸ ἄβατον εἶναι ἕνα ἰσχυρὸ φρενάρισμα πού ταπεινώνει τὸ σύγχρονο ἄνθρωπο, ἄνδρα καὶ γυναῖκα, πού ἐν ὀνόματι τῶν «δικαιωμάτων» θεωροῦν ὅτι τὰ πάντα, ἀκόμη καὶ τὰ «δικαιώματα» τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶναι στὸ χέρι τους. Ἄς θυμηθοῦμε τὴ Μαρία, τὴν Αἰγύπτια ἐκεῖνη πόρνη τοῦ 6^{ου} μ.Χ., πού θέλησε νὰ μπῆ στὸν Πανάγιο Τάφο καὶ ἐμποδίστηκε (ἀποθώθηκε) ἀπὸ τὴ θεία Χάρη. Αὐτὴ καὶ μόνη ἢ συγκλονιστικὴ ἐμπειρία τοῦ ἄβατου ἦταν ἀρκετὴ γιὰ νὰ ἀλλάξῃ τὸ βίο καὶ τὴν πολιτεία της, νὰ υπερβῆ ἀγωνιστικὰ καὶ χαρισματικὰ τὴ βιολογικὴ κατάσταση τῆς φύσης της, ζώντας 40 χρόνια στὴν ἔρημο...

Ὡς συμπέρασμα τῆς θεολογικῆς αὐτῆς θεώρησης, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ πῆ κανεὶς ὅτι τὸ ἄβατον ἀποτελεῖ οὐσιώδεις στοιχεῖο τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων ἀσκητικῶν μονῶν καὶ ὡς ἐκ τούτου θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ἰσχύῃ σὲ ὅλα τὰ Ὁρθόδοξα μοναστήρια, ἀνδρικὰ καὶ γυναικεῖα. Διότι ὅλα τὰ Ὁρθόδοξα μοναστήρια θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ δίνουν τὴ συγκλονιστικὴ αὐτὴ ἐμπειρία τοῦ ἄβατου. Αὐτὸ βέβαια δὲν ἐπικράτησε στὰ περισσότερα μοναστήρια τόσο τῆς Ἑλλάδας ὅσο καὶ ἄλλων Ὁρθόδοξων χωρῶν, προφανῶς γιὰ λόγους ἀνθρωπίνης ἀδυναμίας καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς συγκατάβασης. Στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος ὅμως, τὸ ὁποῖο ἀποτελεῖ τὸ ὑπόδειγμα τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου ἀσκητικοῦ μοναχισμοῦ, τὸ ἄβατον πρέπει ὅπωςδήποτε νὰ διατηρηθῆ.

Τὸ ἄβατον τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους δὲν προσβάλλει κανένα ἀνθρώπινο δικαίωμα. Αντίθετα, μὲ τὸ πλούσιο ἀνθρωπολογικὸ καὶ ἐσχατολογικὸ περιεχόμενό του, καταθέτει διαμέσου τῶν αἰώνων σὲ ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα τὸ μήνυμα τοῦ ἐσχατολογικοῦ προορισμοῦ τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσης, καθὼς καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου ἐγχειρήματος πού κάθε ἄνθρωπος καλεῖται νὰ κάνῃ στὴν πορεία του πρὸς τὴ χαρισματικὴ τελείωση καὶ ὀλοκλήρωση τῆς προσωπικῆς ὑπαρξῆς του.



Οἱ πέντε γλώσσες τῆς Γερὸνισσας Γαβριηλίας

Ἡ πρώτη εἶναι τὸ χαμόγελο... Ἡ δευτέρα εἶναι τὰ δάκρυα... Ἡ τρίτη εἶναι τὸ ἄγγιγμα... Ἡ τέταρτη εἶναι ἡ προσευχή... Ἡ πέμπτη εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη...

Μὲ αὐτὲς τὶς πέντε γλώσσες γυρίζεις ὅλη τὴ γῆ καὶ ὅλος ὁ κόσμος εἶναι δικός σου. Ὅλους τους ἀγαπᾷς τὸ ἴδιο. Ἀσχέτως θρησκείας καὶ ἔθνους. Ἀσχέτως μὲ ὅλα. Παντοῦ ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ δὲν ξέρεις αὐτὸς πού βλέπεις σήμερα, ἂν αὔριο δὲ θὰ εἶναι Ἅγιος...

Περὶ Ἀγγέλων

Ὁσίου Ἰωάννη Δαμασκηνοῦ, ἔκδοσις ἀκριβῆς τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου Πίστεως, Β' (3) 17. Migne, pg. 94, 865-73

Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι Κτίστης καὶ Δημιουργὸς τῶν ἀγγέλων, πού τοὺς δημιούργησε ἐκ τοῦ μηδενὸς καὶ τοὺς ἔκανε κατὰ τὴ δική του εἰκόνα ἀσώματη φύση, ὡσὰν κάποιον ἄνεμο καὶ αὐτὴ φωτιά, ὅπως λέγει ὁ θεὸς Δαβὶδ· «Ὁ ποιὸν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα», περιγράφοντας τὴν εὐκνησία καὶ τὴ φλογερότητα καὶ τὴ θερμότητα καὶ τὴν διεισδυτικότητα καὶ τὴν ταχύτητά τους στὸ θεῖο πόθο καὶ τὴ θεία ὑπηρεσία, καὶ τὴν ἀνοδική τους τάση καὶ τὴν ἀπομάκρυνσή τους ἀπὸ κάθε ὑλικὴ σκέψη.

Ὁ ἄγγελος, λοιπὸν, εἶναι ὑπαρξῆ πνευματικὴ, ἀεικίνητη, ἐλεύθερη, ἀσώματη, πού ὑπηρετεῖ τὸ Θεό, καὶ κατὰ χάρι ἔχει λάβει στὴ φύση της τὴν ἀθανασία, πού τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὴν κατάσταση αὐτῆς τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μόνον ὁ Κτίστης γνωρίζει. Καὶ ὀνομάζεται ἀσώματη καὶ αὐτὴ σὲ σχέση μὲ ἐμᾶς· διότι καθετὶ πού συγκρίνεται μὲ τὸ Θεό, τὸν μόνον ἀσύγκριτο, βρίσκεται ὅτι εἶναι δυσκίνητο καὶ ὑλικό, ἐπειδὴ μόνον τὸ θεῖο εἶναι ἀληθῶς αὐλο καὶ ἀσώματο.

Εἶναι λοιπὸν ὁ ἄγγελος φύση λογικὴ, πνευματικὴ καὶ ἐλεύθερη, μεταβλητὴ σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἀπόφασή της, δηλαδή μὲ τὴ θέλησή της· διότι καθετὶ πού ἔχει δημιουργηθεῖ εἶναι καὶ μεταβλητο καὶ μόνον τὸ ἀδημιούργητο εἶναι ἀμετάβλητο. Ἐπίσης, καθετὶ λογικὸ εἶναι ἐλεύθερο. Ἐπειδὴ λοιπὸν ὁ ἄγγελος εἶναι λογικὴ καὶ πνευματικὴ φύση, εἶναι ἐλεύθερη· ἐπειδὴ ὅμως εἶναι φύση πού ἔχει δημιουργηθεῖ, εἶναι μεταβλητὴ, μὲ δυνατότητα νὰ μὲν σταθερὴ καὶ νὰ προοδεύῃ στὸ ἀγαθό, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ κατευθύνεται στὸ κακό.

Ἐπίσης, δὲν ἔχει τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ μετανοήσῃ, διότι εἶναι καὶ ἀσώματος. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος δηλαδή μπορεῖ νὰ μετανοήσῃ λόγω τῆς ἀσθενείας τοῦ σώματός του. Εἶναι ἀθάνατος ὄχι ἐκ φύσεως, ἀλλὰ κατὰ χάρι· διότι καθετὶ πού ἔχει ἀρχή, ἔχει καὶ τέλος σύμφωνα μὲ τοὺς φυσικοὺς νόμους. Καὶ μόνος ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι αἰώνιος, ἢ καλλίτερα πέραν ἀπὸ τὸ αἰώνιο· διότι ὁ Δημιουργὸς τοῦ κόσμου δὲν ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ τὸ χρόνο, ἀλλὰ εἶναι πέραν ἀπὸ τὸ χρόνο.

Οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι δευτέρα πνευματικὰ φῶτα, πού παίρνουν τὸ φωτισμὸ ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶτο καὶ ἄναρχο φῶς καὶ δὲν ἔχουν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ γλώσσα καὶ ἀκοή, ἀλλὰ πληροφοροῦνται μεταξύ τους τὰ προσωπικὰ διανοήματα καὶ τὶς ἀποφάσεις τους χωρὶς τὸν προφορικὸ λόγο. Δημιουργήθηκαν λοιπὸν ὅλοι οἱ ἄγγελοι μὲ τὴ συνεργία τοῦ Λόγου, καὶ ἐφθασαν στὴν τελειότητα μὲ τὸν ἁγιασμὸ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, καὶ μετέχουν στὸ φωτισμὸ καὶ τὴ χάρι ἀνάλογα μὲ τὸ ἀξίωμα καὶ τὸ ἀγγελικὸ τους Τάγμα.

Εἶναι ἱκανοὶ καὶ πρόθυμοι στὴν ἐκτέλεση τοῦ θεοῦ θελήματος, καὶ παρουσιάζονται ἀμέσως λόγω τῆς ταχύτητας τῆς φύσεώς τους παντοῦ, ὅπου τυχὸν προστάζει ἡ θεία θέληση, καὶ διαφυλάττουν τὰ μέρη τῆς γῆς, καὶ εἶναι ἄρχοντες τῶν λαῶν καὶ τῶν χωρῶν, ὅπως τοὺς ὄρισε ὁ Δημιουργός, καὶ τακτοποιοῦν τὰ ἀνθρώπινα καὶ μᾶς βοηθοῦν. Ὅπωςδήποτε εἶναι ἀληθῆς ὅτι σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ θεῖο θέλημα καὶ πρόσταγμα εἶναι ἀνώτεροι ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς καὶ πάντοτε εἶναι στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

THE MEANING OF FASTING FOR THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.” (Luke 21:34)



St. Ignatius Brianchaninov
(+1867)

It is good for the salvation of our souls during the Holy 40 Days of Advent and especially the Great Lent not only to oppress our bodies by fasting, but also to speak about fasting; it is for the salvation of our souls for us to direct all the necessary attention to the warning against over-eating and satiation made to us by the Lord Himself; “take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down

with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.”

The institution of fasting is a divine institution. The first commandment given by God to man was the commandment of fasting. (“...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...” Gen 2:17) It was indispensably necessary for us in Paradise prior to our fall; it is even more necessary after the fall. The commandment of fasting was given in Paradise; it is repeated in the Gospel. Let us lift up our thoughts to the divine institution of fasting and by a consideration of this institution, let us revitalize with our soul the effort of fasting itself.

The effort of fasting does not belong exclusively to the body. The effort of fasting is useful and necessary not only for the body; it is useful and necessary primarily for the mind and the heart. “Take heed of yourselves that your hearts not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness” (Luke 21, 34). The Savior of the world showed us in these words something worthy of special attention, the effect of the excessive use of food and drink, a terrible consequence, a soul destroying after-effect. The heart is hardened, coarsens, is weighed down from pleasing the stomach; the mind is deprived of its lightness and spirituality; man becomes fleshly.

What is meant by a “fleshly man?” Holy Scripture calls fleshly that unfortunate man who is nailed to the earth, who is incapable of spiritual thoughts and feelings. “My Spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is flesh” (Genesis 6, 3), testifies God. The fleshly man is incapable of the worship of God. Even the spiritual man, once he has subjected himself to satiation, loses his spirituality, loses in some way the very ability to know God and to serve Him. “And Israel waxed fat,”

says Holy Scripture, calling Jacob the true servant of God, “and became stubborn; you became fat, you grew thick and became sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the rock of his salvation” (Deuteronomy 32, 15). The saint comes to such a condition when he excludes from his efforts the effort of fasting. Plumpness and laziness passed on to the body by excess and lack of discrimination in food, little by little are passed on by the body to the heart and by the heart to the mind. These spiritual eyes, the heart and the mind, are then deadened; eternity is hidden from them; earthly life appears to the unhealthy sight as endless. Our earthly life is guided by these ideas and feelings and the ill-fated, blinded traveler, together with the serpent who was cast out, walks “on his belly” and “eats dust” all the days of his earthly life. (Genesis 3, 14). Breaking the fast threatens the disciple of Christ with falling away from Christ.

Such an effect of intemperate or even imprudent and careless use of food on man explains the reason why man, in the very state of his innocence, in the midst of the enjoyments of Paradise, needed the commandment of fasting. It was intended to preserve the newly created creation, composed of two natures, the bodily and the spiritual, in a spiritual state. It was intended to keep in balance the two natures and give the preference to the spiritual nature. With its help, man could always stand in thought and heart before God, could be unapproachable to thoughts and dreams of vanity.

The commandment of fasting is even more necessary for fallen man. A weakness for the earth, for the transitory earthly life, its sweetness, greatness, glories, the very inclination to sin have become the way of life for our fallen nature, just like the feelings and attractions proper to an illness. We are nailed to the earth, attached to it with all our soul and not only with the body. We have become completely fleshly, deprived of spiritual feeling, incapable of heavenly thoughts. The commandment of fasting again is the first commandment necessary for us. Only with the help of fasting can we tear ourselves away from the earth! Only with the help of fasting can we withstand the attractive power of earthly enjoyments! Only with the help of fasting can we break the bond with sin. Only with the help of fasting can our spirit free itself from the heavy chains of the flesh! Only with the help of fasting can our thoughts arise from the earth and look toward God!

As far as we take upon ourselves the blessed yoke of fasting does our spirit acquire greater freedom. It aspires to the realm of spirits akin to it, it begins to turn often to the contemplation of God, to submerge itself in this measureless and wonderful contemplation, to acquire a skill in it. If things in the natural world, enlightened by the rays of the sun, without fail borrow brilliance and shine from it, then how shall our spirit be enlightened once it, having overthrown by means of fasting the coarse and thick curtain of fleshiness, shall stand directly before the Sun of Truth, God? It is enlightened! It is enlightened and changed! In it arise new thoughts, divine ones, to it are opened up mysteries, which before were un-

known to it. "The Heavens," declare to it "the glory of God"; the firmament proclaims the omnipotence of the Hand which created it; all creation, both seen and unseen, loudly proclaim the unspeakable mercy of the Creator! It tastes spiritually and sees spiritually "how good is the Lord!" The blessed lightness and fineness of the spirit is passed on to the body; the body, after the spirit, is attracted to spiritual feelings and prefers imperishable food for which it was created to the perishable food to which it has fallen. At first it submits with difficulty to the healing and violence of fasting; at first it rebels against the institution of fasting, sets our spirit against it, arms itself against it by various rationalizations drawn from falsely-called reason; but, being tamed and healed by fasting, it already feels and thinks differently. Its relationship to satiation is similar to the feelings of a man, who is healed, towards harmful foods, which he used to desire violently during the illness. His relation towards eating are like the attitude towards a detected and evident poison by which mastery over the flesh is taken away from the spirit, by which man is reduced from his likeness and kinship to the Angels to a likeness and kinship with unreasoning animals.

Spiritual soldiers who have gained victory over the flesh by means of fasting, who have stood before the face of the Lord to learn the greatest mysteries and the highest virtues, hear from His lips the teaching of the highest virtue of fasting and are shown the mystery of that condition which little by little takes shape from over-eating and satiation; "Take heed to yourselves, less your heart be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness." These conquerors are reminded of carefully keeping near them that weapon by which the victory was won. And the victory is won and the spoils gained by that victory by the very same weapon-fasting.

The ascetic, the hero of Christ, illumined from above and learning from his religious experiences, as he examines the effort of fasting in itself, finds really necessary not only abstinence from satiation and constant eating, but also a strict discrimination in food. The discrimination seems to be excessive only upon a superficial and fleeting look; but, in essence, the quality of food is especially important. In Paradise, only the quality was forbidden. In our valley of tears on earth, we find that lack of discrimination in the quality produces many more spiritual distresses than excess in quantity. It should not be thought that a cluster of grapes has a way of acting on our mind, on our soul, but every kind of food has its own effect on the blood, the brain, the whole body and through the body, on the soul. Whoever looks after himself attentively, exercising himself in the effort of fasting, will find it really necessary to practice abstinence of the body and soul from the continuous use of meat and even fish; he will greet the regulations of the Church concerning fasting with love and will obey them.

The Holy Fathers called fasting the foundation of all the virtues since our mind is kept in the necessary purity and sobriety, while our heart is preserved in fineness and spirituality

by it. He who shakes the foundation of the virtues, shakes the entire building of the virtues.

Brethren! Let us run the course of the holy fast with sincerity and thoroughness. The deprivations to which our body is apparently subjected by the rule of fasting are really nothing in the face of the spiritual worth which the fast is capable of bringing. By means of fasting, let us tear our bodies away from the luxuries and rich table and our hearts from the earth and corruption, from that deep and destructive forgetfulness, by which we separate ourselves from eternity which stands before us and is ready to embrace us. Let us aspire both in body and in soul to God! Let us fear that fleshly condition caused by breaking the fast. Let us fear the complete inability of worshipping God and the Knowledge of God produced by despising the fast. This destructive inability is the beginning of eternal death. This fatal inability is shown in us when, due to scorning the Divine commandment of fasting, we allow "ourselves and our hearts to be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness." Amen.



A WORD FROM THE DESERT ON HUMILITY AND CHRIST'S COMING TO THE WORLD

By St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 77

Wishing to open my mouth, O brethren, and speak on the exalted theme of humility, I am filled with fear, even as a man who understands that he is about to discourse concerning God with the art of his own words. For humility is the raiment (clothing) of the Godhead. The Word Who became man clothed Himself in it, and therewith He spoke to us in our body. Everyone who has been clothed with it, has truly been made like unto Him -- Who came down from His own exaltedness, and hid the splendor of His majesty, and concealed His glory with humility, lest creation should be utterly consumed by the contemplation of Him. Creation could not look upon Him unless He took a part of it unto Himself, and thus conversed with it, and neither could it hear the words of His mouth face to face... Now, when He poured out His grace upon the world through His own Coming, He has descended not [as was the case with the God-seer, Moses, and the Isrealites in the desert] in an earthquake, not in a fire, not in a terrible and mighty sound, but "as the rain upon a fleece, and raindrops that fall upon the earth" (Ps 71:6) softly, and He was seen conversing with us after another fashion. This came to pass when, as though in a treasury, He concealed His majesty with the veil of His flesh, and among us spoke with us in that body, which His own bidding wrought for Him out of the womb of the Virgin, Mary the Theotokos...

ON HUMILITY

By Mother Alexandra (formerly Her Royal Highness, Ileana Princess of Romania and Archduchess of Austria)

“The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psalm 37:11)

Humility, like faith, is a gift of Grace. Some happy souls may, perhaps, be disposed toward it at birth; but all, whatever their dispositions, have to struggle with pride and self-satisfaction. Rare, indeed, would be the person who does not enjoy praise and admiration, for taking pride in a job well done is a very human trait and need not even be sinful, as such. The truly humble man, however, is he who is immune to both flattery and offense, who, as Kipling says, “. . . can meet with triumph and disaster. . . And treat those two imposters just the same.” Accepting all with equanimity, this man quietly follows his path to salvation, while “delighting, “ as the Psalmist says, “in the abundance of peace.”

But what does humility really mean? The derivation of the word “humble” is the Latin “humus,” meaning “soil,” and herein lies a most apt metaphor for understanding what is most basic to humility. The humble feel themselves equal to the soil upon which they walk and from which they are made. They cannot be lowered, for they are already low. But this lowliness in no way means servility; it means purity and godliness. Satan’s great fall came from his inordinate pride, which rendered him impure. For us, each time that we let pride get the better of us; we have similarly soiled ourselves. This is the nature of our lowliness: not servility, but a purity shared with the soil, by which we paradoxically remain unsoiled (by pride).

It is a curious fact, too, that the more humble we become, the closer we are to God. Our Lord Jesus Christ said that, unless we become as children, we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. We must therefore, become simple and pure, like children, to draw near God. “And the source of this purity”, says St. John Cassian, “is unavailable to us unless we have acquired real humility of heart.” The ascent to God, the climb toward the divine, begins with the acquisition of humility. We approach the heights by attaining lowliness. We acquire spiritual maturity by becoming children.

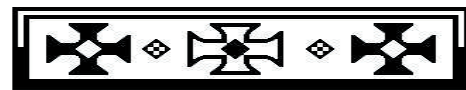
It is important to understand clearly that humility lies not primarily in the natures with which we are born, but in how we develop those natures. The decisions, which we ultimately make in life, determine who we are. We are not responsible for what talents we may have, as also we are not responsible for what happens to us in the world’s turmoil. What we are responsible for is what we do with what we have and what we make of what happens to us. Thus, those who are called to high stations in life can be humble in their hearts, while a sweeper can feel envy and pride. Haughtiness can dwell equally in the heart of the mighty one and in the beggar. The attainment of humility rests outside the rank and station to which one is born; it resides in what we do with what we are. In the eyes

of God, all men are equal, and we are judged accordingly, not by our rank, but by our accomplishments.

What we must all do, then, is develop the degree of natural humility with which we are born, whether it be great or small. We must nurture it, perhaps even forcing ourselves to act humbly, no matter how difficult that may be to do. In time, what we act may become reality. We must be cautious in our actions and our deeds and in our habits, remembering the task before us: the acquisition of humility. Clearly our own wills are involved here, and whether we humble or exalt ourselves depends greatly on our own volition. It is only the result of our willful humility or pride which lies outside our grasp -- in the divine promise of the Saviour: “Whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:12).

And what of this humility? What does it profit us? Above all, true humility shows itself in the most glowing colors when we are beset by adversity. It is our only hope in the inevitable bleakness of human life. When adversity strikes, we can meekly bow our heads in acceptance, without outward complaint or inward revolt. We can remember always that Jesus, the master of the most extreme humility, during his trial gave hardly any answers. And he asks that we pick up our crosses and likewise follow him. “Take my yoke,” he beckons, “and learn from me; I am gentle and humble of heart: and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 1:29-30). Indeed, if we let these words guide us and follow the example set by Christ before us, our spirits will be strong and we will humbly endure all things in love. Humility guides us to the Spirit, the fruits of which are “love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, and temperance...” (Gal. 5:22-23). Humility engenders meekness, against which no earthly law, no persecution, and no adversity can prevail.

The Holy Fathers from the earliest times dwell on humility, and Holy Scripture abounds in emphasis of its great virtue. Humility reaches, therefore, into the inner core of Christianity. It is an essential subject, resounding from the past and necessarily heard in the present. These sounds should not prompt in us abstract thought or mere reflection, but humble submission to the Will of God: “Humility consists not in considering our conscience, but in recognizing God’s Grace and compassion” (St. Mark the Ascetic). Humility, as we said in our opening words, is -- in recognition of our efforts and as reward for our love of God -- a free gift given by Grace.



Everyone who speaks contrary to what has been prescribed, even if he fasts, even if he is a virgin, even if he prophesies, even if he works miracles, you should see him as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, who is contriving the destruction of the sheep.

St Ignatius of Antioch

RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

By St. Basil the Great

Question: Can someone, who is not free from every defilement of the flesh and of the spirit, safely eat the Body of the Lord and drink His Blood.

Response: God in the Law appointed the supreme penalty for those who dare to touch holy things when in a state of impurity, for the following words written figuratively for the men of old are meant for our correction. "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons, that they beware of those things that are consecrated of the children of Israel and defile not the name of the things sanctified to me which they offer. I am the Lord. Say to them and to their posterity: Every man of your race that approacheth to those holy things that the children of Israel have consecrated to the Lord, and in whom there is uncleanness, shall perish from my face. I am the Lord!'" (Lev. 22 1-3).

If a threat so grave was pronounced against those who merely approached things consecrated by men, what would be said against one who ventured to draw near to such a great and holy mystery. For, in the measure that He was superior who was greater than the temple, according to the Lord's words, so much more awesome and dread is the act of daring to touch the Body of Christ when the soul is defiled as compared with handling rams and bulls.

The Apostle says: "Therefore, whosoever shall eat the bread and drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11-27). Then, presenting the penalty in a manner at once more striking and more awe-inspiring through repetition, he says: "But let a man prove himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the chalice. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11-29). And if one who is in a state of uncleanness only (and from the law we learn in figure the proper nature of uncleanness) incurs so dire a condemnation, how much more severe a penalty will one bring upon himself who, being in a state of sin, is guilty of presumption toward the Body of the Lord! Let us be free, therefore, from all defilement (the difference between defilement [μόλυσμος -- molysmos] and uncleanness [ἀκαθαρσία -- akatharsia] being clear to persons of intelligence) and so approach the Holy Mysteries that we may avoid the condemnation of those who killed the Lord; for "whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord." And let us come to the possession of eternal life as He promised, Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, who is without deceit, if only, in eating and drinking, we will be mindful of Him who died for us and if we will accomplish the Apostle's words: "For the charity of Christ presses us; judging this, that if one died for all, then all were dead; and Christ died for all, that they who live may not now live to themselves but unto Him who died for them and rose again." And this is our pledge in Baptism.

Guideline for Preparation for Holy Communion

The Holy Orthodox Church sets certain guidelines for members to prepare themselves for the joyous partaking of the divine Body and precious Blood of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. These are:

Attendance at Church services the night before the Liturgy.

Observance of the fasting regulations of the Church during the week before Communion, and since the last confession made.

Fasting from all food and beverage (including water) from midnight on the day which Communion is being received.

Reading of the appointed Psalms, the Canon and the Pre-Communion prayers; after Holy Communion, the Post-Communion prayers are to be read as well.

Before approaching the divine Mysteries of the holy Body and Blood of Christ, one must be at peace with all others.

A recent confession should have been made before Communion. Members of the faith should make confessions as often as possible, and must confess immediately before Communion if they have neglected the Church's guidelines for fasting, Church attendance, or the like. Likewise, confession should always immediately precede Communion if a person has committed any transgression against God or neighbor that would defile his presence at the partaking of the Holy Communion. Note that certain sins require the clergy to forbid the partaking of the Eucharist until the confessing person ceases involvement in such sins. Among such sins are fornication and adultery. Furthermore, penance given by the spiritual father must be completed before the confessing person may partake of the Holy Mysteries.



... There is **one** religion only, the Orthodox Christian Religion. And this spirit the Orthodox one is the true one. The other spirits are spirits of delusion and the teachings are mixed up.

... The truth is in Orthodoxy... There are many lights, which (man) sees and is impressed, but one is the true light... It is worth it for one to worship the only true God, our Lord Jesus Christ... The truths of God, as He has said, from the beginning, are these. There do **not** exist new other truths, because the people and science progressed and people went to the stars!...

... Only the Religion of Christ unites and all of us must pray that they come to this. Thus union will occur, not by believing that all of us are the same thing and that all religions are the same. They are not the same... our Orthodoxy is **not** related to other religions.

Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

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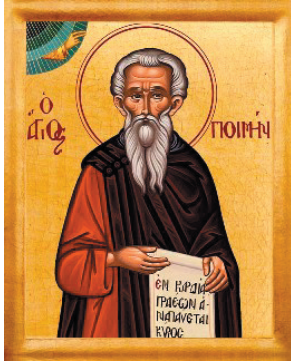
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MERRY CHRISTMAS

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THE FOUR VIRTUES OF THE SOUL

By St. Peter of Damaskos, from G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Bishop Kallistos Ware, "The Philokalia: vol. III," (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 100 - 101

There are four forms of wisdom: first, moral judgment, or the knowledge of what should and should not be done, combined with watchfulness of the intellect; second, self-restraint, whereby our moral purpose is safeguarded and kept free from all acts, thoughts and words that do not accord with God; third, courage, or strength and endurance in sufferings, trials and temptations encountered on the spiritual path; and fourth, justice, which consists in maintaining a proper balance between the first three. These four general virtues arise from the three powers of the soul in the following manner: from the intelligence, or intellect, come moral judgment and justice, or discrimination; from the desiring power comes self-restraint; and from the incensive power comes courage.

Each virtue lies between the unnatural passions. Moral judgment lies between craftiness and thoughtlessness; self-restraint, between obduracy and licentiousness; courage, between overbearingness and cowardice; justice between over-frugality and greed. The four virtues constitute an image of the heavenly man, while the eight unnatural passions

constitute an image of the earthly man (see I Corinthians 15:49).

God possesses a perfect knowledge of all these things, just as He knows the past, the present and the future; and they are known to some extent by him who through grace has learned from God about His works, and who through this grace has been enabled to realize in himself that which is according to God's image and likeness (see Genesis 1:26). But if someone claims that, simply by hearing about these things, he knows them as he should, he is a liar.

Man's intellect can never rise to heaven without God as a guide; and it cannot speak of what it has not seen, but must first ascend and see it. On the level of hearsay, you should speak only of things that you have learned from the Scriptures, and then with circumspection, confessing your faith in the Father of the Logos, as St. Basil the Great puts it, and not imagining that through hearsay you possess spiritual knowledge; for that is to be worse than ignorant. As St. Maximos has said, "To think that one knows prevents one from advancing in knowledge." St. John Chrysostom points out that there is an ignorance which is praiseworthy: it consists in knowing consciously that one knows nothing. In addition, there is a form of ignorance that is worse than any other: not to know that one does not know. Similarly, there is a knowledge that is falsely so called, which occurs when, as St. Paul says, one thinks that one knows but does not know (see I Corinthians 8:2).