

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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“PRAY UNCEASINGLY” (1 THESS 5:17)

By St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, from «The Life of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, the Wonderworker»

Let no one think, my fellow Christians, that only the clergy and the monks are obliged to pray unceasingly and at all times, and not also the laity. Oh, no! All of us Christians are obliged to pray always, as well. To demonstrate this, Philotheos, that most-holy Patriarch of Constantinople, writes the following, in his biography of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica.

The divine Gregory had a beloved friend named Job, a very simple man of great virtue. Once when they were conversing, Gregory told him about prayer, that each Christian individually ought always to make an effort to pray, and to pray unceasingly, as the Apostle Paul exhorts all Christians in common, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), and as the Prophet David says, even though he was king and had all those cares of ruling his kingdom, “I behold the Lord before me always”; that is, noetically, by means of prayer, I see the Lord in front of me all the time. And Gregory the Theologian teaches all Christians, that we should remember the name of God in prayer more often than we breathe. Having said all this and more to his friend Job, the Saint added that we ought to obey the injunctions of the saints, and that we ourselves should not only always pray,

but we should instruct also everyone else to do the same: monks and lay people, educated or not, men, women, and children; and should encourage them to pray unceasingly.

When the elder Job heard this, it seemed to him that it was an innovation, and he began to argue, and to say to Gregory that to pray always was only for the ascetics and the monks living away from the world and its distractions, and not for lay people who have jobs and so many cares. The saint responded with more examples and irrefutable proof, but the elder Job was not convinced. So, wishing to avoid talkativeness and argument, Gregory held his tongue, and each went to his cell.

Later, as Job was alone praying in his cell, an angel appeared before him, sent from God Who desires the salvation of all men. The Angel sternly rebuked him for arguing with Gregory, and for opposing what was obvious, and that clearly affects the salvation of Christians. He admonished him on behalf of God to be careful from now on, and to beware never again to say something against such a soul-edifying work, for in so doing he would be opposing the will of God. Not even mentally should he ever again dare to harbor any thought contrary to this, or think otherwise than the divine Gregory had told him. Then that most simple elder went at once to Gregory and, falling at his feet, begged forgiveness for contradicting and arguing; and he revealed to him all that the angel of the Lord had said to him.

The staff of “Orthodox Heritage” and the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wish our readers a blessed and spiritually profitable New Year. As we start our 4th year of publication, we wish to thank our supporters for their prayers, ideas, feedback and material support throughout the last three years.

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Do you see, my brethren, how all Christians, small and great, should always pray, using the noetic prayer, "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me"; and how their mind and heart should become accustomed to saying it always? Just think how pleasing this is to God, and how much good comes from it, that out of His extreme love for mankind He even sent a heavenly angel to reveal it to us, so that we should no longer have any doubt about it.

But what do lay people say? "We are involved in so many matters and cares of the world. How can we possibly pray without ceasing?" My answer to them is that God has not commanded us to do anything impossible; but He has commanded us to do all those things that we are able to do. Therefore this too can be accomplished by anyone who diligently seeks the salvation of his soul. For if it were impossible, it would be so for all lay people, and there would never have been so many in the world who did accomplish it. As an example of someone like this, let us take St. Gregory's father, that amazing Constantine Palamas.

This man was an official of the imperial court, and was called the father and teacher of the Emperor Andronikos. He was daily occupied with imperial affairs, in addition to those his own house, since he was very wealthy and owned a large estate and servants, and had a wife and children. Nevertheless, he was so inseparable from God and so given to unceasing noetic prayer, that most of the time he would forget what it was the Emperor and the officials of the palace were discussing with him about imperial matters, and he would ask about the same things several times. Often the other officials, not knowing the reason for this, would become agitated and reproach him for forgetting so quickly, and for disturbing the Emperor with his repeated questions. But the Emperor, who knew the cause,

would defend him, saying, "Lucky Constantine has his own concerns, and they do not permit him to pay attention to what we are saying on matters temporal and vain. But the nous of this blessed man is fixed on what is true and heavenly, and thus he forgets what is mundane. All of his attention is focused on the prayer and on God."



Thus, as the most holy Patriarch Philotheos relates, Constantine was admired and loved by the Emperor and all the magnates and officials of the Empire. Likewise, he was loved by God, and the venerable one was even counted worthy to perform miracles. The holy Philotheos tells us in his biography of St. Gregory (Constantine's son), that he took his whole family once on a boat to a place above Galatas, to pay a visit to a hermit who lived in stillness there, and get his blessing. On the way, he asked his servants if they had any food to take to that Abba, so

that they might eat with him. The servants said that in the rush they had forgotten to bring any. The blessed man was saddened a bit, but said nothing. As they continued on in the boat, he simply put his hand into the sea, and with silent and noetic prayer he asked God, the Master of the sea, to let him catch something. After a short time (how wonderful are your works, O Christ King, by which you marvelously glorify Your servants!), he brought up his hand from the sea holding a large bass-fish. Tossing it into the boat in front of his servants, he said, "Look here how our Lord provided for his servant the Abba and has sent him something to eat." Do you see, my brethren, with what sort of glory Jesus Christ glorifies those servants who are always with Him and who constantly invoke His sweetest name?

Then there was that righteous and holy Evdokimos. Wasn't he also in Constantinople, and in the imperial court and involved

in state affairs? Didn't he keep company with the Emperor and the palace officials, with so many cares and distractions? And for all that, noetic prayer was always inseparable from him, as related in his biography by St. Symeon the Translator. Thus, even though this thrice-blessed man dwelt in the world among worldly things, he nevertheless lived an angelic, supermundane life. And God, who gives the rewards, counted him worthy to have a blessed and divine end. There were also many, countless others who were in the world and yet were given entirely to this noetic and saving prayer, as we read in the histories.

So, my dear fellow Christians, I beg you, as did once the divine Chrysostom, for the sake of the salvation of your souls, do not neglect this important work of prayer. Imitate those whom we mentioned, and follow their example as far as possible. And though it seem difficult in the beginning, be certain and assured, as if from the person of God Almighty, that this very name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, when we invoke it constantly every day, will make all the difficulties easier. And in the course of time, once we are accustomed to it and it is sweet to say, then we will know from experience that it is not impossible nor difficult, but possible and easy.

That is why the divine Apostle Paul, knowing better than we do the great benefit of prayer, commanded us to pray unceasingly. He would never have advised us to do something too difficult or impossible; for if we were incapable, it follows that we would necessarily appear to be disobedient and transgressors of his commandment, and thus we would be condemned. But what the Apostle meant in saying, "Pray without ceasing," was that we should pray with our nous, which we can always do. For whether we are working with our hands, or walking, or sitting, or eating and drinking, we can always pray with our mind and do noetic prayer that is pleasing to God and true. We can work with our body and pray with our soul. The outer man performs all bodily functions, and the inner man is entirely devoted to the worship of God, and never ceases from this spiritual work of noetic prayer.

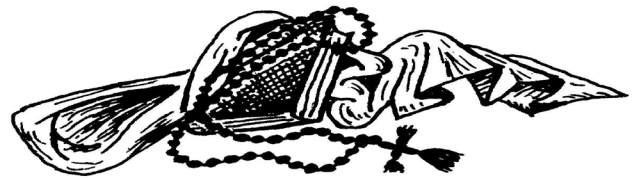
Our divine-human Lord Jesus Himself so commands us in the holy Gospel, saying, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father Who is in secret" (Mt. 6:6). The room of the soul is the body; the doors are our five senses. The soul enters its room when the mind does not wander to and fro among worldly things, but remains within our heart. And our senses close and remain closed when we do not allow them to cling to outward sensible things. In this way our mind remains free from every worldly attachment; and through secret noetic prayer, you are united with God your Father. And then, as He says, "your Father Who sees you in secret will reward you openly". God, Who knows what is secret, sees your noetic prayer and rewards it with great and manifest gifts; for this prayer is true and perfect prayer, and it fills the soul with divine grace and spiritual gifts. It is like perfume: the tighter you stop the vessel, the more fragrant the vessel becomes. So too with prayer: the more you confine it within your heart, the more it fills you with divine grace.

Blessed and lucky are they who accustom themselves to this heavenly work, for they overcome every temptation of the wicked demons by it, like David prevailed over the proud Goliath; they put out the inordinate desires of the flesh by it, as the three youths put out the flame of the furnace. By this noetic work of prayer, they calm the passions, like Daniel tamed the wild lions; by it they bring down into their hearts the dew of the Holy Spirit, like Elias brought down the rain on Mount Carmel. It is this noetic prayer that rises to the throne of God and is kept in the golden bowls, so that the Lord can be incensed with it, like John the Theologian says in Revelation, "and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8). This noetic prayer is a light that ever illumines a man's soul and ignites his heart with the flames of the love of God. It is a chain that keeps God united with a man and joined together.

O incomparable grace of noetic prayer! This is what makes a man always talk with God. O truly marvelous and extraordinary phenomenon! You are physically with other people and noetically with God. Angels have no audible voice, but noetically they offer unceasing adoration to God. In this consists all their activity and to this their whole life is consecrated. So too you, brother, when you enter your room and shut the door, i.e., when your mind does not scatter here and there but enters into your heart, and your senses are shut and not attached to the things of this world, and you always pray like this with your nous, then you become like the holy angels, and your Father, who sees the secret prayer that you offer him in the depths of your heart, will openly give you great spiritual gifts in return. What could you want that is more or greater than this, when, like I said, you are noetically always with God and constantly talking with Him; Him without Whom none can ever be happy, neither here nor in the next life?

And finally, brother, whoever you may be, when you get hold of this and read it, I fervently entreat you, also remember to pray to God and say a "Lord have mercy" for the sinful soul of the man who labored over this writing, and the one who paid for it to be published, for they are in great need of prayer, so that they may obtain God's mercy on their souls, and you on yours.

Amen. Amen.



Abba Macarius was asked, "How should one pray?"

The old man said, "There is no need at all to make long discourses, it is enough to stretch out one's hands and say, 'Lord, as You will, and as You know, have mercy.' And if the conflict grows fiercer say, 'Lord, help!' He knows very well what we need and He shows us His mercy."

ON THE EIGHT DEADLY SINS, PART 2 OF 2

From St. John Cassian, "The Conferences," (New York: Newman Press, 1997), pp. 183 – 196

[Continued from our previous issue]

The First Evil Pair: Gluttony and Fornication

Now let us discuss individually the different kinds of each vice. There are three kinds of gluttony. The first impels a person to hasten to eat before the fixed and lawful hour. The second is pleased with a full stomach and with devouring any edibles whatsoever. And the third desires more refined and delicate foods. These three entail no small loss for a person unless he struggles to extricate himself from all of them with equal diligence and care. For just as breaking the fast before the canonical hour is never to be dared, so likewise filling one's stomach and the preparation of costly and choice dishes must be avoided. From these three causes different and very bad states of health of the soul are produced.

From the first is born hatred for his own dwelling (the monastery, for a monk); with that there grows a dread of the same dwelling place and an inability to endure it; and this is always soon followed by departure and swift flight. From the second the burning pricks of lasciviousness and wanton desire are aroused. The third also fastens the inextricable bonds of avarice on the necks of its captives and never permits the person to be rooted in Christ's utter deprivation.

We notice that the traces of this passion are in us when perchance, having been invited to eat by one of the brothers, we are not content to eat the food with the condiment with which it was seasoned by our host but demand with importunate and unbridled boldness that something be poured on it or added to it.

There are three reasons why this must never happen. In the first place, because the mind of the person must be practiced in the discipline of endurance and moderation and must, according to the Apostle, learn what a sufficiency consists in. For whoever takes offense at a slightly unpleasant taste and is unable to restrain the pleasure of the palate even for a moment will be completely incapable of controlling the hidden and greater desires of the body. Secondly, because it sometimes happens that the particular thing that we are asking for at a given moment is lacking and we would shame our host in his need and frugality by making known this poverty, which he would prefer to be known to God alone. Thirdly, because occasionally the condiment that we ask to have added is unpleasant to others, and we discover that we are annoying many people in trying to cater to our own gormandizing and desire. Therefore this boldness in us is to be disciplined in every respect.

There are three kinds of fornication. The first takes place in the union of the sexes. The second occurs without touching a woman, and for it we read that Onan, the son of the patriarch Judah, was struck down by the Lord (Genesis 38:9-10). This is called impurity in Holy Scripture. About this the Apostle

says: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." (I Corinthians 7:8-9). The third is that which is conceived in the soul and in the mind, and about which the Lord says in the Gospel: "But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matthew 5:28).

"The blessed Apostle declares that these three kinds must all be extinguished in the same way when he says: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Colossians 3:5). And again he speaks of two of these to the Ephesians: 'Fornication and impurity should not be mentioned among you' (Ephesians 5:3). And again: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:5). Just as we should guard against these three with equal care, so one is enough to keep us out of the kingdom of Christ.

The Remaining Vices:

Avarice, Anger, Sadness, Acedia, Vainglory and Pride

There are three kinds of avarice. The first does not permit renunciants to be deprived of their wealth and property. The second persuades us by a still greater covetousness to take back what we have dispersed and distributed to the poor. The third demands that we long for and acquire what in fact we did not possess before.

There are three kinds of anger. One blazes up interiorly ... Another breaks out in word and deed and effect... About these the Apostle says: "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." (Colossians 3:8). The third, unlike that which flares up, is not finished in a short space of time but is held over for days and seasons... All of these must be condemned by us with an equal horror.

There are two kinds of sadness. The first is begotten once anger has ceased, or from some hurt that has been suffered or from a desire that has been thwarted and brought to naught. The other comes from unreasonable mental anguish or from despair. There are two kinds of acedia (anxiety or weariness of heart). One makes those who are seething with emotion fall asleep. The other encourages a person to abandon his home and to flee.

Although vainglory is multiform and multifarious and exists in many subdivisions, nonetheless it is of two kinds. The first is that by which we are uplifted because of carnal and external things. The second is that by which we are inflamed with the desire for empty praise because of spiritual and hidden things.

Yet in one way vainglory is beneficial for beginners, for those who are still stirred up by carnal vices. If, thanks to a word spoken at the time when they happen to be harassed by the spirit of fornication, they should think of the dignity of the priestly office or of the opinion of people who might believe

that they are holy and blameless, and if only because of this consideration they should reject the impure urges of desire, judging them as base and unworthy either of their own good name or of that rank, they are restraining the greater evil with a lesser one. For it is better for a person to be troubled by the vice of vainglory than for him to fall into the fire of fornication, from which he could not or could barely be saved once he had been ruined.

One of the prophets expresses this sense very well when he speaks in the person of God: "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off." (Isaiah 48:9). That is to say: As long as you are shackled by the praises of vainglory, you will never rush into the depths of hell and sink irretrievably by the commission of deadly sins.

It is not surprising that this passion is so strong that it can hold back someone who is hastening to the destruction of fornication, since the frequent experience of many people shows that once someone has been poisoned by this disease he becomes so tireless that he does not even feel fasts of two or three days.

Even in this desert we have often seen some people admit that when they were living in the cenobia of Syria they were easily able to go without eating for five days, whereas now they are so hungry at the third that they can hardly keep the daily fast until the ninth hour. When someone asked why, after having lived in a cenobium where he felt no hunger and often disdained to eat for whole weeks, he should now be hungry at the third hour. Macarius replied pointedly: "Because here there is no one to see you fasting and to support and sustain you with his praises. But there the attention of others and the food of vainglory filled you to repletion."

The Eight Principal Vices: How to Fight Them

Although these eight vices, then, disturb the whole human race, nonetheless they do not assail everyone in the same way. In one person the spirit of fornication is dominant, in another wrath rides roughshod, in a third vainglory tyrannizes, and in still another pride holds sway. And although it is evident that we are all attacked by all of these, yet we each suffer in different ways and manners.

Therefore we must so join battle against them that everyone spies out the vice by which he is particularly besieged and struggles chiefly against it, fixing all the care and attention of his mind on fighting it and keeping watch on it, brandishing the sighs of his heart and the many darts of his groans against it at every moment, employing the effort of his vigils and the meditations of his heart against it, pouring out the unceasing tears of his prayers to God, and insistently and continually demanding an end to the assault on him.

For it is impossible for a person to deserve to triumph over a passion before he has understood that he is not able to obtain victory in the struggle by his own diligence and his own effort, even though in order to be cleansed he must always be careful and attentive, day and night.

When he finds himself freed from it, he should once again and with similar intensity shine light on the hidden places of his heart, locate for himself whatever is still more horrible that he notices remaining, and move against it in particular with all the arms of the Spirit. Thus, when he has consistently overcome more powerful foes, he will have a quick and easy victory over the ones that remain, because the mind too becomes stronger through a succession of triumphs, and subsequent struggles with weaker foes make for readier successes in the battle. So it is with those who are accustomed to fight for prizes against all sorts of beasts in the presence of the kings of this world.

These persons, I say, make their first attack against the beasts that they have noticed are stronger and fiercer, and when these have been killed they more easily destroy the ones that are left, which are less terrible and less aggressive. Likewise, it is always the case that when the more powerful vices have been overthrown and are succeeded by weaker ones we shall obtain a perfect victory without any hardship. Yet it must not be thought that whoever struggles chiefly against one vice and seemingly does not pay much heed to the darts of others can be more easily wounded at an unexpected moment.

This will never happen. It is impossible for one who is concerned about the purification of his heart and has armed the attention of his mind for fighting any given vice not to have a certain fear of all the other vices and a similar watchfulness with respect to them as well. How indeed will a person deserve to obtain victory over the passion from which he yearns to be freed if he makes himself unworthy of the prize of cleansing by being contaminated with other vices? But when our heart's chief concern has been directed to fighting against one passion in particular, so to speak, we shall pray more intently about it and be especially careful and assiduous in our supplication, so that we may be worthy to watch out for it more diligently and thus obtain a swift victory.

The Lawgiver himself teaches us that we must keep to this plan of battle and not trust in our own strength in these words: "You shall not fear them, because the Lord your God is in your midst, a God great and terrible. He himself will consume these nations in your sight, little by little and by degrees. You will not be able to destroy them all at once, lest perhaps the beasts of the earth multiply against you. And the Lord your God will deliver them over in your sight, and he will slay them until they are completely destroyed."

But he likewise warns that we must not be proud of our victory over them: "Lest when thou hast eaten and art full," he says, "and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein. And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied, then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee

forth water out of the rock of flint (Deuteronomy 8:12-15). Solomon also says in Proverbs: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." (Proverbs 24:17-18) -- that is, lest seeing your proud heart he cease to assail him and you be forsaken by him and begin to be troubled once again by the passion that you had previously vanquished by the grace of God.

For the prophet would not have prayed and said: "O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever" (Psalms 74:19), unless he had known that, because of their pride of heart, some would be delivered over again to vices that they had overcome, so that they would be humbled.

Therefore we should be certain from experience and have learned from innumerable scriptural texts that we cannot conquer such great enemies by our own strength but only with the support of God's help, and that every day we must attribute to him the sum of our victory. This is recalled thus by the Lord speaking through Moses: "Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord swore unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Do not say in your heart, when the Lord your God has destroyed them in your sight: Because of my righteousness the Lord has led me in to possess this land, while those nations were wiped out because of their sins. For it was not because of your righteous deeds and the uprightness of your heart that you were led in to possess their land, but because they acted wickedly they were destroyed as you entered in...) (Deuteronomy 9:4-5).

I ask, what could be said more clearly against that pernicious opinion and presumption of ours, by which we want to attribute everything that we do to our free will and to our own effort? "Do not say in your heart, when the Lord your God has destroyed them in your sight: Because of my righteousness the Lord has led me in to possess this land."

Did he not express himself clearly to those whose souls' eyes are open and whose ears hear? Namely, when you have enjoyed a notable success in warring against the carnal vices and you see that you have been freed from their filthiness and from this world's way of life, you should not be puffed up with the success of the struggle and the victory and ascribe this to your own strength and wisdom, believing that you were able to obtain victory over evil spirits and carnal vices through your own efforts and application and free will. There is no doubt that you would never have been able to prevail over these if the Lord's help had not fortified and protected you.

WORDS FROM ABBA AMMONAS

Source: "The Sayings of the Desert Fathers," pp. 25-28

Abba Ammonas was a disciple of St. Anthony the Great and later became a bishop. He was also an outstanding expert on the Scriptures and left this world in the beginning of the fifth century.

There was once a hard-working old man there who wore a mat. He went to find Abba Ammonas who, when he saw him wearing the mat, said to him, "This is no use to you." But the old man questioned him in the following way, "Three thoughts pester me. The first compels me to withdraw into the desert. The second, to wander as a pilgrim to where no one knows me. The third, to shut myself up in a cell, to see no one, and to eat only every second day." Abba Ammonas replied, "It is not expedient for you to do any of these things. Rather, sit in your cell and eat a little every day, keeping always in your heart the word of the publican which is read in the Gospel, and you may be safe." (Luke 18:13 God be merciful to me, a sinner.)

A brother asked Abba Ammonas to give me a word, and the old man replied, "Go, make your thoughts like those of the evildoers who are in prison. For they are always asking when the magistrate will come, awaiting him in anxiety. Even so the monk ought to give himself at all times to accusing his own soul, saying, 'Unhappy wretch that I am. How shall I stand before the judgment seat of Christ? What shall I say in my defense?' If you give yourself continually to this, you may be saved."

Abba Ammonas was going to pay a visit to Abba Anthony one day, and he lost his way. So sitting down, he fell asleep for a little while. On waking, he prayed thus to God, "I beseech you, O Lord my God, do not let your creature perish." Then there appeared to him as it were a man's hand in the heavens, which showed him the way, till he reached Abba Anthony's cave.

Abba Ammonas came one day to eat in a place where there was a monk of evil repute. Now it happened that a woman came and entered the cell of the brother of evil reputation. The dwellers in that place, having learnt this, were troubled and gathered together to chase the brother from his cell. Knowing that bishop Ammonas was in the place, they asked him to join them. When the brother in question learnt this, he hid the woman in a large cask. The crowd of monks came to the place. Now Abba Ammonas saw the position clearly but for the sake of God he kept the secret; he entered, seated himself on the cask and commanded the cell to be searched. Then when the monks had searched everywhere without finding the woman, Abba Ammonas said, "What is this? May God forgive you!" After praying, he made everyone go out, then taking the brother by the hand he said, "Brother, be on your guard." With these words, he withdrew.

Abba Ammonas was asked, "What is the 'narrow and hard way?'" (Matt 7:14). He replied, "The 'narrow and hard way' is this, to control your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God. This is also the meaning of the sentence, 'Lo, we have left everything and followed you.'" (Matt 19:27)

Ταπείνωση

Γέροντος Παΐσιου Αγιορείτου

Μακάριοι είναι εκείνοι οί άνθρωποι πού κατόρθωσαν νὰ μιμηθοῦν τὴν ταπεινὴ γῆ, ἡ ὁποία, ἐνῶ πατιέται ἀπὸ ὄλους, ὅμως ὄλους τοὺς σηκώνει μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη της καὶ τοὺς τρέφει μὲ στοργὴ σὰν καλὴ μάννα, ἡ ὁποία ἔδωσε καὶ τὸ ὑλικὸ γιὰ τὴν σάρκα μας στὴν πλάση. Δέχεται ἐπίσης μὲ χαρὰ καὶ ὅ,τι τῆς πετᾶμε, ἀπὸ καλοὺς καρπούς μέχρι ἀκάθαρτα σκουπίδια, τὰ ὁποία ἐπεξεργάζεται ἀθόρυβα σὲ βιταμίνες καὶ τίς προσφέρει πλουσιοπάροχα μὲ τοὺς καρπούς της ἀδιακρίτως σὲ καλοὺς καὶ κακοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

Ὁ ταπεινὸς ἄνθρωπος, ὅπως φαίνεται, εἶναι ὁ δυνατότερος τοῦ κόσμου, διότι καὶ νικᾷει, ἀλλὰ καὶ σηκώνει πολλὰ ξένα βάρη μὲ ἑλαφριά τὴν συνειδήσὶ του. Ἐνῶ ζεῖ περιφρονημένος καὶ ἀδικημένος γιὰ τὰ ξένα σφάλματα πού οικειοποιεῖται ἀπὸ ἀγάπη, ἐσωτερικὰ νιώθει τὴν μεγαλύτερη χαρὰ τοῦ κόσμου, γιὰ εἶναι περιφρονημένος πιά ἀπὸ αὐτὸν ὁ μάταιος τοῦτος κόσμος. Οἱ ὕβρεις, οἱ ἀδικίες κλπ. εἶναι τὰ καλύτερα νυστέρια γιὰ ὄσους ἔφταιξαν, διότι μὲ αὐτὰ καθαρίζουν οἱ παλιὲς πληγές. Γιὰ ἐκείνους ὅμως, πού δὲν ἔφταιξαν εἶναι μαχαίρια δημίου, καὶ Μάρτυρες θεωροῦνται αὐτοὶ πού τὰ δέχονται χαρούμενοι γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Οἱ μεγάλοι στὴν ἡλικία πού δὲν δέχονται ὕβρεις καὶ αὐστηρὲς παρατηρήσεις, γιὰ νὰ θεραπευθοῦν ἢ γιὰ νὰ λάβουν μισθὸ (ὅταν δὲν φταῖνε), εἶναι πιὸ ἀνόητοι καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ μωρὰ παιδιά, πού δὲν θέλουν οὔτε νὰ ἀκούσουν τὸν γιατρό, διότι φοβοῦνται τὴν ἔνεση (μὴν τοὺς τρυπήσει μὲ τὴν βελόνα), καὶ ὑποφέρουν τὸν πυρετὸ συνέχεια καὶ τὸν βῆχα.

Περισσότερη εὐγνωμοσύνη ὀφείλουμε σ' αὐτοὺς πού μᾶς κέντησαν καὶ βγήκαν τὰ ἀγκάθια τῆς ψυχῆς μας, παρὰ σ' ἐκείνους πού θὰ ἔσκαβαν δωρεὰν τὴν περιοχὴ μας καὶ θὰ μᾶς φανέροναν τὸν κρυμμένο μας ἄγνωστο θησαυρὸ.

Δὲν ὀφελεῖ νὰ τρίβει κανεὶς τὰ γόνατά του μὲ ἀμέτρητες μετάνοιες, ἐὰν δὲν τρίβει παράλληλα καὶ τὴν μούρη του μὲ τὴν ταπείνωση (τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ μετάνοια).

Ἐκεῖνος πού ζητάει ταπείνωση ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, ἀλλὰ δὲν δέχεται τὸν ἄνθρωπο πού τοῦ στέλνει ὁ Θεός, γιὰ νὰ τὸν ταπεινώσει, δὲν ξέρεει τί ζητάει, διότι οἱ ἀρετὲς δὲν ἀγοράζονται σὰν τὰ ψόνια στὸν μπακάλη (ὅσα κιὰ θέλουμε), ἀλλὰ μᾶς στέλνει ὁ Θεὸς ἀνθρώπους νὰ δοκιμαστοῦμε, νὰ ἐργαστοῦμε, νὰ τὴν ἀποκτήσουμε καὶ νὰ στεφανωθοῦμε. Ὅποιος σκύβει ταπεινὰ καὶ δέχεται τὰ χτυπήματα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους, διώχνει τὰ δικά του ἐξογκώματα, ὁμορφαίνει πνευματικὰ σὰν Ἄγγελος καὶ ἔτσι χωράει ἀπὸ τὴν στενὴ πύλη τοῦ Παραδείσου.

Μακάριος ἐκεῖνος ὁ ἄνθρωπος πού ἔδωσε τὰ ἐξογκώματά του καὶ βαδίζει τὴν τεθλιμμένη ὁδὸ τοῦ Κυρίου μὲ ξένο βάρος (συκοφαντίες, κλπ.) καὶ ἀφήνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ τοῦ πλέκουν ἀμαράντινα στεφάνια μὲ τίς κατηγορίες, διότι αὐτὸ φανερώνει τὴν γνήσια ταπεινοφροσύνη πού δὲν

ἐξετάζει τί λένε οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἀλλὰ τί θὰ πῆ ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Κρίσεως.

Ἐκεῖνος πού μιλάει λογικὰ σὲ φιλοκατήγορο, ἢ σὲ ὀλιγόμυαλο καὶ ἔχει τὴν ἀπαίτηση νὰ βρεῖ κατανόηση, φανερώνει ὅτι καὶ ὁ ἴδιος δὲν εἶναι καλά, διότι ὁ κακότερος εἶναι χειρότερος ἀπὸ τὸν ὀλιγόμυαλο, γιὰ εἶναι σκοτισμένο τὸ μυαλό του ἀπὸ τὴν κακία καὶ τὸν ἐγωισμό.

Ὅσοι ὅμως ἔχουν ταπείνωση, ἔχουν καὶ καλοσύνη καὶ θεῖο φωτισμὸ καὶ δὲν σκοντάφτουν ποτε στὴ πνευματικὴ τους πορεία ἀπὸ τὰ ἐμπόδια τοῦ πονηροῦ.

Τοὺς περισσότερους πειρασμούς, τίς περισσότερες φορές, τοὺς δημιουργεῖ ὁ ἴδιος μας ὁ ἑαυτός μας, ὅταν βάζουμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας στὶς συνεργασίες μας μαζί μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους, ὅταν δηλαδὴ θέλουμε νὰ ὑψώνουμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας. Στὸν Οὐρανὸ δὲν ἀνεβαίνει κανεὶς μὲ τὸ κοσμικὸ ἀνέβασμα ἀλλὰ μὲ τὸ πνευματικὸ κατέβασμα. Ὅποιος βαδίζει χαμηλά, βαδίζει πάντα μὲ σιγουριά καὶ ποτε δὲν πέφτει.

Ἐκεῖνος πού δὲν συμβουλευεῖται στὴν πνευματικὴ του πορεία, μπερδεύει τοὺς δρόμους καὶ κουράζεται πολὺ καὶ καθυστερεῖ. Ἐὰν δὲν ταπεινωθεῖ νὰ ρωτήσῃ ἔστω καὶ ἀργότερα, δύσκολα θὰ φτάσῃ στὸν προορισμὸ του. Ἐνῶ αὐτοὶ πού συμβουλευοῦνται βαδίζουν ξεκούραστα, μὲ σιγουριά, καὶ σκεπάζονται μὲ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ φωτίζονται ἐπειδὴ ταπεινώνονται.

Ὅσοι κινοῦνται ὄλο ἀπλὰ μὲ καλοὺς λογισμούς, καὶ λένε ὄλους τοὺς λογισμούς τους καὶ πιστεύουν ἀπὸ πολλὴ ταπείνωση ὅτι δὲν ἔχουν τίποτα τὸ καλὸ, ἐνῶ ἀγωνίζονται μὲ φιλότιμο πολὺ, αὐτοὶ κρύβουν τὸν μεγαλύτερο πνευματικὸ θησαυρὸ μέσα τους, χωρὶς νὰ τὸν γνωρίζουν οὔτε οἱ ἴδιοι οὔτε οἱ ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι, καὶ ἔτσι δὲν σαταλιέται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἴδιους καὶ δὲν κλέβεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους.

Στὸν πολὺ ταπεινὸ καὶ εὐαίσθητο ἄνθρωπο ὅταν ταπεινώνεται κανεὶς, βοηθίεται πολὺ, ἐνῶ στὸν ἄνθρωπο πού ἀγνοεῖ τὴν ταπείνωση, ἐὰν ταπεινωθεῖς -- τὸν συμβουλευθεῖς ἢ πεις τὰ ἐλαττώματά σου -- τὸν κάνεις πιὸ περήφανο καὶ ἀναιδί.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πού δὲν ἔχει ταπείνωση καὶ καλοὺς λογισμούς, εἶναι γεμάτος ἀπὸ ἀμφιβολίες καὶ ἐρωτηματικά. Κι ἐπειδὴ θὰ βρίσκεται συνέχεια ζαλισμένος, ἔχει ἀνάγκη στὶς ἀρχές ἀπὸ Γέροντα μὲ μεγάλη ὑπομονή, γιὰ νὰ τοῦ δίνη συνέχεια ἐξηγήσεις, μέχρι νὰ καθαρῖσῃ ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ καρδιά, γιὰ νὰ μπορῇ νὰ βλέπῃ καθαρά.

Ὁ ταπεινὸς καὶ καλοκάγαθος ἄνθρωπος, ἐπειδὴ ἔχει τὴν καθαρότητα καὶ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ καὶ ἐξωτερικὴ ἡρεμία, ἔχει καὶ βάθος πνευματικὸ καὶ βλέπει βαθιὰ τὰ θεῖα νοήματα καὶ βοηθίεται περισσότερο, καὶ αὐξάνεται καὶ ἡ πίστη του πιὸ πολὺ, ζώντας τὰ μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ υπερήφανος, ἐκτὸς πού εἶναι σκοτισμένος, εἶναι καὶ συνέχεια ἐσωτερικὰ καὶ ἐξωτερικὰ ταραγμένος ἀπὸ τὴν ἐλαφρότητα τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ, στέκεται πάντα στὴν ἐπιφάνεια τῶν πραγμάτων, καὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ προχωρήσῃ στὸ βάθος, ὅπου βρίσκονται τὰ θεῖα μαργαριτάρια, γιὰ νὰ πλουτίσῃ πνευματικὰ...

THE ARK OF SALVATION: THE TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Alexander Kalomiros, from "Against False Union"

Someday sooner or later, no one knows exactly when, the "churches" and the religions will be united. In that chaos of falsehood even the chosen will be in danger of losing their way. It will be the age of the Antichrist. How and when the Antichrist will come, no one can say. And it is unknown how many shall be able to recognize him when he comes, because he will come as a benefactor of humanity. For the present, one thing can be said with certainty: all these movements towards union among nations and churches, all these compromises, all this uniformity of humanity gradually produced under the steamroller of technological culture are paving the way for the coming of the Antichrist.

This development of humanity, according to the criteria of the world, is wonderful. But according to Christian criteria, it is a development towards destruction. This does not surprise or frighten the Christian. He knows that the world has condemned itself. And that is why Christ refused to pray for the world. "I do not ask for the world." The ruler of this world is the devil, and the devil "from the beginning was a murderer."

Death will find the world at the height of its glory, at the height of self-conceit, at the summit of the tower of Babel, when man will be at the zenith of his very old attempt to become god by his own powers, apart from God. When the Son of man comes, he shall find man in the full glory of his satanic mania.

God does not ask the Christian to save the world. Any attempt on the part of Christians to change the course the world has taken would be futile and ridiculous. The world is a sinking ship, and it is sinking because its very structure is rotten. God does not ask the Christian to save the ship, but to save as many of the shipwrecked as he can.

The new Ark of Noah, the Church of Christ, sails near the site of the shipwreck. Any who wish to be saved from the waters must seek refuge in her. But in order to find refuge they must forsake the world, not so much geographically as essentially. "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not any unclean thing, and I will receive you" (II Cor. 6:17). But here is where the difficulties begin. How can you forsake the world when your whole life is bound up in it? But to answer this question is not the purpose of the present book. One finds it in the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers. Besides, the whole life in Christ is a struggle for freedom from the world, from the "Egypt" of the passions, and for refuge in the Ark of the Church.

But when the age of the Antichrist approaches, even the Ark of the Church shall be difficult to discern. Many will say, "Behold, here is Christ", and "There is Christ", but they will be false prophets. 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 marmelade 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.

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 they will preserve undefiled.

In those days even the chosen will be in danger of being led astray. Much courage is needed for one to side with the few and to go against the currents of the world, with the danger of being ridiculed by the "smart" and abused by the strong. Much wisdom is needed in order for one to discern the truth there exactly where the whole world sees nonsense and stupidity. Besides, the followers of falsehood will have the miracle on their side, the miracle which the devil asked of Christ in the desert, the signs and wonders of the false prophets and the false Christs. "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and they shall show great signs and wonders; inasmuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Mat. 24:24). How many shall be able to find their way when all the beacons will be misguiding? Then, "he who persists to the end shall be saved."

For the present, let all who wish to live near Christ hasten to acquire discretion in order to recognize beforehand the false prophets and false Christs, and let them wear the armor of the Faith so that they will be able to strike them and their followers invincibly. For our age is a cunning age, where falsehood is disguised and poison is offered sugar-coated, where the roads are full of snares and well-camouflaged pits. Whoever is misled by appearances is lost.

We must learn to distinguish the Church from the world, for the destiny of the Church is one thing and that of the world another. We must have as much distrust of the world as we have faith in the Church, as much hate towards the world (not towards men, but the world) as we have love for the Church, as much pessimism for the world as we have optimism for the Church.

The world is the camp, the mentality, and the intentions of those who have rejected the offering of God, who have turned their backs when He wanted to speak to them, who have separated themselves from Him forever. These people have given preference to death over life. They are not punished, just as the demons are not punished, for no one wishes them any harm. Of their own accord they chose death, of their own accord they chose to be enemies of God and to stand far away from Him.

This choice is made in life, independent of moments and time, in the depths of our heart, and it is irrevocable. Freedom separates the spiritual beings into two camps. There are two types of people, as there are two types of angels: the friends of God and the enemies of God.

Freedom does not lie in individual actions, but in the whole inclination and disposition of man, in the final positive or negative response to God's call. Freedom lies in the general direction of man's life, and not in the details of that life. The details are deceiving: they make the Pharisees and Scribes appear to be friends of God, and the thief, the harlot, the publican, and Saul [Paul] appear to be His enemies. We must be able to recognize the true enemies and the true friends of God under the masks of hypocrisy or weakness.

We are in an age where the masks of hypocrisy have multiplied and reached an astonishing degree of perfection. From one moment to the next we are in danger of being deceived by men who, while wearing the mask of the friends of God, are actually His enemies. Such are those who speak of the union of the churches. They are the Church's most dangerous enemies, the false prophets of the Gospel.

The enemies who appear without any mask - the atheists, the materialists, the communists - cannot fool anyone. They are the ones who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But the others - "Orthodox" patriarchs, bishops and archbishops, leaders of Christian organizations, theologians and professors of theology - all who speak with hypocritical Christian love for our "brothers" the heretics and spread the message of union, all of these mask-wearers may not be killing the body, but they are surely killing the soul. This is why the battle against them must be relentless.



THEOPHANY

By St. Romanos the Melodist (Kontakia)

"Overcome by feelings of pity, I, the Merciful, have come to My creature, holding out My hands that I may embrace you. Do not feel shame before Me. It is for you, who are naked, that I became naked and came to be baptized. Now the Jordan is opened for me, and John prepares the way for Me in the water and in the hearts of men." Having thus addressed the man - in deed, not in words - the Saviour came, as He had said. Directing His footsteps near the river, He appeared to the Forerunner as the unapproachable Light.

At the divine command, ... the son of Zacharias exalted his spirit; and stretching out his hand, he placed it on the King. He immersed Him in water, and then led back to the land the Lord of the earth and of the firmament. From on high, a voice pointed Him out - as though by a finger - crying out: "This is My beloved Son." To this Father, and to the baptized Son and to His Spirit, I cry: "Destroy, O Redeemer, those that oppress my soul; put an end to my errors, O unapproachable Light."

THE "RAPTURE" AND RELATED INCONSISTENCIES

By Fr. Dimitri Cozby

Some of our evangelical or pentecostal neighbors occasionally speak about "the Rapture" as one of the events leading up to Christ's Second Coming. By this they mean the physical removal from earth of the true believers in Christ in preparation for the "Great Tribulation," a seven-year period of unparalleled calamity which will herald the end. A few advocates say that the Rapture will follow the Tribulation. Most who believe in it, however, contend that it precedes the Tribulation. The Rapture's purpose, according to its advocates, is to safeguard the righteous during that horrible time. Its most familiar champions are Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late, Great Planet Earth* and other books), John T. Walvoord (of Dallas Theological Seminary), and the late Cyrus Scofield (author of *The Scofield Reference Bible*).

These ideas are popular with groups who are enchanted, even obsessed, with speculation about the Second Coming and who have convinced themselves that they see in current events signs that His return is near. These speculations form part of a broader ideology called "dispensationalism." Dispensationalists come in all shapes and sizes and what we say about one may not apply to all. Still we can list some general characteristics which virtually all dispensationalists share. The name comes from their division of history into eras or "dispensations." They believe that the Bible outlines the whole course of mankind's religious history. Each stage in God's program is a dispensation, and in each dispensation God relates to the world and His chosen peoples in a different way. Some dispensationalist schemes encompass all human history; others include only Christian history since the time of Christ. Most often these systems are based on a symbolic interpretation of the "letters to the seven churches" of Revelation 2 and 3, with each church standing for the Christianity of a particular period. Dispensationalism presents a detailed program of events leading up to the Second Coming. Two of the events in this master plan are the Rapture and the Great Tribulation.

Proponents of the doctrine of a pre-Tribulation Rapture claim that it rests on Scripture and has always been a part of Christian teaching. The truth is that it dates from about 1830 and was largely the creation of John Nelson Darby, a one-time Anglican priest and founder of a sect called the Plymouth Brethren. He contributed much to the dispensationalist scheme, and in particular he was the first to include the Rapture among the catalogue of phenomena of the last times. The Rapture's recent origin is one of the things which should make us skeptical. Neither the Apostles nor the Fathers expounded any such teaching. Even Darby's circle, although they claimed to find support for their teaching in the Bible, did not maintain that they had arrived at this doctrine through study of the Scriptures, but that they had received it through a revelation. According to its supporters the pre-Tribulation

Rapture is an extremely important part of the Christian message. Yet it was unknown before 1830.

The Rapture's supporters derive their opinions ultimately from a single Scripture verse, I Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we who are left alive will be carried off together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." Less popular but often cited is Matthew 24:40-42, "Then there will be two in the field. One will be taken and the other left. Two will be grinding at the mill. One will be taken and the other left. Therefore, be vigilant, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

The paragraph which contains the first verse quoted above, I Thessalonians 4:17, forms the Epistle reading for funerals in Orthodox worship. The passage begins with 4:13. In preceding verses St. Paul has spoken of the necessity for holiness of life and for brotherly love among Christians (4:1-12). With verse 13 he turns to another topic, the fate of Christians after death. Misunderstandings on this issue had apparently caused needless distress and apprehension in the church at Thessalonika. It seems that some people believed that Christians who died before Christ's return would somehow miss out on that glorious event. St. Paul seeks to calm their fears (vs. 13). He points out that as Christ returned from the dead at His Resurrection, so also, at the end of time, His followers who have died in the interim will be restored through resurrection (vs. 14). At the Second Coming, the Christian dead will be raised (vs. 16). Then they and the faithful who are still alive will be caught up into the clouds to welcome Christ as He descends (verses 15,17). Paul then discusses other matters relating to the Second Coming, beginning with the date it will occur.

When we look at verse 17 in context, it is easy to see that it does not really support the doctrine of the Rapture. There is no reference to a Great Tribulation or to any other events preceding Christ's Return. The verse refers to something that will happen as part of the Lord's Coming. The course of events St. Paul presents is simple and straight-forward. At the time of the Second Coming, the dead will be raised, and all the faithful — the dead now restored and those still alive now transfigured — will ascend to be with Him as He comes down. This is the universal interpretation of the Fathers who see the verse as referring to the last days.

Why does St. Paul speak of an ascension of the righteous? The Fathers suggest at least three answers to this question. St. Gregory of Nyssa says that the ascension is a natural consequence of the purity of the transfigured resurrection body: "... this change which takes place... when the resurrection trumpet sounds which awakens the dead in an instant transforms those who are left alive to incorruptibility according to the likeness of those who have undergone the resurrection change, so that the bulk of the flesh is no longer heavy nor does its weight hold them down to earth, but they rise up through the air..." ("On the Making of Man" 22,6).

St. John Chrysostom and others say that it is to provide Christ with a proper escort for His appearance on earth and

to demonstrate His favor toward the faithful. "If He is about to descend, why shall we be taken up? For the sake of honor. When a king enters a city, those who are in his favor go out to meet him, but the condemned await their judge inside. Or, when a loving father comes, his children, and also those worthy of being his children, are taken out in a chariot to see and kiss him, but the servants who have offended him remain indoors. So we are carried out upon a chariot to our Father... See how great our honor is? As He descends we go out to meet Him, and what is more blessed, we shall be with Him always" (Homily 8 on Thessalonians).

Let us summarize what we have found so far. St. Paul does speak of a sort of rapture, in the sense of a carrying up into the sky of the righteous at the time of the Second Coming. The Fathers generally agree on that. But St. Paul and the Fathers see this as an event which accompanies Christ's return and immediately precedes the Judgment and the establishment of the Kingdom. The Rapture which Darby and Scofield taught and which Lindsey, Walvoord, and others still teach, is different from that. They talk about it as a separate happening, part of a decades long program of events leading up to Christ's Coming. The dispensationalists see the Rapture as the disappearance of the faithful from the earth before the Great Tribulation and many years before the Judgment. This is foreign to the Apostle and to the Tradition. St. Paul mentions no period of affliction and persecution following the Rapture.

In an effort to forge a link between the Rapture and the Tribulation, supporters turn to Matthew 24:40-42, quoted above (in part 1, September's Dawn). Certainly we have here references to a time of horror and suffering. Matthew 24 and 25 comprise a long discourse by Jesus. The occasion for this teaching is the first days of Holy Week, when Christ and His disciples were in Jerusalem on that last visit which ended in His death and resurrection. The Lord and His entourage have been in the Temple. As they leave, one of the company remarks on the structure's splendor and grandeur (24:1-2). Jesus replies by prophesying its coming destruction, which took place some 40 years later (70 AD). The group proceeds to the Mount of Olives, across the Kedron Valley from the city. They halt at a place which even today offers an admirable panorama of the Old City and the Temple site. The disciples, perhaps alarmed by Christ's words, ask when "these things," meaning the Temple's destruction, will happen and what will be the signs of Christ's return.

Christ's sermon is His response to these questions. In order to understand it properly we must remember that there were two questions, one about disasters which would befall Jerusalem during the Roman-Jewish War of 66-72, the other about the end of time. Parts of the speech address one concern, some the other. Much of what Christ says is intended to keep His followers from confusing the two events, taking the horror of the Jewish War as a sign of the Second Coming. We see this in the warnings He gives: that the Gospel must be preached in the whole world before the end comes (vs. 8), that many

deceivers will arise claiming to be Him (verses 23-26), that no one knows “the day or the hour” except the Father (vs. 36), and many more. Christ is concerned that His followers not confuse the impending disasters in Judea with the cataclysms of the end. To make His point clear He emphasizes the suddenness and unpredictability of His return.

We must interpret 24:40-42 in light of Christ’s insistence that He will return “at an hour you do not expect” (24:44). It would seem strange if Christ were to make this point over and over in the early verses of chapter 24, then in verses 40-42 describe an occurrence which would certainly tip everyone off that something was about to happen, and all the more peculiar if that tip-off were to happen seven years before His appearance, as the dispensationalists assert. The key to understanding the passage is the Greek word normally translated “taken.” The word (παραλαμβάνω -- “paralamvano”) has two meanings. The first we might render “to take,” but not in the sense of “to lift up,” the meaning which the dispensationalists give it. It means instead “to bring along,” as in English we might say that someone takes a friend to the movies. That does not seem to fit the use of the word in Matthew 24, so we turn to the second meaning, “to accept” or “to choose.” Either of these words would be better in these verses than the imprecise “take.” This second meaning fits with what the Lord has been saying in the passage in question, that His followers must be ready for His coming lest they be caught off-guard like the world, unprepared for the Judgment. Some will have heeded His commandments, will face the Judgment in confidence, and will be “accepted” into the Kingdom. Others, though living and working with the first group, day by day, will not have lived the life of the Gospel and will not be chosen or accepted by Christ when He returns. These verses form part of Christ’s exhortation to all who hear Him to respond to His message and thereby avoid condemnation at the End. The verses do not supply the idea of the Rapture.



- Today people want to be loved, and for this reason they are unsuccessful. The correct way is not to be interested in whether or not people love you, but whether or not you love Christ and people. This is the only way that the soul is fulfilled.

- There is an electric generator, and in the room there is a lamp. If, however, we do not flip the switch, we will remain in darkness. Similarly, there is Christ and there is our soul. If, however, we do not flip the switch of prayer, our soul will not see the light of Christ and will remain in the darkness of the devil.

- Our sicknesses do us well when we endure them ungrudgingly, glorify His name, and ask God to forgive our sins.

(Blessed Elder Porphyrios, +1991)

THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich

After a large number of people had gathered around our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord spoke these words: “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?” In addition, He spoke these words: “What can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

This means that a man’s soul has more value than the whole visible world. And if a man loses his soul, with what can he make payment, with what can he buy it back again? With nothing in the world. Not even if he gives the whole world can he buy his lost soul.

Blessed is he who knows this, and who guards his soul as his greatest treasure. Blessed is he who stands guard over his soul every day and does not permit his soul to suffer harm in any way. For he who saves his soul will save everything, and he who loses his soul will lose everything.

In a small town there once lived a very rich man. He lived in a small dilapidated house. He did not want to renovate his house, but saved and guarded his wealth. Now this one night his house happened to catch fire and burn down. The man, however, jumped out of bed undressed, searched out his saved-up treasure, and leapt out of the house. His whole house was reduced to ashes, but he did not feel sorry about it at all. Rather, with his wealth he moved to a large city, and in this large city he built a beautiful palace, and there he continued to live cheerfully and free from worry.

What does this story symbolize? The small town represents this world, in which men live as guests for a short time. The small dilapidated house represents man’s body, the home of man’s spirit. The rich man represents a sensible Christian, who has heard, understood, and laid up in his heart the words of Christ: “What does it help a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?”

The great wealth of the rich man represents the rich soul of a sensible Christian, who labored for a whole lifetime to live according to the law of Christ and amass into his soul all those good works which shine more brightly than gold or silver or precious gems. That spiritual gold and silver, that great spiritual treasure is: faith and hope in God, love for God, prayerfulness, mercy, goodness, peace, brotherly love, humility and purity.

What does the burning down of the house represent? It represents bodily death. The unexpected fire in the night represents unexpected bodily death, of which no mortal knows the day or the hour. The awakening of the rich man from sleep at the moment of the fire and the moving to the large city represent the freeing of the soul from the body at the hour of death and the moving to the other world. The large city represents the eternal kingdom of Christ, in which only the angels and the righteous live. The beautiful palace in the large city represents the dwelling place of every righteous soul in that world, in the eternal and everlasting kingdom.

This story is clear and the moral is beautiful. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear. Let no one place his hope in this transitory life, which passes as quickly as a cloud driven by the wind from one part of a small town to the other. Let no one take pride in his body, for every human body is a dilapidated house, which death will soon reduce to ashes.

But let every Christian man and woman ceaselessly take thought for their souls, for that unique treasure, which can save them from death and destruction. Whoever takes thought for his soul, listens to Christ's words and carries out His holy commandments -- the meek Christ helps such a man and helps him without ceasing. He watches over him as a mother over a child in a cradle. And He nourishes him and waters him day and night with His Holy Spirit. And He gives him a guardian angel to protect him in all the paths of life and to take away his soul at the hour of death and lead it into the Heavenly Kingdom.

To our God be glory and praise. Amen.



In the European West, Christianity has gradually transformed into humanism. For a long time and arduously, the God-Man diminished, and has been changed, narrowed, and finally reduced to a man: to the infallible man in Rome and the equally "infallible" man in London and Berlin. Thus did papism come into being, taking everything from Christ, along with Protestantism, which asks the least from Christ, and often nothing. Both in papism and in Protestantism, man has been put in the place of the God-Man, both as the highest value and as the highest criterion. A painful and sad correction of the God-Man's work and teaching has been accomplished. Steadily and stubbornly papism has tried to substitute the God-Man with man, until in the dogma about the infallibility of the pope -- a man, the God-Man was once and for all replaced with ephemeral, "infallible" man; because with this dogma, the pope was decisively and clearly declared as something higher than not only man, but the holy Apostles, the holy Fathers, and the holy Ecumenical councils. With this kind of a departure from the God-Man, from the ecumenical Church as the God-Man organism, papism surpassed Luther, the founder of Protestantism. Thus, the first radical protest in the name of humanism against the God-Man Christ, and his God-Man organism -- the Church -- should be looked for in papism, not in Lutheranism. Papism is actually the first and the oldest Protestantism.

St. Justin Popovich (1979)

ADMONITIONS FOR PARENTS

By Our Holy Father St. John Chrysostom

- If the Apostle commands us to take more care for others than for ourselves, and if we are guilty when we neglect their benefit, then is it not a much greater guilt when this concerns those who are so near to us? "Was it not I," the Lord will say to us, "Who gave place to these children in your family? Was it not I Who entrusted them to your care, making you masters, guardians and judges over them? I gave you complete authority over them; I placed all care for their upbringing in your hands. You will tell me that they did not want to bend their necks to the yoke, that they threw it off. But this should have been averted from the very beginning; you should have mastered their first impressions and placed the reins on them before they had the power to break away from them. You should have bent their young souls under the yoke of duty, accustomed them to it, educated them in accordance with it, bound the wound when it first opened. You should have uprooted the tares when they first began to sprout around the young plant, and not have waited until they put down deep roots, when the passions have become uncontrollable and untamable through gradual strengthening in their formation."

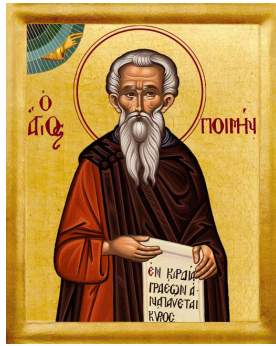
- The wise Sirach says: "Hast thou children? Instruct them, and bow down their neck from their youth" (Sir. 7:25). But the Lord does not only prompt us with this command through the lips of His prophet; he even takes our side, supporting the fulfillment of this commandment with the fearsome punishment that awaits those children who do not submit to the authority of their parents: "Every man who shall speak evil of his father or of his mother, let him die the death" (Lev. 20:9). He punishes with death those who become guilty before you, and you look tepidly at these sins that they commit against the highest possible authority. They are rebelling against God Himself, transgressing His commandments, and you look at this without the least displeasure, without the slightest criticism of your children. What does He have to lose from their offense? Nothing. But you, why should you not fear for your own selves? For whoever abandons the Lord will never respect either his own father or himself.

- Tell me, which trees are best? Do we not prefer those that are inwardly strong and are not injured by rainstorms, or hail, or gusts of wind, or by any sort of harsh weather, but stand exposed to them all without fences or garden to protect them? He who truly loves wisdom is like this, and his riches we have already described. He has nothing yet has everything; he has everything, yet has nothing. A fence does not provide internal strength, nor is a wall a natural support; they provide only artificial protection. What is a strong body? Is it not one that is healthy, whether hungry or surfeited, cold or warm? Or is it something that is dependent upon restaurants, tailors, merchants, and physicians for health? The truly rich man, the true lover of wisdom, needs none of these things, and that is why the blessed Apostle admonishes us to bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

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HAPPY New
YEAR

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

FALLEN ANGELS

By Dr. Steven Bushnell

The 1990s saw an explosion of the number of books on angels. Many of these books contain touching accounts of the roles angels played in the salvation of people in their daily lives. Almost all these books advocate openness to angels and a grateful acceptance of angels and their communications with mankind. Many of the authors encourage an angel-centered life and the hope for their regular influence and, at the same time, an awareness that angels sometimes appear in ways that are outwardly not very angelic.

Nearly all these books fail to consider that the devil and his legions of demons are fallen angels who can disguise themselves as angels of light to cause the destruction of our souls. From the letters of St. Paul (2 Cor 11:14) to modern times, the writings of the Church describe how these fallen angels masquerade not only as angels of light but also as saints, the Virgin Mary, and Christ Himself.

For example, in his discussion of the importance of discrimination, St. John Cassian recounts how one monk caused his own death and how, in another instance, another monk was prepared to murder his own son. In both cases, demons disguised as angels were the cause (The Philokalia, vol. I). In a different time and place, the Kiev Caves Paterikon records that a young monk named Nikita did reverence to an angel of light who told him not to spend time in prayer, that the angel would do it for him because it was more important for Nikita to spend time reading. While the demon-as-an-gel prayed in his place, Nikita became clairvoyant. Soon he didn't even want to hear about the Gospels,

preferring to become well versed in the Old Testament instead. His fellow monks, having finally perceived the demon, drove it away by prayer. Nikita repented and, through the grace of God, went on to become bishop of Novgorod, a shepherd to his flock, and a miracle-worker. We know him as St. Nikita the Recluse.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?” (Matt. 7:15-16). *“But the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts”* (Gal 5:22-24).

To put into practice these words of Christ and St. Paul in discriminating between real angels and demons masquerading as angels is difficult in the face of human frailty, our sinfulness, our self-willed delusion, and the thousands of years of experience of the enemy of man and God. Remember that the deluded monks described above had dedicated their very lives to Christ. The Holy Fathers of the Church, in their great love for us, tell us to pray, to seek humility, and to seek the guidance of a spiritual Father. They clearly tell us not to seek visions of angels and to be very questioning and skeptical when we do receive such visions. They tell us that if we have the slightest doubt about a vision, to say, in fact, *“I do not know,”* and to put it aside or simply to reject it. They tell us that God will overcome our actions if God is the source and that the angels will rejoice at our humility and sobriety. What the Holy Fathers of the Church tell us is very different from what has been written by the authors of today’s popular books.

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]

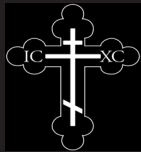
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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HE WILL COME IN GLORY, TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich

Vigilance is demanded of you and vigilance is alertness, keeping watch with expectation. Vigilance over yourself, over your thoughts, desires, and deeds; this is the strict ordinance of your faith. Alertness sharpens spiritual vision, so that it can see and discern good and evil, and can know who is coming into your heart and thoughts. By keeping watch, one repulses an enemy and admits a friend. Expectation fortifies love and a clean conscience. To whom does this greatest expectation of yours pertain? To the Beloved, to the Most Beloved, to the One whose love brought you into this world, and whose love will greet you in the other world. Lo, He has promised to come. And human souls tremble at that promise, like love that trembles when it expects its beloved.

This expectation fortifies love and a clean conscience. *Watch therefore, for you do not know the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come* (Matt. 25:13). These are His words; they are words of warning. May you not be like the five foolish virgins, who in their carelessness were caught by surprise and cast out. He is coming, stay awake and keep watch!

He came once; He will come again. The first time He came in humility; the second time He will come in glory. The first time He came as the Redeemer of the world; the second time He will come as the Judge of the world. The difference between His first and second coming is very great. During His first coming He spent thirty-three years on earth. His second coming will last a very short time. *For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man*, as He himself said

about His own second coming (Matt. 24:27). Thus the second coming of the Lord will be unexpected and as quick as lightning. Hence, He gave this warning to all the faithful: *Watch therefore, for you do not know at which hour your Lord will come* (Matt. 24:42). The first time He came as a painstaking sower; the second time He will come as a swift winnower. And just as winnowing is a brief task compared to the many tasks involving crops from the time of sowing to the time of winnowing, so shall His second coming, when compared to the first, be swift and brief. Oh, and how unexpected it will be!

Therefore, vigilance is demanded of you, along with alertness of spirit, watchfulness, and expectation.

And the second coming of the Lord will be glorious, all in a flash of unseen glory. *Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory* (Matt. 24:30). In truth, His coming will be worthy of the King of kings. Before Him, beneath Him and around Him the radiant hosts of angels will hover. Trumpets will sound from the mouths of trumpet-bearing angels, fire and flame will go before them. *And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His chosen people from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other* (Matt. 24:31).

Thus does the Lord describe His coming again. And His clairvoyant prophet, whom even the Jews cannot deny, describes it in this way: *His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A river of fire came forth and flowed before him; a thousand thousands served Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him; the judgment began and the books were opened* (Daniel 7:9-10).

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And His holy apostle describes it in this way: *For indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all who have believed in Him* (II Thess. 1:7-10).

The coming of the Judge will be unexpected, and will be in power and glory. And His judgment will be just as He himself foretold and described it (Matt. 25:3). He will divide all people to the right and to the left as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. To those on the right the righteous Judge will say: *Come, blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which was prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* And to those on the left He will say: *Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.* The criterion of justice will be simple and clear. He will summon the former to eternal life and blessedness, *For, He says, I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed Me; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.* After these blessed ask Him when they saw Him in need and helped Him, the righteous Judge will answer: *Truly, I say to you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me.*

And the others, who will be standing on His left, the righteous Judge will drive off to eternal torments, into the fire prepared for the devil and the servants of the devil. After these unblest ask Him when they ever saw Him in need and failed

to help Him, the righteous Judge will answer: *Truly, I say to you, when you did not do it for one of these, my little brothers, you did not do it for Me.*

Observe, O chosen people, and see how Christ the Lord identifies Himself with those who suffer in the world. He graciously calls them His own little brothers. Would you ever refuse bread to Christ's brothers? Know, that whoever refuses it to them, refuses it to Him. At the Judgment this shall be revealed, and He shall judge with justice.

And when the Judgment comes to an end, there will begin for the righteous an endless and everlasting reign. *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father* (Matt. 13:43). All other kingdoms will be demolished, and every other dominion and power will dissipate like fog in the face of the sun; only His kingdom will remain, without boundaries or neighboring territories. Even as the prophet, whom even the Jews recognize, foretold and saw in a vision: *His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed* (Daniel 7:14). And His kingdom will be more lasting than visible heaven and earth themselves; for it is written that heaven and earth will pass away, but His kingdom will remain (Rev. 21:1).

With such a flash of light, with such power and glory and worthiness will the divine-human drama conclude, which began in a cold cave in Bethlehem. Thus will the mustard seed grow and grow tall (Matt. 13:31-32), and will unfurl into the tree of life, which will envelop the whole world, visible and invisible. Therefore, let your souls be glad, O righteous, if you should suffer anything for the name of Jesus or endure humiliation for His justice in this life.

Each day of your sorrow, torment, and humiliation, will bring you ages and ages of joy. For you will be rewarded

with angelic citizenship in His kingdom. Whoever is at all like Jesus in suffering, will be like Him in glory as well. Your tears and your wounds, now hidden, will be illumined by a sun which never sets. Your illusory defeats for the sake of His gospel, will be transformed into a triumphant victory, which will not be proclaimed in headlines by men, but rather by God's angels with the blast of trumpets.

It would be better for the unrighteous to tremble and weep now than at the Judgment. But you, Christ-bearers, rejoice that your Messiah is the Judge of the world. For He will judge with justice. Behold, that same Jesus,

*whom Herod wished to condemn to death in the manger;
whom Judas betrayed for thirty pieces of silver;
whom the Jewish elders tortured and beat;
whom Pilate pronounced innocent and then crucified;
who died in great agony on Golgotha;
who gloriously resurrected from the tomb on the third day;
who ascended into heaven on the fortieth day,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father,*

this same Jesus will come again in power and glory. He will come as the supreme Judge of the world, to judge all the living and the dead. He will come as the immortal King, to open up the immortal kingdom to the righteous. In that kingdom the righteous will shine like the sun.

This is the faith of the righteous, of those who are meek and humble, yet fearless on the path of justice. This faith cannot be accepted by those whose hearts follow their eyes. This faith is loved by those who know the majesty of God and the justice of eternity. For them it is joy to meditate on the majesty of the immortal God in the midst of the stench of death all around them. And it is a joy for them to walk in the way of justice, being surrounded by injustice. The sublimity of God attracts them, and the beauty of justice captivates them. They walk in the way of justice, but do not rely on their own deeds, but on the grace of God. The more righteous they are, the more they await Christ's judgment with fear. But the unrighteous commit injustice, because they have no fear of the Judgment of Christ.

Blessed are they who await the coming of the Lord in power and glory, and help the little brothers of Christ as though they were helping Christ Himself. Blessed are they who watch for the Beloved One, the Most-Beloved One, with vigilance, alertness, watchfulness, and expectation. Truly, they will await Him and greet Him like the five wise virgins. And He will lead them into Paradise, and they will reign with Him forever.

Is this not your faith, O Christ-bearers, and the faith of your most righteous forefathers? Let it also be the faith of your children, from generation to generation. 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 within themselves. On the Judgment Day of Christ they shall be called blessed!

ST. THEODORE STRATELATES THE GREAT MARTYR

Commemorated on February 8



The Great Martyr Theodore Stratelates came from the city of Euchantum. He was endowed with many talents and a handsome appearance. For his charity God enlightened him with the perfective knowledge of Christian truth. The bravery of the saintly soldier became known to many after he, with the help of God, killed a giant serpent living on a precipice in the surroundings of

the city of Euchantum. The serpent had devoured many people and animals, holding in terror all the surrounding countryside. Saint Theodore, having armed himself with a sword and a prayer to the Lord, vanquished it, glorifying amongst the people the Name of Christ. For his bravery Saint Theodore was appointed military commander [stratelates] in the city of Heracleium, where he as it were carried out a dual obedience, combining his official military service with an apostolic preaching of the Gospel among the pagans subject to him. His ardent persuasion, reinforced by his personal example of Christian life, turned away many from the pernicious "false-gods." Soon nearly all of Heracleium had accepted Christianity.

During this time the emperor Licinius (307-324) began a fierce persecution against Christians. Wanting to decapitate the new faith, he resorted to making persecution against the enlightened adherents of Christianity, in which not without foundation he saw as the fundamental threat to the dying paganism. Among such was also St. Theodore. The saint himself invited Licinius to Heracleium, having promised him to offer a sacrifice to the pagan gods. To make this splendid ceremony, the saint requested to be gathered up at his house all the gold and silver statues of the gods which they had in Heracleium.

Blinded by his hatred for Christianity, Licinius trusted the words of the saint. But his expectations were cheated: having seized hold of the statues, St. Theodore smashed them into pieces which he then distributed to the poor. Thus he shamed the vain faith in soulless idols and literally on the shards of paganism he affirmed the laws of Christian charity.

St. Theodore was arrested and subjected to fierce and refined torture. The witness was the servant of the saint, St. Varos, who barely found in himself the strength to write down the incredible torments of his master. Sensing the nearness of death, St. Theodore yet turned to God with a last prayer, saying: *Lord, Thou hast told me formerly, I am with thee, wherefore dost Thou now abandon me? Behold, O Lord, how the wild beasts do tear at me on account of Thee, my eyes are gored out, my flesh lacer-*

ated with wounds, the face is smashed and teeth broken, and they have my bared bones on a cross: remember me, O Lord, having suffered a cross on account of Thee, the iron and fire, and being raised up on nails for Thee: wherefore accept my spirit, since my life doth expire.

God, however, by His great mercy, willed that the end of St. Theodore should be as fruitful for those near him as was his life: He healed the bruised body of the saint and brought him down from the cross, on which he had been left all night. In the morning the imperial soldiers found him alive and unharmed; persuaded in their own eyes of the infinite might of the Christian God, they, right there, not far from the place of the unsuccessful execution, accepted holy Baptism.

Thus the saint became *like a day of splendor* for those pagans dwelling in the darkness of idol-worship and he enlightened their souls *with the bright rays of his suffering*. Not wanting to flee a martyr's death for Christ, St. Theodore voluntarily gave himself over into the hands of Licinius, preventing the people believing in Christ from rising up against the torturer, with the words: *Beloved, halt! My Lord Jesus Christ, hanging upon the Cross, held back the Angels and did not permit them to take revenge on the race of man*. Going to execution, the holy martyr with but a word opened up the prison doors and liberated those locked up from their bonds. The people also who touched at his robe were restored of body, healed instantly from sicknesses and freed from demons. By order of the emperor, St. Theodore was beheaded by the sword. Before the death by execution he told Varos: *Neglect not to write down the day of my death, and put my body in Euchantum*. Together with these words he asked for an annual remembrance. Then, having said *amen*, he bent his neck beneath the sword. This occurred on 8 February 319, on a Saturday, at the third hour of the day.



Abba, I fast and eat a couple of loaves on alternate days. Will I save my soul, or am I going astray? Abba, from the proceeds of my handiwork I spend two small coins a day, I keep little food and give the rest away in alms. Will I be saved or perish?

The questions seemed fairly routine but Abbot Pambo did not treat them lightly. He remained silent for three days because he did not speak readily, unless God inspired him. So, finally, he at last spoke: *Pambo fasts and eats a couple of loaves on alternate days. Will he become a monk through this? No. Pambo works for two small coins and gives these away in alms. Will he become a monk through this? Not at all.* Then he said: *“Ascetical practices are good. But if you keep your conscience clear with regard to your neighbor, that is what brings salvation.*

And consoled, they departed with joy.

From Like a Pelican in the Wilderness

CHILDREN MUST LEARN EARLY TO LOVE GOD

By Elder Silouan of Mount Athos

A group of little children were playing. They were running about, picking flowers, singing, and rejoicing, because the grace of God made them happy. Then they saw a monk who was crying.

“Look,” they said to him, “the Lord decorated the heavens with stars and the earth with rivers and gardens; hawks fly high above the clouds and enjoy the beauty of nature; birds sing beautifully in the fields, but you, a monk, sit in your cell and do not see the whole beauty of God. You just sit and cry. What are you crying about in your little cell, when the sun is shining, the world is full of beauty, and there is joy everywhere on earth?”

“Children,” replied the monk, “you do not understand my tears. My soul cries for you because you do not know God, Who created all this beauty. My soul knows Him, and I want all of you to know Him, too. That is why I am sorrowful, and with tears I pray to God for you, that you would also come to know the Lord through the Holy Spirit.”

“What does it mean, to come to know the Lord through the Holy Spirit?”

“You cannot know God with your mind. But when you read the Holy Scriptures, where the Holy Spirit dwells, it will delight you, and so you will come to know God and will serve Him with joy day and night. When you know God, the desire to think only about the things of this world will leave you, and your soul will strive to see the glory of God in the heavens.”

“But we like flowers, and we love playing and having fun.”

“You love roaming through the fields and picking flowers; you love singing and listening to the chirping of birds. But there is something much more wonderful than all this in the heavens: Paradise, where the Lord lives with the angels and the saints. In Paradise there is also rejoicing and singing of songs -- but another, better kind. And when the soul hears those songs, it can never forget them, and earthly songs no longer attract it.”

“But we love to sing.”

“Sing, my children, to the Lord through the Holy Spirit. Sing in humility and love.”

“Still, we don't understand why it is you are crying.”

“I cry for you, my children. Looking at you, I pity you, and I ask the Lord that He would protect you, so that you would come to know your Creator and Lord. I look at you and, there, you look like children of Christ. As you grow up, may you not lose the grace of God; may you not begin to look like your enemy, with bad thoughts. It is my desire for you that you look like the Son of the Most Pure Mother of God. This is what my soul desires. This is what I pray for. I feel pity for you, children on the earth. I cry for all innocent children and orphans. I cry, my children, for the world, and I mourn for all the people of God.”

“O Lord, send down Thy grace upon the children of the earth, children whom Thou lovest. Grant them to love Thee through the Holy Spirit, and teach them to glorify Thee. With tears I beseech Thee: hearken to my prayer, and grant everyone to come to know Thy glory through the Holy Spirit. Children, love God like the angels love Him in the heavens.”

“We have never seen God. How can we love Him?”

“My beloved children, think always of God: that He loves you and gave you life in order that you might live with Him forever and bask in His love.”

“How can we know that God loves us?”

“Love is recognized by its fruit, my children. When we are in the love of God, we fear sin, there is peace and joy in the soul, we want to remember God all the time, we want to pray, and there are good thoughts in the soul.”

“How can we find out what kind of thoughts dwell in us, and which of them are good and which are bad?”

“So that you can tell good thoughts from bad thoughts, you have to keep your mind pure in God.”

“We do not understand how we can keep our mind in God, when we have never seen God and do not know Him. And what does a pure mind mean?”

“My children, think about the fact that God sees you, even though you don't see Him. Keep this thought in mind, and you will always walk before the eyes of God. Although it is a small love, when you keep my word, it will grow into a big love, and then, through the Holy Spirit, you will come to know what it is that I am telling you and all that you do not yet understand.”



MAINTAIN THY VIGILANCE

As Orthodox Christians, we should not walk with our heads in the clouds, and neither should we relax our vigilance. If we truly respect people's lives, if we truly hurt for those tormented by the dead-end religious traditions of the western world, and also for those trapped in the demonic beliefs of the east, we have an obligation to remain attached to our Holy Church -- to keep the traditional Faith of our Fathers pure and unadulterated, and to live/experience, authentically, our daily struggle for our own personal holiness and deification. The right Faith, and a life correctly lived, will make us capable of being, [not only] a good Orthodox witness, but also (and why not?) of [being prepared for] martyrdom, if and when the time demands it.

The adherence to Orthodoxy, that is, to the genuineness of life, and the perseverance in the Truth that liberates and saves, is not egoistic, fanatic or intolerant. It expresses an ecumenical dimension: the love and philanthropy of the Orthodox Church. It constitutes the last opportunity for a radical spiritual change in the west, [as well as] a way out for the east from its entrapment by false gods.

(From a pamphlet by a monastery in Greece)

I HAVE FOUND THE DRACHMA I HAD LOST

By the Rev. Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and St. Vlassios

The start of 2002 was accompanied by a very important event which was the monetary union of Europe. It is believed that this was the preamble of its political union, with the hope that it will not also imply the cultural union of Europe, because Europe is and must remain a multicultural society.

For the Greeks, Europe's monetary union signaled the loss of the drachma, a currency with a history of many centuries, and its replacement with the euro which is currently used in transactions. Certainly, the euro's circulation has many advantages. It is not our purpose in this article to proceed to economic and monetary analyses. We would mostly like to emphasize some other truths.

The word drachma derives from the Greek verb “dratto -- δράττω,” meaning something that one can grab with his hands, and was the currency circulating in ancient Greece. It has been written that it has a history of 2,700 years. It was established as a currency in ancient Greece in the 7th century BC by Phaedon, who ascended to the temple of Hera and deposited a “pack of obolos” and thus replaced obolos with the drachma. From the mid-6th century on, the drachma became the prevailing currency in most Greek cities. In fact it was used by Alexander the Great who issued the four-drachma coins with which he paid his soldiers and gave a “dowry” to the newlyweds and used it in his campaigns along with the gold stater.

Because of this, the drachma was circulating in Palestine during Christ's times. It was a money Christ used, together with Jewish and Roman money. In the New Testament there survive two incidents involving the drachma.

The first one took place in Capernaum, when “they that received the two-drachmas [“tribute money” in the English translation] came to Peter and said: Doth not your master pay the two-drachmas?” (Matt.17, 24). This was a tax paid by Jews everywhere for the Temple. The two-drachma coin was the attic money, equivalent to two attic drachmas or one Alexandrian drachma. Christ then said to Peter that taxation is not proper for free citizens, but in order not to create a scandal ordered him to cast a hook into the sea and in the first fish he would catch he would find a stater equivalent to four drachmas. This he should give to the person asking him, in order to avoid creating a scandal for those who ask (Matt. 17, 25-27).

The second incident from the New Testament and the life of Christ related to the drachma is a parable narrated by Christ in which He presents the work He accomplished with His incarnation. After referring to the example of the shepherd who found his lost sheep, leaving aside the other ninety-nine sheep, and celebrated by calling his friends, he then used the example of the lost drachma.

“Either what woman having ten drachmas [“pieces of silver” in the English translation], if she lose one drachma, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she had found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the drachma which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Lk 15, 8-10)

According to holy Theophylaktos, this parable is associated with the work of God’s love and philanthropy which was richly manifested with His incarnation. The woman depicts the Father’s wisdom and power, who is the Son and Word of God, who lost a drachma by the logical beings -- the angels -- and this drachma is man, created in the image of God. To find this lost drachma, that is, man, “He lights His own flesh as a candle.” As the candle illumines all darkness, by the light it has received, so Christ’s flesh illumined the whole world by the light of His deity. After the illumination, “the house was swept, that is the whole world was purified from sin,” because Christ Himself bore the sin and liberated man from it. This way, “the drachma, the royal image, was found.”

Man, who is implied by the drachma, is the image of Christ the King, because he has the noetic and self-rule qualities, namely nous and freedom, which are found in no other creatures. So Christ celebrates this event, just like the woman did with her friends and neighbors. In other words, Christ celebrated with the angels in heaven for finding the lost man. The angels are called friendly powers because they obey His will, and neighbors because they are closer to God. Man is the lost drachma found by Christ, he is the royal image found by the incarnated Christ.

Here we see the question of what man is and how great his value is. The ancient Greeks dealt with the problem of man. Alkmaion of Kroton said, as preserved by Theophrastos: “It is said that man differs from other animals because he has intelligence, while the others have senses but not intelligence.” Menander’s saying is also well known: “How graceful man is when he is a man.”

The holy Fathers study extensively man and his worth as created in the image of God. St. Gregory the Theologian, to confine myself to him, is very expressive. In one of his sermons he says: “What is this new mystery about me? I am small and great, humble and noble, mortal and immortal, earthly and heavenly”. The first are of this world, while the second are of God, the first are attributes of the flesh, the other attributes of the Spirit. And he concludes by describing the purpose of man’s existence, which shows his ontology and inner objective: “I must be buried together with Christ, be risen with Christ, inherit with Christ, become a son of God, this God”.

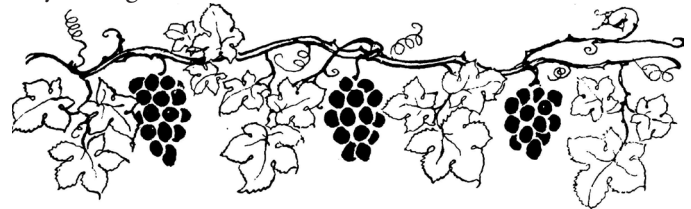
In another sermon, St. Gregory the Theologian, after discussing man’s creation, which followed the creation of angels and of the perceptible world, so as to be a kind of second world, a

great one in his smallness, he then talks about man, as created by God: “Another angel, pilgrim, combination, overseer of the visible creation, partaker of the invisible, king over earth, under the king of heaven, earthly and heavenly, temporal and eternal, visible and invisible, a measure of humbleness, spirit and flesh together.” He then gives another definition which is the summary of the entire Orthodox anthropology and Christology and soteriology. Man is “an animal residing here but transferring elsewhere, and the end of this mystery is to move towards God.” That is, man resides on earth but moves elsewhere and the end of this mystery is for him to become God by grace. And, as he says subsequently, the dim gleam of truth he finds here on earth leads to the vision of God’s brightness.

The problem for us Orthodox is neither the drachma, which is a currency for commercial transactions, nor the euro, but the person, the royal image, man, who has a high destination and a high mission and can be neither identified nor replaced by the drachma or the euro. The person can not become a slave and pawn to objects. Objects must be subjugated to the person. Man is the found drachma, or the new euro, that has the royal image on him and is worthy this royal honour.

These days, among discussions on the value of the euro, there was one sentence written in a newspaper which demonstrates the tragedy of this issue: “How many euros does it cost to find fellowship?” (Eleftherotypia newspaper). Someone who experiences loneliness, the absence of love, does not benefit from the circulation of the euro.

The point is that each one of us should neither cry for the lost drachma nor rejoice too much with the found euro, but rather repeat the woman’s words in the parable: “I have found the drachma which I had lost,” that is, I found the meaning of life and proved worthy of my royal value with which Christ created and recreated me, and of course, he who “finds” the Royal image “will receive his due.”



The very name, “*World Council of Churches*,” contains the entire heresy of this pseudo-ecclesial organization. The church is One and Catholic, and in it is all Truth, all Grace, and all that that the Lord brought with Him to the earth and gave to the people, and left among them for their salvation. The Church is One and Catholic because it gathers all who desire salvation into one, into wholeness, which is the Body of the God-Man Christ. Hence the very idea of a “*council*” or “*union*” of churches is unthinkable, inadmissible and unacceptable to the consciousness and conscience of the Orthodox person.

Bishop Artemije of Raska and Prizren (Serbia)

Ο Πάπα-Εφραίμ Ο Κατουνακιώτης

Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου και Αγίου Βλασίου Γεροθέου Βλάχου, από την «Εκκλησιαστική Παρέμβαση», τεύχος 87

Τὴν νύκτα ἀπὸ 26 ἕως 27 Φεβρουαρίου 1998 μὲ τὸ νέο ἡμερολόγιο κοιμήθηκε ἐν Κυρίῳ στὸν ἁγιασμένο Ἄθωνα, τὸ Ἀγιώνυμο Ὅρος, «τὸν σεβάσιμον χῶρον, τὴν τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐστία», ὅπως τὸ ἀποκαλεῖ ὁ ἀγιορείτης ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, ἕνα ἁγιασμένο καὶ εὐδῶδες ἄνθος ἀπὸ τὸ Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας, καὶ μάλιστα ἀπὸ τὸ περιβόλι τῆς ἐρήμου τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους, ὁ παπα-Ἐφραίμ ὁ Κατουνακιώτης.

Ἀργησε νὰ γίνῃ γνωστὴ ἡ κοίμησις τοῦ εὐλογημένου καὶ ἁγίου αὐτοῦ Γέροντος, γιατί ὁ παπα-Ἐφραίμ ἀνήκε στὴν κατηγορία ἐκείνων τῶν μοναχῶν ποὺ δὲν ἐπιδιώκουν τὴν προβολή, ἀλλὰ παραμένουν μέσα στὸ μυστήριο τῆς ἡσυχίας, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ μεγαλύτερη κραυγὴ γι' αὐτοὺς ποὺ μποροῦν νὰ καταλάβουν τὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος. Δυστυχῶς, ἡ σύγχρονη ἐπιστήμη τῆς πληροφορικῆς ἀσχολεῖται μὲ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ ζοῦν μέσα στὸ σύστημα τῆς διαμορφώσεως τῆς κοινῆς γνώμης, ἐνῶ ἀγνοεῖ τὶς ἡρωϊκὲς ἐκεῖνες μορφές ποὺ ζοῦν μέσα στὴν ἐλευθερία τοῦ πνεύματος, ἀφοῦ ἀπηλλάγησαν ἀπὸ τὸν νόμο τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ τῆς κτιστότητος.

Ὁ παπα-Ἐφραίμ ἔζησε στὰ Κατουνακία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους ἐξήντα πέντε χρόνια, ἐντρυνώντας στὰ μυστήρια τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς, καὶ ρουφώντας ἀχόρταγα ἀπὸ τὸ μέλι τῆς ἡσυχίας. Ζοῦσε τὴν κατὰ Θεὸνσχόλη. Μετὰ ἀπὸ πενήντα σχεδὸν χρόνια ἀσκητικῆς ζωῆς στὸν μυροβόλο Ἄθωνα, στὴν ἐρημο τῶν Κατουνακίων βγήκε γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ στὴν Θεσσαλονίκη γιὰ μίαν ἀσθένειά του. Ἦταν ἀγνωστος γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀλλὰ τόσο γνωστὸς γιὰ τὸν Θεό.

Ἀξιῶθηκα ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ νὰ τὸν γνωρίσω πρὶν ἀπὸ εἴκοσι περίπου χρόνια σὲ μίαν κατάστασι ἡσυχίας του. Μοῦ ἔκανε τεράστια ἐντύπωση ἡ προσωπικότητά του. Ἡ μορφή του ἀκτινοβολοῦσε ἀπὸ τὸ θεῖο Φῶς, μέσα στὸ ὅποιο λουζόταν καθημερινά: τὰ μάτια του ἦταν ἀπαστράπτοντα καὶ ἀνέδιδαν ἰδιαιτέρη λάμψη. Μόλις τὸν ἔβλεπε κανεὶς, ἀντιλαμβάνονταν ὅτι δὲν ἦταν συνηθισμένος ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλὰ εἶχε κατὰ Χάρη ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς εἶχε κατὰ φύσιν· εἶχε κατὰ μετουσίαν αὐτὸ ποὺ ὁ Θεὸς εἶχε κατ' οὐσίαν. Ὅλα αὐτὰ ποὺ γράφω δὲν εἶναι λογοτεχνικὰ σχήματα, ποὺ ὠραιοποιοῦν τὶς καταστάσεις, ἀλλὰ εἶναι λιγότερα ἀπὸ τὴν πραγματικότητα ποὺ ἀντιλαμβάνονταν κανεὶς, πλησιάζοντας αὐτὴν τὴν ἁγιασμένη μορφή. Ὅταν γράφω γιὰ τὸ πρόσωπο, τὴν μορφή του καὶ τὰ μάτια του, δὲν τὰ γράφω μὲ κοσμικὴ νοοτροπία, ἀλλὰ μέσα ἀπὸ πνευματικὲς ἐμπειρίες. Καὶ αὐτὸ

φαινόταν κυριολεκτικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια τὰ ὅποια ἔλεγε, ποὺ ἦταν λόγια θεόπνευστα καὶ ἀπαστράπτοντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν κατασκευαστικὴ καὶ ἐνδοξη ἀτμόσφαιρα ποὺ δημιουργοῦσε κατὰ τὴν διάρκειά τῆς συνομιλίας.

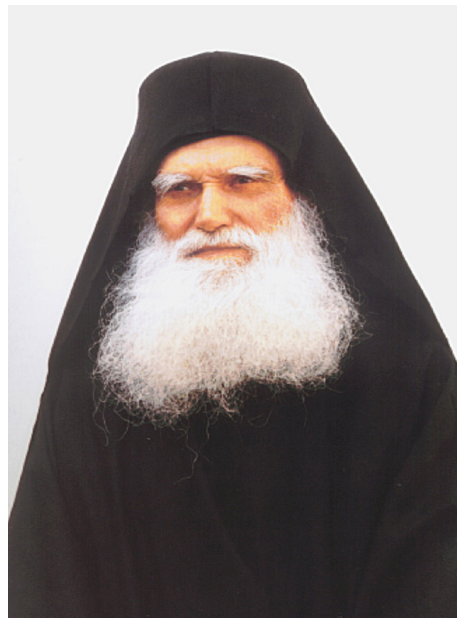
Ὁ παπα-Ἐφραίμ ἦταν ἕνας ἁγιασμένος μοναχὸς ποὺ ζοῦσε μέσα στὴν ἐγκαρπο ἡσυχία. Συνεχῶς προσευχόταν καὶ ζοῦσε τὶς ἐμπειρίες τοῦ Φωτός. Πολλὲς φορὲς δεχόταν καὶ τὶς σατανικὲς ἐμφανίσεις. Ἀγωνίστηκε χρόνια γιὰ νὰ καθαρῆ ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, μὲ τὴν ἀρετὴ τῆς ὑπακοῆς στὸν Γέροντά του. Ἔκανε τελεία καὶ ἀδιάκριτη ὑπακοή, σὰν ἐκεῖνη ποὺ ἰσοδυναμεῖ μὲ μαρτύριο, καὶ μόνον λίγοι μποροῦν νὰ τὴν καταλάβουν. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς καὶ ἦταν κατάφορτος ἀπὸ ὅλους ἐκείνους τοὺς ξηροὺς, ἀλλὰ εὐχημοὺς καρποῦς τῆς ἡσυχαστικῆς καὶ ἐρημικῆς αὐτῆς ζωῆς. Ἐτρεφε μεγάλη ἀγάπη πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ τὸν πλησίαζαν, εἶχε μίαν ἀγάπη ποὺ ὑπερέβαινε ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν μεγαλύτερη ἀγάπη τῆς μάνας γιὰ τὰ παιδιά της. Ὅταν τὸν πλησίαζε κανεὶς μὲ ἀπλότητα, ἀφηνόταν στὴν θάλασσα τῆς ἀρρενωπῆς

ἀγάπης του. Γιατί ἡ ἀγάπη του ἦταν ἄλλης προελεύσεως καὶ ἄλλης ὕψους. Μιλοῦσε ἀκόμη γιὰ τὴν ὑπακοή στοὺς Πνευματικὸς Πατέρας καὶ μάλιστα συνιστοῦσε τὴν ἀδιάκριτη ὑπακοή. Καὶ ἐνῶ συνιστοῦσε ἀδιάκριτη ὑπακοή, ἐν τούτοις ἦταν πολὺ διακριτικὸς κατὰ τὴν διάρκειά τῆς πνευματικῆς καθοδηγήσεως τῶν ἄλλων. Εἶχε σὲ ἔντονο βαθμὸ τὸ διορατικὸ χάρισμα, ἀφοῦ ἔβλεπε μὲ τὰ λαμπερὰ μάτια του καὶ κυρίως μὲ τὸν διορατικὸ ὀφθαλμὸ τῆς ψυχῆς του ὅλα ὅσα συνέβαιναν μέσα στὴν καρδιά τοῦ συνομιλητοῦ του. Καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη του ἐπενέβαινε διακριτικὰ καὶ σοφά.

Μοῦ ἔτυχε νὰ γνωρίσω περιστατικὰ στὰ ὅποια φαίνεται ὅτι ὁ Γέροντας ἀγαποῦσε πολὺ αὐτοὺς ποὺ εἶχαν ἀμαρτήσῃ, ἀλλὰ μέσα τοὺς αἰσθάνονταν βαθύτατο πόνον. Καταλάβαινε αὐτὸν τὸν

πόνον καὶ ἔλουζε τὸν ἄλλο μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη του. Αὐτὸν ποὺ ἡ κοινωνία ἦταν ἔτοιμη νὰ βάλῃ στὴν φυλακή, ὡς ἐπικίνδυνον ἄνθρωπον, ὁ Γέροντας τὸν ἔκλεινε στὴν «φυλακή» τῆς ἀγάπης του, ποὺ ταυτόχρονα ἦταν χῶρος πνευματικῆς ἐλευθερίας.

Εἶχα τὴν μεγάλη εὐλογία ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ μερικὲς φορὲς νὰ μιλήσω μαζί του γιὰ θέματα πνευματικῆς ζωῆς. Εἶχε διαβάσει μερικὰ βιβλία μου καὶ θέλησε νὰ μοῦ ἀποκαλύψῃ πολλὰς ἀθέατες, ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς, πλευρὲς τῆς ζωῆς τῶν θεουμένων ἁγίων, γιὰ νὰ τὰ γράψω πρὸς ὠφέλειαν τῶν ἀδελφῶν. Μὲ νοσταλγία θυμᾶμαι μίαν ἀνεπανάληπτη ἡμέρα ποὺ ὁ παπα-Ἐφραίμ ἀνοῖξε τὴν καρδιά του καὶ μοῦ ἔλεγε γιὰ τὰ μυστήρια τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς. Μοῦ ἔλεγε γιὰ τὴν σημασία καὶ τὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῶν δακρύων τῆς μετανοίας, πῶς καθαρίζεται ὅλο τὸ λογιστικὸ ἀπὸ τὰ δάκρυα, γιὰ τὸ ὅτι τὰ δάκρυα δὲν ἔχουν σχέση μὲ τὴν θεωρία τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀφοῦ,



Παπα-Ἐφραίμ ὁ Κατουνακιώτης (+ 1998)

ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος βλέπῃ τὸ ἄκτιστο Φῶς, τότε σταματοῦν τὰ δάκρυα, γιὰ τὴν ἐμπειρία ποὺ εἶχε τῆς θεωρίας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅταν εἶδε τρία Φῶτα, τὴν Ἁγία Τριάδα, τὰ ὁποῖα Φῶτα πλημμύρισαν ὅλο τὸν χῶρο τοῦ κελιοῦ του καὶ τὸν ἀγκάλιασαν, γιὰ τὴν συνηθισμένη στάση τοῦ σώματος κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῆς θεωρίας καὶ τόσα ἄλλα.

Ἐνθυμοῦμαι ὅτι ἔμεινα ἀλαλος ἀκούγοντας αὐτὲς τὶς ἐμπειρίες τοῦ θείου Φωτός. Καὶ ἦταν πέρα γιὰ πέρα ἀληθινές, δηλαδή δὲν εἶχαν ἴχνος φαντασίας καὶ ἀρρωστημένων συναισθηματικῶν καταστάσεων, γιατί ἦταν ἀποτέλεσμα μακροχρόνιου ἀγώνα καθάρσεως, ἀφοῦ ὁ παπα-Ἐφραίμ ζούσε μέσα στὴν ἀφάνεια καὶ τὴν σιωπῇ, ἀποφεύγοντας τὴν ἐπίδειξη, ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν ἐπικοινωνία μὲ πολλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ κυρίως εἶχε τὸ χάρισμα τῆς μεγάλης ἀγάπης, μιᾶς ἀγάπης ποὺ δὲν γνώριζε ὅρους καὶ ὅρια.

Ὁ παπα-Ἐφραίμ δὲν ἔλεγε μόνο τέτοιες ὑψηλὲς πνευματικὲς καταστάσεις, ἀλλὰ τόνιζε ἰδιαίτερος τὸν τρόπο καὶ τὸν δρόμο τὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει νὰ ἀκολουθήσουμε γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦμε. Στους προσκυνητὰς του τόνιζε τὴν ἀξία τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως σὲ πνευματικὸ Πατέρα, διότι ἔτσι καθαρίζεται ἡ καρδιά ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη. Μοῦ ἔλεγε ἀκόμη ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν πάει στὸ Μοναστήρι γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθῇ, ἀλλὰ γίνεται μοναχὸς γιὰ νὰ κἀνῃ ὑπακοή, διότι δι' αὐτοῦ τοῦ τρόπου θεραπεύεται, ὅποτε ἡ ὑπακοὴ θὰ φέρῃ ὅπωςδῆποτε τὴν ἀδιάλειπτη προσευχή, καὶ ἡ προσευχή θὰ φέρῃ τὴν θεολογία.

Γιὰ νὰ δῆ κανεῖς τὴν μεγάλη προσωπικότητα τοῦ Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ θὰ ἤθελα νὰ ἀναφέρω ἓνα παράδειγμα ποὺ ὁ ἴδιος μοῦ διηγήθηκε. Κάποιος νέος ἐπισκέπτης του μὲ πολὺ ἄσχημο παρελθὸν καὶ χωρὶς διάθεση μετανοίας, κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῆς συνομιλίας μὲ τὸν Γέροντα, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἐκεῖνος τοῦ μιλοῦσε γαλήνια καὶ κατανυκτικά, ἔπεσε ἀπότομα στὰ πόδια του καὶ ξέσπασε σὲ λυγμούς. Τὸν ἄφησε ὁ μέγας Γέροντας γιὰ πολὺ ὥρα καὶ στὴν συνέχεια ὡς θεόπτης Μωϋσῆς τὸν παρηγόρησε, τὸν ἐνέπνευσε καὶ τὸν καθοδήγησε. Ὅταν ἔφυγε ὁ νέος ἐκεῖνος, ὁ Γέροντας πετοῦσε ἀπὸ τὴν χαρὰ του, μιὰ ὑπερκόσμια ὄχι συναισθηματικὴ χαρὰ εἶχε κατακλύσει τὴν ἁγιασμένη του ὑπακοή καὶ εἶπε: «σώθηκε αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος». Ὅταν τὸν ρώτησα πῶς τὸ κατάλαβε, εἶπε: «ἡ παράδοξη καὶ ἀνέκφραστη αὐτὴ χαρὰ, ποὺ ἦταν ἐπίσκεψη τῆς θείας Χάριτος δὲν ἐξηγεῖται διαφορετικά».

Δὲν μπορῶ νὰ γράψω περισσότερα γιὰ τὴν ἁγιασμένη αὐτὴν μορφή. Ὅσοι τὸν γνώρισαν καλύτερα εἶμαι βέβαιοι ὅτι θὰ γράψουν γιὰ νὰ παρηγορηθῇ ὁ κόσμος, γιὰ νὰ καταλάβῃ ὅτι καὶ στὶς ἡμέρες μας, τὶς τόσο ὑποβαθμισμένες ἀπὸ ὑψηλὰ νοήματα καὶ ὑψηλὰ πρότυπα βίου καὶ ζωῆς, ὑπάρχουν ἅγιοι, ἀστέρες ποὺ λάμπουν στὸ στερέωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὑπάρχουν μυρίνοια ἄνθη τοῦ Παραδείσου.

Ὅταν ἐπισκέπτομαι τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος αἰσθάνομαι βαθύτατη κατάνυξη καὶ συντριβή. Αἰσθάνομαι τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος ὡς ἓναν τόπο μυστηρίου. Σέβομαι τὰ πάντα, ἀκόμη καὶ τὸ μικρὸ χορταράκι. Διότι ὅλη ἡ κτίση ἐξαγιάζεται ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπακοή τῶν θεομένων ἁγίων ποὺ ζοῦν ἐκεῖ, καὶ αἰσθάνονται ἀναλογικὰ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶτε καθαρτικὰ εἶτε φωτιστικὰ εἶτε θεωτικὰ. Σέβομαι ἀπεριόριστα τὰ Μοναστήρια καὶ τὰ

ταπεινὰ κελιά, σέβομαι τὸ χῶμα ποὺ πατῶ, γιατί κάτω ἀπὸ αὐτὸ κρύβονται, εἶναι θαμμένα σώματα ἁγίων, ὅπως τοῦ παπα-Ἐφραίμ. Πόσες ἐξαγιασμένες μορφές δὲν πέρασαν ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, πάνω ἀπὸ χίλια χρόνια, ποὺ ἐφθασαν ἀπὸ τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα στὸ καθ' ὁμοίωση, ποὺ εἶδαν τὸν Θεὸ καὶ λαμπρύνθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ θεῖο Φῶς Του!

Λένε μερικοὶ ὅτι καθὼς βαδίζουν στὴν ἔρημο τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὅρους, κατὰ καιροὺς, ἀναβλύζει μιὰ παράδοξη εὐωδία, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὰ κτιστὰ λουλούδια. Εἶναι εὐωδία ποὺ προέρχεται ἀπὸ ἅγια σώματα ἁγίων ἀσκητῶν, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐγιναν κατοικητήρια τοῦ ζῶντος Θεοῦ καὶ ναοὶ τοῦ Παναγίου Πνεύματος.

Ὅσπερ Ἐφραίμ, ἔνδοξο ἄνθος τοῦ Περιβολιοῦ τῆς Παναγίας, πνευματικὸ ἀστέρι τοῦ νοητοῦ στερέωματος, συμπόλιτη τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖε τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐπίγειε ἄγγελε καὶ οὐράνιε ἄνθρωπε, ἀγαπημένο παιδί τῆς Παναγίας καὶ εὐλογημένο μέλος τοῦ Σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εὐλόγησε τὸν λαὸ ποὺ γνώρισες καὶ ἀγάπησες, ὅλους ἐμᾶς, ποὺ παρὰ τὴν ἀναξιότητά μας, δεχθήκαμε τὴν φιλοσοργία σου...



Ὁ Πατέρας καὶ ὁ Ρόλος του

Τοῦ Β. Κ. Κοινονασιίου

Στὶς περισσότερες Ἑλληνικὲς οἰκογένειες θεωροῦν ὅτι Σὴ σημαντικότερη βοήθεια τῶν γονιῶν στὴν ἀγωγή τῶν παιδιῶν τους εἶναι ἡ φροντίδα γιὰ τὴ σωστὴ σωματικὴ ἀνάπτυξη καὶ ὑγεία καὶ ἡ βοήθεια νὰ πᾶνε καλὰ στὰ μαθήματά τους. Τὴ φροντίδα αὐτὴ τὴν ἀναλαμβάνουν σὲ σημαντικότατο ποσοστὸ οἱ μητέρες. Συνήθως οἱ πατεράδες ἀρκοῦνται σὲ μία παρακολούθηση τῆς ὅλης προσπάθειας, ἔχοντας ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴ μητέρα τῶν παιδιῶν τους.

Ὁ ρόλος τοῦ πατέρα ὅμως στὸ σπῆτι εἶναι πολὺ πιὸ σημαντικὸς ἀπὸ ὅσο ἐκτιμᾶται ἀπὸ τὴν παραπάνω ἀντίληψη. Εἶναι ἐξίσου ἀπαραίτητος, ὅπως καὶ τῆς μητέρας, καὶ ἀναντικατάστατος. Ἡ πολὺ σωστὴ καὶ ἀναμφισβήτητη ἀντίληψη γιὰ τὴν ἰσότητα τῶν δυὸ φύλων δὲν πρέπει νὰ ὀδηγῇ στὴ σκέψη τῆς ὁμοιότητάς τους. Ὑπάρχουν ἀνδρικὰ καὶ γυναικεῖα πρότυπα. Καὶ εἶναι διαφορετικὰ μεταξὺ τους. Γιὰ τὴ σωστὴ ἀγωγή τῶν παιδιῶν στὴν οἰκογένεια χρειάζεται καὶ τὸ ἀνδρικὸ καὶ τὸ γυναικεῖο πρότυπο. Καὶ ἔχει τὸ κάθε πρότυπο τὰ δικά του χαρακτηριστικὰ. Καὶ εἶναι λάθος ἡ ἀντίληψη ὅτι ἡ κόρη χρειάζεται τὸ γυναικεῖο πρότυπο καὶ ὁ γιὸς τὸ ἀνδρικό.

Ὁ πατέρας θὰ δώσῃ σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκογένεια τὸ πρότυπο τῆς δύναμης τοῦ χαρακτήρα, τῆς αὐτοπεποίθησης, τῆς σταθερότητας κάποιων ἀξιῶν, τῆς δημιουργικότητας καὶ ἀποτελεσματικότητας τῶν ἐνεργειῶν, τῆς ἀντοχῆς στὶς δυσκολίες, τῆς σιωπηλῆς παραδοχῆς, τῆς ἐμπιστοσύνης

στις ατομικές δυνάμεις, των λίγων λόγων, τής σοβαρότητας. Αυτός θα δώσει το σωστό ανδρικό πρότυπο για έγκριση και μίμηση στο γιο και για θαυμασμό και σωστή επιλογή μελλοντικού συντρόφου στην κόρη. Η αυτοπεποίθηση τής ατομικότητας του δυνατού πατέρα είναι εκείνη που θα οδηγήσει τα παιδιά στην ανεξαρτητοποίηση και απελευθέρωση. Η αυθεντικότητά του δεν θα γοητεύει δεσμευτικά και σαηγευτικά και δεν θα παραλύει γοητευτικά τη δημιουργία ανεξαρτήτων και διαφορετικών ατομικότητων. Από τον πατέρα θα μάθουν να μη δισταίνουν να διαφωνούν και να άμφισβητούν τις επιλογές των άλλων, όσο κι αν αυτοί οι άλλοι επικρατούν μέσα στην κοινωνία, αν οι ίδιοι δεν συμφωνούν.

Ο πατέρας θα οδηγεί και θα καθοδηγεί με τη ζωή του, με το παράδειγμά του. Δεν θα διδάσκει με λόγια. Δεν θα κάνει κήρυγμα. Δεν θα κουράζει νουθετώντας. Δεν θα πουλάει σοφία. Θα άκτινοβολεί ώριμότητα, θα εκπέμπει άνδρισμό, γενναιότητα, έμπιστοσύνη. Δε θα κάνει βίαιες και ανακλαστικές ενέργειες. Θα είναι ή ήρεμη δύναμη του άσάλευτου βράχου.

Ο ρόλος του πατέρα είναι διαφορετικός από της μητέρας. Ο πατέρας διδάσκει όχι κυρίως με λόγια. Διδάσκει με έργα, διδάσκει με την παρουσία του στο σπίτι, διδάσκει με όσα κάνει αλλά και με όσα άποφεύγει να κάνει, αν και τα μπορεί, άκριβώς γιατί είναι ο πατέρας στο σπίτι. Γιατί έτσι είναι σίγουρος ότι κάποτε και ο γιός του και ή κόρη του θα του πούνε όσα έγραψε σε έφημερίδα σε ένα ποιήμά του με τον παράξενο τίτλο «Σ ευχαριστώ, πατέρα, για εκείνα που δεν έκανες» ένα άμερικανόπουλο, σαν μνημόσυνο του πατέρα του, που σκοτώθηκε στον πόλεμο τής Κορέας:

«Θυμάσαι τή μέρα που έβρεχε και μου έλεγες να μην βγω γιατί θα άρρωστήσω; Έγώ βγήκα και άρρώστησα. Περιμένα να με μαλώσης, μα δεν το έκανες. Θυμάσαι που έπαιζα ως το βράδυ κι άς με φώναζες πολλές φορές να διαβάσω και μηδενίστηκα στο διαγώνισμα τής άλλης μέρας; Νόμιζα πως θα με μάλωνες και θα μου έλεγες· σου το είχα πεί. Μα δεν το είπες. Θυμάσαι όταν μου είπες να μην τρέχω στο σπίτι, γιατί θα σπάσω τα κρυστάλλινα που ήταν στο τραπέζι; Δε σ' άκουσα και έτρεχα και έπεςα στο τραπέζι και τα έσπασα όλα. Νόμιζα πως θα με έδερνες άλύπητα. Μα δεν το έκανες. Υπάρχουν χιλιάδες τέτοια πράγματα, μπαμπά μου, που δεν τα έκανες. Περιμένα να γυρίσης από τον πόλεμο να σου τα πώ. Μα έσύ δε γύρισες...»



Τό Όπλο του Πνεύματος

Άπό την Ι. Μονή Παμμεγίστων Ταξιαρχών Πηλίου

Ένας εύλαβης Έλληνας ιερέας, όταν συνελήφθη από τους Γερμανούς και ρωτήθηκε, άν φέρεи όπλο μαζί του, έβγαλε την Καινή Διαθήκη και είπε: «Ναί, φέρω όπλο!»

Ο Γερμανός έκανε μεταβολή και έφυγε. Αναφέρεται στην ιεραποστολική ιστορία τής Ορθόδοξης Έκκλησίας τής Ίαπωνίας, ή όποία έλαβε το φως του Ευαγγελίου από την Ορθόδοξη Έκκλησία τής Ρωσίας, ότι, όταν πήγε εκεί ο άγιος Νικόλαος Κασάκιν, Ρώσος ιερομόναχος και ιεραπόστολος, βρήκε αντίδραση από τους ντόπιους πληθυσμούς. Ένα βράδυ που διάβαζε με άνοιχτο παράθυρο κάπως φωναχτά το Ευαγγέλιο, είδε στο παράθυρο έναν Ίάπωνα με μαύρη στολή και ένα τεράστιο σπαθί· του είπε, λοιπόν, αυτός: «Θά σε σκοτώσω, διότι κηρύττεis άλλο Θεό στη χώρα μου.» «Θέλεις να άκούσης, πριν με σκοτώσεις, αυτά τα λόγια;» του άπάντησε ο πατήρ Νικόλαος· και άρχισε να διαβάξει από την έπί του Όρους όμιλία του Κυρίου. Του διάβασε, λοιπόν, άρκετά και κείνος όσο άκουγε, τόσο αλλοιωνόταν μέσα του. «Διάβαζε, διάβαζε, συνέχισε», του λέγει, «δε σε πειράζω, θα άκούσω πρώτα.» και ο άνθρωπος εκείνος, έλκύσθηκε από τα λόγια του Θεού, πίστευσε και έγινε από αίμοβόρος πολεμιστής των πολεμικών τεχνών, ο πρώτος ιερέας τής Ίαπωνίας, ο πατήρ Παύλος Σαβάμπε.

Χαρακτηριστικό είναι ότι όταν πήγαν ιεραπόστολοι από το Βυζάντιο στη Βουλγαρία και έζέθεσαν έμπρός στο βασιλιά τη διδασκαλία του Ευαγγελίου, του διάβασαν και το λόγο του Κυρίου σχετικά με τη Δευτέρα Παρουσία, την κρίση και το διαχωρισμό των ανθρώπων. Του ανέφεραν ότι οι μέν δίκαιοι θα πορευθούν εις ζωήν αιώνιον, οι δε άμαρτωλοι εις κόλασιν αιώνιον, στο πυρ το άσβεστο και το σκοτός το έξώτερο. Τότε ο βασιλιάς έβαλε τα κλάματα, διότι έλέγχθηκε για τα πολλά του κρίματα. Ξύπνησε μέσα του ή συνείδηση και πίστευσε και ο ίδιος και όλος ο βουλγαρικός λαός.

Στη Ρωσία είχαν άπαγορεύσει την έκδοση του Ευαγγελίου. Στα παλαιοπωλεία ήταν σπάνιο εύρημα. Προσπαθοΰσαν οι Χριστιανοί να διαβάσουν το λόγο του Θεού από παλιά Ευαγγέλια, όπου ύπήρχαν, αλλά και από άθειστικά περιοδικά, όπου δημοσιεύονταν τμήματα από τα ιερά κείμενα, για να πολεμηθούν από τα άθειστικά επιχειρήματα. Έκοβαν τα κομμάτια εκείνα του Ευαγγελίου, τα συνταίριαζαν μεταξύ τους και τα διάβαζαν. Όταν κατέρρευσε εκείνο το καθεστώς, μετά από 70 χρόνια τλαιπωρίας ενός ήρωικού λαού, ή Έκκλησία τής Ρωσίας άντιμετώπισε την ανάγκη τής μεγάλης ζητήσεως του Ευαγγελίου. Έπενέβη τότε ο αίρεσιάρχης πάπας και άλλοι αίρετικοί, για να διαδώσουν το δικό τους λόγο, αλλά ή Έκκλησία τύπωσε 100.000.000 αντίτυπα που έγιναν άνάρπαστα από τον έπί τόσα έτη διωασμένο λαό του Θεού.

Στά μοναστήρια οι μοναχοί νύχτα και ήμέρα άντέγραφαν το λόγο του Θεού. Οι άντιγραφείς, προκειμένου να τελειώσουν το έργο τους, έλεγαν: «Θεέ μου, βοήθει μοι! Σταυρέ του Κυρίου, βοήθει μοι! Άγιε, βοήθησέ με, για να έχη κουράγιο το χέρι να άντιγράφη το λόγο του Θεού!» Ο Βολταίρος, ο όποιος δήλωνε άγνοια περι του Θεού, είχε ισχυρισθεί πως σε 50 χρόνια ή Καινή Διαθήκη θα βρίσκεται στα άζητητα των παλαιοπωλειών. Σε 50 χρόνια το σπίτι του Βολταίρου, που είχε πεθάνει εν τώ μεταξύ, έγινε κέντρο διακινήσεως τής Άγίας Γραφής σε όλο τον κόσμο!...

MARRIAGE OR CELIBACY?

By Bishop Alexander Mileant (+2005)

The Three Sides of Married Life

Marital life, which begins after marriage, provides a normal solution for the needs and strivings connected with gender. The truth is that in our times marital life has become complicated and subject to many temptations, -- partly due to economic problems, as well as to the hectic pace of life in modern society, but most of all due to moral degradation. But only in marriage the gender life finds a healthy outcome. If for some reason marriage is impossible or complicated, there cannot be a healthy sexual life outside of it -- everything will be a deviation from the norm, a contamination of the soul and a perversion, undermining the foundations of human personality.

Life in marriage has three sides: biological, social and spiritual, and each of these sides does not just develop along with the others, but under normal conditions, they create a unity. The division between sexuality and eros that signifies a disorder in youth does not just disappear here, but, rather, becomes a source of new energy and releases a new way of life.

The Apostle Paul spoke beautiful words on marriage; let us just look at their initial part. "This mystery (that is, the mystery of marriage)," says the Apostle, "is great!"

This "great mystery" of marriage only appears where the division between sexuality and eros has been completely overcome. Where for some reason this division is still active or where only one side prevails, for example, the sexual one, "the great mystery" does not only reveal itself, but its meaning is also perverted, and that which is most holy and deep in people is dragged out into the mire.

By the way, it is not correct to identify pure sexuality with the "animal" side in a human being; animals do not have a division between sexuality and eros. Their nature is much more simple and primitive.

Marriage as The Fulfillment of Unity

Those who enter into marriage, having been clear and chaste before it, learn the mystery of bodily union for the first time in marriage. Because of that, a new and careful attitude to the body of the other is born in their soul. Life experience shows that it is exactly due to bodily intimacy in marriage that a deep, bright and joyous feeling of love to one another, a tender feeling of unity flourishes within the two souls. It is here, in this union blessed by God, that one can learn through experience the truth of monogamy (being married to one person at a time) and all the falsehood of "free love."

Sexual intimacy cannot only be separated from other ways of unity, but it also creates a complete wholeness of all mutual relations. When love flourishes between a husband and wife, it is reflected in all their life and takes possession of everything. The smallest disharmony at this time is experienced very painfully; carelessness, indifference, rudeness, accusations can all bring grievance and anxiety. Christianity helps a mar-

ried couple find a way to do away with disharmony in their relationship. Through practicing Christian life under the new conditions of marriage, the two mature spiritually and perfect themselves. Family is a great school of piety.

When the first symptoms of pregnancy appear, the relations of husband and wife become strengthened through their love for the awaited child -- flesh from their flesh. The purity of their mutual love does not only increase due to bodily intimacy, but is also feeding on the latter, and there is nothing more warm than that deep tenderness that blossoms in marriage; its inner meaning is in the acute feeling of being filled with each other. The feeling of one's own "I" as a separate individual disappears. A husband and wife experience themselves as part of something whole -- one does not want to experience anything without the other, there is a desire to see everything together, do everything together, be together in everything. It is an ideal to which a married couple should aspire to.

There should be neither differentiated "spheres of activities" in a family nor any kind of physical or spiritual disconnection; here one thing echoes in another, everything is connected internally and intimately. According to the Creator's plan family is the only way for the mystery of gender to be actualized in us. There must not be a sexual life outside a marriage; such a life will not be right, it will only pervert our nature and break life's harmony. For this reason, the way of purity before marriage is not just a demand of morality, but it is also dictated by the very nature of the human being. Premarital sexual life is always one-sided. It is therefore a perverted expression of gender that threatens to devastate the soul and distort its inner structure.

The Meaning of Voluntary Celibacy

To give the question of gender a thorough consideration, it is necessary to mention voluntary celibacy. Christianity teaches that voluntary celibacy means a conscious abstinence from sexual life for the sake of moral purity and spiritual perfection. Does it mean that family is a lower form of life? Should those who seek spiritual perfection remain virginal for the rest of their lives?

The chastity of virgins and monks does not debase their gender, but, rather, shows the latter's potential holiness that remains closed due to the moral corruption of human nature. The meaning of voluntary celibacy is not a fight against gender, but a fight against sin that is present in our flesh. Chastity and abstinence from sexual life is not the purpose, but a means in this battle. In voluntary celibacy people look for the best way to overcome their passions. This task, which is valid for all people, is solved here by rejecting everything which is of this world, not because of spite for it, but because sin finds its easiest way into us through our flesh and the world. He who strives for spiritual perfection must, in his ascetic struggle, wage a severe battle against the world inside himself. He will perceive disorderly lusts of the flesh as obstacles on the way to God.

Let us also notice that remaining in marriage also sets the task of struggling with sin, only here different means are ap-

plied. The meaning of voluntary celibacy consists in the feat of crucifying one's flesh -- not because of despising marriage, but for the sake of attaining a victory of the human spirit over the flesh. The same task remains in marriage, but in a different way. Marriage is not just sexual life; it is a long and complicated spiritual way, in which there is a place for chastity and abstinence. If sexual activity occupies the major place, that family is at risk of falling into excessive sexuality. The same division which tears apart the youth is intruding, dimming the image of the family as a shared life.

Thus, the family way leads to a restoration of wholesome life, given by God to man at the time of creation. As for the way of voluntary celibacy, it leads to victory over sin through the suppression of fleshly passions. That is why the monastic way is not open for all, but only for those who do not have an attraction for family life with its cares and problems or those who, having tried a family life, after its loss, seek for more spirituality in their lives.



A brother asked one of the fathers, "What shall I do? My thoughts are always turned to lust without allowing me an hour's respite, and my soul is tormented by it." He said to him, "Every time the demons suggest these thoughts to you, do not argue with them. For the activity of demons always is to suggest, and suggestions are not sins, for they cannot compel; but it rests with you to welcome them, or not to welcome them. Do you know what the Midianites did? They adorned their daughters and presented them to the Israelites. They did not compel anyone, but those who consented, sinned with them, while the others were enraged and put them to death. It is the same with thoughts."

The brother answered the old man, "What shall I do, then, for I am weak and passion overcomes me?" He said to him, "Watch your thoughts, and every time they begin to say something to you, do not answer them but rise and pray; kneel down, saying, 'Son of God, have mercy on me.'"

Then the brother said to him, "Look, Abba, I meditate, and there is no compunction in my heart because I do not understand the meaning of the words." The other said to him, "Be content to meditate. Indeed, I have learned that Abba Poimen and many other fathers uttered the following saying, 'The magician does not understand the meaning of the words which he pronounces, but the wild animal who hears it understands, submits, and bows to it. So it is with us also; even if we do not understand the meaning of the words we are saying, when the demons hear them, they take fright and go away.'"

From *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*

ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY COMPARED AND CONTRASTED WITH ROMAN CATHOLICISM

By Protopriest V. Potapov, *Parish Life*, June, 1997

All the deviations of the Roman Catholic confession from the ideals of the ancient, undivided Church could not but affect its spiritual life. M.V. Lodyzhensky, in the second volume of his "Mystical Trilogy," compares the spirituality of the Eastern and Western Churches using the examples of Venerable Seraphim of Sarov and Francis of Assisi. This is not by chance, since in the West the sanctity of Venerable Seraphim is thought to resemble the righteousness of the friar of Assisi. Here are the main conclusions at which Lodyzhensky arrives in his comparison:

"In the mystic of the East, in the person of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, we see an example of man's complete regeneration... that the super-consciousness of the ascetic of the East is concentrated in his flaming heart. There, within himself, he perceives the fire of the Godhead, he perceives Christ. This feeling of his inner unity with God descends upon him naturally and freely, as a direct result of growth, as a result of work on himself on the path of humility and repentance. According to the mysticism of the East, all these descents of higher perceptions are for the humble man beyond expectation, for the ascetic, in accordance with his humility, does not even feel himself worthy of this." (Mystical Trilogy, v. 2 - "Light Unseen", Petrograd, 1915, pages 156-157)

The spiritual vision of the ascetic of the East is turned toward his inner world, in accordance with Christ's word, "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). The source of the spirituality of the western saints is different. Again Lodyzhensky:

"St. Francis, in his notion of Christ, was struck most of all by the earthly life of Christ, by His image of suffering. This impression came to Francis from without, and Francis thirsted for visions of the suffering Christ. Proceeding from an external impression, from an image of Christ and His sufferings, the mysticism of St. Francis developed. This resulted in the mysticism of Francis having to deviate toward the imagination and sensuality, for, if Christ was for Francis an object, if he came to a notion of Christ from an external impression, one of the means for developing this mysticism was the stimulation of the imagination toward this external impression. And if the imagination was stimulated, then sensuality also had to be affected" (ibid., page 157).

The spirituality of Francis of Assisi is characteristic of the spirituality of the whole Roman Catholic Church. It is all sensual and oriented toward the Saviour's external feat. This does not mean that the Orthodox Church does not impart significance to this feat; but She always seeks the inner meaning of this feat, its inner light and repose. It is not superfluous here to touch upon the question of hesychasm and the place of Saint Gregory Palamas in confirming this Orthodox teaching.

The Greek word “hesychia” signifies peace, repose. The hesychast monks, besides various other spiritual exercises, uninterruptedly practiced the Jesus Prayer, that is, they continually repeated the words: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Such praying not infrequently was accompanied by special bodily techniques, for example, by prostrations, by a bent over posture of the body while sitting, by rhythmical breathing.

Monks who had long practiced such prayer attained a lofty state of spirit, perceived the manifest grace-filled presence of God in their hearts and in a radical manner eliminated from their consciousness not only sinful, but all involuntary notions and feelings; they were wholly absorbed in contemplating God. The hesychast monks who were successful in this prayer not infrequently received gifts of prophetic clairvoyance, and they promoted the enlightenment of the people surrounding them and of those who resorted to their spiritual help. In a word, the influence of these monks, who lived mainly on Athos, was very powerful during the epoch of Gregory Palamas.

In the thirteenth century, when rationalism, emanating from the Latin West, began to spread, certain theologians raised their voices against the hesychasts. The main thing against which the rationalists rose up was the faith of the ascetics that they could be deemed worthy of true divine communion and that that spiritual light which illumined them interiorly was that very same light that transfigured Christ on Mount Tabor. The opponents of the hesychasts asserted that the Essence of God is unapproachable for man, and that God, only as it were from afar, illumines chiefly the thoughts of men and in this way directs human behavior.

Hierarch Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, came out in defense of the hesychasts. He declared that the practice of the hesychasts was an ancient Christian phenomenon, that there were no innovations here whatsoever, and that drawing near to God in prayer had its basis in the mysteries of the Church, through which man receives the seed of true grace. But Palamas’ main contribution to theology was his teaching on the divine energies. He demonstrated that if communion with the Divine Essence Itself is unattainable, all the same, man has the possibility of genuine divine communion and contact with God, since God, out of love for man, communes with him through His special energies or powers.

According to the teaching of Gregory Palamas, God has, as it were, two forms of existence: one form is the proper life of the Godhead, which is inaccessible to us, and His Essence; the other is God’s constant advertence toward His creation. Thus, we can commune with God, Who is turned toward us through his energies, and obtain from Him various grace-filled gifts. The teaching of Gregory Palamas, expounded by him in the fourteenth century, explained and consolidated the teaching of the ancient Fathers of the Church, who had written that man is created for transfiguration, for deification. By this teaching, faith in the efficacy, in the reality of the whole sacramental life of the Church and of prayers was

strengthened.

The sensuality of Roman Catholic spirituality is particularly striking in its prayers and ecclesiastical art. Let us compare the well-known prayer of Ignatius of Loyola, which is revered in the Catholic Church to the same degree that the Lenten prayer of Venerable Ephraim the Syrian, “O Lord and Master of my life...”, is revered by us. Here is the prayer of Ignatius of Loyola:

Soul of Jesus, sanctify me,
Body of Jesus, save me,
Blood of Jesus, grant me rest,
Water from the side of Jesus, cleanse me,
Sufferings of Jesus, strengthen me,
O good Jesus, hear me.

Let us compare an Orthodox prayer, taken from the Akathist for Communion of the Holy Mysteries (First Echos), analogous to this Catholic prayer:

Jesus, burn up the thorns of my many transgressions.
Jesus, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.
Jesus, bring my poor soul out of the prison of the passions.
Jesus, destroy in me unclean thoughts and evil lusts.
Jesus, direct my feeble steps on the path of Thy commandments.
Jesus, God of my heart, come and unite me with Thee forever.

The manifest spiritual difference, which is noticed in these prayers, strikes one to an equal degree while examining the sacred art of the West and East. In the Orthodox notion, the icon depicts the world glorified; in it there ought not be anything earthly or worldly. Therefore, the techniques of depiction are altogether different from those that are used in realistic painting.

Rome has completely departed from classical Byzantine fundamentals. This was expressed particularly forcefully during the epoch of the Renaissance. The very philosophical direction of this period hymns man’s egoism and powerfulness, his self-perception in the surrounding and material environment. As a result, the ecclesiastical art of the West also headed along this path, along the path of free creativity, independent of the Church and its enactments. A free attitude toward Church ideas and the mixing of Church traditions with contemporary reality resulted in Western religious art allowing, by striving toward human earthly beauty and sensuality, the distortion of the sacred image.

That which the ancient Church so painstakingly avoided -- the influence of antique pagan painting and realism -- was in full measure reborn in Western Christianity and has covered the walls of the largest Catholic churches and cathedrals. Naked bodies, contemporary dress and decor became the norm, while spiritual beauty was brought down to something worldly and everyday.

ON THE HOLY CROSS

By St. John Maximovitch

In the prophet Ezekiel (9:6) it is said that when the Angel of the Lord was sent to punish and destroy the sinning people, he was told to not strike those on whom the "mark" had been made. In the original text this mark is called "tau," the Hebrew letter corresponding to the letter "T", which is how in ancient times the cross was made, which then was an instrument of punishment.

And so, even then was foretold the power of the Cross, which preserves those who venerate it. Likewise by many other events in the Old Testament the power of the Cross was indicated. Moses, who held his arms raised in the form of a cross during the battle, gave victory to the Israelites over the Amalekites. He also, dividing the Red Sea by a blow of his rod and by a transverse blow uniting the waters again, saved Israel from Pharaoh, who drowned in the water, while Israel crossed over on the dry bottom (Exodus, chs. 14, 17).

Through the laying on of his hands in the form of a cross on his grandsons, Jacob gave a blessing to his descendants, foretelling at the same time their future until the coming of the "expectation of the nations" (Genesis, ch. 48).

By the Cross, the Son of God having become man, accomplished our salvation. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross (Phil. 2:8). Having stretched out His hands upon the Cross, the Saviour with them, as it were, embraced the world, and by His blood shed on it, like a king with red ink, He signed the forgiveness of the human race.

The Cross of the Lord was the instrument by which He saved the world after the fall into sin. Through the Cross, He descended with His soul into hell so as to raise up from it the souls who were awaiting Him. By the Cross, Christ opened the doors of paradise which had been closed after our first ancestors had been banished from it. The Cross was sanctified by the Body of Christ which was nailed to it when He gave Himself over to torments and death for the salvation of the world, and it itself was then filled with life-giving power. By the Cross on Golgotha, the prince of this world was cast out (John 12:31) and an end was put to his authority. The weapon by which he was crushed became the sign of Christ's victory.

The demonic hosts tremble when they see the Cross, for by the Cross the kingdom of hell was destroyed. They do not dare to draw near to anyone who is guarded by the Cross. The whole human race, by the death of Christ on the Cross, received deliverance from the authority of the devil, and everyone who makes use of this saving weapon is inaccessible to the demons. When legions of demons appeared to St. Anthony the Great and other desert-dwellers, they guarded themselves with the Sign of the Cross, and the demons vanished.

When they appeared to Saint Symeon the Stylite, who was standing on his pillar, what seemed to be a chariot to carry him to heaven, the Saint, before mounting it, crossed himself; it

disappeared and the enemy, who had hoped to cast down the ascetic from the height of his pillar, was put to shame.

One cannot enumerate all the separate examples of the manifestation of the power of the Cross in various incidents. Invisibly and unceasingly there gushes from it the Divine grace that saves the world.

The Sign of the Cross is made at all the Mysteries and prayers of the Church. With the making of the Sign of the Cross over the bread and wine, they become the Body and Blood of Christ. With the immersion of the Cross, the waters are sanctified. The Sign of the Cross liberates us from our sins. "When we are guarded by the Cross, we oppose the enemy, not fearing his nets and barking." Just as the flaming sword in the hands of the Cherubim barred the entrance into paradise of old, so the Cross now acts invisibly in the world, guarding it from perdition.

The Cross is the unconquerable weapon of pious kings in the battle with enemies. Through the apparition of the Cross in the sky, the dominion of Emperor Constantine was confirmed and an end was put to the persecution against the Church. The apparition of the Cross in the sky in Jerusalem in the days of Constantius the Arian proclaimed the victory of Orthodoxy. By the power of the Cross of the Lord, Christian kings reign and will reign until Antichrist, barring his path to power and restraining lawlessness (Saint John Chrysostom on II Thes. 2:6-7).

The "sign of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:30), that is, the Cross, will appear in the sky in order to proclaim the end of the present world and the coming of the eternal Kingdom of the Son of God. Then all the tribes of the earth shall weep, because they loved the present age and its lusts, but all who have endured persecution for righteousness and called on the name of the Lord shall rejoice and be glad. The Cross then will save from eternal perdition all who conquered temptations by the Cross, who crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts, and took up their cross and followed their Christ.

But those who hated the Cross of the Lord and did not engrave the Cross in their soul will perish forever. For "the Cross is the preserver of the whole universe, the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings, the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and the scourge of demons" (Exapostilarion, Monday Matins).



Wherever Orthodox monasticism is absent, the Church does not exist, just as there cannot be a government without an army or 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.

Elder Amphilochios of Patmos (+1970)

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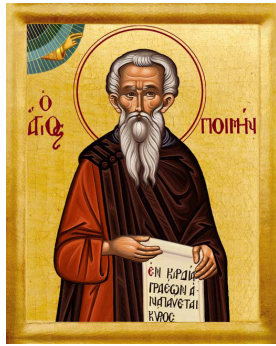
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THE ORIGIN OF TRUE JOY

By an Anonymous Author, from an Orthodox pamphlet

True joy comes from seeing God in all things, knowing God in all things. To know of God in the wisdom of the mind, this brings shimmers of peace and a foretaste of joy. Yet such joy is bounded, able to be swayed; for he who knows God's presence but in part, still is able to imagine His absence. One who sees God only in this place or in that, sees Him missing from those places in between. His joy is fleeting, for as in a moment it arises in the perception of God's presence, so it retreats in the illusion of His absence.

The one whose joy is stable, solid and penetrating, is he who knows of God's presence among all things, with all things, and in all things. Even as in the temple, so, too, in the school. Even as in the Church, so, too, in the field. From the brightest star to the smallest blade of grass, he sees the beautiful mystery of Christ present as all in all. He beholds the leaf with reverence, as the vessel of his direct encounter with the grace of God. He beholds his sister with love, seeing

in her the energies of the blessed Divinity. He begins to see God present in more and more, and absent from less and less; until he comes to the divine realization that there is no place that God is not, that the whole of creation around him shimmers in radiance with the presence of the Most Holy. He understands that perceptions of God's absence are but an illusion in which there is no truth.



Then is joy most full, most pure. Then it is unfailing, for in all things is God encountered; and where God is, there true joy also abides. Even in sorrow, joy is known; for the earth itself cries out in witness of Christ's presence in the sorrow -- of the divine love that pervades even the deepest human grief. In loneliness, one too finds joy: for all creation sings of the Creator's grace, and through it the Creator

Himself is present, reaching out to His children.

Behold God the all-present, all-loving, all-merciful Father, everywhere existing and ever the same. Behold the source and giver of joy, abounding in this world of life. Behold God indeed, who has the power to save and the compassion to redeem.

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]

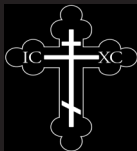
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WHAT IS ORTHODOXY?

By Archbishop Averky (Taushev), from The Life and Works of Archbishop Averky.

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. St. Gregory, by his grace-bearing eloquence and the example of his highly ascetic private life, put to shame the teachers of falsehood who dared to reject the very essence of Orthodoxy, the spiritual 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 that 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 (Jn 6:63). Thus the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples of His divine teaching. Consequently, the teaching of Christ is merely abstract theory, 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 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 some type of purely earthly organization that is headed by the patriarchs, bishops, and priests who hold the ministry in the Church that officially is called *Orthodox*. Orthodoxy is the mystical *Body of Christ*, the head of which is Christ Himself (see Eph 1:22-23 and Col 1:18, 24), 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—both 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, as think the ignorant and those alien to

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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; 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 that 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 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 Tim 3:15), and therefore *in her there can be no falsehood*. (Eph 6:27). Any 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* (Eph 4:25), or *Lie not to one another* (Col 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* (Jn 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 (Rev 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—when 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 strive to *lighten the easy yoke of Christ* (Matt 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 is, of course, in no way proper, despite 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.” Even when from an external point of view everything seems quite correct and strictly legal, this does not mean that it is truly so. In Orthodoxy there can be no place for Jesuitical rationalization; 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 that 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 salva-

tion, the dark demonic power. It is through this ascetic struggle 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 podvig 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* (Matt 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 from 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” that demands “reform” in our Orthodox Church leads! All these liberal free-thinkers and their menials, 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 endeavor 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 Christianity, 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* (Mk 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 Pt 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* (Gal 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* (Matt 7:13).

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



AN ADMONITION TO FATHERS

By our Holy Father St. John Chrysostom

Having made the necessary exhortation to children, the Apostle addresses himself also to the fathers, saying: *You fathers... bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* (Eph 6:4).

Do you want your child to be obedient? Then from the beginning bring him up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Do not think that it is not necessary for a child to listen to the Scriptures; the first thing he will hear from them will be *Honor thy father and mother* (Ex. 20:12), and immediately you will begin to reap your reward.

Do not say, “The Bible is for monks; am I turning my child into a monk?” No! It is not necessary for him to be a monk. Make him into a Christian! Why are you afraid of something so good? It is necessary for everyone to know scriptural teachings, and this is especially true for children. Not knowing divine truths, they do know something of the pagan stories, learning from them about wondrous lives—about heroes in their sight, who served the passions and were afraid of death. Such an example is Achilles, inconsolably dying for his mistress; another who gives himself over to drunkenness, and on and on!

Therefore, your children need remedies for these things, in the retribution and teachings of the Lord.

PHARISEES, HUMBLE YOURSELVES!

By Metropolitan Avgoustinos of Florina, from the weekly bulletin "Kiriaki," Feb. 20, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen].

My dear brethren, if we take a quick look around us and observe nature and all in her, we will notice something astonishing: all of nature and all of God's creatures are in prayer, each of them in their own unique way. The sea thanks God through the roaring of the waves; the small stream of water through its murmuring; the trees through the rustle of their leaves; the birds through their melody; the stars through their twinkling lights. Did you ever pay attention to a chicken drinking water? During every swallow, it raises its head high, as if it is conveying gratitude to its Creator, saying, "God, I thank you!"

Now I ask you: is it possible or remotely likely that man would be absent from this Divine invitation? Of course not. Man prays as well, conveying his gratitude to his Maker. Ever since our childhood, our wonderful mothers have taught us to humbly cross our hands in front of the icons of Christ and Panagia, and to whisper a simple prayer towards our Heavenly Father. These constitute unforgettable moments for all of us. Later in our lives, we learned, along with many other children, how to say in Church the "Our Father" and the Creed, thus joining the rest of the congregation in our mutual pleas and thanks towards our Lord.

The most noble expression and manifestation of the human heart take place during the time of prayer. The creation communicates with the Creator. It is the exact moment that compels man to thank Him for the many benefactions he enjoys daily in his life. It is also the moment that man, feeling perhaps great sorrow and hopelessness, turns to His omnipotence and pleads for help and protection.

But what is this that I see? What is this that I observe and hear? Man, in his great sinfulness, somehow manages to profane and commit another great sin during this time of prayer. How does he do that? Our Lord provides us the answer to this question through the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee.

Our Lord through this parable transports us to the temple of Solomon, during the time of prayer for the Jewish congregation. The magnificence of this temple made man "feel" the presence of God, i.e., that God comes down to all those in prayer so that all of them in turn are elevated towards God. Multitudes of faithful thus approached the Temple of Solomon with great piety to pray within. Their movements, attitudes, and stance were calm and noiseless.

This environment of sanctity and piety is being disturbed by someone. It is the Pharisee. What does he do? He avoids all others and walks alone. His walk is prideful and his appearance and bearing are haughty and arrogant. He considers himself saintly, righteous, and pure. He refuses to associate

with others and does not mingle with them in fear that they might "pollute" him. Furthermore, he enters in a boisterous, noisy manner. All others must stop what they are doing and take special notice of him; they must turn their eyes towards him. There is only one prayer that must be heard: his and his alone! He thus directs himself towards the center of the temple and he raises his hands so that he can proceed with his prayers in an elevated tone...

This however, is not prayer. The prayer of the Pharisee is a mockery of God. He does not take a second to consider that in front of him is not a simple Jew but He Whose presence makes the universe tremble and shiver. The Pharisee, all puffed up with ego, does not consider it proper to kneel or even lower his head and ask for God's mercy. Thus standing, he begins his "prayer".

He begins with, "I thank Thee" (Luke 18:11). I wonder what he is thanking God for. Does he thank Him for his wealthy house, for his excellent health, for his many riches that are spread all over his home, for being protected from committing sins? What is he thanking God for? Let us listen to him: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican; I fast twice in a week, I tithe all things that I acquire..." Now I ask you: Did he do this "prayer" for God? No. This "prayer" was meant to be heard by the people that were present all around him. He wanted all to know his "virtues" so that they could admire him.

The Pharisee altered the prayer stance into a display of self-idolization, a show. Where is the self-awareness, the feeling of contrition, the pose of humility? Where is the consciousness of the sinful human nature and the plea for God's mercy? He is preoccupied with his ego and self-declared accomplishments. "I am not an extortioner, I am not unjust, and I am not an adulterer." Yes, Pharisee, you are not all these things, but you are an egomaniac and prideful. And for God, there exists no human passion or evil more disliked than that of pride. Pharisee, it would have been more welcome if you were an extortioner and unjust and an adulterer, as long as you were not prideful. Why? Because then it is possible for your humility to guide you into repentance and thus attract God's mercy.

O Pharisee, you departed the temple all puffed up since you accomplished your feat and attracted the admiration of people who eulogized you and judged you as good. Did God agree with the opinion of all others in the temple? Did God praise you like they did? Did He even accept your prayer? Let me assure you that prayers of this type cannot and do not reach God's "ears." This is why Christ, having full foreknowledge of such predispositions, explicitly told us how we must all pray. My fellow man, do you truly wish to communicate with your Creator in Heaven? If so, then "...enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee

openly.” (Matt 6:6) Let me also be as emphatic as humanly possible and assure you that pharisaic prayers are a complete waste of time; they are good-for-nothing and lost forever.

Now you see, my dear brethren in Christ, how it is possible and likely, through pride, for many to commit grave and terrible sins, even during this time of prayer.

But why remain with the sad and pitiful image of the Pharisee? In His parable and within the confines of the same temple, our Lord presents us with the ideal image of a praying man. Before, we had the egocentric and prideful Pharisee; now, we have a humble, sensible, and wise person. He is the Publican.

The Publican examines himself as well. There is, however, a difference. The Pharisee saw only virtues, while the Publican can only see sins. From the lips of the Pharisee we hear, “I thank Thee,” full of callousness. From the lips of the Publican, however, we hear, “God be merciful unto me the sinner” (Luke 18:13). His words come out with immense pain and anguish. The Pharisee boasted, while the Publican “smote upon his breast” (Luke 18:13). The Pharisee had no knowledge of Who was standing across from him, while the Publican had complete understanding that he was standing in front of God his Creator, the only One Who is without sin, Him Whose virtue covers the heavens. He has complete self-awareness of his misery, wretchedness, and sinfulness. He does not even dare to “lift his eyes unto Heaven.” He knows that as it is not possible for injured eyes to face the sun, it is equally unlikely for a sinful man to face God. He is in immense pain; he weeps; he laments; he stands afar off and smites his chest. He cries out, “God be merciful unto me, a sinner.”

Hail to you O humble heart that is aware of the heights of God and your own wretchedness. You did not arrive to seek the recognition of people or to put on a show of ostentatious behavior. You entered the temple quietly to express your pain and anguish, to confess your sinful state, to beg for God’s mercy and love.

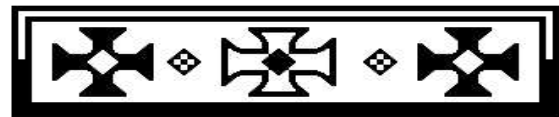
This is why the Publican’s prayer did not go to waste. It would be natural to rightfully think that the prayers of a man as sinful as him would be unlikely to receive any type of audience from God, since everybody ignored him, especially the self-proclaimed “virtuous” Pharisee. Do you see how the judgment and discernment of people is wrong more often than not? We never have any true knowledge of what actually transpires within the hearts of people. People’s judgment results in the condemnation of the Publican; God’s judgment, however, results in his acquittal. People ignored him or looked upon him with contempt. God, however, welcomed and received his prayer. The Publican’s humility attracted God’s love.

My fellow brethren, even today (or perhaps especially today) our own world is full with Pharisees and Publicans. As during that time, people today also come to church to pray. I wonder how many of those come with a prideful air about them and a boastful attitude, just like the Pharisee. How many men and

women make these big crosses and light the candles up front so that they can put on a show? How many come to church not to pray but to instead display their newly tailored suits or dresses, those fur coats or their new expensive jewelry, thus seeking admiration, recognition, or to become the topic of conversation? How many are even “praying” through self-recognition, calling themselves good Orthodox Christians? Thankfully, however, we also have Publicans. Perhaps that older lady in the corner and that weeping mother, who with contrition in their hearts, place their heads down and pray, “O Most Holy Mother of God, please save my family and me, the sinner!” They give us a renewed appearance of the Publican. O holy soul, may His mercy be with you at all times.

I am directing my words now toward the Pharisees of our days. Do not take comfort in the words of other people about you. Examine yourselves; is it possible that the serpent of pride has bit you and his evil poison has made you ill? Examine to see if God is truly with you. And if the answer is no, then weep, bow down, kneel and cry out: “God, have mercy upon us, the sinners!” It is only in this manner that you will find His justice. Do not forget that there exists nobody without sins. No matter what heights or virtues you may reach, there will always be something lacking, something on which you know you have fallen behind. It is for this reason that you must “humble yourselves in the sight of God, and He shall lift you up.” (James 4:10). We must never forget: “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5)

Amen.



Do not trust your mind too much; thinking must be refined by suffering, or it will not stand the test of these cruel times.

How much our American Orthodoxy needs more heart and not so much mind! I don’t know any answer for it, except more prayer and basic education in Orthodox sources.

Orthodox Christians, surrounded by and already swimming in a sea of humanist-worldly philosophy and practice, must do everything possible to create their own islands in that sea of other-worldly, God-oriented thought and practice.

I think about that older generation that is now almost gone, and I want to weep for the young know-it-all who have missed the point. But the understanding comes only through real suffering, and how many can do that?

Above all, may we all grow in spiritual understanding, not “rational” understanding—which I fear is the constant plague of all us poor converts!

Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1982)

OPENING THE CASKET ON ABORTION

By Cody Sain, from the "The Texas A&M Battalion," 3/22/04.

In the summer of 1955, a young man named Emmett Till took a trip to Mississippi to visit relatives. His mother warned him of hostility toward blacks in the South, but he failed to heed her warning. In August of that year, Emmett was beaten and shot to death by two white men, and then his body was thrown in a river. His crime was speaking to a white woman in the grocery store.

After the body was recovered, Emmett's mother held an open-casket funeral so everyone could see the heinous crime done to her son. His face and body had been beaten beyond recognition, and he had a bullet hole through his head. This crime and the case that followed are considered by many historians to be a major turning point in the struggle for civil rights.

During this month [March 2004], there are [were] setups at various western academic institutions by a student organization called Justice for All. These setups show graphic, often difficult to look at pictures of aborted fetuses. A common question asked by passers-by is, "Why do they have to show this?"

At the University of Colorado-Boulder, a black student asked this question. One of the volunteers told him the story of Emmett Till. The next day he returned, asking for help to defend the pro-life movement. When asked about his sudden change of heart, he responded that Justice for All is simply "opening the casket" on abortion.

So, what should be seen once the casket is open? First, one should be able to decide from the pictures if the fetus is indeed an innocent human person. If it is, then the question of how, if ever, it is justifiable to end an innocent human's life must be answered. One must either conclude that there are times when it is OK to end an innocent human life or that abortion is murder and must be stopped.

Second, if abortion is nothing more than a simple medical procedure, then the aftermath should not be a problem to look at. If the panels contained pictures of pulled wisdom teeth or of women and men with stitches, although it might seem odd and disgusting, one would not object to this as fiercely as he might the Justice for All demonstration.

What is the difference? Having stitches and having teeth pulled are just mere medical procedures, but, as the Justice for All panels show, abortion involves the dismemberment of a human being. Making a trip to the local abortion clinic as being comparable to a trip to the local dentist masks the true reality of abortion; Justice for All's goal is to unmask this illusion and expose this heinous crime.

When the movie "Schindler's List" was released, its producers donated copies of it to high schools around the country. Faculty members acknowledged its importance in helping students understand the realities of the Holocaust. Abortion is today's Holocaust. To truly understand the horror of it all, it must be seen.

It is true that the Justice for All display might cause unimaginable difficulties and emotional stress both for women in crisis pregnancies and those who have had abortions in the past. There are people on hand who are ready to counsel women in need. However, this does not affect the need for the display. In the case of women in crisis pregnancies, they have the right and a need to see what abortion really is. And finally, for post-abortive women (and men), acceptance is the first step to healing.

Now is the time to see the truth. Now is the time to act. No longer will the caskets of aborted children be closed.



Gluttony makes a man gloomy and fearful, but fasting makes him joyful and courageous. And as gluttony calls forth greater and greater gluttony, so fasting stimulates greater and greater endurance. When a man realizes the grace that comes through fasting, he desires to fast more and more. And the graces that come through fasting are countless....

Saint Nikolai of Zicha



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Ἀπὸ τὸν θεολόγο Θεόδωρο Ἐκκλησιάρχο.



Ἅγιος Νικόλαος ὁ Πλανᾶς
(τιμᾶται 2 Μαρτίου)

μας καὶ νὰ ποδηγετήσουν μὲ τὸ παράδειγμά τους τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Μία τέτοια μορφή ἦταν ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος ὁ Πλανᾶς. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τιμᾷ τὴν μνήμη του στὶς 2 Μαρτίου. Γεννήθηκε στὴ Νάξο τὸ 1851 καὶ κοιμήθηκε στὴν Ἀθήνα τὸ 1932. Θὰ κάνουμε μία προσπάθεια νὰ παρουσιάσουμε τὸν παπα-Νικόλα, τὸν ἀπλοϊκὸ ποιμένα τῶν ἀπλοϊκῶν προβάτων, στὶς σχέσεις μὲ τοὺς ἐνορίτες του, ὅπως φαίνονται ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τῆς μοναχῆς Μάρθας.

Ἡ σχέση πού καλλιεργεῖ ὁ ἱερέας μὲ τοὺς ἐνορίτες τους εἶναι τὸ μέτρο μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο μετρᾷ κανεὶς τὴν προσπάθεια πού καταβάλλεται. Μέτρο δὲν εἶναι τὸ πολυπληθές, καὶ συνήθως ἀπαθές, ἐκκλησιασμο. Ὁ παπα-Νικόλας ἀδιαφορεῖ γιὰ τὸ πλῆθος κι ἐνδιαφέρεται γιὰ τὸ πῶς θὰ τοὺς κάνει μετόχους τῆς ἀγιαστικῆς χάριτος τῶν μυστηρίων. Ποτὲ δὲν ἐνδιαφέρθηκε γιὰ τὸ βαθμὸ τῶν κοινωνικῶν γνωριμιῶν τῶν «παιδιῶν» του καὶ γιὰ ὅλα τὰ προβλήματά τους «διανυκτέρευε σχεδόν, προσευχόμενος» κι ἄς εἶχε λειτουργήσει μὲ τὸ δικό του, μοναδικὸ τρόπο τὴν προηγούμενη καὶ θὰ λειτουργοῦσε καὶ τὴ μέρα πού θὰ ξημέρωνε (ἀναφέρεται ὅτι ἡ λειτουργία παρ' αὐτῷ διαρκοῦσε 9-10 ὥρες...)

Στὴ σχέση μὲ τοὺς ἐνορίτες κυριαρχοῦσε ὁ σεβασμὸς τῆς ἰδιαιτερότητας τοῦ προσώπου. Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ξεχωριστὴ σὲ κάθε λειτουργία μνημόνευση ὄλων τῶν ὀνομάτων, βλέπουμε νὰ μὴ συμπεριφέρεται ὁμοίομορφα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐξομολόγηση. Ἀνάλογα μὲ τὶς δυνάμεις καὶ τὴν πνευματικὴ προκοπὴ τοῦ ἐξομολογούμενου καθόριζε τὴ νηστεία. Γιὰ τὸν κάθε ἐνορίτη του καὶ πνευματικὸ παιδί του δείχνει ἰδιαίτερο ἐνδιαφέρον στὶς στιγμὲς τῆς θλίψεως «κατέβασε τὸν οὐρανὸ στὴ γῆ, ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδιάκοπη κι ἐγκάρδια προσευχή». Νιώθει τὰ ξεχωριστὰ ἀτομικὰ προβλήματα «ἄκουσε μὲ προσοχή

καὶ συμπόνια, ... εἶπε ὅτι θὰ προσευχηθῆ». Καὶ ὅταν κάνει παρατηρήσεις, τίς κάνει μὲ πολὺ εὐγένεια, διακριτικότητα ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀμεσότητα.

Στοὺς ὑποτακτικούς του προσπαθεῖ νὰ δώση τὴ σωστὴ ἱεράρχηση τῶν ἀξιῶν. Δὲν τοὺς πιέζει νὰ συμμετάσχουν πουθενά, ἀλλὰ ὅπου συμμετέχουν πρέπει νὰ συμμετέχουν ὁλόψυχα. «Ἦρθαμε νὰ ἀγρυπνήσουμε, ὄχι νὰ κοιμηθοῦμε...» εἶπε σὲ κάποιον πού ἀποκοιμήθηκε κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς ἀγρυπνίας.

Ὅταν πρόκειται νὰ κάνει κάτι τὸ καινούργιο, πού θὰ ἔχη ἐπίπτωση στὸς γύρω του, ρωτᾷ «τί λὲς νὰ συνεχίσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς αὐτό; (τὴν προσευχὴ τῶν Ἀκοίμητων)» καὶ σέβεται τὴν ἀπάντηση τῆς ὑποτακτικῆς του χωρὶς νὰ προσπαθήσει νὰ ἐπιβάλλῃ τὴ γνώμη του. Δὲν διστάζει νὰ ζητήσῃ συγγνώμη ἀπὸ τοὺς συνεργάτες του ὅταν καταλαβαίνει ὅτι ἡ προσωπικὴ του ἐπιθυμία καὶ διάθεση γιὰ συνέχιση τοῦ ἀγῶνος καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς, τοὺς κουράζει: «σᾶς παιδεύω, παιδιά μου, νὰ μὲ συγχωρέσετε», «νὰ μὲ συγχωρέσης... εἶμαι λιγάκι παράξενος!»

Ὅλες του οἱ ἐνέργειες εἶχαν ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα τὸ γαλήνεμα τοῦ ἐσωτερικοῦ κόσμου ὅσων τὸν πλησίαζαν. «Ἀποφάσισαν νὰ τὸν φέρουν (ἕνα δαιμονισμένο) στὸ μικρὸ καὶ ἤσυχο λιμανάκι, ἐκεῖ πού κατέφευγαν ὅλες οἱ κυματοδαρμένες ἀπὸ τίς φουρτοῦνες τῆς ζωῆς ψυχοῦλες». Ἀκόμη καὶ ἡ κουβέντα πού εἶπε σὲ κάποιον στεναχωρημένο ἀμαξᾶ «δὲν πειράζει



ΔΩΡΕΑΝ ΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ

ΠΡΟΣ ὍΛΟΥΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΕΣ ΜΑΣ

Ἡ Ἀδελφότης «Ὁσιος Ποιμῆν» μὲ ἰδιαίτερη χαρὰ κοινοποιεῖ πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἀναγνώστες τῆς «*Orthodox Heritage*» ὅτι μὲ τὴν οικονομικὴ βοήθεια εὐγενῶν καὶ καλοπροαίρετων ψυχῶν, προσφέρουμε ΔΩΡΕΑΝ DVDs μὲ ὁμιλίες πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐνδιαφέροντας Ὁρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς. Τὸ DVD τὸ ὁποῖον προσφέρουμε τὸν παρόντα μῆνα περιέχει ὅλες τίς ὁμιλίες τοῦ πατρὸς Ἀθανασίου τοῦ Μυτιληναίου (103 εἰς ἀριθμὸν) ἐπὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ βιβλίου τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Ἰωάννου. Εἰς τὸ μέλλον θὰ προσφέρουμε (ἐπίσης δωρεάν) καὶ ἄλλες ὁμιλίες τοῦ Πατρὸς Ἀθανασίου ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ κ. Παναγοπούλου.

Πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε mini-DVD player ἢ DVD home theater ἢ ὑπολογιστὴ μὲ Windows operating system καὶ μὲ DVD player γιὰ νὰ ἀκούσετε τίς προαναφερόμενες ὁμιλίες. Οἱ ἐνδιαφέροντες ἄς γράψουν ἕνα μικρὸ σημείωμα μὲ τὴν διεύθυνσή σας καὶ στείλτε το στὸ e-mail τῆς Ἀδελφότητος (Poimen@mail.com) ἢ διὰ τοῦ Ταχυδρομείου πρὸς:

Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen

PO Box 38688

Phoenix, AZ 85069-8688

παιδί μου, πηγαίνω με τὰ πόδια», άνταννακλον τή γαλήνη πού έκρουβε μέσα του. Η γαλήνη αυτή έκανε τον άλλον να παραμερίξει όποιαδήποτε έμπόδια και καλλιεργούσε τήν ειρήνη στις μεταξύ τους σχέσεις.

Ός καλός ποιμένας γνωρίζει καλά τὸ ποιμνίό του και προσπαθεί να τὸ γνωρίσει ακόμη καλύτερα. Όταν μία φορά είχε μείνει από πρόσφορο και δεν θα μπορούσε να τελέσει τή Θεία Λειτουργία, έστειλε να ζητήσουν από τις γυναίκες «πού ήξερε πώς πάντα είχαν πρόσφορο». Ανακαλύπτει ένα κρυμμένο λεπρό και τὸν εντάσσει στα πλαίσια τῶν ασχολιών του. Προσπαθεί να νιώσει τήν ούσία τῶν προβλημάτων και μετά να προσφέρει τή βοήθειά του. Αυτό του δίνει τήν άνεση να έχη ξεκάθαρη στάση απέναντί τους και να μὴ τους κάνη να πικραίνονται ποτέ γιατί έβλεπαν ότι ο παπα-Νικόλας δεν έβλεπε τὸν άνθρωπο μόνο ως ψυχή αλλά και ως σῶμα και κατά πρώτον λόγο έπρεπε να καλυφθοῦν οί σωματικές άνάγκες και μετά να προσεγγιστῆ ὁ πιστός και από τήν «πνευματική» σκοπιά.

«Προσφέρθηκε να βάλη τήν περιουσία του ενέχυρο, για να σωθεῖ ὁ πλησίον του», «ένα γεροντάκι τὸν επισκεπτόταν δις τῆς έβδομάδας και τὸν συντηρεῖ σχεδὸν (ὁ παπα-Νικόλας)»—βλέπουμε ότι δεν αφήνει στο φιλόπτωχο τήν ύλική συμπαράσταση—«πῆρε τὸν φάκελο κλειστό με σεβαστὸ ποσόν, τὸν έδωσε άμέσως κλειστό σε μία πτωχή, είχε κόψει μισθὸ σε έντεκα οικόγενείες χήρων και ὀρφανῶν. ... Χρόνια διατηρεῖ τὸ έπίδομα. ...», «περνούσε πολύ χρῆμα από τὰ χέρια του, άλλ' άμέσως τὸ διοχέτευε στην έλεημοσύνη», προσεύχεται για να βρῆ κάποιος οίκογενειάρχης δουλειά, προσεύχεται για ν' απαλλαγῆ από τὸς στομαχικούς πόνους μία ένορίτισσά του, και ακόμη, και μετά τὸ θάνατό του, προσωπικά του άντικείμενα ἢ και μία εὐχή στ' ὄνομά του έδιναν λύση σε έπείγοντα σωματικά προβλήματα.

Οί πράξεις του αυτές είχαν καλλιεργήσει ένα σεβασμὸ του ποιμνίου του, πού τὸν συνόδευε σε κάθε του βῆμα. Τὸν ὑποδέχονταν με χαρὰ και προσπαθοῦσαν να έρθουν σε έπαφή μαζί του, να πάρουν τήν εὐλογία του—ακόμη και οί ὀδηγοὶ θὰ είχαν εκείνη τή μέρα περισσότερα κέρδη! Δεν ενδιαφέρονταν για τήν πτωχική έξωτερική του εμφάνιση, οὔτε και για τὸ ότι ἦταν κατά κόσμον άμόρφωτος. Όμως και ὁ παπα-Νικόλας καταλάβαινε τήν άγάπη τους, δεν τῆ έκμεταλλεύονταν και δεν άδιαφοροῦσε όταν κάποιο «παιδί του» έτοιμάζε κάτι γι' αυτόν.

Πρόθυμα ὁ παπα-Νικόλας συγχωρεῖ τις πράξεις τῶν άλλων πού τὸν έχουν ως στόχο. Συγχωρεῖ τὸν νεωκόρο πού τὸν μούντζωνε, συγχωρεῖ αὐτοὺς πού θέλουν να τὸν εμπαιξουν. Αυτό, όμως, πού δεν συγχωρεῖ είναι ἡ άσυγχωρησία: θεωροῦσε ένοχο έναν κληρικὸ πού είχε άφορίσει μία κυρία και πέθαναν και οί δυὸ άσυγχώρητοι. Κυριότερο μέσο άγωγῆς είχε τὸ παράδειγμα και τήν εμπρακτῆ νοθεσία. Έξηγεῖ σε μία «κόρη του» γιατί να μὴ θυμῶνη και λέει: «και ἴγῶ δεν ξέρω να μιλήσω; ξέρω, αλλά σκέφτομαι τὸ άποτελεσμα και έτσι σιωπῶ».

Πηγαίνει νωρίς σ' ένα σπίτι για να μπορέσει να λειτουργήσει τήν έπόμενη, δίνοντας τήν άφορμή στο σπίτικὸ εκείνο να συλλειτουργηθῆ μαζί του. Έλέγχει με πολύ ὁμορφο τρόπο

τῆ συμπεριφορὰ τῶν άλλων και τοὺς κάνει να καταλάβουν τὸ βαθύτερο αἴτιο τῶν σφαλμάτων τους, «έβαλε κανόνα» σε ένα άστεφάνωτο ζευγάρι μόνο όταν τοὺς καλλιέργησε πνευματικά, και έξηγεῖ με πολύ άγάπη σε μία γυναίκα πού ζούσε παράνομα για ποῖο λόγο δεν μπορεί να άποδεχθῆ τὸ πρόσφορό της. Έτσι ἡ γυναίκα καταλαβαίνει ότι δόγμα και ἠθος είναι ένα και τὸ αὐτό.

Άκόμη, κι όταν βλέπει ότι ἡ άγάπη του δεν βρίσκει ανταπόκριση και ἡ καλημέρα του δεν άπαντᾶται, αὐτὸς συνεχίζει άκάθεκτος τήν προσπάθειά του για να δείξει ότι ἡ άγάπη καταργεῖ ὅλα τὰ σύνορα: «δεν είχε έχθρὸ κανένα». Φυσικά, προτιμᾶ να προλάβη μία κατάσταση παρά να τῆ νοθετῆσει εξ' ύστερων: ενίσχυε τις νεαρές χήρες «διότι ἡ φτώχεια έξωθεῖ πρὸς τήν διαφθορά». Τὸ ενδιαφέρον του ἦταν στραμμένο πρὸς τὸν συνάνθρωπο, άδιαφορῶντας για τήν πολιτική του τοποθέτηση. Χαρακτηριστικὸ είναι ότι όταν τὸν ρώτησαν κάτι για τὰ πολιτικά, αὐτὸς άπάντησε: «Ποιὸς κυβερνάει τώρα;»

Ποτέ, έπίσης, για κάποιο αἴτημά του δεν έκρουσε τήν πόρτα ισχυρῶν—οὔτε ενδιαφερόταν τί θέση κατεῖχε ὁ έξομολογούμενος. Ὁ παπα-Νικόλας έκρουε συνεχῶς τήν πόρτα του Θεοῦ. Προσπαθεί να παρηγορήσει για πράγματα πού νιώθει ότι στενοχωροῦν τοὺς άλλους αλλά δεν τοὺς βλέπουν πνευματικά: «δεν πειράζει παιδί μου» εἶπε σ' έναν άμαξᾶ όταν αφήνιασαν τὰ αλογά του· «μὴ στεναχωρίσαι» εἶπε στην ψάλτρια του όταν περπατοῦσαν στο σκοτάδι, και ὁ ἴδιος δεν στεναχωροῦνταν ακόμα και με πράξη πού δικαιολογημένα θα έκαναν άλλους να άγανακτῆσουν, αλλά διδάσκει τήν ὑπομονή και τήν άγάπη με καλωσύνη και άπάθεια.

Κάναμε μία μικρῆ προσπάθεια να δοῦμε μία πλευρὰ τῆς ζωῆς μιᾶς από τις νεότερες μορφές άγίων κληρικῶν. Όμως ἡ προσωπικότητα του παπα-Νικόλα δεν μπορεί να κλειστῆ σε μερικές γραμμές. Μπορεῖ να μετρηθῆ μόνο με τὸ πόσες ψυχές παρασυρμένες από τή ζωή του θα μπορέσουν να φτάσουν πιὸ κοντὰ στη Βασιλεία τῶν Ουρανῶν.

Τήν εὐχή του να ἴχουμε!



Ὁ Σεβασμὸς και ἡ Ἱερότητα τῆς Πατρίδος

«Μητρός τε και πατρός και τῶν άλλων προγόνων άπάντων τιμιώτερον έστι ἡ πατρις και σεμνότερον και άγιώτερον και έν μείζονι μοῖρα και παρά θεοῖς και παρ' ανθρώπους τοῖς νοῦν έχουσι»,

δηλαδή

«Και από τήν μητέρα και τὸν πατέρα και άπ' ὅλους τοὺς προγόνους πολυτιμότερη είναι ἡ πατρίδα, πιὸ σεβαστῆ και πιὸ ἱερῆ και σε μεγαλύτερη εκτίμηση από τοὺς θεοὺς κι από τοὺς ανθρώπους πού έχουν μυαλό».

Πλάτωνος Διάλογοι - Κρίτων

Η 25^η Μαρτίου του 1821

Άνωνυμος προσφορά προς τον πανταχού Έλληνισμό.

Η 25^η Μαρτίου 1821 αποτελεί άδιαμφισβήτητα την ένδοξότερη σελίδα στη σύγχρονη ιστορία του Έλληνικού Έθνους. Είναι ή μεγάλη αυτή ημέρα της Έθνικής παλιγγενεσίας, κατά την οποία ο Παλαιών Πατρών Γερμανός, ο μπουρλοτιέρης των ψυχών, ύψωσε το λάβαρο της Έπανάστασης στο μοναστήρι της Αγίας Λαύρας και όρκισε τους αγωνιστές να λευτερωθούν ή να πεθάνουν. Η επανάσταση ήταν πιά γεγονός. Οι ράχες και οι βουνοκορφές γέμισαν από φλογερούς πατριώτες, όρκισμένους να συντρίψουν το βάρβαρο, αναισχυντο και άπολίτιστο κατακτητή και ή ίαχη «ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ Η ΘΑΝΑΤΟΣ», έσχιζε τον ήδη ελεύθερο Έλληνικό άερα.

Είχαν όπως όλοι γνωρίζουμε προηγηθεί τετρακόσια χρόνια σκλαβιάς: τετρακόσια όλόκληρα χρόνια από την σκοτεινή εκείνη ημέρα της 29ης Μαΐου 1453 που άκούστηκε το «Εάλω ή Πόλις», και όλόκληρη ή Βυζαντινή Αυτοκρατορία ύποδουλώθηκε στους άξεστους Μογγόλους κατακτητές. Τέσσερις αιώνες πραγματικού μαρτυρίου για τον Έλληνισμό. Σφαγές, παιδομάζωμα και έξιςλαμισμός, βιασμοί, έξαντλητικές συνθήκες διαβίωσης, άπαγόρευση της Χριστιανικής θρησκείας και στέρηση της Έλληνικής μόρφωσης ήταν λίγα μόνο από τα δεινά που υπέστηκε ό Έλληνικός λαός στα μαύρα και πέτρινα χρόνια της Τουρκοκρατίας. Τετρακόσια χρόνια όμως ΔΕΝ ΗΤΑΝ ΑΡΚΕΤΑ για τους βάρβαρους για να ύποδουλώσουν την άδάμαστη Έλληνική ψυχή, το ελεύθερο Έλληνικό πνεύμα. Διότι οι βάρβαροι, δέν είχαν ένα Σωκράτη, ένα Περικλή, ένα Άριστοτέλη, ούτε ένα Παρθενώνα, ούτε μία λαμπρή ιστορία χιλιάδων έτων να βαραίνη τους ώμους τους σαν ιερό χρέος. Ξεφύτρωσαν άξαφνα από τα βάθη της Άνατολίας και νόμισαν πως μπορούν να κυριεύσουν όλόκληρο τον κόσμο. Σφάλμα μέγα! Έπεσαν τραγικά έξω! Η 25^η Μαρτίου 1821 ήρθε για να τους διαψεύσει πανηγυρικά!

Άσφαλώς, το γεγονός ότι τουτός ό λαός δέν μπορεί να ζήση σαν σκλάβος ήταν γνωστό από την πρώτη κιόλας μέρα της Τουρκοκρατίας. Από τότε κάποιοι είπαν «Κάλιο μιās ώρας ελεύθερη ζωή, παρά σαράντα χρόνια σκλαβιά και φυλακή», πήραν το δρόμο για τα ελεύθερα Έλληνικά βουνά και έγιναν οι κλέφτες οι όποιοι με τη ζωή και τα κατορθώματά τους κράτησαν ύψηλό το αγωνιστικό φρόνημα του λαού για τέσσερις όλόκληρους αιώνες. Οι ιερείς, με το «Κρυφό Σχολείο» κατάφεραν με έξαιρετικά μεγάλο κόπο και κινδύνους να κρατήσουν άσβεστα από γενιά σε γενιά τα Έλληνοχριστιανικά ιδεώδη και να έτοιμάσουν τους μελλοντικούς αγωνιστές. Παράλληλα, στο



Ό Παλαιών Πατρών Γερμανός ύψώνει τη σημαία της Άνεξαρτησίας

Ευρωπαϊκό σκηνικό διακεκριμένοι Έλληνες προσπάθησαν με τη βοήθεια και μερικων Ευρωπαίων Φιλελλήνων να έξασφαλίσουν τη βοήθεια των τότε ισχυρων της Ευρώπης. Δυστυχώς, όμως «...δέν είν' εύκολες οι θύρες όταν ή χρεία τις κουρταλειΰ», όπως αναφέρει ό Διονύσιος Σολωμός στον «Ύμνο εις την Έλευθερία», με άποτελεσμα οι δυνατοί της Ευρώπης να μάς γυρίσουν ως συνήθως την πλάτη. Ός εκ' τουτού ή λύση που άπέμενε ήταν φανερή και οι Έλληνες την ήξεραν καλά! Η Ελλάδα έπρεπε από μόνη της να ύψωση περήφανα και λεβέντικα το άνάστημά της και να πολεμήση για να λευτερωθή. Η στιγμή όλοένα και πλησίαζε. Το 1814 ό κύβος είχε ήδη ριφθει. Σκουφάς, Ξάνθος και Τσακάλωφ, ίδρυσαν την «Εταιρία των Φιλικων», την γνωστή σε μάς ως «Φιλική Έταιρία», που στόχο είχε την άπελευθέρωση της πατρίδας μας. Με τον Άλέξανδρο Ύψηλάντη ως άρχηγό

και τους τρεις προαναφερθέντες ως Άποστόλους του έργου και του σκοπού τους, οι «Φιλικοί» από σπίτι σε γειτονιά και από εκκλησιά σε μοναστήρι, ξεσηκώνουν ένα προς ένα τους Έλληνες. Η ώρα του γενικού ξεσηκωμού δέν θα άργήση!

Πρώτοι άπ' όλους οι Έρολοχίτες—τά μαυροντυμένα παλληκάρια—ρίχνονται στη μάχη με λύσσα πριν ακόμη ξεκινήσει επισήμως ή επανάσταση. Τί κι αν σκοτώνονται ό ένας μετά τον άλλο; Η λευτεριά είναι κοντά, την άγγίζουν, την μυρίζουν. Γι' αυτούς οι πύλες του Παραδείσου έχουν ήδη άνοιξει! Η μαζική έξέγερση δέν άργει να ξεκινήση. Τα παλληκάρια ξεχνούνται για να εκδιώξουν τους άπολίτιστους άλλόθρησκους από τα ιερά μας χώματα και γράφουν χρυσές σελίδες στο βιβλίο της ένδοξης Έλληνικής ιστορίας. Ό Θεόδωρος Κολοκοτρώνης, ό «Έρος του Μοριά», δεσπόζουσα ήρωική μορφή της επανάστασης, συντρίβει στα Δερβενάκια τον πολυάριθμο και άνοπλο στρατό του Δράμαλη. Ό Άθανάσιος Διάκος με τη θυσία του στο γεφύρι της Άλαμάνας δείχνει σαν γνήσιος άπόγονος του Λεωνίδα της Σπάρτης πως οι Έλληνες ξερουν όχι μόνο να πολεμούν αλλά και να πεθαίνουν για τα ιδανικά τους. Οι «Ελεύθεροι Πολιορκημένοι» στο Μεσολόγγι προτιμούν την ήρωική έξοδο και το θάνατο από την ύποταγή, ένω οι Σουλιώτισσες με το χορό του Ζαλόγγου, ή Μπουμπουλίνα, ό Μπότσαρης, ό Κανάρης, ό Καραϊσκάκης και τόσοι άλλοι δείχνουν το δρόμο της άρετής και της τιμής. Η ψυχή νικά τα όπλα! Μιά χούφτα γενναίοι, σχεδόν άοπλοι, με μόνο πραγματικό όπλο την ψυχή και την άνδρεία συντρίβουν και ντροπιάζουν μία πανίσχυρη και άνοπλη αυτοκρατορία.

Όντως, ή 25^η Μαρτίου 1821 άποτελεί το μεγαλόурηγμα του Έλληνισμού και το ζωντανό ανά αιώνες μήνυμα προς την εποχή μας... Είναι ύποχρέωσή μας να το φυλάξουμε στα σπλάχνα μας και να το διαβιβάσουμε στις μέλλουσες γενεές!

«Φάρμακο» ή Αύστηρή Νηστεία Μειώνει την «κακή» χοληστερόλη κατά 20%

Από την Ρούλα Τσουλέα, Έφημερίδα «Τα ΝΕΑ», 20/4/05.

Η νηστεία ωφελεί σημαντικά την υγεία, αλλά ή λίγη τήν... βλάπτει. Νέες μελέτες αποκαλύπτουν πώς όσοι κάνουν αύστηρή νηστεία τις μισές μέρες του χρόνου έχουν μειωμένη χοληστερόλη, λιγότερο σωματικό βάρος και μικρότερο κίνδυνο ανάπτυξης καρκίνου, αλλά όσοι νηστεύουν μόνο για λίγες μέρες καταλήγουν με αύξηση της χοληστερόλης τους!

Σε μία νέα μελέτη του Τμήματος Προληπτικής Ίατρικής και Διατροφής του Πανεπιστημίου Κρήτης, διαπιστώθηκε πώς σήμερα είναι μετρημένοι στα δάκτυλα οι πολίτες που κάνουν αύστηρή νηστεία. Οι περισσότεροι από τους 800 έρωτηθέντες είπαν πώς νηστεύουν δύο-τρεις ημέρες, όταν είναι να κοινωνήσουν, καθώς και τη Μεγάλη Έβδομάδα, δηλαδή το πολύ 10-15 μέρες τον χρόνο—μία τακτική που «όδηγεί σε αύξηση της χοληστερόλης τους, επειδή νομίζουν ότι κάτι έκαναν με μία εβδομάδα νηστείας και μετά το παρακάνουν με το φαγητό»!

Η αύστηρή νηστεία συνιστάται από την Έκκλησία για τουλάχιστον 180 ημέρες τον χρόνο. Οι μεγαλύτερες σε διάρκεια νηστείες είναι αυτές της Σαρακοστής—φτάνει τις 48 ημέρες—των Χριστουγέννων, που είναι 40ήμερη και του Δεκαπενταύγουστου, που είναι δεκαπενθήμερη, ενώ οι μικρότερες είναι μονοήμερες—όπως εκείνες της Τετάρτης και της Παρασκευής.

Κατά τη διάρκεια της νηστείας αποφεύγονται το κρέας, τα αυγά και τα γαλακτοκομικά προϊόντα, ενώ αντίθετως συνιστώνται όσπρια, φρούτα, λαχανικά, χόρτα, ψωμί, θαλασσινά, και περιστασιακά κάποιο νηστίσιμο γλυκό, συνήθως χαλβάς. Ωστόσο, κάθε Τετάρτη και Παρασκευή απαγορεύεται και το λάδι, ενώ αν εξαιρέση κανείς τη νηστεία των Χριστουγέννων, στις υπόλοιπες νηστείες πρέπει να αποφεύγεται σε μεγάλο βαθμό και το ψάρι.

Υγιεινή διατροφή

«Από διατροφικής πλευράς, όλα αυτά σημαίνουν σημαντική μείωση της κατανάλωσης κεκορεσμένων λιπών, τα οποία θεωρούνται επιβλαβή για την υγεία, και αυξημένη κατανάλωση φυτικών και θαλασσινών προϊόντων που είναι πλούσια σε θρεπτικά συστατικά», λέει ο κ. Αντώνης Καφάτος, καθηγητής Προληπτικής Ίατρικής και Διατροφής στο Πανεπιστήμιο της Κρήτης. «Πρόκειται δηλαδή για μία άκρως υγιεινή διατροφή, που παρέχει πολλά όφελη στην υγεία». Το συμπέρασμα αυτό προκύπτει από μελέτες που πραγματοποίησαν ο κ. Καφάτος και οι συνεργάτες του—οι πρώτες που διεξάγονται για να διερευνήσουν πόσο επηρεάζει και εάν πραγματικά ωφελεί ή νηστεία την υγεία.

Αύστηρή νηστεία ακολουθούσαν κάποτε οι περισσότεροι Έλληνες. Πριν από 40 χρόνια, όταν άρχισε η περίφημη

«Μελέτη των 7 Χωρών», ή οποία για πρώτη φορά κατέδειξε τη σημασία της Μεσογειακής διατροφής για την υγεία και στην οποία συμμετείχαν περισσότεροι από 700 Κρητικοί, οι έξι στους δέκα άντρες και ακόμα περισσότερες γυναίκες νηστεύαν 180 μέρες τον χρόνο. Σήμερα, η νηστεία αυτή ακολουθείται από ελάχιστους Έλληνες.

Χάνουν βάρος, κερδίζουν υγεία!

Στην πιο πρόσφατη μελέτη συμμετείχαν 120 έθελοντές, ηλικίας άνω των 25 ετών, οι 60 από τους οποίους (20 πολίτες και 40 μοναχοί και μοναχές) έκαναν αύστηρή νηστεία, δηλαδή 180 ημέρες τον χρόνο. «Διαπιστώσαμε πώς στη διάρκεια της νηστείας η όλική χοληστερόλη όσων έκαναν νηστεία ήταν 12,5% χαμηλότερη απ' όση σε όσους δεν νηστεύαν, ενώ ειδικά η «κακή» χοληστερόλη, που θεωρείται ιδιαίτερος επιζήμια για την καρδιαγγειακή υγεία, ήταν 20% χαμηλότερη», έξηγεί ο κ. Καφάτος. «Ακόμα, όμως, κι όταν τελείωσε η νηστεία και άρχισαν να τρώνε φυσιολογικά, εξακολουθούσαν να έχουν 10% χαμηλότερη «κακή» χοληστερόλη. Επιπλέον, είχαν πολύ λιγότερο όξειδωτικό στρες—μια αντίδραση του οργανισμού που θεωρείται γενεσιουργός αιτία της αθηροσκλήρωσης, του καρκίνου και των έκφυλιστικών νοσημάτων του νευρικού συστήματος, όπως η νόσος του Πάρκινσον και του Άλτσχάιμερ.

Άς βγάλουμε τώρα κι εμείς τα δικά μας συμπεράσματα για το εάν η νηστεία είναι κάτι το θετικό για την φυσική μας κατάσταση...



Διπλή Γιορτή

Διπλή γιορτή' ναι σήμερα
μιά για την Παναγία
κι' ή άλλη της Πατρίδας μας
γλυκειά έλευθερία.

Για σένα Άειπάρθενε
σημαίνουν οι καμπάνες
γονατιστές σε προσκυνοούν
όλες του κόσμου οι μανάδες.

Σεις την σκλαβιά που πνίξατε
μεσ' στ' άγιό σας τó αίμα
αίώνια ή μνήμη σας
αδέλφια άνδρειωμένα.

Ένα κερí στην Παναγία
θ' άνάψω και λιβάνι
στής λευτεριάς τούς Ήρωες
θά πλέξω ένα στεφάνι.

“LORD, HAVE MERCY”

By Metropolitan Avgoustinos of Florina, from the weekly bulletin “Kiriaki,” Feb. 13, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen].

“Have mercy on me, oh Lord...” (Matt 15:22)

My dear brethren, one of the greatest evils which plague humanity in our days is ingratitude. Conversely, one of the greatest virtues one may possess is gratitude; in other words, each one of us ought to consider himself obliged to express thankfulness to all those who are our benefactors. Each of us owes gratitude to the father that gave us life, the mother that raised us, the teacher who taught us, the priest that blessed us. This also extends to every other person from whom we were the recipients of good will, assistance, or benefit.

When we carefully examine the corresponding actions of all of our benefactors, what do we notice? We notice that the benefit we realized through them is fairly small and insignificant; that is, small and insignificant when compared to what all of us realize from our Great Benefactor, Who is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God’s acts of mercy as well as His material and spiritual benefactions are countless. If you find the way to count the stars in the heavens, you will be able to come up with the number of benefactions which we continuously enjoy. These benefactions are ever-present during each day and night, fall and spring, summer and autumn... As the fish that swim in the vast sea, so man who continuously wonders within the great ocean of God’s benefactions. Does our heart not go on beating, second after second, minute after minute? Think for a second that right at this moment, as you are sitting down, it might stop! This is why each heartbeat, each pulse should be a small but nevertheless sincere sign of gratitude, a small “thank-you” to God. “In everything give thanks” (I Thes. 5:18), for this is how we can express our gratitude to God.

One of God’s benefactions is also our ability to go to church. This is because a church is a holy place; it is Heaven-like, a piece of Paradise. And if you do not believe this, you ought to not go there anymore. It is essential that faith accompanies every single visit to a church; it is the only way through which the church receives an infinite dimension for all of the faithful. You ask: “What is it that takes place there?” For starters, the church welcomes, accepts, and receives us. Who is it that does that? Is it this famous person or that well-known neighbor? Is it a government minister or even our prime minister or the president of our republic? These people are nothing; they are a big zero when compared with Him Who governs the universe. It is God Who welcomes, accepts, and receives us. He receives us for a hearing and He keeps His “ears” wide open so that He can listen to our prayers. The church is where He allows us to become His audience; it is the place of this holy “interview” and what is it that we ask our Heavenly Father to grant us?

Have you ever paid close attention to our Divine Liturgy? As a young child pleads with his father, we likewise plead with Him to grant us material as well as spiritual riches and goods. Let us examine what specifically we ask Him to grant us.

Our Divine Liturgy contains a total of twenty petitions, each one of them no less important than the other. The first thing we ask upon the start of the Liturgy is “for the peace from above.” Our Heavenly Father, please grant us peace; we ask for this peace neither from the east nor from the west. We cannot await peace from all these who talk about peace and plan wars at the same time. Hypocrites! It is only within our Church that our petition is pure and real; and this petition is so very timely and necessary in our days, for today’s wars may be easily conducted through the use of nuclear weapons. “Grant peace to this world—we ask You for peace in the whole world, Lord!”

What else do we ask? We ask for “the stability of the holy churches of God.” Lord, protect Your churches disbursed throughout this world; protect them so they stand well and steadfast and withstand the continuous attacks of the barbarians, the atheists, the heretics. Let them not be shaken or staggered from such attacks. Protect Your Church, Christ, and keep Her firm and unshaken to the end of ages.

We also ask for unity. Our world is separated into a thousand broken pieces; nations are divided and in a continuous ideological struggle with each other. We thus ask and plead with our Lord that these thousand broken pieces be united, so that they “shall be one fold and one Shepherd” (John 10:16)

We pray for all those in public service who govern us. Lord, give them sound minds and, most important, strong hearts, so that they do not neglect but always remember Your high values and standards, that our nation may continue to progress spiritually.

We ask that you also strengthen and protect our armed forces that guard and protect our borders.

We also remember and pray for all of our Church’s faithful. Lord, protect the widows, orphans, those who are ill and bed-ridden and moan in physical pain, the sailors who are constantly exposed to danger while they sail Your oceans, the captives, the slaves and all those who are imprisoned in one manner or another... Our Church neglects nobody! As a good mother, She remembers all of Her children, and thus pleads to God for our entire world.

Every petition for material or spiritual goods offered by our Church on our behalf is answered by the people through the chanter with, “Lord, have mercy.” The chanter’s voice is the only one heard but it should be loudly pronounced by all of the Church. “Lord, have mercy,” save us, give us all these things we need as the good Father that You are. “Lord, have mercy” is a very brief prayer. They are three simple words, yet combined, they contain such power, especially when they are repeated as they should be, with deep faith and devotion to God!

“Lord, have mercy” was also resounded with great resolve by the woman of Canaan. We call her “the woman from Canaan” but this was not her name – it was a title indicating her city of origin, just as if we said today the “Athenian” woman. Her city was on the borders of Israel. When Christ drew near, she ran and started calling out to Him: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David” (Matt. 15:22). What did she want? She had a daughter that was most unfortunate, for she was greatly crippled by a demon. She would fall down with foam coming out of her mouth, torn to pieces like a fish out of water; simply put, a terrible sight.

The woman of Canaan searched for years for a doctor, or even a magician, and could find nobody to heal her daughter. With her hopes withered down to nothing, she comes to the hope of the world and loudly beseeches Him: “Lord, have mercy.”

Christ, however, does not answer her. He appears to completely disregard her. She does not lose her hope; she runs after Him and proclaims and begs Him even louder: “Lord, have mercy.” The disciples intervene and ask our Lord, does He not hear her, does He not feel sorry for her, and does He not have any compassion for her? Christ had His purpose in this appearance of neglect for the woman of Canaan. He says to her: “It is not meet to take children’s bread and cast it to dogs” (Matt 15:26). This bread you seek, our Lord tells her, is for my children and not for the dogs. What did He mean? He wanted her to know that the miracles He does are for His people, Israel, and not for the unclean idolaters (the time had not come for them yet).

Christ’s characterization could be easily considered as a strong insult; He called her a dog. But the woman of Canaan did not get angry, she did not go away. She took our Lord’s words and made them her weapon. She thus turns around and tells her last hope: “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table” (Matt 15:27). She admits to Him that she is not His child and instead is an insignificant dog in His yard. This small dog is now seated below his Master’s table. The Master and His children eat and this dog patiently waits to feed himself from the crumbs that fall down from the table. “I just need a small crumb, O Lord; I do not ask for the bread of Your children.”

What great and magnificent words she announces to our Lord. One crumb from Christ’s infinite strength: that is all that she wanted! And Christ, seeing this faith, this humility, this persistent prayer, tells her: “O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Matt 15:28). The woman of Canaan had her prayer answered; her daughter was instantaneously healed by her hope, the Hope of the world...

Let us also learn and teach all others, my fellow Orthodox Christians, that our Church is not a false institution as so many heretical religions offer. Our Church is not a lie but truth, His truth. Through Her, our communion with God is real and alive, very much alive. This earth, the skies, and

the stars may be a complete lie. Our whole universe may be a lie. There is one thing that will always be true, however, our Lord and His Bride, the blessed Orthodox Church. Let us imitate the woman of Canaan. Let us kneel and pray, saying unceasingly, “Lord, have mercy.”

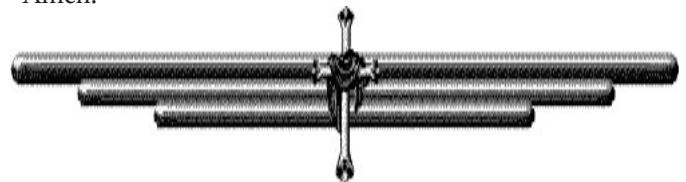
“Lord, have mercy” was also said by our saints and they made miracles. In the old days, Christians used to kneel and tearfully repeat these words. The faithful in Russia say it and the entire church body hums. On the Holy Mountain, they hold onto a prayer rope all night long; each knot is one “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” And how about us? What do we do? We are typically present in church; our bodies are within the church while our spirit is absent. It is absent and we have no feeling, no spiritual consciousness, no shivering of our soul.

“Lord, have mercy” is the shortest prayer we have; it is nevertheless appropriate for all. Even the uneducated or a young child can say it, the infant that can barely speak as well as the white-haired grandfather. And our Lord keeps on listening to this “Lord, have mercy,” and answers it countless times each hour...

I likewise advise and recommend it to all of you. Are you unable to say long prayers? Are you finding it difficult to be in church during all of the services? Take a breath and call it out wherever you are: “Lord, have mercy.” Are you sitting down to eat? “Lord, have mercy.” Is the night upon you? “Lord, have mercy.” Is it morning? “Lord, have mercy.” Are you on your way to work? “Lord, have mercy.” Are you plowing the earth? “Lord, have mercy.” Are you grazing the flock? “Lord, have mercy.” Are you a factory worker? “Lord, have mercy.” Are you a soldier on guard duty? “Lord, have mercy.” Are you a sinner? “Lord, have mercy”.

This tiny prayer, “Lord, have mercy,” is capable of great miracles. That which we need and ask of God will be granted to us, for He is a father. Christ tells us: “If ye then know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father Who is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” (Matt 7:11, Luke 11:13) If our physical father watches after us, and grants us our material wishes and needs, how much more He Whom we call out in “Our Father, Who art in Heaven...” God will truly grant us all of our wishes, if we truly believe, if we are truly Orthodox Christians!

Amen!



Fasting appears gloomy until one steps into its arena. But begin and you will see what light it brings after darkness, what freedom from bonds, what release after a burdensome life.

Saint Theophan the Recluse

A LOOK AT ASTROLOGY

By Archbishop Dimitri, from "The Dawn," March 1979.

"...For at it they who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to adore Thee, the Sun of righteousness, and to know Thee, the Orient from on high..."
(The Christmas Troparion)

The average person today likes to think of himself as a product of the scientific age. He often flatters himself with the thought that he is superior to his ancestors, not standing in awe of the natural world, having no fear of the unknown, and being free from superstition. He is reluctant to believe anything that cannot be proven logically or scientifically and rejects what he often refers to as "myth" in religion: man's creation from nothing, his fall, the promise and the coming of the Savior, salvation and life in the world to come. Twentieth-century man has been described as man "come of age", too sophisticated and knowledgeable to accept these things as literally true, and he takes this description of himself very seriously. He doubts that the Supreme Being, whoever He may be, could have any interest in or plan for man and the rest of creation. For the advocates of twentieth-centuryism, man is entirely on his own and has to work out his own destiny and the meaning of his existence.

In rather glaring contradiction to all this theorizing and self-satisfaction of modern man and his exaggerated ideas about himself, stands one unquestionable fact: ...man is as superstitious (today) as at any time in recent centuries. There are more "psychics" and "mediums", more "seers of the future," more "fortune tellers," now than at any time in recent centuries. Hundreds of cheap publications, usually available not only in newspaper and magazine stores but even in the super-markets, carry the "predictions" of self-styled "clairvoyants," tales of the supernatural, accounts of communication with the dead and experiences with demonology.

One of the areas in which this fact is most evident is the widespread interest in astrology. Practically all newspapers and magazines dedicate a considerable amount of space to the advice of charlatans who pretend to be experts in reading the stars. It is a multi-million dollar business, and hundreds of self-proclaimed astrologers, many of whom would not know one star from another, have become wealthy on the gullibility of the public. There are books and pamphlets in the bookstores, drug stores, five and dime shops, airport gift shops, and many other places, large books especially dedicated to the "virgos" and "scorpios", and pocket-size books that treat the subject in a general way. All of this worthless "literature" is filled with platitudes that are about as serious and useful as the little bits of advice found in a Chinese fortune cookie. In fact, most of what they tell their readers could be said by anyone and applied to anyone. Imagine taking these "gems of wisdom" as revelations from observations of the movements

and conjunctions of the stars: on a given day, to an Aries: "You will have new incentives given to you. Use them to your advantage;" to a Taurus: "You can profit from this day by showing your serene and happy personality;" to a Gemini: "Work out a suitable program, and plan what phase you will develop first." And yet, millions of people apparently not only consult their horoscope daily, but base their day's activities on what the stars supposedly tell them to do. They eagerly test all the events of a day and deceive themselves into believing that things turned out just the way the horoscope said. Many claim it is only an innocent pastime, and others see nothing in it contradictory to religion.

Evidently, some Orthodox Christians do not know that the Church, in the Bible, the canons, and writings of the fathers, condemns the practice of Astrology. Isaiah, for example, says (47:13-14), "Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame..." Jeremiah writes: "Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain..." In Daniel (2:27-28), we read: "Daniel said, the Secret which the king hath demanded, cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers show unto the king? But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets." In his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul, finding that even some who had become Christians were holding to their former practices, wrote: "But now, after ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements (the Greek word means 'rudiments of religion', such as astrology) whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." (Gal 4: 9-11)

Astrology was originally a religion. The Greeks learned it from the Chaldeans and Persians. Each planet was a god that had a divine personality and controlled the life and destiny of man. In spite of the fact that today's astrologers generally deny that their "art" has anything to do with religion, modern astrology is nothing more than a disguised ancient pagan religion.

It is interesting to read what some of the fathers of the Church have had to say about the subject. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catachetical Lecture IV, 18) says: "It is not according to the date of your birth that you sin, nor is it by the power of chance that you commit fornication, nor, as some idly say, do the confluence of the stars compel you to give yourself to wantonness. Why do you hesitate to confess your own evil deeds and ascribe the blame to the innocent stars? Pay no attention to astrologers; for concerning these the divine Scriptures say: ..." (here he quotes Isaiah 47: 13-14, see above).

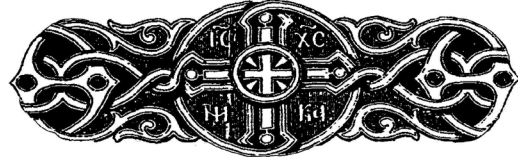
St. Gregory the Theologian (Oration XXXIX, v) speaks of "... the Chaldean astronomy and horoscopes, comparing our lives with the movements of the heavenly bodies, which cannot even know what they are themselves, or what they shall be." St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on First Corinthians, iv, 11) shows how the faith of the Christians of his time had been weakened by the revival of this pagan practice: "And in fact a deep night oppresses the whole world. This is what we have to dispel and dissolve. It is not only among the heretics and among the Greeks (pagans), but also in the multitudes on our side (the Christians) with regard to doctrines and to life. For many entirely disbelieve the resurrection; many fortify themselves with their horoscopes; many adhere to superstitious observances, and to omens and auguries and presages. And some likewise employ amulets and charms."

St. John of Damascus (The Exact Exposition of the Orthodox faith, Book II, Chap. vii) writes: "Now the Greeks (the pagans) declare that all our affairs are controlled by the rising and setting and collision of the stars, the sun, and moon (and the signs of the zodiac); for it is with these matters that astrology has to do. But we hold that we get from them signs of rain and drought, cold and heat, moisture and dryness, and of various winds, and so forth, but no sign whatsoever as to our actions. For we have been created with free will by our Creator and we are masters over our own actions. Indeed, if all our actions depend on the course of the stars, all we do is done out of necessity (fate, in other words); and necessity precludes either virtue or vice. But if we possess neither virtue nor vice, we deserve neither praise nor punishment, and God too, will turn out to be unjust, since He gives good things to some and afflicts others. In fact, He will no longer guide or provide for His own creatures, if all things are carried and swept along in the grip of necessity. And the faculty of reason will be superfluous for us, for if we are not masters of any of our actions, deliberation is quite superfluous. Reason, indeed, is granted to us solely that we might take counsel, and therefore all reason implies freedom of will."

Christians must not practice astrology nor consult horoscopes because it puts faith in created things rather than in the Creator; it thus undermines faith in God and His redeeming economy (plan) for mankind; it denies free will and attributes all that happens to fate; it relieves man of the responsibility for his sins; it weakens and finally replaces, however subtly, the faith of the Church, which is the doctrine of Christ, with a pagan philosophy or religion.

The purpose of the coming of the Savior was to reveal the truth to man and to destroy this very kind of futile faith that people had put in the course supposedly determined for them by the stars. This is the whole point of the Nativity troparion: "Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath arisen upon the world (as the sun, moon and stars rise), as the light of wisdom (the true knowledge of God). For at it they who worshipped the

stars (the magi who were astrologers) were taught by a star (the unique star that appeared once as a guide to where the child was) to adore Thee, the Sun (Christ the true light) of righteousness, and to know Thee, the Orient (the real morning star) from on high. O Lord, glory to Thee."



MARCH 25TH, 1821

On March 25th 1821, the blessed day of the Annunciation of the Holy Mother of God, Bishop Germanos of Patras hoisted the Greek flag at the monastery of Aghia Lavra, in the Peloponnese, an act that marked the beginning of the War of Independence. Hellenes had decided to end the Turkish tyranny or to die. Outnumbered by the enemy 10 to 1, they declared LIBERTY or DEATH.

Hellenes, or Romioi, would give an end to the dark years of immense religious persecution and occupation of their land that started in 1453, after the fall of Constantinople. It was during these dark years that the Greek Orthodox people suffered so much and were nearly exterminated. The Greek population had diminished to one million after thousands of years of existence. During the Hellenic Byzantine Empire, Greeks were estimated at over 20 million. Heavy taxation, kidnapping of young boys and girls, injustice, terror, and random murder were the main characteristics of Ottoman occupation. The biggest part of state's revenue came from heavy taxation of Orthodox Christians. Education was forbidden, with the only exception being the area of Constantinople, Smyrne and Ioannina. The Orthodox Church kept the Greeks from losing their identity and their language. Monasteries became hidden schools (krifa scholeia).

In Europe the "Holy" Alliance—England, Austria (Metternich), France, Russia—opposed any movement that could bring destabilization to the region, irrespective of the Turkish atrocities upon the Orthodox people. Any previous revolts against the tyrants ended in severe bloodshed. Chios, Messolonghi, Psara, Cassos, Cyprus, Crete, Kydonies (Aivalli), Peloponnese, Chalkidiki, and numerous other regions were burned to ashes, the men killed while women and children were sold to slave-bazaars in Syria and Egypt. Many Greeks fled to Europe. Greek communities flourished in Odissos, Venetia, Vienna, Aghia Petroupolis, and other cities in Europe. Also in Greece, those who could not stand Ottoman tyranny lived on the mountains, where they remained free. They fought all their life against tyrants and were called Kleftes and Armatoloi. Mountainous regions of Suli in Epirus, Mani in Peloponnese, and Sfakia in Crete never stopped fighting the barbarian invaders.

OPEN TO ME THE DOOR OF REPENTANCE, O GIVER OF LIFE!

By St. John Maximovitch.

Repentance is expressed in Greek by the word *metanoia* (μετάνοια). In the literal sense, this means an alteration of one's mind, of one's thinking. In other words, repentance is a transformation of one's orientation, of one's way of thinking, a transformation of a man within himself. Repentance is a re-examination of one's views, an alteration of one's life.

How can it come about? In the same way as when a dark room into which a man has happened to enter becomes illuminated by rays of sunlight. While he was looking at the room in the darkness, it presented itself to him in one aspect: much that was there he did not see and he did not even imagine that it was there. Many things appeared to him not at all as they were in actual fact. He had to move cautiously, since he did not know where there might be obstacles. But now the room has become light: he sees everything clearly and moves freely. The same thing occurs in the spiritual life.

When we are immersed in sins and our mind is occupied only with worldly cares, we do not notice the state of our soul. We are indifferent as to how we are within, and go constantly by a false path, ourselves not noticing this. But now a ray of Divine Light penetrates into our soul. How much filth shall we see then in ourselves! How much injustice, how much falsehood! How hideous will many actions turn out to be which we fancied excellent! It will become clear to us that we are going by wrong paths. It becomes clear to us which path is right.

If we shall acknowledge then our spiritual nothingness, our sinfulness, and with our whole soul shall desire our correction—we shall be near our salvation. From the depth of our soul let us call to the Lord: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, according to Thy mercy!" "Forgive me and save me!" "Grant me to behold my sins and not to judge my brother!"

Let us hasten to forgive each other all hurts and offenses... Let us ever hear the words of the Gospel of Forgiveness. Sunday: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14-15)



A certain person asked Abba Poimen to explain to him exactly what repentance is. "Not to repeat the same sins," responded Saint Poimen...

GREAT LENT, OUR EXILE

By Hieromonk Seraphim Rose (+1982).

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."

In these words of the Lenten psalm, we Orthodox Christians, the New Israel, remember that we are in exile. The psalm has a special meaning for all Orthodox Christians who live in exile in this world, longing to return to our true home, Heaven. For us the Great Fast is a season of exile ordained for us by our Mother, the Church, to keep fresh in us the memory of the Zion from which we have wandered so far. We have deserved our exile and we have great need of it because of our great sinfulness. Only through the chastisement of exile, which we remember in the fasting, prayers, and repentance of this season, do we remain mindful of our Zion.

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem..."

Weak and forgetful, even in the midst of the Great Fast we live as though Jerusalem did not exist for us. We fall in love with the world, our Babylon; we are seduced by the frivolous pastimes of this "strange land" and neglect the services and discipline of the Church which remind us of our true home. Worse yet, we love our very captors—for our sins hold us captive more surely than any human master—and in their service we pass in idleness the precious days of Lent when we should be preparing to meet the rising sun of the New Jerusalem, the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

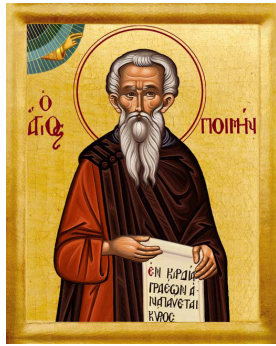
There is still time; we must remember our true home and weep over the sins which have exiled us from it. Let us take to heart the words of St. John of the Ladder: Exile is separation from everything in order to keep the mind inseparable from God. Exile loves and produces continual weeping. Exiled from Paradise, we must become exiles from this world if we hope to return. This we may do by spending these days in fasting, prayer, separation from the world, attendance at the services of the Church, in tears of repentance, in preparation for the joyful Feast that is to end this time of exile; and by bearing witness to all in this "strange land" of our remembrance, of that even greater Feast that shall be when our Lord returns to take home His people to the New Jerusalem, from which there shall be no more exile, for it is eternal.



Abba Poimen struggled for piety and purity of heart. He taught us: "As long as the pot is on the fire, no fly nor any other animal can get near it, but as soon as it is cold, these creatures get inside. So it is for the monk; as long as he lives in spiritual activities, the enemy cannot find a means of overthrowing him."

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

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AERIAL TOLL HOUSES

By protopresbyter Vassili Boshchanovskii, Lessons in Dogmatic Theology, from Tserkovnaya Zhizn' (Church Life), No. 5-6, 2001, pp. 41-43.

The Orthodox faith, in the reality of the personal judgment after death, finds its illustrative depiction within the patristic teaching about the toll houses beyond the grave.

The essence of this teaching is this: the justice of God performs a judgment upon Christian souls that have departed their bodies through angels, both holy and evil. The first note his good works during the earthly life of a person; the second note all his evil works. When the soul of a Christian begins to ascend to heaven, guided by holy angels, the dark spirits indict it with those of its sins which have not been eradicated by repentance.

For the trial of souls passing through the aerial realms, the dark powers have established places of judgment, with guards, all in a remarkable order. Every area deals with a particular type of sin and torments the soul in it, when the soul reaches this area. The aerial demonic guards and the places of judgment are called in Patristic writings toll houses. There are twenty toll houses in all; every toll house is subject to a separate prince and the spirits of each toll house reflect in their outward appearance the sin that is being tried in the toll house. We find a detailed description of the toll houses and their order in the account of St. Theodora.

The teaching on toll houses is a patristic teaching, the traces of which we find both in some church prayers and in the works of many Church fathers. Thus, in one prayer it says: *It is a fearful and stern place that I must pass, having parted with the body, where*

a dark and inhuman multitude of demons will meet me . In the Canon to the Guardian Angel we pray: Be for me a protector and an unconquerable warrior, when I shall pass the toll houses of the ferocious ruler of the world.

St. John Chrysostom says that the soul, after its parting from the body, needs the help and intercession of the angels to be led past the most terrible powers and invisible rulers of this aerial world. There are many places in the works of St. Ephraim the Syrian which prove the universality, in his time, of the opinion regarding toll houses. St. Cyril of Alexandria writes that upon parting from the body, the soul holds on to holy angels while passing through the air and, ascending, encounters toll houses guarding the air and impeding the ascending souls, and he in detail enumerates the toll houses.

Nevertheless, according to the teaching of the holy fathers, not all souls in equal measure are impeded by the evil spirits, but in accordance with the degree of their moral perfection and purity, while pure and holy souls are not impeded at all, but, just as Lazarus in the Gospel, are straightway carried by good angels into the bosom of Abraham.

The teaching about toll houses finds its confirmation also in the holy scripture, which calls the air specifically the realm of evil spirits. We read, *For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spirits of wickedness under the heavens* (Eph 6:12); *the prince of these spirits is called the prince of the powers of the air: Wherein ye once walked according to the age of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air...* (Eph 2:2).

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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ON THE RESURRECTION

By St. John of Damascus.

We Orthodox also believe in the resurrection of the dead. Truly, there will be a resurrection of the dead; and by resurrection we mean resurrection of bodies. This is because resurrection is the second state of that which has fallen. Our souls are immortal, and hence how can they rise again? Thus, if death is defined as the separation of soul and body, resurrection surely is the re-union of soul and body, and the second state of the living creature that has suffered dissolution and downfall. It is, then, this very body, which is corruptible and liable to dissolution, that will rise again incorruptible. He, who made it in the beginning out of the sand of the earth, does not lack the power to raise it up again after it has been dissolved again and returned to the earth from which it was taken, in accordance with the reversal of the Creator's judgment.

If there is no resurrection, let us eat and drink and let us pursue a life of pleasure and enjoyment. If there is no resurrection, how would we differ from the irrational brutes? If there is no resurrection, let us hold the wild beasts of the field happy who have a life free from sorrow. If there is no resurrection, neither is there any God nor Providence, but all things are driven and borne all by themselves. Let us observe how we see most righteous men suffering hunger and injustice and receiving no help in the present life, while sinners and unrighteous men abound in riches and every delight. And who in his senses would take this for the work of a righteous judgment or a wise providence? There must be, therefore, there must be, a resurrection. For God is just and is the rewarder of those who submit patiently to Him.

We may thus conclude that if it is the soul alone that engages in the contests of virtue, it is also the soul alone that

will receive the crown. And if it were the soul alone that revels in pleasures, it would also be the soul alone that would be justly punished. But since the soul does not pursue either virtue or vice separate from the body, both together will obtain that which is their just due.

The divine Scripture bears witness that there will be a resurrection of the body. God in truth says to Moses after the flood, *Even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* (Gen 9:3-6) How will He require the blood of man at the hand of every beast, unless because the bodies of dead men will rise again?

And again to Moses, *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, (that is, those who are dead and will be no more), but of the living* (Matt 22:32), whose souls indeed live in His hand, but whose bodies will again come to life through the resurrection.

And David, sire of the Divine, says to God, *Thou takest away their breath, they die and return to their dust.* (Ps 103:29) See how he speaks about bodies. Then he subjoins this, *Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth.* (Ps 103:30)

Further Isaiah says: *Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead* (Isa 26:19) And it is clear that the souls do not lie in the graves, but the bodies.

And again, the blessed Ezekiel says: *And as I prophesied, there was a noise,*

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and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above. (Ezek 37:7-8) And later he teaches how the spirits came back when they were bidden.

And divine Daniel also says: *And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.* (Dan 12:1-3) The words, many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, clearly show that there will be a resurrection of bodies. For no one surely would say that the souls sleep in the dust of the earth.

Moreover, even the Lord in the holy Gospels clearly allows that there is a resurrection of the bodies. *For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (John 5:28-29) Now no one in his senses would ever say that the souls are in the graves.

But it was not only by word, but also by deed, that the Lord revealed the resurrection of the bodies. First He raised up Lazarus, even after he had been dead four days, and was stinking. He did not raise the soul without the body, but the body along with the soul; and not another body, but the very one that was corrupt. For how could the resurrection of the dead man have been known or believed if it had not been established by his characteristic properties? But it was in fact to make the divinity of His own nature manifest and to confirm the belief in His

own and our resurrection, that He raised up Lazarus who was destined once more to die. And the Lord became Himself the first-fruits of the perfect resurrection that is no longer subject to death. Also, the divine Apostle Paul said: *For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.* (1Cor 15:16-17) And, *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.* (1Cor 15:20) and again, *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* (1Thes 4:14)

Moreover, that the resurrection of the Lord was the union of uncorrupted body and soul (for it was these that had been divided) is manifest; for He said, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* (John 2:19) And the holy Gospel is a trustworthy witness that He spoke of His own body. *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see;* the Lord said to His own disciples when they were thinking that they saw a spirit, *for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* (Lk 24:39) And *Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.* (John 20:27) Is not this sufficient to establish belief in the resurrection of bodies?

Again the divine apostle says, *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.* (1Cor 15:53) And again: *It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body (that is to say, crass and mortal), it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is spiritual body* (1Cor 15:42-44) such as was our Lord's body after the resurrection which passed through closed doors, was unwearying, had no need of food, or sleep, or drink. For they will be, saith the Lord, as the angels of God: there will no longer be marriage nor procreation of

children. The divine apostle, in truth, says, *For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus, Who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body* (Phil 3:20-21), not meaning change into another form (God forbid!), but rather the change from corruption into incorruption.

But some one will say, how are the dead raised up? Oh, what disbelief! Oh, what folly! Will He, Who at His solitary will changed earth into body, Who commanded the little drop of seed to grow in the mother's womb and become in the end this varied and manifold organ of the body, not raise up again at His solitary will that which was and is dissolved? And with what body do they come? Thou fool, if thine hardness will not permit you to believe the words of God, at least believe His works. For what thou sowest is not enlivened except it die. And what thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, perchance of wheat or of some other grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body. Behold, therefore, how the seed is buried in the furrows as in tombs. Who is it that giveth them roots and stalk and leaves and ears and the most delicate beards? Is it not the Maker of the universe? Is it not at the bidding of Him Who hath contrived all things? Believe, therefore, in this wise, even that the resurrection of the dead will come to pass at the divine will and sign. For He has power that is able to keep pace with His will.

We shall therefore rise again, our souls being once more united with our bodies, now made incorruptible and having put off corruption, and we shall stand beside the awful judgment seat of Christ; and the devil and his demons and the man that is his, that is the Antichrist, and the impious and the sinful, will be given over to everlasting fire. Not material fire like our fire, but such fire as God would know. But those who have done good will shine forth as the sun with the angels into life eternal, with our Lord Jesus Christ, ever seeing Him and being in His sight and deriving unceasing joy from Him, praising Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit throughout the limitless ages of ages. Amen.



What then? Someone will say: "We have been beguiled and are lost. Is there then no salvation left? We have become crippled: can we never walk upright? In a word, we are dead: may we not rise again?" He that woke Lazarus who was four days dead and already stank, shall He not, O man, much more easily raise thee who art alive? He, who shed His precious blood for us, shall Himself deliver us from sin. Let us not despair of ourselves, brethren; let us not abandon ourselves to a hopeless condition. For it is a fearful thing not to believe in a hope of repentance.

Saint Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem

"LET US STAND ARIGHT, LET US STAND WITH FEAR!"

LAITY WITHIN THE HOLY ALTAR?

From the Holy Mountain publication "«Σελίδες Ἐρημίου» (Pages from the Wilderness)", October 2004. Translated from the Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of Saint Poimen.

The sight is indeed awesome! If it is a fearful thing to be within the confines of an Orthodox Church, the space occupied by the Sanctuary of our faith—the location wherein His Body and Blood prevail, the so-called Holy Altar—ought to invoke an even greater awe and fear. The priest who serves literally trembles in fear, for he has been deemed worthy by God "to enter within the veil into the Holy of Holies where angels desire to stoop; to hear the voice of the Lord God's glad tidings; to see with his own eyes the presence of the holy Oblation; and to delight in the divine and sacred Liturgy" (from the services of Holy Unction).

Attention, prayer, awe, contrition, fear, compunction, sanctity, and an overly attentive and respectful behavior: these are all elements recommended for the posture and attitude of all clergy within the Holy Altar. Unfortunately, this environment worthy of the Divine Presence is altered through the presence of other persons within this sacred location.

We could easily maintain that the presence of a specific individual to serve the liturgical needs of the priest would not necessarily compromise or be at odds with the location's holiness. However, there is such an abuse in the presence of laity that it provokes impiety and completely disrupts the serving clergy's prayers and attentiveness to the ongoing divine services. Thus, one ends up wishing for the complete absence of all laity from within the Holy Altar.

Let us review all those who enter the Holy Altar of various Orthodox Churches:

(1) Young children, the so-called "Altar boys." These are pure and innocent—for the most part, children. However, these children either become overly familiar with the ongoing divine events; or become scandalized by the inattentive behavior of men; or reconcile their presence only through their "Altar-wear" uniforms; or, even worse, cause disruptions through their noisy presence. They thus become accustomed to disrespectful behavior and an overall impious posture. It is quite noticeable that Altar boys rarely stay within the area wherein the church-going laity is present. With a few quick leaps, they "fly" through the main section of the church and then through the Holy Altar back door, they eventually find their way into the streets. The Church often loses these children forever. It is essential and necessary that these children receive some very specific instructions and training. They must understand that their sole purpose is to assist in the divine services. During the Liturgy, let all these children stand attentively at the solea. Their presence within the Holy Altar is not necessary.

(2) Men of varying ages. Young men who used to dress like “Altar boys” now rush into the Holy Altar. They claim and behave as if they take responsibility for the younger children. They are often seen talking among themselves or even laughing. The serving priest appears to be completely unable to ask them to permanently leave the Holy Altar. He instead tolerates these “used to be Altar boys,” who nowadays enter God’s Church and His Altar with all kinds of different looks and clothing (long hair, blue jeans, earrings, etc.). The presence of these young men with the peculiar looks in the Altar becomes the topic of conversation and source of scandal for many churchgoers.

We also observe a few older men, of varying ages, who insist upon being within the Holy Altar because they are the priest’s friends, or because they have a relative who is a priest, or because they “need to be” there, or because... Usually, all of these men have the exclusivist or pharisaic attitude that they are better than all other adult churchgoers on the outside and thus demand special treatment, a better piece of holy bread, etc. All these men must exit the Holy Altar. The argument that “if we ask them to leave the Holy Altar they will never step foot inside this Church” simply does not hold and is completely incorrect. Furthermore, the serving priest becomes morally implicit in this exemplification and public display of pride, lack of discernment, and complete disrespect during the Liturgy.

(3) Women who assist in maintaining the propriety of the Church enter the Holy Altar as well. They even utilize the excuse that somebody has read a prayer over them. However, even within women’s monasteries whereby the presence of a nun within the Altar is necessary, such presence takes place with the greatest of discernment. The presence of women in the Holy Altar is prohibited and permitted in few and extremely rare occasions. The demand for attendants within the Holy Altar is minimal and even when deemed appropriate, it is preferred that the serving priest address completion of the related tasks on his own instead of being distracted by the presence of laity. It is not difficult to prepare the censor or the boiling water for Holy Communion.

Even when circumstances warrant this, let the priest select an older, serious man of impeccable character to assist him with piety and devotion. The holy bread can be cut into pieces at a different location in the Church and brought into the Holy Altar by this person. The candles may also be lit by the same person and passed to the children who will be in the solea. The loaves of holy bread, along with the names to be commemorated, should also be passed onto the same person.

There is an easy solution for all of the associated needs. Let us only make the firm commitment that our Holy Altar will remain impassible; that it will be impassible not only to laity, but also to the corresponding familiarity of “typical” worship, to mischief and disorder, to disrespect and impiety.

“Let us Stand Aright, let us stand in Fear!”

+ + +

Editor’s Note: Much of the disrespect observed by the Athonites can be applied to the very structure of our churches today. A

visualization of their typical churches, so true to the ancient form, as compared with many of our modern structures, will elucidate the Athonites’ frustration. With a vain and convenient appeal to “ancient tradition,” modernist elements within worldwide Orthodoxy have sought to tear down the iconostasis or templon. If this is not possible, they want to at least minimize it by shortening its height or compromising its actual wall with see-through slots. Compare this to many of the Athonite churches, where the iconostasis is usually tall and opaque.

Rarely do we find a church with a typikario (bookroom) or proper vestry. Having these compartments that surround but do not include the altar-proper would provide a close and quiet place for attendants to complete their tasks as suggested by the article.

The general degradation—even blatant disregard—of the architectural tradition of the Church is also a visible demonstration of the pervasive lack of understanding of the theological symbolism contained in the actual church structure. While a separate article (or rather, book) could be dedicated to this subject, let us at least not fail to recognize that the erosion of our architectural tradition extends beyond the altar. Let the reader ask himself how many American Orthodox churches he has visited are either in the shape of a cross or in the basilica style. How many, instead, are haphazard, irregular, or even “New Age” in form? How many actually face east? How many are free from Protestant pews and organs? How many contain Roman Catholic kneeling benches? How many have for seating purposes the theologically significant stasithia, so traditional to Orthodoxy?

In addition to the recommendations in the above article, we would also like to add a few suggestions along the same lines:

(1) Rather than creating a stir with a loud heating device, the attendant may boil water ahead of time and store it in a good thermos until the appointed time.

(2) Altar boys should avoid wearing ties (they can get caught in or negligently brushed against holy things) or shoes that distract by clicking on hard floors. The latter applies to women as well.

(3) To avoid scandal and needless temptation, altar wine should be stored in a locked cabinet away from the access of children.



Rejoice if you happen to meet with external humiliation that is not of your own seeking. Accept it as a special mercy of God. There have been people who attained salvation by humility alone, without ascetic endeavors. But without humility no one has ever been saved or ever will be saved.

St. Theophan the Recluse, “The Art of Prayer”

THE DAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

By St. John of Shanghai & San Francisco.

The day of the Last Judgment! That day no one knows—only God the Father knows—but its signs are given in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation) of the holy Apostle John the Theologian. Apocalypse speaks of the events at the end of the world and of the Last Judgment, primarily in images and in a veiled manner. However, the Holy Fathers have explained these images, and there is an authentic Church tradition that speaks clearly concerning the signs of the approach of the end, and concerning the Last Judgment. Before the end of life on earth there will be agitation, wars, civil war, hunger, earthquakes... Men will suffer from fear, will die from expectation of calamity. There will be no life, no joy of life but a tormented state of falling away from life. Nevertheless there will be a falling away not only from life but from faith also, and *when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?* (St. Luke 18:8). Men will become proud, ungrateful, rejecting Divine law. Together with the falling away from life will be a weakening of moral life. There will be an exhaustion of good and an increase of evil.

Of these times, the holy Apostle John the Theologian speaks in his God-inspired work, the Apocalypse. He says that he *was in the Spirit* when he wrote it; this means that the Holy Spirit Himself was in him, when under the form of various images, the fate of the Church and the world was opened to him, and so this is a Divine Revelation.

The Apocalypse represents the fate of the Church in the image of a woman who hides herself in the wilderness: she does not show herself in public life. In public life, forces that prepare the possibility for the appearance of Antichrist will play the leading role. Antichrist will be a man, and not the devil incarnate. “Anti” signifies “in place of” or “against.” Antichrist is a man who desires to be in place of Christ, to occupy His place and possess what Christ should possess. He desires to possess the attraction of Christ and authority over the whole world. Moreover, Antichrist will receive that authority before his destruction and the destruction of the world.

What is known of this man—Antichrist? His precise ancestry is unknown: his father is completely unknown, and his mother a foul pretended virgin. He will be a Jew of the tribe of Dan. He will be very intelligent and endowed with skill in handling people. He will be fascinating and kind. The philosopher Vladimir Soloviev worked a long time at presenting the advent and person of Antichrist. He carefully made use of all material on this question, not only Patristic, but also Moslem, and he worked out a brilliant picture.

Before the advent of Antichrist, there was a preparation in the world, the possibility of his appearance. The mystery of iniquity doth already work (II Thes. 2:7). The forces preparing for his appearance fight above all against the lawful Imperial authority. The holy Apostle Paul says that Antichrist cannot

be manifested until what withholdest is taken away (II Thes. 2:6-7). St. John Chrysostom explains that the *withholding one* is the lawful pious authority: such an authority fights with evil. For this reason the *mystery*, already at work in the world, fights with this authority; it desires a lawless authority. When the *mystery* decisively achieves that authority, nothing will hinder the appearance of Antichrist any longer.

Fascinating, intelligent, kind, he will be merciful—he will act with mercy and goodness; but not for the sake of mercy and goodness, but for the strengthening of his own authority. When he will have strengthened it to the point where the whole world acknowledges him, then he will reveal his face.

For his capital, he will choose Jerusalem, because it was here that the Savior revealed His Divine teaching and His person. It was here that the entire world was called to the blessedness of goodness and salvation. The world did not acknowledge Christ and crucified Him in Jerusalem; whereas, the whole world will acknowledge the Antichrist’s authority and Jerusalem will become the capital of the world.

Having attained the pinnacle of authority, Antichrist will demand the acknowledgement that he has attained what no earthly power had ever attained or could attain and then demand the worship of himself as a higher being, as a god.

V. Soloviev describes the character of his activity well, as “Supreme Ruler.” He will do what is pleasing to all—on the condition of being recognized as Supreme Authority. He will allow the Church to exist, permit her Divine services, promise to build magnificent churches... on the condition, that all recognize him as “Supreme Being” and worship him. Antichrist will have a personal hatred for Christ; he will see Him as a rival and look upon Him as a personal enemy. He will live by this hatred and rejoice in men’s apostasy from Christ.

Under Antichrist, there will be an immense falling away from the faith. Many bishops will change in faith and in justification will point to the brilliant situation of the Church. The search for compromise will be the characteristic disposition of men. Straight-forwardness of confession will disappear. Men will cleverly justify their fall, and gracious evil will support such a general disposition. There will be the habit of apostasy from truth and the sweetness of compromise and sin in men.

Antichrist will allow men everything, as long as they “fall down and worship him”; and the whole world will submit to him. Then there will appear the two righteous men, who will fearlessly preach the faith and accuse Antichrist. According to Church tradition, they are the two Prophets of the Old Testament, Elijah and Enoch, who did not taste of death, but will taste it now for three days, and in three days they must rise. Their death will call forth the great rejoicing of Antichrist and his servants. Their resurrection will plunge them into great confusion and terror. Then, the end of the world will come.

The Apostle Peter said that the first world was made out of water—an image of the primordial chaos, and perished by water—in the Flood. Now the world is reserved unto fire. The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up

(II Peter 3:5-7, 10). All the elements will ignite. This present world will perish in a single instant. In an instant all will be changed. Moreover, the Sign of the Son of God, the Sign of the Cross, will appear. The whole world, having willingly submitted to Antichrist, will weep. Everything is finished forever: Antichrist killed, the end of his kingdom of warfare with Christ, the end, and one is held accountable; one must answer to the true God.

“The end of the world” signifies not the annihilation of the world, but its transformation. Everything will be transformed suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye. The dead will rise in new bodies: their own, but renewed, just as the Savior rose in His own body and traces of wounds from the nails and spear were on it, yet it possessed new faculties, and in this sense it was a new body. It is not clear whether this new body will be the same as Adam was made, or whether it will be an entirely new body.

Afterward, the Lord will appear in glory on the clouds. Trumpets will sound, loud, with power! They will sound in the soul and conscience! All will become clear to the human conscience. The Prophet Daniel, speaking of the Last Judgment, relates how the Ancient of Days, the Judge sits on His throne, and before Him is a fiery stream (Daniel 7:9-10). Fire is a purifying element; it burns sin. Woe to a man if sin has become a part of his nature: then the fire will burn the man, himself. This fire will be kindled within man: seeing the Cross, some will rejoice, but others will fall into confusion, terror, and despair. Thus, men will be divided instantly. The very state of a man’s soul casts him to one side or the other, to right or to left.

The more consciously and persistently man strives toward God in his life, the greater will be his joy when he hears: “Come unto Me, ye blessed.” Conversely: the same words will call the fire of horror and torture to those who did not desire Him, who fled and fought or blasphemed Him during their lifetime!

The Last Judgment knows of no witnesses or written protocols! Everything is inscribed in the souls of men and these records, these “books,” are opened at the Judgment. Everything becomes clear to all and to oneself. Moreover, some will go to joy, while others—to horror.

When “the books are opened,” it will become clear that the roots of all vices lie in the human soul. Here is a drunkard or a lecher: when the body has died, some may think that sin is dead too. No! There was an inclination to sin in the soul, and that sin was sweet to the soul; and if the soul has not repented and has not freed itself of the sin, it will come to the Last Judgment with the same desire for sin. It will never satisfy that desire and in that soul there will be the suffering of hatred. It will accuse everyone and everything in its tortured condition; it will hate everyone and everything. “There will be gnashing of teeth” of powerless malice and the unquenchable fire of hatred.

A “fiery gehenna”—such is the inner fire. “There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Such is the state of hell.

A PARENTAL ADMONITION

By Our Holy Father St. John Chrysostom.

Let us suppose that you fulfill the commandment of the Law in every other respect, but being unfaithful in this one commandment you will be severely punished. Listen to this proof taken from the history of one ancient people. You will immediately see to what terrible punishment those fathers subject themselves who neglect their children’s upbringing.

Among the Jews was one priest who was respected for his meek character. His name was Eli. This priest had two sons who had given themselves over to every vice. The father did not concern himself with this and paid little attention; or if their depravity, having reached the limit, forced him to reproach them, he did it without the necessary fervor and authority. He should have punished them severely, thrown them out of his presence, and taken strict measures in order to put a stop to the outrage.

He did nothing of the sort. He limited himself to giving them a form of admonition: *Nay, my Sons, for the report which I hear is not good; do not so* (I Kings 2:24). Is this what he should have said? They offended the One to Whom they owed their existence, and he still accepts them as part of his family? His admonition was useless and vain. No, this demanded not an admonition but a strong lesson, severe torments, a treatment as strong as the evil. He should have used fear to root their young hearts out of this blindness.

An admonition! Eli’s sons had no lack of these. O useless words! O criminal meekness by which they became victims! A war began, and the wretches became the spoils of their enemy. When their father learned of their misfortune, he fell to the ground and, smashing his head, died.

I have just told you that fathers who do not take care to give their children a Christian upbringing are murderers of their own children. Is it not true? Who should Eli blame for his sons, Death?

No, Himself. True, the enemy’s sword slew them, but the neglect of their false father directed the blow. Abandoned by heavenly help, they appeared naked against the arrows of the Philistines. The father destroyed himself and them. Meanwhile, we see the same thing before ourselves daily. How many parents there are who do not want to take upon themselves this labor of correcting their un-submissive and unruly children! They are as if afraid to upset their children by reigning in with stern words the vicious tendencies to which they have submitted themselves. What is the outcome? Their disorder increases; their impunity leads them to criminal offenses; they are brought to trial; and the wretches die at the hands of the executioner. You refused your personal rights over them and committed them to the severity of civil punishment, and human justice wielded its harsh rights over them. You are afraid to humiliate them with some light punishment in your presence; but what horrible dishonor shall befall you when your son is no longer around; and the father, hounded everywhere by accusing glares, no longer dares to show himself anywhere.

Τὸ Μυστήριον Τῆς Ἀναστάσεως Τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Ἁγίου Συμεῶν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου, λόγος ἀπὸ τὶς Κατηχήσεις τοῦ Ἁγ. Συμεῶν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου ποὺ ἐκφωνήθηκε τῆ δευτέρα ἡμέρα τῆς δευτέρας ἐβδομάδος μετὰ τὸ Πάσχα, πρὸς τοὺς μοναχοὺς τῆς μονῆς τοῦ Ἁγ. Μάμαντος, στὴν ὁποία διετέλεσε ἡγούμενος.

Τώρα πλέον τὸ Πάσχα, ἡ χαρμόσυνη ἡμέρα ποὺ μᾶς χαρίζει εὐφροσύνη καὶ χαρὰ, ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως, ποὺ συντελεῖται καθημερινὰ καὶ ἀέναο στὶς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν ποὺ γνωρίζουν τὸ μυστήριό της, γέμισε τὶς καρδιές μας μὲ χαρὰ καὶ ἄφατη ἀγαλλίαση. Ταυτόχρονα ἔδωσε τέρμα στὸν κόπο τῆς πάνσεπτης νηστείας, ἣ γὰρ νὰ πῶ καλλίτερα, τῆς ἔδωσε πλήρωμα καὶ συγχρόνως παρηγόρησε τὶς ψυχὰς μας.

Ἄς εὐχαριστήσουμε λοιπὸν τὸν Κύριο ποὺ μᾶς βοήθησε νὰ διαπλεύσουμε τὸ πέλαγος τῆς νηστείας καὶ μᾶς ὀδήγησε στὸν λιμένα τῆς ἀναστάσεώς του γεμάτους χαρὰ. Ἄς τὸν εὐχαριστήσουμε καὶ ὅσοι διανύσαμε τὸ δρόμο τῆς νηστείας μὲ ἐπιμέλεια καὶ προθυμία, μὲ πρόθεση γεμάτη ζέση καὶ μὲ ἀγῶνες γιὰ τὴν ἀπόκτηση τῆς ἀρετῆς, καὶ ὅσοι λιποψυχήσαμε σ' αὐτὰ ἀπὸ ἀμέλεια καὶ ψυχικὴ ἀσθένεια (...)

Ἀλλὰ ἄς δοῦμε καὶ ἄς ἐξετάσουμε προσεκτικὰ, ποῖο εἶναι τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ μας, τὸ ὁποῖο σ' ἐμᾶς ποὺ θέλουμε τελεῖται πάντοτε μυστικά, καὶ πῶς ὁ Χριστὸς θάπτεται μέσα μας σὰν σὲ μνήμα, καὶ πῶς, ἀφοῦ ἐνώθει μὲ τὶς ψυχὰς μας, ἀνίσταται καὶ ἀνιστᾶ μαζί του κι ἐμᾶς.

Ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ Θεὸς μας σταυρώθηκε καὶ προσήλωσε πάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία τοῦ κόσμου, γεύθηκε τὸ θάνατο καὶ κατέβηκε στὰ ἔγκατα τοῦ ἄδη. Ὁ Χριστὸς, λοιπὸν, ἀνεβαίνοντας πάλι ἀπὸ τὸν ἄδη, ἐνώθηκε μὲ τὸ ἄχραντο σῶμα του, ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο κατεβαίνοντας ἐκεῖ καθόλου δὲν χωρίστηκε ἡ Θεότητα, καὶ ἀμέσως ἀναστήθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκροὺς· μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ, ἀνέβηκε στὸν οὐρανὸ μὲ δόξα πολλή καὶ δύναμη. Ἔτσι λοιπὸν καὶ τώρα, ὅταν ἐμεῖς βγαίνουμε ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ εἰσερχόμαστε, μὲ τὴ μίμηση τῶν παθημάτων τοῦ Κυρίου, στὸ μνήμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως καὶ τῆς μετανοίας, αὐτὸς ὁ ἴδιος κατεβαίνοντας ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ, εἰσέρχεται σὰν σὲ τάφο στὸ σῶμα μας, καὶ ἀφοῦ ἐνώθει μὲ τὶς ψυχὰς μας τὶς ἀνασταίνει, αὐτὲς ποὺ εἶναι ὁμολογουμένως νεκρὲς. Καὶ τότε ἀκριβῶς ἀξιώνει αὐτόν ποὺ μ' αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο ἀναστήθηκε μαζί μὲ τὸν Χριστό, νὰ βλέπῃ τὴ δόξα τῆς μυστικῆς ἀναστάσεώς του.

Ἀνάσταση λοιπὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ δική μας ἀνάσταση, ποὺ εἴμαστε πεσμένοι στὴν ἁμαρτία. Ἀνάσταση τῆς ψυχῆς εἶναι ἡ ἔνωση μὲ τὴ ζωὴ· γιὰ τὸ ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τὸ νεκρὸ σῶμα, ἂν δὲν δεχθῆ μέσα του τὴ ζωντανὴ ψυχὴ καὶ δὲν ἐνώθη μ' αὐτὴν χωρὶς μείξη δὲν λέγεται ὅτι ζεῖ, οὔτε μπορεῖ νὰ ζῆ, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ζῆ μόνη της, ἂν δὲν ἐνωθῆ μὲ τὸν Θεό, τὴν πραγματικὰ αἰώνια ζωὴ, μὲ ἔνωση ἄρρητη

καὶ ἀσύγχυτη. Γιατὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔνωση ποὺ ἐπιτυγχάνεται μὲ τὴ γνώση τῶν μυστηρίων τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν ὄραση τῶν πνευματικῶν ἀληθειῶν καὶ τὴν αἴσθηση τῆς Θείας Χάριτος, ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι νεκρὴ, ἂν καὶ εἶναι νοερὴ καὶ κατὰ τὴν φύση της ἀθάνατη (...)

Τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἄνθρωποι τὴν πιστεύουν, εἶναι ὅμως πολὺ λίγοι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ τὴ βλέπουν καθαρά. Πῶς λοιπὸν μᾶς προτρέπει τώρα τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, σὰν νὰ εἶδαμε αὐτὴ ποὺ δὲν εἶδαμε, νὰ λέμε «Ἀνάστασιν Χριστοῦ θεασάμενοι», ἀφοῦ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀναστήθηκε μιὰ φορά, καὶ μάλιστα οὔτε τότε τὸν εἶδε κανεὶς τὴν ὥρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως; Ἄραγε μήπως θέλει ἡ Θεία Γραφὴ νὰ λέμε ψέματα; Ὅχι βέβαια, ἀλλὰ ἀντίθετα μᾶς παραγγέλλει νὰ λέμε τὴν ἀλήθεια, διότι ἡ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ γίνεται πραγματικὰ στὴν ψυχὴ κάθε πιστοῦ ξεχωριστά, καὶ μάλιστα ὄχι μιὰ φορά, ἀλλὰ—θὰ τολμοῦσα νὰ πῶ—συνεχῶς ὁ Δεσπότης Χριστὸς ἀνίσταται μέσα μας, λαμπροφωρόντας καὶ ἀπαστράπτοντας τὶς ἀστραπὲς τῆς ἀφθαρσίας καὶ τῆς θεότητος. Γιατὶ ἡ φωτοφόρος παρουσία τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτει τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Δεσπότη Χριστοῦ, ὅπως μέσα σὲ πρωϊνὴ φωτοχυσία. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέμε «Θεὸς Κύριος καὶ ἐπέφανεν ἡμῖν», καὶ



ΔΩΡΕΑΝ ΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ

ΠΡΟΣ ὍΛΟΥΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΕΣ ΜΑΣ

Ἡ Ἀδελφότης «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν» μὲ ιδιαίτερη χαρὰ κοινοποιεῖ πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἀναγνώστες τῆς «*Orthodox Heritage*» ὅτι μὲ τὴν οικονομικὴ βοήθεια εὐγενῶν καὶ καλοπροαίρετων ψυχῶν, προσφέρουμε ΔΩΡΕΑΝ DVDs μὲ ὁμιλίες εἰς τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐνδιαφέροντας Ὁρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς. Τὰ DVD τὰ ὁποῖα προσφέρουμε τὸν παρόντα μῆνα περιέχουν πάνω ἀπὸ 600 ὁμιλίες τοῦ **κ. Δημητρίου Παναγοπούλου** ἐπὶ πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων θεμάτων. Οἱ ὁμιλίες αὐτὲς ἀποτελοῦν ἓνα μεγάλο πνευματικὸν θησαυρὸν γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς Ἑλληνορθοδόξους Χριστιανούς. Εἰς τὸ μέλλον θὰ προσφέρουμε (ἐπίσης δωρεάν) καὶ ἄλλες ὁμιλίες τοῦ Πατρὸς Ἀθανασίου τοῦ Μυτιληναίου.

Πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε mini-DVD player ἢ DVD home theater ἢ ὑπολογιστὴ μὲ Windows operating system καὶ μὲ DVD player γιὰ νὰ ἀκούσετε τὶς προαναφερόμενες ὁμιλίες. Οἱ ἐνδιαφέροντες ἄς γράψουν ἓνα μικρὸ σημεῖωμα μὲ τὴν διεύθυνσή σας καὶ στείλτε το στὸ e-mail τῆς Ἀδελφότητος (**Poimen@mail.com**) ἢ διὰ τοῦ Ταχυδρομείου πρὸς:

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υποδηλώνοντας την δευτέρα παρουσία του τελειώνοντας λέμε «Ευλόγημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου».

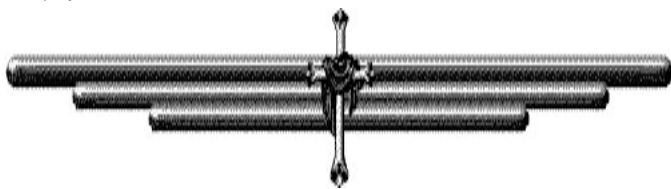
Σὲ ὅσους λοιπὸν φανερωθεῖ ὁ ἀναστημένος Χριστός, ὀλωσδιόλου πνευματικὰ φανερώνεται καὶ τὸν βλέπουν μὲ τὰ πνευματικὰ μάτια. Ὅταν δηλαδή ὁ Χριστός ἔλθει μέσα μας, μὲ τὴ χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, μᾶς ἀνιστᾷ ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ μᾶς ζωοποιεῖ καὶ μᾶς ἀξιώνει νὰ τὸν βλέπουμε μέσα μας ὀλοζώντανο, αὐτὸν ποὺ εἶναι ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀνώλεθρος· κὶ ὄχι μόνο αὐτό, ἀλλὰ μᾶς δίνει τὸ χάρισμα νὰ ἀντιλαμβανόμαστε ὅτι μᾶς ἀνιστᾷ μαζί Του καὶ μᾶς συνοξάζει!

Αὐτὰ λοιπὸν εἶναι τὰ θεῖα μυστήρια τῶν Χριστιανῶν, αὐτὴ ἡ κρυμμένη δύναμη τῆς πίστεώς μας, τὴν ὁποία οἱ ἄπιστοι ἢ δύσπιστοι ἢ, γιὰ νὰ πῶ καλύτερα ἡμίπιστοι, δὲν τὴν βλέπουν, οὔτε ἀσφαλῶς μποροῦν καθόλου νὰ τὴ δοῦν. Ἄπιστοι, δύσπιστοι καὶ ἡμίπιστοι εἶναι αὐτοὶ ποὺ δὲν ἀποδεικνύουν τὴν πίστη μὲ τὰ ἔργα τους. Γιατὶ χωρὶς ἔργα καὶ οἱ δαίμονες πιστεύουν καὶ ὁμολογοῦν ὅτι εἶναι Θεός ὁ Δεσπότης Χριστός. «Οἶδαμεν γάρ σε», λένε, τὸν «Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ», καὶ ἄλλοῦ «Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦλοι τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ Ὑψίστου εἰσίν».

Ἀλλὰ ὅμως οὔτε τοὺς δαίμονες οὔτε κὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀκόμη θὰ ὠφελήσῃ αὐτὴ ἡ ὁμολογία. Διότι κανένα ὄφελος δὲν προκύπτει ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν πίστη, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι νεκρὴ, σύμφωνα μὲ τὸν θεῖο Ἀπόστολο: «Ἡ πίστις γὰρ δίχα τῶν ἔργων νεκρὰ ἐστίν», ὅπως ἀκριβῶς καὶ τὰ ἔργα χωρὶς πίστη. Καὶ γιὰ τὴν εἶναι νεκρὴ; Διότι δὲν ἔχει μέσα της τὸ Θεὸ ποὺ ζωογονεῖ τὰ πάντα. Διότι δὲν προσπάθησε νὰ κλείσῃ μέσα της αὐτὸν ποὺ εἶπε: «Ὁ ἀγαπῶν με τὰς ἐντολάς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσει, καὶ ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ἐλευσόμεθα καὶ μονὴν παρ' αὐτῷ ποιησόμεθα», ὥστε μὲ τὴν παρουσία του νὰ ἀναστήσῃ τὸν πιστεύοντα ἐκ νεκρῶν, νὰ τὸν ζωοποιήσῃ καὶ νὰ τὸν ἀξιώσῃ νὰ διη καθαρὰ καὶ ὀλοκληρωτικὰ αὐτὸν ποὺ ἀναστήθηκε μέσα του καὶ ἀνέστησε καὶ αὐτόν. Νεκρὴ λοιπὸν εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ πίστη καὶ μᾶλλον εἶναι νεκροὶ ὅσοι τὴν ἔχουν ἀποκτήσει χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ ἔχουν καὶ ἔργα (...)

Ἄς τηρήσουμε σὰς παρακαλῶ τὶς ἐντολὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ, μὲ ὅση δύναμη ἔχουμε, ὥστε καὶ τὰ παρόντα καὶ τὰ μέλλοντα ἀγαθὰ νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε, καὶ μάλιστα ἐννοῶ τὴν ἴδια τὴν θέα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὴν ὁποία εἶθε ὅλοι ἐμεῖς νὰ ἐπιτύχουμε μὲ τὴ χάρη τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, στὸν ὅποιο ἀνήκη ἡ δόξα στοὺς αἰῶνες.

Ἀμήν.



Πολλὰ τέρατα ἐγέννησεν ἐν τοῖς καιροῖς ἡμῶν ὁ Ἄδης, ἀλλ' ἰσομέγεθες τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ οὐδέν!»
Ἀρχιμ. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδωρόπουλος (+1984)

Ἀπάντησις τοῦ Κυρίου Εἰς Προσευχὴν

Ἐξ ἐνός Ὁρθοδόξου φυλλαδίου (τὸ παρὸν κείμενο, ἀνεξαρτήτως τῆς γνησιότητός του, εἶναι δείγμα μεγάλης πίστεως).

Ἡ Ἁγία Ἐλισάβετ, Βασίλισσα τῆς Οὐγγαρίας ἐπεθύμει νὰ μάθῃ μερικὰς λεπτομερίας ἐπὶ τῶν παθῶν τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἐνῶ προσήυχετο ἐνεφανίσθη εἰς αὐτὴν ὁ Χριστὸς λέγων·

Ἀγαπητὴ μου Δούλη,

Μάθετε ὅτι οἱ ἐναντίον μου ἐνοπλοὶ στρατιῶται ἦσαν 125, οἱ συνοδεύοντές με δεμένον ἦσαν 33, οἱ ἐκτελεσταὶ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἦσαν 33, γρόνθοι ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου 30, πλησίον τοῦ κήπου διὰ νὰ ἀναγερωθῶ ἀπὸ χάμω μοῦ ἔδωσαν 105 κλωτσιές, τὰ κτυπήματα ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου καὶ τοῦ στήθους μου ἦσαν 18, κτυπήματα ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων 8. Μὲ ἔσυραν μὲ σχοινιά καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ μαλλιά 23 φορές. Πτύσματα ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου 666, εἰς τὸ σῶμα 100, πληγαὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς 100. Μὲ ἀνέτρεψαν θανασίμως μίαν φοράν. Ἐπὶ τοῦ Σταυροῦ ἔμεινα κρεμασμένος 2 ὥρες. Ἀναστέναξα 120 φορές. Μὲ ἔσυραν καὶ μὲ τράβηξαν ἀπὸ τὸ γένειον 23 φορές· μοῦ ἔκαμαν 100 ἀμυχὰς ἀπὸ ἀγκάθι καὶ στήν κεφαλὴν τρεῖς θανασίμους ἀμυχὰς καὶ 1000. Μὲ συνάδευσαν 508 στρατιῶται καὶ τρεῖς μὲ ὠδήγουν. Ἔχουσα 4380 σταγόνας αἵματος.

Ἐκεῖνος ὅστις καθημερινῶς θ' ἀπαγγέλλῃ 7 φορές τὸ «Πάτερ ἡμῶν» καὶ 7 φορές τὸ «Χαῖρε Κεχαριτωμένη» ἐπὶ διάστημα 12 ἐτῶν συνεχῶς, ἵνα συμπληρώσῃ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν σταγόνων τοῦ αἵματος ποὺ ἔχουσα, καὶ ποὺ θὰ ζῆσῃ ὡς καλὸς χριστιανός, θὰ τοῦ κάμω 5 χάριτας.

Ἦτοι· α) πλήρης συγχώρησις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, β) ἐὰν ἀποθάνῃ πρὸ τῶν ἐτῶν θὰ εἶναι ὡς νὰ εἶχε συμπληρώσει 12, γ) θὰ ἀπαλλαγῇ τῶν κόπων τῆς κολάσεως δ) θὰ εἶναι μάρτυς ὡς νὰ εἶχε χύσῃ τὸ αἷμα του ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως, ε) θὰ κατέλθω ἐξ οὐρανῶν εἰς τὴν γῆν διὰ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν ψυχὴν τῶν συγγενῶν αὐτοῦ μέχρι τῆς τετάρτης γενεᾶς. Ἐκεῖνος ὅστις θὰ φέρῃ μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ τὴν προσευχὴν ταύτην δὲν θὰ ἀποθάνῃ ἀπὸ πνιγμὸν οὔτε ἀπὸ βίαιον ἢ αἰφνίδιον θάνατον. Δὲν θὰ προσβληθῇ ἀπὸ πανώλην οὔτε ἀπὸ κεραυνὸν καὶ δὲν θὰ ἀποθάνῃ χωρὶς νὰ ἐξομολογηθῇ. Θ' ἀπαλλαγῇ τῶν ἐχθρῶν του, τῆς ἰσχύος τῶν δικαστηρίων καὶ ἀπὸ ὄλας τὰς κακοβούλους καὶ ψευδεῖς μαρτυρίας. Αἱ γυναῖκες αἱ ὁποῖαι θὰ ὑποφέρουν ἀπὸ τὸν τοκετὸν καὶ δὲν θὰ δύνανται νὰ γεννήσουν, ἔχουσαι μεθ' ἑαυτῶν τὴν προσευχὴν ταύτην θὰ περιέλθουν ἐκτὸς κινδύνου καὶ θὰ γεννήσουν εὐκολα.

Εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, εἰς τὴν ὁποίαν θὰ εὐρίσκειται ἡ προσευχὴ αὕτη, δὲν θὰ ὑπάρξῃ ποτε προδοσία, οὔτε ἄλλα κακὰ συμβάντα. Τεσσαράκοντα δὲ ἡμέρας ἀπὸ τοῦ θανάτου θὰ ἰδῇ τὴν Ἁγίαν Ἀειπάρθενον Μαρίαν. Ζήτω τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.

Ἄρχισε νὰ λέγῃς· *Κύριε ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ Υἱέ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐλέησον μὲ τὴν ἁμαρτωλήν...*

THE CONFESSION OF AN ABORTIONIST

From the Greek Orthodox publication, "St. Philotheos of Paros" («Άγιος Φιλόθεος της Πάρου»), Jan.–April 2006 issue, pp. 96–100 (translated from the Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen).

Dr. Stoyan Antasevich is the only Serbian gynecologist who has publicly declared that abortion is murder. He has further declared that responsibility for this murder is attributed to both the mother as well as the gynecologist who performs the abortion. Dr. Antasevich has recently published a book (in Serbian), titled *The Sanctity of Life*. It is a collection of articles on the treacherous and horrible crime of infanticide within the womb of the mother. He gave an interview that was published within the pages of the Serbian periodical *Orthodoxy*. The content of this interview is quite shocking due to its subject matter as well as Dr. Antasevich's sincerity and frankness. A more fitting name for this interview would have been "A Public Confession and Repentance." We provide a portion of this valuable and precious testimony.

QUESTION: Which was the specific moment when you realized that by performing an abortion, you are murdering a living human being?

ANSWER: I am a medical doctor, and as such I have full realization of all my past actions as they relate to my being an abortionist. I am truly guilty of all of the associated horrible atrocities that I committed as a "gynecologist." I thus feel obliged to serve as a witness, to reveal, awaken, and warn others that willful interruption of any pregnancy constitutes essentially murder of the defenseless, unborn child. Among my many responsibilities as a "gynecologist," I also had the unfortunate task of performing abortions, an activity that is grievously considered 100% legal. Back then, I had no concept that my actions were equivalent to murder; now, however, I have full knowledge and realization that my sinful acts before God are immense! In the university, I was taught that a child is alive only after it is born, after its first cry. Prior to this moment, we were all taught and truly believed that it is a mere "organ" within the mother's body; it is "no different" than a tooth, or a kidney, or the outgrowth of an appendix.

I performed up to 62,000 abortions! You could say that I am responsible for the murder of enough people to populate a whole city. Also, keep in mind that Belgrade has several hospitals and many private clinics, where doctors such as me perform abortions on a daily basis. In the latter part of the 1980's ultrasound technology was introduced, which along with its diagnostic ability resulted in many "surprises," at least for me. For the first time, I saw the fetus within the mother's womb; I observed its heartbeat, movements, and opening of its mouth; for larger fetuses, I saw them sucking their thumbs. The fetus has the obvious ability to sense, think, and react to its environment, as it was made apparent by the deep ultrasound waves. I also realized that this same fetus—this obviously

living, human being—within the four to five minutes that it takes to perform an abortion, ended up butchered on the abortionist's table, right next to his surgical tools.

QUESTION: When did you stop performing abortions?

ANSWER: What I am about to describe to you is quite troublesome and extremely painful; it is no longer possible for any doctor or any person to continue sugar-coating or even embellishing and beautifying something which is so horrible and frightful.

To my extreme sorrow, misfortune, and unhappiness, in 1988, I was performing an abortion on a four-and-a-half month old fetus. During that "procedure", whose details I am and will remain unable to describe without becoming emotional and extremely disturbed, I was horrified to discover the murderer within me. A procedure, which should have been rather routine for me and my staff, became a true nightmare... With the first movement of the "crusher", the surgical instrument that literally butchers the baby, I retrieved its little hand and placed it on my table. The end of the hand, where its nerves were exposed, touched a small cotton ball with iodine and immediately began to contract and move! Through my next movement I removed a foot, and the same thing happened: the foot began to contract and tremble! I had never had this happen to me before. I attempted to capture its heart, which I could feel through my instruments still beating rapidly at first, and then slower and slower...until it finally stopped. It was during that exact moment that I realized that I had just murdered a full human being! To make matters worse, the woman was bleeding profusely... I started to pray: "Lord, please help me to save this woman's life and hold me and me alone accountable. Punish me!"

From that day, I never again performed another abortion. And it so happened that my "newly" discovered knowledge—or rather, "realization"—coincides with the Church's position, that the fetus is truly alive and a human being from the exact instant of its conception—in other words, the moment of the egg's fertilization.

I must emphatically state and inform everybody that murder of the child within the mother's womb is a graver sin than "ordinary" murder; this is because the fetus within the mother's womb is helpless and fully unable to defend itself, even though it is not guilty of any offense whatsoever. The fetus may be the only human being with no offense, since it has not even been born yet...

QUESTION: How are the aborted fetuses being utilized? The question also applies to fetuses that were fertilized in the laboratory, outside of the mother's womb. What is the eventual fate of the bodily members or the microscopic dead fetuses?

ANSWER: Yes, it is a good and frequently posed question: what do hospitals and clinics do with the over-abundance of the fetus body parts? In our country (as well as the rest of the world, I think) there are neither public announcements nor any information disseminated on this question. There exist limited capabilities at best, in our country, as well as the rest

of the world, to utilize fetuses in the pharmaceutical industry; it is apparently quite expensive to do this. Furthermore, I am unaware of any plans, conditions, or circumstances that would change that. For the medical industry, the aborted fetuses are truly considered an “outcast” or “rejected” material. They are placed within black sacks, along with organs or organic matter from various operations that are performed on adults, and disposed accordingly within the confines of environmental law—burned or...

Bottom line, even after its murder, the fetus is still not treated with any amount of human decency or respect. I contend that as a society, we are obligated to protect the child medically, ethically, legally, and through solid, enforceable laws. The unborn child ought to have and must be granted the same rights as an adult. That child is an equal member of our society and our obligation extends to all of its members.

QUESTION: Is there accurate information or statistical data on the number of abortions performed each year in Serbia?

ANSWER: It is impossible to obtain accurate information, and I consider all of the existing statistical data as suspect, at best. Some of the sources indicate that we perform 120,000 abortions per year; other sources inform us that the number may be significantly higher, by order of magnitude, and as much as 420,000 abortions per year. It is my personal, professional opinion, that we perform 25 abortions for every child that is born!

QUESTION: What is your personal opinion on the issue of birth control?

ANSWER: Birth control means that one knowingly takes “measures” or performs an “act” for the sole purpose of controlling impregnation, or fertilization of an available egg within a woman’s body. I classify birth control in three different types: The first kind is abstinence, which is completely acceptable. The second kind is the undisciplined gratification or satisfaction of the sexual urge without the injection of sperm within the womb, and this is clearly prohibited [by the Church]. The third kind is truly satanic. In no uncertain terms it is the indirect application of abortive techniques that are incorrectly (and for obviously “political” reasons) called “birth control”—the widely utilized birth control pills, the IUD, etc.

Very few people know what the IUD (also called spiral) truly is. It is a mechanical device introduced within the womb to provoke or cause sterility. Every spiral is abortive in its nature. Early pregnancy tests prove that women who consistently use this “birth-control” technique actually get pregnant several times each year. This technique simply prohibits the fetus from implanting itself onto the womb; thus, it dies when it is approximately one week old. The exact same thing results through the utilization of the “pill”. This “technique” prevents the maturing of the egg and alters the state of the pituitary wall of the womb, thus forcing rejection of the potential fetus.

There exist a great number of uninformed or misinformed women who naively adopt the commonly accepted irresponsible position on this matter. After all, when was the last time that you saw a TV program or a presentation that was against

abortions, against “birth-control” techniques, against human egg fertilization outside of the womb?

QUESTION: What is fertilization outside of the womb?

ANSWER: Oh yes, I have also performed this several times. In this process, several of the mother’s eggs are collected and fertilized. There can be as many as 10 or even 20! The “doctor” then performs a differentiation process, during which the extra embryos are “terminated” so that the survival of three of them, at most, is made possible. If more than three are fertilized, it becomes necessary to reduce their numbers, as the womb is incapable of reliably supporting such pregnancies.

+ + +

Editor’s Note: In post-Communist Serbia, the Serbian Constitution of April 1992 eliminated Article 191 of the Yugoslav constitution, which guaranteed abortion as a right. A few months later, the Serbian Parliament removed abortion from the list of medical services covered by insurance, and new legislation restricted access to abortion. Legal abortion availability after 10 weeks was legal for purely medical (life threatening) reasons and not for rape. Unfortunately, the Women’s Law Advocacy Centre campaign of August 1994 against the restrictive abortion law got it withdrawn. In early 1993, the Serbian Orthodox Church called for the banning of abortion. Women’s groups protested on the streets of Belgrade, causing a huge stir. In March 2000, the Serbian Orthodox Church sent a letter to its priests telling them “not to grant Holy Communion” to doctors and midwives known to perform abortions. “Abortion is a grievous sin before God, condemned by the Scriptures,” reads the letter by the Church’s highest body, the Holy Synod. “As such, it threatens the entire Serbian nation with biological extermination.”

The biggest supporter of abortions in Serbia had been the George “Soros foundations” which have been kicked out of that country. It is interesting to note that Mr. Soros’ foundations have as a primary objective “to improve the availability and quality of abortion services.” As of the early 1990s, 29 “Soros Foundations” were active in every post-communist country. In 1994, his foundations spent a total of \$300 million; by 1998, that figure had risen to \$74 million. These are enormous sums in an impoverished and vulnerable Eastern Europe. Current spending figures have not been uncovered. One can not help but wonder: Why is the compassionate, liberal, abortion-worshipper Soros so interested in promoting more abortions in Eastern Europe? One, for example, will look in vain for breast-cancer detection or prenatal or post-natal care funding by his foundations; yet for pro-abortion, the sky is the limit. Overpopulation cannot be the reason: The region is experiencing a colossal demographic collapse and has some of the lowest fertility rates in the world. Unavailability of abortion cannot be the answer either. According to a recent U.N. report, five European countries had more abortions than live births in 2000—the Russian Federation, Bulgaria, Belarus, Rumania, and Ukraine. Overall, the report said, abortion rates are “substantially higher in central and eastern Europe and the CIS countries than in western Europe and North America.” The only logical answer is that Soros wants as few Eastern Europeans born into this world as possible...

THE ONE TRUE AND INDIVISIBLE CHURCH

By Archpriest Lev Lebedev. Translated by Hieromonk Herman Ciuba.

Since its birth in the days of the Apostles, the Church of Christ has absorbed into itself people from many nations along its historical path. It has gradually grown from strength to strength *unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13). As a mighty tree grows from a little seed, or as a mature adult develops from an infant, so the Church of Christ, which once consisted of twelve fishermen, has at the present reached its full flowering. It has become a beautiful tree, covered with many branches and leaves (Matt. 13:32), with a developed doctrine, liturgics, symbolism, and rules, or canons, which embrace all aspects of its life and the life of each individual member. The canons of the Church are the laws necessary for its life and activity, just as there are laws which govern the living organism of the human body.

Christ cannot have several "bodies"; similarly, there can only be one Church of Christ.

The realities of contemporary life bring us face to face with the existence of a multitude of Christian denominations, all claiming the title of "Church." Both Catholics and Protestants of various kinds - Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, and even the followers of the most fanatical cults - all insist on the truth of their teachings.

One of the reasons for the divisions in Christianity, as in any other original idea, can be found in the Second Law of Thermodynamics, according to which every physical system tends toward a maximum of entropy, i.e., towards maximum disorder. But inasmuch as Christ founded the Church for man's salvation, it is certain that the leading and most active role in the division of Christianity has at all times been played by the devil, that age-old enemy of God and man.

When Christ called the devil *a liar and the father of lies* (John 8:44), He indicated the chief method used by the devil, namely, lying. In order to tear as many people as possible away from the Church, the devil first of all tries to put into their minds false ideas about religion, or heresies. When someone is then captivated by some new idea, taking it for a divine revelation, he imagines himself to be God's messenger, and begins to spread his pernicious doctrine with the greatest zeal and self-sacrifice. Everything he does is directed (so he thinks) toward "improving," "purifying," or "completing" the Christian religion. When the Church rejects some new heresy, the self-styled prophets separate themselves from it. They lead away some of the faithful and found new churches, which they declare to be the true Church, while they say that Christ's Church has gone astray and does not understand His teaching.

In this way all sorts of heresies have sprung up and continue to do so, from apostolic times until the present. First came Arianism, Monophysitism and Iconoclasm. Later, Roman

Catholicism departed from the true Church. From it came the churches of the Reformation, the Protestants, and from them, as from a veritable horn of plenty, flowed countless contemporary sects. These new sects are basically a repetition of heresies which were long ago condemned by Councils; they are just dressed up in new words.

As for those people who adhere steadfastly to the true teaching of Christ, the devil attempts to tear them away from the Church by means of schisms and parish strife. Once again, he cleverly suggests to people seemingly good reasons for correcting some deficiency or improving some existing situation. The trouble lies not so much with some particular customs or external activities, which may not be the best, and may be in need of correction; the real trouble is that people start quarrelling among themselves and then split into hostile groups.

How can a simple believer see his way clear amidst the confusing array of a multitude of churches, denominations, and cults?

In order to find the answer to this question, we must understand that the true Church has to be one that has an unbroken continuity with apostolic times, so that it preserves the Apostles' teaching, their traditions, and an unbroken line of apostolic succession, which runs from one bishop to the next. As a living organism, the Church grows and develops, but at the same time it must maintain the unity and identity of its own theanthropic nature.

In the Symbol of Faith, the Creed, we say, "I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." Such belief assumes the oneness of the Church, as the unity of a living organism, in which everything is closely linked together; this means unity in faith and doctrine, in liturgical life and in canonical order. All these things serve to guarantee that believers will be able to share in what is most important: in the sacrament of Holy Communion and in prayer. The various ancient Orthodox Churches were thus united in this communion; they formed, in essence, one Church, which was, as it were, a reflection of the Trinity and Unity of the one Divine Essence in diverse persons.

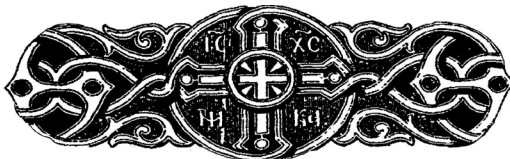
Some people put forward a theory which supposes that the Church of Christ was once one but was later "divided" into parts, including the Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, etc.; each of these parts is a "Christian Church," containing pieces of the truth; each is a sort of fragment of the once-united Apostolic Church. All of them, therefore, should now join together, first in a "dialogue of love," and then in prayer, and finally in the Eucharist. At the same time, each of these "churches" will retain its own teachings - in other words, its heresies. Such an approach to the question of unity ignores the fact that the true Church, the one founded by the Apostles, already exists in our own day, and according to Christ's promise it will exist until the end of the world (Matt. 16:18). Since this is so, the right thing to do would be for those who have fallen away to return to it. The Church is not some human organization; it is the

Body of Christ! If the discussion was simply about cooperation among people on the practical, earthly level, it would be natural for people to join together by mutual agreement. But since we are talking about uniting with the Church, all that is purely human must be set aside. What is necessary is to come back to Christ fully, to accept His teachings in their fullness, without any amendments or modernizations. It is necessary to rehabilitate that structure of the Church which was set up by Christ's Apostles.

Christ cannot have several "bodies"; likewise, there cannot be several parallel true Churches, because the Church is the Body of Christ, which, like every living organism, is indivisible. Therefore, there have never been, and by rights there cannot be, divisions of the Church. There were, and still are, heresies and schisms, which have fallen away from the Church. For this reason the ancient canons (rules) of the Church strictly forbid any kind of communion in prayer with those who have fallen away, i.e., with heretics, until they return to the Church by repentance.

Every man can find the salvation intended for him only in Orthodoxy, in the true Body of Christ. One who truly loves God will surely desire to be united with Him. In this love lies the essence of Christianity! Those who sincerely love Christ should be drawn by this love into the true Church!

If certain present-day "wise men" assert, that there are various paths leading to God, just as various trails lead to the summit of a mountain, it must be kept in mind that He Who offered Himself as the sole Way, Truth and Life is the Son of God, the God-Man. Those who teach anything else, or who lead men by other paths, are *thieves and robbers* (John 10:8).



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WHAT IS AN ANATHEMA?

By St. Theophan the Recluse.

Rarely has Orthodoxy existed without censures and reproaches on somebody's part. And no matter how many sermons are given explaining that the Church acts wisely for the salvation of her children—still the malcontents just keep repeating their line. Either they do not listen to the sermons, or these sermons do not strike home as regards the latter's perplexities, or perhaps they have formed their own conception of Orthodoxy and do not want to abandon it, no matter what you tell them. To some people our anathemas seem inhumane, to others constricting. Such charges might be valid in other situations, but there is no way they can apply to Orthodoxy.

What is the holy Church? It is a society of believers, united among themselves by a unity of confession of divinely revealed truths, by a unity of sanctification by divinely established Mysteries, and by a unity of government and guidance by God-given shepherds. The oneness of confession, sanctification, and administration constitutes the rule of this society, which is obligatory for anyone who joins it. Membership in this society is contingent upon accepting this rule and agreeing with it; remaining in this society is contingent upon fulfilling it.

Let us see how the holy Church grew and how it continues to grow. The preachers preach. Some of the listeners do not accept the preaching and leave; others accept it and as a result of accepting it are sanctified by the holy Mysteries, follow the guidance of the shepherds, and thus are incorporated into the holy Church—they are churched. That is how all the Church's members enter her. In entering her, they are mingled with all her members, they are united with them, and they remain in the Church only as long as they continue to be one with them all.

From this simple indication regarding how the Church is formed, you can see that as a society, the holy Church came to be and continues to exist just like any other society. And so regard it as you would any other, and do not deprive it of the rights belonging to any society. Let us take, for example, a temperance society. It has rules which every member must fulfill. And each of its members is a member precisely because he accepts and abides by its rules. Now suppose that some member not only refuses to abide by the rules but also holds many views completely opposed to those of the society and even rises up against its very goal. He not only does not himself observe temperance but even reviles temperance itself and disseminates notions which might tempt others and deflect them from temperance. What does the society ordinarily do with such people? First it admonishes them, and then it expels them. There you have an anathema! No one protests this, no one reproaches the society for being inhuman. Everyone acknowledges that the society is acting

in a perfectly legitimate manner and that if it were to act otherwise, it could not exist.

The holy Church acts likewise. After all, an anathema is precisely separation from the Church, or the exclusion from her midst of those who do not fulfill the conditions of unity with her and begin to think differently from the way she does, differently from the way they themselves promised to think upon joining her. Recollect how it happened with Arius. He held impious opinions concerning Christ and distorted the very act of our salvation. First he was admonished, and admonished many times by every persuasive and touching means possible. But since he stubbornly insisted upon his opinion, he was condemned and excommunicated from the Church—expelled from our society. Beware, have no communion with him and those like him. What else could the holy Church do? And could she continue to exist if she did not employ such strictness and warn her children with such solicitude about those who might corrupt and destroy them?

Let us see—what false teachings and what false teachers are excommunicated? Those who deny the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, divine providence; those who do not confess the all-holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the One God; those who do not acknowledge the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and our redemption by His death on the Cross; those who reject the grace of the Holy Spirit and the divine Mysteries which bestow it, and so forth. These are issues which are the very reason the holy Church is the Church, principles upon which she is founded and without which she could not be that which she is. Therefore those who rise up against such truths are to the Church what those who make attempts against our lives and our property are to us in our daily life. Robbers and thieves, after all, are nowhere permitted to carry on freely and go unpunished! And when they are bound and handed over to the law and to punishment, no one considers this to be inhumane or a violation of freedom. If you judge thus here, judge thus also concerning the society of the Church. These false teachers, just like thieves and robbers, plunder the property of the holy Church and of God, corrupting her children and destroying them.

Does the holy Church err in judging them, binding them, and casting them out? And would it really be love for man if she regarded the actions of such people with indifference and left them at liberty to destroy everyone else? Would a mother permit a snake to freely crawl up to and bite her little child, who does not understand the danger? If some immoral person were to gain access to your family and begin tempting your daughter, or your son—would you be able to regard their actions and their speeches with indifference? Would you not push such a person out the door and close it against them forever?! You should view the actions of the holy Church in the same way. She sees that individuals of corrupt mind appear, and corrupt others—and she rises up

against them, drives them away, and calls out to all those who are her own: Beware—so-and-so and such-and-such people wish to destroy your souls. Do not listen to them; flee from them. Thus she fulfills the duty of motherly love, and therefore acts lovingly.

At the present time, we have a proliferation of nihilists, spiritists and other pernicious clever ones who are carried away with the false teachers of the West. Do you really think that our holy Church would keep silence and not raise her voice to condemn and anathematize them, if their destructive teachings were something new? By no means. A council would be held, and in council all of them with their teachings would be given over to anathema.

But there is no need for such a council. Their false teachings have already all been anathematized in advance in those points where anathema is pronounced to those who deny the existence of God, the spirituality and immortality of the soul, the teachings concerning the all-holy Trinity and concerning the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

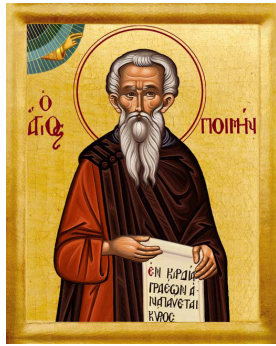
One must say concerning our time, that if a Rite of Orthodoxy did not as yet exist, it would be needful to introduce one, and to perform it not only in the capital cities but in all places and in all churches: in order to collect all the evil teachings opposed to the Word of God, and to make them known to all, in order that all might know what they need to beware of and what kind of teachings to avoid. Many are corrupted in mind solely due to ignorance, whereas a public condemnation of ruinous teachings would save them from perdition.

Thus, the Church excommunicates, expels from her midst (when it is said, “Anathema to so-and-so”, that means the same thing as, “So-and-so: out of here”), or anathematizes for the same reason that any society does so. And she is obliged to do this in self-preservation and to preserve her children from destruction. Therefore there is nothing blameworthy or incomprehensible about this present Rite.

If anyone fears the act of anathema, let him avoid the teachings which cause one to fall under it. If anyone fears it for others, let him restore him to sound teaching. If you are Orthodox and yet you are not well disposed toward this act, then you are found to be contradicting yourself. But if you have already abandoned sound doctrine, then what business is it of yours what is done in the Church by those who maintain it? By the very fact that you have conceived a different view of things than that which is maintained in the Church, you have already separated yourself from the Church. It is not inscription in the baptismal records which makes one a member of the Church, but the spirit and content of one’s opinions. Whether your teaching and your name are pronounced as being under anathema or not, you already fall under it when your opinions are opposed to those of the Church, and when you persist in them. Fearful is the anathema. Leave off your evil opinions.

Amen.

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THE LORD DESCENDS INTO HELL

By St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Cyprus (+403 A.D.)

Something strange is happening. There is a great silence on Earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and He has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh, and Hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, He has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, He who is both God and the Son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the Cross, the weapon that had won Him the victory. At the sight of Him Adam, the first man He had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone, *My Lord be with you all.* Christ answered him, *And with your spirit.* He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying, "Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.

"I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants, I now by My own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in Hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the Life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in My image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in Me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.

"For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

"See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to re-fashion your warped nature in My image. On My back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See My hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.

"I slept on the Cross and a sword pierced My side for you who slept in Paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in Hell. The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

"Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly Paradise. I will not restore you to that Paradise, but I will enthrone you in Heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am Life itself am now one with you. I appointed Cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them venerate you as god. The throne formed by Cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The Bridal Chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The Kingdom of Heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity..."

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]

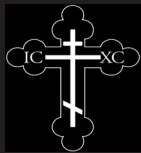
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE TRUTH WITHIN ORTHODOXY

By St. Theophan the Recluse, an edited excerpt from "Preaching Another Christ," translated by Dimitri Kagaris.

With great pleasure I undertake the effort to answer those things that you wrote to me in your very worthwhile letter. I see that a fire has been started in your area and this is why I'm writing to you what God enlightens me to write.

You write: "A preacher of the faith has appeared in our city. He seems very noble and courteous. He goes around to all our homes reading the Bible; he explains it, teaching us faith in Jesus Christ, calling all to repentance. Near me is the house of a poor book binder. The preacher comes to this man's house, and many people gather here to listen to his teaching. I went a couple of times also. It is said that he goes everywhere teaching many people the word of God."

Let's stop your letter here. It is clear that this new teacher is not a preacher of the Church. How does he teach our faith without recognition by the Church? This is an unheard of event! You should have thought about this, and you should have been cautious. You say that he teaches faith in Christ and talks constantly from the Gospels. Why is he teaching you faith in Christ? Are you not Christian? From childhood you believed in Christ and lived within the bosom of the Holy Orthodoxy. Therefore, when he started to teach what you already believe, you should have thought about how his faith is perhaps not the same as yours, the faith of our Church.

And yet, not one of you protested. In telling you that you must believe in Christ, he considered you as people without faith. This is your second mistake, greater than the first!

You write: "He talks constantly about our Lord and His salvific sacrifice. He

talks with great enthusiasm. We listen to him with pleasure, and he constantly entices us to his talks." By any chance, did you distinguish whether he is Orthodox or heterodox? Perhaps you thought that since he talks about Christ, and especially with such enthusiasm, that he must be one of us, preaching the truth. You thus fell into deception. Maybe he was Orthodox, but he fell away from Orthodoxy. He is a heretic! Maybe he teaches salvation, but not in the way that Christ Himself or the Holy Apostles taught us.

The papists, who were first to break away from the Church, believe that truth is exclusively with their side. Protestants, who criticized the failures of the papists on several points, instead of returning to the truth, went even farther away from it. In England they didn't like Germanic Protestantism so they created their own, according to their own notions, and not according to the eternal God-revealed truths. And from Anglicanism and from Protestantism grew more offshoots, and heresies were thus multiplied.

The West brought forth many unorthodox beliefs, some more deceived than others; in the East the Orthodox faith remained constant, the True Church, which contains Holy Truth within itself. Even though many centuries have passed, truth has remained intact and unchanged in the bosom of Orthodoxy, and has been passed on to us, exactly as it was taught by God and His Holy Apostles. Since childhood you have been taught this eternal truth, yet this false teacher learned his deceit just recently. Despite this, he does not hesitate to teach his false Christianity to all, while you turned to him without reservation and are now in danger of being cut off from the Holy Church and from God's truth.

I'm anticipating your reactions to this: "But what lies is he teaching us? He's proclaiming the truth, teaching about salvation in Christ, and reading the Gos-

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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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pels." Is this not what heretics always did? Countless heresies have appeared, all of them rejected by Orthodoxy, despite teaching of Christ the Savior! Didn't you read in the Gospel the prophetic words of the Lord, *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves?* (Matt 7:15)

You write that this false prophet reads and teaches from within the Gospel. Of course the Holy Gospel and the New Testament are sources of truth, safe harbors and the true path to salvation. But it is not easy for whoever reads the Gospel to understand it fully and to walk safely the road to salvation. Someone may read the Gospel and interpret it falsely. For him the Gospel becomes a means of destruction. Why is this? This is because he doesn't know the road to salvation well. He does not know certain points of the spiritual path, such as faith, keeping the commandments, the acquisition of divine grace, etc. In the Gospel, **these points are not spelled out** and written collectively, but they've been written under several different passages. In order for one to walk safely in the way of salvation, he must recognize all these points.

Many stumble as they concentrate on certain passages that are related to salvation and turn their attention to one or two of these; they become isolated from the rest of Holy Writ, and cry out, "We have found it, the way of salvation!" In this way one declares, "Have faith and you will be saved." Another proclaims, "Acquire Divine Grace and you don't need anything else." A third advises, "Love and you will obtain heaven." And many other such things are taught. All these are real, and based on Holy Writ. But alone, none covers the entire subject of salvation. They must be combined and only then will full knowledge of the true character of salvation be gained.

Your false teacher is thus among all these who are deceived. He reads the Bible, as you write, and teaches how we will be saved. However, does he present the whole breadth and depth

of the struggle that is required, or only one side of it? He grabs two to three isolated passages from Writ, and starts preaching: "Here is the salvific medicine for you. Take it and be saved!" In the end, he is a liar and a deceiver. And you listened to him and kept quiet, and gave him courage to preach without hindrance: "Only believe in Christ the Savior and you will be saved." Without a doubt we must believe in Christ to be saved. But here I emphasize that this faith in Christ should be received in such a manner that it is intertwined with our faith in the Holy Trinity. Because if one listens constantly about "salvation in Christ," it is possible that this truth will be ingrained within him so exclusively that the significance of the Holy Trinity in the effort of salvation will wane. Thus the Holy Trinity will be covered up in the Person of Jesus Christ. This is a deviation from the true path of salvation. It is not honorable to embrace the Christian faith and then to distort it.

Just like the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ on the cross didn't happen without the Father and the Holy Spirit, so also our salvation is not attained without the synergy of the entire Holy Trinity. The faithful come to the Son through the Father, as the Lord himself reveals to us: *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.* (John 6:44) But how does the Father draw one towards the Son? He draws him through the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit no one is saved. This is why the Lord said: *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* (Jn 16:7) It is as if He said: *"If the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, does not come in vain is my incarnation, in vain my death, in vain my resurrection. You will be far from salvation, because without the Holy Spirit you cannot be transfigured, you cannot obtain the characteristics of one who has been saved."*

Do you see, therefore, how we are saved? We are saved in Christ Jesus, with the good-will of the Father and the Grace

of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Apostles understood this deeply, which is why they wished all: *The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God the Father, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.* (II Cor 13:13) In the same way you should understand the matter of your salvation, and with these criteria you should verify the truth of this preacher's opinions and the opinions of any other teacher.

It is immaterial to talk about the fact that faith is necessary in order to attain salvation. The Apostle Paul writes: *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* (Heb 11:6) We are obliged to believe in all that God chose to reveal to us, without adding anything or subtracting anything, just as they are kept only in Holy Orthodoxy. Specifically:

God is one in His nature, but in three distinct persons. The Father created the world through the Son and provides for it. He created man in his image and likeness, in order that he may live in paradise. Through the disobedience of the first-created, we lost the paradisiacal life and it was impossible to be saved. But the Son of God had compassion on us, came to earth, was incarnated in our flesh, suffered and died on the cross, was resurrected, arose into the heavens and sat as a God-man on the right of the Father, who showed thus that He accepted this sacrifice of the Son and his mediation on behalf of the salvation of the faithful.

The Son himself sent the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father, Who descended on the Apostles and filled them with Godly wisdom and power. They, full of the Holy Spirit, sowed the Christian faith and assembled the faithful into the Church, whose head is Christ. The Apostles, through God's commandments, performed the mysteries that offer Divine Grace to the faithful and left in their stead bishops and priests, successors in the apostolic calling and stewards of the heavenly spiritual treasures that the Holy Spirit entrusted to the Church.

The successors of the Apostles continued the task of salvation unbroken, through the ages, all the way to our days, with the particular grace of ordination. The faithful who receive the Divine Grace through the mysteries are saved within the bosom of the Church, not isolated but united together in the genuine life-giving faith and under the guidance of the shepherds. The salvation of every soul is conducted mystically and each faithful awaits the other luminous life, by which he patiently endures voluntary and involuntary privations. He believes that all faithful who have died continue to belong to the body of the Church and to communicate with us; not, of course, in a visible manner but invisibly. In all these things you must believe whole-heartedly.

Faith alone, however, is not sufficient for salvation. It must be accompanied by a sanctified life, according to the Lord's commandments: *Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.* (Matt 7:21) The will of the heavenly Father is formulated in His commandments: *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who*

loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. (Jn 14:21-23) According to the word of God, faith and works are of equal significance. One is not superior to the other.

In order for faith to be true, and for the works to be sanctified, Divine Grace is necessary. The Holy Spirit descended from heaven to the Apostles and through them to all the faithful. What occurred with the Apostles occurs now through their successors, according to the order decreed by the Holy Spirit. Thus Divine Grace remains constantly in our Church within the multitude of the faithful. It illumines all, strengthens all, sanctifies all. The faithful were saved and are saved by Divine Grace: *For by grace you have been saved* (Eph 2:8), writes the Apostle Paul. Many non-Orthodox proclaim that it is enough to believe in order to obtain grace. Learn and believe fully that grace does not come and is not received other than by the Holy Mysteries that are performed by the Apostles or their successors, as the Lord Himself decreed in the Church. And be assured further by these two examples from the Bible:

1) The Lord while conversing with Nicodemus said: *Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* (Jn 3:5-7) This is nothing else but Holy Baptism, the first Christian Mystery.

2) St. Paul, in drawing near Ephesus while on one of his journeys, met twelve faithful and asked them: *When you believed, did you receive the Holy Spirit?* And they replied, *We never heard anything about the Holy Spirit.* Paul asked them, *In what were you baptized then?* They responded, *In the baptism of John.* Then the Apostle explained that the baptism of John the Baptist was only in preparation for faith in Christ. And after he taught them the entirety of the Gospel, he baptized them in the Christian baptism. After the baptism, *he laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.* (Acts 19:6)

Do you see that *baptism* is one thing and the *laying on of hands* another? With the *laying on of hands* alone is Divine Grace given. This perceptible activity was replaced later by the Apostles with *chrism* and thus *chrismation* was decreed a Mystery of our Church. These two examples are enough to convince you that Divine Grace is transmitted by perceptible acts, through the Holy Mysteries, and not mentally through theoretical faith. I will enumerate the other Mysteries:

- The forgiveness of sins, which is not performed by simple mental confession to God but in a confession in front of a spiritual father, with heartfelt contrition and resolve to not repeat the same sins.
- The Mystery of Holy Communion which creates a biotic oneness with our Lord Jesus Christ.
- The power of Divine grace in the continuing task of sanctification by the Church through the Mystery of laying-on of hands.
- Two persons are united and create a blessed Christian family through the Mystery of marriage.
- Sick people are healed through the Mystery of chrismation.

The Mysteries are streams of Divine Grace that irrigate the faithful with life. There is no other way, no other means for one to receive Divine Grace. And whoever teaches another path is unorthodox and deceived.

The three features that we have expounded on so far as being necessary in the task of salvation, faith, life according to the divine commandments and Divine Grace that is provided for by the Holy Mysteries demand a fourth: the priesthood, decreed by the Lord. It is necessary to live according to the divine commandments, but this is impossible without the guidance of those mediators of God who advise us, teach us to be careful, correct our mistakes, lift up those who have fallen, and return to repentance those who have gone astray. They teach faith and sanctify with Divine Grace by way of the Mysteries, leading us in the way of salvation. Here's the apostolic assurance: *And He Himself gave some to be Apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* (Eph 4:3). But the very act assures this also. The Lord sent his Apostles commanding them to: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.* (Matt 28:19-20). And the Apostles obeyed this command. But because they wouldn't live forever, since their work must be continued to all ages, they left their successors everywhere by God's decree. These successors, shepherds and teachers, would perform the divine services of the Holy Mysteries in fulfilling the task of salvation. This is exactly what happens today. For the priests it is enough what the Lord told the Apostles: *He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.* (Lk 10:16)

I have told you the four necessary aspects that are needed for our salvation. But there is one more: to belong in the body of the Church in unison with the multitude of the faithful. The Lord called His Church the *vineyard*. He is the vine, and the faithful are the branches. The assembly of all the faithful creates an indivisible whole, corporally united with the Lord. *As a branch which is cut dries up and stops living, so is every faithful who in any way has been severed from the Church, and thus from the Lord, spiritually deadened.* (Jn 15:1-6).

We regard the Church as our mother. And the word is true that **for whom the Church is not mother, God is not father.** Participation in the life of the Church and the work for salvation within the Church's bosom require the following obligations from the faithful:

- 1) Believing in the same way that the entire Church believes, from the beginning until today. She is the *"pillar and ground of the truth."* (1 Tim 3:15)
- 2) They must not separate themselves from the other faithful; they must participate in all the worship and sanctification expressions of the Church, according to the command of Apostle Paul to not forsake the *assembly*. (Heb 10:25)
- 3) They must have deep confidence that the members of the Church who are now in heaven have real and immediate

communication with the members who are on earth. The prayers of the former for the latter are heard and fulfilled according to the will of God. We on earth are familiar with the angels and with all the saints of every epoch, because we have come to *"Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven..."* (Heb 12:22-23).

You write that this heretic prays with his own prayers and during the services he does not make the sign of the cross. You see from this how new he is to the Christian life. All the Orthodox Christians, even the majority of the heretics, make the sign of the cross. He, however, does not. And yet this sign is a way to confess faith in Jesus Christ, who for our sakes endured the Cross and saved us. The Lord crushed the power of the enemies of mankind through the Cross. These enemies remember this and avoid any remembrance of it. He who does not seal himself with the sign of the Cross, leaves an opening in the field of battle for these enemies. The Cross sanctifies all men and all material. This is what the Church received from the apostles, and this is how Christians believe. This is why we ask ourselves: "Is he who avoids the sign of the Cross Christian or not?"

You write: "Between us has come confusion, because while this teacher goes everywhere, tries hard, teaches and talks with enthusiasm, our own shepherds keep quiet. And in church it is very rare that anyone gives a sermon. They only keep the liturgy of the different divine services. We need a living word and they don't give it to us."

I agree with you that priests should talk with the faithful more often and to converse with them either within the church or anywhere else. I don't agree with you that if these talks don't occur, the parishioners will lack in spiritual food. The divine services themselves fill the observant faithful as well as the dogmas and commandments of God. And they teach how we'll become united with Him. It is enough to be inside the church in order to renew one's religious feelings, as many have confessed has viably happened to them.

I have tried to answer your questions from your letter. There is nothing more to say except to advise you thusly, in conclusion: **Stay away from this heretic and false teacher, and unite yourself more strongly to the Orthodox Church. Advise all Christians in this way!**



There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased with both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.

C.S. Lewis

REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

Source: From the Greek Orthodox periodical "Fountain of Life," issue no. 95, July 3, 2005. Translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

Editors Note: the subject article is one of the many treasures which one may find in the web pages of what in our opinion is the finest Greek Orthodox web sites around, <http://www.pigizois.gr/> for our readers who are knowledgeable in the Greek language, this website is a must; it also has an English section.

Among the many priceless gifts granted to us by our God and Savior is the soul-saving sacrament of Repentance, or, as we commonly refer to it, Holy Confession. It is through this sacrament that our sins are forgiven and swept away. Without Holy Confession, no human being can earn salvation, irrespective of his virtues, for it is impossible to find even a single person who is sinless.

A humble acknowledgement and confession of our sins is very pleasing to our Lord. If Adam, after his disobedience and subsequent fall, acknowledged in repentance his error, he would have surely received the forgiveness of our Most Gracious God. Even Cain who committed such an atrocious act, the willful and abominable murder of his own brother, could have also been forgiven through real repentance and acknowledgement. This is what King David did; although he was guilty of two deadly sins, murder and adultery; he was the recipient of God's forgiveness and mercy because of his true repentance. *I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord," and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sins.* (Psalms 31:5)

In order to conduct a proper confession so that we cleanse all of the filth and dirt within our conscience and brighten and turn our soul "whiter than snow," we must neither improvise nor approach this Holy Sacrament without proper preparation. That is unfortunately how most of our Orthodox brethren confess. A mystery such as confession warrants the corresponding preparation and must be approached with the fitting state of our heart.

First, we ought to prepare at least two to three days before we go to confession. During this preparatory time period, we should minimize our contact with other people to as minimum of a level as it is practical, while at the same time we collect our thoughts and nous. We reflect on the length of time since our last confession—can we recall when we last confessed? Or, is this our first time. In this manner, we attempt to recall from that time until now the type and number of times we committed various sins. Either through word, deed or thought, and whether we intended or we did so through negligence and carelessness.

Second, when we go to a spiritual father, you will tell him all of your sins and exactly how they were committed. We will hide absolutely nothing, we will alter nothing and we will as-

sign blame and fault for all of our sins to no other but our own selves. Furthermore, we will not be content with a "dry, catalog-type" enumeration of our sins but instead, we will also present, in general terms, the overall condition of our soul, our passions, inclinations, tendencies, vices, faults, and weaknesses. In this manner, the spiritual father, as a physician of souls, will be afforded the opportunity to diagnose and form a complete picture of our illness and thus decisively and effectively assign the correct therapy.

Third, the method through which we describe our sins must be especially careful so that it combines exactness with decency. In other words, on one hand we must state concisely and with few words the conditions and corresponding elements of each sin – the what, how, when, etc. -- so that the spiritual father assesses its proper "weight." On the other hand, again, we must avoid detailed and wordy descriptions which are tiresome and at times even scandalous. The latter serves no benefit to either us or the spiritual father. It should be especially noted that if a sin was committed with one or more persons (i.e., we stole with some of our friends or committed adultery with a person we know), it is best to not reveal their identity. Let us truly repent for our own sin and leave all others to our Lord's judgment and mercy.

Fourth, among all various factors, the most important is that we find a spiritual father that is experienced, discrete, wise, prudent, sensible, and capable of healing, through our cooperation and by God's grace, the sores and wounds of our soul. In the same manner by which we search for a good medical doctor that can heal our physical ailments, it is likewise and even more persistently that we ought to search and discover a spiritual father who is capable of contributing towards our spiritual help. That is because "if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into a ditch." (Matt. 15:14) When, however, you find this spiritual father, keep him as your spiritual father for life and do not change him. Those who go around from spiritual father to spiritual father find no benefit or profit with any one of them, whether they do this because of ignorance or ego. It is only when a spiritual father follows us systematically and gets to know us well that he can substantially aid in our spiritual struggles for the cleansing of our soul and the path towards our salvation.

A good confession is characterized by the following attributions:

- 1) It is brief but substantive. In other words, it is conducted with no omissions and without superfluous and empty talk, useless repetitions, oblique presentations or even stories and fables.
- 2) It is humble. In other words, it is conducted with the full realization of our sinfulness and guilt a realization which is also reflected both in our words as well as our posture as Christians.
- 3) It is honest. It thus contains nothing more and nothing less than the pure truth, and is fully absent pretenses and

excuses. It further assigns zero blame to anybody else, even to the demons or Satan himself!

4) It is immediate and it thus takes place without any delay or postponement. At the very moment our conscious censures and reproves us, we must run to our spiritual father for confession as we are always unaware when death will visit us without any warning.

5) It is discreet. In other words, it is characterized by good judgment, common sense, and prudence. It is also formulated clearly, plainly, explicitly, carefully, and orderly.

6) It is complete and it therefore contains all of our sins and omits nothing with the intent of confessing it to a different spiritual father.

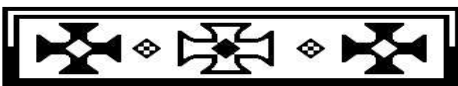
7) It is Publican like; in other words, it is conducted with extreme devoutness, piety, and contrition of the heart. It is no different than what we read in the Gospel, “And the Publican standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’.” (Luke 18:13)

8) It is private. Thus, other than the priest who is the spiritual father and the confessing Christian, nobody learns and nobody should learn the content of one’s confession. If someone should hear one’s confession—an unlikely and highly improbable event—he must absolutely never reveal it to nobody whatsoever but to take whatever he heard with him to his grave. This is even more applicable to the priest himself who in no instance is allowed to reveal sins confessed to him, even when his own life is at stake.

9) It is the beginning of a new life. Along with our confession we make a solid decision consciously to engage in our personal spiritual struggle and warfare. We thus decide not only never to repeat the sins we just confessed, but to also make good whatever we can from the sins that we committed in the past. Thus, we compensate a person whom we wronged, return something we stole, ask forgiveness from anybody that we insulted, etc. If we do not do so our repentance is not real!

10) It is accompanied by our acceptance of whatever penance or kanona that may be possibly assigned by our spiritual father (e.g., fasting, almsgiving, or whatever else he considers suitable). We also must fully comprehend and accept that such penance does not constitute a “sentence” or a “punishment,” but it is a therapeutic and pedagogical element of our spiritual healing and means by which our spirituality is increased.

May our Lord guide us all in the most fitting method for each one of us to receive the Holy Sacrament of Confession.



Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him, because evil is but a chance misfortune, illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

St. John of Kronstadt, from *My Life in Christ*

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

By Judge Roy Moore.



This poem is written by Judge Roy Moore whose battle to keep installed a monument to the Ten Commandments in front of the Alabama Judicial Building (see picture to the left) gained a great amount of publicity, especially during 2005. We believe this poem accurately describes the anguish and pain within the hearts of many Americans.

America the Beautiful, or so you used to be.

Land of the Pilgrims’ pride; I’m glad they’ll never see.

Babies piled in dumpsters, abortion on demand,

Oh, sweet land of liberty; your house is on the sand.

Our children wander aimlessly, poisoned by cocaine,

Choosing to indulge in lusts, when God has said abstain.

From sea to shining sea, our Nation turns away

From teaching of God’s love and a need to always pray.

We’ve kept God in our temples, how callous we have grown.

When earth is but His footstool, and Heaven is His throne.

We’ve voted in a government that’s rotting at the core,

Appointing Godless Judges who throw reason out the door,

Too soft to place a killer in a well deserved tomb,

But brave enough to kill a baby before he leaves the womb.

You think that God’s not angry, that our land’s a moral slum?

How much longer will He wait before His judgment comes?

How are we to face our God, from Whom we cannot hide?

What then is left for us to do, but stem this evil tide?

If we who are His children, will humbly turn and pray;

Seek His holy face and mend our evil way:

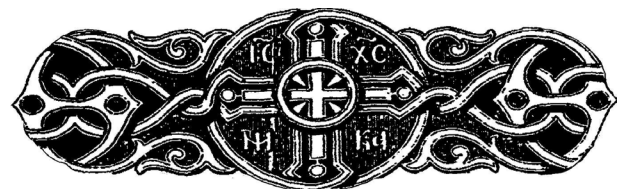
Then God will hear from Heaven and forgive us of our sins,

He’ll heal our sickly land and those who live within.

But,

America the Beautiful, if you don’t—then you will see,

A sad but Holy God withdraw His hand from Thee.



Not every quiet man is humble, but every humble man is quiet.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

Μία πρώτη, και μάλιστα πολύ φθηνή λύση, είναι η όντως «δημοκρατική». Να παύση το εμπόριο ταφών από τους Δήμους. Δεν μπορεί μέσα σε μια ευνουμένη χώρα άλλοι να διαθέτουν τεράστιους τάφους, διότι είναι πλούσιοι, και οι φτωχοί να καιγόμαστε (...και πεθαμένοι). Προτείνουμε κανονική ταφή ΟΛΩΝ και συγκέντρωση των όστων σε μικρές λειψανοθήκες, σε άλλοτε άλλο επίπεδο, όπως λ.χ. στο Κοιμητήριο του Δήμου Ζωγράφου. Άλλ' αυτό ισχύει για ΟΛΟΥΣ! Είναι ευνουμένη πόσος χώρος εξοικονομείται.

Η δημοκρατική συνείδηση επιβάλλει, βέβαια, να δεχθούμε την ελεύθερη επιλογή καύσεως από τους μη Έλληνορθόδοξα φρονούντες και σκεπτόμενους. Όχι όμως να την επιβάλουμε και σ' όσους την αρνούνται. Περιττό να πω, ότι είναι αδιανόητο συνειδητός Ορθόδοξος Έλληνας να επιλέξει την καύση.

Θά έλεγα, μάλιστα, και ο ευρύτερα Χριστιανός. Όσοι ζητούν την επιβολή (ιδού η δημοκρατικότητά τους) της καύσεως, εις βάρος της εθνικής μας παραδόσεως ανήκουν στους «έκτός», που όμως θέλουν να νομοθετούν... δημοκρατικότερα και για τους «έντός». Έπειδή δέ κάποιος επικαλούνται το παράδειγμα της Μαρίας Κάλλας, δηλώνω ότι ούτε η μακαρίτισσα αοιδός, ούτε ο μακαρίτης Δημήτρης Μητρόπουλος, που προηγήθηκε (1960), είναι μέτρα πίστεως και Έλληνορθόδοξου συνειδήσεως. Άλλο η τιμή στην προσφορά των προσώπων και άλλο η μίμηση των επιλογών τους.



Πώς να... Καταστρέψετε Αποτελεσματικά το Παιδί σας!...

Από το βιβλίο «Μητέρα, Πρόσεχε!», εκδ. Ι. Μονής Παρακλήτου Ωρωπού.

Από μικρό να μην το αρνείστε τίποτα. Δίνετε του ό,τι επιθυμεί, ό,τι ζητάει, ιδίως όταν πεισματώνει και κλαίει. Έτσι θα μεγαλώσει και θα πιστεύει πως οι άλλοι του οφείλουν τα πάντα, πως έχει μόνο δικαιώματα.

Όταν αρχίσει να ξεστομίζει βρισιές, έσεεις να γελάτε. Έτσι θα το δώσετε να καταλάβει ότι είναι πολύ έξυπνο!

Μην το λέτε ποτέ: «Αυτό είναι κακό!». Έτσι λένε τα παλιά μυαλά. Όταν αργότερα θα συναντήσει στη ζωή του δυσκολίες και θα υποστή το κακό, τότε θα έχει τη βεβαιότητα πως η κοινωνία είναι που το άδικει.

Μαζεύετε έσεεις ό,τι παρατάει εδώ κι εκεί—βιβλία, παπούτσια, ρούχα... Μην το πείτε ποτέ: «Μάζεψέ τα, βάλ' τα στη θέση τους». Έτσι θα πιστέψει πως ή μάνα είναι δούλα του και πως για όλα είναι υπεύθυνοι πάντα οι άλλοι.

Αφήστε το να βλέπει τα πάντα (προπαντός στην τηλεόραση) και να διαβάσει τα πάντα, χωρίς να το καθοδηγείτε. Το παιδί

σας είναι άτσίδα και ξέρει να διακρίνει! Η μόρφωσή του θα γίνη έτσι πολύ πλατειά!

Μην το δίνετε καμμιά πνευματική αγωγή. Να κοροϊδέυετε μπροστά του την πίστη, την Έκκλησία, τους παπάδες κι εκείνους που τους ακολουθούν. Όταν το παιδί μεγαλώσει, «θα διαλέξει από μόνο του».

Δίνετε του μπόλικο χαρτζιλίκι για να μη νιώθει κατώτερο από τους άλλους και «να μη στερηθή ό,τι στερηθήκατε έσεεις». Όταν μεγαλώσει, θα είναι βέβαιο πως την άξια στον άνθρωπο τη δίνει το χρήμα, αδιάφορο πως αποκτήθηκε.

Μην το λέτε ποτέ: «Κάνε αυτό» ή «Μην κάνεις εκείνο», γιατί έτσι το καταπιέζετε, δεν σέβετε την ελευθερία του και την προσωπικότητά του. Μπορεί μάλιστα να το δημιουργήσετε... ψυχικά τραύματα! Όταν μεγαλώσει, θα νομίζει πως ή ζωή είναι μόνο να διατάζει, ποτέ ν' άκουσ.

Να τσακώνετε, να βρίζετε, να προσβάλλετε ο ένας τον άλλον μπροστά του χωρίς ντροπή. (Μην ανησυχείτε, έτσι δεν θα το δημιουργήσετε ψυχικά τραύματα!). Αργότερα, όταν παντρευτεί, θα το φαίνεται φυσικό να κάνει τα ίδια.

Όταν αρχίσει να μπλέκεται στα δίχτυα του έρωτισμού και της φιληδονίας, έσεεις κλείστε τα μάτια σας. Μην το μιλήσετε, μην το καθοδηγήσετε, μην το συμβουλέψετε. Αφήστε το να βγάλει τα μάτια του, αφού «αυτό είναι φυσιολογικό».

Να παίρνετε πάντα το μέρος του μπροστά στους δασκάλους και τους γείτονες. Μην πιστεύετε ποτέ ότι «το άγγελουδι σας» μπορεί να κάνει άναποδιές και άτιμίες. Βρίστε εκείνους που φιλικά και καλοπροαίρετα σ' άναφέρουν κάτι σχετικό. Είναι συκοφάντες και ζηλιάρηδες.

Όταν θα πάτε στο αστυνομικό τμήμα, όπου το μάζεψαν γιατί έκλεψε ή γιατί πήρε ναρκωτικά, φωνάξτε δυνατά μπροστά σε όλους ότι είναι ένα παλιόπαιδο, ένας άλήτης, ότι θυσιαστήκατε για το καλό του αλλά δεν μπορέσατε ποτέ να το συμμαζέψετε. Έτσι έσεεις θα βγει καθαρός.

Ετοιμαστείτε για μιá ζωή γεμάτη πόνο και τύψεις. Σίγουρα θα την έχετε!...



Ούκ άρνησόμεθά Σε, Φίλη Όρθοδοξία· ού ψευσόμεθά Σε, πατροπαράδοτον σέβας. Έν Σοί γάρ έγεννήθημεν, έν Σοί ζώμεν και έν Σοί κοιμηθησόμεθα. Εί δέ και καλέσει καιρός, και μυριάκις υπέρ Σου τεθνηξόμεθα.

Πρ. Ίωσηφ Βουεννίος

Βυζαντινός Θεολόγος και Μοναχός (+1432)

(Από το βιβλίο «Όρθοδοξία και Παπισμός», Τόμος Β', σελ. 30)

ON THE PSEUDO-GOSPEL OF JUDAS

By George Karras, "Orthodox Heritage" Editor.

It would not be Pascha, at least not for us Orthodox Christians in the West, unless we were "blessed" with the annual "gift" of well-organized and methodological media attack on our Christian Faith. This year's "blessing" arrived in the form of "breakthrough" news on what we Orthodox have known for nearly 18 centuries as the greatly heretical (Gnostic) text titled "The Gospel of Judas."

We have (our once favorite) magazine of National Geographic to thank for this newly-found western revelation of new lies... In its May edition, religious sensationalism reached a new level as their editors present new challenges to Christian dogma and tradition. They have, under nefarious (at best) circumstances, attained a copy of the manuscript which is known to have been the product of a highly heretical (Gnostic) group called the Cainites. The copy in question has been dated to the third or fourth century. Its claims include the ludicrous assertion of a secret and very special bond and friendship between our Lord and Judas Iscariot. It portrays Judas as obeying "divine will" in his betrayal of Jesus! The text supposedly reveals the secret account of the revelation that Jesus spoke in conversation with Judas Iscariot during a week, up to three days before he celebrated Passover. It goes on to assert that our Lord was searching for someone to free him finally from his human body and he preferred that this liberation be done by His closest friend, Judas.

The great heresy of Gnosticism (which dates to even before the coming of our Lord) finds its origin in various types of pantheistic groups. After the spread of Christianity, Gnosticism considered it profitable to associate itself with our Faith, albeit there were few, if any, teachings and values that were held in common. This heresy teaches that our universe is the creation of an evil creator-god and that the parent-gods, through a series of descending steps came into contact with humans in order to lead them to the return to the parent-god. This process was facilitated by various illuminators who would set free the divine spark captured in the evil human body. A great amount of their teachings were later adopted by Freemasonry as well as many other related heretical groups and New Age organizations.

The historically known original (i.e., the source document for National Geographic's "find") dates to the second century and we Orthodox have denounced it as early as 180 A.D., through the writings of St. Irinaios of Lyons. St. Irinaios, in his publication "Against Heresies," describes the aforementioned Gnostic sect, the Cainites. Furthermore, other Church fathers, before and after St. Irinaios, repeatedly refuted similar teachings, as distributed through dozens of documents of that time period and all of which served one and only one purpose: the distortion of the Apostolic teachings. One word about the Cainites:

they worshiped Cain, the killer of Abel; their claim was that by this murder, Cain freed his brother from the captivity of the creator-god. Do you see how ridiculous the authors of this garbage truly are?

It is interesting to note that even in National Geographic's own documentary, biblical scholar Craig Evas bluntly states (near the end of the film) that there is nothing new and nothing historically true to be found in the Pseudo-Gospel of Judas (the documentary, of course, ensured that the prevailing view was entirely opposite of the view of this and other scholars...)

We will not waste our readers' time to counteract all of the ridiculous assertions of the subject document. We will just pose a few questions that easily prove the fallacy of this pseudo-gospel:

First, if Judas was truly fulfilling divine mission per our Lord's direction, why is it that guilt guided him to suicide shortly after his betrayal? Along the same lines, why is it that our Lord could not just deliver Himself to the Jews for His Crucifixion? And why is it that Christ's supposed Will to die is in direct conflict with His distress in Gethsemane, wherein He prayed three times to be spared the Cross?

Second, does National Geographic (or any other defender of this document), realize the absurdity within the claim that Jesus, Who traveled and taught through an open ministry for three years, passed on this "very important single secret" to a "single person" that later committed suicide (after, of course, revealing it to the original Gnostic author of this text?) Let us not forget Christ's own words: *I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly.* (Jn 18:20)

Third, and most important, this pseudo-gospel's teachings are in direct conflict with the teachings and historical facts that our within our New Testament. Furthermore, the Gnostics' claims also borrow selected portions of the traditional Gospels to make their case. (St. Irinaios had accused them that they use the Bible as a mosaic from which they extract selected tiles and create a wholly different portrait of Christ, turning, as he said, the portrait of a King into that of a fox.) How can anybody ask logical human beings to assign full truth only to the pseudo-gospel of Judas and at the same time ignore the fullness of the four Gospels which collaborate each other as well as the Apostolic teachings?

We advise our readers to stay far away from any writing collaborating this heresy and keep firmly in their heart and mind the words that we all heard during the Holy Thursday services: *Every member of Thy Holy Body endured dishonor for us: Thy Head, the thorns; Thy Face, the spittings; Thy Cheeks, the smitings; Thy Mouth, the taste of vinegar mixed with gall; Thine Ears, the impious blasphemies; thy Back, the lash; Thy Hand, the reed; Thy Whole Body, extension upon the Cross; Thy joints, the nails; and Thy Side, the spear. O Thou Who didst suffer for us, and set us free from suffering, Who by Thy compassion didst stoop down and hast raised us up, Almighty Saviour, have mercy on us!*

WHY ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS OUGHT TO REMEMBER THE SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE

By Constantine Holevas, Political Scientist, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

More than five hundred and fifty years have gone by since that ill-omened day of May 29th, 1453. It was then that the cry "Constantinople has fallen" was heard loudly all over the world and the Queen of Cities, the City of Saints, Emperors and legends, fell into the hands of the Ottoman oppressor. This is how the Turkish occupation begun. The nation and Orthodoxy have survived but Constantinople and Saint Sophia, the cathedral of all cathedrals, remain in the hands of non-believers. Today we honor those who fell during its lengthy siege and during its awful and inhumane sack; we read the stories and learn about the legends, we are moved and we are taught. This is indeed the true value of historic memory; to be the never-ending lesson for the younger generations as well as for the generations that will come after them.

1) We must remember the sack of Constantinople so that we pay a never-ending and great honor to Byzantium (Romania, as the texts of those days refer to it) which was the Christian Roman Empire of the Hellenic nation, as it is characterized by the byzantinologist Dionisios Zakynthinos. The Byzantine Empire, with Constantinople as her capital, withstood the test of time for over eleven centuries. Following the Sack of 1204 by the Crusaders, her territorial area and her vigor were severely limited. Nevertheless, the Empire did retain, throughout her life and all the way to her sad end, the successful, creative and originative encounter of Christendom and Hellenism. The Greek Orthodox tradition was a direct result of this encounter and Byzantium spread and peacefully passed on this trait to the neighboring nations. This missionary work of our Byzantine ancestors is obvious and apparent, remaining in history as a witness to our days, in the civilizations of the people in Eastern Europe. The Russian Patriarch Alexios admitted this, when while in Athens in 1992, he spoke and said that Russia is the spiritual child of the Hellenic Christian civilization of the Byzantium. The Roumanian historian and political scientist of our 20th century, Nikoai Yiorga characterized Molthovlahia as the "Byzantium that came to be after the Byzantium, i.e., the sack of Constantinople." The Cyril Hellenic-rooted alphabet, utilized by the Slavic people of our day, also constitutes a true survival of the Byzantine civilization. This Hellenic Orthodox Christian civilization is what we, Greek Orthodox Christians, must teach to the later generations of our days.

2) We must remember the sack of Constantinople because through the historical narrations of the related events, by the historians of those days as well as our days, one sees the Hellenic Orthodox duration and survival, the multi-year, classic and extensive path of the Hellenic Orthodox values. The

dramatic, compelling and moving speech of Constantine Palaiologos, the last Emperor, on the 28th of May, just hours before that last fateful attack of the Ottomans, continues to teach generations that they must fight for: Faith, Country and relatives. It adds the Emperor as well (since that was the political systems of those days). However, the triptych of Faith, Country and relatives that the last Emperor discussed connects us and the nations of all honorably fighting generations throughout mankind's history, with the ancient Athenian Youths and with the heroic hymn of the fighters in Salamina, the infamous: "Lets us then, O' children of Hellenes, fight for the freedom of our country and our children and our wives, fight for the freedom of the land of our gods, fight for the traditions passed on to us by our ancestors. There is no fight more noble and honorable than this one!" This continuation of the Hellenic Orthodox spirit reaches the days of the 1821 fight for independence and the declaration of Alexander Ypsilantis, who wrote in February of that same year: "Enter the battle field and fight for your Faith and for your Country." Following the liberation of Greece, Theodore Kolokotronis, the father of the revolution, while speaking to the first High School student of liberated Athens, he told them that "when we grabbed the arms to enter into battle, we first said for our Faith and then for our Country." These are then the eve-lasting values of Hellenic Orthodoxy. There exists this moral liaison and tie that connects the last Emperor, Constantine Palaiologos, with the fighters of Salamina in ancient Greece, with Kolokotronis and his fighters in 1821 and with the brave soldiers of 1940 who fought against fascism and Hitler. We fight for our Faith, our Family and our Country, no matter who and where some characterize us as ...old-fashioned. Honoring the memory of the forerunners and martyrs of the everlasting Hellenic Orthodoxy, we will continue to fight for these principles if and when the need arises.

3) We must remember the events of that time, before and after the sack of Constantinople, because they teach us the invaluable contribution of our Orthodox Church in the survival of the nation as a whole. A few decades before the fall of Constantinople, we had the bold and autocratic intervention of the state in the affairs of the Orthodox Church. The imperial authority believed the great lie of the Latins and was willing to sign away the submission of Orthodoxy to the pope for the sake of promised (but never delivered) aid in the fight against the Ottomans. In 1438-39, at Ferrara and Florence, we saw the Orthodox Church leaders pressured and humiliated by the Latins, and subsequently extorted to sign the agreement for the pseudo-union of the Churches. St. Mark Evgenikos, though, resisted and refused to sign and thus saved the honor of the Orthodox Church. Pay attention: He did not refuse to discuss the prospects for a proper union; Orthodoxy never refuses the dialogue with any other church. What Orthodoxy had refused is blind submission. It should be noted that even among those who "agreed: and signed,

there is great figure who subsequently withdrew his signature upon return to Constantinople. It is George Scholarios, later called Gennathios, who became the first Patriarch following the sack of Constantinople.

The people followed St. Mark Evgenikos and Scholarios. These two Orthodox heroes who refused to sign were right all along; even though the false union of the churches was agreed, the ships of the Latins never showed up to help defend the Queen of all cities. The British historian Steven Runciman in his infamous publication "The Church in Captivity" praised these two leaders as well and points out that their refusal to sign did not just save Orthodoxy, but through this refusal for the pseudo-union, Hellenism was able to survive as well. In his other well known book, "The Sack of Constantinople," he disproves all critics of the Orthodox Church and monasticism by pointing out that, during the siege of the City, one of the towers facing the ocean was being defended by monastics.

4) We must remember the sack of Constantinople because history teaches us that when the few decide to resist the will and strength of many, they may be defeated for a while but in the end and through the depth of time they become victorious. The resistance of the fighters on the walls of the Queen of Cities, a mere 5,000 Greeks and 2,000 foreign allies, had remained deep within the souls of the subsequently enslaved Greeks as a title of honor and a commitment for future battles. The sacrifice of Constantine Palaiologos at the gate of Romanos became the foundation for the 1821 revolution for independence. There were dozens of small resistance fights throughout the occupation years, all of which were fostered and cultivated through the memory of the sacrificed Emperor, the legend of the Marble Stone-Still King and the recapture of lands all the ways to the Red Apple area, deep within Asia Minor. If the Emperor had instead compromised and simply delivered the Queen of Cities in the hands of the Ottomans without the fierce defensive battle that had taken place, it can be easily concluded that there would have never been a revolution of independence and the Orthodox Faith and Hellenism at large may have been lost. A compromise would have been a never-ending shame in the souls of the enslaved nation and their Orthodox Faith. On the other hand, the bravery and faith exemplified through Constantinople's heroic defense gave birth to patience, hope and anticipation. This is exactly the hope expressed by the Hellenes of Pontos in their related lamentation "... Romania fell, Romania has been conquered, even though Romania is no more, it will somehow blossom and bring another..."

Furthermore, Theodore Kolokotronis used to tell his foreign visitors during various conversations on the subject matter: "Our King did not compromise—his garrison is still engaged in battle and his fortress is still resisting." He would then go on and explain that he was referring to Constantine Palaiologos, to his rebel fighters at Souli and Mani. Those who lost their life defending Constantinople gave us the gift of the right to think the Great Idea and to have the Great Hope. And

without Great Ideas and Hope nations are unable to progress or even survive.

5) The resistance of the last few fighters of Constantinople and their commitment to "all of us through our own choice and will choose to fight with no regard for our own lives" has been the inspiration for the great "NO" that Hellenism shouted in 1940 towards Mussolini, in 1941 towards Hitler and in 1955 in Cyprus to prevent the loss of self-governance and their Hellenic Orthodox identity and submittal to colonialism. Today we ought to continue our resistance to potential similar dangers in the same manner. Today's sacks are small and take place daily; nevertheless they are equally conniving and dangerous. The subversion of our language, the lack of historical knowledge, our preoccupation with materialism, the continuous compromises towards our arrogant non-Christian neighbors and, most important, the defamation and slander of our Greek Orthodox roots and Holy Tradition are all dangerous. They constitute small sacks which demand that we quickly recognize them, remain aware and alert, and resist the temptation of ignorance and lack of a fighting will. We must never deny our cooperation, contact or communication with other people and other civilizations and religions. Hellenic Orthodoxy was never restricted to her own little shell. We will, however, refuse assimilation, self-alienation, the "grey, neutral lines" within our own lands and seas, our identity, our Orthodoxy! We will fight with our moral and spiritual weapons. And we will be taught by our Holy Tradition and our living Church. The sack of Constantinople teaches us that, in the end, we survived until today thanks to our Orthodox Church. This is because our Orthodox Tradition is one of Crucifixion and Resurrection. It stands to remind us that every crucifixion of our nation will always be followed by a resurrection. We just need to believe it!



You, mothers, look after your daughters. This should not be difficult for you. Watch that they sit at home. First of all teach them to be pious, modest, disdain money, and not worrying too much about fancy dress. Give them thus to marriage. If you raise your daughter this way, you will save not only her, but the husband who takes her; and not only her husband, but the children; and not only the children, but the grandchildren. If the root is good the branches will spread out more beautifully, and you will receive your reward for this. Therefore let us do everything as though we are caring for the good not of one soul alone, but of many through the one. For at the time of marriage, they (daughters) should go forth from their father's house as fighters from the place of competition; that is, they should know precisely the entire science, by which they might, like a leaven, raise all the ingredients to the increase of them.

St. John Chrysostom

ST. JOHN THE RUSSIAN

Feast day: May 27th (Based on "A Life" by Photios Kontoglou. The Orthodox Word, June-July, 1967).



One of the most popular saints among Greeks today is St. John the Russian whose incorrupt relics are the boast of the island of Euboia. The multitudes who visit his shrine are such that there is daily bus service to the shrine from Athens. Countless miracles flow from his relics and icons, and even now—when the spirit of the world is having such an oppressive effect on traditional Greek piety—icons of the Saint are often found

in buses and in nearly all Orthodox homes.

St. John was neither a celebrated hierarch, nor an eloquent theologian, but a simple young man who spent the better part of his life in a stable. He was born in the south of Russia of pious Orthodox parents. He was still young when, in 1711, he took part in the battle against the Turks. Sharing the unhappy fate of many other Russian soldiers, the Saint was captured and sold as a slave to a Turkish cavalry commander from the village of Procopion near Caesarea in Asia Minor. Fanatic in their Moslem beliefs, the Turks inflicted cruel tortures upon their Christian slaves in trying to force them to renounce their faith. While some succumbed to this form of persuasion, many preferred to suffer death and a whole multitude of martyrs was thus added to the heavenly choir. In their misguided zeal, the Turks would also kidnap the sons of Christians and raise them as fanatical Moslem soldiers. Procopion was the army-camp of these Christian-hating Janissaries and the new slave of the Turkish Agha became a target of their derisions. But neither their insults nor the beatings of his Turkish master were able to shake the faith of the pious Russian youth who confessed outright that he would sooner die than lose what he treasured above all—the holy Orthodox faith.

The blessed John was assigned to work in the stable where he was also told to sleep. Recalling the lowly Bethlehem cave and The manger where the Saviour of the world first lay His head, the Saint rejoiced in his rude dwelling place. In his humility he regarded his dark corner of the stable as a little paradise where he could freely offer prayer and praise to the true God. The unshakable firmness of his faith, his patience, fortitude, and gentleness of spirit, gradually won the hearts of the Agha and his wife who offered the meek stable boy to sleep in a small room near the hayloft. John, however, preferred to remain in the stable where he could toil more assiduously in the ascetic life, bringing his body into subjection to the spirit according to

the Apostle's command. He ate very sparingly and spent long hours in prayer with the Psalms of David continually on his lips. Weekly he prepared himself to partake of the Most Holy Mysteries in a nearby church, for he knew that without the strength of Christ he was powerless to persevere on the path of the true Faith. At night he would secretly go and keep vigil in the narthex of the church. The Lord rewarded the labors of His faithful servant and through him bestowed blessings also upon his Turkish master who became one of the wealthy and powerful men of Procopion.

The Agha understood the cause of his new prosperity and did not shrink from telling it to his fellow citizens. Once the Agha undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca, the city most sacred to the Moslems. While he was away, his wife invited friends and relatives to pray for the Agha's safe return from such an arduous journey. As they were getting ready to eat, the mistress turned to John, who was serving at the table, and said, "How much pleasure your master would have, Gavan, if he were here now and ate this pilaff with us!" The pilaff, a common grain dish of the Middle East, was a favorite with the Agha. Wishing the best for his master and firmly believing in the almighty power of God, John asked for a plate full of pilaf from his mistress, saying that he would send it to his master in Mecca. The guests laughed but the mistress asked the cook to comply with the youth's request, thinking that he would take it to some poor Christian family as was his custom.

Those who are familiar with the Gospel should not be astonished at what happened next, for did the

Lord not say that faith as small as a mustard seed is enough to move mountains? Strong in his faith, the blessed one returned with the plate of pilaff to the stable and, as he was petitioning the Lord, in answer to his firm entreaty, the plate disappeared. What was the amazement of the entire household when the Agha finally returned from Mecca bringing with him the copper plate which had held the food. He had been equally astonished to discover the steaming plate of pilaff upon his return from the Mosque to the locked room where he was staying. Still greater was his confusion when he realized that the copper plate was engraved with his initials—just as all the vessels in his house. "For the sake of Allah, I cannot understand how it came even unto Mecca and who brought it!" When his wife told him of John's request, they recognized the strange occurrence to be a miracle of God, and henceforth all considered John as a righteous man who had found favor with God.

Once again the Agha and his wife tried to persuade the blessed one to change his dwelling place, but the Saint preferred to remain among the animals, willingly fulfilling his duties and continuing steadfast in his ascetic struggles. He persevered in this manner of life until, after a few years, he became ill. Foreseeing his end, he called for a priest and asked to partake of the Holy Mysteries. Fearing the fanaticism of the Turks, the priest did not want to bring the Holy Mysteries openly to the stable, but receiving wisdom from above, he thought to hollow out an apple; lining the cavity with beeswax, he placed

the Holy Mysteries inside and was thus able to safely bring Communion to the Saint. Upon receiving the immaculate Body and Blood of the Lord, the blessed one surrendered his holy soul into the hands of God Whom he loved so much. He reposed on the 27 of May, 1730, having spent some forty years in this temporal vale of sin and sorrow.

The Saint was given a Christian burial by order of the Agha who, as a token of his love and great respect for the Saint, gave an expensive cloth to cover his relics. Three years later a light appeared over the tomb which was seen by many. At the same time, the Saint appeared in a dream to his father confessor revealing that it was the will of God that his relics be exhumed, for his body was incorrupt.

Until 1924 the relics were kept in the church of St. George there in Procopion. When, however, the exchange of population took place between Greece and Turkey, and many of the Christian inhabitants of Procopion were resettled on the island of Euboia, the relics of their beloved St. John were also moved and were received with great acclaim and veneration by the Greeks who built a majestic temple in his honor there in the village of New Procopion.

To this day, streams of pious Greek pilgrims make their way to this village on the island of Euboia, where the Saint answers the faith of their earnest petitions with his strong and quick intercession before the throne of God.

Some Miracles of Saint John

The Saint performed many wonders even after his blessed repose. A descendent of the Agha told many of the following miracle: "My children would not live except for a short time, and would die while yet infants. Their unfortunate mother, after she had lost hope in the wisdom of medicine, fled without my knowledge to the relics of the slave John, so that he might grant her a little child which would not die while yet young, so that we also might rejoice to see it as a young man or even a young girl In truth the righteous John heard the supplication of my wife. God granted us a strong little boy whom we called, as you know, Kole Guvan Oglu (that is, "Son of the Slave John"), and he lives through the power of God and the prayers of John even until today."

Several times St. John has appeared in dreams and visions warning of impending dangers. Once he warned some Greek school children that the roof was about to fall; they had time enough to jump underneath their desks and when the roof fell, its beams came down upon the desks without striking even one of the children.

More recently we have heard about the miraculous healings of two severe cases of meningitis—one a 19 year old shepherd boy in southern Greece and the other a 3-year old boy in London.

Today, there are holy relics of St. John in the United States at, for example, St. Anthony's Monastery in Florence, AZ, where they are available for veneration most Saturday evenings. Many people come to venerate and to ask the prayers of this simple Confessor of the Christian faith, knowing that the Lord—Who resisteth the proud—hears speedily the prayers of the meek.

A PARENTAL ADMONITION

By Our Holy Father St. John Chrysostom.

Why do you refuse to imitate the holy men and women of old? Tell me! Especially you mothers; think of Hannah's example; look at what she did. She brought Samuel, her only son, to the temple, when he was only an infant!

Who among you would not rather have a son like Samuel than one who became king of the whole world? But "it is impossible," you say, "for my son ever to become as great as he." Why is it impossible? Because you do not really want it; you will not entrust him to the God Who is able to make him great. Hannah commended Samuel into His hands.

The high priest Eli had no real ability to form him, since he even failed to form his own children. It was the mother's faith and zeal that made everything possible. He was her first and only child. She did not know if she would ever have another, yet she never said, "I will wait until he grows up; he should have a taste of worldly pleasures, during his childhood at least." She had only one object: how from the very beginning she could dedicate her heart's delight to God.

Be ashamed, you men, at the wisdom of this woman. She gave Samuel to God, and with God she left him, and thus her marriage was blessed more than ever, because her first concern was for spiritual things. She dedicated the first-fruits of her womb to God and obtained many more children in return. She saw Samuel honored even in this life. If men return honor for honor, will not God do much more? How long are we to be mere lumps of flesh? How long will we cling to the ground? Let everything take second place to our bringing children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide. If a child is highly educated for a lucrative profession, this is nothing compared to the art of detachment from riches; if you want to make your child rich, teach him this. He is truly rich who does not desire great possessions or surrounds himself with wealth, but who requires nothing. Do not worry about giving your child an influential reputation for worldly wisdom, but ponder deeply how you can teach him to think lightly of this life's passing glories; thus he will become truly renowned and glorious.

Whether you are poor or rich, you can do this; these lessons are not learned from a skillful professor but from divine revelation. Do not ask how he can enjoy a long life here, but how he can enjoy an infinite and eternal life in the age to come. Give him the great things, not the little things. Do not strive to make him a clever orator, but teach him to love true wisdom. He will not suffer if he lacks clever words; but if he lacks wisdom, all the rhetoric in the world cannot help him. A pattern of life is what is needed, not empty speeches; character, not cleverness; deeds, not words. These things will secure the Kingdom and bestow God's blessing. Do not sharpen his tongue but purify his soul. Worldly learning is not to be ignored, but it should not be an exclusive preoccupation...

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CHRIST IS RISEN

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CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH

By Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (edited for length).

As a general rule, children like attending Church; this instinctive attraction is the foundation on which we must build religious education. When parents worry that children will get tired because services are long, they subconsciously express their concern not for their children but for themselves. Children penetrate more easily than do adults into the world of ritual and liturgical symbolism. The experience of Holiness, the sense of encounter with Someone Who is beyond daily life is more accessible to our children than it is to us. *Except ye become as little children:* these words apply to the receptivity, the open-mindedness, the naturalness, which we lose when we grow out of childhood. The first duty of parents and educators is to *suffer little children and forbid them not* (Matt. 19:14) to attend Church. It is in Church before every place else that children must hear the word of God. In a classroom the word is difficult to understand, but in Church it is in its own element. In childhood we have the capacity to understand, not intellectually, but with our whole being, that there is no greater joy on earth than to be in Church, to participate in Church services, to breathe the fragrance of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is *the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit.*"

Church attendance should be complemented from the earliest days of childhood by the home atmosphere, which precedes and prolongs the mood of the Church. Let us take Sunday morning. How can a child sense the holiness of that morning and of that which he will see in Church if the home is full of the blare of radio and TV, the parents are smoking and reading the papers, and

there reigns a generally profane atmosphere? Church attendance should be preceded by a sense of being gathered in, a quiet, a certain solemnity. The lighting of vigil lights before the icons, the reading of the Scripture lessons, clean and fresh clothes, the festively tidied-up rooms—so frequently parents do not realize how all these things shape the religious consciousness of the child, make an imprint which no later tribulations will ever efface. On the eve and on the day of Sundays and Church feasts, during Lent, on the days when we prepare ourselves for Confession and Communion, the home must reflect the Church, must be illuminated by the light that we bring back from worship.

And now let us speak of the school. It is self-evident that to organize the "Sunday School" lessons during Divine Liturgy is in deep contradiction with the spirit of Orthodoxy. The choice of Sunday for church school is not a very good one. Sunday is primarily a liturgical day; therefore, it should be Church-centered and Liturgy-centered. It would be far better to have church school on Saturdays before the Vigil or Vespers service. The argument that parents cannot and will not bring children to church twice a week is merely admitting indolence and sinful negligence of what is important to our children. Saturday evening is the beginning of Sunday and should be liturgically sanctified just as much as Sunday morning. Why, in all Orthodox churches the world over Vespers or the Vigil is served on the eve of Feasts and Sundays. There is no reason why we too cannot arrange our church life according to principle: School—Vespers—Liturgy, where School would be for children the essential preparation and introduction to the Day of the Lord, His resurrection.

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]

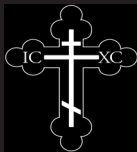
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ALMS: THE RETURN OF HIS OFFERING (PART 1 OF 2)

By Fr. Daniel G. Aerakis, for the Greek Orthodox monthly periodical "St. John the Baptist" («Ἄγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Βαπτιστής»), issue no. 345, translated from the Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

"But this I say: He who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." (2 Cor 9:6)

CHILDREN OF OUR MERCIFUL GOD

A child resembles his father. This is one of our society's several general rules. There is only one child that insists upon avoiding any resemblance to his father. This father is merciful while the child is stingy and greedy. Who is this child? It is man. Who is the Father? It is God. What is our merciful God's most characteristic sign? It is His ever-continuing offerings to man. God continually offers His countless blessings to man. One would say that His treasury is exclusively available for expenses only and not for the receipt of any revenues. He offers us everything. And not only that, God Himself is also offered to man! He willingly came upon this earth to be offered. He truly is the One Who offers and is also offered.

Apostle Paul emphasizes this perpetual offering and self-offering by God and he calls upon all of us to also fulfill our part in this act of mercy. We are frequently invited, as citizens, to participate in various elections. For a Christian, there is one and only one election choice: Jesus Christ. He is the only One that solves all problems because He offers and is offered on behalf of all people.

Let us imagine that a law was passed which demanded that the Prime Minis-

ter be elected as the person who willingly and lovingly performs the following three acts: First, he must offer all of his property and estate to the people. Second, he must work non-stop and around the clock without any salary, bonus, or reward whatsoever. Third, he must be willing to sacrifice himself on a cross for the pure benefit of his citizenry. Let me ask you: Do you think we would find even one person to declare his candidacy for this office? Are we kidding ourselves? We all know the sad truth far too well; all of the candidates of our days pursue their election so they can be praised, gain in material wealth, or both...

But we all know very well that this is exactly the law that our Lord fulfilled. It is the one and only true law of love and self-sacrifice. He came upon this earth, clothed in humanity, and gave everything to man. And in the end, He willingly delivered Himself to be crucified for the salvation of His people. It is for this exact reason that a Christian has only one election choice, Jesus Christ, Who *though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich* (2 Cor 8:9).

If we are thus true children of our Heavenly Father, we ought to act and behave in a similar manner when it comes to His primary characteristic, that being unselfish, self-sacrificing love. *He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love*" (1 Jn 4:8). God's true children become true Christians when they offer unselfishly almsgiving, which St. Paul discusses in his second letter to the Corinthians. Let us never forget that our offering, no matter what the size, is minute and insignificant compared to God's sacrifice on our behalf. God's offering is a self-offering. Our offering is an "anti-offering", i.e., in place of or in return for His mercy. God offers us what belongs to Him 100%. Whatever

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we offer, though, is from things that He has granted to us. We are simply giving back, in return. As we proclaim in our Divine Liturgy, "We offer You these gifts from Your own gifts, in all and for all."

Is there anything in our possession that is truly ours? What did we have a hundred years ago? Nothing, just simple non-existence. Our life, our body, our soul, all of them are His gifts. What material possessions did we have at the moment of our birth? Nothing. Did you ever see or hear a child born with a bag of gold coins or a bank-deposit booklet in hand? We came into this physical world naked, without any material possessions, and we will exit similarly. Thus, *what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not been given it?* (1 Cor. 4:7).

We came into this world as children of God. Let us not retain things belonging to Him. Let us spread it among many, let us give abundantly. Let us finally learn the true meaning of offering and almsgiving.

ALMSGIVING MUST BE UNSPARING

St. Paul delivers to us all an excellent lesson on the subject of offering and almsgiving. After all, this great saint set the standard, as he dedicated every beat of his own heart to God Himself and to all of God's children.

Many of us believe that offering means to have a million drachmas and to offer one thousand; to have much and to offer little. Do you know how all of the Christians of our days appear when it comes to our manner of handling money and all others material possessions? We look like a faucet that willingly pours ample amounts of water upon a certain thistle or thorn. When, however, the same faucet must water a beautiful flower, it lets out the water drop by drop, until it gets completely dry. All of us are always willing to waste our

money and material resources on useless things or purposes; when it comes to almsgiving, however, we become sparing, parsimonious, stingy, miserly, and tight. Let us realize today and from here on that true almsgiving is unsparring and lavish. *He who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly and he who soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully* (2 Cor. 9:6).

Why is it that we ought to offer more, much more, even everything we have? Because alms, in its fundamental essence, is an anti-offering, an anti-giving: You grant someone a lot of land and they give you in return a home. There exists something infinitely higher that happens with almsgiving: You offer land and in return you are granted heaven. You offer material things and in return you become the recipient of a heavenly home, an ever-lasting residence, part of God's kingdom.

In order to comprehend this, the Apostle Paul presents us with the sowing example. Fall is the time for sowing; it is the same for our earthly lives. Our future life is the time of harvest. *He who soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly...* St. John Chrysostom notes: "And he called the thing sowing; that thou mightest at once look unto the recompense, and having in mind the harvest, mightest feel that thou receivest more than thou givest" (Homily 19, on II Corinthians II).

When the farmer sows, not all of the seeds produce. He sows, for example, one hundred seeds, yet only one sprouts and delivers fruit. Almsgiving is quite similar. We must comprehend that true almsgiving does truly produce: it results in miracles! There exist two primary human acts that bring forth God's miracles: prayer and almsgiving. Whatever happens with prayer, also happens with almsgiving. You pray to God many times; you present Him your problems, your request for a timely resolution, your appeal for His understanding and a miracle. You go on insisting and persisting; you tell yourself:

“Come on now, God will listen to me!” You thus must be equally insistent and persistent with your almsgiving. Keep on giving! The miracle will take place! *For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not* (Gal 6:9). Give continuously, give always, give plenty. Almsgiving will result in the miracle; it will give back!...

What will almsgiving provide us in return? Let us see now: one seed, when it sprouts and grows, is capable of returning one hundred times over. The same is true with almsgiving, only greater: you give one and stand to reap one thousand! Surely we all recall the great upheaval caused by the Greek government’s proposal to impose a tax upon the interest earned through the ownership of government deposit instruments. Nobody wishes to have a tax levied upon the interest received from their bank deposits. And what is the quantity of this interest? Perhaps 5% or even 10%? God, my beloved brethren, not only does He not tax our almsgiving deposits but additionally offers us 1,000% interest!

Imagine that a secure earthly bank truly existed that offered 1,000% interest. Would we all not withdraw our funds from all other banks and deposit them in this bank? Should we all thus not withdraw our deposits immediately from the banks of wastefulness, earthly pleasures, and avarice, and direct them to the bank of almsgiving? The bank of almsgiving truly delivers 1,000% interest, steadily and dependably. *He who soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully* (2 Cor 9:6).

[Continued in our next issue]



THE SPIRITUAL DOCTOR

A parable by St. Kosmas Aitolos.



A rich ruler collected much treasure. He never wanted to go to confession, nor did he ever give alms. He had a son about ten years old.

There came a time when the ruler became ill. His family told him to confess His sins, to do something for his soul. He answered them: “As long as my son is well, he’ll do something for my soul.” He was completely on the side of the devil and wouldn’t change his mind.

In the same place there was a very virtuous confessor who shaved off his beard, put on secular clothes, and went to the

house of the ruler. He knocked on the door. Someone came out and asked him what he wanted. He answered: “I’m a stranger and happen to be in your village. I learned that the ruler is ill and I came to see him because I’m a doctor.”

They let him in immediately. All of his relatives were around the ruler and were assisting him. The doctor said: “How is the patient?”

The patient answered: “I’m very sick, master.”

The doctor asked: “What do the doctors of your village say?”

The patient replied: “They say I’m very sick and on the verge of death.”

The spiritual doctor took his hand and said: “I too say that you are dying. But if a medicine that I know were to be found, you wouldn’t die.”

He asked the servants to bring him a cup of water and some flour. He mixed them and then pretended to add something else to it and said: “The medicine is ready; all that is needed now is for your son to come here and for me to prick his small finger with a needle so that three drops of blood will drip out. Then I’ll give it to you to drink and you will instantly get well.”

The boy was playing with some other children. They immediately sent for him and said to him: “Come, son, a doctor has come to make your father well.”

The boy wanted to continue playing, but they brought him in. As the doctor saw him, he said: “Come, my son, I want to prick your finger with a needle to take three drops of blood to place in this medicine so your father can drink it and become well immediately.”

The boy said: “Am I stupid or crazy to hurt my finger?”

The doctor replied: “It’s up to you, my son, whether your father lives or dies. Don’t you realize how much he has accumulated to give to you?”

The boy answered: “Whether he lives or not, I won’t hurt my finger.” Then he left.

The confessor said to the patient: “I’m the confessor of the area, and I did this to show you that you shouldn’t expect anything to be done for your soul by your son.”

The patient then arose. “I,” he said, “have damned my soul for my son’s sake, so I can leave him a great inheritance. And he didn’t have it in his heart to give me three drops of blood to save my life? You’re quite right, confessor.”

He immediately asked for his account books, his promissory notes, and he tore them up. He divided all of his possessions as alms to the poor and needy and left nothing to his son. He thus made his son a pauper but in turn he was able to win Paradise and rejoiced forever.

Now all of you who have sons, don’t hope and say: “My son is good and he’ll concern himself with my soul.” it’s whatever a person does by himself that he’ll be repaid for in the next life.

WHO IS THE HEAD OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH?

By Fr. Andrew Phillips, protopresbyter of the St. Felix and St. Edmund Orthodox church in Felixstowe, Suffolk, England and editor of the journal "Orthodox England," [edited for length].

This is a question often asked, especially by Roman Catholics. No doubt they expect to find in the Orthodox Church an equivalent to the papacy. For Orthodox, however, the very existence of a visible head of the Roman Catholic Church indicates that, whatever its merits, the Roman Catholic Church is structurally (as well as in its true essence—Ed.) a secular institution. Visible heads are the symbols of secular corporations, companies or governments. Many argue that, ultimately, the Pope is the descendent of the pagan Roman Emperors; historically, when the imperial power disappeared from Rome, its authority and prestige were transferred, mainly by the Carolingians and their descendents, to the Papacy. In Roman Catholic ideology, the Pope of Rome has been known as the "Vicar of Christ" ever since the Hildebrandine Reform of the late eleventh century. (Until that time, he had been known in Orthodox fashion as "the Vicar of St. Peter.") And since according to the heresy of "filioque" the Holy Spirit precedes from Christ as from the Father, so the Holy Spirit must proceed from the "Vicar of Christ," i.e., the Pope. Is this not precisely the affirmation of the greatly heretical dogma of papal infallibility?

Thus, there are also those who assume the Orthodox Church must have a "head." Journalists quite often appoint a "head"—usually the Patriarch of Constantinople. But the truth is that the Orthodox Church has no visible head. It is true that in history various figures have played an important role in the Orthodox Church, certain Emperors of Constantinople, for example. They worked to protect the Church from heathen invasions or heretics, gave generous donations to monasteries and church-building programs, sponsored missions, and issued laws in defense of the Church. But they were never "heads" of the Church, and those who tried to meddle in Church affairs were always fiercely opposed by the faithful.

In Church history other great and universal figures have stood up to defend the Church at critical times. For example:

- St. Anthony the Great, founder of monasticism;
- St. Basil the Great, defender of the Orthodox teaching on the Holy Trinity;
- St. Athanasios the Great, defender against Arianism;
- St. Ambrose of Milan, defender against a wicked emperor;
- St. John Chrysostom, pastor, preacher and confessor of our Faith;
- St. John Cassian, father of western monasticism;
- St. Leo the Great, defender of the Orthodox teaching on Christ's two natures;
- St. Gregory the Great, pastor, missionary and theologian;

- St. Martin the Confessor, defender of the Person of Christ with St. Maximos the Confessor;
- St. Theodore the Studite, defender of the teaching on the Incarnation and, therefore, of icons;
- St. Photios the Great, defender of the Orthodox teaching on the Holy Spirit and the Holy Trinity;
- St. Symeon the New Theologian, defender of the spirituality of the Church;
- St. Gregory Palamas, defender of Orthodox spirituality against humanist and atheist rationalism;
- St. Mark of Ephesus, defender of the Church from scholastic rationalism;
- St. Paisios (Velichkovsky), defender of monasticism and prayer from impious rulers and the decadence of the Enlightenment;
- St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, canonist, pastor and theologian;
- St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco, preacher of repentance and return to Orthodoxy on five continents;
- St. Justin Popovich, confessor and defender of the theology of the Church.

None of these figures ever claimed to be "head" of the Church. Indeed, several denounced the concept of the Church having a visible head, especially St. Gregory the Great, himself Pope of Rome! For the Orthodox, there can only be one Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, as is affirmed constantly in the Epistles (Eph 1:22, 5:23, or Col 1:18).

Some may object and ask about the role of bishops. A bishop is a visible head (or, in Orthodox language, an icon of Christ), but only of his own diocese, not of the Church as a whole. Local churches may be "headed" by a patriarch, pope (as in Alexandria), metropolitan or archbishop, but these are likewise heads of local churches, not of the entire Church of Christ. Moreover, any bishop is only "head" in an administrative and liturgical sense; he is an "icon" of Christ, no more.

How, then, is the Church governed if it has no visible head? A company would dissolve into chaos without a chairman; the Roman Church would surely vanish without a pope. How is it that the Orthodox Church can continue without a visible Head and does not break up? Where is the principle of unity and authority?

The answer is given by the Saviour in the Gospel. Knowing that He would ascend to His Father, He promised to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 14:26). The Holy Spirit guides us into truth (John 16:13), for, in the words of Christ, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. In this way, although the Church has no visible head, and has no need of one, she has an invisible Head, which is Christ our God and King, present through the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ from the Father (John 15:26). This inner sense of Christ's presence as Head of the Church has always prevented Orthodoxy from elevating a human being to this position. Thus, while some

continue to argue that it could be “convenient” to have a human Head, for us Orthodox a Roman Catholic type of an arrangement is unacceptable. The purpose of the Church is not efficiency; it is holiness!

This explains why, to the outsider, Orthodoxy presents a paradoxical, even chaotic face. The human face of the Orthodox Church is indeed chaotic—because it is living in the world. Internally, however, the unity and authority of the Church is maintained by the Holy Spirit. The Church is the Body of Christ. The unity of the Church is apparent to the extent that we are partakers of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4), to the extent that we participate in the Holy Spirit. The unity of the Orthodox Church is thus a spiritual unity, not a secular one.

The unity of our Church becomes visible and tangible to the degree that the invisible Head of the Church, the Saviour Jesus Christ, becomes visible and tangible in our lives by the Holy Spirit. Where there are those who refuse the Church, where there are schisms and heresies—for whatever doctrinal, political, or nationalistic reasons penetrating Church life from the world—there, unity no longer exists. It is for this reason that the unity of the Church is most apparent in the Lives of the Saints, where there is no difference between *Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free* (Col. 3:11); *for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... and have all been made to drink into one Spirit* (I Cor 12:13). This spiritual unity is at the center of Her Orthodoxy as well as Her Catholicity. She is Orthodox, for She confesses the Orthodox teachings; but She is also Catholic since She is universal, beyond time and space. Indeed, the two are inseparable, for Orthodoxy which is not Catholic would be but a local opinion or custom, and Catholicity which is not Orthodox would be a form of monolithic totalitarianism. This is why the term “Roman Catholic” is contradictory: one cannot be “Catholic” and “Roman” at the same time.

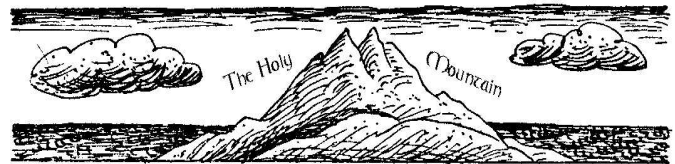
The Catholicity and Orthodoxy of the Church is best witnessed at the councils, whether local or ecumenical. It is here, at gatherings of bishops—and often saints—that the Holy Spirit inspires understanding of God and reveals spiritual realities that are then expressed in dogmas and canons. In the case of local councils, truths have been expressed which sometimes become universally accepted by the Church. A good example is the First Council of Jerusalem, when St. James, who presided at the Council, said, *For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and us...* (Acts 15:28), when speaking of the decision of this Council concerning the question of circumcision.

So too, there have been meetings of bishops and others which were prematurely termed “councils” and whose decisions were later rejected by the Church as not being inspired by the Holy Spirit but rather by human passions; for example, the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century. Characteristically, such “councils” bring not unity but disunity; they weaken the Church’s authority. At various periods in her history, centrifugal forces, schismatic or nationalistic, have threatened to

undermine the unity of the Church. Such is the case today with the so-called Macedonian Orthodox Church which, with Communist and Vatican aid, was separated from the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In the past, whole local Churches have left Orthodoxy. Such was the case with the Nestorians, the Monophysites, and later the Western Church (whose leaders envisioned the reestablishment of a Western Roman Empire). At other times the Church has been menaced by centripetal (centralizing) forces which threatened to enforce unity at the cost of diversity. Such was the case with certain emperors who wished to Hellenize or Russify local populations. In spite of these two anti-ecclesial tendencies, the Church remains undivided, for even the gates of hell shall not prevail against Her.

The Orthodox Church, then, is a commonwealth of local churches, a community of unity in diversity, which is founded on the Orthodox Christian theology of the Holy Trinity. The nature of the Church’s unity is spiritual, not secular, not organizational, but ascetic. The unity of the Church is manifest when each one of us, individually and collectively, roots out from within us all that is contrary to the free and untrammelled working and movement of the Holy Spirit. If we fail to do this, our unity with the Body of Christ, the Church, is weakened. Her Head is the invisible Head of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, present always within Her through the Holy Spirit, Who is everywhere present and within all things, the Treasury of blessings and Giver of Life.



Many people understand about the ultimate effects of illusion, for these are clearly manifest. What is more important is to learn how this illusion originally arises. It starts from a false thought, which serves as the foundation of all the delusions and all the disastrous infirmities that afflict the soul. A false thought in the mind already contains the whole structure of illusion, just as a seed sown in the earth contains the whole plant which will grow out of it.

To make progress in prayer and to escape from illusion, self-denial is needed, which teaches us that nothing should be sought in prayer except attention. The work of prayer will become more simple and easy. Temptations will also become less strong, although they always accompany any endeavour. St. Nil Sorski and other Holy Fathers tell us that powerful temptations coming from the devil—temptations far beyond our strength—attack us if we seek to experience in ourselves the fruits of prayer of the heart prematurely. We seek these fruits too soon because—unknown to ourselves—we suffer from an exaggerated opinion of our own abilities, and from conceit masquerading as zeal.

St. Ignatii Brianchaninov (1867)

POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY AND THE UNBORN CHILD

By Stephen Caesar, M.A., from "Christian News," Dec. 9, 2002.

The women's movement defends abortion by employing two myths that have been exploded by modern science. The first myth is that an unborn child is not a cognizant human being but a "potential life" or a "blob of tissue." This is in contradiction to Luke 1:41, which affirms the cognizance of the unborn child. In this passage, the Holy Virgin, while pregnant with Jesus, enters the house of her relative Elizabeth, who at the time was pregnant with John the Baptist. The Bible recounts: *And it came to pass, that, when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mariam, the babe leaped in her womb.* This indicates that a baby can hear voices outside the womb and react to them, something that a "lump of tissue" or a "potential" anything cannot do.

Recent technological breakthroughs have shown that the Biblical position is right and that the women's movement is wrong. The Boston Globe recently reported: "In the comfort of the womb, a baby can hear its mother speaking. Scientists have shown that the newborn already recognizes its mother's voice and can also distinguish between the language spoken by the mother and a foreign language" (Cook 2001:6).

Further evidence of the unborn child's cognizance of the outside world has been discovered by Alexandra Lamont, lecturer in the psychology of music at Keele University in Great Britain. According to the Globe, Prof. Lamont "asked a group of expectant mothers to pick a piece of music and then play it every day during the final three months of their pregnancy. The children were then not exposed to the music for 12 months after they were born" (Cook 2001:7). Prof. Lamont then played three pieces of music to the one-year olds: The song the mothers had played to them in the womb, a similar song, and a song from a completely different style of music. "What she found stunned her," reported the Globe. "The children consistently preferred the exact piece of music they had heard in the womb" (Cook 2001:7). Prof. Lamont herself remarked, "I never expected this kind of long-term memory" (Cook 2001:7).

Still more evidence for the unborn child's ability to hear sounds and react to them was reported recently by Scientific American. Ultrasound, the high-tech medical procedure that permits an obstetrician to see inside a pregnant woman's womb, relies on sound waves to form a picture of the unborn child. These sound waves are too high to be heard by adults, but unborn babies can hear them perfectly—a little too perfectly, it turns out, as the prestigious journal reported:

"Volumes [of sound from the procedure] can reach up to 100 decibels in utero, as loud as a subway train. An unborn baby would perceive this sound as a high-pitched tone or chord,

although the noise would be more akin to a finger tap near the ear than a shriek cutting the air. The finding may explain why babies wiggle more during ultrasound scans than when resting undisturbed" (Minkel 2002:28).

Both of these discoveries demonstrate that an unborn child is a cognizant human being who can react to sounds, just as Luke 1:41 suggests, and in complete opposition to feminist mythology.

The second myth used by the women's movement is the claim that an unborn child is not a separate entity, but merely a piece of a woman's body, like her liver or kidney (or a man's prostate). In the Bible, however, the separate personhood of a child in the womb is clear; Isaiah 49:1 states, *The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.* If a child in a woman's womb were merely a piece of her body, like a lung or a bladder, it would hardly make sense for God to call it, since He is not in the habit of calling out inseparable body parts. However, if the baby is a separate human entity, then Isaiah 49:1 would make perfect sense. Genetics has shown the Biblical position is correct: The cells of the unborn child are so different from those of his or her mother that they are foreign. The research of J. Lee Nelson demonstrates this point. An associate member in the Program of Human Immunogenetics at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and an associate professor in the Division of Rheumatology at the University of Washington, Dr. Nelson has been trying to find the cause of autoimmune diseases (in which the body considers itself to be a disease which must be fought). According to Nelson, "One of the unsolved mysteries of immunology is why the body of a pregnant woman doesn't reject her fetus... In recent years, the mystery deepened as researchers learned that fetal cells get into the maternal blood stream during pregnancy and, what's more, may stay there for decades, perhaps indefinitely... The indefinite persistence of fetal cells in a woman's body... led me to ask if some so-called autoimmune diseases may be triggered by foreign cells, specifically by fetal cells present in the mother's body" (Nelson 2001:14).

If the unborn baby were the genetic equivalent of the mother's kidney or appendix, then his or her cells would not be "foreign," but would have the same genetic code as the rest of the mother's cells. The fact that fetal cells are foreign to the pregnant woman confirms the Biblical truth that an unborn child is a separate human entity.

The findings of modern science are in accordance with Biblical statements, while the women's movement is completely at odds with the truth on this issue. Isaiah, writing in the eighth century BC, and Luke, writing in the first century AD, knew more about the true nature of the unborn child than science did until very recently. This is yet another indication of the divine source of the Biblical authors' knowledge—not to mention the profound wrongness of the women's movement on the question of abortion.

διότι «ή εις οὐρανοῦς ἀνοδος διὰ τούτων (τῶν λέξεων) τοῦ Κυρίου σημαίνεται» (Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος).

β) Οἱ Ἀπόστολοι. Οἱ Ἀπόστολοι εἶναι χωρισμένοι εἰς δύο ὀμίλους ἔχοντες εἰς τὸ μέσον τὴν Παναγίαν. Ὅπισθεν τῆς Παναγίας εὐρίσκονται δύο λευκοφοροῦντες ἄγγελοι, οἱ ὅποιοι δείχνουν τὸν Ἀναληφθέντα Κύριον. Ὡς ἀγγελιαφόροι τοῦ Θεοῦ διαβεβαιώνουν καὶ παρηγοροῦν τοὺς παρισταμένους διὰ τὴν ἐπάνοδον τοῦ Κυρίου κατὰ τὴν δευτέραν παρουσίαν.

Εἰς τὸ κείμενον τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς, τὸ ἀναφερόμενον εἰς τὴν Ἀνάληψιν, δὲν ἀναφέρεται ὅτι παρευρέθη ἡ Θεοτόκος κατὰ τὴν εἰς οὐρανοῦς ἀνοδὸν τοῦ Υἱοῦ Της. Περὶ αὐτοῦ μᾶς πληροφορεῖ ἡ Ἱερά Παράδοσις, ὅπως τὴν βλέπομεν ἄλλωστε καὶ εἰς τὰ τροπάρια τῆς ἑορτῆς. Ἀξία προσοχῆς εἶναι ἡ θέσις καὶ ἡ στάσις τῆς Θεοτόκου εἰς τὴν εἰκόνα. Εὐρίσκεται ἀκριβῶς κάτωθεν τοῦ Υἱοῦ Της καὶ εἶναι ἔτσι ὁ ἄξων τῆς ὅλης συνθέσεως. Ἡ στάσις Της εἶναι στάσις προσευχῆς. Οἱ Ἀπόστολοι μὲ τὰς πρὸς τὸν Κύριον ἐστραμμένας κεφαλὰς τῶν καὶ τὰς χειρονομίας τῶν ἔρχονται εἰς ἀντίθεσιν πρὸς τὴν ἀτάραχον καὶ ἥρεμον μορφήν τῆς Παναγίας. Εἰς τὴν εἰκόνα μᾶς τὸ ὑποπόδιον, ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁποίου πατεῖ ἡ Θεοτόκος τονίζει ἀκόμη περισσότερο τὴν ξεχωριστὴν θέσιν Της μετὰ τῶν εἰκονιζομένων Ἀποστόλων.

Ὁ ἀγιογράφος τῆς εἰκόνας τῆς Ἀναλήψεως ἠθέλησε μὲ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους, ποὺ περιστοιχίζουν τὴν Παναγίαν, νὰ παρουσιάσῃ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, εἰς τὴν ὁποίαν ὁ Κύριος θὰ ἔστειλε κατὰ τὴν Πεντηκοστήν τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα διὰ νὰ τὴν ζωοποιήσῃ. Περὶ τῆς ἀποστολῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος εἰς τοὺς Μαθητὰς καὶ τῆς ἐπιδημίας του εἰς τὸν κόσμον ὀμιλοῦν καὶ τὰ τροπάρια τῆς ἑορτῆς τῆς Ἀναλήψεως, συνδέοντα ἔτσι τὰ δύο κοσμοϊστορικά καὶ κοσμοσωτήρια γεγονότα.

Τὸ πρόσωπον δεξιὰ τῆς Θεοτόκου, τὸ ὁποῖον βλέπει εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν μὲ τὴν χεῖρα ἐμπρὸς εἰς τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς του, εἶναι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Κατὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψιν ὁ Παῦλος δὲν εἶχε θέσιν μετὰ τῶν Ἀποστόλων, διότι ἡ μεταστροφή του ἔγινεν ἀργότερον. Ἡ θέσις του εἰς τὴν εἰκόνα εἶναι συμβολικὴ. Θὰ γίνῃ καὶ αὐτὸς μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ μάλιστα μέλος ἐκλεκτόν. Ὁ ὀρθόδοξος ἀγιογράφος ἀποσπᾷ τὸν Παῦλον ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴν του καὶ τὸν συγκαταριθμεῖ μετὰ τῶν Ἀποστόλων. Ἔτσι καὶ ἡ θέσις τοῦ Ἰούδα ἀνεπληρώθη καὶ ἡ παράστασις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔγινε δυναμικὴ, ἐκφραστικὴ καὶ συμβολικὴ.

Αἱ ὑψωμένα εἰς προσευχὴν χεῖρες τῆς Παναγίας ὑπενθυμίζουν τὸν ρόλον Της πλησίον τοῦ Υἱοῦ Της. Ἡμεῖς, ὅπως ψάλλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μᾶς, «ἄλλην γὰρ οὐκ ἔχομεν ἁμαρτωλοὶ πρὸς Θεόν... ἄει μεσιτεῖαν». Παρακαλοῦμεν τὸν Χριστὸν νὰ μᾶς σώσῃ καὶ ἐλεήσῃ «ταῖς πρεσβείαις τῆς παναχράντου Δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας».

Ἐνα ἀκόμη δεῖγμα τῆς σχέσεως Θεοτόκου καὶ Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι τὸ ἀλύγιτον τῆς στάσεως τῆς Παναγίας, ποὺ βλέπομεν εἰς μερικὰς εἰκόνας. Μὲ τὴν ἀκινήσιαν Της αὐτὴν φαίνεται νὰ ἐκφράζῃ τὰ ἀμετακίνητα δόγματα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας

μας. Ἀπὸ τὸ ἄλλο μέρος οἱ Ἀπόστολοι μὲ τὰς διαφόρους χειρονομίας τῶν συμβολίζουν τὰς διαφόρους γλώσσας καὶ τὰ ποικίλα μέσα, μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ σπείρεται εἰς τὰς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Κλείομεν τὴν ἀνάλυσιν τῆς εἰκόνας τῆς Ἀναλήψεως μὲ τοὺς λόγους τοῦ Ἁγίου πάπα Λέοντος Α΄ (440-461): «Ἡ Ἀνάληψις τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἰδική μας ἀνύψωσις καὶ ὅπου ἡ δόξα τῆς Κεφαλῆς προεπορεύθη, ἐκεῖ καλεῖται καὶ ἡ τοῦ Σώματος ἐλπίς», τὰ μέλη δηλαδὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι τὸ Σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.



Καταντήσαμε τὴ γῆ μας καὶ τὴν Ἐποχὴ μας Σωστὸ Ψυχιατρεῖο!

Γέροντας Πορφύριος Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991).

Αὐτὸ κατόρθωσε ὁ διάβολος νὰ κάνῃ. Ἔκανε τὴ γῆ λαβύρινθο, γιὰ νὰ μὴ μπορούμε νὰ συνεννοηθοῦμε ματαξὺ μας. Βλέπετε πῶς πλανηθήκαμε; Καταντήσαμε τὴ γῆ μας καὶ τὴν ἐποχὴ μας σωστὸ ψυχιατρεῖο! Καὶ δὲν καταλαβαίνομε τι μᾶς φταίει. Ὅλοι ἀπορούμε:

«Τὶ γίναμε, ποῦ πᾶμε, γιατί τὰ παιδιά μας πήρανε τοὺς δρόμους, γιατί φύγανε ἀπ' τὰ σπίτια τους, γιατί παρατήσανε τὴ ζωὴ, γιατί παρατήσανε τὴ μόρφωσή τους; Γιατί γίνεται αὐτό;»

Ὁ διάβολος κατόρθωσε νὰ ἐξαφανίσῃ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του καὶ νὰ κάνῃ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν ἄλλα ὀνόματα. Οἱ γιατροὶ, οἱ ψυχολόγοι λένε συχνά, ὅταν ἕνας ἄνθρωπος πάσχει:

«Ἄ, νεύρωση ἔχεις! Ἄ, ἄγχος ἔχεις!» καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα.

Δὲν παραδέχονται ὅτι ὁ διάβολος ὑποκινεῖ καὶ διεγείρει στὸν ἄνθρωπο τὸν ἐγωϊσμό. Κι ὅμως, ὁ διάβολος ὑπάρχει, εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ κακοῦ. Ἄν ποῦμε ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει, εἶναι σὰν νὰ ἀρνούμαστε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ποὺ μιλάει γι' αὐτόν. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ ἐχθρὸς μας, ὁ πολέμιός μας στὴ ζωὴ, ὁ ἀντίθετος τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ λέγεται ἀντίχριστος. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἦλθε στὴ γῆ γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀπαλλάξῃ ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο καὶ νὰ μᾶς χαρίσῃ τὴ σωτηρία!



Ὁποῖος ἀγωνίζεται πνευματικά, πολεμᾷ τὸν ἐχθρὸν διάβολο καὶ ἐπόμενο εἶναι νὰ πολεμηθῇ καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτόν. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ θὰ νικήσῃ τὸν νοητὸ ἐχθρὸ, θὰ στεφανωθῇ ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό. Πρὶν ἀρχίσει τὴ μάχη ὁ ἐχθρὸς, ἀρχίζει τὸν βομβαρδισμό μὲ τοὺς λογισμοὺς. Ἡ εὐχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἶναι τὸ βαρύτερο ὄπλο κατὰ τῶν λογισμῶν τοῦ ἐχθροῦ.

Γέροντας Παῖσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

«Ἐπεθύμησε Πόρνη...»

Αγ. Ιωάννου Χρυσοστόμου από την ὁμιλία «Ὅτε τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔξω εὐρεθεὶς Εὐτρόπιος...», ἀναδημοσίευση ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Σύναξη», τεῦχος ἀρ. 2, 1982.

Πόρνη ἐπιθυμοῦσε ὁ Θεός; Ναι πόρνη. Ἐνοῶ τὴ δική μας φύση. Ἦταν τρανός καὶ αὐτὴ ταπεινὴ. Τρανός ὄχι στὴ θέση ἀλλὰ στὴ φύση. Πεντακάθαρος ἦταν, ἀκατάστρευτη ἢ οὐσία Του, ἄφθαρτη ἢ φύση Του. Ἀχώρητος στὸ νοῦ, ἀόρατος, ἀπιαστός ἀπὸ τὴ σκέψη, ὑπάρχοντας παντοτεινά, μένοντας ἀπαράλλακτος. Πάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, ἀνώτερος ἀπὸ τὴ δύναμις τῶν οὐρανῶν. Νικώντας τὴ λογικὴ σκέψη, ξεπερνώντας τὴ δύναμη τοῦ μυαλοῦ, ἀδύνατο νὰ τὸν δῆς, μόνον νὰ τὸν πιστέψης...

Ἔριχνε τὸ βλέμμα του στὴ Γῆ καὶ τὴν ἔκανε νὰ τρέμη... Ποτάμια ἔβγαζε στὴν ἔρημο... Κι αὐτὸς ὁ τόσο μέγας καὶ τρανός, πεθύμησε πόρνη. Γιατί; Γιὰ νὰ τὴν ἀναπλάσῃ ἀπὸ πόρνη σὲ παρθένα. Γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ ὁ Νυμφίος τῆς. Τί κάνει; Δὲν τῆς στέλνει κάποιον ἀπὸ τοὺς δούλους Του, δὲν στέλνει Ἄγγελο στὴν πόρνη, δὲν στέλνει Ἀρχάγγελο, δὲν στέλνει τὰ Χερουβεὶμ, δὲν στέλνει τὰ Σεραφεὶμ. Ἀλλὰ καταφθάνει αὐτὸς ὁ ἴδιος, ὁ ἐρωτευμένος.

Ἐπεθύμησε πόρνη. Καὶ τί κάνει; Ἐπειδὴ δὲν μπορούσε νὰ ἀνέβῃ ἐκεῖνη στὰ ψηλά, κατέβηκε Αὐτὸς στὰ χαμηλά. Ἐρχεται στὴν καλύβα τῆς. Τὴ βλέπει μεθυσμένη. Καὶ μὲ ποῖο τρόπο ἔρχεται; Ὅχι μὲ ὀλοφάνερη τὴ Θεότητά Του, ἀλλὰ γίνεται ἐντελῶς ἴδιος μαζί τῆς, μήπως βλέποντάς Τον τρομοκρατηθεῖ, μήπως λαχταρήσει καὶ Τοῦ φύγει. Τὴ βρίσκει καταπληγωμένη, ἐξαγριωμένη, ἀπὸ δαίμονες κυριευμένη. Καὶ τί κάνει; Τὴν παίρνει καὶ τὴν κάνει γυναίκα του. Καὶ τί δῶρα τῆς χαρίζει; Δαχτυλίδι. Ποῖο δαχτυλίδι; Τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα.

Ἐπειτα λέγει:

- Δὲν σὲ φύτεψα στὸν Παράδεισο;

- Τοῦ λέγει, ναί.

- Καὶ πῶς ξέπεσες ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ;

- Ἦλθε καὶ μὲ πῆρε ὁ Διάβολος ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο.

- Φυτεύτηκες στὸν Παράδεισο καὶ σὲ ἔβγαλε ἔξω. Νά, σὲ φυτεύω μέσα μου. Δὲν τολμᾷ νὰ μὲ πλησιάσῃ ἔμένα. Ὁ Ποιμένας σὲ κρατᾷ καὶ ὁ λύκος δὲν ἔρχεται πιά.

- Ἀλλὰ εἶμαι, λέγει, ἀμαρτωλὴ καὶ βρώμικη.

- Μὴ μοῦ σκοτιζέσαι, εἶμαι γιατρός.

Δῶσε μεγάλη προσοχή. Κοίταξε τί κάνει. Ἦλθε νὰ πάρῃ τὴν πόρνη, ὅπως αὐτὴ—τὸ τονίζω—ἦταν βουτηγμένη στὴ βρώμα. Γιὰ νὰ μάθῃς τὸν ἔρωτα τοῦ Νυμφίου. Αὐτὸ χαρακτηρίζει τὸν ἐρωτευμένο: τὸ νὰ μὴ ζητᾷ εὐθύνες γιὰ ἀμαρτήματα, ἀλλὰ νὰ συγχωρῇ λάθη καὶ παραπατήματα.

Πιὸ πρὶν ἦταν κόρη τῶν δαιμόνων, κόρη τῆς Γῆς, ἀνάξια γιὰ τὴ Γῆ. Καὶ τώρα ἔγινε κόρη τοῦ βασιλιά. Καὶ αὐτὸ γιατί ἔτσι θέλησε ὁ ἐρωτευμένος μαζί τῆς. Γιατί ὁ ἐρωτευμένος δὲν πολυνοιάζεται γιὰ τὴ συμπεριφορά Του. Ὁ ἔρωτας δὲν βλέπει ἀσχήμια. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὀνομάζεται ἔρωτας,

ἐπειδὴ πολλές φορές ἀγαπᾷ καὶ τὴν ἀσχημὴ. Ἔτσι ἔκανε καὶ ὁ Χριστός. Ἀσχημὴ εἶδε καὶ τὴν ἐρωτεύτηκε καὶ τὴν ἀνακαινίζει.

Τὴν πῆρε ὡς γυναίκα, καὶ ὡς κόρη Του τὴν ἀγαπᾷ, καὶ ὡς δούλα Του τὴν φροντίζει, καὶ ὡς παρθένα τὴν προστατεύει, καὶ ὡς Παράδεισο τὴν τειχίζει, καὶ ὡς μέλος τοῦ σώματος Του τὴν περιποιεῖται. Τὴ φροντίζει ὡς κεφαλὴ τῆς ποῦ εἶναι, τὴ φυτεύει ὡς ρίζα, τὴν ποιμαίνει ὡς Ποιμένας. Ὡς Νυμφίος τὴν παίρνει γυναίκα Του, καὶ ὡς ἐξιλαστήριο θῦμα τὴν συγχωρεῖ, ὡς πρόβατο θυσιάζεται, ὡς Νυμφίος τὴ διατηρεῖ μέσα στὴν ὁμορφιά, ὡς σύζυγος φροντίζει νὰ μὴν τῆς λείπει τίποτα.

Ὡ, Σὺ Νυμφίε, ποῦ ὁμορφαινεὶς τὴν ἀσχήμια τῆς νόμφης!



ΔΩΡΕΑΝ ΠΡΟΣΦΟΡΑ

ΠΡΟΣ ΟΛΟΥΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΕΣ ΜΑΣ

Ἡ Ἀδελφότης «Ὁσιος Ποιμίν» κοινοποιεῖ τοὺς ἀναγνώστες τῆς «Orthodox Heritage» ὅτι προσφέρουμε ΔΩΡΕΑΝ πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐνδιαφέροντας Ὁρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς τὸ CD μὲ τὴς ὁμιλίες ἀπὸ τὸ ΔΙΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΟ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΚΟ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ ποῦ ἔλαβε μέρος τὸν Σεπτέμβριο τοῦ 2004 στὸ Ἄριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης με θέμα: «**ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΣΜΟΣ: Γένεση, Προσδοκίες, Διαφεύσεις**».

Οἱ ὁμιλίες εἶναι εἰς τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν καὶ προσφέρουν μίᾶ πολὺτιμη καὶ πλήρη εἰκόνα στὶς θέσεις ἀλλὰ ἰδιαίτερα τοὺς κινδύνους ποῦ κρύβονται πίσω ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπουλη ταυτότητα τοῦ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΣΜΟΥ. Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς ἀποτελεῖ τὴν πιὸ σοβαρὴ καὶ ἐπικίνδυνη αἴρεση τοῦ παρόντος αἰῶνος. Ἡ ἀδελφότητά μας θεωρεῖ ὅτι τὸ ἐκπαιδευτικὸ ἔργο τῶν ὁμιλιῶν αὐτῶν εἶναι κάτι πλήρως ἀναγκαῖο γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς τῆς ἐποχῆς μας.

Πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε ὑπολογιστὴ μὲ Windows operating system καὶ μὲ CD player γιὰ νὰ ἀκούσετε τὴς προαναφερόμενες ὁμιλίες, ἢ ἓνα MP3 Player. Οἱ ἐνδιαφέροντες ἂς γράψουν ἓνα μικρὸ σημεῖωμα μὲ τὴν διεύθυνσή σας καὶ στείλτε το στὴν ἠλεκτρονικὴ διεύθυνση (e-mail) τῆς Ἀδελφότητος (Poimen@mail.com), ἢ διὰ τοῦ Ταχυδρομείου πρὸς:

Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen

PO Box 38688

Phoenix, AZ 85069-8688

Γάμος και Παρθενία

Αγ. Γεωργίου Χρυσοστόμου, από το περιοδικόν «Παναγία Εκατονταπυλιανής», Μάρτιος-Απρίλιος 2002.

Στην πραγματεία του «Περί Παρθενίας», ο ιερὸς πατέρας παρουσιάζει τὴν ἀξία τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς παρθενίας καὶ τὴ συγκρίνει μὲ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ γάμου. Ἀναφέρει, λοιπόν, ὅτι ὁ γάμος εἶναι ἱερὸ καὶ ἅγιο μυστήριον, εἶναι τὸ καλὸ ἀγαθόν. Δὲν εἶναι ὁμῶς τὸ ἄριστον ἀγαθὸν ποὺ ἐκφράζει καὶ βιώνει ἡ παρθενία. Αὐτὸ βέβαιον τὸ συμπεραίνει ἀπὸ τὴν προσωπικὴν του ἐμπειρία, ἀφοῦ ὁ ἴδιος ἐξῆλθε μέσα στὴ συνειδητὴ ἀσκηση καὶ στοὺς μόχθους καὶ τοὺς κόπους τῆς παρθενίας.

Ἡ πραγματεία του αὐτὴ ἀποτελεῖται ἀπὸ 84 κεφάλαια. Ὁ ιερὸς πατέρας στὴν ἀνάπτυξιν τῶν θεμάτων του στηρίζεται ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ κυρίως στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη. Ἰδιαίτερα, ὁμῶς, ἀναφέρεται στὸν ἀπόστολον Παῦλον καὶ σὲ ὅσα ἐκεῖνος γράφει γιὰ τὸ γάμον καὶ τὴν παρθενία στὴ Β΄ πρὸς Κορινθίους ἐπιστολήν του.

Προκειμένου νὰ ἀποδείξῃ ὁ ιερὸς Χρυσόστομος ὅτι ἡ παρθενία εἶναι χάρισμα θεῶ καὶ ἱερὸ καὶ ὅτι ἡ ἀξία της εἶναι ἀσύγκριτη, ὅταν βέβαιον τὴν ζεῖ κάποιος ἀληθινά, καθὼς καὶ ὅτι ἡ παρθενία τῶν αἰρετικῶν χωρὶς τὴν ἀξία καὶ τὸ περιεχόμενον τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας δὲν ἔχει κανένα νόημα, ἔγραψε αὐτὴν τὴν ὑπέροχον πραγματεία «Περί Παρθενίας». Παραθέτομε ἐδῶ ὀρισμένα ἀποσπάσματα:

(...) Πῶς, λοιπόν, ἀπαγορεύω τὸ γάμον, ἀφοῦ δὲν κατηγορῶ αὐτοὺς ποὺ παντρεύονται; Ἀπαγορεύω τὴν πορνείαν καὶ τὴ μοιχεία, οὐδέποτε ὁμῶς τὸ γάμον. Καὶ ἐκείνους μὲν, ποὺ τολμοῦν νὰ πράξουν αὐτὰ τὰ κακά, τοὺς τιμωρῶ καὶ τοὺς ἀπομακρύνω ἀπὸ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἐνῶ αὐτοὺς ποὺ συνάπτουν γάμον, ἐάν βέβαιον εἶναι σῶφρονες, ὄχι μόνον δὲν τοὺς κατηγορῶ ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐπαινῶ ἐπὶ πλέον.

Γιατὶ αὐτὸς ποὺ κατηγορεῖ τὸ γάμον, μειώνει καὶ τὴ δόξαν τῆς παρθενίας, ἐνῶ αὐτὸς ποὺ τὸν ἐπαινεῖ, ἐξυψώνει περισσότερο τὸ θαῦμα της καὶ τὸ κάνει λαμπρότερον. Ἐπειδὴ αὐτὸ ποὺ φαίνεται καλόν, ἂν συγκριθῇ μὲ τὸ χειρότερον, δὲν θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι πάρα πολὺ καλόν (δηλαδὴ, ἂν θεωρήσουμε τὸν γάμον κακὸν καὶ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ παρθενία εἶναι καλύτερη, τότε καὶ αὐτὴ δὲν μπορεί νὰ εἶναι πάρα πολὺ καλή). Ἐνῶ αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι καλύτερον ἀπὸ τὰ ἀναγνωρισμένα ἀγαθὰ, αὐτὸ εἶναι καλόν στὸν ὑπερβολικόν βαθμό, καὶ σὴν τέτοιον ἀγαθόν ἐμεῖς ἀποδεικνύουμε ὅτι εἶναι ἡ παρθενία (δηλαδὴ, ἡ παρθενία εἶναι τὸ ἄριστον μόνον ὅταν θεωρήσουμε τὸ γάμον ὡς καλόν, ὡς ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀναγνωρισμένα ἀγαθὰ).

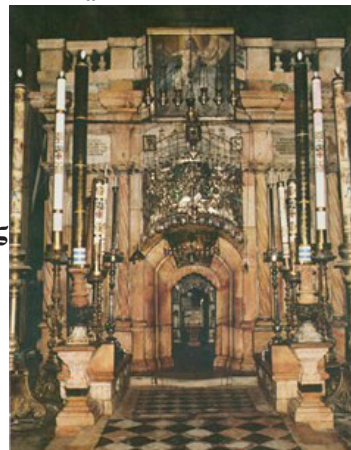
Ὅπως λοιπόν ἀκριβῶς αὐτοὶ ποὺ κατηγοροῦν τὸ γάμον, καταστρέφουν τὰ ἐγκώμια τῆς παρθενίας, ἔτσι καὶ αὐτὸς ποὺ δὲν τὸν κατηγορεῖ ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐπαινεῖ, ἐπαινεῖ ὄχι μόνον αὐτὸν ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τὴν παρθενία. Καθότι καὶ σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾶ τὰ σώματα, δὲ λέμε ὅτι εἶναι ὥραια ὅσα εἶναι καλύτερα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνάπηρα, ἀλλ' ὅσα εἶναι καλλίτερα ἀπὸ τὰ ἄρτια.

Εἶναι καλὸν πράγμα ὁ γάμος. Λοιπόν, γι' αὐτὸ ἡ παρθενία εἶναι θαυμαστή, γιατί εἶναι ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ τὸ καλόν (...) Ἄν

βγάλης τὸ γάμον ἀπὸ τὴν ἄριστη θέση, τότε πῶς δόξα τῆς παρθενίας καὶ τὴν ὑποβίβασες στὸ χειρότερον βαθμό.

Εἶναι καλόν πράγμα ἡ παρθενία. Συμφωνῶ βέβαιον καὶ ἐγώ. Ἀλλ' εἶναι ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ τὸ γάμον. Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀποδέχομαι. Καὶ ἂν θέλῃς, προσθέτω καὶ τὸ πῶς ἀνώτερη εἶναι. Εἶναι λοιπόν ἀνώτερη ὅσο ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ, ὅσο οἱ ἄγγελοι ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Καὶ ἂν πρέπη, μπορῶ νὰ πῶ ὅτι εἶναι κάτι τὸ ἀναντίρρητον καὶ ἀκόμη περισσότερον. Γιατὶ οἱ μὲν ἄγγελοι ἂν καὶ δὲν συνάπτουν γάμον, ἀλλ' ὁμῶς δὲν ἀποτελοῦνται ἀπὸ σάρκα καὶ αἷμα, οὔτε ἔχουν τίς κατοικίες τοὺς στὴ γῆ, οὔτε πειράζονται ἀπὸ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, οὔτε ἔχουν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τροφῆς καὶ ποτῆς, οὔτε μπορεί νὰ τοὺς ἐπηρεάσῃ ἄσμα μελωδικόν, οὔτε νὰ τοὺς λυγίσῃ ὄψιν ὁμορφῆς, οὔτε καὶ κανένα ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὰ παρόμοια. Ἀλλ' ὅπως ἀκριβῶς μπορείς νὰ δῆς τὸν οὐρανὸν καθαρὸν τὴν ὥραν τοῦ μεσημεριοῦ, τότε ποῦ δὲν τὸν σκιάζει κανένα σύννεφον, ἔτσι καὶ οἱ φύσεις τῶν ἀγγέλων παραμένουν καθαρῆς καὶ λαμπρῆς, ἀφοῦ δὲν τίς ἐνοχλεῖ καμιά ἐπιθυμία.

Τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ὁμῶς γένος, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἀπὸ τὴ φύσιν του κατώτερον ἀπὸ τοὺς μακαρίους ἐκείνους ἀγγέλους, ἀγωνίζεται μὲ ὅλην τὴν δύναμιν καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ ἐξισωθῇ, ὅσο τοῦ εἶναι δυνατόν, μ' ἐκείνους. Πῶς λοιπόν; Μὲ τὴν παρθενία, καταλήγει ὁ ιερὸς πατέρας, καὶ μὲ τὸ νὰ βρίσκονται ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ τὴν ἀσκῶν συνέχιστα πλησίον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ τὸν ὑπηρετοῦν ἀδιάκοπα, ὅπως οἱ ἄγγελοι.



**Ὁ Πανάγιος
Τάφος**

**The Holy
Sepulchre**

Προσευχὴ πρὸς τὸν Κύριον

Ἀντίγραφον μιᾶς προσευχῆς εὐρεθείσης ἐντὸς τοῦ Τάφου τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, φυλασσομένης ἐντὸς ἀργυροῦ κιβωτιδίου.

Ἐμπρὸς σου στέκω Κύριε καὶ εἶμαι ἀφοσιωμένη ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη τῆς καρδιάς εἰς Σε παραδομένη. Θέλω Χριστέ μου νὰ σωθῶ, νὰ ῥθω στὴν κιβωτόν σου νὰ πλέω ἐπάνω στὸν ἀφρόν μὲ ὅλους τοὺς δικούς σου. Μέρα καὶ νύχτα Κύριε νὰ εὐρίσκομαι κοντά σου καὶ νὰ φωνάζω δυνατὰ τὰ κατορθώματά σου. Χριστέ, ἀληθινὸ Θεέ, σβῆσε τὰ σφάλματά μου, σβῆσε τίς ἀμαρτίες μου καὶ τὰ ἐγκλήματά μου.

DECRYPTING THE... “DA VINCI CODE”

By Christina Pantzou, from the Greek Sunday Newspaper “Eleftherotypia”—“Epsilon” magazine insert—Issue No. 707, October 31, 2004, page 36, translated from Greek by A. N. [edited for length].

There are some who—albeit totally ignorant of the Holy Bible—have come to acknowledge this “Da Vinci Code” book as a truthful document, which supposedly “exposes” the Christian faith. However, the facts outlined below, as taken from the newspaper’s “Epsilon” article by Christina Pantzou, will prove just how incorrect they are, in these as well as many more things!

On researching the sources of the book “The Da Vinci Code,” the researchers finally stumbled onto the Conservative right-wing person of Pierre Plantard, who seems to be the one who provided the “sources” that Dan Brown presents as “historical documents.”

The book in question is perhaps the most intriguing “conspiracy theory” book of our times. It is an international best-seller, with millions of readers from all over the world. The imaginative and the real, myth and history, all randomly combined in a narrative that puts the adventures of Indiana Jones to shame. However, an ensuing, second examination (with the assistance of specialists) revealed that it is actually a medley of esoteric references, unreliable sources, recycled, old conspiracies, undocumented metaphors and—the most dangerous of all—extreme, right-wing references cloaked with literary brushwork.

Snow White eating the poisoned apple: an allegory that referred to the fall of Eve in the Garden of Eden? Mary Magdalene sitting next to Jesus in Da Vinci’s painting of the Last Supper? Walt Disney—an occultist who, from his very first movies has been sending us strange messages? The glass pyramid of the Louvre was constructed on the instruction of Francois Beran—also called “The Sphinx,” because he was initiated into terrible secrets? In his world-wide best-seller, 38 year old Dan Brown, an English teacher in New Hampshire and a graduate in the history of art, is toying with our need for miracles and mysteries by speaking of anagrams, coded messages, hidden secret signs... right before our very eyes.

His essay is nothing more than an adult version of Harry Potter, basically focusing on the quest for the Holy Grail and the descendants of the union (!!!) between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, sprinkled with “profound” metaphors that are nothing more than a recycling of old familiar arguments found in Religious fantasy literature, according to the comment by Michel Kessnel, Dean of the University of Lyons: “Knights of the Temple, Zion, Holy Grail, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Vatican’s secrets, the occultism of Da Vinci. The wife and children of Jesus... The only thing missing is Jesus’ twin brother!...”

This is nothing more than a cleverly thought-out text, which could have easily been taken as just another fantastic story, a story that Ron Howard has now prepared and transferred onto the big screen, insisting that it is the next Hollywood blockbuster; however a story it is not claimed to be as the author insisted on the historical veracity of his sources within the introduction of his book. Despite the tens of books in circulation which have debunked his assertions, he has miraculously convinced his readers to such a degree, that, last summer, thousands of tourists swarmed in droves to see the places where the “events” in his book took place, eager to “see” for themselves all those secret signs at last. How were they to know that the only person responsible for all of this was a right-wing extremist Frenchman? Apparently, Pierre Plantard was the man who concocted the sources that Dan Brown presented as “historical references”, as revealed by the journalist Marie France Esteguan in the “Nouvel Observateur.”

The life and the history of Plantard begins in 1940, in occupied Paris. He wrote enthusiastic letters to Petain, urging him to “stop the war that the Jews provoked,” stressing that he “had at his disposal about one hundred men, all dedicated to our cause;” he published anti-Semitic magazines such as “Vaincre” (which he re-circulated in the 1980s); with the assistance of the German occupational forces, he took over buildings that Jews lived in; he headed several small nationalist groups and secret societies—along the lines of knightly brotherhoods—whose purpose was the “ethnic cleansing” of his country, and he began to sign with the name “Pierre de France.”

According to Dan Brown, the glass pyramid of the Louvre Museum is an unusual building, consisting of 666 glass panes (the number of the beast, according to conspiracy theorists), that was commissioned by Francois Mitterand who—according to the author—moved in occult circles.

In 1956, he registered in Haute-Savoie the Article of Association of a newly-founded organization: he called it the Priory of Sion and declared himself its head, with the title of Grand Magister. A few years later, together with another eccentric personality—the Marquis Philippe de Chérisey—they “manufactured” a series of documents that supposedly revealed the whereabouts of the Holy Grail, the existence of a line of descendants from the marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene and their incorporation in the Merovingian Dynasty (which apparently was Plantard’s lineage also!), the founding of the Priory of Sion in 1099 by Godfrey—supposedly for the purpose of protecting the secret of the Holy Grail—and a list of the Grand Masters of the organization, amongst whom were included Da Vinci, Botticelli, Newton, V. Hugo, Jacque Cousteau... In the mid-sixties, Plantard and Chérisey somehow managed to deposit these documents in the National Library of Paris.

These are the renowned “secret files” which Dan Brown invokes in the introduction of his book as being the unshakable

historical evidence of everything that he has recorded. The journalist Marie France Esteguan concludes, “What a pity! The much-praised secret brotherhood of the ‘Priory of Sion’ is nothing more than an average, mid-20th century, bourgeois society, founded by an extreme-right personality who poses as a descendant of Jesus, and a member of that superior race of ‘Illuminati’ who hold the fortunes of the world in their hands!”

If the murky Plantard is indeed the latent “protagonist” of this book, Leonardo Da Vinci is the obvious one. However, he too is presented as a somewhat obscure personality, i.e., the conspiring guardian of the formidable secret of the Priory of Sion, who, through his artwork, attempts to convey... encrypted messages. This apparently occurs with many of his paintings, such as the “Mona Lisa”, the “Last Supper”, or the “Lady of the Rocks”, which—according to Brown—contain symbolisms of the divine female element that the Church had forsaken.

Unfortunately for him, the specialists insist that Da Vinci was a rationalist who was totally indifferent to such theological disputes: “When executing significant orders on religious themes, Leonardo would work under the close supervision of a group of theologians, who left nothing to chance,” claims Antonio Natali, the head of the Department for Renaissance Paintings of the Uffici Art Gallery in Florence. “His symbolisms are confined to the established Roman-Catholic mentality of his time.”

Serge Bramley, one of the most respected Da Vinci biographers, also added the following comment, thus clearing the scene: “Maybe in his artwork Da Vinci did resort to various sleights in order to attribute mystery to his paintings. But in real life, he was anything but a mystic. He was an absolute rationalist. Furthermore, in his notes, he referred to the necromancers, the alchemists, and the astrologers with anything but flattering words. Da Vinci had absolutely nothing to do with any secret organizations.”

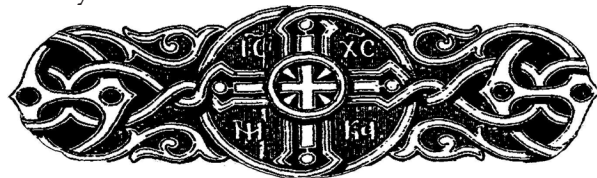
If Dan Brown had not reassured the reader—from the very introduction of his book—that his sources were absolutely reliable, one would have considered the book a pleasant, adventurous, fantasy-filled narration. But, when he mixes history with myths and draws a large portion of his “sources” from dubious circles with dangerous ideologies of “young Messiahs who will bring a worldwide prevalence of values” (which is something that he also did in his book “Illuminati”), then his story—whether voluntarily or involuntarily—is not so innocent.

According to Dan Brown, in Da Vinci’s painting of the “Last Supper”, the figure with the long red hair depicted on Jesus’ right is not John, but Mary Magdalene, while between the bodies a “V” shape can be discerned – the symbol of the divine female. But A. Natali, the head of the Department for Renaissance Paintings of the Uffici Art Gallery in Flor-

ence, responds accordingly: “The characteristics may appear somewhat feminine, but that does not mean that a woman is in fact depicted there, much less Mary Magdalene. Besides, the disciples of Jesus have been placed in groups of three, each group forming a pyramid shape. This was the ‘visual style’ that Da Vinci wanted to give to his painting. It is only logical, that between two such pyramids that meet at the same base will necessarily form an angle that reminds one of the figure ‘V.’ This does not mean it is a reference to any feminine element.”

And as far as the painting “Madonna of the Rocks,” Dan Brown asserts that this painting depicts John the Baptist blessing Jesus instead of the opposite, as while for the first time, Jesus is depicted without a halo. “No hidden meaning,” says Da Vinci’s biographer, Serge Bramley. And Frank Zelner, author of a treatise on the painter’s art, adds: “It was an artistic challenge; he wanted to portray the divine, without resorting to traditional forms. He also devised another form: the positioning of the four faces form the sign of the cross. As for the infant blessing the other, it is the smaller of the two, therefore it must be Jesus.”

It is apparent from the above that both Mr. Brown’s book as well as Mr. Howard’s movie are clear attacks on Christ, the Holy Bible, and the Church at large. The lies and deceptions are many and **both the book as well as the movie should be avoided by all.**



Just as it is necessary to guard the mind from ignorance, so is it equally necessary to protect it from the opposite, namely, from too much knowledge and curiosity. Inquiry and investigation is very often the offspring and food of self-love and pride. They are the nets and shackles of the devil; he sees the strength and firmness of will of those who pay attention to spiritual life, and strives to conquer their minds by means of such curiosity, in order to gain possession of their minds and wills. For this purpose, he suggests to them thoughts that are lofty, subtle, and wondrous, especially to those who are sharp-witted and quick to make lofty speculations. Attracted by the pleasure of possessing and examining such lofty thoughts, they forget to watch over their purity of heart and to pay attention to a humble opinion of themselves and to true self-mortification; and so they are enmeshed in the bonds of pride and conceit; they make an idol of their own mind and thus, little by little, without realizing it, they fall into the thought that they no longer need any advice or admonition from others, since they are accustomed in all cases to hasten to the idol of their own understanding and judgment.

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain

AN ORTHODOX VIEW OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

By Fr. John S. Romanides (+1993), delivered at the First National Institute of the Project, Religious Freedom and Public Affairs of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., November 20, 1962 [edited for length].

I have been asked to make some remarks on religious freedom from an Orthodox point of view. I will preface the theological portion of my statement with some observations on current Orthodox concerns about religious freedom.

Of the 150 million Orthodox Christians throughout the world today, the great majority are behind the Iron Curtain (of past times—Ed.). Many millions of these people have lived through several decades of persecution and are now enjoying what seems to be precarious toleration (and a true spiritual re-awakening since the Fall of the Soviet regime—Ed.). Additionally, several million Orthodox have survived the social and religious disabilities imposed upon them by Islamic conquests. The few million who are today within the Islamic world enjoy a ghetto-type toleration not very different from that of old. In at least one modern and supposedly liberal Islamic state (Turkey) the Orthodox population has in recent years undergone one more persecution and is now living in a state of terror.

In one European country the Orthodox Church is the state religion, and in another predominantly Lutheran nation the small but dynamic Orthodox minority enjoys the status of a state church. The 500,000 citizens of the newly democratic Cyprus had elected as their first president an Orthodox Archbishop, and in spite of their insignificant numbers they are members of the United Nations with a vote equal to that of India. Nevertheless, Will Herberg, an American author, has indirectly, and I believe unintentionally, informed more than three million American Orthodox Christians that they are not regarded as real Americans because they have not yet disappeared in the boiling oil of the “triple melting pot” of Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism.

From this very brief description of current conditions, one can readily see why most Orthodox Christians must remain content with toleration at the church-state level. A radical separation of church and state has become the rule for almost all Orthodox churches, and indications are that these churches have benefited in the process. In the United States, the Orthodox Church is in an advanced stage of transition from a religion of immigrant groups to that of second- and third-generation Americans. Fourth-generation Americans are increasing by the thousands every year. We are getting greater numbers of third-generation candidates for the priesthood at our theological schools. We have survived the melting pots of Communism and Islam and are not about to accept the social disabilities inherent in the “triple melting pot” theory based on the false impression that Christianity is a monopoly

of Catholics and Protestants. We have a melting pot of our own and are not about to use anyone else’s.

American Orthodox of Greek ancestry are especially proud and very sensitive about the fact that so much of the ancient democratic and republican traditions of Athens and Rome have been incorporated into American democracy. Perhaps one of the reasons most Greek immigrants joined the Democratic party was that it never occurred to any Republican to explain to them that the Latin word *republica* means almost the same thing as the Greek word “democracy.”

Fr. Ellis (of the Catholic church) pointed out that great sections of the United States once belonged to Catholic Spain and France. It’s also interesting to note that the largest state in the Union was once ruled and Christianized by Orthodox Russia. Orthodox Christianity came to Alaska, which then included Oregon and Washington, in the middle of the eighteenth century, and after 200 years is still the religion of a large section of the native population. We were the first to establish Christianity in Alaska and have been on the North American Continent longer than the Constitution of the United States. Regardless of the significance it may or may not have, this Union is made up of vast expanses once ruled by Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox nations.

In speaking of the three contributions to the meaning of religious liberty that a Protestant Christian finds in his most basic faith and theology, Dr. Shinn expects considerable agreement with Jews and Roman Catholics since this faith is rooted in the Bible. An Orthodox Christian, faithful to the theology of his Church, must also give his wholehearted endorsement, but would preface it with some remarks about God’s love for man and add some further remarks about the nature of man’s love for God and neighbor. While the points I am about to make would take us well beyond the level of toleration, they are still short of any guarantee of religious freedom.

The attitude of Orthodox faith and theology to sociological realities outside of Her sacramental reality as Church, in other words, to those not participating in Her inner soteriological experience, is governed by the nature and purpose of her inner community life; this, in turn, is determined by Her understanding of God and spiritual freedom.

The doctrine of beatific vision, borrowed by Augustine of Hippo from the Neo-Platonists, whereby man’s destiny is to become completely happy in the possession of the vision of the divine essence, is unknown to the Orthodox Patristic tradition. Whereas in neo-Platonic Christian theologies the reward of the just will be or is the vision of God, and the punishment of the unjust will be the privation of this vision, in the Orthodox tradition both the just and the unjust will have the vision of God in His uncreated glory, with the difference that for the unjust their inability to perceive this same uncreated glory of God will be the eternal fires of hell.

God is light for those who learn to love Him and a consum-

ing fire for those who will not. The reason for this is not that God has any positive intent in punishing but that for those who are not prepared properly, to see God is a cleansing experience, but one which does not lead to the eternal process of perfection. This understanding of the vision of God does not belong to the rewards and punishment structure of theologies geared to transcendental happiness and therefore overcomes the dualistic distinction between an inferior world of change and frustration and a superior world of immutable realities and happiness.

Salvation is thus not an escape from motion, but an eternal movement toward perfection within the time process. Salvation can also not be the product of unmerited meritorious works and intentions rewarded finally by the happiness of the beatific vision. Good works and good intentions are only preliminary steps to the necessary preparation. In the Orthodox tradition, the responsibility for good works and a good intention rests with what one may call natural man, both within and without the Church, whereas the good work of transforming man takes place by the grace of God, in cooperation with man. It is the latter stage of cooperation which leads from a utilitarian to a non-utilitarian love of eternal perfection. Being a Christian is not to attain to the reward, which in a real sense will be common to all, but of being prepared that the reward will not in fact be an eternal stagnation.

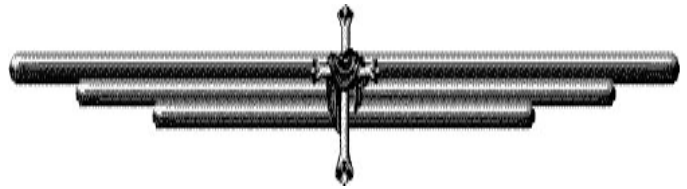
God has predestined all the salvation, but by their own spiritual laziness some will be spiritually stymied.

It goes without saying that the doctrines of original sin, atonement (in Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, atonement is the "satisfaction of Christ," whereby God and the world are reconciled or made to be at one, Ed.), and predestination were never understood by Orthodox Christians in an Augustinian, Anselmian, and Calvinistic manner. Original sin is not an inherited guilt, nor is death a punishment from God for such guilt. God permitted death in order that sin may not become eternal. Salvation is not a question of satisfying a wrathful God. God really loves those who refuse to return His love and so are eternally damned. Therefore, anyone who thinks that he has a special claim on the love of God because of any special church affiliation or predestination will be in for a real surprise. On the other hand, he who has confidence in the love of God and is indifferent to the question of salvation will also be in for a surprise.

I was especially gratified by Dr. Shinn's remarks about self-knowledge and hidden motives. It has been my impression that the Augustinian Latin tradition restricted or overemphasized the work of grace in moving the will to faith and good works to the detriment of the Greek patristic understanding of the work of grace in what some people call the subconscious, which we call the heart, distinguishing it clearly from human reason and will. From the Orthodox position, willful good works and a faith rationalized by the needs of a sick subconscious can

hardly be called a work of the Holy Spirit. The heart, captive to hidden motives, produces a utilitarian love which seeks to use either God or its neighbor or both for the satisfaction of the pertinent desire.

It is my suspicion that each man's understanding of God and the nature of love has more to do with our problems than we are usually led to suspect. If I believe that God is just waiting to punish those who refuse to join my church or that most people won't join because they haven't been eternally elected, then we would have a hard time maintaining the case for tolerance, let alone religious freedom and mutual respect. There is a strong tendency for people who believe that they have a monopoly on God's love and that God by a positive decision is going to punish others, to be sometimes tempted in anticipating future punishment by beginning to help God now. I say this in full awareness of the fact that the Orthodox Churches have not always been careful in living up to their theological insights. A form of culture religion is a real problem with us also and was partly resolved by Islamic conquest, and the Communist revolution has helped do away with some of it.



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GAINING THE HABIT OF PRAYER

By St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, from "Unseen Warfare."

If you desire to seek success in the work of prayer, adapt all else to this, lest you destroy with one hand what the other builds.

1) Keep your body strictly disciplined in food, sleep and rest. Do not give it anything simply because it wants it; as the Apostle says: "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14). Give no respite to the flesh.

2) Reduce your external contacts to the most inevitable. This is for the period of your training in prayer. Later, when prayer begins to act in you, it will itself indicate what can be added without harming it. Especially guard your senses, above all, eyes and ears; also tie your tongue. Without this guarding, you will not make a single step forward in the work of prayer. As a candle cannot burn in wind and rain, so the flame of prayer cannot be lit in a flood of impressions from outside.

3) Use all the time left from prayer in reading and meditation. For reading, choose mainly such books as deal with prayer and generally with inner spiritual life. Meditate exclusively on God and on divine matters, and above all on the incarnated dispensation for our salvation, chiefly on the passion and death of our Lord and Savior. Doing this you will always be immersed in the sea of divine light. In addition, go to church whenever you have the possibility to do so. Merely to be present in church will envelop you in a cloud of prayer. What then will you receive if you stand throughout the service in a true state of prayer?

4) Know that it is impossible to make progress in prayer without general progress in Christian life. It is absolutely necessary that no sin, not purified by repentance, should burden the soul. If during your work on prayer you do something, which troubles your conscience, hasten to purify yourself by repentance, so that you can look up to the Lord boldly. Keep humble contrition constantly in your heart. Moreover, neglect no opportunity for doing some good, or for manifesting some good disposition, above all humility, obedience and cutting off your own will. It goes without saying that zeal for salvation must always be burning and fill the whole soul; in all things, great or small, it must be the main impelling force, together with fear of God and unshaken trust.

5) Thus established, labor in the work of prayer, praying now with set prayers, now with your own, now with short appeals to the Lord, now with the Jesus Prayer, omitting nothing which can be of help in this work. And you will receive what you seek. I remind you of the words of St. Macarios of Egypt: God will see your work of prayer and that you sincerely wish to succeed in prayer—and He will give you prayer. For you must know that, although prayer done and achieved with one's own efforts is pleasing to God, yet that real prayer, which comes to dwell in the heart and becomes constant, is the gift

of God, an act of Divine grace. Therefore, in your prayer for all other things, do not forget to pray too about prayer.

6) I shall repeat to you what I heard from a God-loving man. "I was not leading a very good life," he said, "but God had mercy on me and sent me the spirit of repentance. This was during preparation for communion. I was trying hard to plant in myself a firm resolve to mend my ways, and especially before confession I prayed for a long time before the Icon of the Mother of God, begging Her to obtain this resolve for me. Then, during confession, I candidly related everything. My Spiritual Father said nothing; but while he was reciting the prayer of absolution over my head, a small sweet flame was lit in my heart. The sensation was like swallowing some delectable food. This little flame remained in the heart, and I felt as though someone was gripping my heart. From that time I prayed continuously, and kept my attention there, where this sensation was, my only care being to preserve it. And God helped me. I had not heard about the Jesus Prayer, and when I did hear of it, I saw that what was within me was precisely that which is sought by this prayer." I mention this story to make you understand what the work of prayer seeks and what are the signs that it is received.

7) I shall also add the following words of St. Gregory of Sinai (from the *Philokalia*): "Grace abides in us from the time of our holy baptism; but, through our inattention, vanity, and the wrong life we lead it is stifled or buried. When a man resolves to lead a righteous life and is zealous for salvation, the fruit of his whole labor is, therefore, the restoration in force of this gift of grace. It comes to pass in a two-fold manner: first, this gift becomes revealed through many labors in following the commandments; in so far as a man succeeds in following the commandments, this gift becomes more radiant and brilliant. Secondly, it manifests and reveals itself through constant invocation of the Lord Jesus in prayer. The first method is powerful, but the second is more so, so that even the first method gains power through it. Thus, if we sincerely wish to open the seed of grace concealed in us, let us hasten to train ourselves in this latter exercise of the heart, and let us have only this work of prayer in our heart, without forms, without images, till it warms our heart and makes it burn with ineffable love of the Lord."



Examine yourself to see whether you have within you a strong sense of your own importance, or, negatively, whether you have failed to realize that you are nothing. This feeling of self-importance is deeply hidden, but it controls the whole of our life. Its first demand is that everything should be as we wish it, and as soon as this is not so we complain to God and are annoyed with people.

St. Theophan the Recluse

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ON JUDGING OTHERS

By St. Dorotheos of Gaza (6th century), from Eric P. Wheeler's "Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings."

Why are we so ready to judge our neighbor? Why are we so concerned about the burden of others? We have plenty to be concerned about, each one has his own debt and his own sins. It is for God alone to judge, to justify or to condemn. He knows the state of each one of us and our capacities, our deviations, and our gifts, our constitution and our preparedness, and it is for him to judge each of these things according to the knowledge that he alone has. For God judges the affairs of a bishop in one way and those of a prince in another. His judgment is for an abbot or for a disciple, he judges differently the senior and the neophyte, the sick man and the healthy man. Who could understand all these judgments except the One who has done everything, formed everything, knows everything?

I remember once hearing the following story: A slave ship put in at a certain port where there lived a holy virgin who was in earnest about her spiritual life. When she learned about the arrival of the ship she was glad, for she wanted to buy a small serving maid for herself. She thought to herself, "I will take her into my home and bring her up in my way of life so that she knows nothing of the evils of the world." So she sent and enquired of the master of the ship and found that he had two small girls who he thought would suit her. Whereupon she gladly paid the price and took one of the

children into her house. The ship's master went away. He had not gone very far when there met him the leader of a dancing troupe who saw the other small girl with him and wanted to buy her; the price was agreed and paid, and he took her away with him.

Now take a look at God's mystery; see what his judgment was. Which of us could give any judgment about this case? The holy virgin took one of these little ones to bring her up in the fear of God, to instruct her in every good work, to teach her all that belongs to the monastic state and all the sweetness of holy commandments of God. The other unfortunate child was taken for the dancing troupe, to be trained in the works of the devil. What effect would teaching her this orgiastic dancing have, but the ruin of her soul? What can we have to say about this frightful judgment?

Here were two little girls taken away from their parents by violence. Neither knew where they came from; one is

found in the hands of God and the other falls into the hands of the devil. Is it possible to say that what God asks from the one he asks also from the other? Surely not! Suppose they both fell into fornication or some other deadly sin; is it possible that they both face the same judgment or that their fall is the same? How does it appear to the mind of God when one learns about the Judgment and about the Kingdom of God day and night, while the other unfortunate knows nothing of it, never hears anything good but only the contrary, everything shameful, everything diabolical? How can he allow them to be examined by the same standard?

As to those who are good and kind but are not believers, we cannot and must not judge them. The ways of the Lord are inscrutable; let us leave these good people entirely to His judgment and to the grace of His Providence. He alone knows how and why He has built the argosy of humanity, and the small boat of each one of us, such as it is.

St. Macarius of Optina (19th century)

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]

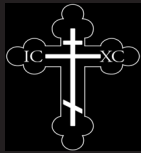
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ALMS: THE RETURN OF HIS OFFERING (PART 2 OF 2)

By Fr. Daniel G. Aerakis, for the Greek Orthodox monthly periodical "St. John the Baptist" («Ἄγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Βαπτιστής»), issue no. 345, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

ALMS THAT IS JOYFUL AND OF THE HEART

The first element of true almsgiving is that it must be unsparing and open-handed. The second is that it must be of the heart. Whatever we give, it must be given from our heart. *Every man according to his purpose in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver* (2 Cor 9:7). God can read that which people are unable to read; God can read our heart, and through our heart, he knows our disposition, and, most important, our intention. What is intention? It is the deed before the deed. Just like before we embark in the construction of a home we have to develop and design its plans, it is likewise for any act of almsgiving; a plan is laid out ahead of the act. Intention is thus the pre-formation of any deed.

Before any of us surmise our ability to do alms, there exists within us the will to perform the deed, the "I want" pre-disposition. There exist a number of those who have a great desire to offer alms but are unable to do so because the means are simply not available. Then we have a great number of those who are fully able but refuse to do so. God observes the "I want" disposition within each of us. Do you truly wish to offer alms? Is your intention noble and from the heart? Do you have a great desire to offer whatever you can? That is what matters to God. Opening up your wallet and delivering the alms is actually the lesser of the deeds. It is of much greater

significance to open up your heart. For most of us, we do not perform the lesser of the two deeds simply because we are unwilling to do the greater one; to truly open our hearts towards the act of true almsgiving. It is important for all of us to be aware that our Church considers as martyrs not only those who actually marched to their martyrdom, but also all those who had the true intention, the desire and will, as well as the decision to become martyrs, if God desired them to do so. They were (and are) the "martyrs of volition". [Editor's note: "confessors" fall into this category.]

Thus, what truly matters in the life of every Christian (and the significant subject of his personal salvation), what "tips the scale," is his intention and free will exercised towards the performance of good deeds. For alms, it is the cheerful offering of whatever he is capable of giving. Let us take note: cheerful and joyful giving...this is the other element of true almsgiving. *Not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver* (2 Cor 9:7).

As far as the funds that we give as a result of the law of the land, that does not constitute almsgiving. For example, based on the local laws, the citizenry of an area are subjected to taxation that they must pay. Why is this not almsgiving? Because we would simply not give such amounts if it was not a legal requirement. The fact that we give merely what is exactly required of us (and most of us try to find ways to give lesser amounts) makes it apparent that such giving is done "grudgingly, or of necessity."

Almsgiving is a voluntary offering. Through almsgiving, a person is not dragged into this virtuous deed, but instead he participates on his own while rejoicing. He does not give unwillingly but with great volition. Joy is apparent in his deed. Let us ask: When a person is relieved of a great worry, a so-called

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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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heavy weight, is he distressed or is he joyful? Surely he is joyful! Well, the joy is equally great when he performs a significant offering of alms and thus removes from within the weight of avarice and materialism that are ever-present in our world to drag and sink us in the abyss of the evil one, wherein a bottom is never found. We thus ought to always remember that alms are performed with joy and cheerfulness, never with grumbling and reflection.

St. John Chrysostom says that: "It is not possible that lust of wealth and righteousness should dwell together; they have their tents apart. Do not then obstinately strive to bring things together which are incompatible, but banish the usurper covetousness, if thou wouldest obtain the kingdom," and, "extortion belongs to the unwilling, so that whoso giveth alms unwillingly giveth of extortion" (Homily 19, on Corinthians II series). In conclusion, almsgiving is not when someone takes a thing or two away from you; it is instead your voluntary, joyful offering, from your heart and on your own, and consisting of several things, which would preferably be more than you ever thought in the past that you could give.

GOD IS SUPERABUNDANT

Offering alms often leads to various thoughts. When you compel or simply ask a fellow Christian to consider a significant offering, he immediately sets in action his cold logic and associated deductive "reasoning." He tells you: "How can this be possible? If I give this much and to so many, how will I live? I have many needs, you know. Am I to be the keeper of others now?" St. Paul addresses this exact thought process when he says: *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you* (2 Cor 9:8). To further support the Holy Apostle's words, St. John Chrysostom adds regarding this type of "reasoning": "For many persons are afraid to give alms, saying, 'Lest perchance I become poor,' 'lest perchance I need aid from others.'

To do away with this fear then, he adds this prayer, saying, May 'He make all grace abound towards you.' " (Homily 19, on Corinthians II series).

Let us suppose that you have a full glass of water while standing next to a spring out of which an abundant amount of clear water runs non-stop. I, your fellow man, ask you for a glass of water. Will you hesitate offering me what is in your hand? Will you concern yourself with what will happen to you and how you will be able to quench your own thirst? Surely, you will offer him your glass of water with no hesitation.

My brethren, right next to us we have the abundant spring called God's Divine Providence. Is it possible for this spring of God's blessings to ever dry up? Thus, even if we were to offer all of our miniscule material possessions, no matter how few or how many, there must be no thought given as to what will happen to us or how we will survive. We have God, Who is not simply "rich;" for He is not the fullness of earthly goods and blessings but rather the surplus. God's love is abundant and plentiful, as are His blessings. God is thus enough for us all plus much more. God is superabundant. Why, then, worry?

Let us not forget that most of humanity is ready and willing to spend much more for their "needs," even the sinful ones. Why, then, does any Christian stand so willing to be stingy with his most important offering, that which is so greatly needed for his personal salvation? Regarding this, St. John Chrysostom says the following: "But as long as thou spendest it upon thy belly and on drunkenness and dissipation, thou never thinkest of poverty: but when need is to relieve poverty, thou art become poorer than anybody. And when feeding parasites and flatterers, thou art as joyous as though thou hadst fountains to spend from; but if thou chance to see a poor man, then the fear of poverty besets thee." (Homily 19, on Corinthians II series)

AN INCREASE IN SPIRITUALITY

God's love is overabundant. He does not, however, wish for us to have an overabundance of material goods and riches. He wants us to have all that we truly need; he thus wants us to have the virtue of self-sufficiency. Do we think for a second that should God desire, He could not make us all wealthy? He surely could; this, however, would not be beneficial to us at all. If the sun pours all of its rays upon a single flower, that flower will burn. The sun is a true benefaction only when it is offered in moderation. It is likewise for man. We all go through our lives enjoying God's benefactions; God, however, does not offer us more than we truly need, for that will result into our own demise. Naturally, there are quite a few individuals who "enjoy" much more than they could possibly need; that reality, however, is not the result of God's providence. Most of what deviates from self-sufficiency constitutes ungodly greed and stealthy removal of goods belonging to others.

Almsgiving, among other things, also leads us to self-sufficiency, to being content with less and only what we truly need: *That ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work* (2 Cor 9:8).

We must strive for self-sufficiency in material good and thus lead ourselves towards an overabundance of spiritual qualities. This is exactly what God promises all of His children. Be materially content and frugal and thus become rich in spirituality; rich to "every good work." This is where we discover the solution to our socioeconomic problems. For as long as avarice and greed are permitted to drive us towards absence of material satisfaction, our "solution" for the socioeconomic problems will be found among injustice, theft, robbery, and perpetual stress.

Many of our fellow Christians are continuously in the pursuit of a raise, a new source of additional income, the latest way to lock in a quick profit. They could care less about at least asking at the same time for an increase in virtues, an increase of love, compassion, and faith. They do not ask for an increase in their *fruits of righteousness* (2 Cor 9:10). For what is truly needed or what constitutes unnecessary accumulation of goods, St. John Chrysostom tells us: "For when we are able even without a thing to live healthfully and respectably, certainly the addition of that thing is a superfluity." (Homily 19, on Corinthians II series)

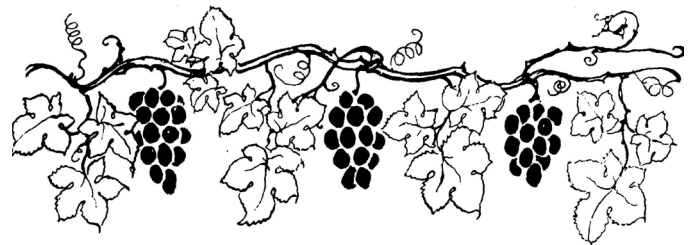
CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS

The lesson of self-offering and almsgiving is a very difficult lesson for all Christians of our days. Avarice and greed, the direct result of a complete lack of faith, makes most of us incapable of learning the God-committed and God-taught lesson of offering and almsgiving. When will we learn how to give? All of us are focused on receiving only. Our own country is ours because the fathers of this land offered their life to the noble cause of freedom and independence. Furthermore, our Heavenly country, the Kingdom of Heaven, was earned for us all not because a mere human being, but God Himself came

onto this earth to give His human life for us all. Can we not notice that, without an offering, a self-sacrifice, nothing can ever be earned?

Let us all destroy all thoughts of what will happen to us all should we offer a generous amount towards alms, towards the needs of our fellow human beings. It is a faithless thought to worry, for it contradicts Divine Will by placing God and His Providence aside. God, Whose mercy is endless for us all, Who without receiving anything has given us so much, will surely look after us and give us His blessings in abundance when we self-offer, when we self-sacrifice; it is impossible for Him to do anything else but give back to us in abundance! As St. John Chrysostom informs us: "For if a man who hath received will not overlook, but will requite the favor, much more will Christ. For He that giveth even without receiving, how will He not give after receiving?" (Homily 19, on Corinthians II series).

Wherefore, with all earnestness let us shun greed and welcome almsgiving, that we may obtain both all freedom in this life and the kingdom of Heaven, through the grace and love towards men of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory, might, and honor, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.



Don't sit glued to the television... especially with your children!... Guard yourselves and your family from the means of mass blinding. And learn to speak more to God about your children than to your children about God. The soul of the teenager is in a state of explosion of freedom. For this reason, he has a hard time accepting various counsels. So, rather than counseling him continuously and reproaching him now and again, leave the situation to Christ, to the Panaghia and to the Saints, asking them to bring him to reason.

Blessed Elder Epiphanius of Athens, + 1989

Many people are under the impression that the Saints are far from us. They are indeed far from those who have, of their own will, withdrawn themselves, but they are very near to those who keep the commandments of Christ and have the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the heavens, all live and all are sustained by the Holy Spirit; but the Spirit is the same also upon the earth. The Holy Spirit unites all men and that is why the Saints are near us. When we pray to them, by the Holy Spirit they hear our prayers and our souls feel that they are praying for us.

Saint Silouan of Mount Athos, on the Saints

INSTRUCTING YOUTH IN THE ORTHODOX FAITH

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Path to Salvation."

THE INSTRUCTION AND GUIDANCE OF YOUTH

One cannot define just when a person comes to the awareness of himself as being a Christian and to the independent resolve to live in a Christian way. In actual fact this happens at different times: at the age of seven, ten, fifteen, or later. It may be that the time of study comes before this, as usually happens.

At the same time there is an unchanging rule: one must keep the whole previous order without change during the whole time of study also, for it proceeds essentially from the nature of our capabilities and from the demands of Christian life. The order of study must not be placed in opposition to the indicated outlook, otherwise everything will be destroyed which was created there. That is, one must preserve young students, just like infants, by means of the piety of everything surrounding them, by means of church life and the Mysteries; and likewise one must act upon their body, soul, and spirit. [Editor's note: In the Russian language, no word exists for the Greek term "nous". Following the Apostle Paul, the Russian fathers often use the term "spirit" for "nous", the only indication of meaning being the context in which the term appears. Here, as he often does, St. Theophan refers to the "nous" or eye of the soul.]

EMPHASIZE THE SPIRITUAL IN A CHILD'S EDUCATION

At the same time, practically speaking, to the teaching itself one must add only this: let instruction be so arranged that it will be evident what is the main point and what is secondary. This idea is easiest to imprint through a division of the objects of study and the time for them. Let the study of faith be considered the chief thing. Let the best time be assigned to works of piety, and in case of conflict let them take the first place over learning. Let approval be given not only for success in learning, but likewise for faith and good behavior.

In general, one must so dispose the mind of pupils that they do not lose the conviction that our chief work is the pleasing of God, and that learning is a secondary quality, something incidental, which is good only during the present life. This is why it should not at all be placed so high and in such an attractive form that it will occupy all one's attention and absorb all one's concern. There is nothing more poisonous or ruinous for the spirit of Christian life than such learning and an exclusive concern for it. It casts one straight into coldness and can keep one forever in it; and sometimes it also adds to this an immoral life, if there are conditions which are favorable for this.

LET SPIRITUALITY PERMEATE ALL SUBJECTS

The second thing to which attention should be given is the spirit of the instruction or of the attitude towards the objects of study. It should be placed as an unailing law that every kind

of learning that is taught to a Christian should be permeated with Christian principles and, more precisely, Orthodox ones. Every branch of learning is capable of this approach, and it will be a true kind of learning only when this condition is fulfilled. Christian principles are true beyond doubt. Therefore, without any doubting, make them the general measuring stick of truth. It is a most dangerous error among us that subjects of learning are taught without any attention to the true faith; one allows oneself freethinking and even lying under the supposition that faith and learning are two spheres that are quite distinct.

On the contrary, we have a single spirit. [Editor: Here, St. Theophan reverts to the more common meaning of "soul".] It receives learning and is imbued with its principles just as it receives faith and is penetrated by it. How is it then possible that these two spheres should not come into contact here, whether favorable or unfavorable? At the same time, the sphere of truth is one. Therefore, why pound into the head that which is not from this sphere?

If instruction will be conducted in this manner, so that faith together with life in the spirit of faith might dominate in the attention of pupils, both in the manner of studying and in the spirit of instruction, then there is no doubt that the principles placed in childhood not only will be preserved, but will increase, be strengthened, and come to a corresponding maturity. And what a good effect this will have!

EARLY EDUCATION FORMS THE CHILD'S CHARACTER

If one will put in such order the upbringing of a child from his first years, then little by little the character which his whole life should have will be revealed before him, and he will grow more accustomed to the thought that upon him there lies the obligation given by our God and Saviour to live and act according to His decree, that all other deeds and occupations are lower than this and have a place only for the course of the present life, and that there is another dwelling place, another homeland towards which one must direct all one's thoughts and all one's desires.

In the natural course of the development of one's capabilities, everyone naturally comes to the awareness that he is a man. But if to his nature there is engrafted the new principle of the grace of Christianity at the very moment when a person's powers and their movements are awakened (in Baptism); and if then in all the points of the development of these powers, this new principle not only does not yield first place but on the contrary always prevails and gives, as it were, the form to everything; then when a man comes to full awareness, he will find himself at the same time acting according to Christian principles and will find himself to be a Christian.

TEACH THE CHILD TO KNOW HE IS A CHRISTIAN

This is the chief aim of a Christian upbringing: that a man as a result of this might say within himself that he is a Christian. And if, when he comes to full awareness of himself he will

say, "I am a Christian, obliged by my Saviour and God to live in such a way so as to be vouchsafed the blessed communion with Him and with His chosen ones in the future life," then in the very midst of his independent existence or the unique, rational ordering of his life, he will place for himself as his first and essential duty to preserve in an independent way and to warm the spirit of piety in which he previously walked under the guidance of others.



DO WE "HOLD THESE TRUTHS" TODAY?

By Jim H. Hill, Jr., July 2, 1998

July 4th, 1776, fifty-six men pledged their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor as their commitment to a list of principles they believed were absolute truths. At the top of that list was the unalienable right to life. That document is known as the Declaration of Independence.

January 22, 1973, nine Supreme Court justices legalized the utmost form of discrimination against a certain class of Americans based on their age, location, and their desirability to their immediate families. This landmark case we know as *Roe vs. Wade*.

When the guilty receive capital punishment, we call it a barbaric practice. Nearly every case makes the national news. Vigils are held and TVs light up from coast-to-coast. When innocent children are put to death, we call it a Constitutional right. The silent screams of these children forever go unmentioned. During the time it takes you to read this letter, six babies will die in this country—and you and I will never know their names.

Fifty-six men, who believed that the unalienable right to life was a non-debatable issue, birthed the greatest country in the history of the world. Today, our elected representatives cannot even condemn infanticide. If "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" are cornerstones of freedom, will the abandonment of life ultimately lead to the "abortion" of freedom?

Every 4th of July, beaches and parks fill to capacity. Americans celebrate something, but most do not know what. Some remember the Founders and the principles they held. Some may question whether or not we still hold the same core values. This question will best be answered the next business day when the abortion mills fire up all across the country, at least 4000 more babies die, and another day proves that we, indeed, no longer hold those self-evident truths.

SATAN'S REJOICING OVER THE FALL OF A MONK

From "The Paradise of the Holy Fathers."

An old man from Thebes used to say: "I was the son of a priest of idols. When I was young, I lived in the temple, and I have on many occasions seen my father go into the temple to perform sacrifices to the idols. Once, I went in secretly after him, and I saw Satan sitting there with his whole army before him and, behold, one of his devils came and did homage to him. And Satan said unto him, 'From where do you come?' And the devil answered, saying, 'I was in such and such a country, and I stirred up many wars and revolts, and I caused the shedding of blood, and I have come to tell you these things.' Satan said unto him, 'How long did it take you to do this?' And the devil said, 'Thirty days.' Then Satan commanded him to be beaten, saying unto him, 'Is this all that you have done in so long a time?'"

And, behold, another devil came and worshipped him, and to him he said, 'Where do you come from?' And the devil answered and said, 'I was in the sea, where I stirred up storms, and sank ships and drowned many men, and I have come that I may inform you of these things.' Then Satan answered and said unto him, 'How long did it take you to do this?' The devil answered and said unto him, 'In twenty days,' and Satan commanded that he also should be beaten, saying unto him, 'Why is it that in all these days you have done only what you say?'"

And when he said this, behold, a third devil came and worshipped Satan, who answered and said unto him also, 'And where do you come from?' The devil answered and said unto him, 'I have been in such and such a city, wherein there was a marriage feast, and I stirred up a war there, and caused the shedding of much blood and the death of the bridegroom and the bride; as soon as I had done this I came to inform you.' And Satan said unto him, 'How long did it take you to do this?' And the devil said, 'Ten days,' and Satan commanded that he should be beaten, saying, 'In all these days you have done only this?'"

Then afterwards, behold, a fourth devil came and worshipped him, and Satan answered and said unto him, 'And where do you come from?' And he who was asked answered and said unto him, 'I have been in the desert for forty years struggling with a monk and tonight I have hurled him into fornication.' When Satan heard this, he rose up immediately and embraced and kissed that devil, and he took the crown off his own head, and placed it upon the other devil and made him sit by his side upon the throne, saying, 'And so you have been able to do so great a work as this in so short a time! For there is nothing which I prize so highly as the fall of a monk.'"

And the old man went on to say, "When I saw these things I said to myself, 'Yes, so great then is the army of the monks!' And by the will of God, Who desired my redemption, I came forth and became a monk."



ABORTIONS IN AMERICA ARE DECLINING NATIONWIDE, DESPITE MEDIA AND PRO-LIFE BASHERS

By Steven Ertelt

One of the untold stories in the abortion debate today is the significant progress that's been made in reducing the number of abortions. Thanks to dozens of pro-life laws approved by state legislatures each year, the growth and effectiveness of pregnancy centers, and the popularity of abstinence among teenagers, states across the country are seeing abortions decline. In some cases they've reached their lowest abortion total since Roe.

But, because of politics, researchers and the media want the public to think abortions are increasing because of who works in the White House. When researcher Gerald Stassen came out with a study just before the 2004 presidential elections claiming abortions were increasing under President Bush's watch, the media went into "gotcha" journalism mode. Surely the president must not be pro-life after all.

Stassen only bothered to look at abortion numbers in 16 states to come up with his analysis. In Illinois, he used a figure showing abortions up in 2001, ignoring that they went down 10 percent in 2002. In Wisconsin, Stassen said abortions went up, but the state health department said they went down. And in South Dakota, Stassen mistook an increase in the birth rate for an increase in the number of abortions.

After both sides of the abortion debate refuted his claims, Stassen admitted that an analysis by the pro-abortion Alan Guttmacher Institute was "significantly better" than his own. AGI, a Planned Parenthood partner, said abortions had gone down by a total of 1.6 percent over the years 2001 and 2002.

Recently, the New York Times hoped the nation would buy into the hoax that pro-life laws do nothing to reduce the number of abortions. The Times looked at even fewer states than the discredited Stassen -- using just six to assert that somehow laws allowing parents to know about their daughter's abortions or requiring their approval do nothing to reduce abortions.

University of Alabama political science professor and statistician Dr. Michael New has conducted extensive analysis on abortion laws and abortion figures and determined that the hundreds of pro-life laws state legislatures approved contributed significantly to the 17.4 percent abortion decline during the 1990s.

Abortion decline is continuing into the current decade. There are no reliable national abortion figures since 2002, but looking at new abortion totals from every state that has reported over the last 18 months shows abortions are on the decline again.

- The number of abortions in Tennessee has dropped to its lowest level in almost 30 years. Not since 1977 has the number of annual abortions been this low. The number of abortions in 2004 dropped by more than 1,000, a 6.9 percent decline.

- New figures in November from the Georgia Department of Health reveal the number of abortions is down more than 5 percent. According to health officials, abortions performed in Georgia fell 5.3 percent from 2003's totals.

- The new Pennsylvania figures show a decline of 2.4 percent in 2004.

- Minnesota's abortion numbers are down to their lowest totals since 1975. The Minnesota Department of Health says there were 13,788 abortions reported in 2004, compared to 14,174 in 2003 -- a decrease of nearly three percent.

- New statistics in the state of Illinois show a whopping 10 percent drop in the number of abortions performed last year. They're at the lowest level since Roe.

- The Michigan Department of Community Health reports 26,269 abortions were performed in Michigan during 2004 compared to 29,540 Michigan abortions in 2003, a decrease of 11.1 percent.

- Abortions on women in Washington state are at their lowest points since the state started collecting data in 1980, according to a May 2005 report.

- Also in May, the state of Wisconsin reported that abortion rates there are at their lowest levels since 1974.

- Abortions in Oregon are down to their lowest levels since 1998, having decreased 20 percent between then and 2004.

- Abortions in Kentucky have been steadily dropping for more than a decade with 3,502 in 2002 and 9,590 in 1991.

- Since 1988, abortions have dropped a whopping 53 percent in South Carolina.

- After peaking at 8,814 in 1991, the number of abortions in 2004 in Mississippi fell to just over 3,000.

- Abortions in Kansas are still on the decline, having dropped again for the fourth year in a row. In 2005, abortions there decreased significantly, with a decline of 8 percent from the previous year.

These declines in abortion are good news. But even one abortion is one too many and our job is far from over. We still face many pro-life battles in our goal to end abortion entirely.

Ἡ Ἐπίσκεψις τοῦ Ἁγίου Δεσπότη

Τοῦ Κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη

«Μὴ οἱ ποιμένες βόσκουσιν ἑαυτούς; οὐχὶ τὰ πρόβατα βόσκουσιν οἱ ποιμένες;» (Ἰεζεκιήλ)

Ἀφοῦ τὸ βαποράκι ἐστάθη ὡς μισὴν ὥραν εἰς τὸν μικρὸν ὄρμον, κατέναντι τῆς ἀγοράς, ἦτις ἐφαίνετο σχεδὸν γεμάτη ἀπὸ κόσμον, ἔστρεψε τὴν πρῶραν πρὸς ἀνατολὰς καὶ ἀπέπλευσε. Συγχρόνως οἱ καμπάνες τῶν δύο ἐκκλησιῶν, αἵτινες διέπρεπον μὲ τοὺς ὑψηλοὺς πύργους καὶ τοὺς θόλους των, ἢ μία εἰς τὸ ὕψος τῆς παραθαλασσίας ὁδοῦ καὶ τῆς πλατείας, ἢ ἄλλη εἰς τὸ κέντρον τῆς ἐπάνω συνοικίας, ἐκινήθησαν γοργῶς, ἐκχέουσαι μεγάλην καὶ παρατεταμένην κωδωνοκρουσίαν.

Διατὶ αὐτά; Οἱ παπάδες ἤξευραν, ὅτι ὁ Δεσπότης ὁ νεοχειροτόνητος τῆς ἐπαρχίας ἦτο μέσα στὸ βαπόρι, ἀλλ' ὁ πρῶτος μεταξὺ αὐτῶν, ὁ ἐπισκοπικὸς ἐπίτροπος, εἶχε πληροφορηθῆ ὅτι ἡ Σεβασμιότης του δὲν ἐπροτίθετο πρὸς τὸ παρὸν νὰ ἐξέλθῃ εἰς τὴν πολίχνην, ἀλλὰ θὰ μετέβαινε πρῶτον, χάριν τῆς ἰδίας εὐκολίας του, εἰς τὴν ἄλλην νῆσον, τὴν ἀνατολικήν, τὴν ἀπωτέραν εἰς τὸν δρόμον του, καὶ εἶτα θὰ ἐπέστρεφε νὰ ἐπισκεφθῆ καὶ τὸ ἐδῶ ποιμνιὸν του. Οὐχ ἦττον ἐπῆραν μίαν βάρκαν καὶ ἀνήλθον ὅλοι ὁμοῦ, οἱ ἐπτὰ παπάδες, εἰς τὸ βαπόρι, διὰ νὰ χαιρετίσουν ἀπλῶς τὸν ἐπίσκοπον εἰς τὴν διέλευσίν του.

Μόλις ἡ μαύρη τῶν ρασοφόρων πλειὰς ἀνήλθεν εἰς τὸ πρυμναῖον «κάσαρο» τοῦ ἀτμοπλοίου, ὅπου ἴστατο ἀγναντεύων τὴν μικρὰν πόλιν ὁ περιοδεύων ἱεράρχης, καὶ ὁ διάκος, ἀποτεινόμενος πρὸς τὸν πρῶτον βαίνοντα ἐκ τῶν ἱερέων, τὸν ὁποῖον ἐκατάλαβεν ὡς ἐπίτροπον τοῦ Δεσπότη, ἄν καὶ πρῶτην φορὰν τὸν ἔβλεπε, τοῦ λέγει μὲ τόνον δεσποτικόν.

— Γιατὶ δὲν ἐσημάνατε τὶς καμπάνες;

Ὁ παπά-Γιαννάκης, 83 ἐτῶν ἄνθρωπος, ἄν καὶ κωφὸς ἦτο, ἐκατάλαβεν τί ἔλεγε ὁ διάκος. Ἐπειδὴ ὁ Δεσπότης δὲν ἐπρόκειτο νὰ ἐξέλθῃ, δὲν εἶχαν προβλέψει, ἢ τὸ ἐνόμισον περιττόν, νὰ κρούσουν τὶς καμπάνες. Τώρα, ὅμως, εἰς τὸ κέλευσμα τοῦ διακῆ, ἐστράφη πρὸς τὴν λέμβον, ἐφώναξεν ἕνα νέον κρατοῦντα τὰς κώπας, καὶ τοῦ λέγει.

— Σταμάτη! Τρέχα γρήγορα, ἔξω! Τὶς καμπάνες! Βαρᾶτε τὶς καμπάνες!

Ὁ Σταμάτης, ἔφηβος ὡς 16 ἐτῶν, κυρίως βαρκάρης δὲν ἦτο, ἀλλ' ὀρφανὸς μάγκας, τρέχων παιδιόθεν κατόπιν εἰς τὰ ράσα τῶν παπάδων. Ὅπως ὑπάρχουν ἐκκλησιαστικὰ δαιμόνια, οὕτω ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἀγνιόπαιδα ἐκκλησιαστικά. Πάραυτα ἐσὶ ὁ φῖ σ ε ν, ἐκωπηλάτησε, καὶ μετὰ ἐν λεπτὸν

ἔφθασεν εἰς τὴν προκυμαίαν. Θὰ ἤμποροῦσε νὰ φωνάξῃ ἀπὸ τὴν βάρκαν πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω, διὰ νὰ τρέξουν νὰ σημάνουν τὶς καμπάνες, ἀλλὰ δὲν τὸ ἔκαμε. Ἐπήδησε ἔξω, κ' ἔτρεξε διὰ ν' ἀπολαύσῃ αὐτὸς πρῶτος τὴν ὑπερτάτην ἡδονὴν τῆς κωδωνοκρουσίας.

Καθὼς ἔτρεχεν, ἔκραξε τὸν ἄλλον ἀδελφόν του, τὸν Φώτην, καὶ τὸν ἔστειλεν εἰς τὴν ἐπάνω ἐνορίαν πρὸς τὸν αὐτὸν σκοπὸν. Εἶτα ἀνήλθεν ὑψηλὰ εἰς τὸ καμπαναριό, ἐκόλλησεν ὡς τελώνιον εἰς τὴν μεγάλην καμπάνα, ἤρπασε τὸ γλωσσίδι τῆς, μὲ τὴν ἄλλην χεῖρα τὴν λαβὴν τοῦ ἐπικράνου τῆς ἄλλης, κ' ἔρριψε τὸ σχοινίον τῆς τρίτης εἰς ἕν ἄλλο παιδίον παρὰ τὴν βᾶσιν τοῦ κωδωνοστασίου, τὸ ὁποῖον εἶχε κλειδώσει πεισμόνως ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ πορτέλλο τοῦ καμπαναριοῦ.

Μετὰ μίαν στιγμὴν μανιώδης κωδωνοκρουσία ἤρχισε, καὶ ἄλλοι ἐναέριοι ἤχοι ἀπήντησαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλην ἐκκλησίαν. Καὶ ὑπὸ τοὺς ἤχους αὐτοὺς τὸ ἀτμόπλοιο ἀπέπλεε, καὶ οἱ παπάδες ἐπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν ξηράν.

Μετὰ δυὸ ἐβδομάδας, ὅταν ἐπέστρεψεν ἀπὸ τὴν γείτονα νῆσον ὁ Σεβασμιώτατος, ἐν μεγάλῃ κλαγγῇ κωδῶνων, ὡς πρῶτην φορὰν ἐρχόμενος, ἐπῆγε κατ' εὐθείαν εἰς τὸν ναόν. Ἐκεῖ, εἰς τὸ τέλος τῆς δοξολογίας—καὶ αὐτὸ ὑπῆρξε μετὰ τὴν περὶ κωδωνοκρουσίας διαταγὴν, τὴν διὰ τοῦ διακῆ δοθεῖσαν, ἢ πρῶτη χαρακτηριστικὴ πράξις τῆς ποιμαντικῆς του—ἐπετίμησεν ἕνα τῶν ἱερέων, διότι ὡς ἐπαρχιώτης καὶ ἀσυνήθιστος ἀπὸ ἀρχιερατικὰς ἱεροπραξίας, εἶπε τὸ σύνηθες «Δι' εὐχῶν τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων ἡμῶν», καὶ δὲν εἶπε: «Δι' εὐχῶν τοῦ ἁγίου Δεσπότη ἡμῶν». Ὁ δυστυχὴς

ἱερεὺς πὼς νὰ τὸ ξεύρῃ, ἀφοῦ πουθενὰ δὲν τὸ εἶχεν εὐρεῖ γραμμένον.

Τὴν Κυριακὴν ὅταν ἐλειτούργησεν ὁ ἐπίσκοπος, εἰς τὸ τέλος τῆς λειτουργίας ἔδωκε νέον δείγμα τῆς ποιμαντικῆς του. Εἰς τὸ «Πάντοτε, νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ», τὸν γεροντότερον, τὸν πλέον πεπειραμένον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐγγράμματον ἱερέα, τὸν ἔπιασεν ἀποτόμως ἀπὸ τὸν βραχίονα, βασιτάζοντα τὸ Ἅγιον Ποτήριον, καὶ τὸν ἐβίασε νὰ σταθῇ ἐπὶ ἐν λεπτὸν εἰς τὰ βημόθυρα, διὰ νὰ εἴπῃ τὸ «Πάντοτε»—ὡς νὰ ἐπρόκειτο, κατόπιν τοῦ «Μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ», νὰ γίνῃ καὶ Δευτέρα Μετάληψις. Καὶ ὅμως τὸ Εὐχολόγιον γράφει μόνον, ὅτι «βλέπει ὁ ἱερεὺς πρὸς τὸν λαόν», καὶ ὄχι ἴσταται εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν Πύλιν. Ὅ,τι δὲ περιττόν γίνεται, μαρτυρεῖ μόνον τάσιν πρὸς τὸ πομπῶδες καὶ θεατρικόν—ὅπως συνηθίζου μάλιστα οἱ Ρῶσοι.

Μέγα εὐτύχημα ὑπῆρξε γιὰ τὸν ἄλλον γέροντα, τὸν ἐπίτροπόν του, εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ὁποῖου κατέλυσε ὁ



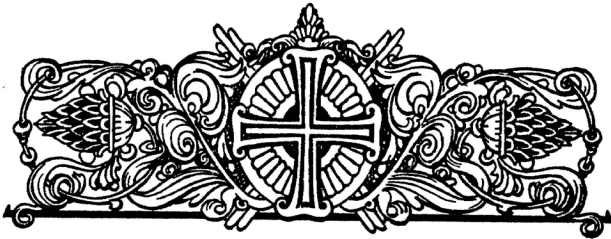
**Κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης,
ὁ «ἅγιος» τῶν γραμμάτων
(1851-1911)**

ιεράρχης, τὸ ὅτι ἦτο πολὺ κωφός. Ὁ Δεσπότης ἠδύνατο νὰ τὸν ἐπιτιμᾷ καὶ νὰ τὸν ὀνειδίξῃ μάλιστα, χωρὶς αὐτὸς ν' ἀντιλαμβάνεται, μηδὲ νὰ πικραίνεται τίποτε. Ὅταν δὲν ἦτο παρὼν ὁ διάκος, διὰ νὰ τοῦ ἐξηγήσῃ, αὐτὸς δὲν ἠδύνατο νὰ ἐννοῇ τίποτε ἀπὸ τοὺς θυμοὺς καὶ τὰς ἐξάψεις τοῦ Σεβασμιωτάτου.

Τέλος κατώρθωσε νὰ δώσῃ λογαριασμὸν ὁ γέρον ἐπίτροπος εἰς μετρητά, δι' ὅλας τὰς ἀδείας γάμου καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ «δικαιώματα» τῆς Ἐπισκοπῆς. Ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰ γαλόπουλα, τοὺς ἀστακοὺς καὶ τ' ἀυγοτάραχα, κανεὶς δὲν τοῦ ἐζήτησε λογαριασμὸν πόσα εἶχε ξοδεύσει. Εἶναι ἀληθὲς ὅτι ὁ Δεσπότης ἦτο ἐγκρατέστατος. Ἔπασχε ἀπὸ στομαχικὰ καὶ καρδιακὰ συμπτώματα—ἴσως ἀπὸ ψαμμίασιν ἢ καὶ διαβήτην. Ἀλλ' ὁ διάκος εἶχε τὰ νειάτα του, τὴν ξανθὴν γενειάδα καὶ τὴν κόμην του. Θὰ ἦτο ὑπερβολὴ βεβαίως ἂν ἐλέγαμεν, ὅτι ὁμοίαζε μὲ τὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπον ἐκεῖνον τῆς Παπικῆς αὐλῆς, τοῦ Λέοντος τοῦ Ι', ὅστις εἶχε παραπονεθῆ ποτέ, ὅτι ἔκαμνε στίχους διὰ χίλιους ποιητὰς, καὶ εἰς τὸν ὁποῖον ὁ περιώνυμος Ποντίφηξ ἔδωκε τὴν ἀπάντησιν: Et pro milleallis archipoeta bibit.

Ὅπως καὶ ἂν ἔχη, εἶναι βέβαιον, ὅτι ἠγάπα πολὺ τὸ ἐντόπιον μωσχάτον εἰς δαμιτζάνες προσφερόμενον.

Τέλος ὁ Σεβασμιώτατος, ἀφοῦ ἔδωκε τὸ τελευταῖον καὶ κυριώτερον μάθημα ποιμαντικῆς εἰς τοὺς ἱερεῖς του—τοὺς ἐνουθέτησε νὰ εἶναι καθάριοι, νὰ μὴ καπνίζουν ναργιλὲ δημοσία καὶ νὰ μὴν κρατοῦν ποτὲ ράβδον—ἐν ἤχῳ κωδῶνων καὶ πάλιν, προεπέμφθη, ἐπεβιβάσθη στὸ βαποράκι, κ' ἐπῆγε νὰ ποιμάνῃ καὶ ἄλλα πρόβατα.



Οἱ ἄλλες πίστες (-εις) εἶναι ψευτικες, κάλπικες. Μόνο ἡ ἐδική μας, ἡ Χριστιανική, εἶναι Ὁρθόδοξος, ἀληθινὴ καὶ ἁγία. Διὰ τοῦτο σᾶς λέγω, ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοὶ νὰ χαίρεσθε καὶ νὰ εὐφραίνεσθε, ὅπου εὐρέθητε Χριστιανοὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι, καὶ νὰ κλαίετε καὶ νὰ θρηνητε τοὺς ἀπίστους καὶ αἰρετικούς, ὅπου εὐρίσκονται εἰς τὸ σκότος...

Καὶ ἀνίσως καὶ νὰ ἦτον δυνατὸν νὰ ἀνέβαινα εἰς τὸν Οὐρανὸν νὰ φωνάξω μίαν φωνὴν μεγάλην καὶ νὰ κηρύξω εἰς ὅλον τὸν κόσμον καὶ νὰ εἰπῶ πὺς μόνον ὁ Χριστὸς μου εἶναι Υἱὸς καὶ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Θεὸς ἀληθινὸς καὶ ζωὴ τῶν ἀπάντων, ἤθελα νὰ τὸ κάμω...

Ἀπὸ τὴν 1^{ην} Διδαχὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ

[Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἔστηνε παντοῦ ὅπου ὀμιλοῦσε μεγάλο Τίμιο Σταυρὸ καὶ τὸν ἄφηγε ἐκεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ διένειμε δωρεὰν Σταυροὺς (φυλακτὰ) μέχρι καὶ 500,000! Αὐτὸ δηλώνει καθαρὰ τὴν πίστη του ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν λόγο που ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας τὸν ὀνομάζει καὶ Ἰσαπόστολο.]

Γ' Αὐτοὺς ποὺ Θέλουν Θαύματα...

Ἀπὸ ἓνα Ὁρθόδοξο φυλλάδιο

Τὶ θαῦμα θέλεις ἄνθρωπε
ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ σου
σκέψου λιγάκι τὴ ζητᾶς
νὰ δῆς πόσο εἶν' ντροπὴ σου.

Τὸ πρῶτο θαῦμα, ὁ ἄνθρωπος
τὸ δεύτερο ἡ φύσις,
οἱ οὐρανοὶ, ὁ ἄνεμος,
τ' ἀστέρια κ' ὅλη ἡ κτίσις.

Ὅμως τὸ μαγαλύτερο
θαῦμα ποὺ συγκλονίζει
εἶναι ποὺ μᾶς ἀνέχεται ὁ Θεὸς
καὶ δὲν μᾶς ἀφανίζει.

Ὅσο κ' ἂν ψάξῃς δὲν θὰ βρῆς
ἄλλη σωστὴ θρησκεία
ἢ μόνη ποὺ εἶν' ἀληθινὴ
εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία.

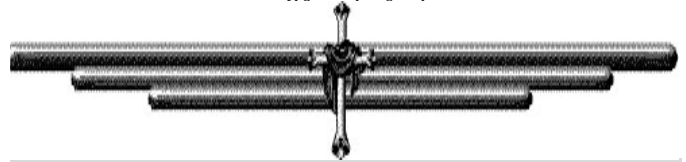
Σ' αὐτὴν εἶναι ἁγιασμὸς
εἰς τὰ Μυστήριά της.
Ἐκεῖ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο
κ' ὅλα τὰ θαύματά της.

Προσκύνησε Ἅγία Λεϊψανα
νὰ δῆς, εὐωδιάζου
οἱ τάφοι τῶν Ἁγίων Της
οἱ Εἰκόνες Μύρα βγάζου.

Χίλιες αἰρέσεις πέρασαν
μιὰ σβήνει κ' ἄλλη βγαίνει,
μὰ ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ
παντοτεινὰ θὰ μένη.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας εἶναι ἡ Αὐτὴ
ἀπ' τῆς συστάσεως, ἡ Μία
εἶναι Ἀποσταλικὴ
καθολικὴ καὶ Ἅγία.

Ἐύπνα λοιπὸν καὶ φρόντισε
λίγο γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ σου
εἶναι τὸ μόνον ἔξυπνο
ποὺ θὰ κάνῃς στὴν ζωὴ σου...



Τὶς Θεὸς μέγας ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν; Σὺ εἶ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ὁ ποιῶν θαυμάσια μόνος!

Μέγα Προκείμενον

Μέγας εἶ, Κύριε, καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα Σου καὶ οὐδεὶς λόγος ἐξαρκέσει πρὸς ὕμνον τῶν θαυμασίων Σου!

Εὐχὴ Μ. Ἁγιασμοῦ

Λανθασμένες Συνήθειες για τὸ Μυστήριον τῆς Ἱερᾶς Ἐξομολογήσεως

Ἀπὸ ἓνα Ἑλληνορθόδοξο φυλλάδιο.

Ο τίτλος Χριστιανὸς Ὁρθόδοξος εἶναι πολὺ τιμητικὸς καὶ βαρὺς ταυτόχρονα. Δημιουργεῖ δεσμεύσεις καὶ ὑποχρεώσεις. Ὁ καθένας μας ἀνταποκρίνεται ἀνάλογα μὲ τὸ μέτρο τῆς πίστεώς του καὶ σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν παιδεία ποὺ ἔλαβε. Ἡ παιδεία αὐτὴ ξεκινᾷ ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι, συνεχίζεται στὸ σχολεῖο, καὶ αὐξάνεται μὲ τὴ συμμετοχὴ μας στὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ. Πολὺ βοηθᾷ τὸ κατηχητικὸ, ἡ ἀκρόαση κηρυγμάτων, ἡ ἀνάγνωση πατερικῶν βιβλίων καὶ ἡ μαθητεία μας στὰ πόδια ἑμπειρῶν πνευματικῶν ὁδηγῶν.

Συνήθως δὲν ὑπάρχουν ὅλες αὐτὲς οἱ προϋποθέσεις καὶ σὲ πολλοὺς ἀδελφούς μας ριζώθηκαν βαθειὰ μέσα τους συνήθειες καὶ πρακτικὲς ποὺ δὲν συμβαδίζουν μὲ τὴν παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Τέτοιες συνήθειες ἔχουν ἐπικρατήσει σὰν ἔθιμα, ποὺ ποικίλουν ἀπὸ τόπο σὲ τόπο. Πολλὲς φορές, ἐνῶ γνωρίζουμε τὸ σωστὸ, προτιμοῦμε τὸ εὐκόλο, αὐτὸ ποὺ μᾶς βολεῦει. Κρίνω σκόπιμο νὰ ἐπισημάνουμε μερικὲς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς, προκειμένου νὰ διορθώσουμε τὰ κακῶς κείμενα, ὅταν μάλιστα ἀφοροῦν τὸ αἰώνιο μέλλον μας, τὴν ἴδια τὴ σωτηρία μας.

Ἀστήρικτες Ἐπιφυλάξεις

Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας Χριστιανούς, ἐνῶ ἀποδέχονται τὴ μεγάλη σημασία τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως στὴ Χριστιανικὴ ζωὴ, διατηροῦν ἐν τούτοις σοβαρὲς ἐπιφυλάξεις γιὰ μερικὲς πλευρὲς του. Ἔτσι δυσκολεύονται νὰ πάρουν τὴ μεγάλη ἀπόφαση νὰ χτυπήσουν τὴν πόρτα τοῦ ἐξομολογηταρίου.

Οἱ πιὸ ἔντονες ἐπιφυλάξεις ἀφοροῦν στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ. Ἀναρωτιοῦνται πολλοί: «Πῶς ἓνας ἄνθρωπος σὰν κι ἐμᾶς μπορεῖ νὰ συγχωρῇ ἁμαρτίες;». Μπορεῖ, γιὰτὶ ἀπλούστατα ἔλαβε τὸ ἱερατικὸ χάρισμα καὶ τὴν πνευματικὴ ἐξουσία τοῦ «δεσμεῖν καὶ λύειν» (Ματθ. 18:18). Ἡ διδασκαλία τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς εἶναι κρυστάλλινη. Ὁ Πνευματικὸς δὲν ἀσκεῖ τὸ ἔργο τοῦτο μὲ τὶς δικὲς του δυνάμεις, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ τὶς ἀνθρώπινες ἁμαρτίες δὲν τὶς ἐξαλείφει παρὰ ἢ χάρι τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας. Ὁ Πνευματικὸς εἶναι ἀπλῶς τὸ ὄργανο τῆς χάριτος.

Ἄλλοι ἰσχυρίζονται: «Γιὰτὶ νὰ πάω στοὺς ἱερεῖς, ἀφοῦ κι ἐκεῖνοι κάνουν τὰ ἴδια καὶ χειρότερα;». Ἡ ἔνστασις αὐτὴ, ἂν δὲν εἶναι συκοφαντία τὶς περισσότερες φορές τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς πίστεως καὶ προῖον φιλοκατήγορης διαθέσεως ὄλων μας, ἀποτελεῖ πρόφασις καὶ ὄχι ἀξέπεραστο ἐμπόδιο. Οἱ Πατέρες μᾶς συνιστοῦν: «Ὅπως ὁ ἄρρωστος ψάχνει νὰ ἀνακαλύψῃ τὸν εἰδικὸ καὶ διακεκριμένο γιὰ τὴν πάθησίν του γιὰτὸν, ἔτσι κι ἐσὺ ψάξε νὰ βρῆς τὸν καλὸ καὶ ἑμπειρο Πνευματικὸ, ἂν πιστεύεις μάλιστα ὅτι πολὺ πιὸ μεγάλη ἀξία κι ἀπὸ τὴν υγεία τοῦ σώματος ἔχει ἢ σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας». Ἄς μὴν ἐπιστρατεύουμε λοιπὸν εὐκόλες προφάσεις.

Ἄλλη μιὰ κατηγορία ἀνθρώπων ὑποστηρίζει: «Δὲν ἐξομολογοῦμαι γιὰτὶ τὰ λένε οἱ ἱερεῖς· δὲν ἔχω ἐμπιστοσύνη».

Κι ἐδῶ πρόκειται γιὰ δεινὴ παρεξήγησις ποὺ καλλιεργεῖ ὁ πονηρὸς στὶς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἀπομακρύνῃ ἀπὸ τὴ σωστικὴ χάρις τοῦ Μυστηρίου. Ὁφείλουμε νὰ ὑπερνηκίσουμε ἓναν τέτοιο φόβο. Ὁ πνευματικὸς, ἔχοντας ὑπόψη τοῦ πόσο βαρὺ ἁμάρτημα καὶ φοβερὴ παράβασις εἶναι ἡ ἀνακοίνωσις ἐξομολογημένων ἁμαρτημάτων, δὲν παραβιάζει σὲ καμιά περίπτωση τὸ ἀπόρητο τοῦ μυστηρίου. Ἄς μὴ μᾶς πλανᾷ λοιπὸν ὁ διάβολος.

«Ἐγὼ τὰ Λέω στὴν Εἰκόνα»

Εἶναι μιὰ ἄλλη κατηγορία Χριστιανῶν ποὺ ὑποστηρίζουν: «Προτιμῶ νὰ τὰ λέω στὴν εἰκόνα». Πολὺ ἀφελὲς ἐπιχείρημα! Ἡ εἰκόνα δὲν ἔλαβε τέτοια ἐξουσία, νὰ ἀκούῃ δηλαδὴ καὶ νὰ συγχωρῇ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ἀπόλυτα σαφής. Ἐξἄλλου, σὲ μιὰ τέτοια περίπτωση, πῶς εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ γνωρίζουμε ὅτι μᾶς συγχώρησε ὁ Θεός; Ἀκόμη, στὰ διάφορα πνευματικὰ προβλήματα μας, ποιὸς θὰ μᾶς καθοδηγήσῃ; Ποιὸς θὰ μᾶς συμβουλευθῇ; Ποιὸς θὰ μᾶς δώσῃ τὰ ἀνάλογα πνευματικὰ φάρμακα γιὰ νὰ θεραπευτοῦμε ἀπὸ τὰ διάφορα πάθη μας; Δὲν μποροῦμε λοιπὸν νὰ ἐξομολογοῦμαστε στὶς εἰκόνας.

Ἡ Συνεχῆς Πορεία

Ἄλλοι πάλι ἰσχυρίζονται τὰ ἐξῆς: «Καὶ γιὰτὶ νὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ, ἀφοῦ τὶς ἴδιες ἁμαρτίες θὰ τὶς ξανακάνω;». Ἐπιτόλαιο ἐπιχείρημα. Οὔτε καὶ ἡ καθημερινὴ ζωὴ δὲν τὸ ἐπιβεβαιώνει, ἀφοῦ καὶ στὸ γιὰτὸν ξαναπηγαίνουμε, ὅταν ἐκ νέου ἄρρωστήσουμε, καὶ τὰ ροῦχα μας ξαναπλένουμε, ὅταν καὶ πάλι λερώσουν, καὶ τόσα ἄλλα. Γιὰτὶ λοιπὸν νὰ μὴ συμβαίη τὸ ἴδιο καὶ μὲ τὴν ψυχὴ μας; Ἡ Χριστιανικὴ ζωὴ εἶναι μιὰ συνεχῆς πορεία γιὰ τὴν κατάκτησις τῆς ἀγιότητος καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς. Εὐτυχεῖς ὅσοι τὴν ἀκολουθοῦν, ἔστω κι ἂν σκοντάψουν, καὶ πέφτουν. Ἀρκεῖ νὰ σηκῶνται ὀρθοὶ καὶ νὰ τὴ συνεχίσουν πάλι. Ὁ Κύριος κρατᾷ πάντοτε ἀνοιχτὴ τὴν πόρτα τῆς μετάνοιας καὶ μᾶς περιμένει.

Ἡ Παγίδα τῆς Ἀναβολῆς

Τὸ πιὸ συνηθισμένο ὅμως ἀπ' ὅλα ὅσα προβάλλουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, γιὰ νὰ ἀποφύγουν τὴν ἐξομολογήσις, εἶναι ἡ ἀναβολή. «ἔχουμε καιρὸ. Ἀργότερα!», ἀκοῦμε πολλοὺς νὰ λένε. Ἀπερίφραστα πρέπει νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ ἀναβολὴ εἶναι ἢ πιὸ ἐπικίνδυνη δικαιολογία, ἀληθινὴ παγίδα, διότι ἀποκοιμίζει τὴ συνείδησις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ φυγαδεύει κάθε ἱερὴ ἀνησυχία ἀπ' τὴν καρδιά σου. Δὲν εἴμαστε ἐξουσιαστὲς τοῦ χρόνου καὶ δὲν ἔχουμε συμφωνία γιὰ τὸ πότε θὰ φύγουμε ἀπὸ αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον. Πῶς μὲ τόση εὐκολία προεξοφλοῦμε πόσο θὰ ζήσουμε ἢ πότε θὰ πεθάνουμε; Γιὰτὶ δὲν βλέπουμε τόσους αἰφνίδιους θανάτους, τόσα ἀτυχήματα, τόσες ἀρρώστιες;

Ἔστερα, ἂν τὸ μεγαλύτερο ἀγαθὸ εἶναι ἢ συμφιλίωσις καὶ ἢ ἔνωσις μας μὲ τὸ Θεὸ—καὶ αὐτὸ προϋποθέτει ἀπαραίτητα τὴν ἐξομολογήσις—γιὰτὶ ἓνα τέτοιο ἀγαθὸ νὰ τὸ στερούμαστε; Ἄς ἀκούσουμε λοιπὸν τὴν ἐντολή τοῦ Θεοῦ: *Μὴ βραδύνεις νὰ ἐπιστρέψῃς πρὸς τὸν Κύριον καὶ μὴν ἀναβάλλεις τὴ μετάνοιά σου ἀπὸ μέρα σὲ μέρα. Διότι ἡ ὁργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ θὰ ἔρθῃ αἰφνίδια...* (Σοφ. Σειράχ 5,7).

Τί Είναι η Όρθοδοξία

Πρωτοπρ. Γεώργιος Σ. Ρωμανίδου (†2001), Καθηγητού Πανεπιστημίου, από το βιβλίο του «Πατερική Θεολογία».

Τί είναι ο Όρθόδοξος πολιτισμός; Είναι πολιτισμός με την έννοια του Δυτικού πολιτισμού; Όχι. Δεν είναι πολιτισμός ή Όρθοδοξία, και ως αναφέρονται οι Παπικοί για Όρθόδοξο πολιτισμό. Γιατί; Διότι η Όρθοδοξία είναι επιστήμη και μάλιστα ιατρική επιστήμη σύμφωνα με τα σημερινά κριτήρια. Όχι πολιτισμός. Δεν είναι η Όρθοδοξία πολιτικό ή κοινωνικό σύστημα. Διότι αναφέρεται στην προσωπική σωτηρία του ανθρώπου, δηλαδή στην σωτηρία της ψυχής του. Η Όρθοδοξία βασίζεται σ' αυτά τα δύο: Στο «ό Λόγος σάρξ ἐγένετο» και στο «ἐν τῷ Ἄδι οὐκ ἔστι μετάνοια». Βέβαια μέσα στην Όρθοδοξία υπάρχουν προϋποθέσεις για να δημιουργηθεί πολιτισμός. Όμως η Όρθοδοξία δεν είναι πολιτισμός. Αλλά η Όρθοδοξία δεν είναι ούτε θρησκεία. Δεν είναι η Όρθοδοξία μία θρησκεία όπως όλες οι άλλες θρησκείες. Η Όρθοδοξία ξεχωρίζει από ένα μοναδικό φαινόμενο, που δεν υπάρχει στις άλλες θρησκείες. Αυτό είναι ανθρωπολογικό και θεραπευτικό. Σ' αυτό διαφέρει. Η Όρθοδοξία είναι μία θεραπευτική αγωγή που θεραπεύει την ανθρώπινη προσωπικότητα.

Ο σωστός γιατρός μεριμνά για την θεραπεία όλων, ανεξαιρέτως των ασθενών, και χωρίς διακρίσεις. Δεν ξεχωρίζει μερικούς μεταξύ των ανθρώπων για να τους θεραπεύσει. Δεν τον ενδιαφέρει η κοινωνική του τάξη ή το μορφωτικό τους επίπεδο ή η οικονομική τους κατάσταση ή η θρησκεία τους ή η ήθικη τους συμπεριφορά. Ο σωστός γιατρός βλέπει μόνο αν ένας άνθρωπος, που τον πλησιάζει είναι άρρωστος ή όχι. Και αν είναι άρρωστος, ενδιαφέρεται και προσπαθεί να τον θεραπεύσει. Να θεραπεύσει την πάθησι του ανθρώπου. Είναι υποχρεωμένος να τον θεραπεύσει. Στην Όρθοδοξη παράδοσι, έχουμε κάτι παραπάνω από αυτό. Και σ' αυτό ακριβώς συνίσταται η «άντεπίθεσις» μας.

Ο Θεός αγαπάει όχι μόνο τους αγίους, αλλά όλους τους ανθρώπους ανεξαιρέτως. Όλους τους άμαρτωλούς, όλους τους κολασμένους, ακόμη και τον ίδιο τον διάβολο. Και θέλει να σώσει, να θεραπεύσει τους πάντας. Θέλει, αλλά δεν μπορεί να θεραπεύσει τους πάντας, διότι δεν θέλουν όλοι να θεραπευθούν. Αυτό, το ότι ο Θεός είναι αγάπη και θέλει να θεραπεύσει τους πάντας και ότι αγαπά τους πάντας ἐξ' ἴσου, διαπιστώθηκε και διαπιστώνεται από την εμπειρία των θεομένων, όσων δηλαδή έφθασαν σε θέωση, δηλαδή σε θεοπτία και είδαν τον Θεόν.

Δεν μπορεί όμως ο Θεός να θεραπεύσει τους πάντας, διότι δεν εκβιάζει την θέληση του ανθρώπου. Σέβεται ο Θεός τον άνθρωπο και τον αγαπά. Δεν μπορεί όμως να θεραπεύσει κάποιον με το ζόρι. Θεραπεύει μόνο όσους θέλουν να θεραπευθούν και του ζητούν να τους θεραπεύσει. Φυσιολογικά κάποιος, που έχει σωματική άρρώστεια ή και ψυχική, πηγαίνει μάλιστα την θέλησί του και όχι με το ζόρι

στον γιατρό, για να γίνει καλά, αν ακόμη έχει τα λογικά του. Έτσι και στην Όρθοδοξη θεραπευτική αγωγή. Πρέπει κάποιος από μόνος του, χωρίς καταναγκασμό, χωρίς καταπίεσι, ελεύθερα να προσέλθει στην Έκκλησία, στους κατάλληλους ανθρώπους, που έχουν την φώτισι και την εμπειρία και κατέχουν την θεραπευτική μέθοδο της Όρθοδόξου παραδόσεως, και σ' εκείνους να κάνει ύπακοή για να βρή θεραπεία.



Χρονίζων Πρόβλημα της Εκκλησίας

Τοῦ πρωτ. Διονυσίου Τάτση, ἀπὸ τὸν «Όρθόδοξο Τύπο», 17 Φεβρουαρίου, 2006.

Ανησυχούν οι συνειδητοί Χριστιανοί, για την πορεία των εκκλησιαστικών μας πραγμάτων. Βλέπουν ότι δεν γίνεται τίποτα ουσιαστικό, κάτι, που να εξυψώνει την Έκκλησία στα μάτια του λαού. Γι' αυτό και τα προβλήματα παραμένουν αλτα. Η κατάσταση, πράγματι, είναι απογοητευτική. Ένδεικτικά αναφέρω ένα πρόβλημα, το πρόβλημα της καθάρσεως, που πρέπει να λυθί άμεσα.

Υπάρχουν πολλές περιπτώσεις ανάξιων ιερέων, αλλά και επισκόπων, οι όποιοι βαρύνονται με σαρκικά άμαρτήματα. Χρειάζεται κάθαρση. Όμως, καμμία ουσιαστική προσπάθεια δεν καταβάλλεται. Και όχι μόνο αυτό. Συνεχίζεται η προβολή και ανάδειξη στην ιερωσύνη ανθρώπων, που δεν έχουν ήθος. Εκλέγονται, επίσης, επίσκοποι οι ήμετεροι, χωρίς να λαμβάνεται υπόψη η ήθικη τους καθαρότητα.

Το αίσχρρο φαινόμενο της όμοφυλοφιλίας υπάρχει. Και βασιλεύει! Βέβαια, είναι σχεδόν αδύνατο ν' αποδειχτούν τα σαρκικά άμαρτήματα, γιατί πάντα οι πρωταγωνιστές είναι δύο και λείπει ο τρίτος, ο ουσιώδης μάρτυρας. Είναι, όμως, πολύ εύκολο να καταλάβη κανείς αυτούς τους προβληματικούς ανθρώπους και να τους αναγκάσει ν' άπεκδυθούν το τιμημένο ράσο. Δεν πρέπει ν' αφήνουμε τους ανήθικους να βεβηλώνουν τα ιερά και τα όσια της πίστης μας. Δεν πρέπει να τους έχουμε κοντά μας, και πολύ περισσότερο συνεργάτες μας.

Είναι προκλητικό να περνά κάποιος ανάξιος κληρικός απ' την διαδικασία της λεγόμενης αυτοκάθαρσης και να βγαίνει λελαμπρυσμένος. Κάτι δεν πάει καλά. Πολύ παράξενη είναι αυτή η κολυμβήθρα της αυτοκάθαρσης! Γι' αυτό και οι περισσότεροι άνθρωποι δεν πίστεψαν την διακήρυξη της Ιεράς Συνόδου ότι η αυτοκάθαρση ολοκληρώθηκε. Διερωτήθηκαν: «Πώς ολοκληρώθηκε, αφού δεν άρχισε;...»

NORTH CYPRUS: PORTRAIT OF A CHRISTIANITY OBLITERATED

By the Roman Catholic reporter Sandro Magister

The island of Cyprus was the first destination of the “special mission” that the Holy Spirit entrusted to Paul and Barnabas, according to what is written in the Acts of the Apostles, in chapter 13. On the island they found a Roman governor, Sergius Paulus, “an intelligent man who wanted to hear the word of God and believed, deeply shaken by the teaching of the Lord.”

But if Paul and Barnabas were to return to Cyprus today, to the northern part of the island, they would find not the Romans as governors, but the Turks. And instead of a Christianity being born, they would find a dying Christianity, with the churches and monasteries in ruin, or else transformed into stables, hotels, and mosques. This is documented in a startling report from Luigi Geninazzi, who was sent to Cyprus by “Avvenire,” the newspaper of the Italian bishops’ conference.

Cyprus became part of the European Union on May 1, 2004. But this was true only for the southern part of the island, which is Greek and Christian. The northern part was occupied by Turkey in 1974 with 40,000 soldiers. The Turkish occupation caused death, destruction, and a forced relocation of populations.

About 200,000 Greek Cypriots of the Christian Orthodox faith who lived in the north of the island fled to the south. In 1983 Turkey consolidated the occupation by creating a Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is internationally recognized only by the government of Ankara: 180,000 persons live there, 100,000 of whom are colonists originally from Anatolia. A wall guarded by the United Nations divides the two parts of the island and cuts through the capital, Nicosia. In April of 2004, the UN placed before a referendum a plan of confederation between the two states, but this was rejected by the Greek Cypriots of the south, who are four times as numerous as the Turkish Cypriots of the north.

The Islamization of the north of the island has been concretized in the destruction of all that was Christian. Yannis Eliades, director of the Byzantine Museum of Nicosia, calculates that 25,000 icons have disappeared from the churches in the zone occupied by the Turks. For a Turkey that aspires to enter the European Union, its actions in the north of Cyprus give a terrible impression of itself.

And what it has done in destroying the Christian presence begun by Paul and Barnabas is described in the report that follows, published in “Avvenire” on Sunday, February 26:

“THEY DID NOT EVEN SPARE THE STONE ALTAR...”

By Luigi Geninazzi

Europe ends here, in the most beautiful island of the Mediterranean, torn by a wall that splits it in two. Europe ends abruptly along a barrier of barbed wire, cement, and military turrets that splits Cyprus along its entire width and divides Nicosia, a capital wounded in its ancient heart. For the UN, which guards over it with its blue helmets, it is the “green line.” But here the people continue to call it the “Attila line,” from the name that the Turks gave to the invasion.

The scourge has left its marks. It has struck Cyprus, the site of the most ancient Christian community on European soil, in its artistic, cultural, and religious treasury: stupendous Byzantine and Romanesque churches, imposing monasteries,

mosaics and frescoes of inestimable value. It is a heritage that in the northern part of the island, under Turkish occupation, has been sacked, violated, and destroyed.

To realize this it is enough to cross the “Attila line” at the checkpoint of Nicosia, and there you are in the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which greets the visitor with a large banner on which is written a topsy-turvy welcome: “How happy I am to be a Turk!” (a famous phrase of Kemal Ataturk, the 1920s architect of the awful atrocities and subsequent extermination of the Armenian and Greek populations from Turkey). The nationalist pride of the descendants of the Ottoman empire has also modified the natural countryside, carving the crescent moon and the red star on the side of the Pentadati-

tilos mountains, which dominate the wide plains.

The Turkish flag billows on the façade of the church of Agia Paraskevi, in the once Greek Orthodox village of Angastina. A sign says that work is underway to transform it into a mosque. The bell tower, which no longer bears a cross, is a strange minaret with the loudspeaker of the muezzin fixed upon an archway. Christodoulos, the young archeologist accompanying me, is visibly shaken: “I was baptized here,” he says in a voice hoarse with emotion. He is one of the 200,000 Greek Cypriot refugees who, thirty years ago, lived in the north of the island and were chased out of their homes. Christodoulos kneels on the spot where he was once baptized and lights a candle. The Turkish construction workers, squatting in front of the apse for their lunch break, look at him curiously: “Every time I come back to this area, it’s always worse,” he sighs.

We stop at Trachoni, where a jewel of the Renaissance once stood, the church of the Panagia, Our Lady. Now only the walls are left; the interior bears the signs of vandalism that has not spared even the stone altar, the pieces of which have ended up in a hole dug recently to search for who knows what treasure.



A “Small” Sign of Barbarism during the Turkish Invasion

Ours is a sad pilgrimage that at every stop adds to one's outrage and disbelief, a *via dolorosa* that retraces the places of Christian memory at risk of disappearing. At the village of Peristerona, on the road to Famagosta, the medieval monastery of Saint Anastasia is being used as a stable, with the cows chewing their cud amid what remains of the ancient cells. The tombs of the cemetery have been profaned, and the gravestones broken.

We leave the countryside behind and go to the coast. Here many of the churches have been turned into restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, for the enjoyment of the tourists. At the top of the rock of Lapethos, which juts out over the sea, the church and convent of Agia Anastasia have become a sumptuous hotel with a swimming pool dug into the cloister, and a casino under the bell tower.

Almost the entire artistic patrimony of the Orthodox Church in the territory occupied by the Turks—520 buildings between churches, chapels, and monasteries—has been sacked, demolished, or disfigured. Only three churches and one monastery, the monastery of Saint Barnabas, which has been turned into a museum, are in a more or less dignified state.

“The ruin is before our eyes, but the European Union prefers to look the other way,” the Cypriot foreign minister, George Iacovou, bitterly tells us. “The only hope is that, in the course of negotiations for Turkey's adhesion to the EU, someone might pull out the dossier of shame.”

The Byzantine Academy of Nicosia has gathered detailed and meticulous documentation on the occupied churches in Cyprus. And for two years an attempt has been made at religious dialogue, with the support of the Orthodox bishop Nikiforos of the historic monastery of Kykko: “We have met with the Muslim leaders headed by Lefka, and I told them that respect for our places of worship is the basis for cooperation.” Nikiforos is moderately optimistic: “I encountered a lot of understanding. Errors have been made on both sides; we must overcome the divisions of the past and walk together.”

But the last word belongs to the politicians. Huseyn Ozel, a government spokesman for the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, displays great cordiality with the foreign journalist. The destroyed and sacked churches? “There was a war, and bad things happened on both sides,” he explains.

I point out to him that most of the mosques in Greek Cypriot territory have been restored, while his government has authorized the transformation of churches into restaurants and hotels, an insult to the sentiment of believers. “They did this to keep the buildings from falling into ruin, and anyway, these are decisions made by the preceding government, which I do not share,” Ozel counters.

I insist: what do you have to say about the churches that, still today, are being turned into mosques? The Turkish Cypriot functionary spreads his arms wide: “It is an Ottoman custom...” It is a tradition that, unfortunately, continues. An unsettling calling card for a Turkey that is neither ready nor worthy to enter the civilized world, yet it continues to aspire for her entrance into the European club...

A CONFESSION PRAYER (FROM AN ATHONITE PAMPHLET)

By An Athonite Monk

Bless me, O Lord and my Saviour, to confess to Thee not only with words but with bitter tears as well. There is much to weep for...

My faith in Thee is shaken, O Lord! The thoughts of little faith and faithlessness crowd into my soul more often than not. Why? Of course, the spirit of the times is guilty, the people with whom I associate are at fault, but above all, I myself am guilty, in that I do not struggle with faithlessness and do not pray to Thee for help; I am incomparably more guilty if I become a scandal for others by deed, by word, or by a cold silence, whenever conversations concerned the faith. I am sinful in this, Lord; forgive and have mercy and grant me faith.

Love for my neighbor and even for my close relatives fails me. Their incessant requests for help, their forgetfulness of how much has been done for them already, arouse mutual discontent among us. But I am guilty above all in that I have the means to help them, but help them grudgingly. I am guilty in that I help them, not out of pure Christian motives, but out of self-love, out of a desire for thanks or praise. Forgive me, Lord; soften my heart and teach me to look not at how people act towards me but at how I act towards them. And if they act in a hostile way, remind me, O Lord, to pay them back with love and good, and to pray for them!

I am also sinful in that I seldom, very seldom, think about my sins. Not only during week days, but even when preparing for Confession I do not remember them, do not strive to bring them to mind for confession. General phrases come to mind: “I'm not guilty of anything in particular, like everyone else.” O Lord, it were as if I didn't know what sin is before Thee - that every vain word and the very desire in the heart is an abomination before Thee. And how many words and desires come each day, not to mention in a year! Thou alone, Lord, knowest them; do Thou grant me to behold my sins and be compassionate and forgive!

Moreover, I realize that my constant sin is the virtual absence of any struggle with evil within me. As soon as any excuse or suggestion appears, I already dive headfirst into the abyss of sin, and only after my fall do I ask myself: what have I done? A fruitless question, because it does not help me grow better. And if I feel sorrow at the same time, it comes from the fact that my self-love is wounded, and not from the awareness that I have offended Thee, O Lord!

I do not struggle with obvious evil, nor even with the most trifling and harmful habits. I do not control myself and do not even try. I have sinned; forgive me!

Furthermore, there is the sin of having a short temper. This passion rules over me, does not leave me at all. When I hear a sharp word, I do not reply with silence, but act like a pagan: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. An enmity arises from something insignificant and continues for days and weeks,

and I do not think of reconciliation, but rather try to be, as it were, stronger, to get revenge at the first chance. I have sinned beyond reckoning, O Lord: be compassionate, forgive me, and put my heart at peace!

Apart from these major sins, my entire life is a chain of sins. I do not value the time Thou hast granted for the acquisition of eternal salvation. I often stand irreverently, pray mechanically, judge others as to how they pray, and do not look after myself. At home I pray sometimes only with great effort and scattered thoughts, so that often I myself do not even hear my prayer, and I even omit my prayers sometimes. Such are my relations to Thee, O Lord, and I cannot say anything, except, "Forgive and have mercy!"

In my relations with others I sin with all my feelings - I sin with my tongue, by pronouncing false, profane, provocative and scandalous words; I sin with my eyes; I sin with my mind and heart. I judge others and harbor enmity often and for long periods of time. I sin not only against the soul but also against the body, taking food and drink without restraint. Accept, O Lover of mankind, my repentance, that I may approach Thy holy and life-giving Mysteries with peace for the forgiveness of sins; for the setting-aright of temporary life; and for the inheritance of life eternal. Amen.

"I am unworthy to ask forgiveness, O Lord," Thus exclaimed once the great teacher of repentance, St. Ephraim the Syrian.

"How can one keep from falling into sin? How can one block the entrance to the passions?" St. Basil the Great asked St. Ephraim; and the answer was his tears alone.

Then what can I say before Thee, O Lord, I, so great and habitual a sinner?

By the prayers of our holy Fathers Ephraim and Basil grant me, O Lord, repentance and tears! Help me to expel from myself, like deadly poison, my evil deeds, vain words, wicked thoughts. And if I forget to mention any sin, Thou knowest all, remind me, for I do not wish to hide anything. Thou commandest me: State your cause, that you may be justified (Is. 43:26), and I say: my sins are multiplied Lord, and multiply themselves without ceasing, and there is no limit to them. I know and I remember, that even an impure thought is an abomination before Thee; and at the same time I not only think but even do that which grieves Thee. I know that I commit evil, and do not turn away from evil...

Thus, the beginning has not yet been made for my repentance, and the end is not in sight of my lack of concern over my sins. In truth, there is no end to the vile thoughts within me, the bursts of self-love, vanity, pride, judgments, bearing grudges, and vengeance. I often argue, for no cause at all become angry, cruel, jealous, lazy, or blindly stubborn. I myself am of very little significance, but I think a great deal of myself. I do not want to honor those who are worthy, but demand honor for myself without any basis.

I constantly lie and am angry at liars. I condemn slanderers and thieves, but myself steal and slander. I corrupt myself with lustful thoughts and desires, but strictly judge others for lack

of modesty. I do not endure jokes about myself, but myself like to tease others, considering neither the person nor the place - even in church. Whoever speaks the truth about me, I consider my enemy. I do not want to bother myself with serving others, but if I am not served, I grow angry. I coldly refuse my neighbor who is in need, but when I myself am in need, I make my requests of him without end. I do not like to visit the sick, but when I am sick, I expect someone to care for me without my even asking.

O Lord, send the light of Thy heavenly light into the depths of my soul, that I may see my sins! My confession almost always ends with the merely external recounting of certain sins. O my God, If Thou art not merciful, if Thou grantest me not help, I perish! Innumerable are the times my conscience has given promises to Thee to begin a better life, but I violated my promises and live as before.

Without correcting myself, I am ashamed to show my face before another person, before whom I have not kept my word. How then can I stand before Thee, my God, without shame and self-abasement, when I have made promises so many times before Thy holy altar, before the angels and saints, and then did not keep my word? How low I am! How guilty I am! Thine, O Lord, is righteousness, and mine is a shameful presence (Dan.9:7).

Only Thine infinite goodness can endure me. Thou didst not condemn me when I sinned; do not condemn me as I repent! Teach me how to call to mind and recount the sins of my former life, the careless sins of youth, the sins of self-loving adulthood, the sins of day and night, sins against Thyself, O Lord my Saviour! How can I recount them in the few minutes when I stand in this holy place! I remember, Lord, that Thou didst attend to the brief words of the publican and the thief; I know that Thou wilt mercifully accept even the readiness to repent, and I pray Thee with all my soul, my Lord, accept my repentance, even in a daily confession of sins, according to the Prayer Book. I have far more sins than are mentioned in it, and have nothing with which to erase them.

I now offer only my striving towards Thee and the desire for good, but I myself do not have the strength to correct them myself. O Lord and Lover of mankind, Thou dost not drive away the sinner who comes to Thee, begging Thee for forgiveness. Even before he approaches the doors of Thy Mercy, Thou dost already open the way for him; even before he falls before Thee, Thou dost stretch forth Thy hand to him; even before he confesses his sins, Thou dost grant him forgiveness. Grant this to me, as I repent, grant this according to Thy great mercy; forgive all the evil that I have done, said, and thought. And by granting forgiveness, send me, O Lord, the strength that henceforth I might live according to Thy will and not offend Thee. Help me, and I will be saved; help me by receiving Thy Holy Mysteries. And for the worthy reception of them, speak to me the grace of mercy and forgiveness through the lips of the servant of Thine altar; speak by Thy Holy Spirit, not heard by the ear but heard in the contrite heart and peaceful conscience. Amen.

GAINING THE HABIT OF PRAYER

By St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain

If you desire to seek success in the work of prayer, adapt all else to this, lest you destroy with one hand what the other builds.

1) Keep your body strictly disciplined in food, sleep, and rest. Do not give it anything simply because it wants it; as the Apostle says: Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof (Romans 13:14). Give no respite to the flesh.

2) Reduce your external contacts to the most inevitable. This is for the period of your training in prayer. Later, when prayer begins to act in you, it will itself indicate what can be added without harming it. Especially guard your senses, above all, eyes and ears; also tie your tongue. Without this guarding, you will not make a single step forward in the work of prayer. As a candle cannot burn in wind and rain, so the flame of prayer cannot be lit in a flood of impressions from outside.

3) Use all the time left from prayer in reading and meditation. For reading, choose mainly such books as deal with prayer and generally with inner spiritual life. Meditate exclusively on God and on divine matters, and above all on the incarnate dispensation for our salvation, chiefly on the passion and death of our Lord and Savior. Doing this, you will always be immersed in the sea of divine light. In addition, go to church, whenever you have the possibility to do so. Merely to be present in church will envelop you in a cloud of prayer. What then will you receive if you stand throughout the service in a true state of prayer?

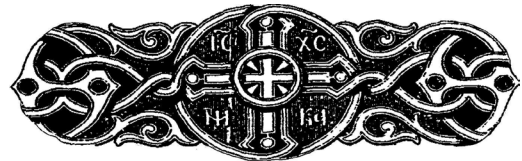
4) Know that it is impossible to make progress in prayer without general progress in Christian life. It is absolutely necessary that no sin, not purified by repentance, should burden the soul. If during your work on prayer you do something that troubles your conscience, hasten to purify yourself by repentance, so that you can look up to the Lord boldly. Keep humble contrition constantly in your heart. Moreover, neglect no opportunity for doing some good, or for manifesting some good disposition, above all humility, obedience and cutting off your own will. It goes without saying that zeal for salvation must always be burning and fill the whole soul; in all things, great or small, it must be the main impelling force, together with fear of God and unshaken trust.

5) Thus established, labor in the work of prayer, praying now with set prayers, now with your own, now with short appeals to the Lord, now with the Jesus Prayer, omitting nothing which can be of help in this work. And you will receive what you seek. I remind you of the words of St. Macarius of Egypt: "God will see your work of prayer and that you sincerely wish to succeed in prayer—and He will give you prayer." For you must know that, although prayer done and achieved with one's own efforts is pleasing to God, yet that real prayer, which comes to dwell in the heart and becomes constant, is the gift of God, an act of Divine grace. Therefore, in your prayer for all other

things, do not forget to pray too about prayer.

6) I shall repeat to you what I heard from a God-loving man. "I was not leading a very good life," he said, "but God had mercy on me and sent me the spirit of repentance. This was during preparation for communion. I was trying hard to plant in myself a firm resolve to mend my ways, and especially before confession I prayed for a long time before the Icon of the Mother of God, begging Her to obtain this resolve for me. Then, during confession, I candidly related everything. My Spiritual Father said nothing; but while he was reciting the prayer of absolution over my head, a small sweet flame was lit in my heart. The sensation was like swallowing some delectable food. This little flame remained in the heart, and I felt as though someone was gripping my heart. From that time I prayed continuously, and kept my attention there, where this sensation was, my only care being to preserve it. And God helped me. I had not heard about the Jesus Prayer, and when I did hear of it, I saw that what was within me was precisely that which is sought by this prayer." I mention this story to make you understand what the work of prayer seeks and what are the signs that it is received.

7) I shall also add the following words of St. Gregory of Sinai: "Grace abides in us from the time of our holy baptism; but, through our inattention, vanity, and the wrong life we lead, it is stifled or buried. When a man resolves to lead a righteous life and is zealous for salvation, the fruit of his whole labor is, therefore, the restoration in force of this gift of grace. It comes to pass in a two-fold manner: first, this gift becomes revealed through many labors in following the commandments; in so far as a man succeeds in following the commandments, this gift becomes more radiant and brilliant. Secondly, it manifests and reveals itself through constant invocation of the Lord Jesus in prayer. The first method is powerful, but the second is more so, so that even the first method gains power through it. Thus, if we sincerely wish to open the seed of grace concealed in us, let us hasten to train ourselves in this latter exercise of the heart, and let us have only this work of prayer in our heart, without forms, without images, till it warms our heart and makes it burn with ineffable love of the Lord."



Evil is corrected by good; faults by love, kindness, meekness, humility, and patience. Acknowledge yourself as the greatest of sinners. Of those who appear to you to be sinners, or are sinners in fact, consider yourself worse and lower than all. Be rid of all pride and malice against your neighbor, all impatience and bad-temper, and only then—with love and long-suffering towards them—try to cure others. Until then, cover the sins of others with your indulgent love.

St. John of Kronstadt

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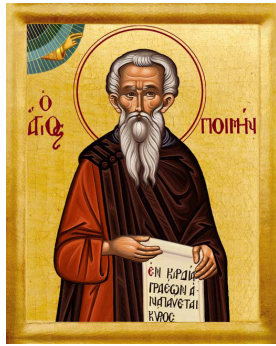
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WE HAVE CHOSEN THE HEAVENLY PHILOSOPHY...

By St. Joseph the Hesychast, from "Monastic Wisdom," 47th letter.

My child, child of our sweetest Jesus, child of Panagia and the saints, what shall I say to you? Where shall I find words to warm your soul? From where shall I draw water to give you drink? Where shall I find bread to fill you? Woe to me! Woe to me the wretch, for I have been counted worthy to give birth in the Holy Spirit to such a son, such a good youth, of like mind and zeal!

When will I be made worthy to see you near me? When will I enjoy your pleasant company? When will I see you in the middle of our church prostrate and crying in front of the icon of our sweetest Jesus? I wonder, will I be worthy to see such things? I wonder, should I hope? I wonder, should I wait until I see you, and then say along with divine Symeon, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace"?

Woe to me the wretch! Tears shut my eyes. My hand is paralyzed. My pen is dry. My heart throbs from emotion, hearing that you are about to become a wise man among the wise, a teacher among teachers, an orator among orators, a theologian among theologians, a preacher among preachers, a monk among monks, a priest among priests, and a son of God among sons of God.



St. Joseph the Hesychast
(+1959)

Therefore, my beloved nestling, come fly to me. Behold I open to you my fatherly bosom full of affection. Run as a deer, and I shall give you living water to drink. Come, my son, to our table, and I shall give you the bread of life.

Walk quickly. Lose no time. For death pursues us as an evil wayfarer, and the world is a liar. Life is full of Satan's snares, and brings a two-fold death upon us. The pleasure of the world passes away like a shadow. Everything is a dream, like bubbles they burst. All is vanity!

But we here have chosen the heavenly philosophy and sojourn in the depth of divine mysteries, making our nous clear. As much as possible we see to it that we grasp things unattainable for the hands, but unattainable for the nous, having God as our helper, and holy, fiery angels speaking to us and showing us heavenly paths through a good conscience. Then in the end, when our soul departs and this lowly body of ours returns to the earth as if to the mother of all, then we shall depart as if returning to our true homeland, and we shall converse with angels as if with brothers, giving one another a divine embrace, and continuously marveling at the heavenly choirs with amazement, until we come forth before our Master and Savior and henceforth remain inseparable.

So come running, so that you do not fall away from these things. Arise and gird your loins like a man.

Come and I shall be waiting for you. Perhaps after a few years I shall depart, and then I shall not be able to benefit you at all.

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]

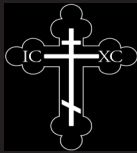
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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OUR HOLY ORTHODOXY

The following homily was delivered by Fr. Demetrios Carellas in a past Sunday of Orthodoxy. We have been prompted to include it upon learning of another high-power ecumenical meeting that is forthcoming during the latter part of November, 2006. The pope will be visiting Constantinople to “co-celebrate” with Patriarch Bartholomew the holy feast of St. Andrew the Apostle. In a pertinent announcement, the pope indicated that the trip “will strengthen ecclesial fraternity and facilitate collaboration in common initiatives...” He further added: “May the Lord help us to move forward with renewed confidence toward the day when we will be able to celebrate together the holy Eucharist of the Lord as a sign of full communion.”

Our position remains that the current ecumenical movement is (at its best) a sell-out of Orthodox dogma, tradition and values. May our Lord and Savior grant His mercy and protect Orthodox faithful from the treacherous progression of ecumenism whose primary goal is the wipe-out of Orthodoxy!

The Faith which I was taught by the Holy Fathers, which I taught without adjusting according to the times, this Faith I will never stop teaching; I was born with it and I live by it.

St. Gregory the Theologian spoke these Spirit-filled words over 1700 years ago. They are timeless words, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, for they make reference to: the Faith that our Lord Jesus Christ established Himself, through sending the All-Holy Spirit upon His Apostles, on the Day of Pentecost; the Faith for which millions have willingly shed their blood—from Apostolic times to this new millennium—rather than deny or compromise Her Truth; the Faith, whose triumph over all heresies we have been honoring on the First Sunday of the Great Fast for over 11 centuries.

But is this Faith also my Faith—your Faith? Do our thoughts, words and actions find comfort in these words of St. Gregory, or condemnation?

I propose to you this evening that many of us—myself included—should be convicted by these holy words. How can the Holy Fathers teach me the essence of our Faith, when I rarely—if ever—read from their writings? How often in my 28 years as a priest have I callously adjusted the true teachings of my Faith, in order to make them more palatable to others and myself? If today was the Day of Judgment, could I honestly tell my Saviour and Lord Jesus that I have lived the Faith that He gave me as a gift on the day of my Baptism? No, my beloved brethren, I could not. For to live our Holy Orthodox Faith, then the Gospel of my Lord Jesus Christ must “take flesh” within me—I must become the Gospel in all of my thoughts, words, and actions. Those who truly live our Faith do not need to say any words, for the “presence” of Jesus Christ in them speaks volumes to any soul that has “ears to hear.”

Can we find this true Faith, which St. Gregory never stopped teaching, in our American society? Most definitely! Permit me to offer this example: In 1994 St. John Maximovitch was officially canonized. He fell asleep in 1966, and continues to bring the Gospel of Christ to those who seek his intercessions. One Saturday evening before his departure from this temporal life—as he was about to begin Great Vespers—he noticed that no one was in Church. This was highly unusual, so he asked his deacon if he knew why everyone was missing. The deacon informed him that there was a big ethnic party at the Mark Hopkins hotel. Without appearing at all angered upon hearing this news, the Saint told the deacon to drive him to the party so that he could see his spiritual children. When the little frail hierarch walked into the ballroom, all the dancing, drinking, and loud talking immediately stopped. Everyone looked at their humble Bishop in fear; however, St. John simply blessed the people silently, bowed before them and left. But Christ

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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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in him “spoke” without using words, and everyone immediately left the party to attend Great Vespers with their Shepherd. Glory be to God! This happened because St. John was a living ikon of the Ascetical/Mystical life of our Faith.

Unfortunately, we do not have many examples like St. John to describe the impact of our Faith during Her 200+ years in the United States. In fact, although we have five or six American saints, only one, St. Peter the Aleut, was born in our nation. Why don't we have more American-born saints? Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlahos rightly states in one of his books that the purpose of our Faith is to “make relics”—to produce saints! What is the problem here in America? The answer is simple: too many of us are not trying to live the ascetical/mystical life of Orthodoxy in the trenches of our daily lives. Our ego-worshipping, secular-humanistic, politically correct society, has infiltrated our attitudes and actions; not only ourselves individually, but also our families, parishes—and beyond.

This evening, we can see one of the examples of this “infiltration.” Where are the anathemas against the heresies, and those who both produced and followed them? Where are the joyous “eternal memory” chants for those champions of Holy Orthodoxy—like St. Athanasios the Great, and St. Theodore the Studite—who were God's chosen instruments to protect from corruption the true dogmas given to us by the Holy Spirit? I heard at least some of these 28 years ago at the OCA Cathedral in Chicago, IL, but they have been omitted in the last 27 Sundays of Orthodoxy that I have attended. In one Sunday of Orthodoxy service in which I participated several years ago, an Anglican Bishop—fully vested—stood at the Bishop's throne; and several other clerics from other denominations were on the front row. In our lifetime, the feast of the triumph of Orthodoxy seems to have been discarded; and replaced by a politically correct, ecumenical gathering that has no historical reference and does not commemorate any historical event.

Some have said that these anathemas are being omitted as an act of love. What love? Can the Church be truly a loving mother to her children when she looks upon those who teach false dogma with indifference, and allows these heretical teachers the liberty to destroy the souls of her flock? Consider this example offered by St. Theophan the Recluse: “Would a mother permit a snake to freely crawl up to and bite her child? ... If some immoral person were to gain access to your family and begin tempting your daughter, or your son, would you be able to regard their actions and their speeches with indifference? Fearing to gain a reputation of being inhumane and old fashioned, would you tie your own hands? Would you not push such a person out the door and close it against them forever? You should view [the anathemas] of the Holy Church in the same manner. She sees that individuals of a corrupt mind appear and corrupt others, and she rises up against them—driving them away and calling out to those who are her own: ‘Beware, so-and-so and such-and-such people wish to destroy your souls. Do not listen to them; flee from them.’ Thus, she fulfills the duty of motherly love.”

Because we seem to have chosen to “benignly neglect” the heresies and the anathemas proclaimed against them—heresies which are still very present in our American Society—we are hearing many of our own people say such things as: “We all worship the same God.” “It is not necessary to pray to the Mother of God and the Saints.” “Fasting is only for the monastics.” “Our Church has too much ritual, and the services are too long and archaic.” Many of them have left our Faith—being attracted by the apparent simplicity and openness of other Christian formations. What a great tragedy, my brothers and sisters, and we must accept much of the responsibility. Our persistence in trying to make Orthodoxy appear more like all other Christian formations is not bearing good fruit. On the contrary, consider the example of the World Council of

Churches (WCC). Since its inception over 50 years ago, we have been very active participants. How many protestant denominations have renounced their heresies against God's true Church and embraced our faith? None! On the other hand, being in the midst of all these non-Orthodox teachings seems to have affected our own understanding of who we are. Please listen carefully to what follows: In 1957, Fr. George Florovsky of blessed memory composed the following official statement of the delegates of the Orthodox Church:

"The Orthodox Church teaches that She has no need to search for a 'lost unity,' because Her historical consciousness dictates that She is the 'Una Sancta' and that all Christian groups outside of the Orthodox Church can recover their unity only by entering into the bosom of that Church, which preserved its identity with early Christianity."

This is a most correct description of who we are as a Church. However, in a statement made by Orthodox delegates at the WCC assembly only 18 years later, we see clearly that our understanding as to who we are made a negative transformation: "...[T]he Orthodox Church does not expect that other Christians be converted to Orthodoxy in its historical and cultural reality of the past and present, and to become members of the Orthodox Church. Its desire is that all should strive in their own churches and traditions to deepen the fullness of their apostolic faith, embodied in a full ecclesial life."

I tell you without hesitation that this statement does not speak for this worthless priest. Far more importantly, however, neither does it speak for Holy Orthodoxy! It is blasphemy against God's true Church, and we have every right to reject it. What should bring tears to both our eyes and hearts, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is that when we make—or accept—comments that express something that goes against the true teachings of our Faith, then we actually separate ourselves from the Church. As St. Theophan the Recluse reminds us, "It is not inscription in the Baptismal records that makes one a member of the Church, but the spirit and content, of one's opinions. I just had a frightening thought: Is it possible that the true reason we no longer verbalize the anathemas on the Sunday of Orthodoxy because, in doing so, we openly condemn ourselves? God forbid!

I beg your forgiveness for opening my sinful heart to all of you, but it is my belief that, before we can address others regarding the Orthodox Faith, we must first establish—firmly—the priority of knowing one another and the Faith that we share. As St. Gregory the Theologian reminds us: "It is necessary first to be purified, then to purify; to be made wise, then to make wise; to become light, then to enlighten; to approach God, then to bring others to Him..." Would that we declare a three-year sabbatical from all involvement with non-Orthodox (except, of course, acts of philanthropy to those in need), so that we can repent, remove the darkness from our own eyes, and become Orthodox Christians in essence instead of just in name. Would that we share a table of discussion and fellowship with the Orthodox Old Calendarist not presently in communion with us. They are TRULY our brothers and sisters

in Christ, and they should be here with us tonight. (Grant this, O Lord!) You and I must RETURN to the pristine Faith that has been passed down to us from the Holy Apostles until this evening, through the holy Church Fathers.

Listen to these Spirit-filled words of Blessed Father Justin Popovich: "The watchword that should be heard within the Church today is: Let us return to the Christ-bearing ascetics and to the Holy Fathers. ... [For] today, only [the Ascetical/Mystical Life of Orthodoxy] can bring about sanctity in every soul. ... The Ascetics are Orthodoxy's only missionaries. Asceticism is her only missionary school. ... The development of asceticism: this ought to be the inward mission of our Church amongst our people."

Notice that Blessed Fr. Justin did not say "monastics," but "ascetics." This is because—while only a few are called to the holy life of monasticism, ALL Orthodox Christians are called to be ascetics; and this is made possible when we daily partake of the sweet, pure milk of the Ascetical and Mystical life that flows spiritually from the breasts of our Holy Mother Church. What is an ascetic? It is someone who strives—with each new sunrise—to surrender more of his will to Christ. By seeking to live the Ascetical/Mystical life provided for him by his Church, the ascetic begins to find that everyone that he encounters in a given day has the ikon of Christ within him or her. And he begins to feel a growing love for everyone and everything in God's creation. By God's grace, as he fasts from various foods and as much of the worldly attractions as possible, he begins to desire more to read God's Word, the lives of the Saints, and the writings of the Holy Fathers. He looks forward to reading the Compline service every evening with his family, and worshipping God—especially in the Divine Liturgy—becomes the center of his life. With much thanksgiving, he carries the Holy Name of Jesus wherever he goes—keeping the Prayer of Jesus in his mind, his heart and on his lips. In short, he truly becomes the Gospel in human flesh.

Such an Orthodox Christian can be a 'light on a hill' that brings thousands of souls to Christ. I would like to share a moment in the life of two such ascetics—one a monastic, the other a layman—both of whom may still be living today. Fr. Arsenios is now a monk somewhere on Monk Athos. Shortly after the end of WW II, while living in the Soviet Union, he was sought by the KGB; because he was leading many souls to Christ. When they came to arrest him, he tried to run away. The KGB agents were told to bring him in alive for interrogation, so they chased after him instead of shooting him. A helicopter overhead kept informing the agents of his position. Finally, he found himself running in the direction of a cliff. He had no other way to go. Upon arriving at the cliff's edge, he simply made the sign of the Cross, and began walking on the air, for quite a distance, until he reached a mountain. When the helicopter pilot saw this, he simply flew away in utter disbelief. Like his forefather Adam before the Fall, Fr. Arsenios was able—by the grace of God—to control nature.

I do not even know the name of this ascetic layman from Thessalonica, Greece, whose amazing story we now share with

you. He was about 38 years old. Both his parents had died, and he was an only child. In his daily prayers, he began to ask God to send him a pious woman to marry, and that his future wife should have two parents; so that he could have the joy of taking care of them as if they were his own. The Lord soon answered his prayer. He was so thankful for his wife and new parents, but one thing concerned him: the father was always blaspheming God. Therefore, this pious man begged God not to allow his new father to die, until he was healed of this terrible sin. After some time, the father became very sick and was hospitalized; so now the humble man's daily routine was as follows: Before work, he would stop by his Church, light a candle for his father's health, then briefly visit his father. After work, he would first go to his mother's home to see if she had a need, then go to his home and have supper with his wife; after which he would visit his father again—staying much longer. This went on for some time, and he was constantly praying for his father's healing—both of body and soul. One day after supper, when he went to his father's hospital room, it was empty. Thinking that perhaps they had moved him to another room he inquired of one of the nurses. "Did no one call you", she said? "Your father died a short time ago." The poor man could not accept this. After all, he had begged God to keep him alive until he no longer spoke blasphemy; and he had not yet stopped the blaspheming. Therefore he asked to be permitted to go into the morgue and be alone with the father's body. Behold the miracle my dear brethren! Trusting so totally that God received his constant prayers for his father's soul, he boldly went over to the corpse, grabbed his hand and said. "Come, Papa, let us go home!" Immediately life came back into the father's body. He lived another couple of years, during which time he was totally healed of his blasphemy; and he died in peace. Great is God's power within the ascetic Christian—whether he be a monastic or living in the secular world.

What are some of the characteristics that would be present in the life of an ascetic Orthodox Christian of the new millennium? He, or she, would have a greater desire: to read the life of a Saint rather than a secular novel; to listen to the Spirit-filled hymns of the Church, rather than the cacophony of today's music; to attend a spiritual retreat rather than a weekend in Atlantic City; to read or chant the Paraklesis to the Most Holy Theotokos, rather than watch sports, or the news, or any 'sitcom' on TV. In fact, he, or she, would most likely have lost his desire to watch any TV. The 21st century ascetic is: more "at home" worshipping God in Church, than attending a party on Saturday night; more eager to read daily from God's Word than from the daily newspaper; more naturally inclined to have the Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me) on his lips, than crude language or unkind words about others. To the Orthodox ascetic: worshipping God is the blood of his soul; prayer, its breath; and the words of the Holy Gospel, its food.

For the past 2,000 years, the God-given, Ascetical/Mystical life of our Holy Orthodox Faith has produced tens of thou-

sands of known Saints; and tens of millions of Saints, most of whose names are only known to God. Before me this evening, I give thanks to our Lord Jesus as I gaze upon several hundred potential ascetics—holy relics-in-the-making that God will use to bring healing to future generations; and all that you and I need in order to become the ascetic missionaries of today, is available in our Holy Church. However, our All-compassionate Lord will never force us against our will to embrace this proven salvific way of life; because He respects the freedom that He Himself has given us. Therefore, it is up to you and me to choose this path.

Holy Orthodoxy, as God's One True Faith, cannot simply be a part of our lives. It cannot be lived, when we compromise it by our words and actions. It cannot be something that we turn on and off like the appliances we use. Our Holy Faith must be present in all aspects of our lives: from the way we worship God in the Divine Liturgy, to the way we drive our cars; from the manner in which we make the sign of the Cross, to the manner in which we prepare a meal, perform our secular work, or play a game of softball. Only by striving with all of our strength to live the Faith in this manner can we come to truly know Christ—to truly know ourselves.

It is certainly not an easy path on which to travel. The devil will trouble us more intensely when he notices that we are struggling to become ascetics, to become the Gospel of Jesus. But as St. Paul reminds us, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy in comparison to the future glory to be revealed in us." We may notice a change in the circle of our friends. Considering how evil the times are today, and how the spirit of compromise and being politically correct in expressing Orthodoxy is being proclaimed by both Orthodox laity and clergy, some of us here this evening may even be called to die for Christ and His Church; so that the shedding of our blood might lead others to repentance and the glorious Ascetical/Mystical life.

Our personal ascetic journeys may not call for us to walk on the air, like Fr. Arsenios, or raise someone from the dead. But God will—in His time and His way—make use of us to glorify Him. Perhaps one day in the grocery store, a stranger might approach us and say, "Why do you have such a presence of serenity about you?" That is why, as St. Peter tells us, we must be "ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks [us] a reason concerning the hope in us." Perhaps we can then bring that person to his true Home, so that he too can embrace the True Faith; and soon be able to share with us, that which God gives freely to all of His ascetics: the victory over all demonic attacks; the "peace that surpasses all understanding;" the hope that "does not disappoint;" the joy that "no one can take away;" and the love that "never ends."

I beg your forgiveness if any of these words have offended you. And I pray that all of us, by striving—daily—to become ascetics, will be placed by our All-compassionate Lord amongst His sheep; when He comes again to judge the living and the dead. And if we do not see each other again in this life, may God grant that we spend eternity together in Paradise!

THE CORRECT PRACTICE OF THE JESUS PRAYER

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, from Orthodox Life, vol. 28, no. 5 [edited for length].

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

The correct practice of the Jesus Prayer proceeds naturally from correct notions about God, about the most holy name of the Lord Jesus, and about man's relationship to God.

God is an infinitely great and all-perfect being. God is the Creator and Renewer of men, Sovereign Master over men, angels, demons and all created things, both visible and invisible. We ought to stand prayerfully before Him in deepest reverence and in great fear and dread, directing toward Him all our attention, concentrating in our attention all the powers of the reason, heart, and soul, and rejecting distractions and vain imaginings.

St. Isaac the Syrian put it marvelously: "When you turn to God in prayer, be in your thoughts as an ant, as a serpent of the earth, like a worm, like a stuttering child. Do not speak to Him something philosophical or high-sounding, but approach Him with a child's attitude." Those who have acquired genuine prayer experience an ineffable poverty of the spirit when they stand before the Lord, glorify and praise Him, confess to Him, or present to Him their entreaties. They feel as if they had turned to nothing, as if they did not exist. That is natural. For when he who is in prayer experiences the fullness of the divine presence, of Life Itself, of Life abundant and unfathomable, then his own life strikes him as a tiny drop in comparison to the boundless ocean. That is what the righteous and long-suffering Job felt as he attained the height of spiritual perfection. He felt himself to be dust and ashes; he felt that he was melting and vanishing as does snow when struck by the sun's burning rays (Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes, Job 42:6).

The name of our Lord Jesus Christ is a divine name. The power and effect of that name are divine, omnipotent and salvific, and transcend our ability to comprehend it. With faith therefore, with confidence and sincerity, and with great piety and fear ought we to proceed to the doing of the great work which God has entrusted to us: to train ourselves in prayer by using the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our ordinary condition, the condition of all mankind, is one of fallenness, of spiritual deception, of perdition. Apprehending—and to the degree that we apprehend, experiencing—that condition, let us cry out from it in prayer, let us cry in spiritual humility, let us cry with wails and sighs, let us cry for clemency! Let us turn away from all spiritual gratifications, let us renounce all lofty states of prayer of which we are unworthy and incapable! It is impossible to sing the Lord's song in a

strange land (Ps. 136:5), in a heart held captive by passions. Should we hear an invitation to sing, we can know surely that it emanates from them that have taken us captive (Ps. 136:3). By the waters of Babylon tears alone are possible and necessary (Ps. 136:1).

This is the general rule for practicing the Jesus Prayer, derived from the Sacred Scriptures and the works of the Holy Fathers, and from certain conversations with genuine men of prayer. Of the particular rules, especially for beginners, I deem the following worthy of mention:

St. John of the Ladder counsels that the mind should be locked into the words of the prayer and should be forced back each time it departs from it. Such a mechanism of prayer is remarkably helpful and suitable. When the mind, in its own manner, acquires attentiveness, then the heart will join it with its own offering—compunction. The heart will empathize with the mind by means of compunction, and the prayer will be said by the mind and heart together. The words of the prayer ought to be said without hurry, so that the mind can lock itself into each word.

A great champion of perfect prayer has said: I had rather speak five words with my understanding... than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue (I Cor. 14:19). Such prayer, that is, the grace-given prayer of the mind in the heart, which shuns imaginings, is not characteristic of children; wherefore we who are like children, being concerned with the perfection of our prayer, that is, the attentiveness which is acquired by locking the mind into the words of the prayer, must pray a great deal. Quantity is the cause of quality. The Lord gives pure prayer to him who, eschewing laziness, prays much and regularly in his own manner, even if it is marred by inattention.

The Russian hieromonk Dorotheus, a great instructor in spiritual asceticism, who was in this respect very much like St. Isaac the Syrian, counsels those who are learning the Jesus Prayer to recite it aloud at first. The vocal prayer, he says, will of itself turn into the mental. "Mental prayer," he continues, "is the result of much vocal prayer, and mental prayer leads to the prayer of the heart. The Jesus Prayer should not be said in a loud voice but quietly, just audibly enough that you can hear yourself."

It is particularly beneficial to practice the Jesus Prayer aloud when assailed by distraction, grief, spiritual despondency and laziness. The vocal Jesus Prayer gradually awakens the soul from the deep moral slumber into which grief and spiritual despair are wont to thrust it. It is also particularly beneficial to practice the Jesus Prayer aloud when attacked by images, appetites of the flesh, and anger; when their influence causes the blood to boil. It should be practiced when peace and tranquillity vanish from the heart, and the mind hesitates, becomes weak, and—so to speak—goes into upheaval because of the multitude of unnecessary thoughts and images.

The malicious princes of the air, whose presence is hidden to physical sight but who are felt by the soul through their influences upon it, hearing as they mount their attack the name of the Lord Jesus—which they dread—will become undecided and confused, and will take flight and withdraw immediately from the soul. The Jesus Prayer should be recited loud enough that you can hear yourself, without any hurry, and by locking the mind into the words of the prayer.

St. Nilus of Sora says: “Experience will soon confirm as correct and very beneficial for mental concentration the recommendation by many Holy Fathers regarding restraint in breathing, i.e., that one should not breathe with great frequency.” Some, without understanding this method, exaggerate its importance and restrain their breath beyond reasonable measure, thereby injuring their lungs and at the same time inflicting harm upon their souls by assenting to such a mistake. All impulsive and extreme actions are but obstacles to success in prayer, which develops only when nurtured by the tranquil, quiet and pious disposition of both soul and body. “Whatever is immoderate comes from the demons,” says St. Poimen the Great.

The Christian who is studying the Jesus Prayer will advance greatly by observing a daily rule comprising a certain number of full prostrations and bows from the waist, depending upon the strength of each individual. These are all to be performed without any hurry, with a repentant feeling in the soul and with the Jesus Prayer on the lips during each prostration.

An example of such prayer may be seen in the “Homily on Faith” by St. Symeon the New Theologian. Describing the daily evening prayers of the blessed youth George, St. Symeon says: “He imagined that he was standing before the Lord Himself and prostrating himself before His holy feet, and he tearfully implored the Lord to have mercy upon him. While praying, he stood motionless like a pillar and bade his feet and the other parts of his body to stay still, especially the eyes, which were restrained from moving curiously in all directions. He stood with great fear and trepidation and denied himself sleep, despondency and laziness.”

Twelve prostrations suffice in the beginning. Depending upon one’s strength, ability and circumstances, that number can be constantly increased. But when the number of prostrations increases, one should be careful to preserve the quality of one’s prayer, so that one not be carried away by a preoccupation with the physical into fruitless, and even harmful, quantity. The bows warm up the body and somewhat exhaust it, and this condition facilitates attention and compunction.

But let us be watchful, very watchful; quantity, useful as it is when accompanied by the proper frame of mind and the proper objective, can be just as harmful when it leads to a preoccupation with the physical. The fruits of physical preoccupation are conceit, self-assurance, and spiritual arrogance: in a word, pride in its various forms, all of which are easy prey to spiritual deception. The fruits of spiritual ardor are repen-

tance, humility, weeping and tears. The rule of prostrations is best observed before going to sleep: then, after the cares of the day have passed, it can be practiced longer and with greater concentration. But in the morning and during the day it is also useful, especially for the young, to practice prostrations moderately—from twelve to twenty bows. Prostrations stimulate a prayerful state of the mind and mortify the body as well as support and strengthen fervor in prayer.

These suggestions are, I believe, sufficient for the beginner who is eager to acquire the Jesus Prayer. “Prayer,” said the divine St. Meletius the Confessor, “needs no teacher. It requires diligence, effort and personal ardor, and then God will be its teacher.” The Holy Fathers, who have written many works on prayer in order to impart correct notions and faithful guidance to those desiring to practice it, propose and decree that one must engage in it actively in order to gain experiential knowledge, without which verbal instruction, though derived from experience, is dead, opaque, incomprehensible and totally inadequate. Conversely, he who is carefully practicing prayer and who is already advanced in it, should refer often to the writings of the Holy Fathers about prayer in order to check and properly direct himself, remembering that even the great Paul, though possessing the highest of all testimonies for his Gospel—that of the Holy Spirit—nevertheless went to Jerusalem where he communicated to the apostles who had gathered there the Gospel that he preached to the gentiles, lest by any means, as he said, I should run, or had run, in vain (Gal. 2:2).



We should not desire the death of a sinner, but his repentance. Nothing grieves the Lord, Who suffered on the Cross for sinners, more than when we pray to Him for the death of a sinner to remove him from our path. It happened that the Apostle Carpus lost his patience and began to pray that God send down death upon two sinful men, one a pagan and the other an apostate from the Faith. Then the Lord Christ Himself appeared to Carpus and said: “Strike me; I am prepared to be crucified again for the salvation of mankind.” St. Carpus related this event to St. Dionysius the Areopagite, and he wrote it down and gave it to the Church as a lesson to all, that prayers are needed for sinners to be saved and not for them to be destroyed. *For the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9).

Οἱ Ἅγιοι καὶ ἡ Ἑλληνορθόδοξη Παράδοση τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας

Τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Χολέβα, πολιτικοῦ ἐπιστήμονος, ἀπὸ ὀμιλία του στὰ Πολυκάρπεια τῶν Σερρών (26 Φεβρ. 2005).

Ἄν εἶμαι Μικρασιάτης. Εἶμαι Μακεδὼν μὲ γηγενεῖς καταβολές καὶ εἶμαι ὑπερήφανος γιὰ τὴν καταγωγή μου. Ὅμως αἰσθάνομαι ὅτι ἐμεῖς οἱ Μακεδόνες ὀφείλομε πολλά στοὺς Μικρασιάτες· ἦλθαν διωγμένοι, ταλαιπωρημένοι, ξεριζωμένοι μετὰ τὸ 1922, καὶ ἀναζωογόνησαν πνευματικὰ καὶ οἰκονομικὰ τὸν χῶρο τῆς Βορείου Ἑλλάδος. Μᾶς ἔφεραν τὰ λείψανα τῶν Ἁγίων τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, πολλὰ ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων φυλάσσονται σήμερα στὴν Μακεδονικὴ γῆ. Καὶ μαζὶ μὲ αὐτὴ τὴν ἱερά παρακαταθήκη, μᾶς ἔφεραν τὰ Ἑλληνορθόδοξα ἔθιμά τους καὶ τὴν βαθειὰ ριζωμένη Ὀρθόδοξη πίστη τους. Ἄς εὐχηθούμε οἱ Ἅγιοι τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας νὰ εὐλογοῦν καὶ σήμερα τὰ παιδιά καὶ τὰ ἐγγόνια τῶν προσφύγων, νὰ τὰ καθοδηγοῦν σὲ ἔργα εἰρηνικὰ καὶ δημιουργικὰ καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐμπνέουν πάντα νὰ μὴν ξεχνοῦν τίς ἀλησμόνητες πατρίδες τους.

Ποῖα εἶναι ἡ Μικρὰ Ἀσία καὶ ποιὲς εἶναι οἱ Ἑλληνορθόδοξοι ρίζες της; Γράφει σχετικὰ στὸ περιοδικό «Ἐκκλησία» τοῦ Δεκεμβρίου 2002 ὁ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτης Καισαριανῆς κ. Δανιήλ: «Ὡς Μικρὰν Ἀσίαν γνωρίζομεν τὴν γῆν τῶν πατέρων μας, ἡ ὁποία γεωγραφικῶς εἶναι μία μεγάλη χερσόνησος τῆς Ἠπείρου τῆς Ἀσίας. Περιβάλλεται ἀπὸ τὸν Εὐξείνιον Πόντον καὶ τὴν Προποντίδα, τὸ Αἰγαῖον Πέλαγος καὶ τὴν Μεσόγειον Θάλασσαν καὶ ἀνατολικῶς ἐκτείνεται ἕως τῶν ποταμῶν Τίγρητος καὶ Εὐφράτου. Συνορεύει μὲ τρεῖς Ἠπειρούς, τὴν Εὐρώπην, τὴν Ἀσίαν καὶ τὴν Ἀφρικὴν. ἔχει δὲ ἑκτασὶν 530.000 τετραγωνικῶν χιλιομέτρων. Τὴν Ἑλληνικότητα αὐτῆς μαρτυροῦν τὰ ἑρείπια τῶν 356 Ἑλληνικῶν Πόλεων, αἱ ὁποῖαι καθιστοῦν φανερόν τὸ εὖρος τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ εἰς τὴν Μικρὰν Ἀσίαν.

Εἰς τὴν Λυκίαν, Παμφυλίαν καὶ τὴν Πισιδίαν, 95 πόλεις· εἰς τὴν Λυκαονίαν, Ἰσαυρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν, 82 πόλεις· εἰς τὴν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατίαν, 61 πόλεις· εἰς τὴν Βιθυνίαν, Παφλαγονίαν καὶ Πόντον, 34 πόλεις· εἰς τὴν Ἰωνίαν, Λυδίαν καὶ Καρίαν, 84 πόλεις. Συνολικῶς ἔχουν καταγραφεῖ 7.000 οἰκισμοὶ μὲ Ἑλληνικὰ ὀνόματα καθ' ἅπασαν τὴν Μικρὰν Ἀσίαν. Εἰς τὴν Μικρὰν Ἀσίαν κατὰ τὸ 1922 ὑπῆρχαν 20 Ἱεραὶ Μητροπόλεις. Αἱ Νικομηδείας, Χαλκηδόνος, Προύσσης, Ἡλιουπόλεως, Θυατείρων, Ἐφέσου, Νικαίας, Κρήνης (Τσεσμέ), Προικονήσου, Κυδωνίων, Φιλαδελφείας, Πισιδίας, Ἰκονίου, Καισαρείας, Ἀγκύρας, Ἀμασειας, Νεοκαισαρείας, Χαλδαίας, Κυζίκου-Δαρδανελλίων».

Οἱ Χριστιανικὲς καταβολές τῆς Μικρασιατικῆς γῆς ἀποδεικνύονται ἀπὸ τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν 7 Ἐκκλησιῶν τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως τοῦ Ἰωάννου (Ἐφεσος, Σμύρνη, Πέργαμος, Λαοδικεῖα, Σάρδεις, Φιλαδέλφεια, Θυάτειρα) καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἵδρυση Χριστιανικῶν κοινοτήτων ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Ἀπόστολο Παῦλο. Μεγάλαις Οἰκουμενικῆς Σύνοδοι ἔλαβαν

χώρα στὴν Μικρασιατικὴ γῆ καὶ συγκεκριμένα τὸ 325 μ.Χ. στὴ Νίκαια, τὸ 451 μ.Χ. στὴν Χαλκηδόνα.

Τὴν γῆ αὐτὴ ἀγίασαν μὲ τὸ αἷμα τους ἢ μὲ τὸν ὀσιακό βίον τους καὶ τὴν διδασκαλία τους μεγάλης μορφῆς τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας. Ἦδη ἀπὸ τὸν 2^ο μ.Χ. αἰῶνα, ἡ Ἑλληνοκατοικημένη Μικρὰ Ἀσία γίνεται τόπος μαρτυρίου γιὰ πολλοὺς Χριστιανοὺς πού κατεδιώκοντο ἀπὸ τὴν εἰδωλολατρικὴ Ρωμαϊκὴ ἐξουσία. Κορυφαῖος μετὰξὺ αὐτῶν ὁ Ἅγιος Πολύκαρπος, Ἐπίσκοπος Σμύρνης, τοῦ ὁποίου τὸ μαρτύριο τοποθετεῖται μετὰξὺ τοῦ 156 μ.Χ. καὶ τοῦ 168 μ.Χ. Ἀπὸ τὸν 3^ο τόμο τῆς Βιβλιοθήκης Ἑλλήνων Πατέρων καὶ Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συγγραφέων (ΒΕΠΕΣ) καταγράφουμε τίς τελευταῖες στιγμὲς του:

Ὅχλος ἀντιχρίστων ὠρύεται τὴν ὄρα πού δικάζει τὸν Ἅγιο ὁ Ἀνθύπατος Στάτιος Κοδράτος. Ζητοῦν τὴν θανάτωση τοῦ Πολυκάρπου. Τὴν στιγμή ἐκείνη φωνὴ Κυρίου ἀκούεται ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ ἐνθαρρύνει τὸν ὑπερήλικα Ἐπίσκοπο. «Ἰσχυε, Πολυκαρπε καὶ ἀνδρίζου». Ὁ Ἀνθύπατος τοῦ ζητεῖ νὰ ἀπαρνηθῇ τὸν Χριστὸ γιὰ νὰ σώσῃ τὴν ζωὴ του. Καὶ ὁ «πανυγηραλέος» Ἐπίσκοπος τοῦ ἀπαντᾷ: «Ὅγδοῖκοντα καὶ ἕξ ἔτη δουλεύω αὐτῷ καὶ οὐδὲν μὲ ἠδίκησεν, καὶ πῶς δύναμαι βλασφημηῆσαι τὸν Βασιλέα μου, τὸν σόσαντά με». Ὁ Ἀνθύπατος τὸν φοβερίζει ὅτι θὰ τὸν ρίξῃ στὴν φωτιά. Ἦρμος ὁ Ἅγιος ἀπαντᾷ: «Μὲ φοβερίζεις μὲ τὴ φωτιά, πού ἀνάβει γιὰ μιὰ στιγμή καὶ σβῆνει. Δὲν ξέρεις τὴν φωτιά τῆς μέλλουσας κρίσης καὶ τῆς αἰωνίου κολάσεως πού περιμένει τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς. Κάνε αὐτὸ πού θέλεις! Μὴν ἀργεῖς!».

Ὁ Ἀνθύπατος ἐξοργισμένος ἀπὸ τὴν θαρραλέα ἀπάντηση τοῦ Πολυκάρπου προστάζει τὸν κήρυκα καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἐρεθίζει τὰ πλήθη πού ξεχύνονται, μαζεύουν ξύλα, ἀνάβουν φωτιά. Δένουν τὰ χέρια τοῦ σεβασμίου γέροντος καὶ τὸν ρίχνουν στὴ πυρὰ. Τότε γίνεται τὸ θαῦμα! Οἱ φλόγες τῆς φωτιᾶς κάνουν καμπύλες, παρακάμπτουν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Πολυκάρπου. Ὁ Ἀνθύπατος ἀπορεῖ, φοβᾶται. Καταλαβαίνει τὴν μεγάλη προσβολὴ πού τὸν περιμένει καὶ διατάσσει τοὺς στρατιῶτες νὰ τρυπήσουν μὲ τὰ ξίφη τους τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἁγίου. Ἀπὸ τὸ αἷμα του σβῆνει ἡ φωτιά. Ἀλλὰ ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου ἤδη ἔχει ἀνέβει στὸν οὐρανὸ. Καὶ τὸ νεκρὸ σῶμα, ὁμως, τὸ φοβοῦνται οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Ἀνθύπατος προστάζει νὰ τὸ κάψουν. Κάποιοι θαρραλεοὶ Χριστιανοὶ ἔτρεξαν καὶ πρόλαβαν νὰ συλλέξουν μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ λείψανα τοῦ Ἁγίου, τὰ ὁποῖα διασώζονται μέχρι σήμερα καὶ θαυματουργοῦν. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας τιμᾷ τὴν μνήμη του στίς 23 Φεβρουαρίου.

Μικρὰ Ἀσία εἶναι καὶ ὁ Πόντος. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀξίζει νὰ στρέψουμε τὸ νοῦ μας στὴν ἱερά μνήμη τοῦ Ἁγίου Εὐγενίου τοῦ Τραπεζουντίου, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐμαρτύρησε στίς 21 Ἰανουαρίου 292 μ.Χ. μὲ διαταγὴ τοῦ τοπικοῦ ἄρχοντος Λυσία. Ἡ τιμὴ του

καθιερώθηκε επί των Αυτοκρατόρων Μεγάλων Κομνηνῶν και έτιμᾶτο στην Τραπεζοῦντα ὅπως έτιμᾶτο και ὁ Ἅγιος Δημήτριος Θεσσαλονίκης. Ὁ ναός του στὸν ὁμώνυμο λόφο ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ τείχη περιείχε τὸ σπήλαιο ὅπου συνελήφθη ἀπὸ τοὺς δημίους του. Τὸ σπήλαιο ἀνεκαλύφθη στοὺς νεωτέρους χρόνους (1898 μ.Χ.) ἀπὸ τὸν λόγιο ἐκπαιδευτικό Ματθαῖο Παρανίκα μέσα σὲ καπνοχώραφα. Τὰ χαριτόβρυτα ἱαματικά λειψανά του προσκυνοῦνταν ἀπὸ τὸν λαό, ἀλλὰ και ἀπὸ εὐσεβεῖς αὐτοκράτορες ὅπως ὁ Βασίλειος Β΄. Τὸ μαρτύριο τοῦ Ἁγίου Εὐγενίου ἔγραψε τὸν ΙΑ΄ αἰῶνα ὁ Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Ἰωάννης ὁ Ξιφιλῖνος, μαζί με τὸ μαρτύριο τῶν Ἁγίων Κανιδίου, Οὐαλεριανοῦ και Ἀκύλα, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀποκεφαλίσθηκαν τὴν ἴδια ἡμέρα με τὸν Εὐγένιο.

Κάθε Μάρτιο, μέσα σὲ τέσσερις ἡμέρες, τιμοῦμε τὴ μνήμη πολλῶν Μικρασιατῶν μαρτύρων. Στὶς 9 Μαρτίου τιμοῦμε τοὺς 40 μάρτυρες τῆς Σεβαστείας ποὺ θανατώθηκαν μέσα στὰ παγωμένα νερά τῆς λίμνης ἐπὶ αὐτοκράτορος Λικινίου. Ὅμως στὶς 6 Μαρτίου τιμοῦμε τοὺς 42 μάρτυρες τοὺς ἐν Ἀμορίῳ. Θὰ μείνουμε λίγο περισσότερο στὴν ἱστορία τους, διότι ἀποτελεῖ τὸ προοίμιο τῶν νεομαρτύρων τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας. Δὲν θανατώθηκαν ἀπὸ Ρωμαίους εἰδωλολάτρες, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ Ἄραβες Μουσουλμάνους τὸ 845 μ.Χ. Ἦσαν ἀξιωματικοὶ τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ στρατοῦ στὴν πόλη Ἀμόριο, ἡ ὁποία ὑπῆρξε και γενέτειρα Βυζαντινῶν αὐτοκρατόρων. Τὸ 838 μ.Χ. οἱ Σαρακηνοὶ Ἄραβες κατέλαβαν τὴν πόλη κι ἔσφαξαν 4.000 Χριστιανούς. Οἱ 42 ἀξιωματικοὶ κρατήθηκαν ἐπὶ 7 χρόνια στὴ φυλακὴ και ἐπέζοντο συνεχῶς νὰ ἀλλαξοπιστήσουν. Ὅπως μᾶς διηγεῖται τὸ κείμενο τοῦ μοναχοῦ Εὐωδίου, οἱ 42 φυλακισμένοι ἔψαλλαν συνεχῶς τὸν Ψαλμὸ τοῦ Δαυὶδ «οὐ μὴ ἀποστῶμεν ἀπὸ σοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔνεκεν σοῦ θανατούμεθα ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν». Οἱ φύλακες τοὺς ἐχλεύαζαν λέγοντας ὅτι τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη μία γυναίκα κυβερνοῦσε τὸ Βυζάντιο: «Γυνὴ γάρ τῆς Ρωμανίας σήμερον βασιλεύει». Παρὰ τὶς πιέσεις, οἱ στρατιωτικοὶ αὐτοὶ ἔμειναν πιστοὶ και στὴν Πίστη και στὴν Πατρίδα και τελικῶς θανατώθηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀλλόθρησκους κατακτητὲς τῆς πόλεως. Ὁ προαναφερθεὶς Εὐωδῖος τοὺς ὀνομάζει «τρिसαριστεῖς», δηλαδὴ ἀριστεύσαντες τρεῖς φορές. Πρῶτον διότι δὲν προσεχώρησαν στὴν εἰκονομαχία, δεύτερον διότι ἔμειναν πιστοὶ στὸν Χριστὸ και τρίτον διότι δὲν πρόδωσαν τὴν πατρίδα τους. Βλέπουμε ἤδη τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη νὰ διαμορφώνεται ἡ σταθερὴ Ἑλληνορθόδοξη ἀντίληψη ὅτι ὅποιος ἐγκαταλείπει τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία—ἐκουσίως ἢ διὰ τῆς βίας—χάνεται και γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό. Μία ἀντίληψη ποὺ ἔγινε πλέον βίωμα και συνείδηση στοὺς Ρωμηοὺς ἐπὶ Τουρκοκρατίας σὲ ὅλα τὰ ὑπόδουλα Ἑλληνικὰ ἐδάφη και περισσότερο στὴν Μικρὰ Ἀσία.

Κεντρικὴ θέση, κυριολεκτικὰ και μεταφορικὰ, στὴν Μικρασιατικὴ γεωγραφία και ἱστορία κατέχει ἡ Καππαδοκία. Ἐκεῖ γεννήθηκαν ἢ ἔδρασαν σπουδαῖες μορφὲς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅπως ἡ Ἁγία Νίνα ποὺ ἐκχριστιάνισε τὴν Γεωργία τοῦ Καυκάσου, ὁ Ἅγιος Θεοδόσιος ὁ Κοινοβιάρχης, ὁ Ἅγιος Γεώργιος ὁ Τροπαιοφόρος, ὁ ὁποῖος γεννήθηκε στὴν Καππαδοκία και

μαρτύρησε στὰ τέλη τοῦ 3^{ου} αἰῶνος μ.Χ. στὴν Παλαιστίνη, ἡ Ἁγία Εἰρήνη Χρυσοβαλάντου, ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀμφιλόχιος Ἰκονίου, ὁ Ἅγιος Βλάσιος, ὁ Ἅγιος Ζήνων, και πολλοὶ ἄλλοι. Ἀπὸ τὸν 7^ο αἰῶνα μ.Χ., ἡ Καππαδοκία καθίσταται μεγάλο κέντρο μοναχισμοῦ και ἀσκήσεως. Στὴν κοιλάδα τῶν Κοράμων—σημερινὸ Γκιόρεμε—βλέπει ὁ σύγχρονος ἐπισκέπτης τὶς τρύπες και τὶς σπηλιές ποὺ προσέφερε ἡ ἰδιόμορφη γεωλογικὴ διαμόρφωση γιὰ τὴν ἀσφαλῆ ἐγκαταβίωση τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων ἀσκητῶν. Γιὰ τὸ Ἑλληνορθόδοξο Βυζαντινὸ κράτος, τὴν Ρωμανία ὅπως τὸ ἀναφέρουν τὰ κείμενα τῆς ἐποχῆς, ἡ Καππαδοκία ἦταν ἀκριτικὴ, μεθοριακὴ, περιοχὴ και ἐπὶ αἰῶνες δεχόταν τὰ πρῶτα κύματα τῶν Ἀραβικῶν ἐπιθέσεων. Ἐκεῖ γεννήθηκε ὁ θρύλος τοῦ Διγενῆ Ἀκρίτα και ὁ κύκλος τῆς ἀκριτικῆς ἐπικῆς ποιήσεως.

Ἡ κορυφαία πάντως στιγμή τῆς Καππαδοκίας ἦταν ὁ Δ΄ αἰῶνας μ.Χ., ὅταν γεννήθηκαν και ἀνδρώθηκαν ἐκεῖ τρεῖς διακεκριμένοι Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος, Ἐπίσκοπος Καισαρείας, ὁ ἀδελφός του Γρηγόριος, Ἐπίσκοπος Νύσσης, και ὁ Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος ἀπὸ τὴν Ναζιανζό, ποὺ ἀνεδείχθη Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Σήμερα οἱ μελετητὲς τοῦ συγγραφικοῦ ἔργου τους τοὺς θεωροῦν, μαζί με τὸν Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Χρυσόστομο ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν Ἀντιόχεια τῆς τότε Ἑλληνιστικῆς Συρίας, ὡς τοὺς Χριστιανούς Πατέρες, οἱ ὁποῖοι τόνισαν τὴν ἀξία τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς παιδείας και βοήθησαν στὴν δημιουργικὴ συνάντηση Χριστιανισμοῦ και Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Χαρακτηριστικὴ εἶναι ἡ προτροπὴ τοῦ Βασιλείου στοὺς νέους νὰ μελετοῦν τὰ ἀρχαῖα κείμενα, ὅπως ἀναλύεται στὴν ἐπιστολὴ του «Πρὸς τοὺς νέους ὅπως ἂν ἐξ Ἑλληνικῶν ὠφελοῖντο λόγων». Ἐπίσης, ἔχει μείνει κλασσικὴ ἡ ἀκόλουθη φράση τοῦ Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐπιτάφιό του πρὸς τὸν Μέγα Βασίλειο, ὅπου τονίζει τὴν ἀξία τῆς μορφώσεως ὄχι μόνο με τὰ Χριστιανικὰ κείμενα ἀλλὰ και με τὰ «ἔξωθεν», δηλαδὴ τὰ ἀρχαιοελληνικά. «Οἶμαι πᾶσιν ἀνωμολογηθῆσαι τῶν νοῦν ἐχόντων, παιδευσιν τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν εἶναι τὸ πρῶτον· οὐ ταύτην μόνην τὴν εὐγενεστέραν και ἡμετέραν... ἀλλὰ και τὴν ἔξωθεν»!

Αὐτὴ τὴν παράδοση τῆς Ἑλληνορθόδοξης παιδείας διετήρησε ἡ Μικρὰ Ἀσία μέχρι τὴν καταστροφὴ τοῦ 1922. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὴ ἡ σύσταση τοῦ τότε Μητροπολίτου Σμύρνης και μετέπειτα Ἁγίου Ἐθνομάρτυρος Πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Γρηγορίου Ε΄, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔγραφε τὸ 1819 πρὸς τὰ σχολεῖα τῆς Σμύρνης: «Οἱ διδάσκαλοι νὰ ἀναδεικνύωσιν τοὺς μαθητιῶντας Χριστιανούς Ἑλληνίζοντας τὰς φράσεις και Ἑλληνας Χριστιανίζοντας τὰ δόγματα, τὰ ἦθη και τοὺς τρόπους». Μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐκπαιδευτικὸ ἰδεῶδες, Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα και γραμματεία, Χριστιανικὴ Πίστη και ἠθικὴ, ἐπιβίωσαμε ἐπὶ αἰῶνες κάτω ἀπὸ ποικίλες δουλεῖες. Μήπως σήμερα ποὺ εἴμαστε ἐθνικῶς ἐλεύθεροι κινδυνεύουμε νὰ χάσουμε τὴν ταυτότητά μας ἀπεμπολῶντας τὴν Ἑλληνορθόδοξη παράδοση στὸ ὄνομα ἀμφιβόλων και ξενόφερτων διῆθεν «προοδευτισμῶν»;

Ὁ Μικρασιατικός Ἑλληνισμός διετήρησε τὴν ταυτότητά του μέσω τῆς Ἐκκλησίας του. Στὴν Καππαδοκία ἐπὶ Τουρκοκρατίας, 18 Ἑλληνικά χωριά γύρω ἀπὸ τὰ Φάρασα ἀναγκάσθηκαν νὰ τουρκοφωνήσουν, ἀλλὰ ἀποφάσισαν νὰ κρατήσουν τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Πίστη. Μιλοῦσαν τουρκικά καὶ ἡ μόνη τους ἐπαφή μετὰ τὴν γλῶσσα τῶν πατέρων τους ἦταν ἐπὶ αἰῶνες ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία, ἡ ὁποία ἐτελεῖτο στὰ Ἑλληνικά. Οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι τουρκόφωνοι Καππαδόκες, γνωστοὶ ὡς καραμανλήδες, διέσωσαν τὴν ἐθνικὴ τους συνείδηση χάρις στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Χαρακτηριστικὸ παράδειγμα ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀρσένιος ἐκ Φαράσων, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐκοιμήθη τὸ 1924, σαράντα ἡμέρες μετὰ τὴν ἀναγκαστικὴ ἀφιξὴ του στὴν Ἑλλάδα.

Τὴν χορεία τῶν Ἁγίων τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας συμπληρώνουν οἱ Ἐθνοϊερομάρτυρες Ἐπίσκοποι ποὺ μαρτύρησαν τὸ 1922, ἀρνούμενοι νὰ ἐγκαταλείψουν τὸ ποίμνιό τους. Δηλαδή ὁ Σμύρνης Χρυσόστομος, ὁ Κυδωνίων Γρηγόριος, ὁ Μοσχονησιῶν Ἀμβρόσιος, ὁ Ἰκονίου Προκόπιος, καὶ ὁ Ζήλων Εὐθύμιος, ὁ ἥρωας τοῦ Ποντιακοῦ ἀγῶνος. Ἀπὸ τουρκόφωνους Ἑλληνες Μικρασιάτες τοῦ Ἰκονίου γεννήθηκε ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος Γρεβενῶν Αἰμιλιανὸς Λαζαρίδης, ὁ ὁποῖος φονεύθηκε τὸ 1911 ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ Γρεβενὰ στὸ πλαίσιο τοῦ Μακεδονικοῦ Ἀγῶνος.

Ἐμεῖς σήμερα πρέπει μετὰ κάθε εὐκαιρία νὰ τιμοῦμε τοὺς Ἁγίους καὶ τὴν παράδοση τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ τοῦ Πόντου. Δηλώνουμε δὲ πρὸς κάθε κατεύθυνση ὅτι ἐπιθυμοῦμε τὴν εἰρήνη, ὄχι ὅμως εἰς βάρος τῆς ἱστορικῆς ἀληθείας. Ζητοῦμε τὴν πλήρη ἀναγνώριση τῆς Μικρασιατικῆς καὶ Ποντιακῆς γενοκτονίας καὶ τραγουδοῦμε τὸν ποντιακὸ θρῆνο τῆς Ἀλώσεως ποὺ μᾶς διδάσκει ὅτι: «Ἡ Ρωμανία κι ἂν πέρασε, ἀνθεὶ καὶ φέρει κι ἄλλο». Γένοιτο!



Παλαιότερα τὸ λίγο κακὸ πνιγόταν στὸ πολὺ καλό. Σήμερα τὸ πολὺ κακὸ πνίγει τὸ λίγο καλό. Αὐτὸς ποὺ ἀνεβαίνει πνευματικὰ δὲν ὠφελεῖ μόνο τῶν ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ποὺ τὸν βλέπουν. Σήμερα ὁ Θεὸς μέσα στοὺς τόσους κινδύνους μᾶς φυλάει, ὅπως ἡ μάνα τὸ μικρό, ὅταν ἀρχίζει νὰ περπατᾷ. Φαρμάκι γενομάστε ὅταν ζοῦμε μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν γλυκὺ Ἰησοῦ.

Ὅταν ἀγωνιζόμαστε σωστά, ἀλλὰ δὲν βλέπουμε καμιά πρόοδο, συμβαίνει μερικὲς φορές τὸ ἔξης: Ὁ δαίμονας, ἐπειδὴ τοῦ κηρύξαμε πόλεμο, ζήτησε τὴν ἐνίσχυση ἀπὸ τὸν σατανᾶ. Ἔτσι, ἐὰν πέρυσι πολεμούσαμε μετὰ ἕναν δαίμονα, ἐφέτος πολεμοῦμε μετὰ πενήντα, τοῦ χρόνου θὰ πολεμοῦμε μετὰ περισσότερους κ.ο.κ. Αὐτὸ δὲν ἐπιτρέπει ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τὸ δοῦμε, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ὑπερηφανευθοῦμε. Χωρὶς ἔμεῖς νὰ τὸ καταλαβαίνουμε, ὁ Θεὸς ἐργάζεται στὴν ψυχὴ μας, ὅταν βλέπει καλὴ διάθεση!

Γέροντας Παῖσιος

Νηστεία—Ἡ Θύρα Τοῦ Παραδείσου

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ὁ Δρόμος τῶν Ἀσκητῶν» τοῦ Τίτου Κολλιάντερ

Ἡ νηστεία ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ὑπερβολικὴ, ἀλλὰ ἀνάλογη μὲ τὴν δύναμει σου, μπορεῖ νὰ σε βοηθήσει στὴν ἐργήγορσή σου. Μὲ παραγεμισμένο τὸ στομάχι δὲν μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ σκέφτεται τὰ θεῖα πράγματα, λένε οἱ ἄσκητές. Γι' αὐτὸν ποὺ καλοτρῶει, μένουν καὶ τὰ πιὸ προσιτὰ μυστήρια τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδας κρυμμένα. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κύριος μᾶς ἔδωσε τὸ παράδειγμα μετὰ τὴ μεγάλη νηστεία. Ὅταν ἔδιωξε τὸν νικημένο διάβολο ἀπὸ μπροστά του, εἶχε νηστεύει σαράντα μέρες καὶ σαράντα νύχτες. Καὶ ἂν ὁ Κύριος αἰσθάνθηκε τὴν ἀνάγκη τῆς νηστείας, πόσο πιὸ πολὺ πρέπει νὰ τὴν αἰσθανόμαστε εμεῖς; «Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄγγελοι προσήλθον καὶ δικήνουν αὐτῷ» (Ματθ. δ' 11). Τὸ ἴδιο περιμένουν καὶ ἀπὸ σένα γιὰ νὰ σε ὑπηρετήσουν.

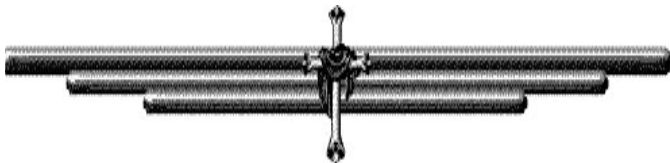
Ἡ νηστεία περιορίζει τὴν πολυλογία, λέει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κλίμακας. Εἶναι θύρα ἐλέους. Διώχνει τὴν κακὴν σκέψιν καὶ ξεριζώνει τὴν ἀναισθησία τῆς καρδιάς. Ἡ νηστεία εἶναι θύρα τοῦ Παραδείσου. Ὅταν τὸ στομάχι περιορίζεται καὶ στενοχωρεῖται μετὰ τὴ νηστεία, τότε ταπεινώνεται καὶ ἡ καρδιά. Ὅποιος νηστεύει προσεύχεται μετὰ νηφιαλότητα. Οἱ ἀσυγκράτητες καὶ ἀχαλίνωτες αἰσθήσεις, ὅταν ἐνισχύονται μετὰ ὑπερβολικὴ τροφή, προκαλοῦν ἁμαρτωλὲς καὶ ἐμπαθεῖς σκέψεις καὶ ἐπιθυμίες.

Ἡ νηστεία εἶναι ἔκφραση ἀγάπης καὶ ἀφοσίωσης. Θυσιάζει κανεὶς τὴν γήινε ἀπολαύσει, γιὰ νὰ πετύχει τὴν οὐράνιε. Πάρα πολλές μας σκέψεις δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ φροντίδες γιὰ τὸ τί θὰ φᾶμε καὶ δολώματα τῆς λαίμαργίας μας. Ἡ νηστεία, ὅμως, ἂν θέλουμε νὰ ἀπελευθερωθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴ σάρκα καὶ τὰ πάθη τῆς, ἀποτελεῖ ἕνα κατάλληλο ὁδηγὸ γιὰ μιὰ πραγματικὴ ἀπελευθέρωση καὶ μιὰ ἀπαραίτητη ὑποστήριξη στὸν ἀγῶνα κατὰ τῶν ἐμπαθῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν. Ἡ νηστεία, σὲ συνδυασμὸ μετὰ τὴν προσευχὴ, εἶναι ἕνα ἀπὸ τὰ μεγάλα δῶρα, ποὺ τὰ διατηροῦν μετὰ ἐπιμέλεια, ὅσοι γευτήκαν κάποτε ἔστω καὶ γιὰ λίγο τὴ γλυκύτητά τους καὶ ἔνωσαν τὴν ἀξία τους.

Μετὰ τὴ νηστεία μεγαλώνει ἡ εὐγνωμοσύνη πρὸς Ἐκεῖνον, ποὺ ἔδωσε στὸν ἄνθρωπο τὴ δύναμη νὰ νηστεύη. Ἡ νηστεία βοηθεῖ στὴν κατάκτηση τῆς περιοχῆς ἐκείνης, ποὺ μόνο μετὰ τὴ διαίσθηση νιώθει κανεὶς ὅτι ὑπάρχει. Οἱ ἐκδηλώσεις τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὅλα τὰ φαινόμενα γύρω σου καὶ μέσα σου ἀποκοῦν ἕνα καινούργιο νόημα καὶ οἱ στιγμὲς ποὺ περνοῦν ἕνα μεγάλο, πλούσιο καὶ καταπληκτικὸ περιεχόμενο. Ἡ ἐργήγορση τῆς «ιερᾶς θεωρίας» γίνεται διαυγής. Ἡ ἀνήσυχη ἐκζήτηση μεταβάλλεται σὲ ἡρεμὴ, ταπεινὴ καὶ γεμάτη εὐγνωμοσύνη ἀποδοχῆ τῶν θεῶν δωρεῶν. Προβλήματα φαινομενικὰ ἄλυτα καὶ βασανιστικὰ ἀνοίγουν τὸν πυρῆνα τους σάν ὄριμοι κάλυκες λουλουδιῶν. Μόνο μετὰ συνοδεία τὴν προσευχὴ, τὴ νηστεία καὶ τὴν ἐργήγορση πρέπει κανεὶς νὰ χτυπή τὴν πόρτα ποὺ εὐχεται νὰ διῆ κάποτε ἀνοιχτή.

Στο σημείο αυτό βλέπουμε τὸν λόγο γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο ἡ νηστεία χρησιμεύει σὰν μέτρο γιὰ τοὺς ἁγίους πατέρες. Αὐτὸς ποὺ νηστεύει πολὺ, ἀγαπάει πολὺ. Καὶ ὅποιος ἀγαπάει πολὺ τοῦ συγχωροῦνται οἱ πολλὲς ἁμαρτίες του (Λουκᾶ ζ' 47).

Οἱ ἅγιοι πατέρες συνιστοῦν μετρημένη νηστεία. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀφήνουμε τὸ σῶμα μας νὰ ἀδυνατίσει παρὰ πολὺ, γιατί τότε βλάπτεται καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ. Οὔτε ἐπίσης μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ νηστεύῃ ἔτσι στὰ ξαφνικά. Τὸ κάθετι ἀπαταιεῖ ἄσκηση καὶ ὁ καθένας ὀφείλει νὰ δοκιμάζῃ τὸν ἑαυτό του, ἔχοντας ὑπόψη του τὴ φύση του καὶ τὴ δουλειά του. Δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ νὰ ξεχωρίζῃ κανεὶς τὶς τροφές σὲ ἀπαγορευμένες καὶ ἐπιτρεπόμενες. Ὅλες τὶς τροφές τὶς δίνει ὁ Θεός. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ μπορούμε νὰ ποῦμε, εἶναι ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ἀποφεύγονται ἐκεῖνες ποὺ κάνουν βαρὺ καὶ δυσκίνητο τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἀνάβουν τὶς κατώτερες ὀρέξεις του. Ἀκριβῶς μάλιστα αὐτὲς καθορίζουν οἱ κανόνες πὼς πρέπει νὰ ἀποφεύγονται. Ἰσχυρὰ μπαχαρικά, κρέατα, οἶνοπνευματώδη ποτὰ καὶ τὰ παρόμοια, ποὺ σκοπὸ τους ἔχουν νὰ ἱκανοποιήσουν τὸ φάρυγγα καὶ ὄχι νὰ συντελέσουν στὴ διατροφή τοῦ σώματος, πρέπει νὰ ἀποφεύγονται. Ἡ σημασία τοῦ “μέτρου” ὅμως δὲν ἀναφέρεται μόνο στὴν ποιότητα ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ποσότητα. Ἔστω καὶ ἂν πρόκειται γιὰ ὄχι τόσο ἰσχυρὲς τροφές, δὲν πρέπει νὰ τρώῃ κανεὶς μέχρι «διαρρήξεως τοῦ στομάχου». Τότε καταλύεται τὸ νόημα τῆς νηστείας. Ἡ λαιμαργία ἀλλάζει ἀπλούστατα ὑλικά γιὰ τὸν κορεσμό της.



Καλὸ εἶναι νὰ ὑπάρχεις, ἀλλὰ νὰ ζῆς εἶναι ἄλλο πρᾶγμα...

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι καταντήσανε σὰν ἄδεια κανάτια, καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ γεμίσουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους, ρίχνοντας μέσα ἓνα σωρὸ σκουπίδια, ἐκθέσεις μὲ τερατουργήματα, μπάλλες, ὀμιλίες καὶ ἀερολογίες, καλλιστεῖα, ποὺ μετριεῖται ἡ ἔμπορική μὲ τὴ μεζούρα, ἠλίθιους καρνάβαλους, συλλόγους λογιῆς-λογιῆς μὲ γεύματα καὶ μὲ σοβαρὲς συζητήσεις γιὰ τὸν ἴσκιό τοῦ γαιδάρου, συνδέσμους ἀφιερωμένους στοὺς ἀποθεωμένους ἄνδρας τῆς Εὐρώπης κι ἓνα σωρὸ ἀλλὰ τέτοια. Αὐτὴ, μὲ μιὰ ματιὰ, εἶναι ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας σήμερα, ποὺ νὰ μὴν ἀβασκαθεῖ! Ποῦ νὰ βρεῖ κανένας καταφύγιο; ... Δόξα στὸν Θεό, ποὺ ὑπάρχει ἀκόμα κάποιο καταφύγιο γιὰ μᾶς ποὺ δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουμε «τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας». Δόξα στὸν Θεό ποὺ ὑπάρχουν ἀκόμα κάποιοι τόποι ποὺ δὲν τοὺς ἐξήρανε αὐτὴ ἡ φυλλοξήρα ποὺ λέγεται σύγχρονος πολιτισμός.

Φώτης Κόντογλου (1895-1965)
Ἄγιολόγος & Λογοτέχνης, Ὁρθόδοξος καὶ Ἕλληνας

Ἕλληνα Ὁρθόδοξε, Μὴ Ξεχνᾶς...

Συμπληρώνονται 86 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴν θλιβερὴ ἡμέρα τῆς δολοφονίας τοῦ Ἰωνος Δραγοῦμη ἀπὸ τὰ τάγματα τοῦ Γύπαρη, τὴν ἡμέρα ποὺ ὁ φρικτὸς κυκλώνας τοῦ Διχασμοῦ παρέσυρε καὶ ἔσβησε μιὰ πραγματικὴ ἐλπίδα γιὰ τὸν τόπο μας. Ἡ πολιτικὴ δολοφονία του πιθανότατα στέρησε τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀπὸ τὸν μοναδικὸ ἄνθρωπο ποὺ θὰ ἀπέτρεπε τὴν Μικρασιατικὴ καταστροφή. Ὁ μεγάλος αὐτὸς ἀγωνιστὴς καὶ ἐπικαιρὸς ὁραματιστὴς τοῦ παγκοσμίου Ἑλληνισμοῦ ζεῖ, ὅμως, ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια παρακαταθήκη ποὺ ἄφησε σὲ ὄλους μας:

Ἕλληνες, ἡ φύτρα σας σὲ γῆς Ἑλληνικῆ γενιέται, ξεφυτρώνει, θεριεύει καὶ φυτρώνει. Γενεές κλεφτῶν ἄς στέκονται παντοτινὰ σκοποὶ ἀκούραστοι στὰ σύνορα γιὰ νὰ φυλάγουν τὰ Ἑλληνικά, τὰ ἀγνὰ χρώματα. Εἶναι ἀνοιγμένοι, τώρα, μπροστὰ στὰ θολωμένα μάτια σας καὶ στὰ μυαλά σας τὰ σκοτισμένα, ἓνας δρόμος ζωῆς καὶ πολέμου. Ἄν θέλετε, πάρτε τὸν. Ἄν δὲν σᾶς ἀρέσει πάλι τοῦτος, βρίσκονται κι ἄλλοι, ἀληθινοὶ κι αὐτοί, δρόμοι ζωῆς καὶ πολέμου. Διαλέξτε καὶ πάρτε. Εἶδεμὴ σαπίσθε ἐκεῖ ποὺ εἴσθε!

(Ἰων Δραγοῦμης, «**Μαρτύρων καὶ Ἡρώων Αἶμα**»)

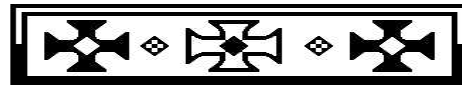
Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ γιατί,

*χρωστᾶμε σ' ὄσους πέρασαν
θάρθουνε, θὰ περάσουν
κριτές θὰ μᾶς δικάσουν
ἀγέννητοι νεκροί...*

(**Κωστῆς Παλαμᾶς**)

Ὅσο γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς «φανατικούς» Ἑλληνορθόδοξους «Ἐθνικιστές», ἐμεῖς θὰ συνεχίσουμε πιστεύουμε ὅτι τὰ διδάγματα τοῦ Δραγοῦμη καὶ τὰ λόγια του Παλαμᾶ εἶναι ἀναγκαῖα σὲ μία περίοδο ποὺ ἡ Βόρειος Ἡπειρος, ἡ Ἰμβρος καὶ ἡ Τένεδος, ἡ Πόλη τῶν πόλεων καὶ πρωτεύουσα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, καὶ ἡ Κύπρος εἶναι ξεχασμένες.

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ κυβέρνησις, ἀνεξαρτήτως κομμάτων, μειοδοτεῖ στὰ ἔθνη καὶ στὰ θρησκευτικὰ θέματα· οἱ παραβιάσεις τοῦ ἑναερίου χώρου καὶ δολοφονίες τῶν πιλότων μας συνεχίζονται, ἐνῶ οἱ διανοούμενοι εἶναι Εὐρωλιγούρηδες καὶ ἡ νεολαία ἀποχαυνώνεται μὲ τὸ MTV καὶ τὶς μοντέρνες θεωρίες «καταπίεσεως», ἀντὶ νὰ μᾶς δίνη Σολωμούς. Ἐλπίζουμε καὶ προσευχόμαστε ὅτι τὰ λόγια μας δὲν θὰ ἀποτελοῦν τὴν συνήθη «φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ»...



Μασῶνοι, λοιπόν, ἀκόμη καὶ μὲ ράσα, ἀγωνίζονται νὰ μᾶς ὀδηγήσουν στὴν “Ἐνωσι τῶν «Ἐκκλησιῶν» καὶ κατόπιν στὴν “Ἐνωσι τῶν Θρησκειῶν». Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμός, κατασκευασμὰ Μασωνικό, ζητεῖ νὰ ἰσοπεδώσῃ ὅλες τὶς θρησκείες, νὰ τὶς ζυμώσῃ μέσα στὸ ἴδιο ζυμωτήρι, γιὰ νὰ ἐτοιμάσῃ σιγὰ-σιγὰ τὴν πάστα τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ἀδιαφορίας, πρόδρομο-σύμπτωμα τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου.

Ἀρχιμ. Χαράλ. Δ. Βασιλόπουλος
«Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς χωρὶς Μάσκα», 1972, σ. 70.

COMFORTING TRUTHS INHERENT IN THE FEAST OF DORMITION

By St. John of Kronstadt



Blessed is God for having granted us this great day, in which from ancient times and with triumphant hymns the universal Church accompanies heavenward into supreme Zion the incorruptible body of the Mother of God together with Her soul, and allows us to take pleasure in the spiritual fragrance of Her indescribable holiness and in all the virtues with

which She was endowed by the Holy Spirit and by the Son of God, Who had issued from Her by taking on human nature! With what tenderness, joy, and piety did the apostles and all the other elect enjoy the wondrous vision of the reposing Theotokos' visage, all shining with heavenly light, and the indescribable heavenly fragrance of Her God-bearing body, and the contemplation of the brightest visage of Her Son and God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who had come to take His holy Mother's soul into His hands! O, this was a celestial vision on earth, never seen before! Even the heavenly angels were visibly present here together with their King and Master.

Only three days did the Most-pure body of the Theotokos, buried by the apostles in Gethsemane, remain in the tomb, only three days did it stay there, and afterwards it was resurrected by the Lord and united with Her soul, and She was taken up together with Her body into heaven. For only three days was She fated to repose in the sleep of death, just as the Lord Himself remained in His tomb for three days and afterwards arose to confirm the universal resurrection of mankind. Death, having been vanquished by the resurrected Christ, became for the faithful a dormition, a passage, a step towards immortality and eternal life, provided we die in faith, repentance, and virtue.

Let us venerate the Most-glorious Mother of God, higher than the heavens and purer than sunlight, Who delivered mankind from its curse, i.e., from God's damnation. But what exactly is God's curse? It is the consequence of God's righteous wrath upon criminal, sinful mankind, so ungrateful to its Creator and Benefactor, for which it had been deprived of God's mercy, eternally rejected from the face of God, condemned to the eternal torment of hell or to eternal death with the fallen angels, the evil spirits. Eve, our foremother, was responsible

for this damnation together with Adam through the sin of disobedience – and even to this day its consequences continue to overshadow sinners who do not know God, their Saviour. But the Theotokos, through Her humility, obedience, meekness, God-like purity, acceptance of the Archangel's tidings, and above all through Her wondrous bearing of the Son of God in Her womb, attracted God's blessing upon the world by giving birth to the Saviour of the world and obtaining the benevolence of the Heavenly Father towards all the faithful. Another consequence of God's damnation of mankind was death, but Christ, the Son of God, Who was born of the Theotokos in flesh, Who suffered and died for the sins of mankind, took upon Himself our damnation, vanquished our death by His death, and removed the curse from us by crucifying our sins on the cross and granting us incorruptibility, resurrection, and immortality.

Such are the comforting truths which the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos brings us: it assures us that Christ the Saviour, born from the Most-pure Virgin Mary, removed from us the curse of our sins and granted to all of us resurrection from the dead on the last day of the world. Is this not comforting for every Christian believer?

And having such an expectation of a general resurrection from the dead, let us try throughout our entire life to become worthy of the glorious resurrection into eternal life by means of constant repentance, battle with our passions and the temptations of the flesh and the world, and strive for success in all virtues, in order to eternally enjoy the infinite, incorruptible, surpassing all understanding, all feeling and all expectation—the blessings of the Heavenly Kingdom, together with God, the Mother of God, the holy angels, and all the saints. Amen.



It is an eternal custom in heaven that those who are lesser should participate through those who are greater, in what lies beyond their existence; and the Virgin Mother is incomparably greater than all. So as many as will share in God will do so through her. All those who know God will know her as the one who holds Him Whom nothing can contain, and all who sing God's praises will hymn her after God. She is the cause of what preceded her, the protectress of what comes after her, and she procures eternity. She is the prophets' theme, the Apostles' starting point, the martyrs' mainstay, and the teachers' foundation. Of all those on earth, she is the glory; of those in heaven, the delight --- the adornment of all Creation. Source, fount and root of ineffable good things, she is the crown and perfection of all the saints.

A LIST OF THE VIRTUES

By St. Peter of Damaskos

The virtues are: moral judgment, self-restraint, courage, justice, faith, hope, love, fear, religious devotion, spiritual knowledge, resolution, strength, understanding, wisdom, contrition, grief, gentleness, searching the Scriptures, acts of charity, purity of heart, peace, patient endurance, self-control, perseverance, probity of intention, purposiveness, sensitivity, heedfulness, godlike stability, warmth, alertness, the fervor of the Spirit, meditation, diligence, watchfulness, mindfulness, reflection, reverence, shame, respect, penitence, refraining from evil, repentance, return to God, allegiance to Christ, rejection of the devil, keeping of the commandments, guarding of the soul, purity of conscience, remembrance of death, tribulation of soul, the doing of good actions, effort, toil, an austere life, fasting, vigils, hunger, thirst, frugality, self-sufficiency, orderliness, gracefulness, modesty, reserve, disdain of money, unacquisitiveness, renunciation of worldly things, submissiveness, obedience, compliance, poverty, possessionlessness, withdrawal from the world, eradication of self-will, denial of self, counsel, magnanimity, devotion to God, stillness, discipline, sleeping on a hard bed, abstinence from washing oneself, service, struggle, attentiveness, the eating of uncooked food, nakedness, the wasting of one's body, solitude, quietude, calmness, cheerfulness, fortitude, boldness, godlike zeal, fervency, progress, folly for Christ, watchfulness over the intellect, moral integrity, holiness, virginity, sanctification, purity of body, chasteness of soul, reading for Christ's sake, concern for God, comprehension, friendliness, truthfulness, uninquisitiveness, uncensoriousness, forgiveness of debts, good management, skillfulness, acuity, fairness, the right use of things, cognitive insight, good-naturedness, experience, psalmody, prayer, thanksgiving, acknowledgment, entreaty, kneeling, supplication, intercession, petition, appeal, hymnody, doxology, confession, solicitude, mourning, affliction, pain, distress, lamentation, sighs of sorrow, weeping, heart-rending tears, compunction, silence, the search for God, cries of anguish, lack of anxiety about all things, forbearance, lack of self-esteem, disinterest in glory, simplicity of soul, sympathy, self-retirement, goodness of disposition, activities that accord with nature, activities exceeding one's natural capacity, brotherly love, concord, communion in God, sweetness, a spiritual disposition, mildness, rectitude, innocence, kindness, guilelessness, simplicity, good repute, speaking well of others, good works, preference of one's neighbor, godlike tenderness, a virtuous character, consistency, nobility, gratitude, humility, detachment, dignity, forbearance, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, discrimination, accessibility, courtesy, tranquility, contemplation, guidance, reliability, clearsightedness, dispassion, spiritual joy, sureness, tears of understanding, tears of soul, a loving desire for God, pity, mercy, compassion, purity

of soul, purity of intellect, prescience, pure prayer, passion-free thoughts, steadfastness, fitness of soul and body, illumination, the recovery of one's soul, hatred of life, proper teaching, a healthy longing for death, childlikeness in Christ, rootedness, admonition and encouragement, both moderate and forcible, a praiseworthy ability to change, ecstasy towards God, perfection in Christ, true enlightenment, an intense longing for God, rapture of intellect, the indwelling of God, love of God, love of inner wisdom, theology, a true confession of faith, disdain of death, saintliness, successful accomplishment, perfect health of soul, virtue, praise from God, grace, kingship, adoption to sonship—altogether 228 virtues. To acquire all of them is possible only through the grace of Him who grants us victory over the passions.



All faith in the triumph of Life over death, every presentiment of the Resurrection, are implicit belief in Christ: for only the power of Christ raises, and will raise the dead. Since the victory of Christ over death, the Resurrection has become Universal Law for creation; and not only for humanity, but also for the beasts, the plants and the stones, for the whole cosmos in which each one of us is the head. We are baptized in the death of Christ, shrouded in water to rise again with Him. And for the soul lustrated in the baptismal waters of tears, and ablaze with the fire of the Holy Spirit, the Resurrection is not only hope but present reality. The *theftera parousia* [the Second Coming] begins in the souls of the saints, and St. Simeon the New Theologian can write: "For those who became children of the light and sons of the day to come, for those who always walk in the light, the Day of the Lord will never come, for they are already with God and in God." An infinite ocean of light flows from the risen body of the Lord.

V. N. Lossky

[from his book "Orthodox Theology: An Introduction"]



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ON TRUTH AND LOVE IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "Orthodox Life", No. 6, 1996.

The Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, the beloved disciple of the Lord, is above all an example and a teacher of love. Love breathes through his gospel, lessons about love fill his epistles, and his life serves as a striking example of love.

He expounded on all the mysteries of love—its source, its movement in deeds, and its culmination—and where it leads all that follow it, to the heights. In this subject of love St. John is especially well known, and no matter who would begin to muse about love, he would immediately bring to mind St. John as the model of love and turn to him as to a teacher of love.

Now let us examine how contemporary wise men have made use of this teaching. They possess a special kind of vain wisdom called "Indifferentism" by which they reason in this way: believe as you like, it makes no difference—just love everyone like brothers, be charitable to them, and have a good influence on them. They point out that the Evangelist John the Theologian writes only about love. For him love is light and life and all perfection. According to his words the person who does not love walks in darkness, abides in death, and is a murderer. It is well known that when St. John grew old and was unable to walk they carried him to church. There he only admonished, "Brethren! let us love one another." Thus he so valued love. They tell us that we also should love like that and only love, believing any way we wish.

I myself have had to listen to such "wisdom." Perhaps you have also had to listen to or will hear something similar to this. Let us contrast their false teaching with the true teaching of St. John the Theologian and then protect our thoughts from wavering from the fundamentals of Christian good sense into the vain wisdom of the "indifferent ones." These so-called "wise" people desire to build everything without God—their external welfare and their morality. From this they strive wherever possible to craftily weave a school of thought where there is no need to talk about God. And they beat their drums about love. They tell us to love one another and here there is nothing to think about God. It is especially on this point where the Holy Evangelist routs them. Although St. John continuously and exactly reminds us to love one another, he also places love in such a close bound with God, love for God, and the knowledge of God, that it is impossible to separate them. Behold where St. John's love originates. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And he adds, Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* (I John 4:10, 11). According to his reasoning, our mutual love must be built up by the action of faith in the Lord, Who came to save us, and consequently

it is not all right to believe as you want. Further he teaches, *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God;* (John 4:7) *If we love one another, God dwelleth in us...* (I John 4:12) *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.* (I John 4:16). You see, he does not say a word about love without speaking about God and the Saviour. Love is from God and leads to God. Thus, he who says that he loves his brother, and does not know and love God and the Saviour, is a liar and the truth is not in him (cf. John 4:20,2:4). Therefore it is possible to summarize the entire teaching of the Holy Evangelist on love in the following words: in order to love your neighbor you must love God; and in order to love God, you must, of course, come to know Him within yourself and especially in His salvific activity on us. We must know and believe. What does the will of God consist of? In faith and love: thus the commandment says that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another. (I John 3:23). It does not only command us to love but to believe in the Lord, and in such a way that faith is the source of love. If one were to gather into one all the places where St. John the Evangelist speaks only of love, one could still not confirm his teaching by the false reasoning: only love and believe as you want.

Besides his teaching on love he also speaks of faith, independent of the law of love. Behold how he categorically rejects those who say, "Believe as you want." What does he preach about from the very first verses? *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.* (I John 1:1-3). The most important point with St. John and all the apostles is the teaching about communion with God though the Lord Jesus Christ, from which proceeds communion of the faithful with one another. How can we have the one without the other? Further St. John asks the question: who is a liar? and answers thus: *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father... Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.* (I John 2:22, 23, 4:15). The whole matter is summed up in confessing the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and to be God. How then could one possibly say, "Believe any way you want"?

Then there follows the warning: *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Herein know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not*

that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist (I John 4:1-3). He who says, "Believe as you want" does not confess Jesus Christ, for if he did confess Christ he would not speak thus. Therefore he cannot be from God. Where then is he from? Truly, he is from the antichrist.

Finally, the Holy Evangelist describes the whole essence of Christianity thus: *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life* (I John 5:11-12). Who possesses the Son of God? Those who believe in His name. Therefore he says and writes *unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life...* (I John 5:13). Consequently, he who does not believe in the Son of God has not eternal life. Could it possibly make no difference how one wants to believe? No. *We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us light and understanding, that we may know the true God, and that we may be in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life* (I John 5:20).

These excerpts should be enough, I suppose, in order to show the Indifferentists that in vain do they seek to find support for their lie in the teaching of St. John the Theologian. It is more than likely that they make such claims without having ever read St. John's holy and divinely inspired writings, but rather quote him based on rumors about his overflowing love. Let them even now find something else besides the above argument to defend their teaching to us believers. One word alone from the beloved disciple is sufficient to discredit their teaching and without any doubt to confirm our belief explicitly in that which was given to us by the Lord through the Holy Apostles and preserved by the Church.

I would only add the following consideration to the decisive words of the Apostle and Evangelist John: having estranged themselves in their minds from the Lord, these unbelievers grasp at acts of charity whose source and support are precisely love. They act in this way only to be founded on something without the assurance that they have found a solid basis. If only they had a clear understanding of how it is indeed possible for man to act in a fruitful way, they would never remain fixed on their teaching. The essence of the matter is that we are not in the proper state. Therefore we cannot act in the right way. In order for us to act in the correct way, we must enter into the right state. By our own powers we are not capable of doing this. The Lord, having come to the earth, lifted up man to the right state. He did not lead man into this state for His own sake but rather that man would accept from Him renewed humanness and thus gain the possibility of acting properly. We obtain this state through Holy Baptism, for those who are baptized into Christ have put on Christ. From the time of Baptism we become one with the Lord and begin to live His life and act by His power. Those who would claim love or the right action (for love is the fullness of the law) should

first accept all the premises of Christianity in order to be able to walk rightly and deny their own falseness (lie). This is impossible without faith, for faith is the root of Christianity and the beginning of everything. The Lord Himself says this: *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except ye abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing. 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: 4-6).

When someone begins to expound to you about love or fruitful action independent of true belief, tell him: Wait, first believe correctly. By faith acquire all the salvific precepts of Christianity. Through them be united with the Lord; make your life and strength depend on Him like you would on an injection for your health; and then you will begin to act in a fruitful way. It is a fact that the witness to a righteous life is fruitful activity in love, but in order to attain it and to remain in it one must accept all of God's Truth with faith and pass through all of God's sanctifying actions [on one's self]. Only under these conditions, i.e., by abiding in True Love, may we grow up into Him in all things, *Who is the head, even Christ* (Eph. 4,15). We could summarize thus: he who does not have the right Faith cannot enter into the proper state, and he who does not enter into the right state cannot properly act. Now do you see how one cannot say, "Believe as you wish, only love"?

Faith is not only the image of the knowledge of God and of our relationship to Him; it also includes all the salvific institutions [not just the Church as an establishment but all that is contained within the Church for salvation] given by God. These salvific institutions maintain active faith. Our so-called wise men might not actually be opposed to Christian teaching, but, more than anything else, they are repulsed by Christian institutions. Since these institutions are nothing more than faith in reality and in action, then their main sin is that they do not want to act in the spirit of the Faith. One is only amazed at how these people so persistently expound about deeds and labors but remove themselves from activity in the realm of holy Faith. There is something amiss here. Surely they are acquainted with the laws of logical thought. There is such duplicity here that one must assume that they are not in fact doers, but are acted upon - they are the tools of a foreign spirit, and such a spirit that is itself foreign to Truth.

Brethren, having understood this, let us guard ourselves from the evil reasoning of this world. Only those who have never tasted the Truth can waver in it. Let us fulfill with humility and in the spirit of truth all that our holy Faith demands. Then we will have, and carry within, a witness that will bring to naught all false arguments from without. May the Lord illumine us by His Truth. Amen.

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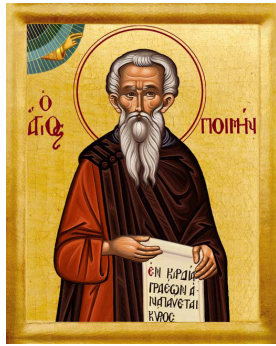
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SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

By Hieromonk Seraphim Rose, January 1981

What a sad and confused time it is in which we live! Those who are striving to be faithful to the true Christianity handed down to our latter times from our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles—the true Orthodox Christianity—cannot help but notice the many ways in which Christians today are falling away from the norms and safeguards of true Christianity which the Church has placed for our protection against the seductive temptations of this world which lies in evil. Christians are called to be the salt of the earth; but if this salt loses the savor of true Christian life, it is therefore good for nothing but *to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men* (Matt. 5:13). This process of Christians losing the savor of Christianity naturally results in what St. Paul calls the *apostasy*—the *falling away* from Christ that is one of the chief signs of the nearness of Antichrist (II Thes. 2:3).

We must therefore be aware of our calling as Orthodox Christians. We must know that we belong to the one Church which Christ established on earth; that through it alone we obtain the grace which we must have to *work out our salvation in fear and trembling* (Phil. 2:12); that nothing else is more precious in our lives, and that we must sacrifice everything else in order to remain in the grace of Christ in His Holy Church; that we can offer nothing better to our fellow men than that they *come and see* (John 1:46) the life in Christ which is offered in His Church. Especially in our times, when the Church exists in the world like an island in the midst of apostasy and unbelief, each Orthodox Christian is called to be a missionary of the true Faith.

But what kind of missionary? It is possible today to be so preoccupied with the apostasy surrounding one that one becomes simply a boaster in his own righteousness? *I am not as other men are... I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess* (Luke 18:11-12). This is the phariseeism which our Lord condemns. People who are thirsting for the life and truth of Christianity cannot help but reject such phariseeism. True Christianity has no room for such vain boasting, nor for merely negative condemnation of the errors of others. If we wish to lead men to the living water of Christ's grace, and indeed if we wish to save our own souls, our *righteousness must exceed that of the pharisees* (Matt. 5:20)—it must be of a different kind entirely: not a dry “correctness” in which we take pride, but a living reflection of the life of grace which Christ has bestowed on us.

We shall be known as the disciples of Christ if *we have love* (John 13:35). This is the chief distinguishing mark of the Christian, as a disciple of the *God Who is Love* (I John 4:8). We must speak the truth to those who thirst—for, we must tell men confused by the myriad of opinions and sects that claim the name of Christian that there is a true Christianity, handed down in an unbroken line from Christ and His Apostles to our times. But we must do this in such a loving and positive way that those who listen to our words will hear the message of the heart which Holy Orthodoxy conveys.

Speaking the truth in love is a part of our maturing in Christ, that we may grow up into Him in all things and come *unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:15, 13). It is our *faith which worketh by love* (Gal. 5:6) that is the test of our Christianity and at the same time our witness to that remnant of the last humanity that thirsts for this kind of Christianity.

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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]

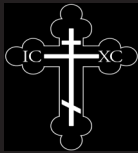
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"THE FAITHFUL FLOCK IS THE TRUE GUARDIAN OF ORTHODOXY"

[DECLARATION OF THE
ORTHODOX PATRIARCHS,
MAY 6, 1848]

By Konstantinos D. Mouratithis, from his book "The Great Treason," pg. 315-321 and 342-345, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

THE GRANDEUR AND DOWN- FALL OF THE EPISCOPAL MIN- ISTRY

Throughout the 2,000 years of Orthodoxy, the body of the Church's bishops has rendered several leading, fatherly figures. These bishops have adorned the foundation of His Bride and continue throughout the ages to strengthen and inspire all of those bishops who are deemed worthy of the mission as well as position. **All such God and Christ-bearing, spiritually-gifted bishops, clergy or monastics represent and embody whatever is holy, spiritual, and divine within our Church's treasure chest.** Each one of them faithfully followed the footprints of our Crucified Lord, thus becoming worthy to repeat St. Paul's words: *Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Christ* (1 Cor 11:1).

The main characteristic of a true shepherd, as defined by our Lord, is his self-sacrificing love towards his flock: *The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep* (Jn 10:11). This type of absolute and self-sacrificial love of the bishop is not only the unquestionable criterion of his genuineness as a true shepherd, but also the supreme and highest principle that defines his relationship with his flock.

It is also though this same love as a foundational force that the episcopal authority is defined and fully interconnected with the bishop's ministry, thus fully differentiating it from the political and worldly authority of civil leaders. As

our Lord categorically declared (through His words as well as His life and crucifixion), this type of spiritual authority is in its deepest essence a life-long service and sacrifice that must be exercised and arise at all times for and from true love towards the flock. Without such Love, the bishop's ministry simply falls among the dead and meaningless letters of ecclesiastic customs and law.

This latter statement infers that true episcopal ministry is unattainable if the bishop in question does not maintain continually and endlessly, in his thoughts as well as in all of his actions, our Lord's words: *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.* (Mt 20:25-27).

Without any exception whatsoever, all of the Church's bishops that were deemed worthy through the centuries to adorn the spiritual structure of episcopal saints had placed this self-sacrificing love as the absolute cornerstone of their ministry's foundation. They surrounded their flock with immense affection and dedication, and ministered imitating our Lord's extreme humility, Who, after washing the feet of His disciples, told them: *Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* (Jn 13:13-17).

We must parenthetically mention and emphasize here that every action or effort by any bishop or any member of the Church's clergy to adulterate their

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ministry through efforts of self-promotion, projection or imposition, intended or otherwise, constitutes a clear source of anomaly and division for the Body of the Church... A bishop's ministry is defined through and secured by our Lord's teachings, as these teachings have been expressed within the holy canons of our Orthodox Church. Such ministry must thus be in a state of continually harmonious enrollment with service towards the Body of Christ and in full communion with all of Its members. **The creation, existence, or establishment of any chasm or tendency towards any type of differentiation, independence, or autonomy through increased rights or lesser obligations is neither feasible nor allowable or even attainable; not for the true bishop!**

Thus we may conclude that, if this true bishop is the center and head of the local church and the synod of such bishops constitute the organizational expression of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Orthodox Church of Christ, then it is equally valid that **the Church operates synodically not only among the bishops but also in the general populous that constitute the true Body of Christ:** "For the power of the Synod" as St. John Chrysostom notes "is very great in leading the Church" (P.G. 61, 258). The Church's Conscience, i.e., the unanimous views and opinions of the clergy and the people, constitute the supreme and highest criterion that accordingly determines and defines the purity and authenticity of all Synods that have converged as Ecumenical.

This synodicity of the Church, in other words the full participation of the entire flock of the faithful people in the formation of ecclesiastical life, was first revealed through the Holy Apostles in 49 A.D. It was then that all of the faithful, men and women alike, participated in the Apostolic Synod of that time in a triumphant manner. It is thus important to observe and note the high priority that is placed upon the formation of the Church's Body

through the participation of bishops, clergy, and especially the faithful flock.

Bishops who are indifferent or neglectful of this supreme obligation, especially during such a critical time period, are guilty of high treason towards the saintly mission of their position. In accordance with the 58th canon of the Holy Apostles, such treason entails and carries along with it their subsequent defrocking: "If any bishop or presbyter neglects the clergy or the people, and does not instruct them in the way of godliness, let him be excommunicated, and if he persists in his negligence and idleness, let him be deposed." These bishops are identified by St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite as comparable to the notable leaders of people about whom God says the following through the Holy Prophet Ezekiel: *So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.* (Ezek 33:7-8).

Conclusively, it is not an exaggeration to state that **the grandeur or downfall of an episcopal ministry is reflected in the person of the bearer of such ministry and to a great extent has as a primary consequence either the re-birth or the decomposition of the associated ecclesiastical environment and life.** It is for this reason that God, through the Evangelist John's writings in The Apocalypse, exhorts the bishop of Smyrna (whose virtues He stresses and exalts as necessary for any bishop). God stresses the need for this bishop to remain faithful, confronting any and all attacks of the evil one: *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* (Rev 2:10). This exhortation takes special

meaning and significance for our days, when we find ourselves in such great need for saintly and heroic bishops so that the flock may confront and defeat the “archon of this world” and all of his assistants.

WHAT OUR GOD-BEARING FATHERS HAVE TO SAY REGARDING UNWORTHY BISHOPS

In Her 2,000 years of existence, our Church has come to know an abundance of God-bearing Fathers and bishops who served Her faithfully and glorified our Most Holy Trinitarian God, thus guiding an immeasurable number of faithful towards the calm and peaceful harbor of the Kingdom of Heaven. In contrast to this group of great saints, one easily notes the presence of a great number of unworthy bishops who have, through the ages as well as especially today, profaned, polluted, infected and defiled Christ’s most Holy Body, the Church militant that we come into contact with in our world. These bishops’ actions continue to scandalize the flock and thus they become solely responsible for leading so many souls into oblivion, souls for whom Christ was crucified!

For these bishops, the words of St. Paul take special significance and validity: *For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.* (Rom 2:24). Such bishops remain “faithful” to the long-standing tradition of Judas the Iscariot; for Judas had the unique and immense privilege to co-habitate with the God-man, our Lord and Savior, and in return for this highest benevolent act offered Him the kiss of betrayal.

Significant amounts of time and space would be required for someone to accurately describe all of the abominable, hideous, and blasphemous deeds that these bishops have either allowed or performed against the theanthropic body of the Church and Her Divine Benefactor, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is thus of greater value that the subject topic be limited to the comparative presentation of a comprehensive and a superbly apocalyptic passage in one of St. Basil’s writings. Within this passage, St. Basil accurately portrays the utmost moral downfall and collapse of a great majority of bishops from his time. His words are equally applicable to all unworthy bishops of all times.

The student of this passage may be easily impressed to consider its descriptive analysis as extremely accurate and applicable to the contemporary ecclesiastical reality, especially the moral and spiritual decline of a great number of today’s bishops. Such decline has been especially noted among the Greek Orthodox hierarchy since the middle of the 19th century. One can truly distinguish this overthrow of fundamental values today; this modern institutional confusion is quite apparent and easily recognizable. Most notable is the unrestrained vainglory of several episcopacy candidates who, without any fear of God or any shade of fundamental human shame, climb onto the highest hierarchal seats with the assistance and active intervention of corrupt worldly “archons.” It is for this exact reason that such “archons” show clear preference to “elect” onto vacated episcopal seats all those who distinguish themselves in the evil art of blasphemy...

The hierarchal character has all but lost all traits of modesty and decency; the shepherds who truly lead their flocks with scientific exactness are extremely rare. Financial excesses and abuse or squandering of ecclesiastic funds, meant for the poor or needy, are frequent. Bishops are accessing these funds for their exclusive enjoyment and voluptuous life of luxury. Bishops who have fully delivered themselves unto sin have disregarded the exact observance of the Church’s holy canons. Justice is long gone. Everyone lives in accordance with the desires of the old person within himself, who has now taken a leading position in such a bishop’s existence. Thus, within all societies the unlimited sovereignty of cunning and evil is truly prevalent; people suffer from the lack of true shepherds as people spend their lives without any sense of true direction.

All those bishops and pseudo-shepherds that have acquired their office through human means or the intervention of worldly and corrupt leaders lack any type of courage, discernment, outspokenness, and frankness. They thus become completely dependent and literally the servants or even slaves of those who elevated them and granted them their limited authority and hierarchal power.

Here then is St. Basil’s remarkable passage, which is based on the translation from the original ancient Greek by professor Vasilios Thenkakis:

Dogmatic values of devout and pious nature have been overthrown and overturned; the Church’s institutional decrees are confused. Furthermore, the love of power and ambition of those who have no fear of God are being leveled through various protective means and schemes.

It is rather apparent and evident to all that prelate and all of its occupants (i.e., bishops) finds itself in the forefront of the associated movement, quite ready and willing to deliver itself as a prize towards the evil of impiety; we thus are in a time period whereby the bishop who blasphemes with greater difficulty has become the one favored by the people.

Episcopal piety has practically ceased to exist. The shepherds who lead the flock with any type of scientific guidance have literally disappeared. The funds and resources raised and available exclusively for the poor are continuously and endlessly being enjoyed or granted as gifts by those who possess the seats of authority within the Church.

The exactness of canons is being foreshadowed and blackened. A great amount of authority has been granted to sinful ways and behaviors. All these events are the result of the means by which the Church’s bishops have reached their positions of power; they attained them via human interventions and it is in this exact manner that they repay the corresponding efforts and support they have received. In other words, they yield everything towards the pleasure and delight of themselves and their sinful supporters.

Justice has disappeared and all are conducting themselves in accordance to the human will, the wishes of

their heart and the forces of their passions. Slyness, knavery, and cunning ways are immeasurable. Our Lord's flock remains without spiritual leadership or advice. The shepherds lack any type of courage, boldness, or outspokenness.

This situation is the direct result of the fact that the shepherds are exclusively attaining their positions via human means; they are bound to and have all become the servants of those who granted them their Episcopal authority. (M.P.G. 32, 480).

This extreme moral downfall of so many bishops, especially during the fourth century A. D., found its most repulsive and abominable expression in various synods, all of which were comprised in their absolute majority or even unanimous positions by and of unworthy bishops, most of them heretics and followers of the Arian views. Within these synods, the bishops would enable and give full success to the unification and grandeur of the methods of the evil one in a manner that would surprise every objective observer of the proceedings of such synods, and lead him to question whether such synods were even comprised by Christian hierarchs or instead by despicable members of the underworld!

One need only refer to the extreme persecution of St. Athanasios the Great by such synods and the incomprehensible and literally unbelievable methods that they utilized to exterminate the saint's opposition though ethical, spiritual or even biological means!...

Let us hope that the extreme behaviors and pathetic spiritual state of that period is not being replicated again in our days.



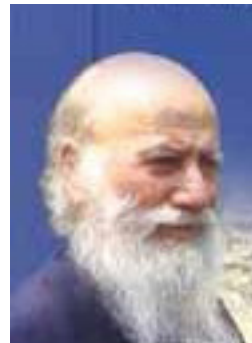
The Lord does not always appear in glory to all who stand before Him. To beginners He appears in the form of a servant; to those able to follow Him as He climbs the high mountain of His transfiguration He appears in the form of God, the form in which He existed before the world came to be. It is therefore possible for the same Lord not to appear in the same way to all who stand before Him, but to appear to some in one way and to others in another way, according to the measure of each person's faith.

St. Maximos the Confessor

In his cell, Abba Dioscorus wept over himself, while his disciple was sitting in another cell. When the latter came to see the old man he asked him, "Father, why are you weeping?" "I am weeping over my sins," the old man answered him. Then his disciple said, "You do not have any sins, Father." The old man replied, "Truly, my child, if I were allowed to see all my sins, three or four men would not be enough to weep for them."

OBEDIENCE THROUGH EGO

An excerpt from the book "With Elder Porphyrios."



I discussed a related matter with the Elder. It was about a certain "strict" spiritual father who had refused to satisfy the wish of one of his spiritual children; this spiritual child wanted to visit Elder Porphyrios and discuss with him a serious personal matter.

This incident had left a painful impression on me and I articulated it to the Elder. He shook his head sadly and whispered, "What can I say? He

is, you see, also a spiritual father."

The Elder was always careful and lenient in his opinions of others, especially when it concerned priests who made mistakes. Rather than making characterizations, he preferred to speak in parables: "You know, when a Latin missionary gets a papal order for some mission, he immediately gets on the plane at Rome. When the plane arrives at the destination airport of, let's say, an African state, he opens a sealed envelope and reads what his task will be. He is obliged to carry it out, even if he does not agree. It obviously does not happen like that with us Orthodox."

I understood what he, more-or-less, wanted to tell me. Besides, it was not the first time that I had discovered that there are also some spiritual guides in Orthodoxy, fortunately only few, who are essentially inspired by a papal spirit. They demand that their orders be carried out, quite indifferent to the inner resistance of their spiritual children. They cultivate a completely unorthodox way of thinking. They impose disciplinary authority, since they are afraid of freedom.

It was not long before the dictatorial discipline bore results; the same spiritual child of the "strict" father informed the friends that urged him to see Fr. Porphyrios that he no longer wanted to see him. On a visit to the Elder I said to him, "I think that he doesn't come to see you, not because he doesn't want to come, but because he is being obedient to his spiritual father. The Elder surprised me by saying to me, "He is being obedient, because his spiritual father's advice indulges his ego."

It was the first time I had ever heard the Elder speak to me openly about spiritual errors. I knew that he did not do it out of personal susceptibility. The Elder did not invite people to visit him. (I was aware of only one exception to this, and this was only after the fervent pleadings from the friends of a prejudiced man, who was immensely troubled. In essence, it was their own indirect invitation). The Elder did not want fans. He simply helped everyone who hurried to his cell. Perhaps he spoke to me like that because he wanted to reveal another trick of the devil amongst the Christian ranks. I thought to myself, "Well then, the motivation for that man's obedience was simply the indulgence of his ego..."

THE AGONY OF HELLENISM

From THEMIS and the Hellenic Electronic Center.

The month of September brings with it the end of summer, the beginning of a new year on the Orthodox calendar, and the anniversaries of dates that have ravaged Hellenic civilization and culture. On September 14, we commemorate the Hellenic genocide. We remember once again the Hellenes of Asia Minor who were systematically murdered by the governments of the Turks and Mustafa Kemal Pasha.

The destruction of Asia Minor's Hellenism began in 1071, when the Byzantine armies were defeated by the Seljuk Turks. In this historical event lies the origin of the Hellenic holocaust which continues up to the present day. In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Turks. The great, honorable, and brave Konstantinos Palaiologos led 5,000 brave Greek soldiers against 80,000 Ottoman Turkish soldiers. The fall of Constantinople, and the fall of the remainder of the Byzantine Empire some eight years later extended the Hellenic holocaust to all Hellenic regions.

The Ottomans brought with them massacres, torture, slavery, the kidnapping of boys for the Janissaries, the enslavement of women into harems, and intolerable political and economic pressures that resulted in the further decimation of Hellenism. For even when Hellenes were not massacred, destruction occurred via the loss of national identity. Forced conversions to Islam and Turkification contributed to the nightmare of the loss of independence and national sovereignty.

In May 1919, the armies of a free and independent Greece entered the glorious and long suffering city of Smyrna. For a brief time, it appeared that the extermination of the Hellenic race had ceased. During World War I, the Turks began to systematically murder the Hellenic Orthodox populations in Asia Minor, along with the Armenians and the Assyrians.

Ultimately, Mustafa Kemal Pasha became an instrument of Western imperialism and as such, Turkish racism earned the unconditional assistance of Great Britain, France, and Italy. The murderous psychopath Mustafa Kemal was aided by the Western powers, while the Greek Army in Asia Minor was cut off by an embargo imposed upon them by the same Western nations! In September 1922, beautiful Smyrna was conquered by the Kemalists and burned. Over 100,000 Greeks and 30,000 Armenians were slaughtered in a matter of a few days.

Special mention must be made of Metropolitan Chrysostom of Smyrna. This brave and noble Greek Orthodox cleric was a powerful voice for the aspirations of a nation that had been enslaved, humiliated, massacred, and denigrated for centuries. When the news broke that the Kemalist aggressors would capture Smyrna, it became apparent that the Greeks and the Armenians would not survive. Metropolitan Chrysostom was offered refuge by the French Consulate. He refused the offer of safety and chose to share the fate of his flock. Metropolitan Chrysostom was handed over to a fanatical Muslim mob by

the crazed and sadistic Kemalist general Nouredin Pasha. His beard was cut off at once, and then his eyes, ears, nose, and hands. He experienced an agonizing and painful death. In 1992, the neo-martyr Metropolitan Chrysostom was canonized as a saint by the Orthodox Church of Greece.

When the Kemalist-Turkish murder machines ceased, over 1,500,000 Armenians, 1,000,000 Greeks, and 800,000 Assyrians had lost their lives. These are all verifiable numbers! The decimation of Hellenism continued when the West supported Kemal's plan to ethnically "cleanse" Asia Minor and Eastern Thraki of well over 1,000,000 Hellenes.

In this day and age, we are inundated with stories of ethnic cleansing throughout the world, but there is still no recognition of the horrors that have been perpetrated against Hellenism. Over 1,000,000 Hellenes were forced to abandon the land and homes **where their ancestors and descendants had lived for over 3,000 years.** This ethnic cleansing and genocide was supported by the "civilized" powers in the West and legitimized by the Treaty of Lausanne. Today, the world commemorates Auschwitz and the victims of Stalin's crimes, but there are no memorials for the dead of Smyrna and Pontus in those ancient Hellenic lands.

On September 6, 1955 crimes against humanity took again place in "modern-day" Turkey, a country that was and still is a "member" of the NATO alliance. The Turkish government of Adnan Menderes (of the so called "democratic" party) incited terrorism against the Hellenes of Constantinople and Imbros. First, the Turks bombed their own consulate in Thessaloniki and blamed the Greeks. Then, they organized the fanatics, the criminals, and the parasites, and encouraged them to attack the Greek population, their Churches, homes, and businesses. In Smyrna, Greek Army officers serving with NATO were assaulted and their wives violated. Throughout these terrorist attacks, the police did not interfere...

We thus commemorate on September 6 the end of Hellenism in Constantinople and Imbros. In the 1960's, the Turkish authorities proceeded to finish the job by ethnically cleansing the last remnants of Hellenism. During all these attacks in Constantinople, Imbros, and Smyrna, there were absolutely no condemnations, protests, or sanctions coming from Washington (that universal protector of "human rights" and "democracy") or any other so-called western "democracy." Following the September 6 pogroms, the U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles wrote identical letters to Greek Prime Minister Alexander Papagos and Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes urging the "allies" to consider NATO. There was no sympathy for Greece expressed, nor was there any condemnation of Turkey's blatant aggression.

Hellenism is today being again eradicated in Cyprus. Over 200,000 Greeks have been ethnically cleansed in the occupied territories. In 1996, Turkish death squads murdered Cypriots Tasos Isaac and Solomos Solomou. As in Asia Minor in 1922,

and Constantinople in 1955, there is not a single protest emanating from the “civilized powers.”

Black September, a month to commemorate and recall our losses, and to re-evaluate where Hellenism stands today in Cyprus, Macedonia, the Aegean Sea, and northern Epirus. The losses of Hellenism have been numerous in terms of lives lost, and in terms of territory that has been conquered. Let us remember, commemorate, and mourn all that has been lost in Asia Minor and Constantinople. Remember Smyrna and Pontus, and the victims of the Hellenic genocide.

Let us also remember and honor the memories of those who worked to protect Hellenes, Armenians, and Assyrians from the Turkish aggressors. Let us honor prominent American officials such as George Horton and Henry Morgenthau who worked tirelessly to assist the refugees that fled from Asia Minor. Let us honor them also because their important work remains alive in their important writings and texts. George Horton documented the Hellenic genocide in *The Blight of Asia*, and Henry Morgenthau documented the ethnic cleansing of Hellenes in his important book *I was sent to Athens*.

Further documentation and texts on the Hellenic genocide include Edward Hale Bierstadt’s *The Great Betrayal* which was published in 1924, and which Turkish supporters in America continue to work hard to discredit. This is a powerful and moving document describing the agony of Asia Minor’s Hellenism. Journalist Edward Herbert Gibbons has also left behind accounts of Turkish genocide against Hellenism in his 1920 book *Biography of Prime Minister Venizelos*.

The American Hellenic Society has left behind an important document, *Persecution of the Greeks in Turkey*, which describes in great detail the atrocities against Greeks in Asia Minor during World War I. Specific atrocities, statistics of the dead in various regions, numbers of victims deported and ethnically cleansed, and the names of Hellenic villages where the Turkish exterminations took place during the World War I are all re-counted here. The American Hellenic Society has also left behind a document authored by Prime Minister Venizelos, *Greece Before the Peace Congress of 1919*, which was submitted to the victorious powers of the World War I. The Prime Minister makes frequent references to the exterminations of Greeks and Armenians in the case he put forward for the rights of Greece in Asia Minor and Constantinople.

Marjorie Housepian Dobkin’s *Smyrna 1922: the Destruction of a City* is a brilliantly researched account of the events that led to the final extermination of Asia Minor’s Hellenism. Thea Halo’s *Not Even My Name* is a memoir re-calling the genocide that affected Hellenism in Pontus. *The Miracle* by Leonidas Koumakis is an invaluable contribution to the documentation of the destruction of Hellenism in Constantinople and Asia Minor. The author re-counts the conspiracy against Hellenism during the 1950’s and 1960’s, and describes the ethnic cleansing of Hellenes by the Turkish state. *The Crucifixion of*

Christianity by Demetrios Kaloumenos is a re-counting of the September 1955 pogroms in Constantinople and contains numerous photographs of the destruction that serve as an indictment against the Turkish state. In 1992, Helsinki Watch published, *Denying Human Rights and Ethnic Identity, The Greeks of Turkey*. This document refers to specific harassment against the Greeks of Constantinople, and Imbros and Tenedos and is further evidence of the ethnic cleansing of Hellenism by the Turkish authorities.

Up to our own day, Hellenism remains under assault. The U. S. State Department’s Country Reports on Human Rights has repeatedly documented the terrorist bombings against the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the discriminatory closing of the Halki Seminary. Cypriot Hellenism also suffers under the Turks today. The plight of the Cypriots is recounted in the documentary film, *Attila 74 the Rape of Cyprus* by film director Michael Cacoyannis. Furthermore, the destruction of Cypriot culture is described in the text, *The Occupied Churches of Cyprus* by a Greek Cypriot priest, Rev. D. Demosthenous.

Let us never forget the agony of Hellenism!



WISDOM FROM ELDER IERONYMOS

The Turks are the cane of God for us Greeks, when we abandon His way and fall into impiety and sin.

Enjoy the spiritual life, there is nothing sweeter than it. The battle is great, but the crowns are sweet... Without a battle we don’t achieve virtue. Avoid much speaking. I have been a cleric here in Aegina for forty years and not once have I sat at a table for a meal. When people would insist, I would at most drink a cup of coffee, nothing more. When one is overly bold, frank and free, his defenses are slowly weakened, and temptation is given power and creates nasty situations. For this reason it is better to avoid such situations.

Now that you are a priest, you need to be aware that when you go out and walk in the streets, wherever you might go, people will pay close attention to you. The world watches closely what a priest does, how he walks, how he speaks, how he behaves. Your gait should be normal. Don’t wave your hands about. Dress in a long, normal cassock with wide sleeves. Walk discreetly, in a Christian manner, not frivolously as worldly people do.

The wretched sickness of priests is love of money. Woe to the priest who becomes a lover of money, because then he will fall into many other sins.

It isn’t enough that the hunter be a skilled sharpshooter. He must also fill his weapon both with gunpowder and with bullets. Teach first by your example and then you will see how much fruit your sermons will bear.

Περὶ Μετανοίας

Αγίου Σιλουανού του Αθωνίτου.



Ψυχή μου Σ' ἐγγώρισε, Κύριε, καὶ γράφω στὸ λαό Σου γιὰ τὰ ἔλέη Σου. Μὴ θλίβεστε, λαοί, πὸν εἶναι δύσκολη ἡ ζωὴ. Ἀγωνίζεστε μόνον ἐναντίον τῆς ἀμαρτίας καὶ ζητᾶτε βοήθεια ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο κι Αὐτὸς θὰ σᾶς χαρίσῃ ὅ,τι εἶναι ὠφέλιμο, γιὰτὶ εἶναι σπλαχνικὸς καὶ μᾶς ἀγαπᾷ.

Ὡ λαοί, ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐπιθυμεῖ νὰ γνωρίσετε

τὸν Κύριο καὶ νὰ δῆτε τὸ ἔλεος καὶ τὴ δόξα Του. Εἶμαι ἑβδομήντα δύο ἐτῶν καὶ ἐπλησίασα τὸν θάνατο καὶ γράφω γιὰ τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Κυρίου, πὸν μοῦ ἔδωσε ὁ Κύριος νὰ τὸ γνωρίσω μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Ὡ καὶ νὰ μποροῦσα νὰ σᾶς ἀνέβαζα σ' ἕνα ψηλὸ βουνό, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσετε νὰ δῆτε ἀπὸ τὸ ὕψος τῆς κορυφῆς τὸ πρᾶο καὶ σπλαχνικὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ νὰ γεμίσουν ἀγαλλίαση οἱ καρδιές σας.

Ἀλήθεια σᾶς λέω! Δὲν ξέρω νὰ ἔχω κανένα καλὸ κι ἔχω πολλές ἀμαρτίες. Ἡ Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ὁμως ἐξάλειψε τὶς ἀμαρτίες μου, καὶ ξέρω πὼς σ' ὅσους παλαίβουν ἐναντίον τῆς ἀμαρτίας, ὁ Κύριος τοὺς χαρίζει ὄχι μόνον τὴν ἄφεση, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἡ ὁποία δίνει χαρὰ στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ τὴν γεμίζει μὲ βαθεῖα καὶ γλυκεῖα εἰρήνη.

Ὡ Κύριε, Ἐσὺ ἀγαπᾶς τὰ πλάσματά Σου. Καὶ ποὺ θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ κατανοήσῃ τὴν ἀγάπη Σου ἢ νὰ γευθῇ τὴ γλυκύτητά της, ἀν δὲν τὸν διδάξεις Σὺ ὁ Ἴδιος μὲ τὸ Ἁγιόν Σου Πνεῦμα; Σὲ παρακαλῶ λοιπόν, Κύριε, ν' ἀποστείλεις στὸν κόσμῳ Σου τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, γιὰ νὰ γνωρίσουν ὅλοι τὴν ἀγάπη Σου. Ζέστανε τὶς θλιμμένες καρδιές τῶν ἀνθρώπων, γιὰ νὰ δοξάζουν μὲ χαρὰ τὸ ἔλεός Σου.

Παράκλητε ἀγαθέ, Σὲ ἱκετεύω μὲ δάκρυα, παρηγόρησε τὶς θλιμμένες ψυχές τοῦ κόσμου Σου. Δῶσε σ' ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς ν' ἀκούσουν τὴ γλυκεῖα φωνή Σου: «Ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἀμαρτίαι.» Naί, Ἀγαθέ, στὴν ἐξουσία Σου εἶναι νὰ κἀνης θαύματα, καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει μεγαλύτερο θαῦμα ἀπὸ τὸ ἀγαπᾷ κανεὶς τὸν ἀμαρτωλὸ στὴν πτώση του. Τὸν ἅγιο εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ τὸν ἀγαπᾶς, εἶναι ἄξιος.

Naί, Κύριε, ἄκουσε τὴν προσευχὴ τῆς γῆς. Ὅλοι οἱ λαοὶ ἀδημονοῦν. Ὅλοι χἀθηκαν μέσα στὶς ἀμαρτίες. Ὅλοι στερήθηκαν τὴ Χάρη Σου καὶ ζοῦν στὸ σκοτάδι.

Ὡ λαοί, ἄς φωνάξουμε στὸν Κύριο ὅλη ἡ γῆ καὶ θ' ἀκουστῆ ἢ προσευχὴ μας, γιὰτὶ ὁ Κύριος χαίρεται μὲ τὴ μετανοία τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Κι ὅλες οἱ οὐράνιες δυνάμεις περιμένουν ν' ἀπολαύσουμε κι ἐμεῖς τὴ γλυκύτητα τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ

Θεοῦ, καὶ νὰ δοῦμε τὴν ὁμορφιά τοῦ προσώπου Του. Ὅταν οἱ ἀνθρώποι φυλάγουν τὸν ἅγιο φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε ἡ ζωὴ στὴ γῆ εἶναι εὐχάριστη καὶ γλυκεῖα. Τώρα ὁμως οἱ ἀνθρώποι ἀρχισαν νὰ ζοῦν σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ θέλημά τους καὶ τὸ νοῦ τους κι ἐγκατέλειψαν τὶς ἅγιες ἐντολές κι ἐλπίζουν νὰ βροῦν χαρὰ χωρὶς τὸν Κύριο, μὴ ξέροντας πὼς μόνον ὁ Κύριος εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ χαρὰ μας καὶ μόνον μὲ τὸν Κύριο εὐφραίνεται ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Αὐτὸς ζεσταίνει τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ψυχὴ, ὅπως ζεσταίνει ὁ ἥλιος τὰ ἀγριολούλουδα κι ὅπως τὰ λικνίζει ὁ ἀνεμὸς δίνοντάς τους ζωὴ.

Ὁ Κύριος μᾶς ἔδωσε τὰ πάντα γιὰ νὰ τὸν δοξάζουμε. Ὁ κόσμος ὁμως δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνει. Καὶ πὼς μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ καταλάβῃ κάτι, πὸν οὔτε τὸ εἶδε οὔτε τὸ δοκίμασε; Κι ἐγὼ ὅταν ἦμουν στὸν κόσμῳ, σκεφτόμουν κι ἔλεγα: Νά, αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ εὐτυχία πάνω στὴ γῆ. Εἶμαι ὑγιής, κομψός, πλούσιος, ὁ κόσμος μ' ἀγαπᾷ. Αὐτὴ τὴν κενοδοξία εἶχα. Ὅταν ὁμως γνώρισα μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα τὸν Κύριο, ἀρχισα πᾶ νὰ θεωρῶ ὅλη τὴ δόξα τοῦ κόσμου σάν καπνὸ πὸν τὸν διασκορπίζει ὁ ἀνεμὸς. Ἡ Χάρη ὁμως τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος χαροποιεῖ καὶ εὐφραίνει τὴν ψυχὴ, κι αὐτὴ μέσα σὲ βαθεῖα εἰρήνη βλέπει τὸν Κύριο καὶ λησμονεῖ τὴ γῆ. Κύριε, ἐπίστρεψε τὸν λαόν Σου κοντά Σου, γιὰ νὰ δοῦν μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα τὴνπραότητα τοῦ προσώπου Σου, γιὰ νὰ ἀπολαύσουν ὅλοι τὴν κατὰ πρόσωπον θέα Σου ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴ γῆ καὶ βλέποντάς Σε, νὰ ὁμοιωθοῦν μὲ Σένα.

Ἄς εἶναι δοξασμένοι ὁ Κύριος πὸν μᾶς ἔδωσε τὴ μετανοία καὶ μὲ τὴ μετανοία σωζόμαστε ὅλοι μας χωρὶς ἐξαίρεση. Δὲν θὰ σωθοῦν μόνον ὅσοι δὲν μετανοοῦν. Κι ἐδῶ βλέπω τὴν ἀπόγνωσή τους καὶ κλαίω ἀπὸ συμπόνια γι' αὐτοὺς. Ἄν κἀθε ψυχὴ ἐγνώριζε τὸν Κύριο, θὰ ἤξερε πόσο μᾶς ἀγαπᾷ Αὐτὸς, καὶ κανένας δὲν θ' ἀπελιζόταν γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία του, οὔτε κἀν θὰ ἐγόγγυζε. Ψυχὴ πὸν ἔχασε τὴν εἰρήνη, πρέπει νὰ μετανοήσῃ, καὶ ὁ Κύριος θὰ συγχωρήσῃ τὶς ἀμαρτίες της καὶ τότε θὰ ἔχη χαρὰ καὶ εἰρήνη. Καὶ δὲν χρειάζονται ἄλλοι μάρτυρες, ἀλλὰ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἴδιο μαρτυρεῖ μέσα μας πὼς μᾶς συγχωρήθηκαν οἱ ἀμαρτίες. Καὶ σημάδι γιὰ τὴν ἄφεση τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν εἶναι πὼς ἔχεις μισησῆ τὴν ἀμαρτία.

Τὶ ἄλλο νὰ περιμένουμε; Νὰ ζητήσουμε ἀπὸ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς νὰ μᾶς ψάλλῃ κάποιος ἕνα οὐράνιο τραγούδι; Μᾶ στὸν οὐρανὸ ὅλα ζοῦν μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα: ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ μᾶς, ἐδῶ στὴ γῆ, δόθηκε τὸ Ἴδιο Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Καὶ στὶς Ἐκκλησίες τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ ἀκολουθίες τελοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Καὶ στὶς ἐρήμους, στὰ βουνὰ καὶ στὶς σπηλιές, καὶ παντοῦ οἱ ἀσκητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ζοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Ἄν τὸ φυλάξουμε, θὰ εἶμαστε ἐλεύθεροι ἀπὸ τὸ σκοτάδι καὶ ἡ αἰώνια ζωὴ θὰ εἶναι μέσα μας. Ἄν ὅλοι οἱ ἀνθρώποι μετανοοῦσαν καὶ τηροῦσαν τὶς ἐντολές τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Παράδεισος θὰ ἦταν στὴ γῆ, γιὰτὶ ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐντὸς ἡμῶν ἐστίν. Ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο. Καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο στὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ στὴ γῆ. Ὁ Κύριος δίνει τὸν Παράδεισο καὶ τὴν αἰώνια Βασιλεία μαζί Του, σὲ ὅποιον μετανοεῖ. Μὲ τὸ πλούσιο ἔλεός Του δὲν θυμᾶται τὶς ἀμαρτίες μας, ὅπως δὲν θυμῆθηκε τὶς ἀμαρτίες τοῦ ληστῆ στὸ Σταυρό.

Μεγάλο τὸ ἔλεός Σου, Κύριε! Ποιὸς ὅμως θὰ μπο-ροῦσε νὰ σ' εὐχαριστήσῃ ὅπως πρέπει; Μᾶς ἔδωσες στὴ γῆ τὸ Πνεῦμα Σου τὸ Ἅγιο! Μεγάλῃ ἢ δικαιοσύνῃ Σου, Κύριε! Ἐσὺ ἔδωσες στοὺς Ἀποστόλους τὴν ἐπαγγελία: «Οὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς». Κι ἐμεῖς ζοῦμε τώρα αὐτὸ τὸ ἔλεος καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ αισθάνεται πὼς ὁ Κύριος μᾶς ἀγαπᾷ. Κι ὅποιος δὲν τὸ αισθάνεται αὐτό, ἂς μετανοήσῃ, καὶ ὁ Κύριος θὰ τοῦ δώσῃ τὴ Χάρη πὺ καθοδηγεῖ τὴν ψυχὴ. Ἄν ὅμως δεῖς ἄνθρωπο ἀμαρτωλό, χωρὶς νὰ συμπάσχῃς, θὰ σ' ἐγκαταλείψῃ ἢ Χάρη. Μᾶς δόθηκε ἡ ἐντολή ν' ἀγαποῦμε. Κι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ σπλαχνίζεται ὅλους, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα δίνει τὴ δύναμη νὰ κάνωμε τὸ καλό.

Ἦ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, μὴ μᾶς ἐγκαταλείπεις. Ὄταν Ἐσὺ εἶσαι μαζί μας, ἡ ψυχὴ ἀντιλαμβάνεται τὴν παρουσία Σου καὶ ἀναπαύεται μακαρίως κοντὰ στὸν Θεό, γιατί Σὺ χαρίζεις τὴν φλογερὴ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ Κύριος ἀγάπησε τόσο τοὺς ἀνθρώπους Του, πὺ τοὺς ἀγίασε μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ τοὺς ἔκανε ὁμοίους μὲ τὸν Ἐαυτὸ Του. Ὁ Κύριος εἶναι σπλαχνικὸς καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μᾶς δίνει κι ἐμᾶς τὴ δύναμη νὰ εἴμαστε κι ἐμεῖς σπλαχνικοί. Ἄς ταπεινωθοῦμε, ἀδελφοί, γιὰ ν' ἀποκτήσουμε μὲ τὴν μετάνοια σπλαχνικὴ καρδιά, καὶ τότε θὰ δοῦμε τὴ δόξα τοῦ Κυρίου, τὴν ὅποια γνωρίζει ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ὁ νοῦς μὲ τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Ὅποιος μετανοεῖ ἀληθινά, εἶναι ἔτοιμος νὰ ὑπομείνῃ κάθε θλίψη, πείνα καὶ γυμνότητα, κρύο καὶ ζέστη, πόνος καὶ φτώχεια, ἐξουθένωση καὶ ἐξορία, ἀδικία καὶ συκοφαντία. Γιατὶ ἡ ψυχὴ του ὑψώνεται πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ καὶ δὲν ἐνδιαφέρεται γιὰ τὰ γῆινα, ἀλλὰ προσεύχεται μὲ καθαρὸ νοῦ στὸ Θεό. Ὅποιος ὅμως εἶναι προσκολλημένος σὲ περιουσίες καὶ χρήματα, αὐτὸς ποτὲ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχῃ καθαρὸ νοῦ γιὰ τὸν Θεό, ἐπειδὴ στὸ βάθος τῆς ψυχῆς του κατοικεῖ ἐμμονὴ ἢ φροντίδα τι νὰ κάνῃ μ' αὐτά. Κι ἂν δὲν μετανοήσῃ καθαρὰ καὶ δὲν στενοχωρηθεῖ πὺ ἔχει ἀμαρτήσῃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, θὰ πεθάνῃ αἰχμάλωτος στὸ πάθος, χωρὶς νὰ γνωρίσῃ τὸν Κύριο.

Ὄταν σοῦ παίρνουν τὴν περιουσία σου, δός τὴν μόνος σου, γιατί ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀρνηθῇ τίποτα. Ὅποιος ὅμως δὲν ἐγνώρισε τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, αὐτὸς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἐλεήμων, γιατί δὲν ἔχει στήν ψυχὴ του τὴ χαρὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ἀφοῦ ὁ ἐλεήμων Κύριος μᾶς ἔδωσε μὲ τὰ πάθη Του ἐπὶ γῆς τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ ἀφοῦ μᾶς ἔδωσε τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα Του, εἶναι ὀλοφάνερο ὅτι Αὐτὸς θὰ μᾶς δώσῃ καὶ ὅλα ὅσα μᾶς χρειάζονται. Ἄς παραδώσουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ θὰ δοῦμε τὴν Πρόνοιά Του καὶ ὁ Κύριος θὰ μᾶς χαρίσῃ ἀκόμη κι ἐκεῖνο πὺ δὲν τὸ περιμένουμε κἂν.

Μὴ λυπόμαστε γιὰ τὴν ἀπώλεια περιουσιῶν, αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀσήμαντὴ ὑπόθεση. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἔμαθα κιόλας ἀπὸ τὸν κατὰ σάρκα πατέρα μου. Ὄταν συνέβαινε καμιὰ δυστυχία στὸ σπίτι, αὐτὸς ἔμενε ἥρεμος. Μετὰ τὴν πυρκαγιὰ τοῦ ἔλεγαν μὲ συμπόνια: «Κἀγκες Ἰβάν Πετρόβιτς». Κι ἐκεῖνος ἀπαντοῦσε: «Ὁ Θεὸς θὰ δώσῃ νὰ διορθωθοῦν τὰ πράγματα». Μιὰ φορὰ περνούσαμε κοντὰ ἀπὸ τὸ χωράφι

μας κι ἐγὼ τοῦ εἶπα: «Κοίταξε, μᾶς κλέβουν τὰ δεμάτια». Κι αὐτὸς μᾶς λέει: «Ἐ, παιδί μου, ὁ Κύριος μᾶς ἔδωσε ἀρκετὸ ψωμί. Αὐτὸς πὺ κλέβει, σημαίνει πὺ ἔχει ἀνάγκη». Ἔτυχε νὰ τοῦ πῶ: «Δίνεις πολλὴ ἐλεημοσύνη. Ἄλλοι ὅμως πὺ ζοῦν καλύτερα ἀπὸ μᾶς, δίνουν λιγότερα». Κι αὐτὸς μοῦ ἀπάντησε: «Ἐ, παιδί μου, ὁ Κύριος θὰ μᾶς δώσῃ». Κι ὁ Κύριος ποτὲ μὰ ποτὲ δὲν διεύψυσσε τὴν ἐλπίδα του.

Στὸν ἐλεήμονα συγχωρεῖ ὁ Κύριος τὰ ἀμαρτήματα παρευθῆς. Ὁ ἐλεήμονας δὲν θυμᾶται τὸ κακό. Κι ἂν ἀκόμα τὸν ἀδίκησαν ἢ τοῦ πήραν τὴν περιουσία, αὐτὸς παραμένει ἀτάραχος, γιατί γνωρίζει ἐκ πείρας τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Κυρίου δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ ἀφαιρέσῃ κανεὶς ἄνθρωπος, γιατί εἶναι ἀπαραβίαστο καὶ κατοικεῖ ψηλά, κοντὰ στὸν Θεό.

Ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι πὺ ζήσανε μὲ παρθενία καὶ μετάνοια, ταπεινοί, ὑπάκουοι ἐγκρατεῖς, ἀνέβηκαν στὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ βλέπουν τὸν Κύριό μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ στὴ δόξα Του κι ἀκοῦνε τὰ χερουβικά ἄσματα, ἐνῶ ἐμεῖς ταραζόμαστε ἐπάνω στὴ γῆ, ὅπως ἡ σκόνη πὺ τὴν παίρνει ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ ὁ νοῦς μας ἔχει προσκολληθεῖ στὰ γῆινα.

Ἦ τὸ ἀσθενικό μου πνεῦμα σβύνει σάν μικρὸ κερί ἀπὸ ἐλαφρὸ ἄνεμο, ἐνῶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν ἁγίων ἔκαιγε σάν τὴν ἄφλεκτὴ βᾶτο, ἀπείρακτο ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνεμο. Ποιὸς θὰ μοῦ δώσῃ τέτοια ζέση, πὺ νὰ μὴν γνωρίζω ἀνάπαυση οὔτε νύκτα οὔτε μέρα ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ; Φλογερὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ χάρη τῆς οἱ Ἅγιοι ὑπέμειναν ὅλες τὶς θλίψεις καὶ πήραν τὴν δύναμη νὰ θαυματοουργοῦν. Ἐθεράπευαν ἀρρώστους, ἀνάσταναν νεκρούς, περπατοῦσαν στὰ νερά, σηκωνόταν στὸν ἀέρα κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς, κατέβαζαν μὲ προσευχὴ βροχὴ ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ. Ἐγὼ ὅμως θὰ εὐχόμενος νὰ μάθω μόνο τὴν ταπείνωση καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅστε νὰ μὴν προσβάλλω κανέναν, ἀλλὰ νὰ προσεύχομαι γιὰ ὅλους, σάν τὸν ἑαυτὸ μου.

Ἄλξιμό μου! Γράφω γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐνῶ ὁ ἴδιος δὲν ἀγαπᾷ τὸ Θεὸ ὅπως θὰ ὀφείλα. Γι' αὐτὸ εἶμαι περίλυπος καὶ θλιμμένος, ὅπως ὁ διωγμένος ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο Ἀδάμ, καὶ ὀδύρομαι κραυγάζοντας μεγαλοφῶνας: Ἐλέησέ με Θεέ μου, τὸ πεπτωκὸς Σου πλάσμα.

Πόσες φορὲς Ἐσὺ μοῦ ἔδωσες τὴ Χάρη Σου κι ἐγὼ δὲν τὴν φύλαξα, γιατί εἶμαι κενόδοξος. Ἡ ψυχὴ μου ὅμως Σὲ γνωρίζει, τὸν Κτίστη καὶ Θεὸ μου, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ Σὲ ζητῶ μὲ θρήνους, ὅπως θρηνοῦσε ὁ Ἰωσήφ ὅταν τὸν ἔσερναν δοῦλο στὴν Αἴγυπτο. Ἐγὼ Σὲ στενοχωρῶ μὲ τὶς ἀμαρτίες μου καὶ Σὺ ἀπομακρύνεις τὸ Πρόσωπό Σου ἀπὸ μένα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μου Σὲ ποθεῖ καὶ λυώνει γιὰ Σένα.

Ἦ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, μὴ μ' ἐγκαταλείπεις. Ὄταν ἀπομακρύνεσαι ἀπὸ μένα, μαῦρες σκέψεις καταπιέζουν τὴν καρδιά μου καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μου Σὲ νοσταλγεῖ μὲ καυτὰ δάκρυα.

Ἦ Παναγία Δέσποινα Θεοτόκε, Ἐσὺ βλέπεις τὴ λύπη μου. Βλέπεις πὺ στενοχώρησα τὸν Κύριο, κι Αὐτὸς μὲ ἐγκατέλειψε. Σὲ ἱκετεύω: Σῶσε με τὸ πεσμένο πλάσμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, σῶσε με τὸν δοῦλο Σου.

Ἄν σκέφετσαι κακὸ γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, αὐτὸ σημαίνει πὺ μέσα σου ζῇ πονηρὸ πνεῦμα καὶ αὐτὸ σοῦ ὑποβάλλει

πονηρὲς σκέψεις ἐναντίον τῶν ἀδελφῶν. Κι ἂν κάποιοι πεθάνει ἀμετανόητος, χωρίς νὰ συγχωρήσῃ τὸν ἀδελφὸ, τότε ἡ ψυχὴ του θὰ πάῃ ἐκεῖ πού μένει τὸ πονηρὸ πνεῦμα, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει κυριεύσει τὴν ψυχὴ του. Τέτοιοι εἶναι ὁ νόμος: Ἄν συγχωρεῖς, σημαίνει πὼς σὲ συγχώρεσε καὶ σένα ὁ Κύριος. Ἄν ὁμως δὲν συγχωρεῖς τὸν ἀδελφὸ, σημαίνει πὼς καὶ ἡ δική σου ἁμαρτία παραμένει ἀσυγχώρητη.

Ὁ Κύριος θέλει νὰ ἀγαποῦμε τὸν πλησίον. Κι ἂν σκέφτεσαι γι' αὐτὸν πὼς ὁ Κύριος τὸν ἀγαπᾷ, σημαίνει πὼς ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι μαζί σου. Κι ἂν σκέφτεσαι πὼς ὁ Κύριος ἀγαπᾷ πολὺ τὸ πλάσμα Του καὶ συμπονεῖς καὶ σὺ ὁ ἴδιος κάθε κτίσμα καὶ ἀγαπᾷς τοὺς ἐχθρούς, ἐνῶ τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου τὸν θεωρεῖς χειρότερον ἀπὸ ὅλους, αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι εἶναι μαζί σου ἡ μεγάλη χάρις τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος

Ὅποιος ἔχει μέσα του τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, ἔστω καὶ λίγο, αὐτὸς θλίβεται γιὰ ὅλον τὸν κόσμο μέρα καὶ νύχτα καὶ ἡ καρδιά του πονεῖ κάθε δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἰδιαίτερος τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πού δὲν γνωρίζουν τὸν Θεὸ ἢ καὶ ἐναντιώνονται σ' Αὐτὸν, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ πορεύονται στὴ φωτιά τῶν βασάνων. Αὐτὸς προσεύχεται γι' αὐτοὺς μέρα καὶ νύχτα περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅτι γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του, νὰ μετανοήσουν καὶ νὰ γνωρίσουν τὸν Κύριο.

Ὁ Κύριος προσευχόταν γιὰ τοὺς σταυρωτές Του: «Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς· οὐ γὰρ οἶδας τί ποιοῦσι». Ὁ ἀρχιδιάκονος Στέφανος προσευχόταν γι' αὐτοὺς πού τὸν λιθοβολοῦσαν γιὰ νὰ τὸν θανατώσουν: «Κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ταύτην». Κι ἐμεῖς ἂν θέλουμε νὰ διαφυλάξουμε τὴν Χάρι, πρέπει νὰ προσευχόμαστε γιὰ τοὺς ἐχθρούς. Ἄν δὲν σπλαχνίζεσαι τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸ πού θὰ βασανίζεται στὴν φωτιά, σημαίνει πὼς μέσα σου δὲν ζῆ ἡ Χάρι τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἀλλὰ πονηρὸ πνεῦμα. Ἐνόσο λοιπὸν ζῆς ἀκόμη, ἀγωνίσου νὰ ἀπαλλαγῆς ἀπ' αὐτὸ μὲ τὴν ἀληθινή μετάνοια.



Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι σὲ ὅλα ἀχόρταγος, θέλει ν' ἀπολάβῃ πολλά, χωρίς νὰ μπορῇ νὰ τὰ προφτάξῃ ὅλα. Καὶ βασανίζεται. Ὅποιος ὁμως φτάξῃ σὲ μιὰ κατάστασι πού νὰ εὐχαριστεῖται μὲ τὰ λίγα, καὶ νὰ μὴ θέλῃ πολλά, ἔστω κι ἂν μπορεῖ νὰ τ' ἀποχτήσῃ, ἐκεῖνος λοιπὸν εἶναι ὁ εὐτυχημένος. Δὲν τὸ κάνει ἀπὸ οἰκονομία, εἴτε γιατί ἔχει τὴν ιδέα πὼς τὰ πολλὰ τὸν βλάπτουνε στὴν ψυχὴ ἢ στὸ σῶμα. Ἀλλὰ γιατί στὰ λίγα καὶ στὰ ἀπλὰ βρίσκει πιὸ ἀγνή ικανοποίηση. Καὶ περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλα, ἐπειδὴ μὲ τὰ ἀπλὰ καὶ μὲ τὰ λίγα δὲν χάνει τὸν ἑαυτὸ του. «Τίς ἐστὶ πλούσιος; Ὁ ἐν ὀλίγῳ ἀναπαυόμενος».

Φώτης Κόντογλου (+1965)

Περὶ Ἐξομολογήσεως

Ἁγίου Κοσμά τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ, ἀπὸ τὸ «Διδαχὲς τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμά τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ», τοῦ Ἰωάννου Β. Μενοῦνου, σελ. 164-167.

Εδῶ ὁποῦ ἦλθα, Χριστιανοί μου, ἔλαβα μίαν χαρὰν μεγάλην, μὰ ἔλαβα καὶ μίαν λύπην μεγάλην. Χαρὰν μεγάλην ἔλαβα βλέποντας τὴν καλὴν σας γνώμην, τὴν καλὴν σας μετάνοιαν, λύπην ἔλαβα στοχαζόμενος τὴν ἀναξιότητά μου, πὼς δὲν ἔχω καιρὸν νὰ σᾶς ἐξομολογήσω ὅλους ἕνα πρὸς ἕνα, νὰ μοῦ εἰπῇ τὸ παράπονόν του ὁ καθένας, νὰ τοῦ εἰπῶ καὶ ἐγὼ ἐκεῖνο ὁποῦ μὲ φωτίσῃ ὁ Θεός. Θέλω καὶ ἀγαπῶ, ἀμὰ δὲν ἠμπορῶ, παιδιὰ μου. Καθὼς ἕνας πατέρας εἶναι ἄρρωστος, πηγαίνει τὸ παιδί του νὰ τὸ παρηγορήσῃ, ἐκεῖνος μὴ μπορώντας τὸ διώχνει, μὰ πὼς τὸ διώχνει; Μὲ τὴν καρδίαν καμμένην. Θέλει νὰ τὸ παρηγορήσῃ, μὰ δὲν ἠμπορεῖ. Πατέρας ἀνάξιος εἶμαι ἐγώ. Πνευματικὰ παιδιὰ μου εἴσαστε ἡ εὐγενεῖά σας. Τώρα ἔρχεται ἕνας νὰ ἐξομολογηθῇ εἰς τοῦ λόγου μου νὰ μοῦ εἰπῇ τὸ παράπονόν του, νὰ τοῦ εἰπῶ καὶ ἐγὼ ἐκεῖνο ὁποῦ μὲ φωτίσῃ ὁ Θεός. Ἐγὼ μὴ ἠμπορώντας τὸν διώχνω, μὰ πὼς τὸν διώχνω; Τὸν διώχνω καὶ καίεται ἡ καρδιά μου καθὼς ὁ πατέρας μὲ τὸ παιδί του. Τὶ νὰ σᾶς κάμω; Μὰ πάλιν, νὰ μὴν ὑστερηθῆτε παντελῶς, σᾶς λέγω ἐγὼ παραμικρόν. Ὅταν θέλετε νὰ ἰατρευθετε τὴν ψυχὴ σας, τέσσαρα πράγματα σᾶς χρειάζονται. Κάνομέ τε ἕνα παζάρι; Ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸν ὁποῦ ἐγεννηθήκετε ἕως τώρα ὅσα ἁμαρτήματα ἐκάμετε νὰ τὰ πάρω ὅλα εἰς τὸν λαιμόν μου καὶ ἡ εὐγενεῖά σας νὰ μοῦ πάρετε τέσσαρες τρίχες. Βαρὺ νὰ ἀσκηώσετε τέσσαρες τρίχες ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ γένεια καὶ νὰ σᾶς πάρω ἐγὼ ὅλα σας τὰ ἁμαρτήματα; Καὶ τὶ νὰ τὰ κάμω; Ὡστόσοσον ἔχω μίαν καταβόθρα καὶ τὰ ρίχνω ὅλα μέσα ὡσάν χωνευτήρι. Ποῖα εἶναι ἡ καταβόθρα; Εἶναι ἡ εὐσπλαγχνία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας.

Πρῶτη τρίχα εἶναι ὅταν θέλετε νὰ ἐξομολογήσθε τὸ πρῶτον θεμέλιον εἶναι αὐτὸ ὁποῦ εἶπαμε, νὰ συγχωρᾶτε τὸν ἐχθρόν σας. Τὸ κάμνετε;

– Τὸ κάμνομεν, ἄγιε τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἐπήρετε τὴν πρώτην τρίχα. Δευτέρα τρίχα εἶναι νὰ εὐρίσκετε πνευματικὸν καλόν, γραμματισμένον, σοφόν, ἐνάρετον, εὐλαβὴ νὰ ἐξομολογήσθε. Καὶ νὰ ἐξομολογήσῃ καὶ νὰ εἰπῆς ὅλα σου τὰ ἁμαρτήματα. Νὰ ἔχῃς ἑκατὸ ἁμαρτίες καὶ εἰπῆς τίς ἐνενηντα ἑννέα εἰς τὸν πνευματικὸν καὶ μίαν νὰ μὴ φανερώσης, ὅλες ἀσυγχώρητες μένουν. Καὶ ὅταν κάνῃς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, τότε πρέπει νὰ ἐντρέπῃσαι, ἀλλὰ ὅταν ἐξομολογήσῃσαι, νὰ μὴ ἔχῃς καμμίαν ἐντροπήν.

Μία γυναῖκα ἐπήγε νὰ ἐξομολογηθῇ εἰς ἕνα ἀσκητήν. Ὁ ἀσκητὴς εἶχε ἕνα ὑποτακτικὸν ἐνάρετον. Λέγει τοῦ ὑποτακτικοῦ του ὁ ἀσκητὴς: πηγαινε παρέκει νὰ ἐξομολογήσω τὴν γυναῖκα. Ὁ ὑποτακτικὸς ἐμάκρυνεν ἕως ὁποῦ ἔβλεπε, μὰ δὲν ἤκουε τίποτε. Ἐξομολόγησε τὴν γυναῖκα, ἔφυγε. Ὑστερα ἔρχεται ὁ ὑποτακτικὸς καὶ λέγει: «Γέροντά μου, εἶδα ἕνα παράδοξον θαῦμα: ἐκεῖ πού ἐξομολογοῦσες τὴν γυναῖκα ἔβλεπα ὁποῦ ἔβγαιναν μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα της ὀφίδια μικρά. Βλέπω καὶ κρεμεῖται ἕνα μεγάλο. Ἐκανε νὰ ἔβγῃ καὶ πάλιν

έτραβήθη εις τὰ ὀπίσω.» Λέγει ὁ ἀσκητής: «Πήγαινε νὰ τὴν κράξεις νὰ ἔλθῃ ὀπίσω ὀγλήγορα.» Πηγαίνοντας ὁ ὑποτακτικὸς τὴν εὔρεν ἀποθαμένην. Γυρίζει ὀπίσω καὶ τὸ λέγει τοῦ γέροντός του. Αὐτὸς μὴν ἠμπορώντας νὰ καταλάβῃ τὸ θαῦμα ἐπαρακάλεσε τὸν Θεὸν νὰ τοῦ φανερώσῃ ἢ γυναικίαν ἐσώθῃ ἢ ἐκολάσθῃ; Καὶ φαίνεται ἔμπρὸς του μία ἀρκούδα μαύρη καὶ λέγει τοῦ ἀσκητή: «Εγὼ εἶμαι ἐκείνη ἢ ταλαίπωρος γυναικίαν, ὅπου ἐξομολογήθηκα καὶ δὲν σοῦ ἐφάνέρωσα ἓνα θανάσιμον ἁμάρτημα ὅπου εἶχα κάμει καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὅλα μου τὰ ἁμαρτήματα ἔμειναν ἀσυγχώρητα καὶ με ἐπρόσταξεν ὁ Κύριος νὰ πηγαίνω εἰς τὴν Κόλασιν νὰ καίωμαι πάντοτε.» Καὶ ἐνταυτῷ ἔγινε μία βρῶμα ὡσὰν καπνὸς καὶ ἐχάθη ἀπ' ἔμπροσθέν του.

Διὰ τοῦτο, Χριστιανοί μου, ὅταν ἐξομολογᾶσθε, νὰ λέγετε ὅλα σας τὰ ἁμαρτήματα παστρικά καὶ καλά. Καὶ πρῶτον νὰ εἰπῆς τοῦ πνευματικοῦ σου: «Πνευματικέ μου, ἐγὼ θεὸς νὰ κολασθῶ, διατι δὲν ἀγαπῶ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου με ὅλην μου τὴν καρδίαν καὶ με ὅλην μου τὴν ψυχὴν ὡσὰν τὸν ἑαυτὸν μου.» Καὶ νὰ εἰπῆς ἐκεῖνο ποῦ σὲ τύπτει τὸ συνειδὸς σου ἢ ἐφόρνευες ἢ ἐπόρνευες ἢ ἐμοίχευες ἢ ὄρκον ἔκαμες ἢ εἶπες ψεύματα ἢ τὸν πατέρα σου ἢ τὴν μητέρα σου δὲν ἐτίμησες ἢ ἀδελφὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἢ γείτονας τὸν γείτονα ἢ γυναικίαν τὸν ἄνδρα ἢ ἄλλο κακὸν ὅπου νὰ ἔκαμες. Βαρύ εἶναι νὰ τὸ κάμῃς αὐτό;

– Ὁχι, ἅγιε διδάσκαλε.

Ἴδου ἐπῆρες τὴν δευτέραν τρίχα. Ἡ τρίχα ἢ τρίτη εἶναι φυσικὰ ὡσὰν ἐξομολογηθῆς θεὸς νὰ σὲ ἐρωτήσῃ ὁ πνευματικὸς νὰ σοῦ εἰπῆ: «Διατί, παιδί μου, νὰ κάμῃς αὐτὰ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα;» Ἐσὺ νὰ προσέχῃς νὰ μὴν κατηγορήσῃς ἄλλον, ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου σου καὶ νὰ εἰπῆς: «Αὐτὰ τὰ ἔκαμα ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸν μου κεφάλι, ἀπὸ τὴν κακὴν μου προαίρεσιν.» Βαρύ εἶναι νὰ κατηγορήσῃς τοῦ λόγου σου;

– Ὁχι.

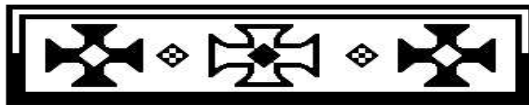
Λοιπὸν ἐπῆρες καὶ τὴν τρίτην τρίχα. Ἔχομεν τὴν τετάρτην. Ὅταν σὲ δώσῃ ἄδειαν ὁ πνευματικὸς σου καὶ ἀναχωρήσῃς, νὰ ἀποφασίσῃς με στερεὰν γνώμην, με στερεὰν ἀπόφασιν καλύτερα νὰ χύσῃς τὸ αἷμα σου, μὰ εἰς ἄλλην φορὰν ἁμαρτίαν νὰ μὴ κάμῃς. Τὸ κάμνεις καὶ αὐτό;

– Μάλιστα.

Ἐπῆρες καὶ τὴν τετάρτην τρίχα. Αὐτὰ τὰ τέσσαρα εἶναι τὰ ἱατρικά σου καθὼς εἶπαμε καὶ ὄχι ἄλλα. Τὸ πρῶτον εἶναι νὰ συγχωρᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς σας. Τὸ δεύτερο νὰ ἐξομολογᾶσθε παστρικά καὶ καλά. Τὸ τρίτο νὰ κατηγορᾶτε τοῦ λόγου σας. Τὸ τέταρτο νὰ ἀποφασίζετε νὰ μὴ κάμῃτε ἁμαρτίαν. Καὶ ἂν ἠμπορεῖτε νὰ ἐξομολογᾶσθε κάθε ἡμέραν, καλὸν καὶ ἅγιον εἶναι. Εἰδὲ καὶ δὲν ἠμπορεῖτε καθ' ἡμέραν, ἄς εἶναι μία φορὰ τὴν ἐβδομάδα καὶ μία φορὰ τὸν μῆνα ἢ τὸ ὀλιγότερον τέσσαρες φορὲς τὸν χρόνον. Καὶ νὰ συνηθίζετε τὰ παιδιὰ σας ἀπὸ μικρά, διὰ νὰ συνηθίζουν εἰς τὸν καλὸν δρόμον, νὰ ἐξομολογοῦνται.

Ἴδου ὅπου σὰς ἐξομολόγησα ὅλους παρρησίαν, διὰ νὰ μὴν ὑστερηθῆτε. Αὐτὰ ὅπου σὰς εἶπα εἶναι τὰ ἱατρικά σας εἰδὲ

ἐκεῖνο ὅπου δίνουν οἱ πνευματικοί, σαρανταλείτουργα, μετάνοιες, νηστείες καὶ ἄλλα, δὲν εἶναι ἱατρικά, ἀλλὰ διὰ νὰ μὴν τύχῃ καὶ ξεπέσετε ἄλλην φορὰν εἰς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν σὰς τὰ δίδουν καὶ ὁποῖος τὰ βάλῃ μέσα εἰς τὴν καρδίαν του αὐτὰ τὰ τέσσαρα, νὰ ἀποθάνῃ ἐκείνη τὴν ὥραν, σώνεται. Εἰδὲ χωρὶς αὐτὰ τὰ τέσσαρα χίλιες χιλιάδες καλά νὰ κάμῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἂν ἀποθάνῃ, εἰς τὴν Κόλασιν πηγαίνει.



Διὰ τὴν Προσευχὴν

Ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης.

«Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι φύλακας τῆς σωφροσύνης, χαλιναγωγεῖ τὸν θυμὸν, καταστέλλει τὴν ὑπερηφάνεια, καθαρίζει ἀπὸ τῆς μνησικακίας, διώχνει τὸ φθόνον, καταργεῖ τὴν ἀδικίαν, ἐπανορθώνει τὴν ἀσέβεια.

Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι δύναμις τῶν σωμάτων, φέρνει χαρὰ στὸ σπῖτι, χορηγεῖ εὐνομία στὴν πόλιν, παρέχει ἰσχύ στὴν ἐξουσία, δίνει νίκη κατὰ τὴν διάρκειαν τοῦ πολέμου, ἐξασφαλίζει τὴν εἰρήνην, ξαναενώνει τοὺς χωρισμένους, διατηρεῖ στὴ θέσιν τοὺς ἐνωμένους.

Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι τὸ ἐπισφράγισμα τῆς παρθενίας, ἢ πιστότητα τοῦ γάμου, ὄπλο στους ὁδοιπόρους, φύλακας ὄσων κοιμοῦνται, θάρρος τῶν ξύπνιων, στοὺς γεωργοὺς φέρνει τὴν εὐφορία, στοὺς ναυτιλλόμενους χαρίζει τὴ σωτηρία.

Ἡ προσευχὴ γίνεται συνήγορος τῶν δικαζομένων, ἐλευθερία τῶν φυλακισμένων, παρηγορία τῶν λυπημένων, χαρὰ γιὰ τοὺς χαρούμενους, παρηγορία στοὺς πενθοῦντες, δόξα γι' αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἔρχονται σὲ γάμο, γιορτὴ στὰ γενέθλια, σάβανο σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ πεθαίνουν.

Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι συνομιλία μετὰ τὸν Θεόν, θεωρία τῶν ἀοράτων, πληροφόρηση γιὰ ὅσα ἐπιθυμοῦμε, ὁμοτιμία μετὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, προκοπὴ στὰ καλά ἔργα, ἀποτροπὴ ἀπὸ τὰ κακά, διόρθωση γιὰ κείνους ποὺ ἁμαρτάνουν, ἀπόλαυση τῶν παρόντων ἀγαθῶν, ὑπόστασις τῶν ἀγαθῶν τοῦ μέλλοντος.

Ἡ προσευχὴ μετέβαλε γιὰ τὸν Ἰωνά σὲ σπῖτι τὸ κῆτος, ἐπανεφερε στὴ ζωὴ τὸν Ἐζεκία ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς πύλες τοῦ θανάτου. Γιὰ χάριν τῶν τριῶν νέων μετέστρεψε τὴ φλόγα τῆς καμίνου σὲ δροσερὴ αὔρα καὶ γιὰ τοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες κέρδισε νίκη κατὰ τῶν Ἀμαληκῶν.

Καὶ κοντὰ σ' αὐτὰ μπορεῖς νὰ βρεῖς ἀμέτρητα παραδείγματα ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἔχουν γίνει κι ἀπὸ τὰ ὅποια φαίνεται καθαρὰ πὼς κανένα ἀπὸ ὅσα θεωροῦνται πολὺτιμα στὴ ζωὴ δὲν εἶναι ἀνώτερον ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴν.

Ἐπειδὴ εἶναι πολλὰ καὶ κάθε εἶδους τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποὺ μας ἔδωκε ἢ θεῖα χάρις, αὐτὸ τὸ ἓνα ἔχομε νὰ ἀνταποδώσουμε γιὰ ὅσα λάβαμε, δηλαδὴ νὰ πληρώνουμε τὸν Εὐεργετὴ μετὰ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ μετὰ τὴν εὐχαριστία...».

ON THE TERM “HERETIC”

Source: “*The Non-Orthodox.*”

Fr. Seraphim (Rose) once wrote the following in a letter to a woman who was interested in becoming Orthodox but who was concerned about how some in the Church (usually converts) related to those outside of Her:

I was happy to receive your letter—happy not because you are confused about the question that troubles you, but because your attitude reveals that in the truth of Orthodoxy to which you are drawn you wish to find room also for a loving, compassionate attitude to those outside the Orthodox Faith.

I firmly believe that this is indeed what Orthodoxy teaches...

The word “heretic” ... is indeed used too frequently nowadays. It has a definite meaning and function, to distinguish new teachings from the Orthodox teaching; but few of the non-Orthodox Christians today are consciously “heretics,” and it really does no good to call them that.

In the end, I think, Father Dimitry Dudko’s attitude is the correct one: We should view the non-Orthodox as people to whom Orthodoxy has not yet been revealed, as people who are potentially Orthodox (if only we ourselves would give them a better example!). There is no reason why we cannot call them Christians and be on good terms with them, recognize that we have at least our faith in Christ in common, and live in peace especially with our own families. St. Innocent’s attitude to the Roman Catholics in California is a good example for us. A harsh, polemical attitude is called for only when the non-Orthodox are trying to take away our flocks or change our teachings.

We live in a culture of extreme atheistic relativism, where the only dogma tolerated is that we should be intolerant of those who actually believe there are dogmas reflecting absolute truth. Combine this with popular attitudes reflecting sensitivity to “multi-cultural diversity” and “politically correct language” and the terms “heretic” and “heresy” end up seeming harsh and “unloving.” Yet these Traditional terms, found often in the writings of the Fathers, should not be viewed by informed and sober-minded people in such an emotionally negative way.

This language may “turn off” some people, but it is only because they do not know what is meant by the terms “heretic” and “heresy” and the necessity for them... [T]hese words have been in the theological glossary of the Orthodox Church from the beginning.

A “heretic” is simply one who maintains a “heretical doctrine.” The sincerity and good will of the “heretic” is not in question. Nevertheless, “heresy” is evil, because it is a powerful means by which the Devil seeks to “prevail” against the Church...

Western Christians should keep in mind that the position of the Church against heretics and heretical teaching most forcefully stated in Her various anathemas—**has arisen, and will continue to arise as long as She contends in this world for pastoral reasons** (e.g., to guard the flock and awaken those in error), not to harshly condemn others. As Archbishop Chrysostomos points out:

[W]e must realize that the Orthodox Church is “catholic.” It is meant for everyone. When, therefore, we seek to protect those within the Church from the **bacterium** of non-Orthodox belief, we must be constantly aware that this is for the purpose also of preserving Orthodoxy as a pure standard for all those who confess Christ (if not for all of those who are not, in fact, confessors of the Christian Faith). We wish to preserve perfectly and in full force the bread of salvation taught to us by the Prophets, the Savior, the Apostles, and the Fathers and Mothers of the Church, lest we offer stones in the name of Orthodoxy. Our exclusivity, our **apparent** disdain for the religious observances of others, and our fear of the relativism of even the best-intentioned ecumenists are things that ultimately derive from pure and true ecumenism, which is expressed in the missionary spirit of desiring with the whole heart and soul to bring all mankind to Orthodoxy. We must remember this. And if we do remember it, then we will be very careful not to hurt, to insult, or to humiliate non-Orthodox. All spiritual actions are, of course, meant to benefit our own souls; but, at the same time, they are aimed at the salvation of our fellow man.

Furthermore, to lovingly help a heterodox Christian see the errors in the teachings that they hold, and that they are outside of the Church and in need of being in-grafted to Her, is an act of love. One should not be fooled by the “love” that ecumenists typically exhibit for the heterodox. For it is one that is typically born of dogmatic minimalism and religious syncretism—in short, one that fails to speak **the truth** and thus merely confirms the heterodox in their errors. This passage from the writings of St. Maximos the Confessor illustrates the spirit of “true ecumenism”:

I write these things not wishing to cause distress to the heretics or to rejoice in their ill treatment—God forbid; but, rather, rejoicing and being gladdened at their return. For what is more pleasing to the Faithful than to see the scattered children of God gathered again as one? Neither do I exhort you to place harshness above the love of men. May I not be so mad! I beseech you to do and to carry out good to all men with care and assiduity, becoming all things to all men, as the need of each is shown to you; I want and pray you to be wholly harsh and implacable with the heretics only in regard to cooperating with them **or in any way whatever support-**

ing their deranged belief. For I reckon it misanthropy and a departure from Divine love to lend support to error, that those previously seized by it might be even more greatly corrupted.

In short, I do think it is best to be extremely careful when using the terms “heresy” and “heretic.” They are unfortunately loaded with many negative connotations, perhaps making them an unwise choice of words depending upon the recipient. When not in the hands of a person who is *wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove* (Matt. 10:16), they could be misconstrued as a statement about one’s sincerity or love for God—which may be real and profound—or about their eternal destiny. Though a use of these terms is clearly warranted by Holy Tradition and the example of the God-bearing Fathers, it can also be an occasion for abuse, especially by those who do not *speak the truth in love* (Eph 4:15).



ON PARENTAL BEHAVIOR

By Elder Paisios, from “Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain,” pg. 124.

Parents must live like true Christians and be careful of their behavior. Children are like computers; since a very early age, they register in their minds everything they see or hear happening in their homes. If they see their father and mother quarrelling, cursing and using bad language, they record everything in their mind’s tape. So, when they grow older, they start cursing and quarrelling using their parents’ language. They behave this way, without really wanting to, because they have inherited the pathetic behavior of their parents. Later on when they realize their mistakes, they find it difficult to correct them.

The biggest help and best inheritance the parents can offer to their children is to make them recipients of their own natural kindness. This does not require extra effort, as young children, whose minds’ tapes are empty of any good or evil, can easily absorb the behavior of their immediate surroundings which are their parents. If a child sees his parents being polite, loving and speaking nicely to each other, humbly praying, then his soul, like carbon paper, will copy the good conduct of the parents.

Many parents, thinking they love their children, end up destroying them without realizing it. For example, a mother, who excessively loves her daughter, tells her while holding her in her arms: “What a nice child I have,” or, while kissing her, she says: “I have the best child in the world.” Therefore, from a very young age (when a child is unable to realize it and react against it) the child acquires a haughty mind-set and believes she is a nice person. As a result, she is unable to sense the lack of God’s presence and His benevolent power in her life and, of course, cannot learn to ask for Him. Consequently, she develops self-confidence as stiff as marble, which often never goes away, since, as time goes by, it becomes very difficult to get rid of it.

Unfortunately, the first ones affected by this pride are the parents. How can the children listen to their parents, when they themselves believe they are virtuous and know everything?

Therefore, parents must look after their spiritual life, because apart from themselves, they are also responsible for their children. Of course, they have the excuse of having inherited their negative traits from their own parents; they have no excuse, however, for not trying to get rid of them, once they become aware of their existence.

The same applies to children. They inherit a fault for which they are not responsible, but they should not blame their parents for it. They have an independent and free will and can discard their “inheritance,” if they decided they don’t want it and don’t love it.

In my opinion, the person who has unwillingly inherited the evil, and strives to get rid of it, is more praiseworthy than the one who has inherited good qualities from his parents and was never forced to struggle to acquire it; the first one fought for it, whereas the second one found it ready. God’s judgment will take this fact into consideration. When, for instance, a child has a father who is a thief, he will also learn to steal, if he lacks good will and finally accepts his father’s inheritance. God will be very lenient in judging this child, as he inherited the tendency to steal from his father, when he was still very young, and could not differentiate between good and evil.



Speak more to God about your children than to your children about God. The soul of the teenager is in a state of a freedom explosion. For this reason he has a hard time accepting various counsels. So, rather than counseling him continuously and reproaching him now and again, leave the situation to Christ, to the Panaghia, and to the Saints, asking them to bring him to reason.

Parents should love their children as their children and not as their idols. That is to say, they should love their children as they are and not how they would like them to be, that is, to be like them.

Elder Epiphanius



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A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE OF ABORTION

By Nicholas Sanchez, April 2001.

From the Editor: Although written by a non-Orthodox, the subject article exemplifies some excellent views on today's "pseudo-moral" aspects of the dreadful act of abortion.

The black-and-white debate over abortion has, for a long time, been convoluted by the proponents of legalized abortion. The pro-abortion movement began this by refusing to be tagged by what they really stood for. They were not “pro-abortion”, we were informed; instead they were merely “pro-choice”. (This was a brilliant strategic move on their part. Who in their right mind could be against “choice”? This is America, after all. We have a dozen different choices for everything. To be against choice—any kind of choice—is practically un-American.)

Then the “pro-choice” crowd insisted to the listening public that abortion should not be portrayed as a moral issue. “Keep your Rosaries off of my ovaries” was an early rallying cry of feminists and their fellow travelers. For abortion to become acceptable to society at large, feminists realized that they had to instill in the zeitgeist a belief that women had this specious “right” to an abortion. This so-called right had to trump all religious and cultural taboos that might consider such an action abhorrent.

The public was endlessly lectured by Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, et. al., that instead of being a moral issue, abortion was purely a personal issue between a woman and her doctor. No mention was ever made of the father of the unborn child. Apparently this is an issue that is a bit too personal for the one half of the party that bore responsibility for the pregnancy in the first place.

Thus, the major selling points of abortion were: one, pro-abortionists were not quite that scary a gaggle; instead, they were just a merry bunch of choice peddlers. And two, abortion is a procedure and a debate that is entirely secular in nature; it would be impossible to attach it to any moral codes (such as “Thou shalt not kill”).

All of this might explain why we have heard very little throughout the years from people who claimed to be both believers in God and supporters of abortion. If having an abortion is no different than having your tonsils taken out, why should this be a debate that concerns the Church? It is best, then, to sit back and label religious pro-lifers as fanatics rather than getting into a debate over whether or not God is in favor of a medical procedure that would allow the taking of human life.

However, changing attitudes have now caused the pro-abortion community to dip its toe in an area where devils should fear to tread. And that is in a self re-examination of the moral/religious implications of an abortion. Such a move is not at all

surprising. After all, for the past few years, polls have consistently shown that Americans are becoming increasingly uneasy with abortions. About this same time, polls have shown an increased attention by Americans to their spiritual life.

Evangelical churches are, by and large, bursting at the seams. And the Catholic Church has shown signs of revitalization in the United States and an increased number of young, conservative-minded vocations to the priesthood. Amid all this newfound religiosity in the hinterlands, some enterprising activists have found time to step up the activities of a group called “Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice” (RCRC).

Self billed as a “pro-faith”, “pro-family”, “pro-choice” organization, the RCRC exists mainly to peddle the notion that it is perfectly moral to be pro-abortion. Indeed, they maintain, the Bible itself shows that abortion is permissible.

Of course, such a notion is laughable. There is no justification, at all, for abortion in the Scriptures. And no amount of bending of Scripture can, with any degree of intellectual honesty, credibly make this argument with a straight face.

We know that the Gospel gives an account of St. John the Baptist leaping in his mother’s womb, St. Elizabeth, upon the visitation by Elizabeth’s cousin, the Blessed Virgin Mary. The unborn John leapt for joy because of his close proximity to the Savior of mankind, Christ Jesus, who was developing in the Virgin’s womb.

And if you think that the telling of this event is too sentimental for proof that Christian thought, guided by the Holy Scriptures, would not allow for the sanctioning of abortion, then let’s look at the other guidepost of Christianity: Holy Tradition.

There is the “Didache”, which is an early constitution of the Christian Church. Reliable historians date this “catechism” to as early as the middle of the first century. This would make it older than the Synoptic Gospels.

On the matter of abortion, the Didache says, “Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion” (2.2). It also says, “The Way of Death is filled with people who are ... murderers of children and abortionists of God’s creatures” (5:1-2). And lest you need more proof of the Christian tradition and its intolerance of abortion, read the words of some of the early Church Fathers. St. Basil the Great once said, “She who has deliberately destroyed a fetus has to pay the penalty of murder...” St. John Chrysostom, a contemporary of St. Basil and one of the Church’s greatest orators, also gave a stinging rebuke to those who would “murder before ... birth.”

It is quite obvious that the true Christian perspective on abortion is unequivocal—such an act is repugnant and unacceptable before the eyes of God. And while the pro-abortion crowd may be able to manipulate the English language and the American political system, they cannot manipulate 2000 years of Christian truth, no matter how hard they try.

A LAMENT FOR SIN

By St. Basil the Great.

In profound humility I weep for all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, covert and overt, great and little, committed by word and deed, in thought and intention, day and night, at every hour and minute of my life.

I weep over my pride and my ambition, my self-love and my boastfulness; I weep over my fits of anger, irritation, excessive shouting, swearing, quarreling and cursing; I weep for having criticized, censured, gossiped, slandered, and defamed, for my wrath, enmity, hatred, envy, jealousy, vengeance and rancor; I weep over my indulgences in lust, impure thoughts and evil inclinations; covetousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and sloth; I weep for having talked idly, used foul language, blasphemed, derided, joked, ridiculed, mocked, enjoyed empty gaiety, singing, dancing and every pleasure to excess;

I weep over my self-indulgence, cupidity, love of money and miserliness, unmercifulness and cruelty; I weep over my laziness, indolence, negligence, love of comfort, weakness, idleness, absent-mindedness, irresponsibility, inattention, love of sleep, for hours spent in idle pursuits, and for my lack of concentration in prayer and in Church, for not observing fasts and not doing charitable works. I weep over my lack of faith, my doubting, my perplexity, my coldness, my indifference, my weakness and unfeelingness in what concerns the Holy Orthodox Faith, and over all my foul, cunning and reviling thoughts; I weep over my exaggerated sorrow and grief, depression and despair, and over sins committed willingly.

I weep, but what tears can I find for a worthy and fitting way to weep for all the actions of my ill fated life and for my immeasurable and profound worthlessness? How can I reveal and expose in all its nakedness each one of my sins, great and small, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, overt and covert, every hour and minute of sin? When and where shall I begin my penitential lament that will bear fitting fruit?

Perhaps soon I may have to face the last hour of my life; I shall have to stand before terrible demons and radiant angels, who will reveal and torment me with my sins; and I, in fear and trembling, will be unprepared and unable to give them an answer; the sight and sound of wailing demons, their violent and bold desire to drag me into the bottomless pit of Hell will fill my soul with confusion and terror. And then the angels of God will lead my poor soul to stand before God's fearful seat of judgment. How will I answer the Immortal King, or how will I dare, sinner that I am, to look upon My Judge? Woe is me! I have no good answer to make, for I have spent all my life in indolence and sin, all my hours and minutes in vain thoughts, desires and yearnings!

And how many times have I taken the Name of God in vain! How often, lightly and freely, at times even boldly, insolently and shamelessly have I slandered others in anger; offended, irritated, mocked them! How often have I been proud and vainglorious and boasted of good qualities that I do not possess and of deeds that I have not done! How many times have I lied, deceived, been cunning or flattered, or been insincere and deceptive; how often have I been angry, intolerant and

mean! How many times have I ridiculed the sins of my brother, caused him grief overtly and covertly, mocked or gloated over his misdeeds, his faults or his misfortunes; how many times have I been hostile to him, in anger, hatred or envy!

How often have I laughed stupidly, mocked and derided, spoke without weighing my words, ignorantly and senselessly, and uttered a numberless quantity of cutting, poisonous, insolent, frivolous, vulgar, coarse, brazen words! How often, affected by beauty, have I fed my mind, my imagination and my heart with voluptuous sensations, and unnaturally satisfied the lusts of the flesh in fantasy! How often has my tongue uttered shameful, vulgar and blasphemous things about the desires of the flesh! How often have I yearned for power and been gluttonous, satiating myself on delicacies, on tasty, varied and diverse foods and wines; because of intemperance and lack of self-control how often have I been filled past the point of satiety, lacked sobriety and been drunken, intemperate in food and drink, and broken the Holy Fasts!

How often, through selfishness, pride or false modesty, have I refused help and attention to those in need, been uncharitable, miserly, unsympathetic, mercenary and grasped at attention! How often have I entered the House of God without fear and trembling, stood there in prayer, frivolous and absent-minded, and left it in the same spirit and disposition! And in prayer at home I have been just as cold and indifferent, praying little, lazily, and indolently, inattentively and impiously, and even completely omitting the appointed prayers!

And in general, how slothful I have been, weakened by indolence and inaction; how many hours of each day have I spent in sleep, how often have I enjoyed voluptuous thoughts in bed and defiled my flesh! How many hours have I spent in empty and futile pastimes and pleasures, in frivolous talk and speech, jokes and laughter, games and fun, and how much time have I wasted conclusively in chatter, and gossip, in criticizing others and reproaching them! What shall I answer to the Lord God for every hour and every minute of lost time? I have wasted my entire life in laziness. How many times have I lost heart and despaired of my salvation and of God's mercy or through stupid habit, insensitivity, ignorance, insolence, shamelessness, and hardness sinned deliberately, willingly, in my right mind, in full awareness, in all goodwill, in both thought and intention, and in deed, and in this fashion trampled the blood of God's covenant and crucified anew within myself the Son of God and cursed Him!

O how terrible the punishment that I have drawn upon myself! How is it that my eyes are not streaming with constant tears? If only my tears flowed from the cradle to the grave, at every hour and every minute of my tortured life! Who will now cool my head with water and fill the well of my tears and help me weep over my soul that I have cast into perdition?

My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Be it unto me according to Thy will, O Lord! If Thou wouldst grant me light, be Thou blessed; if Thou wouldst grant me darkness, be Thou equally blessed. If Thou wouldst destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy righteous judgment; and if Thou wouldst not destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy boundless mercy!

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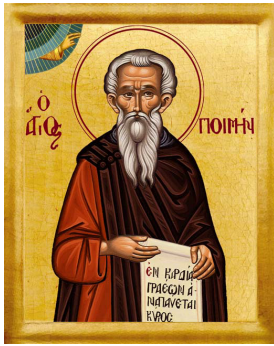
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THE ANGELS

By Fr. Ilarion Alfeyev, from an Orthodox pamphlet on "The Orthodox Church."

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen.1:1). Traditionally these verses of the Bible are understood as pointing to the two worlds created by God—one invisible, spiritual and intelligible, and the other visible and material. It is well known that there are no abstract concepts in biblical language and spiritual realities are often expressed by the word *heaven*.

Christ speaks of the Kingdom of heaven, and in the Lord's prayer we say, *Our Father Who art in heaven... Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* (Matt. 6:9-10). It is obvious that reference is not being made to visible material sky. The Kingdom of God is a spiritual, not a material, Kingdom in which God abides, for by nature He is Spirit. And when we read that He *created the heavens*, this means the spiritual world and its inhabitants, the angels.

God created the angelic world before the visible universe. The angels are incorporeal spirits who possess reason and free will. St. John of Damascus speaks of them being "ever in motion, free, incorporeal, ministering to God," of their rational, intelligent and free nature. He calls the angels "secondary spiritual lights, who receive their brightness from the first Light which is without beginning." Located in direct proximity to God, they are sustained by His light and convey this light to us.

Angels are actively engaged in the unceasing praise of God. Isaiah describes his vision of God around whom the seraphim stand and proclaim: *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full*

of his glory (Is.6:1-3). Yet the angels are also heralds sent by God to people (the Greek word *aggelos*—ἄγγελος—means *messenger, herald*): they take a vital and active part in the life of every person. Thus, the archangel announces to the Holy Virgin that she will bear a Son; angels come and minister to Jesus in the wilderness; an angel supports Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Christ Himself indicates that every person has his own guardian angel (Matt. 18:10) who is his companion, helper and protector.

According to the traditional teaching of the Church, not all angels are equal in dignity and closeness to God: various hierarchies exist among them. In the treatise *The Celestial Hierarchy*, attributed to Dionysius the Aeropagite, the author counts three angelic hierarchies, each of which is divided into three ranks. The first and highest contains the seraphim, cherubim, thrones; the second, dominions, powers, authorities; the third, principalities, archangels, angels.

In its celestial hierarchy, the upper ranks are illumined by the Divine light and partake of the mysteries of the Godhead directly from the Maker, while the lower ranks receive illumination only by devolution through the higher ranks. According to Dionysius, the angelic hierarchy finds its continuation and reflection in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of sacraments, clergy and the faithful. Thus, the ecclesiastical hierarchy partakes of the Divine mystery through the mediation of the celestial hierarchy. Biblical tradition speaks of the number of angels in general terms: there are a *thousand thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand*. The angels certainly outnumber human beings. St. Gregory of Nyssa sees in the image of the lost sheep the entire human race, while he takes the ninety-nine sheep who stayed in the hills to be the angels.

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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]

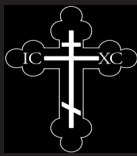
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OUR HOLY ORTHODOXY

By the Rev. Metropolitan Avgoustinos of Florina, from the weekly bulletin "Kyriaki," June 30, 2006, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

Our faith, my dear brethren, is the only true faith. It liberates from sin and guides to the everlasting life. What is of further importance is also Holy Orthodoxy's ability to defend Herself. Those of other faiths, or the heretics, may challenge us: "This only true faith stuff, it is easy for you to say; but what proof do you have?"

Our faith, my brethren, has an overabundance of proof for all who doubt Her or seek evidence of Her unique validity. One such proof is our Holy Apostles, whom we honor and celebrate each summer. I will thus make an effort to show you how the life, teachings, and manner of death of the Apostles confirm by themselves that our faith is true.

Difficult Work and Poor Means

Their work was immensely difficult while their means were negligible and poor. Our Lord summoned the Holy Apostles for a task that was very difficult. As it is difficult or even impossible to guide a sailboat against a strong current or to uproot a 100-year old sycamore tree, the work of the Apostles was even more difficult. For the task in front of them, in other words the overthrow of the entire old world, what means did Christ utilize? Did he employ kings, generals, philosophers, wealthy individuals, or any "powerful" persons of the world at that time? No, He selected no such collaborators or "partners"; for if He had made such a choice, many would be claiming that it was through their abilities and means that our faith prevailed. On the contrary, our Church was confronted

with a myriad of pre-suppositions, all of them negative. And it is for exactly this reason that nobody can ever claim that Her victory was the result of human interventions or worldly support.

St. Paul expresses his sincere admiration and even astonishment on how, with such insignificant means, our Savior challenges and confronts the entire world. He says: *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.* (I Cor 1:27). An ecclesiastical author, Vasilios Selefkiyas, says: "In the same manner that we often admire how a good doctor, utilizing insignificant means, heals a sick person, likewise, we cannot help but admire how our God, employing such simple, weak, insignificant, and uneducated men, healed the deep-rooted wounds of the fallen man.

A New Creation

A home builder constructing a new house never places any of his building material at random. Every little stone or nail has its own unique use and location. It is likewise for every simple word within the Bible. Every word is uniquely and especially selected and utilized accordingly. Thus, in order for our Holy Bible to describe the creation of the universe, it tells the reader repeatedly in the first chapter of Genesis that God "created" (*ἐποίησε*) every living creature or being (Gen 1:1, 1:7, 1:16, 1:21, 1:25, 1:27, 1:31). This same word, though, is also utilized in the original NT in Greek, in the Gospel according to St. Mark, where the calling ("ordination" in English) of the Holy Apostles is described: *And he ordained (ἐποίησε) twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach* (Mark 3:14). Our Lord does not utilize this word by error or by coincidence. The task that He was confronted with was a new creation. Truly, to get hold of

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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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a man buried in corruption and to lift him toward a virtuous life constitutes a new creation.

Our Faith is thus man-creating, for it creates true humans. The Holy Apostles were destined to become servants in the fulfillment of this immense task. However, they were not ready for this task; it was necessary that they first were prepared and organized. Thus, the task our Lord fulfilled (among many others) was preparing and developing the Apostles for the subsequent evangelizing of the world. This was more difficult than the creation of the sun and the stars; more difficult because He had to turn these uneducated, simple men into spiritual suns and stars.

There is an old saying that a sculptor laid his sight upon a piece of marble thrown in mud. Even though many walked by and ignored it, the sculptor picked it up, took it home, cleaned it well, and started applying his knowledge upon it. Within a fairly short time period, using his chisel, produced an angel from this one piece of marble. Likewise, Christ bent down and lifted from the ground twelve ignored stones and turned them into twelve pillars / foundations of His Bride, the Church, as Revelations informs us: *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* (Rev. 21:14)

A "Taste" of Heaven

The Apostles were enabled to experience God's Grace, to "taste" Heaven, and this taste they communicated and transmitted to many others. During the time period that they spent near our Lord, they absorbed in a sponge-like manner His truth, they collected His divine aroma. They saw and heard about great and original miracles and unrepeatable teachings, holiness that truly engulfed the heavens: *His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise* (Habakkuk 3:3). These things, these experiences, enriched their hearts. Furthermore, this divine sweetness that they "came across" and

tasted, was not withheld from others but was instead shared with the whole world.

Sampson once discovered honey pouring out of the mouth of a dead lion. He tasted it and so gave some to his parents to taste: *And he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion. And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat* (Judges 14:8-9). The Apostles experienced an equitable event: they found honey within this corrupt world of ours and shared it with everybody willing to taste it. *O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.* (Psalms 33:9)

Faith as the Only Motive

If you randomly select 100 people from out in the street and ask them what is their rush, why are they constantly on the go, you will observe that each one of them has some transient, some ephemeral reason or purpose. For one it may be money, for another glory, for a third person his career, and for yet another person it is *the dark and moonless madness of wild-desire, the lust for sin* (Troparion of Kassiani). And as for the Apostles, what were their motives when they traversed the known world of their time? Was it perhaps money? Let us search their pockets. A crippled man once solicited alms from St. Peter and he replied: *Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk* (Acts 3:6). And the faithful of our days wonder about today's clergy; are they capable of saying *Silver and gold have I none?*

A few years back, a "distinguished" person visited Rome. The pope was displaying the many treasures in the Vatican and proudly asked him: "Did Peter have these type of things?" The visitor replied that "St. Peter had no such things but he possessed something much greater than all of the Vatican

treasures; can you repeat the saints words, *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk?...*"

What was then the Apostles' motive? Money and material wealth? Surely not. Was it perhaps glory? St. Paul tells us: *Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day* (I Cor. 4:13). People ignored them, ridiculed them, accused them falsely, struck them, and often mischaracterized them. Were earthly delight or pleasures of the flesh their motive? They were unable to have a decent meal or even a proper night's rest. St. Paul informs us, *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway* (I Cor. 9:27). What, then, was their motive? It was their faith alone. Their faith that they teach, their evangelizing message is the one and only Truth!

Signing With Their Own Blood

The faith of the Apostles did not arise through studies and time spent on desks; its source was the furnace of life, the extensive number of trials and tribulations. And in the end, they affirmed this faith with their own blood, through holy martyrdom.

In accordance with our Holy Tradition and the teachings of our Church, St. Peter was crucified on the cross with his head pointing downwards, while St. Paul was beheaded; both of them in Rome. St. Andrew traveled to Byzantium and ended up in Patra (Greece) whereby he was crucified upon a cross in the form of the letter X. St. James, the son of Zebedee, was murdered in Jerusalem by Herod's knife. St. Philip was crucified in Asia Minor. St. Bartholomew was crucified in India where St. Thomas also became a martyr through the spears of his persecutors. St. Matthew was burned alive in Ierapolis, Syria. St. James, the brother of Alpheus, was crucified by the non-believers. St. Thaddeus, or Levveos, or Judas the son of James, was hung in the city Ararat and was subsequently killed through the many arrows that were thrown upon him. St. Simon or Nathaniel was crucified in Africa while Mathias was martyred in Ethiopia. All of them experienced martyrdom in the end except St. John the Theologian who wrote Revelations while in exile on Patmos. We thus note that all of them affirmed the Truth of our Faith through their lives, teachings, many deeds, and eventual martyrdom.

How Shall We Honor Them?

My brethren, with what type of flower wreaths do we crown them? With what spiritual hymns can we possibly praise them? Being at a loss when confronted by their spiritual grandeur, we merely join a teacher of our church and kneeling in front of their icon, we exclaim: Holy Apostles, what can we possibly call you, how do we address you? Bees? Mountains? Rivers? Fruit-bearing Trees? Eagles? Trumpets of Truth? Heavenly Farmers? Lions that exhale spiritual fire? Atlas-like Men?

I, in my limited spiritual state, will point out their resemblance with two separate icons; one is that of fishermen and the other lambs of our Lord Jesus Christ. *I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*, the Lord told them (Matt. 10:16). Imagine,

my dear brethren, twelve lambs that many pursued to throw within the deepest and steepest canyons. Wolves were chasing them with the aim to not even spare the smallest of bones! However, the wolves not only failed to subdue these lambs of our Lord, but the lambs, through their holiness and true love, converted the wolves into sheep. And thus the holy prophet's words came to pass: *The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them* (Is. 11:6). Is it possible for the lamb to co-exist and share habitat with the wolf? That is exactly what happened, that is the great miracle of our faith.

Let us thus honor our Holy Apostles. During WWII, when Hitler's planes threatened London, England was saved by literally a few brave and skilled pilots who were able to push back the German air attacks. It was then that an English politician proclaimed that never before was there so much owed by so many to such few people. However, the words of this politician, while valid for those brave pilots, are even more applicable, perhaps a hundred-fold, for our Holy Apostles. Our human race owes everything to those twelve, simple fishermen of Galilee.

I pray that real mission work, of the type that is befitting our Holy Orthodoxy, becomes soon a reality. Let us all pray that new Peters and Pauls will take on the path of spreading His Name. And may the intercessions of our Holy Apostles be with all of them. *Let us all praise the Lord, and highly exalt Him, above all forever. Amen.*



Priesthood is given as a manifestation of God's love for mankind. God loves us and made us His priests. A priestly celebrant loans his voice and hands to God to perform His Holy Mysteries. A priest is cleansed by God's grace when clothed in his vestments, unless there is a moral shortcoming, vindictiveness, or greed for money. Those who labor for God's word should first be ascetically prepared.

Hieromonk Athanasios, Iviron Monastery

The priests of the Jews had authority to cure leprosy of the body, or rather, not to cure it, but only to certify the cure. And you know what rivalry there used to be for the priesthood then. But our priests have received authority not over leprosy of the body, but over uncleanness of the soul, and not just to certify its cure, but actually to cure it!

St John Chrysostom

The Church, which is catholic and one, is not split asunder nor divided, but is truly bound and joined together by the cement of its priests, who hold fast to one another.

Saint Cyprian of Carthage

ABORTION: THE ULTIMATE LAWLESSNESS

By Frank Schaffer, from *Dancing Alone*, pg. 233-236.

OH Editor's Note: We were informed that, during the recent Orthodox Clergy-Laity Conference (in Nashville, TN—July 2006), GOA Archdiocese officials took the time to “recognize” US Senator Paul S. Sarbanes (D-MD), an Orthodox (only by baptism) Christian, who happens to be one of the major proponents of legalized partial birth abortions. We continue to wonder why the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese (and other GOA organizations, such as Leadership 100), being fully cognizant of Senator Sarbanes position on the issue of abortion, continue to not only avoid confronting him on this very important matter, but also bestow upon him awards, honors, and recognition.

Our Brotherhood considers Senator Sarbanes' views and behavior on the subject matter an absolute travesty. Church officials, via their continued recognition of pro-abortionists like Mr. Sarbanes, are inhibiting his own personal repentance for his part as a major political architect of the greatest legalized crime that mankind has ever witnessed. As a crime, abortion is greater than any genocide or holocaust, for it is being condoned not only by society and her democratically elected officials but indirectly also by the hierarchy of His True Church. We continue to believe that our Archbishop must call this man to repentance and publicly declare his pro-abortion stance as 100% anti-Christian.

May His Most Holy Mother's intercessions continue to protect us and grant us time for repentance for we are very concerned that the time that His wrath will be released upon all of us is drawing nearer than any of us can possibly imagine!

The concept of privatized religiosity on the one hand, and the loss of a sense of personal responsibility for one's actions on the other, has had dramatic and far-reaching consequences. It has led to the idea that one's behavior, one's sin, is a purely “personal” affair. This attitude of subjectivity is at the heart of the sexual, criminal and behavioral license now prevalent in our crumbling, divided, tribalized society.

The practice of legal abortion on demand is the most startling example of the ultimate lawlessness inherent in today's style of American individualism. The abortion of an astounding 1.6 million babies—almost one third of American children conceived each year—is the most drastic example of an external behavior that is now regarded as a mere “personal choice.” It is also evidence of the fact that America has become a thoroughly pagan nation; state-sanctioned child sacrifice has returned.

The taking of human life, for the sake of convenience, is now regarded as a mere “choice.” Sex between “consenting adults” is viewed as no one else's business, in spite of whatever harm

the “consenting adults” do to themselves, the child they conceive, the home they break apart, or their society. Abortion on demand is also a tragic example of the extreme enmity against God that our pagan country now has. It may well represent the final stage, the inevitable conclusion, of the rebellious Protestant-Enlightenment-Romantic movement's experience in selfish individualism.

Legalized abortion on demand is the final fracturing of our social fabric. Now even the primeval community of mother and child has been torn apart. The unborn child is believed to be at war with its mother, with its interests pitted against its mother's.

It is urgently necessary that we examine the Holy Tradition as it applies to the question of abortion since, in the question of the sanctity of life, we have the most important moral issue confronting the Orthodox Church today.

THE CHURCH'S STAND AGAINST ABORTION

The Stand of the historical Church through the ages against the practice of the murder of the unborn serves as a good example of the Church's changeless resolve in upholding the

Law of God which, as Eusebius writes, “made the barbarous, uncivilized customs of uncivilized races give place to his own civilized and most humane laws.” Since we live in a pagan culture very like the declining Roman Empire in which the Church found itself, nothing could be more timely than a study of the Church's attitude to abortion and child sacrifice.

Our Brotherhood has purchased a limited number of copies of the DVD “The Silent Scream” and will gladly ship one, free of charge, to anyone requesting a copy. This DVD graphically shows an abortion 11 weeks after conception and therefore should not be viewed by children. If you or anyone you know is researching the topic of abortion or possibly contemplating an abortion we urge you to request and view this DVD carefully before proceeding. Abortion violates God's commandment “thou shalt not kill.” Please take the time to study, think about, and pray about abortion and its effect on the baby sleeping in it's mother's womb.

The early Church taught that the practice of abortion contradicts the law of God. “You shall not murder.” It also contradicts the teaching of Christ to do to others as we would have them do to us. Since we wish to live and not to be killed, we can assume that everyone also desires life! “Love does no harm to a neighbor.”

Both before and after the tragic division of the Eastern and Western Church, abortion was denounced as the murder of innocent children. The early Church was confronted by a society like ours, in which abortion and infanticide were tolerated. From its very inception, the Church mounted a vigorous defense of the innocent life of unborn children. In the Didache (the written summary of the teaching of the Apostles, finished at the end of the first century), the faithful were told that “you shall not procure abortion. You shall not destroy a newborn child.”

Significantly, the instructions prohibiting abortion in the Epistle of Barnabas (circa 138 A.D.) were couched in terms of combating lawlessness.

“There are two ways of instruction, as there are two powers, that of light and that of darkness. And there is a great

difference between the two ways. One is controlled by God's light-bearing angels, the other by the angels of Satan. And as the latter is the ruler of the present era of lawlessness, so the former is lauded from eternity to eternity. Among the precepts of the way of light is this; do not murder a child by abortion, or commit infanticide."

The Church from its beginning has always been a stern guardian of innocent life. For instance, Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria in A.D. 244, wrote in his letter Hermammou about the state of pagan barbarity against which the Church steadfastly stood.

"For (the Church is) able by being present and seen... and speaking boldly, to frustrate the schemes of the wicked demons... devilish rites, loathsome tricks, and unholy sacrifices, (which) cut the throats of unfortunate boys, use the children of unhappy parents as sacrificial victims, and tear out the vitals of newborn babies cutting up the mincing of God's handiwork."

This was the climate of perversity, resembling that of our own day, against which the Fathers of the Church, East and West, unequivocally stood. This was the social climate that included legal infanticide, human sacrifice and abortion. And it was the Church's visible and absolute stand "by being present and seen" that gradually eliminated the public acceptance of these practices as matters of "personal choice." It was the Church that replaced the private evil of human sacrifice, abortion and infanticide with public moral accountability.

Perhaps two things can be learned by today's Christians regarding the Church's stand against abortion. First, it took centuries to change the pagan climate of perversity. Second, because the Church persevered and molded the culture rather than conforming to it, eventually attitudes and laws were changed. Patience and steadfast perseverance seem to be the qualities that wrought change.

The early historic Church very evidently had not separated life into watertight compartments between state and Church, or between private and public moral choice. Indeed, the early Church took a vigorous public stand on the sanctity of life and, as a result, inspired a change in public sensibility and laws.

THE HOLY FATHERS AND ABORTION

St. Basil the Great wrote "a woman who has deliberately destroyed a fetus must pay the penalty for murder." (Letter to the Bishop Iconium) He also addressed himself to the status of abortionists within society: "Those also who give drugs causing abortions are murderers themselves, as well as those who receive the poison which kills the fetus." (same letter)

Tertullian, representing the Western Church as its first great theologian, in A.D. 208 wrote, "How, then, is a living being conceived? Is the substance of both body and soul formed

together at the same time, or does one of them precede the other? We do indeed maintain that both are conceived, formed and perfected at the same time, as they are born together; nor is there any moment intervening in their conception, which would give prior place to either. Consider the first events in the light of the last. If death is defined as nothing other than the separation of body and soul, then life, the opposite of death, should be defined as nothing else but the union of body and soul... We acknowledge, therefore that life begins with conception, because we contend that the soul begins with conception." (Terullian, "On the Soul")

Writing in A.D. 122, Saint Hippolytus of Rome said, "See then, into what great impiety that lawless one has preceded, by teaching adultery and murder at the same time! (For the heretic teaches) women... to take drugs and render themselves sterile and to bind themselves tightly so as to expel what was being conceived." (St. Hippolytus, "On the Refutation of

All Heresies") In A.D. 300, the council of Elvira pronounced the following: "If a woman... has killed that which came of her deed, it is determined that she is not to be given communion, even at death; because she has made twins (adultery and murder) of her wickedness." And in A.D. 412 St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "The soul is mingled with

the body so as to form the one person of a man! Just as the soul employs the body in the unity of a person to form a man, so too God makes use of man in a unity of a person to form Christ." (St. Augustine, Letter to Volusian) One of the most highly regarded Christian writings by the Church Fathers of Alexandria in the second century notes: "You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. You shall not slay the child by abortion. You shall not kill that which has already been generated." (Epistle of Barnabas)

Let us then regard abortion for what it truly is: a murderous act of a defenseless human being, a creature of God, with the corresponding spiritual consequences. [Ed.]



Whatever gentleness you use in speaking with others, that very same gentleness will Christ use with you. With whatever measure you measure out to others, with that very same measure will He apportion out to you. Just as you forgive the failings of others, He forgives yours. With whatever love and gentleness you seek Him, likewise will He appear to you.

From "Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast"

On Thursday, August 24 2006, the FDA approved over-the-counter purchase of the "morning after pill" for anyone 18 & older. What the pertinent advertisements do not reveal to the potential users is that this pill prevents a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterine wall, so it is an abortifacient. Our readers should be aware that the manufacturer is Barr Pharmaceuticals. Utilize their products as your conscience dictates.

HOLY MATRIMONY

"Holy Sacraments," from "Our Orthodox World," a publication of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the theology of the Orthodox Church, man is made in the image of the Most-holy Trinity, and, except in certain special cases (such as monasticism, for example), he is not intended by God to live alone, but in a family situation. Just as God blessed the first humans, Adam and Eve, to live as a family, to be fruitful and multiply, so too the Church blesses the union of a man and a woman. Marriage, however, is not a state of nature, but is rather a state of grace, and married life is a special vocation (no less than the special calling of monasticism), requiring a gift or charism from the Holy Spirit—this gift being conferred in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

That Holy Matrimony has divine sanction comes no less from the words of the Lord Himself, Who says: *Have you not read that He Who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh [Gen. 2:24]? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder* (Matt. 19:4-6).

The Holy Apostle Paul sees this mystical union of husband and wife as reflecting the mystical union of Christ with His Church: *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her... Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body... This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church... (Eph. 5:22-25, 28-30, 32).*

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony consists of two parts: Betrothal and Crowning. The Betrothal is, in some way, the civil act, sanctified by the blessing of the Church. It sanctifies the intention of two persons to enter into the martial union and reflects Old Testament customs, when on those who had expressed their intentions to marry, rings were placed. This exchange of rings in the Office of Betrothal is an outward token that the two partners join in marriage of their own free will and consent, for without free consent on both sides there can be no Sacrament of Christian marriage.

The Office of Crowning also contains an Old Testament element in the crowning itself, which reflects the ancient practice of placing crowns on the heads of the betrothed. This is the outward and visible sign of the Sacrament, signifying the special grace of the Holy Spirit received by the couple. These crowns are crowns of joy and martyrdom—joy for the

new union, and martyrdom since every true marriage involves immeasurable self-sacrifice on both sides.

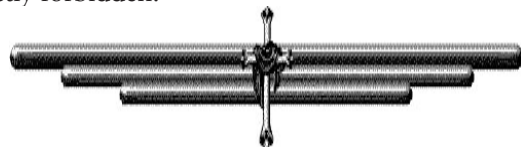
In the Greek churches, the crowns are usually made of leaves and flowers, while in the Russian Church they are usually made of silver or gold. Customarily, the crowns are held over the couples' heads by the best man and maid of honor, but in many places they are actually worn by the bride and groom.

The Gospel for the day contains the account of the Wedding in Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11). The blessing, given by God to man in Paradise was renewed by Christ in the New Testament, when, at the beginning of His ministry, He performed the miracle of changing water into wine. Thus, at the end of the Marriage Service the newly-married couple drink from the same cup of wine, which recalls this miracle of Our Lord. The common cup here is also a symbol that henceforth they will share a common life with one another.

Divorce and Re-Marriage

The Holy Orthodox Church does, however, permit divorce and remarriage, quoting as her authority the words of the Savior: *For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery* (Matt. 19:8-9). Here Our Lord allows an exception to the indissolubility of marriage, and so, too, the Church is willing to allow an exception.

While in principle the Church regards the marriage bond as lifelong and indissoluble, and condemns the breakdown of marriage as a sin and an evil, she still desires to help the sinners and to allow them a second chance. Thus, when a marriage has ceased to be a reality, the Church does not insist on the preservation of a legal fiction. Divorce, therefore, is seen as an exceptional, but necessary concession to human weakness. Yet, while helping men and women to rise again after a fall, the Church does not view a second or third union as being the same as the first, and thus, in the ceremony for a second or third marriage, several joyful ceremonies are omitted and replaced by penitential prayers. Orthodox Canon Law permits a second or third marriage, but more than that is strictly forbidden.



An elder said: Prayer is trusting God. When your trust is completely in God, it is not even necessary to pray for something, for God takes over. It's just that one ought to wait with patience for the fruit to ripen and fall off the tree. Therefore, parents, trust your children in God. For you have given them only your flesh, but God has created their souls. So He is obliged to take care of them.

[From the Gerontikon]

Τὸ Μαρτύριο τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ ἐπὶ Γερμανικῆς Κατοχῆς

Ἀρχιμ. Ἀγαθαγγέλου Χαραμαντίδη.

Ἀπὸ τὸν Συντάκτη τῆς «Orthodox Heritage»: Οἱ πρόγονοί μας ἀφήσανε σὲ μᾶς τοὺς «ξένοιαστούς» νεο-Ἕλληνες παρακαταθήκη ἀπείρου μεγέθους. Ἡ παρακαταθήκη αὐτὴ παραμένει ζωντανὴ μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ ρητὰ τοὺς καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς μεγάλες θυσίες διαφόρων γενεῶν. Ποιὸς ἄραγε μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντιγράψῃ τὶς λέξεις τοῦ παιᾶνος τῶν Σαλαμινομάχων καὶ νὰ μὴν αἰσθανθῆ ἔστω καὶ λίγο οἶγος;

Ὡ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων,

**ἴτε, ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ' ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ παῖδας,
γυναικας, θεῶν τε πατρῶων ἔδη, θήκας τε
προγόνων νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών.**

*Μὲ τὴν πλησιάζουσα (καὶ μισο-λησμονημένη) ἐθνικὴ ἐορτὴ τῆς 28ης Ὀκτωβρίου, τὸ ταπεινὸ φυλλάδιό μας θεώρησε σκόπιμο νὰ παρουσιάσῃ μίαν μικρὴ ἔνδειξη σεβασμοῦ πρὸς ἐκεῖνους ποὺ δώσανε τὸ αἷμα τοὺς γιὰ νὰ μπορούμε ἐμεῖς οἱ ἀνάξιοι νὰ φέρουμε τὸ ὄνομα «Ἕλληνες Ὀρθόδοξοι». Εἶθε ὅλοι μας νὰ ἔχουμε ζωντανὴ στὴν ψυχὴ μας τὴν μνήμη ὄλων αὐτῶν τῶν ἀληθινῶν ἡρώων. Ὁ μεγάλος μας ποιητὴς Κωστής Παλαμῆς, ἔγραψε τὰ ἀκόλουθα λόγια ποὺ σήμερον ὅπως ποτὲ ἄλλοτε παίρνουν ζωὴ γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς
**Ἡ μεγαλοσύνη τῶν ἐθνῶν δὲ μετριέται μὲ τὸ στρέμμα.
Μὲ τῆς καρδιάς τὸ πύρωμα μετριέται καὶ τὸ αἷμα.***

† † †

Ἡ Μαρτυρικὴ Θυσία τοῦ Παπαδάσκαλου Δημητρίου Βαστάκη

Ὁ π. Δημήτριος ἦταν ἐφημέριος καὶ δημοδιδάσκαλος τοῦ Μεγάλου Χωριοῦ Εὐρυτανίας. Μετὰ τὴν κήρυξη τοῦ Ἑλληνοϊταλικοῦ πολέμου 1940, τοῦ ἀνατίθεται ἡ Διεύθυνση τοῦ Ταχυδρομικοῦ Γραφείου σὲ ἀντικατάσταση τοῦ στρατευθέντος τηλεγραφητοῦ. Στὴν ἐπακολουθήσασα ἐπάρατη Κατοχὴ γίνεται μέλος τῆς μυστικῆς ἀντιστασιακῆς ομάδος ΒΥΡΩΝΕΣ. Οἱ ΒΥΡΩΝΕΣ ἦταν μονάδα μυστικοῦ πολέμου μὲ τὰ κρυπτογραφικὰ στοιχεῖα Ν.Ν. 707 τοῦ Συμμαχικοῦ Στρατηγείου Μέσης Ἀνατολῆς, ἐξαρτώμενη ἀπὸ τὴν Βρετανικὴ Ὑπηρεσία «Ἀντβάνς Φόρς 133». Περιέθαλπτε Βρεταννοὺς στρατιωτικούς καὶ ἦταν ἐφοδιασμένος μὲ ἀσύρματο, στὸν ὁποῖο τὸν ἐκπαίδευσε Ὑπολοχαγὸς μὲ τὸ ψευδώνυμο Γιάννης Γρυπάρης. Κάθε Σάββατο, σὲ ἀπογευματινὴ ὥρα, ἄκουγε τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ ραδιοφωνικὴ ἐκπομπὴ τοῦ Β.Β.С. τοῦ Λονδίνου, γιὰ νὰ μεταφέρῃ τὰ νέα στοὺς ἄλλους Ἕλληνες.

Στις 18 Δεκεμβρίου 1942, ὁ Ἰταλικὸς στρατὸς Κατοχῆς πῆγαινε πρὸς τὸ Μεγάλον καὶ Μικρὸ Χωριό. Ἀνύποπτα ἔπεσε σὲ ἐνέδρα Ἀντιστασιακῆς Ὀμάδος, ὅταν ὁ ἡρωϊκὸς ἱερεὺς μετεῖχε στὴν Ἐπιτροπὴ ὑποδοχῆς πρὸς διάσωση τοῦ χωριοῦ. Τὸν συνέλαβαν, μὲ ἄλλους δώδεκα ἐνορίτες του, καὶ τὸν βασάνισαν, γιὰ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρες, ἀπάνθρωπα. Ἐκεῖνος, κυλισμένος ἀπὸ τὰ βασανιστήρια στὴν γῆ, ἔκανε τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ. Τὸν ἄφησαν γυμνὸ, χωρὶς ρᾶσο· τὸ πρόσωπό του παραμορφωμένο, χωρὶς γένεια, καμμένο καὶ καταματωμένο.

Τέλος τὸν ἔκαψαν ζωντανὸ στίς 24 Δεκεμβρίου 1942, ἀφοῦ προηγουμένως ἔψαλε τὴν Νεκρώσιμη Ἀκολουθία γιὰ τοὺς συμμάρτυρες του καὶ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ του.

Τὸ Μαρτύριο τοῦ Ἱερέως Ἀθανασίου Τόσκα

Ὁ μαρτυρικὸς κληρικὸς ἦταν ἐφημέριος τοῦ χωριοῦ Κυδωνιῆς Γρεβενῶν. Στις 7 Ἰουλίου 1944, ἐνῶ οἱ κάτοικοι τοῦ χωριοῦ του ἔφευγαν στὰ βουνὰ γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦν ἀπὸ τὴν καταστροφικὴ ἐπιδρομὴ τῶν Γερμανοβουλγάρων, ὁ π. Ἀθανάσιος παρέμεινε, ἐλπίζοντας ὅτι ἡ παρουσία του θὰ ἀπέτρεπε τὴν πυρπόληση τοῦ χωριοῦ. Ἀλλὰ οἱ ἐπιδρομεῖς, ὄχι μόνον πυρπόλησαν τὸ χωριό, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν γηραιὸ Λευῖτη, ἀφοῦ τὸν συνέλαβαν καὶ τὸν ὠδήγησαν δέσμιος ἐξω ἀπὸ τὸ χωριό, στὴν θέση «Παλιοχέρωνα», κατεκρεοῦργησαν τὸ σῶμα του βρέθηκε μετὰ λίγες ἡμέρες. Τὰ χέρια καὶ τὰ ὦτα εἶχαν ἀποκοπεῖ, ἡ γενειάδα του εἶχε ξεριζωθῆ, καὶ στὸ στήθος καὶ στὰ νῶτα του ἔφερε πολλαπλὰ χτυπήματα μὲ μαχαίρι...

Ἡ Σφαγὴ τοῦ Διστόμου καὶ ἡ Ἐκτέλεση τοῦ Πατρὸς Σωτηρίου Ζήση

Ὁ μαρτυρικὸς Ἱερεὺς π. Σωτήριος ἦταν ἐφημέριος Διστόμου, μέχρι τὴν τραγικὴ ἡμέρα τῆς ἀνιστόρητης σφαγῆς, στίς 10 Ἰουνίου 1944. Εἴκοσι Γερμανοί, μεταμφιεσμένοι σὲ Ἕλληνες ποὺ κρατοῦνταν τάχα σὲ στρατόπεδο συγκεντρώσεως, ξεκίνησαν μ' Ἑλληνικὰ αὐτοκίνητα γιὰ τὸ Δίστομο. Στὸν δρόμο, στὴν θέση «Κερασί» ἔπιασαν ὀμήρους 12 χωριάτες, ποὺ δούλευαν στὰ χωράφια τοὺς καὶ τουφέκισαν, χωρὶς καμμιά διαδικασίαν, ἄλλους 6. Μὲ προπομπὴ τοὺς μεταμφιεσμένους σ' Ἕλληνες χωρικούς ξεκίνησαν, ἀρχικὰ γιὰ τὸ χωριὸ Στεῖρι, ὅπου καταδότες εἶχαν ἀποκαλύψει πὼς κρύβονται Ἀντάρτες. Στὴν διασταύρωση τῆς ὁδοῦ Διστόμου-Ἀράχωβας φθάνουν καὶ ἀποσπάσματα Γερμανῶν στρατιωτῶν-σφαγέων ἀπὸ τὸν 2^ο Λόχο τοῦ 2^{ου} Τάγματος τοῦ 7^{ου} Συντάγματος θωρακισμένων γρεναδιέρων τῆς 1^{ης} Μεραρχίας τῶν Ἐς-Ἐς, μὲ ἐπικεφαλῆς τὸν Λοχαγὸ Κόρφner. Ἡ μεγάλη φάλαγγα τῶν Γερμανῶν φθάνει στὸ Δίστομο. Ζητοῦν τὸν παπὰ τοῦ χωριοῦ, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς δώσῃ ὀρισμένες πληροφορίες. Ἀμέσως πῆγε ὁ παπα-Σωτήρης καὶ σὲ λίγο ὁ Πρόεδρος τοῦ χωριοῦ Χαράλαμπος Κίνιας. Οἱ Γερμανοὶ τοὺς κάνανε τὴν συνηθισμένη ἐρώτηση: ἂν εἶχαν στὸ χωριὸ τοὺς ἀντάρτες. Οἱ Διστομίτες τὸ κρῦψαν καὶ τοὺς βεβαίωσαν πὼς δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανεὶς. Σὲ λίγα λεπτὰ στὸ ξωκκλήσι τῆς Ἁγίας Εἰρήνης, πρὸς τὸ χωριὸ Στεῖρι, ἡ ἄλλη ὁμάδα τῶν μεταμφιεσμένων Γερμανῶν δέχεται τὴν καλὰ ὀργανωμένη ἐπίθεση τῶν Ἀντιστασιακῶν. Σάν γύρισε στὸ Δίστομο ἡ νικημένη γερμανικὴ φάλαγγα ἄρχισε τὸ ὀλοκαῦτωμα. Ἀπὸ τὰ πρῶτα σπίτια ποὺ μπαίνουν εἶναι καὶ τοῦ παπα-Σωτήρη Ζήση. Ἄς ἀφήσουμε τὴν παπαδιὰ Κοντύλω Ζήση νὰ μᾶς διηγηθῆ:

Ἀπ' τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ μᾶς διατάξαν οἱ Γερμανοὶ νὰ κλειστοῦμε στὰ σπίτια μας, καθόμαστε μὲ τὸν παπὰ μέσα, χωρὶς νὰ ξέρουμε τί γινόταν. Σὲ λιγάκι, μαζωχτήκαμε δεκατέσσερες ψυχές, γιὰτὶ ὅλους τοὺς περαστικούς κείνη τὴ στιγμὴ τοὺς κολλάγανε (ἀνεβάζανε) οἱ Γερμανοὶ πάνω στὸ σπίτι μας. Ὑστερα ἦρθαν ἐξὶ στρατιῶτες, μὰ σάν εἶδαν τὸν παπὰ φύγανε οἱ πέντε κι ἔμεινε ὁ ἕνας στὴν πόρτα νὰ μᾶς φυλάγῃ

μέ τη μπούκα του όπλου κατά το χειμωνιάτικο που είμαστε μαζεμένοι. Όλοι καρτερούσαμε χωρίς να ξέρουμε τι μάς περιμένει. Μά σκιαζόμαστε γιατί ακούγαμε τον άλλαλαγκιό που γινότανε έξω. Σ' έπιανε άλλο πράμα. Σίότανε ό τόπος απ' τό κακό. Ό στρατιώτης που μάς φύλαγε δέν έμεινε για πολύ κι έκανε να φύγη. Καλά-καλά δέν είχε κατεβεί τὰ σκαλιά κι ήρθανε κι άλλοι Γερμανοί. Σταθήκαμε πάνω στην πόρτα και τους ακούγαμε να κουβεντιάζουν, μά ποιός από μάς νόγαγε τό τι λέγανε. Σέ μιὰ στιγμή βγήκε ό παπᾶς, απ' τό χειμωνιάτικο να δῆ τι θ' άποκάνουν με μάς. Αμέσως ακούσαμε ντουφεκίες και τον είδαμε να πέφτει νεκρό χωρίς να προφτάση να πῆ τίποτα... Έγώ τη στιγμή που μάς βάλανε στο ντουφεκίδι, βύζαινα τό κοριτσάκι μου Μαργαρίτα ενός χρονού. Μου ρίζανε τρεῖς σφαίρες. Η μιὰ μου χάλασε τό ζερβί χέρι, ή άλλη με πήρε ξώπετσα κάτω απ' τ' αὐτί... κι ή τρίτη χτύπησε στο κεφάλι τη Μαργαρίτα μου. Τῆς άνοιξε τό κεφαλάκι της, κι όπως την κράταγα στην άγκαλιά μου, όλα τὰ μυαλά της πεταχτήκανε στα μούτρα μου...

Μέσα σέ μιὰ ώρα οί Γερμανοί είχαν σκοτώσει πάνω από διακόσιες ψυχές. Από τὰ θύματα 47 ήταν παιδιά. Κουρσεύουν και την Έκκλησία του χωριού, τόν Άη-Νικόλα. Μέχρι και τό δυσκοτόηρο παίρνουν.

Έκείνο όμως που φέρνει φρίκη μαζί και άηδία είναι ότι θέλησαν να νιώσουν και την ήδονή της σάρκας. Αυτό δέν τους ήταν δυνατό πριν. Οί γυναίκες αντιστέκονταν μ' όλες τους τις δυνάμεις και ζωντανές καμμιὰ δέν δίνεται. Λιγοστές, μετριώνται στα δάχτυλα του ενός χεριού, βαριά τραυματισμένες, σχεδόν ψυχομαχώντας, άνήμπορες να παλέψουν, βιάζονται. Τό άρρωστο πάθος των Γερμανών τους σπρώχνει στην πιό άνομολόγητη πράξη: την νεκροφιλία! Η ανθρώπινη κτηνωδία και ή βαρβαρότητα έτοιμάσαν άκόμη ένα νεκρόδειπνο σέ τούτο τόν μαρτυρικό τόπο.

Η Έκτέλεση του Ίερέως των Ρωγών

Καλαβρύτων π. Χρήστου Κ. Κανελλόπουλου

Στις άρχές του Δεκεμβρίου 1943 οί Γερμανοί άρχισαν έκκαθαριστικές έπιχειρήσεις κατά των Άνταρτών. Ένα τμήμα από 700 περίπου Γερμανούς με έπικεφαλής τόν αίμοσταγή Τέννερ, Λοχία των Ές-Ές και Διοικητή της πόλεως του Αιγίου, ξεκίνησε κατευθυνόμενο προς Καλάβρυτα. Τό πρωί της 8ης Δεκεμβρίου 1943, τό χωριό βρέθηκε κυκλωμένο από τους Γερμανούς. Οί πρόκριτοι του χωριού με έπικεφαλής τόν παπα-Χρήστο παρουσιάσθηκαν στους Γερμανούς, που τους διαβεβαίωσαν ότι οί κάτοικοι δέν διατρέχουν κανέναν κίνδυνο και μόνο όσοι προσπαθήσουν να διαφύγουν θα θεωρηθούν άντάρτες και θα επισύρουν τὰ αντίποινα του Γερμανικού στρατού. Ό Τέννερ έδωσε έντολή στον παπα-Χρήστο να χτυπήσει την καμπάνα, για να μαζευτούν οί κάτοικοι του χωριού στην πλατεία. Τους διέταξαν να κλειστούν στην Έκκλησία της Αγίας Βαρβάρας. Ό παπα-Χρήστος κατάλαβε τι θα συνέβαινε. Έκάλεσε γύρω του τό ποιμνιό του και τους είπε: «Είμαι βέβαιος, ότι διερχόμεθα τις τελευταίες στιγμές της ζωής μας. Μή χάνουμε καιρό. Έλάτε να συγχωρήσουμε ό ένας τόν άλλον και να ζητήσουμε τό έλεος του Θεού, για την σωτηρία των ψυχών μας». Γονάτισαν και τους διάβασε την συγχωρητική ευχή. Η

θύρα του Ναού άνοιξε και οί Γερμανοί άρχισαν να καλούν τους χωρικούς άνα έξάδα και να τους έκτελούν. Ό παπα-Χρήστος, με δάκρυα στα μάτια, παρακαλούσε τόν Διοικητή Τέννερ να μην προχωρήσει στο κτηνωδες έργο του, στην δολοφονία άθώων ανθρώπων. «Τώρα, μη βιάζεσαι, θα έλθω και ή σειρά σου», ήταν ή άπάντηση. Τόν έκτέλεσαν διά τυφεκισμού στις 13 Δεκεμβρίου 1943. Έκείνη την μαύρη ήμέρα έκτελέσθηκαν 61 άνδρες από 16 έτών και άνω.

Ένας Ήρωας Ίερατικής Οικογένειας στην Κατοχή

Τόσο στο Έπος του 1940 όσο και στα χρόνια της στυγνής χιτλερικής Κατοχής, ό Ίερός Κλήρος προσέφερε τις υπηρεσίες του και έχυσε τό αίμα του, σαν συνεπή συνέχεια της ιστορίας του. Και ή βίωση αυτής της ιστορίας φυσικό ήταν να έπηρεάση και να έμψυχώσει τό περιβάλλον του, ιδιαίτερα στις περιπτώσεις έγγάμων κληρικών. Συγκεκριμένο παράδειγμα ή περίπτωση του πρωθιερέως του Ίερού Ναού Αγίας Ειρήνης Αιόλου πατρός Βασιλείου Χούπη και του μοναχογιου του Ίωάννη που έκτελέσθηκε λίγο πριν ξημερώσει ή λευτεριά.

Ό Γιάννης Χούπης γεννήθηκε στην Άθήνα τό 1926. Άπεφοίτησε από τό Βαρβάκειο και ήταν πρωτοετής φοιτητής της Νομικής. Για την άνάμιξη του Γιάννη στην Άντίσταση ή οικογένειά του δέν γνώριζε πολλά. Συχνά έλεγε, ότι θα κατέβαινε στο υπόγειο του σπιτιού, για να διαβάσει εκ των ύστερων όμως προέκυψε ότι τό υπόγειο του σπιτιού τό είχε μετατρέψει σέ όπλοστάσιο. Έπαιρνε όπλα, τὰ όποια καθάρριζε, και κατόπιν τὰ έδινε στην Οργάνωση.

Μιὰ μέρα, την άνοιξη του 1944, άνήγγειλε ότι φεύγει με καΐκι για την Σμύρνη, άφοῦ ήταν άδύνατο να παραμείνει στην Άθήνα, γιατί άνήκε στην οργάνωση της Λέλας Καραγιάννη. Έτσι έφυγε από τό σπίτι του λέγοντας στους δικούς του, ότι μόλις θα φθάση στην Μέση Άνατολή θα τους ειδοποιήσει. Η ειδοποίηση, όμως, ήταν έντελώς διαφορετική από αυτή που περίμεναν. Κάποιος συγγενής του είδε να τόν συλλαμβάνουν οί Γερμανοί στο Καλαμάκι, και τόν μετέφεραν στις φυλακές της όδοῦ Μέρλιν.

Στις 4 Σεπτεμβρίου 1944 ή οικογένεια του Γιάννη έμαθε πώς οί Γερμανοί άρχισαν να άποφυλακίζουν τους κρατούμενους, ενώ στους βαρυποινίτες—σ' αυτούς ήταν και ό Γιάννης— θα έδιναν τὰ άποφυλακιστήρια στις 8 Σεπτεμβρίου. Πρωί-πρωί, στις 8 Σεπτεμβρίου, ξεκίνησε ή πρεσβυτέρα από τὰ Πατήσια με τὰ πόδια για τό Χαϊδάρι προκειμένου να παραλάβη τό παιδί της που θα άποφυλακίζόταν. Μόλις έφθασε στο στρατόπεδο του Χαϊδαρίου, είχε μαζί της λίγο ψωμί και λίγο δροσερό νερό, για να του τὰ προσφέρει.

Έβλεπε λοιπόν να έξέρχονται διάφοροι κρατούμενοι. Έναν από αυτούς έρώτησε για τό παιδί της. Τότε της είπαν πώς τους είχαν πάρει από νωρίς τό πρωί, για να τους έκτελέσουν. Στο άκουσμα αυτό έχασε τις αισθήσεις της και έπεσε καταγής. Σύμφωνα πάντα με τις διηγήσεις της θυγατέρας του παπα-Βασίλη, την λυπόθυμη μητέρα κάποιος άγνωστος την παρέλαβε και με μιὰ χειράμαξα άρχισε να την μεταφέρει στην Ίερά Όδό. Έκει στην Ίερά Όδό έπανακτᾶ τις αισθήσεις της και εύρίσκεται μπροστά στο φρικώδες θέαμα να δῆ στο κράσπεδο

τοῦ δρόμου νὰ κυλᾷ ρυάκι ἀπὸ αἷμα. Προερχόταν ἀπὸ τὸ φορτηγὸ τοῦ Δήμου ποῦ μετέφερε τὰ 73 πτώματα, μεταξὺ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ τοῦ παιδιοῦ της, πρὸς τὸ Γ΄ Νεκροταφεῖο.

Τὴν ἐπόμενη ἡμέρα, Σάββατο 9 Σεπτεμβρίου τοῦ 1944, ἔγινε ἡ κηδεὶα στὸ Α΄ Νεκροταφεῖο. Σὲ λίγες ἡμέρες ὁ πόλεμος εἶχε τελειώσει. Ἔτσι μὲ τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση ἐτελέσθησαν καὶ τὰ Σαράντα τοῦ Γιάννη Χούπη, στὸν Ναὸ τῆς Ἁγίας Εἰρήνης. Ἐκεῖ, στὸν κατάμεστο ἀπὸ κόσμο Ναὸ, ἐζήτησε ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπο Δαμασκηνὸ καὶ ὠμίλησε κατὰ θαυμάσιο τρόπο ὁ Διάκονος τοῦ Ναοῦ, ὁ μετέπειτα Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Κύπρου Μακάριος.

Τὴν ὥρα ποῦ ὠδηγοῦσαν τὸ καμιόνι τῶν μελλοθάντων ἀπὸ τὴν ὁδὸ Μέρλιν πρὸς τὸ Χαϊδάρι, κατεβαίνοντας τὴν ὁδὸ Πανεπιστημίου, ὁ Γιάννης ἐβγαλε τὸ χέρι του καὶ πέταξε ἔξω μιὰ μικρὴ ἀσημένια εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας τυλιγμένη σ' ἓνα χαρτί καὶ δεμένη μὲ ἓνα μαντήλι. Ἦταν αὐτὴ ποῦ τοῦ εἶχε δώσει γιὰ φυλαχτὸ ἢ οἰκογενεῖά του, ὅταν τοὺς εἶπε ὅτι ἔπρεπε νὰ φύγῃ γιὰ τὴν Σμύρνη. Κάποιοι μικροπωλητὴς τὴν βρῆκε καὶ τὴν ἐπῆγε στὴν Ἁγία Εἰρήνη. Τὸ χαρτί ἦταν ἀπὸ κονσέρβα καλαμαριῶν καὶ ἔγραφε τὰ ἀκόλουθα:

Ὁ εὐρών παρακαλεῖται νὰ πάῃ τὸ παρὸν σημεῖωμα στὸν Ἱερό Ναὸ Ἁγίας Εἰρήνης εἰς τὸν ἱερέα Βασίλειον Χούπην. Εἶμαι γιὸς του καὶ ἐκετελοῦμαι σήμερα 8-9-1944. Ζήτω ἡ Πατρίς, Πατέρα, μανούλα μου, Κούλα μου. Νὰ μὲ συγχωρήσετε γιὰ τὴν πίκρα ποῦ θὰ σᾶς ποτίσω. Θέλω νὰ ζήσετε, γιὰ νὰ ἐκδικηθῆτε καὶ νὰ προσεύχεσθε γιὰ τὴν ἀνάπαυση τῆς ψυχῆς μου. Θάρρος, συγγνώμη. Σᾶς φιλῶ, Ἰωάννης Χούπης.

Τὸ ἴδιο θαυμαστὴ εἶναι καὶ ἡ περίπτωση τοῦ γιοιοῦ τοῦ Ἱερέως τῆς Καρύστου Νικολάου Μαστρονικολῆ, ποῦ προσέφερε καὶ τοὺς τρεῖς γιουοὺς του στὸν μαχόμενον Ἑλληνικὸ Στρατὸ, ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Μαστρονικολῆς, τοῦ 3^{ου} Συντάγματος (6^{ου} Λόχου) Χαλκίδος Τ.Τ. 850, ἔπεσε ὑπὲρ Πατρίδος γενναίως μαχόμενος ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ Τεπελένι.

Χωρὶς Φέρετρο

Ὁ πόλεμος καὶ ἡ Κατοχὴ εὐρίσκουν τὸν π. Δημήτριο Χατζόπουλο ὡς ἐφημέριο στὸ κοιμητήριον Βόλου. Οἱ νεκροὶ ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα μεταφέρονται στὸ Νεκροταφεῖο καθημερινά. Ἡρώας ἀντοχῆς ὁ παπα-Δημήτρης ἐζήσε στὴν χειρότερη μορφή του τὸ δρᾶμα τοῦ Λαοῦ μας κηδεύοντας τοὺς πρησμένους ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα, τοὺς ἐκτελεσθέντες ἀπὸ τὸν ἐχθρό. Ἀναφέρει ὁ ἴδιος σχετικᾶ:

Ἐγὼ τοὺς κήδενα, ὡς νεώτερος, σχεδὸν ὅλους, ὅμως κανένας δὲν ἐνταφιαζόταν ἀδιάβαστος. Πολλοὶ χωρὶς φέρετρα, χωρὶς κανὼν ὀνόματα (οἱ δικοὶ τους δὲν τὰ ἔδιναν, γιὰ νὰ κρατήσουν τὰ δελτία διανομῶν τῶν νεκρῶν). Οἱ νεκροθάφτες καὶ οἱ Ἱερεῖς ἀγωνίζονταν συνεχῶς χωρὶς ἀμοιβές, χωρὶς κανὼν λίγο ψωμί παραπάνω.

Ὁ ἴδιος ἔσωσε τὴν ζωὴ δύο πατριωτῶν, ποῦ κληρονομήθηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς Γερμανοὺς, κρύφτηκαν μέσα στὸ νεκροταφεῖο. Ὅταν οἱ Γερμανοὶ τὸν ἐρώτησαν ἂν τοὺς εἶδε, ἐκεῖνος ἀρνήθηκε δείχνοντας ὅτι εἶδε κάποιους νὰ τρέχουν πρὸς τὴν Νέα Ἰωνία Βόλου. Ἀργότερα οἱ δύο διασωθέντες τοῦ ἀπεκάλυψαν, ὅτι δὲν ἔσωσε μόνο αὐτούς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλους 70 πατριῶτες τῶν ὁποίων τὰ ὀνόματα ἦταν γραμμένα σὲ ἔγγραφο ποῦ μετέφεραν.

Ἅγιος Ρωμανὸς ὁ Μελωδὸς

Ἀπὸ ἓνα Ὁρθόδοξο φυλλάδιο.

Ὁ κορυφαῖος τῶν ὕμνογράφων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ποιητὴς τῶν Κοντακίων καὶ διάκονος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Βηρυτοῦ, γεννήθηκε στὴν Ἐμεσσαν, πόλη τῆς Συρίας. Ἦκμασε κατὰ τὸν Στ΄ αἰώνα, τὸν χρυσοῦν αἰώνα τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ὕμνογραφίας. Ἡ γονιμότητα τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ ὑπῆρξε ἀνεξάντλητη, γιὰ ἐξύμνησε ὅλες σχεδὸν τὶς ἐορτὲς τοῦ ἔτους καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἁγίων.

Ὁ Ρωμανὸς εἶναι μέχρι σήμερα τὸ ἀντικείμενο τῆς μελέτης καὶ ἔρευνας πολλῶν σοφῶν τῆς Ἑσπερίας, Ἰταλῶν, Γάλλων, Ἀγγλων, καὶ κυρίως Γερμανῶν. Ἕνας ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς τὸν ἀποκαλεῖ «νέο Πίνδαρο», καὶ ἄλλος ἓνας «τὸν μέγιστο ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ποιητὴ τοῦ κόσμου».

Ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία ἦλθε στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, στὴν μονὴ τῆς Θεοτόκου τοῦ Κύρου, γιὰ νὰ σπουδάσῃ. Λέγεται ὅτι, κατὰ τὴν νύκτα τῆς ἐορτῆς τῶν Χριστουγέννων, ἔτυχε νὰ κοιμηθῆ πλησίον τοῦ ἄμβωνα. Τότε ἐφανίσθη σ' αὐτὸν ἡ Θεοτόκος, καὶ τοῦ ἐπέδωσε εἰλιγμένο χαρτί («κόντος» καὶ «κοντάκιον»), τὸ ὁποῖον, ἀφοῦ ἔφαγε ἀμέσως, ἀξιώθηκε τοῦ χαρίσματος, δηλαδὴ ἔγινε μουσικὸς καὶ καλλιφῶνος, ἐνῶ ὁ ἴδιος ἦταν ἄμουσος παντελῶς καὶ ἀηδὴς κατὰ τὴν φωνή. Ἀμέσως, ἀφοῦ ἐποίησε τὸ «Ἡ Παρθένος σήμερον», τὸ ἔψαλε ἀπὸ τὸν ἄμβωνα, ἀποσπώντας τὸν θαυμασμὸ τῶν πιστῶν. Ἦταν τὸ πρῶτο τοῦ Κοντάκιον καὶ ἀκολούθησαν ἄλλα χίλια ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα διακρίνονται καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς, «Ἐπεφάνη σήμερον», «Τὰ ἄνω ζητῶν», «Τὴν ἐν πρεσβείαις ἀκοίμητον Θεοτόκον», «Ὡς ἀπαρχᾶς τῆς φύσεως» καὶ ἄλλα.

Συνέταξε ἐπίσης ὕμνους γιὰ τὶς Δεσποτικῆς, Θεομητορικῆς καὶ ἐορτῆς ἐπιφανῶν ἁγίων, καθὼς καὶ τὰ αὐτόμελα προσόμοια στιχηρὰ εἰς ἦχον πλάγιον β' «Αἱ Ἀγγελικαὶ προπορεύεσθε δυνάμεις». Ἔργο αὐτοῦ εἶναι καὶ ὁ ψαλλόμενος συγκινητικὸς ὕμνος «Ψυχὴ μου, ψυχὴ μου, ἀνάστα τί καθεύδεις;» τοῦ Μεγάλου Κανόνος. Ὁ Ρωμανὸς πρῶτος ἐποίησε καὶ τοὺς Οἴκους. Ὡς πηγὲς δὲ πρὸς σύνθεση τῶν Οἴκων καὶ τῶν Κοντακίων χρησιμοποίησε τὶς βιογραφίες τῶν μαρτύρων.

Ὁ βυζαντινολόγος καθηγητὴς Κρουμβάχερ ἐξέδωσε στὸ Μόναχο πολλὰ ἀνέκδοτα ἄσματα τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ καὶ ἄλλων, ἀπὸ χειρόγραφα τῆς βιβλιοθήκης τῆς Μονῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου τῆς Πάτμου. Ὑπὸ τὸ ὄνομα «Κοντακάριον» βρέθηκε στὴν βιβλιοθήκη τῆς Μόσχας Ἑλληνικὴ χειρόγραφη περγαμινὴ, ποῦ περιέχει Κοντάκια καὶ Οἴκους γιὰ ὄλο τὸν ἐνιαυτό, ἀλλὰ ὄχι καὶ ὄλα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ. Ἦδη δὲν γνωρίζουμε τὰ περισσότερα Κοντάκια τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ, γιὰ αὐτὰ ἀντικαταστάθηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς Κανόνες. Ἐν χρήσει ὅμως παρέμεινε ὁ περιώνυμος τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ ὕμνος εἰς τὴν Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ ὁποίου ἡ πρώτη στροφή ἀπήρτισε τὸ γνωστὸ Κοντάκιον τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ τὸ ὁποῖο μέχρι τὸν ΙΒ΄ αἰώνα ἐψάλλετο κατ' ἔτος σὲ ἐπίσημα γεύματα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐνωμένους χοροὺς τῶν λεγομένων Ἁγιοσοφικῶν καὶ Ἀποστολικῶν. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας γιορτάζει τὴν μνήμη τοῦ Ἁγίου, τὴν 1η Ὀκτωβρίου ἐκάστου ἔτους.

Άγία Αναστασία, ή Ρωμαία, ή Όσιομάρτυς

Μοναχός Πρόδρομος Γρηγοριάτης, 29 Οκτ 2003, στην μνήμη της Αγίας.



Λένε πώς αν είσαι μικρός δεν μπορείς να κάνεις και πολλά πράγματα. Λένε πώς τα κοριτσάκια στην μικρή αυτή ηλικία των 19-20 ετών χρειάζονται μόνο στοργή και καλοσύνη. Λένε πώς στα μάτια ενός τέτοιου παιδιού που προέρχεται από ένα μοναστήρι, ζωγράφισε ο Δημιουργός την αθωότητα και το κάλος της μορφής Του. Λένε πώς οι άγιορείτες δεν

δέχονται τις γυναίκες, δεν εορτάζουν πανηγύρεις γυναικών αγίων και όμως...

Κάτι μεγάλο συμβαίνει με αυτήν εδώ την μικρή κορούλα με τα λευκά δοντάκια της, τα όμορφα χείλη της, τα λεπτά δακτυλάκια με τα όμορφα μικρά νυχάκια της. Σήμερα τί έχουν πάθει και στέκονται όρθιοι 12 ώρες, όλη νύκτα, γεμάτοι γαλήνη και συγκίνηση όλοι εδώ στο Άγιο Όρος, σε αυτή την μονή της Γρηγορίου; Θα σκεφτόταν κανείς ότι η απόλυτη ζωή των μοναχών τους γεννάει μία νοσταλγία της χάρης της Αγίας, μία ζήλια της αγιότητας που κρατάει όλη αυτή την ασυνήθιστη νύκτα, όπου μένουν άφωνοι άνθρωποι, άγγελοι και δαίμονες. Τί άλλο να σκεφτή κανείς;

Όλα αυτά τα πολύτιμα που είχε αυτή η κορούλα την οδήγησαν στον θάνατο από τον έρωτα που άναψαν στην βρώμικη καρδιά του Τυράννου. Αυτά λοιπόν γίνονται άφορμή νίκης για την μάρτυρα, προσφερόμενα ένα-ένα σήμερα στον Αθάνατο Νυμφίο, σαν δώρα της θείας αγάπης που την συνέιχε. Μιάς αγάπης που την οδήγησε από τα παιδικά της χρόνια στην μοναχική αφιέρωση.

Λαϊκοί που έχουν ξεκινήσει από κάθε γωνιά της Ελλάδος, βγαίνουν από τον πλοίο σήμερα στην μονή όπως ο στρατός σε απόβαση την Νορμανδία.. Δεσποτάδες, παπάδες, άσκητές, και λαϊκοί, όλοι με μία έκπληξη κοιτούνε γύρω τους και λένε, τί τρέχει εδώ πέρα; Είμαστε σε άγιορείτικη ήσυχαστική μονή; Ή κάπου άλλου; Μία μηχανή του χρόνου μάς έχει γυρίζει όλους πίσω, εκεί. Το μεγάλο αίσθημα που ζούμε σήμερα με αυτή την Αγία είναι το φως της θεότητας που την περιλούει και κάνει αναλαμπές τα πρόσωπα όλων των προσκυνητών, ανιχνεύοντας όλα τα κρυπτά της καρδιάς, καλά και στραβά.

Τώρα καταλαβαίνω γιατί όλοι αυτοί οι άγιορείτες, που τόβαλαν πείσμα να πολεμήσουν με τον μεγαλύτερο έχθρο του κόσμου, οι άσκητές με τις ρυτίδες στο πρόσωπο, με τα δακρυσμένα μάτια, με τα θεόρατα σώματά τους, τα άπεριποίητα γένια τους, τα ρακενδύτα ρούχα, στέκονται ακίνητοι όλη νύκτα με δέος μπροστά στην θυσία της Αγίας, ψάλλοντας ακούραστα μεταλλικά όπως οι κτύποι των φονικών έργαλείων τραγουδοῦσαν την νίκη της.

Ψέλνουν ύμνους ευχαριστίας στον Άγιο Θεό που ενδυνάμωσε τον αγώνα του μαρτυρίου και ύμνους έγκωμιών στο μικρό πλασματάκι που έχει κάνει το μεγαλύτερο χτύπημα στον άρχοντα του κακού, χρησιμοποίησε το κάλος της ψυχής και του σώματός της, και έδωσε με αυτό τον δαίμονα χειροπόδαρα, του διέλυσε την δύναμη, και τον ξεφτίισε με μία τέτοια ντροπή που το θυμάται εδώ και 1800 χρόνια σαν χθές, το θυμάται και κιτρινίζει, και λυσομανάει από το κακό του. Άλλά μάταια. Ή πάλη με το θηρίο έγινε και θα γίνεται πάντοτε ώστε να εκβιάζει την χάρη του Θεού σε αυτό τον πολύπαθο πλανήτη μας.

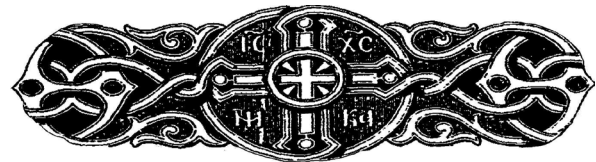
Μέσα στην σιωπή της άγρυπνίας, άκούμε: «Όνυχας οδόντας και μαστούς, χείρας και πόδας έκοπείσα άνηλεώς, όνυξιν εξέσθης πυρι καταφλευχθείσα Αναστασία μάρτυς όσιοπάρθενε»

Τα μικρά και τρυφερά νυχάκια της, τα λευκά δοντάκια της, οι μαστοί που άρχισαν να βλυστανουν στο νεαρό σώμα της, τα άπαλά χεράκια της, τα ποδαράκια της, όλα έγιναν φονικά όπλα που εξακοντίστηκαν στον Δαίμονα, το τέρας της υπερηφάνειας και της δυνάμεως, και τον έξευτέλισαν μπροστά σε όλη την κτίση.

Τώρα εξηγούνται όλα. Έξηγειται γιατί αυτό το σώμα της Αγίας, άφθαρτο για δυό χιλιετίες, γεμάτο ευωδιά και χάρη, κοιμάται σε μία άγιορείτικη άνδρική μονή, όπου ποτέ γυναίκας πόδι δεν πάτησε. Έξηγειται γιατί οι άγιορείτες κάνουν την εξαίρεση με τοῦτο εδώ το μικρό κοριτσάκι που άνοίγει την κλειδωμένη καρδιά τους. Είναι μία από τις 4 άγιες του Άγίου Όρους μαζί με την Παναγία, την Αγία Άννα, και την Αγία Φωτεινή.

Την τιμούν αλλά και ζηλεύουν το άνδρειο φρόνημά της. Ζηλεύουν που η μικρή παιδούλα νίκησε και σταμάτησε, και ξευτέλισε όλο το κακό του κόσμου. Ζηλεύουν το μικρό κορίτσι που ιατρεύει, τους άρρώστους, που παρηγορεί τους πολεμουμένους άσκητές, διορθώνει και γλυκαίνει την καρδιά των άγωνιζόμενων χριστιανών σε όλη την εκκλησία μας.

Γεμάτοι συγκίνηση παρακολουθούμε όλοι μας, 12 ώρες σήμερα αυτό το θαῦμα. Σε ευχαριστούμε μικρή μεγάλη μας Αγία. Είθε να άξιωθούμε σε λίγο καιρό να άπολαύσουμε την μορφή σου στον Παράδεισο. Μέχρι τότε θα δακρύζουμε μπρός στα Άγια λείψανά σου, κάθε χρόνο, βλέποντας τα γονατά σου σπασμένα, γυρισμένα, στεβλωμένα από την μαγία του σατανά, και το πείσμα το δικό σου. Σε ευχαριστούμε. Μη μάς έγκαταλείψεις, έσύ που ξέρεις μόνο να νικάς!



Άρετές ύπερ την ανθρώπινη φύση είναι: η άγνότης ή άαοργησία, ή ταπεινοφροσύνη, ή προσευχή, ή άγρυπνία, ή νηστεία, ή συνεχής κατάνυξις. Σε άλλες από αυτές έχομε πρότυπα και διδασκάλους ανθρώπους, σε άλλες Άγγέλους και σε άλλες ό ίδιος ο Θεός Λόγος είναι διδάσκαλος και χορηγός.

Άγιος Ιωάννης Κλίμακος

ARCHBISHOP JOVAN OF SKOPJE (FYROM), A 21ST CENTURY CONFESSOR

Assembled by the Brotherhood of St. Poimen from material and sources supplied by the Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes.

Many of us may have heard about the plight and the struggles of the Orthodox Church within the Former Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), also known as Skopje, and its ruling Hierarch Archbishop Jovan.

On July 26, 2005, while fulfilling his Archpastoral duties, he was arrested by the FYROM government and thrown into jail for the next 220 days. While he was in prison, he was denied visitors except for his mother. He was not allowed to wear his cassock, cross or Panagia. All were taken away! The Archbishop was also denied his Holy Bible. While the Archbishop was incarcerated, his father reposed in the Lord. In addition his passport was taken away two days before he went into jail and has still not been returned.

The manufactured charge against Archbishop Jovan was “embezzlement.” In truth, though, he was arrested because of who he is: an Orthodox hierarch of the Autonomous Orthodox Church of Ohrid and Skopje, and under the immense pressure of the local pseudo-hierarchs of the schismatic Macedonian Orthodox Church—FYROM. As it is well known, the Archbishop has not embezzled any funds whatsoever, since all of the €57,000, together with the interest of €180, were timely handed over to the court in Veles, literally minutes after this was requested by Mr. Trifun Kostovski through the media, and who later testified before the court that Archbishop Jovan is innocent. Based on his testimony, the Archbishop was twice liberated, and the third time, after a severe political pressure, he was sentenced to imprisonment.

At first they had confined the Archbishop Jovan for a few days, then they confined him for 30 days which he had served; their only goal was to frighten him. Realizing that they failed to do so, they convicted him to two and a half years imprisonment. After he served 8 months of that “punishment,” the Supreme Court of FYROM acquitted him under the great pressure of the international community. Now, they have changed their tactics, aiming to present him as if he was a criminal. They convicted him to one year imprisonment as if he was truly embezzling funds of the Church although he had previously been acquitted by the Court from those charges. Thus, with no choice, Archbishop Jovan voluntarily turned himself in at the prison “Idrizovo” in order to serve the politically pronounced prison sentence.

In the politically motivated processes within FYROM, truth and justice have no value. Of course it is common knowledge within FYROM itself that their government is strongly opposed to His Beatitude Archbishop Jovan and his Autonomous Archdiocese of Ohrid. In addition, it is also public knowledge that the schismatic Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC),

created and sponsored by the FYROM Government, is also opposed to Archbishop Jovan and his Autonomous Archdiocese of Ohrid. It goes without saying that the only legitimate representative of Holy Orthodoxy within FYROM itself is Archbishop Jovan and his church, exclusively recognized as such by the Patriarchate of Serbia and the entire Orthodox world. Thus, and despite the fact that the court proceeding was conducted at the request of the schismatic Macedonian Orthodox Church, which participated in developing an outrageous forgery in collaboration with the Public Prosecutor of Veles, Archbishop Jovan continues to be in prison today, even after the first trial and the already pronounced verdict of “rejection” (innocence).

The Archbishop and his Archdiocese have lost several of their local Orthodox churches and monasteries—all of which have been destroyed. The photos on the website of Archbishop Jovan and his church speak for themselves. Access: <http://www.poa-info.org> and press English Version and then access photo. One shrine after another has been fully destroyed, including several old monasteries.

The Archbishop and those within his Archdiocese have had to serve all liturgical services in local basements and apartments of homes, and even outdoors when the weather permits. The Archbishop and his Archdiocese have been and continue to be deprived of proper food and medical care for their 50 monks and nuns. Nuns were harassed and their hair pulled as they were being dragged from their monastery which was subsequently destroyed. One local monastery abbot was temporarily incarcerated. These monks and nuns now all have to live in private homes and have not been able to find private employment due to official intimidation.

Under these conditions, Archbishop Jovan continues to live his Holy Orthodox Faith with great dignity and with love for all, in prison at this hour. Our Lord, at times, allows for a select few of His flock to be persecuted so that the rest of us may be compelled to act on their behalf, or, most important, to prepare ourselves in the event that widespread persecution of the Orthodox faithful becomes a reality. Such is exactly the case with His Beatitude the Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje Jovan. As mentioned above, keeping his word, he voluntarily appeared in the prison “Idrizovo” and is currently serving the one-year-long politically pronounced prison sentence, for the fabricated criminal act of fictitious “embezzlement.”

Silence on the part of Orthodox brethren throughout the free world only brings further sufferings and great hardship for Archbishop Jovan, because at this hour his health is gravely poor. Although the Archdiocese of Archbishop Jovan still has two Ruling Orthodox Bishops, one can well imagine the pressure for the needs of the monks, the nuns, priests, and faithful. The monks, nuns, and priests, as well as the two bishops find it impossible to maintain a residence for themselves, given the tremendous pressure against them by the government. They struggle to provide for themselves even the necessities of life,

such as food and decent living standards, not to mention items for their liturgical needs.

Thus, the support of Christ-loving Orthodox friends from around the world is needed at this hour so that some means of hope and peace can be brought to the Venerable Archbishop Jovan and his Archdiocese. In cooperation with the St. Herman Brotherhood in Platina, California, a fund has been established to receive badly needed donations that can reach this Archdiocese through a private bank account (and thus not disappear through another manufactured “embezzlement” charge). Such funds would enable provision of the bare necessities such as candles, incense and other liturgical needs, as well as flour, sugar, and potatoes. The Archbishop Jovan Fund USA can make a huge difference to provide these items, and it is thus necessary that the corresponding appeal be directed to all Christ-loving souls to help this Archdiocese in their desperate need at this hour. Donations should be sent to the following address:

The Archbishop Jovan Fund

St. Herman Brotherhood
P.O. Box 70
Platina, CA. 96076

Checks and money orders should be made payable to the Archbishop Jovan Fund. If the donors wish to have a receipt for their donation, it should be so indicated to the St. Herman Brotherhood.

Finally, the Archbishop and his Archdiocese are still being denied status as an official Orthodox religious institution; their appeals are being ignored. Help in this matter is through appeals from the Orthodox faithful from elsewhere in the world. These appeals from outside of FYROM should be directed to the Prime Minister of FYROM, and to the Embassy of the United States of America in Skopje, as follows:

Prime Minister Vlado Buchkovski
Bul. Ilinden bb
1000 Skopje
Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

U.S. Embassy Skopje
Bul. Ilinden bb
1000 Skopje
Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)



The struggle against the passions—the warfare with them and the invisible enemies—is relentless, terrible, and ferocious. It is humility that defeats them.

St. Macarius, +1860

ATTEMPTS OF JEWS AND HERETICS TO DISHONOR THE EVER-VIRGINITY OF MARY

By St. John Maximovitch, from “The Orthodox Veneration of Mary the Birthgiver of God,” pp. 29-33.

The Jewish slanderers soon became convinced that it was almost impossible to dishonor the Mother of Jesus, and on the basis of the information which they themselves possessed, it was much easier to prove Her praiseworthy life. Therefore, they abandoned this slander of theirs, which had already been taken up by the pagans (Origen, *Against Celsus*, I), and strove to prove at least that Mary was not a virgin when She gave birth to Christ. They even said that the prophecies concerning the birth-giving of the Messiah by a virgin had never existed, and that therefore it was entirely in vain that Christians thought to exalt Jesus by the fact that a prophecy was supposedly being fulfilled in Him.

Jewish translators were found (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion) who made new translations of the Old Testament into Greek and in these translated the well-known prophecy of Isaiah (Is. 7:14) thus: *Behold, a young woman will conceive*. They asserted that the Hebrew word *Aalma* signified “young woman” and not “virgin,” as stood in the sacred translation of the Seventy Translators [Septuagint], where this passage had been translated *Behold, a virgin shall conceive*.

By this new translation they wished to prove that Christians, on the basis of an incorrect translation of the word *Aalma*, thought to ascribe to Mary something completely impossible, a birth-giving without a man, while in actuality the birth of Christ was not in the least different from other human births. However, the evil intention of the new translators was clearly revealed because by a comparison of various passages in the Bible it became clear that the word *Aalma* signified precisely *virgin*. And indeed, not only the Jews, but even the pagans, on the basis of their own traditions and various prophecies, expected the Redeemer of the world to be born of a Virgin. The Gospels clearly stated that the Lord Jesus had been born of a Virgin.

How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? asked Mary, Who had given a vow of virginity, of the Archangel Gabriel, who had informed Her of the birth of Christ. And the Angel replied: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon Thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow Thee; wherefore also that which is to be born shall be holy, and shall be called the Son of God* (Luke 1:34-35). Later the Archangel appeared also to righteous Joseph, who had wished to put away Mary from his house, seeing that She had conceived without entering into conjugal cohabitation with him. To Joseph the Archangel Gabriel said: *Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is begotten in Her is of the Holy Spirit, and he reminded him of the prophecy of Isaiah that a virgin would conceive* (Matt. 1: 18-25). The rod of Aaron that budded, the rock torn away from the mountain without hands, seen by Nebuchadnezzar in a

dream and interpreted by the Prophet Daniel, the closed gate seen by the Prophet Ezekiel, and much else in the Old Testament, prefigured the birth-giving of the Virgin. Just as Adam had been created by the Word of God from the unworked and virgin earth, so also the Word of God created flesh for Himself from a virgin womb when the Son of God became the new Adam so as to correct the fall into sin (St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Book III*).

The seedless birth of Christ can and could be denied only by those who deny the Gospel, whereas the Church of Christ from of old confesses Christ *incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary*. But the birth of God from the Ever-Virgin was a stumbling stone for those who wished to call themselves Christians but did not wish to humble themselves in mind and be zealous for purity of life. The pure life of Mary was a reproach for those who were impure also in their thoughts. So as to show themselves Christians, they did not dare to deny that Christ was born of a Virgin, but they began to affirm that Mary remained a virgin only *until she brought forth her first-born son, Jesus* (Matt. 1:25).

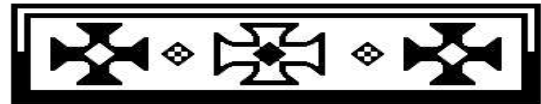
“After the birth of Jesus,” said the false teacher Helvidius in the 4th century, and likewise many others before and after him, “Mary entered into conjugal life with Joseph and had from him children, who are called in the Gospels the brothers and sisters of Christ.” But the word “until” does not signify that Mary remained a virgin only until a certain time. The word “until” and words similar to it often signify eternity. In the Sacred Scripture it is said of Christ: *In His days shall shine forth righteousness and an abundance of peace, until the moon be taken away* (Ps. 71:7), but this does not mean that when there shall no longer be a moon at the end of the world, God’s righteousness shall no longer be; precisely then, rather, will it triumph. And what does it mean when it says: *For He must reign, until He hath put all enemies under His feet?* (I Cor. 15:25). Is the Lord then to reign only for the time *until* His enemies shall be under His feet? And David, in the fourth Psalm of the Ascents says: *As the eyes of the handmaid look unto the bands of her mistress, so do our eyes look unto the Lord our God, until He take pity on us* (Ps. 122:2). Thus, the Prophet will have his eyes toward the Lord *until* he obtains mercy, but having obtained it he will direct them to the earth? (Blessed Jerome, *On the Ever-Virginity of Blessed Mary*.) The Saviour in the Gospel says to the Apostles (Matt. 28:20): *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*. Thus, after the end of the world the Lord will step away from His disciples, and then, when they shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel upon twelve thrones, they will not have the promised communion with the Lord? (Blessed Jerome, *op. cit.*)

It is likewise incorrect to think that the brothers and sisters of Christ were the children of His Most Holy Mother. The names of “brother” and “sister” have several distinct meanings. Signifying a certain kinship between people or their spiritual closeness, these words are used sometimes in a broader, and sometimes in a narrower sense. In any case, people are called brothers or sisters if they have a common father and mother,

or only a common father or mother; or even if they have different fathers and mothers, if their parents later (having become widowed) have entered into marriage (stepbrothers); or if their parents are bound by close degrees of kinship.

In the Gospel it can nowhere be seen that those who are called there the brothers of Jesus were or were considered the children of His Mother. On the contrary, it was known that James and others were the sons of Joseph, the Betrothed of Mary, who was a widower with children from his first wife. (St. Epiphanius of Cyprus, *Panarion* 78.) Likewise, the sister of His Mother, Mary the wife of Cleopas, who stood with Her at the Cross of the Lord (John 19:25), also had children, who in view of such close kinship with full right could also be called brothers of the Lord. That the so-called brothers and sisters of the Lord were not the children of His Mother is clearly evident from the fact that the Lord entrusted His Mother before His death to His beloved disciple John. Why should He do this if She had other children besides Him? They themselves would have taken care of Her. The sons of Joseph, the supposed father of Jesus, did not consider themselves obliged to take care of one they regarded as their stepmother, or at least did not have for Her such love as blood children have for parents, and such as the adopted John had for Her.

Thus, a careful study of Scriptures reveals with complete clarity the insubstantiality of the objections against the Ever-Virginity of Mary and puts to shame those who teach differently.



THE MONASTIC LIFE

By Hieromonk Hilarion Alfeyev of the Orthodox Church of Russia.

In the Orthodox Church, the rite of monastic tonsure has a sacramental character. It is called a *sacrament (mystery)* by Dionysius the Areopagite and other early Christian authors. It is also called a *sacrament* in the rite itself. Like Baptism, it is death to fleshly life and a birth into a new, spiritual mode of existence. Like Chrismation, it is the seal and sign of being elected by God. Like Marriage, it is the betrothal with Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom. Like Priesthood, it is a consecration for ministry to God. Like the Eucharist, it is union with Christ. As in Baptism the person rejects the sinful life and gives vows of faithfulness to Christ; he takes off a secular robe and puts on a new garment. Being born again, the person assumes infancy anew in order to attain *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph.4:13).

The main goal of monasticism is the imitation of Christ whose way of life, as described in the Gospel, was altogether monastic. He was not married, was free from earthly bonds, had no roof over His head, traveled from place to place, lived in poverty, fasted, and spent nights in prayer. Monasticism is an attempt to come as close as possible to this ideal. It is the quest for sanctity, a search for God as the ultimate goal, the

rejection of everything that binds one to earth and prevents one from ascending to heaven.

Monasticism is an unusual and exceptional way of life; not many are called to it. It is a life entirely and integrally given to God. The monastic renunciation of the world is not a hatred of the world's beauty or of the joys of life; it is rather renunciation of sins and passions, of fleshly desires and lusts, in short, of everything that entered human life after the Fall. The aim is a return to that primordial chastity and sinlessness which Adam and Eve possessed in Paradise. The church Fathers called monasticism *a life according to the Gospel* and *a true philosophy*. As philosophers sought perfection along the paths of intellectual knowledge, so monks pursue perfection along the paths of ascetical struggle in imitation of Christ.

The entire philosophy of monasticism is expressed in the following words of Christ: *If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me* (Matt.19:21); *If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever will save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it* (Matt.16:24-25); *He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me* (Matt.10:37).

Monasticism is for those who want to be perfect, to follow Christ and to give their life for Him, to sell everything in order to have heavenly treasure. A monk is ready to deny everything in the world in order to acquire Christ. Monasticism was a part of the Church's life from very early times, but it became much stronger in the fourth century, when persecutions ceased. While during the first three centuries all adherents to Christianity were potential martyrs, in the fourth century the new faith virtually became the state religion of the Empire. Now the quest for martyrdom and sacrifice led people into deep deserts, where ascetics created their *state within the state*. The deserts of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, once fruitless and lifeless, were watered and populated by monks.

There are three basic vows taken by the monastics: obedience, poverty and chastity.

Obedience is a deliberate denial of self-will before God, before the abbot (hegumen) and before every member of the community. The Greek word *hypakoe* (*ὕπακοή*—*obedience*) literally means *hearing, listening*. Monastic obedience is hearing what God wants to tell a monk, listening to His will. Humans suffer greatly from their inability to follow God's will and to accept the world around them as it is. People always tend to think of the circumstances of their lives as less than desirable, and of those close to them as less than perfect. They want to change the world around them but, unable to do so, they find no rest, no peace. A monk, on the contrary, teaches himself to accept everything as it is and to receive from the hand of God with the same joy and thanksgiving both consolation and sufferings, health and illness, fortune and misfortune. With this attitude the monk obtains an inner, undisturbed peace that no external circumstances can spoil.

Poverty is a deliberate rejection of every earthly possession. This does not necessarily mean that a monk is totally deprived

of all material things: it means that he must not be attached to anything earthly. Having inwardly rejected material wealth, he attains that spiritual freedom which is higher than any earthly possession.

The word *chastity* is used in English to render the Greek *sophrosyne*, (*σωφροσύνη*) which literally means *wisdom, integrity*. Chastity is not synonymous with celibacy: in monasticism the latter is only an element of the former. Chastity as wisdom and integrity, as life according to the Gospel and abstinence from passions and lusts, is also necessary in marriage. To live in chastity means to have one's entire life oriented to God, to check every thought, word and deed against the Gospel's standards.

As far as celibacy is concerned, in the context of monastic life it is a supra-natural form of existence. Loneliness is incompleteness, a deficiency: in marriage it is overcome through a common life with one's spouse. Monastics are espoused to God Himself. Monasticism is therefore not the opposite of marriage. Rather, it is also a kind of marital union, but not between two human beings: it is a union of the human person with God. Love is found at the very heart of both marriage and monasticism, but the object of love is different. A person cannot become a monk unless his love for God is so deep and ardent that he does not want to direct it to anyone but Him.

Monastic tonsure takes place in the church and is usually conducted by an abbot. The one to be tonsured takes off all his civil clothes, puts on a long white robe and stands before the abbot. Upon making his monastic vows he listens to the abbot's exhortations, after which he receives a new name, is tonsured, and clothed in black monastic vestments. When the rite has finished, each member of the community comes to him, asking: 'What is your name, brother?' The newly-tonsured monk, according to tradition, spends several nights in the church reading the Psalter or the Gospel.

Monasticism is an inner and hidden life. It is absolute and the most radical expression of Christianity as a *narrow way* leading to the Kingdom of Heaven. Monastic detachment and concentration into oneself, however, does not imply egoism or the absence of love for one's neighbor. Being outside of worldly vanity, a monk does not forget his fellow humans, but in the silence of his cell prays for them.

True renovation of the world is only possible in the realm of spiritual life. Thus, neither Christ, nor the apostles nor the church Fathers demanded social changes; rather, all of them called for the inner spiritual transformation of each particular human being. Monks do not attempt to make the world better. They try to make themselves better in order that the world might be transformed from within. *Save yourself, and thousands around you will be saved*, says St. Seraphim of Sarov. These words reflect the ultimate goal of monasticism and of Christianity in general. Monasticism is not the only way of *saving oneself*, not even the best or the most convenient way. It is one of the ways, like marriage or priesthood, which may lead one to salvation and deification, **if one continues along this path to the end.**

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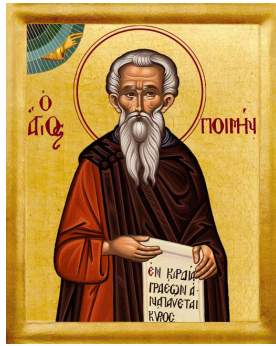
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THE MYRRH-STREAMING ICON OF ST. ANNA

From an Orthodox pamphlet, the Church of Our Lady the Joy of All Who Sorrow (Philadelphia, PA).

On May 9, 2004 (Mother's Day), the icon of St. Anna, mother of the Ever Virgin Mary and grandmother of Our Lord, held at the Russian Orthodox Church of Our Lady the Joy of All Who Sorrow in Philadelphia, began to stream myrrh. A parishioner reported to Fr. Athanasys, pastor of the Church, that the icon seemed to be "perspiring." He confirmed that visible liquid streams and droplets were emitting from the icon. Accumulations of the liquid were on the cuff on St. Anna's left hand and on the left shoulder of her veil. Droplets also appeared on other parts of the icon (fragrant, slightly oily liquid, commonly called *myrrh*). In November of 2004, myrrh began to stream from St. Anna's eyes as though she were weeping.

Fr. Athanasys commissioned this icon in 1998 from an iconographer of the Mount of Olives Convent in Jerusalem where he had served in 1980-1981; it was blessed at the Holy Sepulcher of Our Lord, in the Church of the Holy Resurrection, and brought to Philadelphia shortly thereafter.

Fr. Athanasys has had a special devotion to St. Anna since childhood. When he was seven years old, he fell from the second story

of a building, fracturing his right arm. Doctors at the hospital where the boy was taken could not find a pulse in the arm and considered amputating it. The boy's mother prayed fervently to St. Anna for her son. She quickly procured oil from a nearby shrine to St. Anna and applied it to her son's injured limb. A pulse was soon detected and after a minor surgical procedure, the arm was completely healed. Fr. Athanasys attributes the saving of his arm to St. Anna's intercession before the Throne of God.



The icon of St. Anna continues to stream myrrh that is collected on cotton at the base of the icon (visible at the picture). Each year, it dries up during Holy Week, but resumes producing streams of myrrh on Pascha. It has been observed that the volume of myrrh increases on feast days and when many are gathered for prayer. On the feast day of St. Anna, Fr. Athanasys celebrates Divine Liturgy and anoints the sick with oil from the icon. The parish has also acquired relics of St. Anna for veneration.

Many miracles and healings have occurred among the faithful that venerate the icon and are anointed by its myrrh. Ever since myrrh began streaming from this icon, many individuals and whole parishes have invited the icon of St. Anna to visit them. As guardian of the icon, Fr. Athanasys cannot accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of invitations because of his poor health. But he declares that St. Anna goes where she chooses.

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]

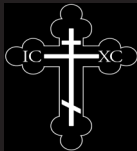
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE THREE ATTRIBUTES OF OUR PANAGIA

Source: *Greek Orthodox Periodical "Ο Σταυρός" ("Ο Σταυρός", The Cross), issue no. 515, September 2006, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.*

On September 8th, our Church celebrated the Nativity of the Theotokos, in remembrance of that blessed day for all of humanity on which the Mother of our Savior was born.

The Orthodox Church celebrates the birth of only two persons: Our Theotokos and St. John the Forerunner. These two persons are very unique and extremely significant for our Holy Faith. The Theotokos is *more honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim*, and St. John the Forerunner *among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than him* (Mt 11:11).

Thus, since our Church makes this rare exception and celebrates the nativity of only these two individuals, all other Orthodox Christians, including all of us, ought to not celebrate birthday. We instead must celebrate our name day, on the same day that we celebrate the memory of our patron saint whose name we were given during our baptismal. Birthday celebrations belong to the Protestants who do not recognize or celebrate the Church's saints. Let us then not protestantize our Holy Faith, and also avoid the temptation of adopting the improper customs of other Christian "denominations." Our religious customs are significantly superior to theirs and their adoption constitutes an improper and unnecessary compromise by all of us.

With the opportunity afforded to us through the Feast Day of our Holy Theotokos' Nativity, we will address three great attributes, all of which unified in

the one person of Panagia. These three same attributes are impossible to be found among any other person or saint of our Holy Church.

Is it possible for one woman to become the daughter, the bride, as well as mother of the same man? Of course not; it is not "natural." However, this that is considered impossible or against the "laws of nature" became possible through spiritual intervention. Our Panagia is God's daughter; she is also the Bride of our God, in a uniquely spiritual manner, for she gave birth not through human sperm, but through God's power; and, of course, she is the Theotokos, the mother of God.

Reviewing our Psalter, we find therein all three of these great attributes for Panagia. They are described within Psalm 44, a psalm that is characterized by its grandeur for its immeasurable poetic content as well as its inexplicable divine mystery. The psalm starts with the following magnificent words: *My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.* (Pss 44:1-3).

In verses 10, 11, and 14 the Psalmist says: *Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him... The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.* In accordance with these words, God is *the King* and Panagia is *the queen*, the bride of God *the King*, in a spiritual and extremely unique manner. Honorably, the queen is placed and attended to on the right of the King. She is also shown clothed in golden and

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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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multi-colored garments, symbolizing her many internal virtues, her glory, her grandeur! Let us also note, however, that *the queen* is concurrently *the King's daughter!*

The King has countless number of daughters. All pious and saintly women are God's daughters. However, our Panagia is the most select and significant among them all. There have been many other women that were quite select and important to the King: Sarah, Rebecca, Mariam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, Anna, Samuel's mother, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Solomoni, the mother of the Macabbes, Anna, the mother of the Holy Theotokos, Elizabeth, the mother of St. John the Forerunner, Maria, the sister of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, the leading Myrrhbearer and the first to see our Resurrected Lord, Thekla, Paraskevi, Kyriaki, Euphemia, Irene, Barbara, Katherine, Marina, Makrina, Matrona, Markella, Synglitiki, Filothei, and many other wonderful and highly admirable women. Our Panagia, however, is superior among all of God's daughters; she is the most select among the elect. Her unique and great merit and worth is exemplified by the praise afforded to her by the Heavens. She is *Maiden full of grace*, full of God's grace, full of the virtues of the Holy Spirit. She is *blessed among women* (Lk 1:28), and a few days after the annunciation, she is again called *blessed* and greeted by righteous Elizabeth with the words *blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb* (Lk 1:42). She is the woman that is *clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars* (Rev 12:1). And we also read: *There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?* (SS 6:8-10). She is a pure dove, perfect, and unique!

Not only is she superior to and above all of God's daughters, but also a *queen*, bride of the King-God, in an extremely unique manner. All faithful souls are God's brides. Panagia, however, is God's bride in an additional manner, a manner that exemplifies a meaning that is original and does not apply to anybody else. She is *bride unwed*, unwed with a man but wed with God. Let us not lose focus of our Lord's birth: The Theotokos gave birth to Christ not through the sperm of a man but rather through the power of God. It is as in that one and only one day of Creation, when the earth gave birth to plant life without the contribution of any seed whatsoever; it was done then as it was done with Panagia: God's power gave life to countless species of plants and again, on that even more significant day for humanity, our Most Powerful God's power enabled her that is *more honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim*, to give birth to Christ without any contact with a man.

For with God nothing shall be impossible. Where is this written? In Lk 1:37 and in other similar biblical sections. In Psalm 2, a psalm that is truly Christological, God referring to Christ as Man says: *Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.* (Pss 2:7) This word of God means that God, referring to Christ the God-Man, says: "You are My Son; You are not the Son of any man; You are not Joseph's Son (as the Jews claimed); I, God, gave birth to You, as I deemed time to be ready for You; I formed You from the flesh and blood of the Theotokos, and I brought You into this world as another Man."

Panagia is God's precious daughter, as well as His unique maiden, and His mother! In verses 6-7 of Psalm 44, we read the following most strange and odd words: *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.* The psalmist words convey the following: "You, Who is our

God, have an everlasting throne; You are our One and Only Immortal King. This is why, You, our God, were chrismated by Your God with the heavenly oil of joy, and exultation, in a manner that is clearly superior to Your normal ways.”

The oddness of these words lies within the statement that God also has a God Who chrismated Him. Yet how can this be possible? How can there be a God for our God? Is it not true that there is nothing or nobody above God? One would thus easily surmise that this statement by the Psalmist is not only strange and odd but quite bold and even blasphemous! Besides its oddity, the Jews never dared ostracize it from within the holy writings of the Old Testament. They left it alone, in its original place, as they did with other paradoxical and equally odd sentences within the Old Testament. While the Psalmist's words represented an enigma in the days before the arrival of our Lord into this world, these same words took full meaning in the Blessed Person of Jesus Christ. God became Man, and as a Man, he also has a God. God became Man and God chrismated Him as a Man, in other words he rendered Him as Christ. This chrismated Christ, the Son of the Virgin, He is the God of the paradoxical Psalmist for as a Man, He has a God.

Thus, the Holy Virgin conceived, carried to term, gave birth, nursed, and raised God Himself! A woman, albeit pure but nevertheless a woman, became the mother of God Himself; she became God's birthgiver, the one and only Theotokos! The human mind becomes perplexed, confused, astonished and dizzy when it thinks about this event, about the honor bestowed upon this humble daughter of Nazareth, our Panagia. The verses of the Holy Scriptures that stand as witnesses for this event of events, and the countless miracles that affirm that Christ is God, the full Divine Essence, the complete Deity and Domination, just as the Father and the Holy Spirit, are countless. Looking beyond Pss 44:7-8, we must all take note of another most paradoxical verse, the one in Lk 1:43: *And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* The mother of St. John the Forerunner expresses her astonishment for the honor bestowed upon her to receive the mother of “her Lord” in her home. A fetus that is barely a few days old, carried in the womb of the Virgin, is announced by Elizabeth as *her Lord*, her God. These words could have never entered the human mind. They entered Elizabeth's mind because she *was filled with the Holy Ghost*” (Lk. 1:41). It is this type of paradoxical and odd-sounding words that the Holy Bible contains—these are all God-inspired verses.

We deservedly honor our Panagia as the most elect daughter of God, the unwed Bride of God—Bride of that most special meaning and significance, and mother of our Lord and Savior, the only Theotokos. Those who are faithful surely honor her more than any other saint thus also becoming part of her own words and fulfilling her own prophesy: *Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.* (Lk 1:48-50). Amen!

LET US BECOME THE TEMPLE OF GOD

By an Athonite Monk (edited for length).

The Word of God tells us that, when the Tabernacle of Moses was built and priesthood and divine services instituted, it was pleasing to God, and He sent down fire from Heaven on the first sacrifice. And when the Temple of Solomon was built and the Ark of the Covenant taken into it, a cloud of light surrounded the temple and the glory of God filled His house. Following the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, the Jews built another temple in Jerusalem, after their return from the Babylonian captivity. It was neither as magnificent nor as richly adorned as the first, but the prophet Haggai proclaimed that the glory of this temple would be greater than the former, for it would be visited by the One Who is awaited by all peoples, Christ the Redeemer.

Our Lord revered this temple and He wished it to be a house of prayer and not a den of thieves. When He went once into the Temple in Jerusalem, as St. John the Theologian relates (John 2:14-21), He *found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.* When the Jews saw what zeal He manifested for the temple of God, they *said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* (John 2:19-21). The Lord was speaking of the temple of His Body, and had in mind His approaching death and Resurrection after three days. And when the Lord rose from the dead, His disciples understood that He had been speaking about the temple of His Body.

The Most High, though, *dwelleth not in temples made with hands* (Acts 7:42, 48), for Christ dwells in the souls of the faithful; as the Apostle asks: *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* (I Cor. 3:16), or, *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?* (I Cor. 6:19)

The grace of the All-Holy Spirit sanctified the patriarchs and prophets who were zealous for the glory of God and who called the people to piety. But even greater grace was shown forth in the New Testament Church, after our Lord's crucifixion, ascension into Heaven and the granting of the All-Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples and Apostles of Christ became divinely inspired vessels of grace, temples of God, and by God's power, they could work great miracles and signs: raise the dead, heal the sick, cast out demons speak in many tongues, and know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Like a multitude of heavenly stars, a great host of vessels of divine grace began to shine in the Church of Christ; these

persons became true temples of Christ: martyrs, monastic saints, hierarchs, and righteous men.

As the temple of God, the human soul is divine and immortal; it is the breath of Almighty God joined with the body for trial and ascent to divine likeness. The soul is in the body; the mind acts on the soul, and nature works on the body. The organ of physical sight is the eye; the organ of the sight of the soul is the mind; a God-loving mind is light for the soul.

Just as the body has many members and altogether they are called “man,” so the soul has many members: mind, conscience, will, thoughts that condemn and justify; but the soul itself—the true inner man, the “I Am” for each of us—dwells in the depths of the heart, like a virgin in a bridal chamber. The soul must not give itself over to the influence of foolish servants—the senses of hearing, sight, taste, smell, touch—so as not to be corrupted. And, the soul is free, self-governing and possesses mind, will and feeling. In this way, the three-part soul, the true internal man, being a mental essence, is the most divine and marvelous likeness and image of the Life creating Trinity, and, in the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian, is “better and higher than the entire world, while the world, the universe, is the schoolhouse for rational souls. The love of the soul for the heavenly King sets it free from all love for the world.”

What food is for the body, prayer is for the soul. A horse is not gifted with reason, so they put a bridle on it and guide it. So it is with the body; its natural desires must be bridled by the rational soul that loves God.

If you want Christ to dwell within you, do not bring evil thoughts into your soul. The Holy Fathers say that the rational soul is more precious than the entire universe. The mind is the rider; it drives the chariot of the soul, holding the reins of the thoughts, and it sets out against the chariot of Satan. God and the angels witness the struggle. *In your patience possess ye your souls* (Lk 21:19), and govern your heart and endure, for *if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation.* (Sir 2:1).

A person knows how much a pony or a donkey or a camel can carry, how long to keep a pot on the fire. How much more does the All-wise God know to what extent each soul can be subjected to temptations so that it becomes skilled and useful for the Kingdom of Heaven. The commandments of God were given against the passions, to cleanse the soul and conduct it to its primal condition. If the soul loves God, it finds its rest in God, in Him alone; it does not fear death; it is filled with joy, happiness, and hope in God. It entrusts itself to the Lord in everything so that in everything, great and small, it petitions the Lord, its Maker, in prayer.

The unceasing remembrance of God sanctifies the mind and all of our thoughts and senses, and in turn does not permit anything impure to settle in our soul. This is the first resurrection of the soul.

In proclaiming various divinely-wise teachings concerning the God-like soul, the Holy Orthodox Fathers often summon

the lovers of Christ to the struggle of prayer. When a temple is being built, an angel is sent by God to be the guardian angel of this temple, to guard it to the last day. All Orthodox faithful, at their spiritual birth (during the Sacrament of Holy Baptism), by grace and through water and the Holy Spirit, receive sanctification, and every person is in turn granted a guardian angel. But to prevent the guardian angel from departing from us, each person must be a temple of God. The deification, theosis, of man is the purpose of Christian life. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes: *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.* (I Cor. 3:17).

When can a person become a temple of God? When the spirit of a man is consecrated by the Spirit of God. Let us take an example from “The Way of a Pilgrim.” How was the temple of his soul built? He sought and labored a great deal until the Lord revealed to him—through his guide and the Holy Fathers—the most reliable path to inner sanctity. He realized that abstaining from crude sins out of fear of torment or the desire for reward is the path of a slave or hireling, that this kind of abstinence is fruitless. The Lord desires us to come to Him by the path of the love of a child, with the insatiable desire to be joined with Him in our heart and soul.

The beginning of this is putting our life externally in an order that is godly: discreet silence of our lips, a measured abstinence in food and drink and sleep. At the same time, we must maintain care for the unceasing prayer of Jesus. One needs only the proper disposition of soul in order to pray everywhere—on the road, at work, at every place and time. Jeremiah prayed in the miry pit, Daniel in the lions’ den, the three youths in the Babylonian furnace, Job on the dunghill, Moses at the sea, Jonah in the belly of the whale, the thief on the cross, and the first martyr Stephen at his last breath, when he was being stoned.

The grace of the Holy Spirit has made us all temples of God. The name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when called upon, enters into the depths of the heart, humbles our passions. Cry out: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” and remain in mental prayer and remembrance of God. Unceasing prayer and remembrance of God; these are very fruitful activities, the most precious tradition of the Church, a divine institution, a spiritual treasure, the inheritance of the Apostles and Holy Fathers who received and passed it on to us at the command of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the holy angels behold God and do not turn their eyes from Him, so we, too, while we are in our bodies, must mentally look to God from the time we awake to the time we fall asleep. Our breathing can take the place of a prayer rope and the remembrance of Jesus can be joined with our breathing of the Jesus Prayer. Prayer leads the spirit into the realm of God, and from the spirit, the body also partakes of life. Prayer is the most important work for all of us. We must serve God in holiness and righteousness in the temple of the altar of the inner man. This is the mental activity of the in-

ner man, whereby true humility and knowledge of God are acquired. This is the true essence of Christian life.

The Holy Fathers call the Jesus Prayer the most fruitful, because the heart is purified by the inner struggle of repentance. Repentance is made up of 1) purification of thoughts, 2) unceasing prayer, and 3) enduring the trials that one meets. In the Jesus Prayer, it is the struggle of the soul which takes first place, and not the struggle of the body. The penitent must bear his struggle and entreat Christ our God for sanctification and the strength to fulfill His commandments. *Pray, so that in your mind the Lord Christ may dwell, for it is on this account that the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil* (1 John 3:8). In prayer you should not think about thoughts, but drive them out. One must cast oneself before God, for this is the sign of wisdom and knowledge.

During church services do not permit your mind to wander, but occupy yourself with the Jesus Prayer, with the purpose of repentance, calling God to help you, paying close attention to your heart, your thoughts, and the words of prayer, with contrition of spirit. Then it will be easier to attend to the readings and hymns in church. Say the prayer without rushing, one syllable at a time, so that your mind can dwell on the words and take its form from them. Always pray for the forgiveness of sins. In solitude, prayer is purer, but despair attacks. The teacher of good prayer is God Himself. He grants prayer to those who pray and blesses the season of the righteous. The angel of God revealed to the Fathers that the best form of prayer is first to thank God and then to set forth your petitions.

The Jesus Prayer, when it is spoken by the lips, the tongue, is called labor, physical activity. Prayer is difficult when the heart is hardened, cold, unfeeling, or when the passions rise up. Pronounce the prayer not loudly, but just loud enough to hear yourself, reverently, without haste, so that you do not become distracted; this gathers your attention and locks your mind in the world of the prayer. Then, audible prayer passes over into mental prayer. The place for total attention is the place of the heart. Or, as Bishop Ignaty Brianchaninov writes, the spirit, or the logical power of the mind, which is in the upper portion of the heart—that is where your attention should be.

The first fruits of prayer are attentiveness, compunction, or tears; tears during prayer are a sign of God's mercy. Then our eyes are opened to behold our sins, and it is followed by the sense of God's presence, the clear memory, of death, fear of judgment and condemnation. All these fruits of prayer are accompanied by weeping. They are followed by the sense of quiet, of humility, love for God and neighbor, for all persons, without distinguishing between good and evil, and the endurance of afflictions. When the gift of tearful prayer is strengthened in us by God's mercy, then the inner warfare is weakened; thoughts fall silent, and abundant mental prayer and prayer of the spirit begin to act. Tears are transformed from bitter ones to sweet and there comes a sense of spiritual delight, consolation, incomparable with the joys of the earth. Humbleness of mind and an overall sense of humility begin to prevail.

In prayer of the heart, a person soberly delving with his mind into his heart must not hearken to anything except God, for the grace of God wages war against the passions. When there is attentiveness and our mind is in the heart, the mind does not drift, and the heart sympathizes and is reverent before the words of the prayer. Then the soul chants and prays in the heart alone. All the Fathers labored in guarding the heart—this is called stillness or attentiveness or sobriety and opposition to thoughts, guarding the mind. In this manner, the Jesus Prayer first acts on the mind alone, bringing it to the condition of quiet and attention; then on the heart, by revealing a feeling of compunction and lamentation; then on the body, thus introducing passionlessness.

This is the path which the lover of God travels, putting his inner, spiritual temple in order—from quantity to quality, from audible prayer to mental prayer, from mental prayer to prayer of the heart, from prayer of the heart to divine vision. Thus, by means of unceasing prayer, he presents an altar for God in his mind, where, alone with the One, in private, he attains to the mystical visions of beholding the Invisible.

Our whole life is a struggle for humility and the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that here on earth we can become worthy of sonship through becoming like unto our Father in Heaven. And for this, while still on earth, a man must enter into communion with God. In church, we commune with the saints, with the entire heavenly Church. In this world we pray, and in this world we are also sanctified by the Holy Mysteries. The Lord has prepared everything for us. The entire universe is like a royal palace, and we can pray in any place. We only must have a pure conscience before God and man and things, so that the Lord will accept our prayer and so that our soul may become a true temple of the Holy Spirit.



ON APPROACHING THE DIVINE LIGHT

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain," the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim.

Fortunate are those who have approached the Divine light and entered into it, and have become united to the light and become all light; for they completely stripped themselves of the defiled garment of their sins and will no longer weep bitter tears. Fortunate are those who have known already in this life the light of the Lord as the Lord Himself, for they will stand before Him with boldness in the life to come. Fortunate are those who have received Christ, Who came as light to them, who were formerly in darkness, for they now have become sons of the light and of the day without evening.

THE VENERATION OF PANAGIA DURING HER EARTHLY LIFE

By St. John Maximovitch, from "The Orthodox Veneration of Mary the Birthgiver of God," pp. 21-23.



From apostolic times, all who truly love Christ give veneration to her who gave birth to Him, raised Him and protected Him in the days of His youth. If God the Father chose her, God the Holy Spirit descended upon her, and God the Son dwelt in her, submitted to her in the days of His youth, was concerned for her when hanging on the Cross, then should not everyone who confesses the Holy Trinity venerate her?

Still in the days of her earthly life, the friends of Christ, the Apostles, manifested a great concern and devotion for the Mother of the Lord; this was especially true for the Evangelist John the Theologian, who, fulfilling the will of her Divine Son, took her to himself and took care of her as a mother, from the time when the Lord uttered to him from the Cross the words: Behold thy mother."

The Evangelist Luke painted a number of images of Panagia, some together with the Pre-eternal Child, others without Him. When he brought them and showed them to the Most Holy Virgin, she approved them and said: *The grace of My Son shall be with them*, and repeated the hymn she had once sung in the house of Elizabeth: *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*.

However, the Virgin Mary during her earthly life avoided the glory which belonged to her as the Mother of the Lord. She preferred to live in quiet and prepare herself for the departure into eternal life. To the last day of her earthly life, she took care to prove worthy of the Kingdom of her Son, and before death she prayed that He might deliver her soul from the malicious spirits that meet human souls on the way to Heaven and strive to seize them so as to take them away with them to Hades. The Lord fulfilled the prayer of His Mother and in the hour of her death, Himself came from heaven with a multitude of angels to receive her soul.

Since the Mother of God had also prayed that she might bid farewell to the Apostles, the Lord gathered for her death all the Apostles, except Thomas, and they were brought by an invisible power on that day to Jerusalem, from all the ends of the inhabited world, where they were preaching, and they were present at her blessed translation into eternal life.

The Apostles gave her most pure body over to burial with sacred hymns, and on the third day they opened the tomb so as once more to venerate the remains of the Mother of God, together with the Apostle Thomas, who had arrived then in

Jerusalem. But they did not find the body in the tomb and in perplexity they returned to their own place; and then, during their meal, the Mother of God herself appeared to them in the air, shining with heavenly light, and informed them that her Son had glorified her body also, and she, resurrected, stood before His Throne. At the same time, she promised to be with them always.

The Apostles greeted the Mother of God with great joy and began to venerate her not only as the Mother of their beloved Teacher and Lord, but also as their heavenly helper, as a protector of Christians and intercessor for the whole human race before the Righteous Judge. And everywhere the Gospel of Christ was preached, His Most Pure Mother also began to be glorified.



A REVELATION TO AN EMPEROR

From "The Revelation of the Holy Liturgy to the Unbelieving Emperor."

At the conclusion of the Kairon, the priest prostrated in the middle of the church before the holy icons, entered the holy place to don the sacred vestments and wash his hands. Then, as he drew near to the prothesis, the emperor saw the priest's face begin to brighten! It became brighter than the sun! It was like the face of an angel! **Know ye that this is the appearance of all Christ's priests when they perform the divine services.** Then the emperor saw a great multitude of angels arrayed in white robes, also with bright faces, descending from above. And in their midst was a Wonderful Child, whose beauty was beyond all Heavenly and earthly beauties, and the radiance of His face brightened even more the faces of the angels surrounding Him...

The emperor could not believe his eyes, for he now saw that a great multitude of people had filled the church. They were so numerous that they even filled the holy place, surrounding the priest! The people reverently looked at the priest and they all began to pray. What the emperor was seeing was the countless number of people for whom the priest was praying, saints and sinners, living and departed. The emperor saw the All-Holy Virgin clothed in a robe of gold, adorned in varied colors, come and stand at the right hand of her Wonderful Child. He saw St. John the Forerunner, severe and thin, clothed in a robe of camel's hair and girded about with a leather belt. He saw the glorious prophets, the holy apostles of Jesus Christ (the Wonderful Child), and all the wonder-working saints, the right-victorious martyrs, and the venerable and righteous men and women. Their faces were luminous and shining brightly, though some of them had wounds and mangled bodies, while others were very thin and gaunt because of their ascetic labors. All of them had joyfully offered their lives to Christ, the Wonderful Child Whom they now surrounded to worship and adore.

Οἱ Ἐκδηλώσεις τοῦ Κακοῦ

Τοῦ πατρὸς Ἀγαθαγγέλου Κ. Χαραμαντίδη.

Στὰ Ἑλληνικὰ οἱ λέξεις «σύμβολον» καὶ «διάβολος» πρόερχονται ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια ρίζα, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἐκφράζουν πολὺ ἐντονότερα πραγματικότητες ἀντίθετες. Ὁ διάβολος (δια-βάλλω) εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ποῦ διαιρεῖ, ποῦ χωρίζει, κόβει κάθε ἐπικοινωνία καὶ κατεβάζει τὸ ὄν στὴν ἐσχάτη μοναξιά. Ἀντίθετα, τὸ σύμβολον (συν-βάλλω) συνδέει, κατασκευάζει μιὰ γέφυρα, ἀποκαθιστᾷ τὴν ἐπικοινωνία.

Ἡ διήγησις τοῦ δαιμονισμένου τῶν Γεργεσηνῶν φανερώνει μὲ ἀνάγλυφο τρόπο τὴν φύση τοῦ κακοῦ. Ὁ Χριστὸς κάνει στὸ δαιμόνιο μιὰ τρομερὴ ἐρώτηση: «Τὶ ὄνομά σοι;» Γιὰ τὴν Ἰουδαϊκὴ νοοτροπία, τὸ ὄνομα ἐνὸς πράγματος ἢ ἐνὸς ὄντος ἐκφράζει τὴν οὐσία του, καὶ τὸ ἀρχαῖο ἀπόφθεγμα «nomen est omen» βλέπει μέσα στὸ ὄνομα τὴν ἔκφρασι τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τῆς τύχης του. Ἡ ἐρώτησις τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐσήμαινε λοιπὸν: «Ποιὸς εἶσαι, ποιά εἶναι ἡ φύσις σου, τὸ κρυμμένο εἶναι σου;» καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιο ἀπαντᾷ «Λεγεῶν ὄνομά μοι, ὅτι πολλοὶ ἐσμέν».

Αὐτὸ τὸ ἀπότομο πέρασμα ἀπὸ τὸν ἐνικὸ στὸν πληθυντικὸ, ἀπὸ τὸ «μοῖ» στὸ «ἐσμέν», ἀποκαλύπτει τὴν δρᾶσι τοῦ κακοῦ μέσα στὴν εὐθραυσι καὶ μὴ συνειδητὴ ἀκόμη ἐνόητά του, θραύεται, σπάζει σὲ κομμάτια μεμονωμένα, καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ κόλασι. Ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς Ἄδης, ὅπως καὶ ὁ Ἑβραϊκὸς Σεὶλ σημαίνουν καὶ οἱ δύο αὐτὸν τὸ σκοτεινὸ τόπο, ὅπου, ἢ μοναξιά καταστᾷ τὸν ἄνθρωπο στὴν ἀκραία πτωχεία τοῦ δαιμονικοῦ ἀπομονωτισμοῦ. Θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ παραστήσωμε τὸν Ἄδη σὰν ἕνα κλουβὶ κατασκευασμένο ἀπὸ καθρέπτες· μέσα ἐκεῖ δὲν μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ ἰδῆ παρὰ τὸ δικὸ του πρόσωπο, ποῦ πολλαπλασιάζεται ἐπ' ἀπειρον καὶ κανένα ἄλλο βλέμμα δὲν ἔρχεται νὰ τὸ κοιτάξῃ.

Τὰ Ἀποφθέγματα τοῦ ἀγίου Μακαρίου δίδουν μιὰ συναρπαστικὴ περιγραφή αὐτῆς τῆς μοναξιάς. Οἱ δέσμοι εἶναι δεμένοι πλάτη μὲ πλάτη καὶ μόνο μιὰ μεγάλη προσευχή τῶν ζωντανῶν τοὺς χαρίζει μιὰ στιγμὴ ἀναπαύσεως: «Ὅσο χρόνο διαρκεῖ ἕνα ἀνοιγόκλειμα τῶν ματιῶν βλέπομε τίς μορφές μας ὁ ἕνας τοῦ ἄλλου...».

Ἀντιθέτως, ἀπέναντι σ' αὐτὴ τὴ δρᾶσι τοῦ κακοῦ, ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος παρουσιάζει τὴ δρᾶσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ: «ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος (ὁ Χριστός), ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμέν» καὶ μέσα στὴν εὐχарιστικὴ κοινωνία γίνεται τὸ ἐν ἀπὸ ὅλους ποῦ ἀνεκεφαλαιώθηκαν ἐν Χριστῷ κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Τριαδικῆς κοινωνίας· ὁ Θεός, ἕνας καὶ ταυτόχρονα Τριάς, ἢ ἐνότης μέσα στὸ πολλαπλοῦν.

Ἐντελῶς φυσικά, λοιπὸν, ἡ Εὐχарιστία τοποθετεῖται στὴν καρδιά ἀκριβῶς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἀποκαλύπτει γέννητρια τῆς ἐνότητος ποῦ διεκηρύχθη προσεφέρθη καὶ ἐβιώθη. Εἶναι ἕνα χρυσοφόρος ὄγκος χωρὶς τὴν παραμικρὴ ρωγμὴ, ποῦ ἀποτελεῖ τὸ εἶναι (esse) τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ ἀρχαιότερη ἐπίκλησις «Μαράνα-θά» (Ἐρχου Κύριε) ἐκλείνει μιὰ λειτουργικὴ προσευχή καὶ ἀναφερόταν στὴ Παρουσία,

τὴν εὐχарιστικὴ ἔλευσι τοῦ ἀναστάντος Κυρίου. Ὁ Θεός ἔρχεται νὰ προσφερθῆ ὡς τροφή καὶ καταναλίσκομε τὴν οὐσία του, τὴν ἀγάπη, τὴν «ἄφθαρτον ἀγάπην». Ἡ εὐχарιστικὴ κοινωνία ἐνεργεῖ μιὰν οὐσιαστικὴ μετοχή στὸν ὅλο Χριστό.

Ἡ ἔνωσι, αὐτὸ τὸ «ἐν μετὰ Χριστοῦ» ποῦ ζοῦμε μέσα στὴν Εὐχарιστία, καθορίζει τὸν εὐχарιστικὸ χαρακτήρα τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς. Ἡ ἀδιάκοπη κοινωνία μὲ τὸν Χριστό καὶ τὸ σῶμα του—τοὺς ἄνθρωπους—γίνεται μιὰ αὔξις ἐν ὁλοκλήρου θετικῆ: «οὐδενὶ γὰρ μέσω διεγείρεται ἡ κεφαλὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα». Κάθε τι ποῦ μετέχει τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰς τὸν ὁποῖον ὑπάρχει τὸ ναί, ὁμολογεῖ ἕνα ναί ὁλόκληρο στὴ ζωῆ, στὸ εἶναι· ἀντιθέτως δὲν ὑπάρχει παρὰ τὸ ὄχι στὸν Σατανᾶ, καὶ αὐτὴ ἢ ἀπόρριψι, καθορίζει τὸν τόπο ἀπ' ὅπου ὁ Θεός εἶναι ἀποκλεισμένος: ἄρνησι, μηδὲν, κόλασι.

Ἀπὸ τίς πολλὰς ἐκδηλώσεις τοῦ κακοῦ, μπορούμε νὰ ξεχωρίσωμε τρεῖς ὅψεις χαρακτηριστικῆς: τὸν παρασιτισμό, τὴν ἀπάτη καὶ τὴν παρῳδιά. Ὁ Πονηρὸς ζεῖ ὡς παράσιτο πάνω στὸ ὄν ποῦ δημιουργεῖ ὁ Θεός σχηματίζοντας ἕνα τερατῶδες σάρκωμα, ἕνα δαιμονικὸ οἶδημα. Ἀπατεῶνας καθὼς εἶναι, ἐποφθαλμιᾷ τίς θεῖες ιδιότητες, ὑποκαθιστᾷ τὴν ὁμοιότητα τὴν ἰσότητα: «καὶ ἔσεσθε ὡς θεοί», ἴσοι μὲ τὸν Θεό. Τέλος, φθονερὸς παραχαράκτης, παρῳδεῖ τὸν Δημιουργὸ καὶ οἰκοδομεῖ τὸ δικὸ του βασίλειο, χωρὶς Θεό, ποῦ εἶναι μιὰ ἀντίστροφη μίμησι.

Οἱ φιλόσοφοι δὲν πέτυχαν ποτὲ νὰ διαλευκάνουν τὸ πρόβλημα τοῦ κακοῦ, μᾶλλον τὸ ἔκαναν πιὸ περίπλοκο. Ἀντιστρόφως, τὸ κακὸ δὲν εἶναι ποτὲ πρόβλημα γιὰ τοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τὸ ζήτημα δὲν εἶναι νὰ κάνη κανεὶς θεωρίες περὶ κακοῦ, ἀλλὰ νὰ πολεμᾷ τὸν Διάβολο. Ἡ προσευχὴ ἐνὸς ἀγίου θὰ ἦταν: Προφύλαξέ μας ἀπὸ κάθε μάταιη θεωρία περὶ τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ γλύτωσέ μας ἀπὸ τὸν Διάβολο. Παρόμοια ἢ Βίβλος δὲν ὀμιλεῖ γιὰ ἠθικὰς ἀρχές, ποῦ ἀφοροῦν στὸ καλὸ καὶ τὸ κακὸ, ἀλλ' ἀποκαλύπτει τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἀναφέρει τὸν ἀντίπαλο· καταγγέλλει ἐπίσης τὸν «ἄνθρωπο τῆς ἀνομίας» τῶν ἐσχάτων χρόνων, τὸν υἱὸν τῆς ἀπωλείας... τὸν ἀποδεικνύοντα ἑαυτὸν ὅτι ἐστὶ Θεός».

Ὁ διάβολος, λέγει ὁ Χριστός, «ἀπ' ἀρχῆς» εἶναι φονεὺς μέσα στὴν ἴδια τὴν καρδιά τοῦ ὄντος. Πνεῦμα ἀρνήσεως, εἶναι προπαντὸς φονεὺς τῆς δικῆς του ἀληθείας, τοῦ νὰ εἶναι δηλαδὴ Ἑωσφόρος, δοχεῖον τοῦ θεοῦ φωτός. Ἐτσι ὁλοκληρώνει τὴν μεταφυσικὴ του αὐτοκτονία καὶ γίνεται καθολικὴ ἄρνησι τοῦ ὁμοιωμάτος τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἔτσι φθάνει ταυτοχρόνως στὴν ἀνθρωποκτονία καὶ στὴ θεοκτονία.

«Ψεύτης καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ ψεύδους», στὴν οὐσία, ὁ Πονηρὸς ἀποδίδει στὸν ἑαυτὸ του μιὰ φοβερὴ ἀποστολή, τὴν ἀποστολή νὰ ἀλλοιώνη ἐκ προθέσεως τὴν ἀλήθεια. Ἡ ἀρχικὴ διαστροφή τῆς θελήσεως του κατέστησε δυνατὸ τὸν σφετερισμὸ τῶν ἐλευθέρων χώρων γιὰ νὰ κατασκευάση μιὰ ὑπαρξὴ μὲ ψεύτικα ὑλικά. Ὁ Ἡσαΐας δείχνει καθαρὰ αὐτὴ τὴ ἐπιχείρησι: «Ἐθήκαμεν ψεῦδος τὴν ἐλπίδα ἡμῶν καὶ τῷ ψεῦδει σκεπασθησόμεθα».

Τὸ νὰ ψευσθῆ κανεὶς ἔναντι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ σημαίνει νὰ ἀντιταχθῆ στὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ, νὰ ἐπιβάλλη στὸν κόσμο τὴν δική του ἐκδοχή. Ὁ Διάβολος γίνεται Ἀντίγραφον τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ νὰ τὸν ἐξώση ἀπὸ τὴν δημιουργία του, γιὰ νὰ κἀνὴ τὴν δημιουργία νὰ μὴν αἰσθάνεται τὴν θεία παρουσία, καὶ νὰ πραγματοποιήσῃ ἔτσι μιὰ γιγαντιαία ὑποκατάσταση μὲ ὑπερηφάνεια λέγει: «ἐγὼ εἰμὶ καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕτερος»— «θεὸς εἰμι ἐγώ».

Ὁ Θεὸς μὲ τὸ δικό του ναί, τὸ «γεννηθῆτω», δημιουργεῖ τις ὁμοιότητες καὶ γεμίζει «τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι». Ὁ Πονηρὸς μὲ τὸ ὄχι του, τὸ «ἀντιγεννηθῆτω», ἀδειάζει, κενώνει τὰ πάντα καὶ ἀποτελεῖ τὸν «τόπον τῆς ἀνομοιότητος».

Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή δὲν κάνει φιλοσοφία. Ἡ Βίβλος δὲν βλέπει στὸ κακὸ μὴν ἀπλή ἔλλειψη Καλοῦ καὶ τελειότητος, μιὰ μὴ πληρότητα, ἀλλὰ μιὰ ἐλευθερία ποὺ ἀπέτυχε καὶ ἔγινε κακὴ θέληση. Προσθέτοντας τὸ μὴ ὑπάρχον στὸ ὑπάρχον, τὸ διαστρέφει σὲ ὄν κακοποιό. Ἐν τούτοις, αὐτὴ ἡ διαστροφή τὸ κακὸ, δὲν ὑλοποιεῖται καὶ δὲν προσωποποιεῖται σὲ Πονηρό, παρὰ μόνο μὲ τὴν ὑπαρξὴ ὀρισμένων προϋποθέσεων, παρὰ μόνον ἂν τοῦ προμηθεύσῃ κανεὶς «κλίνῃ καὶ φαγητό» ὄντολογικά, δηλαδὴ τὴν δυνατότητα νὰ ἐπικαλεσθῆ— χάρις στὴν ἐλευθερία τους— τοὺς συνενόχους συνειδητοὺς ἢ μὴ, οἱ ὁποῖοι προσφέρονται νὰ ὑπηρετοῦν τὸ ψέμα.

Μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ πραγματικὸ λειτουργημὰ τῶν «κατεχομένων» ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸ, τὰ ὄντα μικραίνουν γιὰ νὰ διογκώνεται καὶ νὰ μεγαλώνη ὁ Ψεύτης. Ἡ τραγικότητά του ἔγκειται στὸ ὅτι ἡ τροφή τῶν θεῶν— «ἄρτον ἀγγέλων ἔφαγεν ἄνθρωπος»— λείπει ἀπὸ τὸν Διάβολο, γιὰ τὴν αὐτὴ ἡ οὐράνια ζύμη εἶναι ἡ πλήρωση τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ Πατρὸς. Αὐτὸ τὸ θέλημα εἶναι ἡ ὑπόστασις ὅλων τῶν πραγμάτων, διδάσκει ὁ ἅγιος Εἰρηναῖος. Ἔτσι, μέσα στὸν κόσμο τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ Πονηρὸς-φάντασμα, πειναλὸς γιὰ τὸ πραγματικὸ, εἶναι προορισμένος νὰ μὴν εἶναι παρὰ ἓνα «ὄντολογικὸ παράσιτο»... Τὰ τρομερά του φαγοπότια καμωμένα ἀπ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐπιβολὴ πάνω στὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἀρχίζουν νὰ ἐτοιμάζουσαν ἀπὸ ἐδῶ κάτω τὴν κόλαση τῶν ἀνθρώπων, διευρύνουν τὸ κενὸ ἀπ' ὅπου ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι ἀπών.



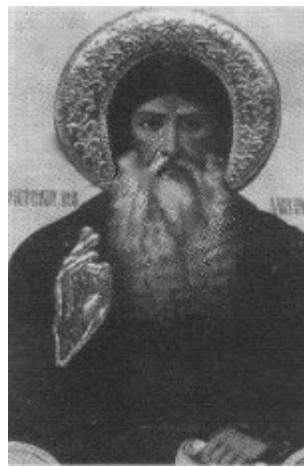
Καιροὶ Μεγίστης Ἐπιφυλακῆς

Σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν συνεχὴ προσέγγιση τῆς ἡγεσίας τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἐκκλησίας μὲ τὸν μέγιστο τῶν αἰρεσιαρχῶν, τὸν πᾶπα τῆς Ρώμης, ἃς ἔχουμε ζωντανὰ στὴν μνήμη μας τὴν ἀκόλουθη σοφὴ παροιμία τοῦ λαοῦ μας:

«Ὁ λύκος κὶ ἂν γέρασε, κὶ ἂν ἄσπρισε τὸ μαλλί του, μήτε τὴν γνώμη ἄλλαξε μήτε τὴν κεφαλὴ του...»

Μία Ζωντανὴ Μαρτυρία καὶ Ἐμφάνισις τοῦ Ὁσίου Δαβὶδ τοῦ ἐν Εὐβοίᾳ

Συντεταγμένο ἀπὸ τὸν π. Σταῦρο Αναγνώστου, ἐφημέριο Ἰστιαίας Εὐβοίας, «Στῦλος Ὁρθοδοξίας», Ἰούνιος 2005.



Μὲ βαθεῖα συγκίνηση θέλω νὰ σᾶς διηγηθῶ ἓνα περιστατικὸ ποὺ μοῦ συνέβη πρὶν 45 χρόνια στὴ Μονὴ τοῦ Ὁσίου Δαβὶδ. Τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη ζούσα μὲ τὴν οἰκογένειά μου στὸ χωριὸ Κοκκινομηλιά, ἓνα πανέμορφο χωριὸ τῆς Β. Εὐβοίας, ὀρεινὸ, μὲ θεὰ τὸ γαλάζιο Αἰγαῖο. Ἐκείνη τὴν περίοδο ὑπηρετοῦσα ὡς ψάλτης στὸ ἀναλόγιο τῶν ἐνοριῶν στὴ Κούλουρη καὶ Μαρούλη, δύο γειτονικὰ μικρὰ χωριά, μὲ

ξεχωριστὴ καὶ αὐτὰ ζωντάνια καὶ ὁμορφιά.

Στις 31 Ὀκτωβρίου 1960, εἶχαμε ἀποφασίσει μὲ τὴν σύζυγό μου νὰ πᾶμε στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ τοῦ Ὁσίου Δαβὶδ γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθοῦμε ἐπειδὴ τὴν ἄλλη ἡμέρα ἦταν ἡ γιορτὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου. Ἡ μετάβαση τότε γινόταν ἢ μὲ τὰ ζῶα ἢ μὲ τὰ πόδια. Αἰφνιδίως ὅμως, τὸ κοριτσάκι μας ἀρρώστησε, γεγονός ποὺ συνέβαλε στὴ ματαίωση τοῦ προσκυνήματός μας. Ἄν καὶ κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς νύχτας συνῆλθε, ἐν τούτοις ἡ ἀναχώρησή μας γιὰ τὸ μοναστήρι ἀναβλήθηκε.

Στις 5 Δεκεμβρίου 1960, τὴν παραμονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου ξεκινήσαμε νὰ πραγματοποιήσουμε τὸ προσκυνήματά μας. Στὸ μοναστήρι συναντήσαμε καὶ ἄλλους 30 περίπου προσκυνητὲς ἀπὸ ἓνα κεντρικὸ χωριὸ τῆς Εὐβοίας, τὴν Ἁγία Ἄννα. Στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ βρισκόταν ὡς προσκυνητὴς καὶ ὁ σημερινὸς ἡγούμενος τῆς Μονῆς π. Κύριλλος, λαϊκὸς τότε, μὲ τὴν μητέρα του, ἐκμεταλλευόμενος τὴν ἄδειά του ἀπὸ τὸ στρατό, ὅπου ὑπηρετοῦσε. Κατὰ τὸν Ἑσπερινὸ ποὺ τελέστηκε ἀπὸ τὸν πατέρα Ἰάκωβο Τσαλικὴ καὶ τὸν πατέρα Γρηγόριο (ποὺ σήμερα βρίσκεται στὴν Ἀλόνησο), οἱ προσκυνητὲς ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Ἄννα μᾶς πληροφόρησαν ὅτι μαζί τους εἶναι καὶ ἓνα δωδεκάχρονο κορίτσι Γυμνασίου ποὺ συνομιλεῖ μὲ τὸν Ἅγιο.

Ἡ πρώτη ἐπικοινωνία του ἔγινε στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἁγίας Ἄννας, ὅπου εἶχαν μεταφερθεῖ τὰ ἱερὰ λείψανα τοῦ Ὁσίου Δαβὶδ. Τὸ δωδεκάχρονο κορίτσι ἔβλεπε τὸν Ὁσιο Δαβὶδ καὶ αὐθόρμητα ἄρχισε διάλογο μαζί του. Αὐτὸ ἐπαναλήφθηκε καὶ στὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Ὁσίου. Ἡ ἐκπληξή μας ἦταν μεγάλη. Παρακολουθοῦσαμε τὸ διάλογο καὶ ἀπὸ τις ἀπαντήσεις συμπεραίναμε τι ἔλεγε στὴ μικρὴ ὁ Ὁσιος Δαβὶδ. Σημειωτέον πὼς δὲν βλέπαμε οὔτε ἀκούγαμε τὴν φωνὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου. Ἀξέχαστος ἦταν ὁ διάλογος τοῦ Ἁγίου. Παραθέτω ὀρισμένα τμήματα ἀπὸ τὸν καταπληκτικὸ αὐτὸ διάλογο ποὺ εὐκρινὰ σημάδευε ἀπὸ τότε τὴ ζωὴ μας:

Ὁ Ἅγιος εἶπε, «Ὁ καθηγητὴς σου Μάντζ... εἶναι ἄμαρτωλός». «Ὅχι Ὅσιε, εἶναι πολὺ καλός» τοῦ ἀπάντησε

ή κοπελίτσα. «Ναί, θά ῥθη μιὰ μέρα πού θά μετανοήση και στο κήρυγμά του θά πιστέψουν δυο χιλιάδες άνθρωποι», συμπλήρωσε ὁ Ἅγιος Δαβίδ.

Σέ ἐρώτηση τοῦ Ἁγίου, ἄν ἐπιθυμῆ νὰ δῆ τὴν κόλαση, ἢ ἀπάντηση τοῦ κοριτσιοῦ ἦταν καταφατική. «Ναί, θά ἤθελα νὰ δῶ τὴν κόλαση καὶ τοὺς κολασμένους», (ἐδῶ θά ἤθελα νὰ σᾶς πληροφορήσω ὅτι τὸ κορίτσι καθόταν καὶ βρισκόταν σὲ κατάσταση ἔκστασης). Ἀμέσως τότε βρέθηκαν στὴν κόλαση. Ἡ κοπελιὰ τρόμαξε μ' αὐτὰ πού ἀντίκρισε καὶ ξεφώνησε: «Πᾶρε με Ἄγιε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ, γιατί δὲν ἀντέχω νὰ βλέπω». Ρώτησε ὅμως τὸν Ἅγιο νὰ ἐξηγήσῃ γιὰ μιὰ φρικτὴ εἰκόνα πού ἀντίκρισε. «Γιατί αὐτὴ ἡ γυναίκα τρώει τὸ παιδί της;» «Ἐπειδὴ τὸ γέννησε καὶ τὸ σκότωσε, γιὰ αὐτὸ τὸ τρώει», ἀπάντησε ὁ Ὁσιος Δαβίδ. Τότε ξανά παρακάλεσε τὸν Ἅγιο νὰ φύγουν, διότι δὲν ἄντεχε νὰ βλέπῃ ἄλλο τὸ φρικτὸ ἐκεῖνο θέαμα. Ἀπὸ τοὺς μορφασμοὺς τοῦ προσώπου του κατανοοῦσε τὴ φρίκη πού ἔβλεπε.

«Θέλεις τώρα νὰ δῆς τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς τοῦ Παραδείσου»; «Ναί, θέλω Ὅσιε» ἦταν ἡ ἀπάντηση τῆς μικρῆς. Ἀμέσως βρέθηκαν στὸν Παράδεισο. «Ὅσιε, τι λαμπρὸς πού εἶναι ὁ ἥλιος ἐδῶ καὶ τι ὠραία τριαντάφυλλα; Ὅσιε, γιατί τὰ τριαντάφυλλα εἶναι ἄλλα ἀνοιγμένα, ἄλλα μισοανοιγμένα καὶ ἄλλα κλειστά»; «Γὰ ἀνοιγμένα εἶναι οἱ καθαρὲς ψυχὲς τῶν χριστιανῶν, τὰ μισοανοιγμένα ὄχι καὶ τόσο καθαρὲς καὶ τὰ κλειστά οἱ ἄπιστες». «Ὅσιε αὐτοὶ μὲ τὰ λευκὰ φτερά γιατί σκουπίζουν τοὺς δρόμους»; «Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ Ἄγγελοι καὶ σκουπίζουν τοὺς δρόμους γιὰ νὰ περάσῃ ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ πατρὸς Ἰακώβου» (ὁ πατὴρ Ἰακώβος ἦταν μαζί μας καὶ τ' ἄκουγε αὐτά). «Καὶ θά ῥθη τώρα ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ πατρὸς Ἰακώβου;» «Θά ἀργήσῃ πολὺ γιατί πρέπει νὰ ἐξομολογῆ τὸν κόσμο». Τότε εἶδα τὸν γέροντα Ἰακώβο νὰ σκουπίζῃ μὲ ἕνα λευκὸ μαντήλι τὰ δάκρυά του.

Κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς συνομιλίας ἤλθε ἕνα λεωφορεῖο μὲ 25 περίπου ἐπιβάτες. Εἰσήλθαν στὸν Ἱερὸ Ναό. Ἡ ἡσυχία πού ἐπικρατοῦσε τοὺς ὠθήσε τὴν περιέργεια. Τί συμβαίνει, μᾶς ρώτησαν. Τοὺς ἐξηγήσαμε πὼς ζοῦμε ἕνα θαῦμα. Παρακολουθοῦμε μιὰ συζήτηση τοῦ κοριτσιοῦ μὲ τὸν Ἅγιο Δαβίδ. Γέλασαν εἰρωνικὰ καὶ μᾶς γλεῦσαν.

Ἐκεῖνη ἀκριβῶς τὴ στιγμή σταμάτησε ἡ συνομιλία τοῦ κοριτσιοῦ μὲ τὸν Ἅγιο. Μὲ ἀπορία ἢ κοπελίτσα ἀπευθυνόμενη στὸν Ἅγιο ρωτᾷ: «Ὅσιε, γιατί φεύγεις; μήπως οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν χριστιανῶν δὲν εἶναι καθαρὲς; Τι εἶπες Ἄγιε; Τὸ ποῦλμαν πού ἦλθε τώρα μὲ τὰ 25 ἄτομα εἶναι ὅλοι ἄθεοι; Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ μιὰ γερόντισσα 85 περίπου ἐτῶν, ἢ ὅποια εἶναι πολὺ πιστὴ καὶ χάριν αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς ἔφτασε ἐδῶ τὸ ποῦλμαν; Τι ἄλλο Ἄγιε; Στὸ ποῦλμαν ὑπάρχει καὶ ἕνας Ἀθηναῖος ψηλὸς καὶ ἄκμηρος πού ἔχει ἕνα σκυλὶ πού τὸ ταΐζει καλύτερα ἀπὸ τὸ παιδί του, ἐνῶ πολλοὶ φτωχοὶ πού ἔπесαν στὰ χέρια του τοὺς πέταξε στοὺς δρόμους;» (Τὰ λόγια τοῦτα τοῦ Ἁγίου συμπεραίνουμε ἀπὸ τίς ἐρωτήσεις τῆς κοπελίτσας.)

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πού περιέγραψε ἡ κοπελιὰ κατὰ σύμπτωση μὲ πλησίασε καὶ μὲ ρώτησε: «Κύριε, τι εἶναι ἐδῶ πού ἦλθαμε»; Εἶναι τὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Ὁσίου Δαβίδ, τοῦ εἶπα. «Μὰ αὐτὰ πού εἶπε τὸ κορίτσι, αὐτὸς πού περιέγραψε εἶμαι ἐγώ. Ποῦ

ξέρει αὐτὸ γιὰ μένα»; Τὴν στιγμή ἐκεῖνη πῆρε τὴν γυναίκα του καὶ στάθηκαν μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἁγίου λέγοντας: «Ἄγνωστε Ἄγιε, δὲν σὲ ξέρω ποιὸς εἶσαι, ἀλλὰ σ' εὐχαριστῶ πού μέσα σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐρημιὰ βρήκα τὸν Θεὸ μου».

Τότε τὸ κοριτσάκι ἀπευθυνόμενη πρὸς αὐτοὺς πού εἶχαν εἰσέλθει στὸν Ἱερὸ Ναὸ εἶπε: «Σᾶς παρακαλῶ, ὅσοι ἔχουν βαριά τὴν συνείδησή τους ἄς βγοῦν ἔξω, διότι ὁ Ἅγιος δὲν θέλει νὰ τοὺς βλέπει». Οἱ ἐπιβάτες τοῦ ποῦλμαν ἀναχώρησαν ἀφοῦ δὲν εἶχαν σκοπὸ καὶ νὰ μείνουν ἄλλο.

Μόλις ἐφυγαν ἄρχισε πάλι ἡ συζήτηση μὲ τὸν Ἅγιο. Ἦταν πλέον περασμένα μεσάνυχτα. «Μὴ φεύγεις Ὅσιε, δὲν κουράσθηκα», εἶπε ἡ κοπελίτσα καὶ ἀμέσως συμπλήρωσε: «Ἄ! θά ῥθῃς στὶς 3.00 ἢ ὦρα καὶ θά κάνῃς καὶ θαῦμα»; Στὴ συνέχεια ἔτριψε τὰ μάτια του καὶ ἀπευθυνόμενη στὴ φίλη της πού στεκόταν δίπλα της εἶπε: «Κοιμήθηκα»; «Ναί, σὲ εἶχε πάρει ὁ ὕπνος» ἀπάντησε ἐκεῖνη. «Συγχώρεσε με Ἄγιε, ἦλθα νὰ σὲ προσκυνήσω καὶ κοιμήθηκα» μονολόγησε. Τότε πράγματι καταλάβαμε ὅτι αὐτὰ πού προηγήθηκαν μπροστὰ στὰ ἐκπληκτὰ μάτια μας τὰ ἀγνοοῦσε.

Ἐμεῖς ὅμως μὲ ἀγωνία περιμέναμε τὸ θαῦμα στὶς 3.00 π.μ. πού εἶχε προαναγγεῖλει ὁ Ἅγιος. Ἦταν 2:45 π.μ. ὅταν οἱ καμπάνες τοῦ μοναστηριοῦ ἄρχισαν νὰ κτυποῦν χαρμόσυνα. Πεταχτήκαμε ἔξω. Κτυποῦσαν μόνες τους. Τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ἐκλάβαμε ὡς τὸ θαῦμα πού ἀναμέναμε. Εἰσήλθαμε πάλι στὸν Ναό. Τὸ ρολοὶ ἐδειχνε 3:00. Ξαφνικὰ ἡ ματιὰ ὄλων μας ἐπικεντρώθηκε στὸ πάνω μέρος τοῦ τέμπλου. Στὸ ὕψος τοῦ μικροῦ παραθύρου, στὸν λευκὸ τοῖχο, παρουσιάστηκε μιὰ σκιά πού τράβηξε σὰν μαγνήτης τὴν προσοχή μας. Διερωτηθήκαμε, τί προκαλεῖ αὐτὴ τὴ μαύρη σκιά στὸν τοῖχο;

Τότε εἶδαμε νὰ προβάλλῃ τὸ κεφάλι τοῦ Ὁσίου Δαβίδ, μὲ τὰ λευκὰ γένια του, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς εἶναι στὴν εἰκόνα ἢ μορφὴ του. Φάνηκε ἀκόμη τὸ πετραχήλι, καθὼς καὶ δυὸ ἢ τρεῖς σταυροὶ ἀπὸ τὸ πετραχήλι. Κουνοῦσε τὸ κεφάλι του. Στὸ χέρι τοῦ κρατοῦσε τὸ θυμιατό. Ἄρχισε νὰ θυμιάζῃ. Τὰ κουδουνάκια τοῦ θυμιατοῦ ἀκουγόντουσαν δυνατὰ. Δάκρυα κατάνυξης πλημμύρισαν τοὺς πάντες. Ἴκετεύαμε τὸν Ἅγιο νὰ μᾶς ἐλεήσῃ. Τὰ δάκρυα ἔτρεχαν ἀσταμάτητα. Ὁ Ἅγιος ἔπαιρνε τὸ θυμιατό στὸ ἀριστερὸ χέρι καὶ μὲ τὸ δεξιὸ εὐλογοῦσε τὸν κόσμο. Ὁμολογῶ ὅτι τὸ θυμᾶμαι ὅσο ζῶ καὶ δὲν θά ξεχάσω ποτὲ μου τὴν γλυκύτητα τοῦ προσώπου του. Μιὰ γλυκύτητα πού ἀγαλλίαζε τὴν ψυχὴ μου.

Τὴ στιγμή πού ὁ Ἅγιος ἔσκυψε καὶ προσκυνοῦσε, τὸ κοριτσάκι φωνάζει δυνατὰ: «Παναγία μου! Χριστέ μου! Περνάει ὁ Χριστός, περνάει ἡ Παναγία, ὁ Μ. Βασίλειος, ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, ὁ Ἅγιος Γεώργιος, ὁ Ἅγιος Δημήτριος». Ἀνέφερε πλειάδα ἁγίων γιὰ ἄρκετὴ ὦρα. Τοῦ λόγου μας διακρίναμε μόνον τὸν Ὁσιο Δαβίδ πού ἔκανε αὐτὴ τὴν ὑπόκλιση. Ἐξ αὐτῶν πού ἔλεγε τὸ κορίτσι δὲν βλέπαμε τίποτε.

Μέσα σὲ ὅλα αὐτὰ ὀφείλω νὰ σᾶς διηγηθῶ καὶ ἕνα ἐξίσου σοβαρὸ περιστατικὸ πού συνέβη στὴ σύζυγό μου τὴν βραδιά ἐκεῖνη. Κρατοῦσε τὸ μικρὸ μας κοριτσάκι στὴν ἀγκυάλια της ὅλη τὴν νύχτα χωρὶς νὰ αἰσθάνεται κούραση. Σὲ μιὰ στιγμή,

ὅμως, πού προσπαθοῦσε νά δῆ καλύτερα, αἰσθάνθηκε ὅτι τὸ μικρὸ ἔγινε φοβερὰ βαρῦ. Προσπάθησε νά ἀφήσῃ κάτω τὸ μικρὸ ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνο παρέμεινε στὴν ἀγκυλιά τῆς χωρὶς ὥστόσο ἢ ἴδια νά τὸ κρατᾷ.

Ἐπὶ μία ὥρα ὁ Ὅσιος Δαβὶδ παρέμεινε ὀρατὸς διὰ γυμνοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ μέσα στὸν Ναό του. «Παιδιά μου, ἰδοὺ ὁ Ἅγιός μας, εἶναι ἐδῶ κοντά μας. Νὰ τὸν παρακαλεῖτε νά σᾶς βοηθήσῃ πάντα. Ἄς ἀρτίσουμε ὅμως τώρα τὸν Ὀρθρο καὶ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία», μᾶς εἶπε ὁ πρ. Ἰάκωβος.

Στὸ τέλος τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας συνομίλησα μὲ τὸν τότε φαντάρου καὶ φίλου μου καὶ σημερινὸ Ἠγούμενο τῆς Μονῆς πατέρα Κύριλλο. «Εἶδες Κώστα, εἶπα, ἀπόψε τί ἔγινε»; «Ναὶ Σταῦρο, ζωντανὰ πράγματα αὐτά, ἔχω συγκλονισθεῖ. Ὅπως βλέπεις εἶμαι στρατιώτης καὶ αὐτὴ τῆ στιγμή σοῦ λέω πῶς ὅταν ἀπολυθῶ, θὰ ἔλθω κατευθείαν ἐδῶ καὶ δὲν θὰ πάω στὸ χωριό μου. Γιατί πλέον θέλω νὰ ὑπηρετήσω τὸν Ἅγιο τὸν ὁποῖο ἀπόψε εἶδα μὲ τὰ μάτια μου. Θὰ μείνω μοναχὸς στὴν Ἱερά Μονή τοῦ Ἁγίου, διότι ὅπως εἶδες καὶ σὺ τὸν εἶδα ζωντανό, Τί ἄλλη ἀπόδειξη θέλω;» Πράγματι ἔτσι καὶ ἔγινε. Ὅταν ἀπολύθηκε πῆγε στὸ Μοναστήρι. Σήμερα εἶναι ὁ Ἠγούμενος τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς τοῦ Ὁσίου Δαβὶδ.

Εὐχομαὶ ὀλόψυχα νὰ εἶναι πάντα Ἄξιος, νὰ τοῦ δίδουν ὁ Ὅσιος Δαβὶδ καὶ ὁ Μακαριστὸς προκάτοχός του Ἰάκωβος, δύναμη, κουράγιο, καὶ υἰεὶα γιὰ νὰ ὑπηρετῆ τοὺς πιστοὺς πού προστρέχουν σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ λιμάνι, ὥστε νὰ βροῦν τὴν γαλήνη τῆς ψυχῆς τους.



Ἐπὶ Χωρισμοῦ Ἐκκλησίας καὶ Κράτους

Μητροπολίτη κ. Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτη.

Τὴν ἀνάγκη τοῦ χωρισμοῦ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπὸ τὸ Κράτος, γιὰ ὀκτῶ ὀσιώδεις λόγους τόνιζε σὲ ἄρθρο τοῦ ὀ Σεβασμιότατος Μητροπολίτη κ. Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτη, στὴν «Χριστιανικὴ Σπίθα» τοῦ 1952.

Σὲ ἄρθρο του μὲ τίτλο «ΧΩΡΙΣΜΟ, ΣΕΒΑΣΜΙΟΤΑΤΟΙ», ἔγραφε μεταξὺ ἄλλων:

« Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἢ ὀποία πρὸς... ἀπολαβὴ ἐγκόσμιων ἀγαθῶν, ἔκρινε καλὸν νὰ συζευχθῆ, νὰ ἐνώσῃ τὴν τύχη τῆς μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου τῆς Ἀποκάλυψης, σὺν τῷ χρόνῳ ἀπώλεσε τὴν ἐλευθερίαν της, καὶ ἡδονικὰ καθισμένη... στὴ ράχη τοῦ θηρίου, κυβερνᾶται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, καὶ περιφέρεται στὶς ὀδοὺς καὶ στὶς ρύμες τοῦ κόσμου ὡς μία μισθωτὴ πόρνη... θρησκευτικὴ πόρνη, πού ἐμπορεῦεται τὸν Χριστόν, ἀναγκασμένη νὰ κερνᾷ τὰ πλήθη ἀπὸ τὸ χρυσὸν ποτήρι... ὀχι τὸν καθαρὸ οἶνο τῆς Κ. Διαθήκης, ἀλλὰ οἶνο νοθευμένο, διδάγματα ξένα καὶ ἄλλότρια πρὸς τὸ γνήσιο πνεῦμα τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ...».

Ὁ Δρόμος τῆς Ζωῆς καὶ ὁ Δρόμος τοῦ Θανάτου

Ἱερέως Βασιλείου Μπαμιᾶ.

Παρουσιάζουμε μία εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ πονηροῦ Πνεύματος. Ἡ μία Κλίμαξ ἀναβιβάζει τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, εἰς τὸν Παράδεισον. Ἡ δὲ δευτέρα καταβιβάζει εἰς τὸν Ἄδη, εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον κόλασιν.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Ἄθανασία, Εὐσέβεια

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Σεμνός, Ἡθικός.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Ἄμνος, Ἀρνιον.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Σοφός, Πανίσχυρος.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Ρόδον, Κρίνον.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Ἄξιος πάσης τιμῆς.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Κριτής, Ἐλεήμων.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Μειλίχιος, Εὐμενής.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Ἀθῶος, Εἰρηνικός.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Ἐργατικός, Ταπεινός.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Στοργικός, Φιλόκαλος.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Ἐνδοξος, Φιλόξενος.

Ἐὐθεὸς εἶναι Παράδεισος.

+ + +

ἘὐΣατανᾶς θάνατος, ἀσέβεια.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς ἄσεμνος, ἀνήθικος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς λύκος, τίγρης, λέων.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς ἄσοφος, μωρός, ἀδύνατος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς ἀκάνθι, τρίβολος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς ἀνάξιος, ἄτιμος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς ὑπόδικος, ἀνελεήμων, σκληρός.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς πικρός, θράσος, κακοῦργος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς ἐνοχος, πταιστής, φιλόνομος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς τεμπέλης, ὑπερήφανος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς τύραννος, φιλόκακος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς ἄδοξος, μισόξενος.

ἘὐΣατανᾶς Κόλαση.

Καὶ τώρα μένει εἰς τὴν διάθεσή μας ἐλεύθερα νὰ διαλέξωμεν τὸν ἓνα ἀπὸ τοὺς δυὸ δρόμους, στὴν πρόσκαιρο αὐτὴν ζωὴ. Χρειάζεται μελέτη καὶ προσοχὴ διὰ νὰ ἀποφασίσῃ ὀ καθεὶς ποῖον δρόμο θὰ ἀκολουθήσῃ καὶ θὰ βᾶδιση ἀποφασιστικὰ καὶ θετικὰ, σκεπτόμενος τὰς συνεπειὰς καὶ τὰ ἀποτελέσματα, τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του. Παράδεισον αἰώνιον ἢ Κόλασιν. Ἐὐθεὸς νὰ μᾶς ἀξίωσῃ νὰ βαδίζωμεν τὸν δρόμο τῆς ζωῆς. Ἀμήν.



Τὸν πάπα νὰ καταρᾶσθε, διότι αὐτὸς θὰ εἶναι ἢ αἰτία τοῦ κακοῦ.

Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς Αἰτωλός

Φεύγετε τοὺς παπικοὺς ὡς φεύγει τις ἀπὸ φρεως καὶ ἀπὸ προσώπου πυρός.

Ἅγιος Μάρκος Εὐγενικός

Ἔργον Μοναχοῦ ἐστὶν μηδὲν ἀνέχεσθαι καινοτομεῖσθαι τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον.

Ἅγιος Θεόδωρος Στουδίτης

THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

By Frank Schaeffer, from "Dancing Alone," p. 226-232.

I remember trying to explain to a Protestant friend why it was that going to confess to my priest was an indispensable part of spiritual self-discipline, of trying to become more like Christ, of battling against my sin, and of following the teaching of the Church. He remarked that he understood. He has several friends from his Southern Baptist church he went hunting with; they had all agreed to be "accountable" to each other. Twice a year or so they would get together to "rap," or "dialogue," "share" in a "mutual support group." He had found this very helpful to his "Christian life." He said he knew just what I meant.

Friendships, talking with one's friends, social fellowship are no doubt all good things, but they have nothing whatsoever to do with the sacrament of confession of one's sin to a priest. In confession, one receives absolution from one who is in direct succession from the Apostles of Christ—that is, one to whom has been given to "bind in heaven" that which he binds of earth (Jn 20:21-23).

What is amazing to me is that otherwise conservative people, in the Protestant denominations, who, for instance, would be horrified by the idea of "alternative lifestyles" replacing traditional families, have themselves replaced the traditional family of God with a self-invented, alternative religion of chaotic personalized experience, in which they are accountable to one, and in which they "do the right thing" in the best tradition of the 1960s. While they would argue against relativistic chaos in many other areas of life—for instance against an "if it feels good do it" approach to sexuality—they have accepted just such a secularistic state of affairs in their personal spiritual lives when it comes to personal moral accountability. And yet the voice of the Orthodox Church is there for all who wish to heed it. It speaks clearly concerning the unique authority vested in the Church. Saint Basil the Great writes of the special relationship of Christians to their confessors: "...diseases of the body are not divulged to all, nor haphazardly, but to those who are skilled in curing them..."

The Church extends the mercy of Christ to its people by obeying Christ's command to the Apostles, which was passed to their successor bishops. "As the Father sent Me, I also send you... If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Jn 20, 21-23)

In its wisdom, the Orthodox Church has ignored modern psychological explanations of sin, let alone ideas of collective "no fault" societal guilt, and instead teaches us to pray:

"O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I confess to Thee all hidden and open sins of my heart and mind, which I have committed as to this present day; wherefore, I beg of Thee,

the righteous and compassionate Judge, remission of sins and grace to sin no more."

The Orthodox Church does not abandon its flock to be orphans, accountable only to their flimsy changeable feelings and consciences, unguided and deprived of the necessary discipline that comes from regular observance of the sacrament of confession. If some secularized "Orthodox" Christians do not regularly go to confession it is because—to their loss—they willfully chose to not take advantage of their great inheritance. And if some "Orthodox" priests do not insist that their flock come to confession, then it is a mark of their own protestantized corruption. St. Basil the Great spoke for the whole Church, regarding the tradition of confession to a priest, or a monastic spiritual Father:

"It is necessary to confess our sins to those to whom the dispensation of God's mysteries are entrusted. Those doing penance of old are found to have done it before the Saints. It is written in the Gospel that they confessed their sins to John the Baptist; that in the Acts they confessed to the Apostles by whom all were baptized."

In the Orthodox Church, the priest does not claim to forgive sins by his own power, but instead gently helps the sinner to come to God and seek forgiveness, reconciliation and a new start. The priest's special authority lies in his power to pronounce the penitent sinner forgiven by God. In this way, the believer is actively helped to learn good habits and to avoid sin. The believer is also offered the hope of countless new beginnings and the certainty that he or she has indeed been forgiven, as well as a wealth of practical advice and, from time to time, a well-deserved godly rebuke. This was the understanding of confession in the West as well as the East. St. Ambrose of Milan writes:

"The sinner not only confesses his sins, but he even enumerates them and admits his guilt; for he does not want to conceal his faults. Just as fevers are not able to be assuaged when they break, so too illness of sins burns on while it is hidden, but disappears when it shows itself in confession."

How precious of a sacramental gift confession truly is becomes abundantly clear to those of us who come to the Orthodox Church from non-Orthodox backgrounds. Our "confessions" once consisted of half-formed, lonely muttered prayers, into our pillows, or occasional sessions of pastoral "counseling" with a physician of the soul who had neither the skill, nor the authority to pronounce us well.

No priest, no guidance, no accountability, and no regular reminders to confess were offered to those raised in most Protestant "churches." We had little opportunity or active regular encouragement to grow, learn and start anew. We had no saint's lives to practically inspire us. We were deprived of the wise mercy of the historical Church. We were deprived of the cumulative pastoral wisdom of two thousand years. Stranded with ourselves, and with whatever theological or psy-

chological whim our pastor used to “therapeutically” modify our behavior, we were bereft of the sacrament of penance that all Christians took for granted for most of the life of the Church. We had the Bible to guide us, but most of our time was taken up arguing about what it “meant” to us. It might have been of us Protestant orphans that St. Mark the Ascetic was speaking when he wrote: “For it is dangerous to isolate oneself completely, relying on one’s own judgment with no one else as witness.”

Holy Tradition teaches that Christ calls His children to live holy lives. In His mercy, Christ establishes the Church to help accomplish the life-long task of achieving personal sanctity. So that we might not isolate ourselves, so that we might be accountable, so that we might not have to rely on pietistic or fundamentalist man-made rules, the Church does not expect us to be holy by our own miserable lonely efforts. The Church teaches us that we cannot expect to grow toward God if we harbor unconfessed secret sin. St. Jerome addressed this fact:

“If the Serpent, the Devil, bites someone secretly, he infects that person with the venom of sin. And if the one who has been bitten keeps silent and does not do penance, and does not want to confess his wound to a brother and to his Master (his spiritual father and priest), then his brother and Master, who have the Word that will cure him, cannot very well assist him. For if the sick man is ashamed to confess his wound to the physician, medicine will not cure that to which it is not applied.”

Today, the counterfeit of authentic confession is offered to people in the form of psychological counseling. This counterfeit of confession can also take the form of self-help group therapy, prayer meetings, home Bible study or times of “fellowship and sharing.” But in the view of the Church, these are band-aid solutions to a severe wound—sin!

The failure of psychology to help people change their behavior is in evidence within our desacralized world in which psychotherapy has replaced sacramental confession and secularized social programs have tried to devise coercive, amoral short cuts to a secularized, social utopia. Professor of Psychology William Kirk Kilpatrick shows, in his important book, “Psychological Seduction: The Failure of Modern Psychology,” that there has been an increase of social pathologies—divorce, abortion, crime, and anti-social behavior of all kinds—at exactly the same time in our history as psychology has replaced religious confession and reduced sin to no more than a “psychological problem.”

Personal Confession

As a new convert to Orthodoxy, I found confession embarrassing and frightening. Yet nothing in my spiritual life has been more helpful to me, or has given me more true peace, than regular confession to my spiritual father. What began as a terror is of the greatest comfort to me now, even though I still approach confession with fear and trembling. Moreover, in

trying to be accountable to my priest, I have taken genuine, if small and incremental steps, away from certain evil behaviors which seemed to be beyond hope of change. Being accountable, without excuses, and knowing that I will have to face someone to whom I will have to admit my moral failures, has slowly begun to change my behavior, step by difficult step. In my own life, I have begun to discover the truth that Saint Ambrose and the other Fathers write about—unconfessed sin is unchanged sin. Unchanged behavior is a stumbling block to learning the good habits that will help us to imitate Christ.

The idea of confession is foreign to the people of our day. Ours is an age that has placed a premium on self-esteem, self-realization, self-image, “rights,” and egocentric intellectual pride. Ours is an age that has perfected the cult of the feel-good self, that has politicized morality, and that eschews any concept of personal moral accountability to the divine order. Ours is a culture that may be fairly described as having perfected the art of self-esteem for no reason. But the voice of the historical Church is clear on the need for those of us who wish to be saved to see our sinful pride for what it is. St. Evagrius (within The Philokalia “On Discrimination”), writes:

“In the whole range of evil thoughts, none is richer in resources than self-esteem; for it is to be found almost everywhere, and like some cunning traitor in a city, it opens the gates to all the demons.”

This may not be what the “New Age” religions of therapeutic Protestantism jingoistic Americanism, secularism, user-friendly modern Roman Catholicism, feminism or psychology teach us, with their constant mind-numbing exhortations to “feel good about you;” nevertheless, humility has been the beginning of wisdom and the start of the way back to God for all Christians since the beginning of the Church.

There is no substitute for confession to a priest in our ascetic struggle to be saved—to subdue our self-esteem—to become God-like—to change the content of our characters, to curb our passions in order that we may find Heaven heavenly!



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.

THE INWARD MISSION OF OUR CHURCH

By St. Justin Popovich (assembled by Fr. Demetrios C., edited for length).

The definition of the Church, her life, her purpose, her spirit, her plan, her ways—all these things are given in the wondrous Person of God-man Christ. Hence, the purpose of the Church is to make every one of her faithful—organically and in person—one with the Person of Christ: to turn their sense of self into a sense of Christ and their self-knowledge (self-awareness) into Christ-knowledge (Christ-awareness); for their life to become the life in Christ and for Christ; their personality to become personality in Christ and for Christ; that within them might live, not they themselves but Christ in them (Gal 2:20). The mission of the Church is still to bring about in her members the conviction that the proper state of human personhood is composed of immortality and eternity, and not of the realm of time and mortality.

The Church is the personhood of the God-man Christ, a God-man organism and not a human organization. For this reason, it is a fundamental error to have the God-man organism of the Church divided into little national organizations. In the course of their procession down through history, many local Churches have limited themselves to nationalism—to national methods and aspirations. The Church has adapted herself to the people, when it should be properly just the reverse: the people adapting themselves to the Church. This mistake has many a time been made by several Churches. But we very well know that these were the tares of our Church life, tares that the Lord will not uproot—leaving them rather to grow with the wheat until the time of harvest (Matthew 13:29-30). We also well know (the Lord so taught us) that these tares have their origin in our primeval enemy and enemy of Christ: the devil (Matthew 13:25-28). But we make known this knowledge in vain, if it is not transformed into prayer, the prayer that—in time to come—Christ will safeguard us from becoming the sowers and cultivators of such tares ourselves.

It is now high time—the twelfth hour—time for our Church representatives to cease being nothing but servants of nationalism, and for them to become bishops and priests of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. **The mission of the Church, given by Christ and put into practice by the Holy Fathers, is this: that in the soul of our people be planted and cultivated a sense and awareness that every member of the Orthodox Church is a catholic (i.e., universal) person—a person who is forever and ever, and is God-human; that each person is Christ's, and is therefore a brother to every human being—a ministering servant to all men and all created things.** This is the Christ-given objective of the Church. Any other is not an objective of Christ, but of the Antichrist. For any local Church to be the Church of Christ, the Church Catholic, and this objective must be bought about continuously among our people. And yet what are the means of accomplishing this God-human objective? Once again, the

means are themselves God-human; because a God-human objective can only be brought about exclusively by God-human means, never by human ones or by any others. It is on this point that the Church differs radically from anything that is human or of this earth.

These means are none other than the God-human ascetic exertions and virtues. And these can be successfully practiced only by God-human, Christ-bearing ascetics. God-human virtues exist in an organic kinship. Each has its source in the other, and they bring one another to completion.

The first among ascetic virtues is the effort of faith: The souls of our people must pass through—and constantly be passing through—this exertion; meaning that these souls may then be given up to Christ as having no reservations and being without compromises—having extended down to God-human depths and ascended to God-human heights. It is essential to create in our people the sense that the faith of Christ is a virtue beyond nationhood—being oecumenical, and catholic, Trinitarian; and that for someone to believe in Christ entails their waiting on Christ, and only on Christ, with every event of their lives.

The second ascetic virtue is the God-human virtue of prayer and fasting: This being a virtue that must become a way of life of our Orthodox people—becoming the soul of their souls; because prayer and fasting are the all-powerful, Christ-given means of purging not only the human personhood, but also society, the people, and the human race at large, of every defilement. The souls of our people must fall in step with the Orthodox life of prayer. Prayer and fasting are not to be performed merely for the individual, or for one people, but for everyone and everything (“in all and for all”): for friends and for enemies, for those who persecute us and those who put us to death, because that is how Christians are to be distinguished from Gentiles (Matt. 5:44-45).

The third God-human virtue is that of love: That love which knows no bounds, which does not question who is worthy and who is not, but loves them all—loving friends and enemies, loving sinners and evil doers without, however, loving their sins and their crimes. This God-human love must be cultivated in our people because its universal character is what sets it apart from other self-proclaimed and relative loves: from that of the pharisaic sort, the humanistic, the altruistic, the nationalistic, and likewise from animal love. The love of Christ is always all-embracing love. It is acquired by prayer, because it is a gift of Christ. Now the Orthodox heart prays with intensity: “Lord of love, this love of Yours for everyone and for all things—give it to me!”

The fourth ascetic virtue is the God-human virtue of meekness and humility: Only he who is meek at heart can appease fierce hearts that are in uproar: only he who is lowly in heart can humble proud and haughty souls. The soul of the people must be rendered meek by Christ's meekness, He being the only truly “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). Every person must learn to pray: “Meek, gentle Lord, assuage my fierce soul!” The Lord humbled Himself with the greatest humility:

He was incarnate and became man. We should [desire to] be of Christ, and then humble yourself like a worm. Embed your flesh: in the pain of all who are in pain, of everyone sorrowing and in grief; in the trial of everyone who, impassioned, is thus tormented; and in the trauma of every animal and bird. Humble yourself lower than them all. Be all things to all men, but be of Christ and according to Christ. When you are by yourself, then pray: "O humble Lord, by Your humility, humble me!"

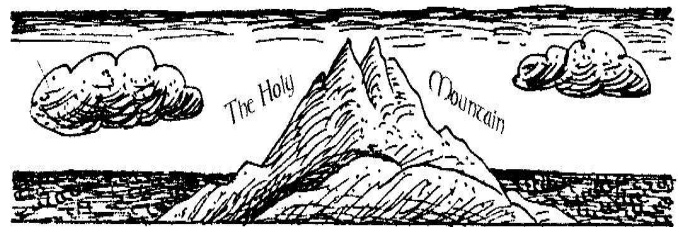
The fifth ascetic virtue is the God-human virtue of longsuffering: To endure ill-use, not to render evil for evil, to forgive—in total compassion—all assault, slander, and hurt. This is what it is to be of Christ: to feel yourself perpetually crucified to the world, persecuted by it, violated and spat upon. The world will not tolerate Christ-bearing men, just as it would not tolerate Christ. Martyrdom is the state in which a Christian brings forth fruit. This must be imparted to our people. For the Orthodox, martyrdom is purification. Being Christian does not simply mean to bear suffering cheerfully, but to pardon in compassion those who cause it—to pray to God for them, as did Christ and the Archdeacon Stephen. and so, pray: "Longsuffering Lord, give me forbearance; make me magnanimous and meek!"

Our Church's mission is to infuse these God-human virtues and ascetic exertions into the people's way of living—to have their life and soul knit firmly with the Christ-like, God-human virtues. For therein lies the soul's salvation from the world and from all of those soul-destroying, death-dealing and Godless organizations of the world. In response to the "erudite" atheism and refined cannibalism of contemporary civilization, we must give place to those Christ-bearing personalities that—with the meekness of sheep—will put down the roused lust of wolves; and with the harmlessness of doves, will save the souls of the people from cultural and political putrefaction. That is why the major task of our Church is the creation of such Christ-bearing ascetics. The watchword that should be heard within the church today is: let us return to the Christ-bearing ascetics and to the holy fathers! To resume the virtues of St. Anthony, St. Athanasios, St. Basil, and St. Gregory... and others like them... And today, only Orthodox ascetic efforts and virtues can bring about sanctity in every soul. Herein lies the difference between the world of men and the one in Christ: the human world is transient and time-bound, while that of Christ is ever whole, forever more. Orthodoxy, as the single vessel and guardian of the perfect radiant Person of the God-man Christ, is brought about exclusively by this exertion of virtues by grace—through entirely God-human Orthodox means, not through borrowings from Roman Catholicism or Protestantism; because the latter are just forms of Christianity after the pattern of the proud European being, and not of the humble God-man being.

This mission of the Church is facilitated by God Himself, because among our people there exists an ascetic spirit as created by Orthodoxy through the centuries. The Orthodox

soul of our people leans towards the Holy Fathers and the Orthodox ascetics. Ascetic exertion—at the personal, family, and parish level, particularly of prayer and fasting—is the characteristic of Orthodoxy.

The Ascetics are Orthodoxy's only true missionaries. Asceticism is her only missionary school. Orthodoxy is ascetic effort and it is life, and it is thus by effort and by life that her mission is broadcast and brought about. The development of asceticism—this ought to be the inward mission of our Church amongst our people. The parish must become an ascetic focal point, but this can only be achieved by an ascetic priest. Prayer and fasting, the Church-oriented life of the parish, a life of liturgy: Orthodoxy holds these as the primary ways of effecting rebirth in its people. The parish community must be regenerated, and in Christ-like brotherly love must minister humbly to Him and to all people—meek and lowly and in a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial. And such service must be imbued and nourished by prayer and the liturgical life. This much is groundwork and indispensable. But to this end, there exists one prerequisite: that our bishops, priests, and our monks become ascetics themselves. That this might be, then: Let us beseech the Lord.



THANKSGIVING DAY PROCLAMATION, 1863

By President Abraham Lincoln.

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and beautiful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God...

No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the most high God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It is seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father, who dwelleth in the Heavens...

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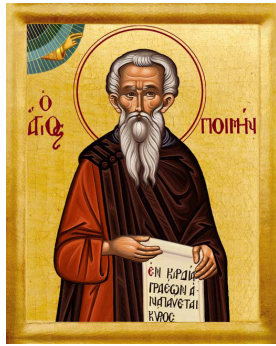
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THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

Author Unknown.

A University professor at a well known institution of higher learning challenged his students with this question. “Did God create everything that exists?” A student bravely replied, “Yes He did!” “God created everything?” The Professor asked. “Yes sir, He certainly did,” the student replied. The professor answered, “If God created everything, then God created evil. And, since evil exists, and according to the principal that our works define who we are, then we can assume God is evil.”

The student became quiet and did not answer the professor’s hypothetical definition. The professor, quite pleased with himself, boasted to the students that he had proven once more that the Christian faith was a myth.

Another student raised his hand and said, “May I ask you a question, professor?” “Of course,” replied the professor. The student stood up and asked, “Professor, does cold exist?” “What kind of question is this? Of course it exists. Have you never been cold?” The other students snickered at the young man’s question. The young man replied, “In fact sir, cold does not exist. According to the laws of physics, what we consider cold is in reality the absence of heat. Every body or object is susceptible to study when it has or transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (-460°F) is the total absence of heat; and all matter becomes inert and incapable of reaction at that temperature. Cold does

not exist. We have created this word to describe how we feel if we have no heat.”

The student continued, “Professor, does darkness exist?” The professor responded, “Of course it does.” The student replied, “Once again you are wrong sir, darkness does not exist either. Darkness is in reality the absence of light. Light we can study, but not darkness. In fact, we can use Newton’s prism to break light into many colors and study the various wavelengths of each color. You cannot measure darkness. A simple ray of light can break into a world of darkness and illuminate it. How can you know how dark a certain space is? You measure the amount of light present. Isn’t this correct? Darkness is a term used by man to describe what happens when there is no light present.”

Finally the young man asked the professor, “Sir, does evil exist?” Now uncertain, the professor responded, “Of course, as I have already said. We see it everyday. It is in the daily examples of man’s inhumanity to man. It is in the multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil. To this the student replied, “Evil does not exist, sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God’s love present in his heart. It’s like the cold that comes when there is no heat, or the darkness that comes when there is no light.” The professor sat down.

The young man’s name—Albert Einstein.

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]

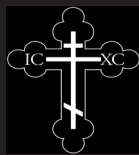
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE VALUE OF TIME (THE NUMBER 8,760)

By the Rev. Metropolitan Avgoustinos of Florina, from the weekly bulletin "Kyriaki" («Κυριακή», "Sunday"), January 1, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen].

On midnight of December 31st, when the clocks reach exactly 12:00, one full year—with all of its joys and sorrows—is fully erased, and a new year rises. The previous year becomes part of history; all of its 365 days are left behind, a simple memory.

My dear brethren, did you ever think, I mean truly contemplate about the time period of these 365 days that on each December 31st becomes part of our own history? What have we truly accomplished during its duration? Let me assure you that all of us are immensely indebted for all of these days. In an effort to provide a notion of our responsibility as well as accountability for each year of our earthly lives, I will draw you a picture and provide you a comparative example; I will present a small parable.

There was a king with many subjects who carried great fondness and devotion for all of his kingdom's citizenry. He loved them all very much, every single one of them, without any exception. One day, he decided to give them all a gift. He prepared and distributed purses filled with gold coins, one to each citizen. The grateful subjects opened the purses up and begun counting the coins within. They each counted them, over and over, again and again... All of them had the exact same quantity of gold within their respective purse: 8,760 coins! This was a significant amount of gold. The good and loving king gave it to them out of his goodwill and love, so that they could each use it for their own benefit and the benefit of their fellow men. And do you know what each of them did with their respective small

fortune? You could have never guessed it! Instead of using this blessed inheritance for their home, neighbor or society, they each went by the river bank, opened up their purses and began throwing the gold coins away into the deep river water, one by one, until all of their small fortune was completely gone and their purses stood empty. If any one of us had been there observing them, what might we have said? Surely all of us would have assumed that they had all gone mad.

My brethren, this is where my simple parable ends. Now who is this loving king? He is our God. Who are these senseless citizens? We are the King's citizenry. And what is this 8,760 number? Grab a pencil and paper and figure it out. Every day that passes by has 24 hours and all of the year has 365 days. If we multiply the 365 days with the 24 hours of each day, we then determine that an entire year contains 8,760 hours; these are then the hours that each year of our life has to offer. From January 1st of each year to the next December 31st that follows 8,760 hours will have passed. I thus repeat my question: What have we truly accomplished during the duration of the year we are about to leave behind? Have we made it a worthwhile year? Did we add any value? Or, perhaps we are all like those foolish citizens that threw away all of their 8,760 gold coins. Let us then make an examination, each one of us on our own, and let us evaluate and estimate the usefulness of last year's 8,760 hours that are about to draw to a close.

Among all of these hours, was there any time set aside for listening to the divine word of God and for the study of Holy Scriptures? Were there any days that we ran to a Church to listen to sermons or attend Church services? How about opening and studying the Bible? Did we do that? If the answer is yes, then we may consider ourselves blessed. This is how the Psalter begins. We read that "blessed"

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is that person, happy and with good fortune. Who does the Psalmist refer to? Is it the person that has lots of money, apartment buildings, businesses, limousines, and enjoys the finest of worldly entertainment? Not quite; the Psalmist says: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* (Ps 1:1-2). Blessed is he who takes time to place the Holy Bible in his hands and read it. I thus ask all of us: During the year that is coming to an end, did our angel see us hold the Holy Gospel in our hands and read it on a regular basis? Christ Himself tells us: *Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.* (Lk 11:28).

We are coming to the close of this year’s 8,760 hours. I ask another question: During this entire year, were there hours regularly devoted to prayer? During the earlier years of Christianity, the faithful would dedicate hours upon hours for the purpose of prayer. Does our angel ever “catch us” on our knees, in prayer to our Heavenly Father? Oh if we only knew the great power of prayer and how much we truly lose by not making prayer a companion to our daily life. There would have been so many unsolved problems (personal, family, professional, etc) that would simply find rapid solutions if, and only if, we used this invaluable key to unlock such solutions; the key of prayer is just another valuable gift granted to us by our God and Creator. What great comfort and consolation can be found when we whisper *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and all of Your saints, have mercy upon me!*

This year’s 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During this time, were there any hours or days of fasting? There are certain days such as Wednesdays and Fridays, and others that are even more significant, such as Holy Friday, that must be days of fasting for all of us. A politician dedicated 15 straight

days for his campaign, and vested several towns. When he returned to his office, he pridefully announced: “I traveled for 15 days straight and toured 15 different towns, In every single one I was treated and fed as royalty; freshly slaughtered meat every single day...” And one of the villagers that heard him, a shepherd, asked him in a soft tone: “Your Excellency, how can there be no Wednesday and no Friday for 15 days straight? Was every day a Pascha?...” You see, my brethren, fasting is nowadays not even a “custom” among many of our faithful—there is no desire or will to fast even on Great Friday! Satan has gotten hold of the special eraser and wiped out fasting from the daily lives of Christians.

This year’s 8,760 hours are ending. Among these hours was time set aside for repentance and confession? These hours would have been the year’s most blessed ones for that is the time that we placed the devil on the ground and stampeded him while angels in Heaven are singing divine victory hymns. It was during those hours that we the sinful ones, full of contrition and in utmost humility, knelt in front of our spiritual father and opened up our lips to whisper not words of criticism and condemnation but the ones that our Lord thrives to listen to: I sinned my Lord, please, grant your mercy upon me the wretched one... And all of us have so many sins to repent for and confess... So, I ask all of us, during this last year, did we manage to spend time with our confessor, to open our heart, to tearfully confess our sins and then say *God be merciful to me a sinner and Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*? (Lk 18:13 & 23:42). Did we do this? If not, we better ask ourselves why not.

This year’s 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. Is it possible that we might have also forgotten the other golden hours of the year that are coming to a close? Which hours are these, you ask? These are the hours of almsgiving and mercy towards our fellow man. Did you reach into your pocket and

silently, secretly and with as little attention as possible place a few crumbs from your many blessings into the hands of a less fortunate man? Did you dedicate a few moments in prayer for a neighbor or a colleague who was in a moment of crisis? Did you spend a few dimes from your earthly blessings towards a Christian mission or cause? Never forget that the hands that spread goodness and alms are the hands of God, the hands of Christ!

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During these hours were there any of the most significant and spiritually highest moments, the moments of receiving Holy Communion, our Lord's holy Body and most precious Blood? These are indeed blessed moments; once we repent and confess our sins, once we are cleansed with tears of true repentance, once we embrace and make peace with our enemies, we approach the Royal Gate with the look of the thief on the cross and receive the Holy Mysteries: *Take, eat; this is my body... Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* (Mt 26:28). These are the moments that carry a unique and incomparable weight and significance; there is no price for them and can neither be purchased nor sold. They are truly above all other hours of our life.

So now we all need to ask: Were there such hours for any of you my brethren, and most pointedly for me the wretched one? I am greatly afraid that in reality we have no such hours. Our hours are almost exclusively hours of sin, the devil's hours; they are everything and anything except one thing: hours of God. Let us not kid ourselves; we waste each year's hours like all those who threw their gold coins into the river.

We truly are inexcusable. Our Holy Gospel says that, during the time of our Lord's time on earth, the citizens of Jerusalem showed great interest in spiritual matters. When they heard that a preacher and confessor came to the area, St. John the Forerunner, they closed their shops, took their wives and children, walked for several miles past the Jordan river, and came to the desolate desert to listen to his sermons and confess their sins. And all of them *were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins* (Mk 1:5). In comparison with the faithful of those days, most of the so-called Orthodox Christians today remain completely indifferent on such matters. The bells ring yet they stay away from Churches. In the not-too-distant past, when the faithful could find no confessor in their area, they would travel for days to go to the Holy Mountain to find a spiritual father and partake of the Holy Sacrament of confession. In our days, this is an extremely rare occurrence for most of our neighbors and friends.

One year is comprised of 8,760 hours and each week has 168 hours. My fellow brethren, let us dedicate to God a couple of hours each week and make our way to our local Church so we can at least attend Liturgy. We anxiously throw away so many hours each week on worldly matters; is it not proper to devote at least a couple of hours for our God? We have completely forgotten Him and have literally pushed Him out of our lives. Putting it simply, we have forgotten Him. We are

an adulteress generation, like trees that bear no fruit and are fit to be only fuel for fire. Our Lord represented this type of condition very accurately during His homily at the mountain: *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* (Mt 7:19).

What is it then that we should do, you ask. Why are you asking me or any of your clergy? The answers lie elsewhere, in black and white, as written by St. John the Evangelist. What does he have to tell us? One simple word that is the one and only key: Repent! (*Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand*, Mt 3:2). In other words, change your mind, your behavior, your life, your daily spiritual path; the road that our ultra-progressive society has carved for the citizens of our days leads the faithful to the deep, dreaded canyon of eternal damnation, Hell. That is the destination towards where most of us are marching; unless we choose here and now to change, re-program our lives, use wisely every minute granted to us by our Lord. Let us stop wasting time now, let us stop throwing our gold coins senselessly into the river.

My dear brethren, if we could hear the repeated petitions of those judged to eternal damnation, those countless souls in Hades, do you know what we would hear them ask? To return to life for a little time, a few moments, a few seconds, so that they can emphatically pronounce: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son and Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Lk 15:21 & 23:42). Let us therefore waste no more time. Let us all comprehend how much we have lost, the countless hours we have wasted. Let us repent, let us shed tears of contrition and kneel in the sight of a spiritual father, let us confess our sins. Starting with this January 1st, let us commit to make full use of our God-granted time, let us not waste a single one of next year's precious hours. Let us promise God that this year, we will not grant or allow the devil to take possession of even a single hour. All of next year's hours, all of next year's days, all of next year's weeks, and all the days of our lives will be spent near God, near His angels, near His Most Holy Mother so that we can be worthy of the blessings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ unto the ages of ages. Amen.



THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF ORTHODOX MONASTERIES

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.

Blessed Elder Amphilochios of Patmos (+1970)

TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY

By Metropolitan Philaret (+1985).



Once long ago, nearly two thousand years in the past, at the dawn of Christianity, the pre-eminent Apostle Paul, one of the greatest preachers of the Christian Faith, wrote in his epistle to his beloved disciple Timothy: *Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh* (1 Tim. 3:16).

And the holy Gospel, relating to us how this, the greatest event in the history of humanity, the manifestation of God in the flesh took place, says that the angel who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds of Bethlehem told them: *I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:10-11).

Great joy... Behold, the Holy Church, solemnly celebrating the great and splendid feast of the Nativity of Christ, renews this great joy in our sight from year to year, reverently and joyously pondering and reminding us of the wondrous accomplishment of the merciful and co-suffering love of Him Who descended from the unapproachable and dread throne of His divine glory and appeared on our sinful earth, “for us men and for our salvation...” The saintly Theophan the Recluse says that there can be no greater joy for the Christian soul than the joy which the angel proclaimed on the blessed night of the Nativity of Christ, and which he said would be a great joy for us, for all people.

O Christian! Does your heart rejoice on this splendid feast day? Behold, before us is the world which surrounds us, which does not know the beauty and light of Orthodoxy. The children of this world, for all appearances, also celebrate the Birth of Christ. But what is their “Merry Christmas!” which thousands and millions of their post-cards and greetings say? Having torn themselves away from the fundamental laws of the Church, having lost all connection in fact with ancient Christian piety, they have reduced the celebration of the great and splendid feast to greetings, gifts and brightly-colored lights. Yet there would be nothing foolish in all of this if it were warmed from within with the truth and joy of the great solemnity of our holy and saving Faith. But do we not see that their entire celebration is but decorative in character? On the outside it is elegant, but within there is spiritual emptiness...

Nay, the joy of the Nativity of Christ lies not in gifts and greetings, but in the news that the Omnipotent Creator of all that exists appeared on earth, dwelt among men, gave them His marvelous evangelical law and the wondrous example of spiritual life in God and love for God and neighbor; by His

redemptive and salvific sufferings He has freed us from sin, the curse and death, and has opened for us as a path to His heavenly kingdom and to everlasting joy in God and with God.

On the night of the Nativity of Christ, the holy angels chanted: *Glory to God the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men* (Luke 2:14); And He Who was born on that night, bidding farewell to His beloved disciples on another night, the night of His redemptive sufferings, confirmed the angel’s words, saying: *Peace I leave with you. My Peace I give you*—yet to this He added—*not as the world giveth, give I to you* (John 14:27).

This is the holy peace of Christ, His precious gift to each soul which believes in Him, and it now overshadows all such faithful souls, despite all the bloody chaos and foolishness which we see in the world today. But do there not now come to mind other dread words of the Lord, which He spoke through His prophet: *Peace, peace; and where is peace?* (Jer 6:14). Yea, there is no peace, nor will there be, all the pitiful attempts and efforts of contemporary “peace-makers” to bring about “peace in this world” notwithstanding. For the awful threat of monstrous, fratricidal war hangs over this world, and the world will not escape this horror if it does not come to its senses and return to the path of Christ’s truth. But will it? Is not the fulfillment drawing nigh to us of the dreaded prophecy of the Apostle, who says that the ancient world was inundated with water (the universal deluge), and the present world will perish through fire, the earth also, and the works that are in it, *shall be burned up*, as we are told in the second Epistle of the holy Apostle Peter (3:10)...

But enough of this. The radiant feast quickly approaches! Let every Christian soul rejoice on these splendid days of festival. What awaits us in the future, the Lord alone knows. The Elder Ambrose of Optina, that great righteous man of the Russian land, said: “What will be, will be; what will be, will be what God grants.” And God does everything well...

I greet you all with the feast!

Christ is Born? Give Ye Glory!



Do not consider your riches as belonging to yourselves alone; open wide your hand to those who are in need; assist those in poverty and pain; comfort those who have fallen into extreme distress; console with those who are in sorrow or oppressed with bodily maladies, and the want of necessities; and also comfort the saints who embrace a voluntary poverty so they may serve God without distraction. Nor will your doing so be un-rewarded.

St. Cyril of Alexandria
(From his commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke)

A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW HIS SEED...

By Pope Saint Gregory the Great (+604), "Parables of the Gospel," Scepter Publishers, Dublin 1960.

A sower went out to sow his seed. And, as he sowed, some fell by the way-side, and it was trodden down; and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock, and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns, growing up with it, choked it. And other fell upon good ground and, being sprung up, yielded fruit a hundredfold. Saying these things He cried out: He that hath ears to hear, let him hear...

(Luke 8:4-15)

† † †

The lesson of the Holy Gospel which you have just heard, my dear brethren, requires no explanation, but only exhortation. Since Christ Himself explained it, human weakness cannot dare to question His illustration of it; rather, you must dispose yourselves to consider it carefully. If it were I who told you that the seed signifies the word, the field the world, the birds the demons and the thorns riches, perhaps you could doubt my words; but it is our Lord himself who interprets His own words so that you may learn to interpret the significance of those things which He did not set forth fully.

At the outset, He tells us that He is speaking metaphorically, so that when our littleness grasps the figurative meaning of His words, we may give our assent to His doctrine. Who would ever credit me if I wished to interpret thorns as riches, especially since thorns pain us, while riches delight us? And yet these are thorns, because they wound our soul with the pricking of the thoughts they inspire; by enticing us to sin, they besmear us with their pollution like the blood from a wound. So that, in the words of another Evangelist, he does not call them riches merely, but *deceitful riches* (Mt 13:22). They are deceitful because they cannot remain with us forever; they are deceitful because they cannot satisfy the needs of our heart. The only true riches are those which make us rich in virtues. So, brethren, if you wish to be rich, love true wealth; if you desire to highest honors, seek the Kingdom of Heaven. If you love the glory of high rank, hasten to be numbered among that exalted court of the angels.

Engrave upon your memory those divine words you have heard just now. The word of God is food for the soul, but it is as if our stomach were sick and rejected food if we hear the word but do not retain it. If a man cannot retain food in his stomach, his life is imperiled. You have to fear, then, the danger of an everlasting death, if you receive the food of this holy admonition, but do not retain the words of life, which are the food of the just man. Reflect that everything you do is passing away and that, willingly or unwillingly, each day hastens you towards the Last Judgment, and none of the time passed will

ever be re-granted you. Why should we love what we must leave? Why do we neglect the end which we must certainly reach? Remember these words: *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*. All who were there listening to Christ had ears of the body. But He who said to those same people *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*, was referring, beyond doubt, to the ears of the heart. See then that the discourse which you hear takes root in your heart. Take care that it does not fall by the wayside, lest the wicked spirit come and take it away. See that it does not fall on stony ground, and shoot up in good works without the roots of perseverance. Many are pleased by the things they hear, and they resolve to do good works, but as soon as difficulty arises they abandon what they had begun. The rocky ground had no moisture, for it did not bring to the fruit of perseverance the seed which sprouted in it. Many, when they hear a sermon against avarice, detest that vice and extol contempt of earthly goods, but as soon as the soul sees something it desires, it forgets what it once extolled. There are those also who, when they are admonished against impurity, not only do not desire to commit sins of the flesh, but are very ashamed of those which they have committed; but as soon as physical beauty tempts them, their heart is so carried away by desires that it is as if they had never resolved to oppose those desires. They fall then into serious sin, sin which they themselves had condemned on remembering their former guilt.

Often we feel compunction for our faults and, nevertheless, once our lamentations are over, we return to those same faults. Thus Balaam wept over the tents of the Israelites, asking for a death similar to theirs when he said, *Let my soul die the death of the just; and my last end by like to them* (Num 23:10), but as soon as the moment of compunction passed, he was burnt up by the vice of avarice. For the sake of the reward he was promised, he gave counsel for the destruction of this people upon whose death he wanted to model his own; he forgot all repentance and would not quench those covetous flames. We must note well what our Lord tells us, namely that cares, pleasures and riches smother the divine word. They smother it because they strangle the soul by their endless attacks; they prevent the entrance of good desires, and our soul languishes without the vital breath it needs. Consider also that there are two things joined with riches: temporal cares and pleasures; this is because riches oppress our mind with worry and weaken it with abundance. By an apparent contradiction they make their possessors both anxious and pleasure-seeking; but since pleasure cannot co-exist with anxiety, at times they afflict men with solicitude, and at other times, by their abundance, dissipate them into pleasures.

The good earth "brings forth fruit in patience," for the good words which we do are of no value if we will not suffer with patience the wicked actions of our neighbor. The higher we ascend the harder things we will have to suffer, for as our love

for this world weakens, its trials still increase. Thus, we often see many who are good and who suffer many tribulations, they flee from all earthly desires; and still they meet with more severe afflictions. But, as our Lord says, they bring forth fruit in patience, for if they bear this scourging with humility, they will find heavenly rest. Thus, the grape is trodden, and gives its wine. So, also, the olive renders up the scum when it is pressed, and its juice becomes pure oil; and in the threshing machine the grain is separated from the straw and, thus cleansed, is stored in the granary. Therefore, if a man wishes to overcome his vices completely, then he must be careful to bear humbly the sufferings of his purification. Then he can hope to present himself unstained before the judge, his soul purified by the fire of tribulation.

In the porch of the church of St. Clement there was a certain man by the name of Servulus, known to many of you as well as to myself, poor in possessions and rich in merits, incapacitated by a long and painful illness, for from early years until the end of life he was a paralytic. I do not have to remind you that he could not even stand; he had never been able to sit up in body, nor raise a hand to his mouth, nor turn from side to side. His mother and his brother attended him continually, and by their hands he distributed among the poor whatever alms he was given. He had never learned to read, but had bought books of sacred Scripture and used to have these read to him by certain religious people to whom he gave hospitality in his own house. In this way he had a complete knowledge of the Scripture, as far as his capacity permitted, since, as I have said, he had never learned to read. He always sought, in the middle of his sufferings, to give God thanks and to bless and praise Him day and night.

But as the time drew near for so much patience to be rewarded, the pains of death attacked him. As he knew that death was near, he desired those pilgrims and others who had enjoyed his hospitality to stand and sing some psalms with him as death approached. As they sang together with him, the dying man suddenly silenced their voices, crying out with a terrible voice, "Be silent, do you not hear these praises resound in heaven?" And as his heart listened to those melodies which he heard within himself, his saintly soul left his body. As it did so, such a fragrant perfume filled the place, and it was such a powerful odor that those present were filled with unspeakable sweetness, so that it was clear that those voices he had heard were welcoming his soul to heaven. A monk of our monastery who is still alive was present at that occurrence, and he has attested frequently and with tears, that while the body remained unburied, the fragrance of that perfume remained. See how this man ended his life, who bore his sufferings with such patience. According to Christ's words, the good earth yields good fruit in patience: ploughed by hardship and severity it yields the harvest of reward. But I would have you ponder, brethren, what excuses we are to offer in that strict account which will be demanded of us, we who have received many gifts and the use of our members, and nonetheless are reluctant

to perform good works, when one who was destitute of means and physical capacity carried out so faithfully the precept of our Lord. Let us not run the risk of the Lord contrasting us with the Apostles, who brought so many multitudes of the faithful to heaven with them, through their preaching; or with the martyrs, who won their heavenly reward by shedding their blood. What defense shall we make then, when we see this Servulus of whom we spoke, his arms rendered useless by his long disease, which yet could not prevent his good works?

Dearly beloved, seek to do many good works and so to imitate the good that, making them your model here on earth, you may be their companions in that kingdom which is to come.



THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

Most radiant and thrilling joy fills the soul on the night of the Nativity. In Bethlehem (the city of bread), an Infant was born, in order to become the Bread of life. He gives Himself as food, and whoever participates in this Mystery experiences the reverent tenderness of the Nativity itself. Angels from heaven proclaimed the nativity of the Saviour to the shepherds who were in the field, and they found the Virgin Mary, and Joseph, and the Infant Christ and worshipped Him.

The Lord deigned to be born in a cave, where animals were sheltered from bad weather, as if to indicate His desire to enter into the coldest heart, made stony by irrational feelings; He became an Infant, so that each man might contain Him in his heart. And we, on being united with Christ in holy Baptism, with a vow renounce satanic pride and start out on the path of divine humility not for the sake of fear or to please men, but for the sake of fulfilling the will of our beloved Lord concerning the salvation of all men.

Genuine humility is impossible without love for Christ, until we see His image in man. Without humility there is no peace either within us or without. *My peace I give unto you... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid* (Jn 14:27).

The King of the world washed the feet of his disciples and ascended the Cross for His world, teaching us: *The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them... But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger...* (Lk 22:25-26).

In the depth of human lowliness is the Creator of the world Himself, Who has vanquished the spirit of pride, enmity and wickedness. On the day of his baptism, a man is born from on high, uniting himself with Christ: "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia!" And a new man is conceived in him, and the peace of Christ, and good will, of which the Angels sing on the night of the Nativity: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men* (Lk 2:14).

Τὰ Λείψανα τῶν Ἁγίων μας

Πρ. Γ. Μεταλληνού, «Λόγος ὡς Ἀντίλογος».

«...Ὅσοι οὖν σεπτοὶ ναοὶ καθιερώθησαν ἐκτὸς ἁγίων λειψάνων μαρτύρων, ὀρίζομεν ἐν αὐτοῖς κατάθεσιν γίνεσθαι λειψάνων μετὰ τῆς συνήθους εὐχῆς» («...Ὅσοι λοιπὸν ἱεροὶ ναοὶ καθιερώθηκαν χωρὶς ἅγια λείψανα μαρτύρων, ὀρίζομε νὰ γίνεται σ' αὐτοὺς κατάθεση λειψάνων μαζί με τὴ συννηθισμένη εὐχή»)
(Κανὼν 7^{ος} τῆς 5' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου)

† † †

Ο ἅγιοι, ὡς μέτοχοι καὶ μέλη τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, φανερόνουν μὲ τὰ χαρίσματά τους τὸν Χριστό, πού κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Μάξιμο τὸν Ὁμολογητῆ, μένει αἰσθητὰ ἀθέατος. Ἡ μίμηση τῶν ἁγίων εἶναι μίμηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ συμπόρευση μὲ τὸ ἐνιαῖο καὶ ἀδιαίρετο σῶμα Του, τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἀναφερόμενο τὸ κάθε μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στοὺς ἁγίους καὶ ἀκολουθώντας τὴν ὁδὸ πού αὐτοὶ «ἐπόμενοι τῷ Χριστῷ» ὑπέδειξαν, ἀποκτᾶ «ὁμοίθειαν Χριστοῦ».

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ἀποδίδει ἰδιαίτερη τιμὴ στὰ ἱερὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων τὰ ὁποῖα ἀποτελοῦν γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς ταμεῖα χάριτος, πηγὲς ἰαμάτων, ἀπὴ ἀἴσθησις τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ τῆς ζωογόνου αὔρας πού ἐμφυσᾶ στὴν ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἐκφράζουν τὴν προσδοκία τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα τῶν πιστῶν γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ ὅτι μερικοὶ διώκτες τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἔκαιαν τὰ σῶματα τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ τὰ ἐξαφανίσουν μὲ κάθε τρόπο, νομίζοντας ὅτι κατ' αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο θὰ ἐπετύγχαναν νὰ ἐξαφάνιζαν τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως πού ἐνθάρυνε καὶ ζωοποιοῦσε τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς καὶ ἤλεγχε τὰ ἔργα τους.

Διὰ τῶν ἁγίων λειψάνων αἰσθανόμαστε καὶ προγευόμαστε τὴν δόξα τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, πού μὲ ὀρατὰ σημεῖα χαριτώνει τὰ σῶματα αὐτῶν οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀπὸ αὐτῆ τῆ ζωὴ ἔζησαν μέσα στὴ δωρεὰ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐπιβεβαιώνεται ὅτι ὁ δεσμὸς ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος, ὕλης καὶ πνεύματος εἶναι ἄρρηκτος, καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος καλεῖται ὡς ψυχοσωματικὴ ὄντοτητα καὶ πρόσωπο νὰ σωθῆ καὶ νὰ δοξασθῆ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό. Δοξάζονται λοιπὸν καὶ τὰ σῶματα αὐτῶν πού δι' ἔργων «ἐκκλιναν ὑπήκοα» στὴν κλήση τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐνῶ τὸ πνεῦμα τους «συνεφρένεται ἐν οὐρανοῖς».

Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτό, ὁ καλύτερος τρόπος νὰ προσεγγίσουμε Ὁρθόδοξα τὴν πραγματικότητα τοῦ σώματος εἶναι νὰ προσκυνήσουμε τὰ ἱερὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων. Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς ἐνὸς ἁγίου λειψάνου μεταγγίζει χάρις στὸ σῶμα μας, παρέχει στὴν ὑπαρξή μας μέσα ἀπὸ τὴ σωματικὴ μας αἴσθησις τὸ νὰ συνειδητοποιῆ τόσο τὸ περιορισμένο ὅσο καὶ τὴ μεγαλωσύνη, τὴ φθορὰ καὶ τὴν ἀφθαρσία τοῦ σώματός μας· μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, προγευόμαστε τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ μετάγγιση τῆς ζωῆς μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ νεκρὰ ἀλλὰ ζωηφόρα σῶματα τῶν ἁγίων περνᾷ στὰ δικά μας σῶματα καὶ μᾶς ὀδηγεῖ σὲ μιὰ ρεαλιστικὴ ὕλικοπνευματικὴ ἀνθρωπολογία ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία τόση ἀνάγκη ἔχουμε στὶς μέρες μας, καὶ τῆς ὁποίας οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες ἔχουν σαφῶς θέσει τὰ θεμέλια.

Τὰ Ἱερὰ Λείψανα Ἀποτελοῦν Πηγὴ Χάριτος

Ἦδη ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴν τῶν διωγμῶν οἱ Χριστιανοὶ τιμοῦσαν τὰ λείψανα τῶν μαρτύρων. Ἀργότερα, περὶ τὸ 400 μ. Χ., ἡ τιμὴ ἐπεξετάθηκε καὶ εἰς τὰ ἅγια λείψανα τῶν ὁμολογητῶν καὶ ὁσίων, ἀφοῦ καὶ οἱ μοναχοί, ὡς «μαρτυροῦντες τῇ συνειδήσει», προσέφεραν τὴν ζωὴ τους θυσία εὐάρεστη στὸν Θεόν, ἔγιναν ὄργανα ἐκλεκτὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, καὶ πῆραν ξεχωριστὴ θέσι στὶς ψυχὰς τῶν πιστῶν. Ἐνῶ ἀκόμη ζοῦσαν τελοῦσαν θαύματα μὲ τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ τὴν ὁποῖαν ἦσαν προικισμένοι.

Ἡ ἴδια θαυματουργικὴ δύναμις, καὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξοδὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, κατοικεῖ μέσα στὰ ἅγια λείψανα, καὶ αὐτὴ εἶναι πού ἐνεργεῖ τὰ θαύματα. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος ὠραῖα ἐξηγεῖ ὅτι ἡ δύναμις πού ἐκπηγάζει ἀπὸ τὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων εἶναι «ἡ τοῦ πνεύματος χάρις, ἡ τοῖς ὀστέοις παρακαθημένη καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις συνοικουσα». Εἶναι δηλαδὴ ἡ δύναμις πού εἶχε ἡ πνευματοφόρος καὶ χριστοφόρος ψυχὴ κάθε ἁγίου, ἀπὸ τότε πού βρισκόταν στὴν ζωὴ καὶ ἡ ὁποία ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ συνοδεύη τὸ νεκρὸν σῶμα. Τοῦτο διδάσκει καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Κύριλλος Ἱεροσολύμων ὅταν γράφει: «καὶ ψυχῆς μὴ ὑπαρχούσης ἐν τῷ νεκρῷ σῶματι, ἔγκειται τις δύναμις εἰς τὰ σῶματα τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τῶν μαρτύρων, διὰ τὴν ἐν τοσοῦτις ἔτεσιν ἐνοικήσασαν ἐν αὐτοῖς δικαίαν ψυχὴν». Ἡ δύναμις αὐτῆ—πάλιν κατὰ τὸν ἱερόν Χρυσόστομον—δὲν μένει στάσιμος, ἀλλὰ «ἀπὸ ψυχῆς εἰς σῶματα καὶ ἀπὸ σωμάτων εἰς ἰμάτια καὶ ἀπὸ ἰματίων εἰς ὑποδήματα καὶ ἀπὸ ὑποδημάτων εἰς σκιάς ἐκτρέχει».

Ἡ θεία χάρις, λοιπὸν, ἡ χάρις τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, πού κατοικεῖ μέσα εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους, ἀποτελεῖ μόνιμο κτῆμα καὶ ἰδιότητα, ὅχι μόνον τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ σώματός των, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖον ἡ ψυχὴ στενὰ συνδεόταν κατὰ τὴν διάρκειαν τῆς ἐπιγείου ζωῆς, καὶ εἶναι αὐτὴ πού θαυματουργεῖ. Θὰ σημειώσωμε ἀκόμη ὅτι, τὰ θαύματα πού γίνονται διὰ τῶν λειψάνων ἀπὸ τὶς «χριστοφόρες» ψυχὰς τῶν ἁγίων, ἀποτελοῦν συνέχεια τῶν θαυματουργικῶν πράξεων τοῦ Κυρίου, ὁ Ὅποιος διαβεβαίωσε τοὺς μαθητάς Του ὅτι «ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ τὰ ἔργα ἃ ἐγὼ ποιῶ κάκεῖνος ποιήσει καὶ μείζονα τούτων ποιήσει» (Ἰωάν. 14, 12). Καὶ οἱ Χριστιανοί, ἐκεῖνοι πού ἔχουν ἀνοικτοὺς «τῆς πίστεως τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς», ἀξιώνονται τῆς χάριτος αὐτῆς, πού ξεχύνεται πλούσια ἀπὸ τὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων. «Ἡ γὰρ ἐπλανθούσα (τοῖς λειψάνοις) χάρις διανέμει τὰ δῶρα, τῇ πίστει τῶν προσιόντων τὴν φιλοτιμίαν μετροῦσα».

Τέλος, ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος παρομοιάζει τὰ σωζόμενα λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων μὲ ρίζες δένδρων πού τὰ κλαδιά των ἀνυψώνονται στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, τοὺς καρπούς των ὁμως οἱ πιστοὶ ἀπολαμβάνουν, παίρνοντάς τους ἀπὸ τὶς ρίζες. «Λείψανα ἁγίων—γράφει—ρίζαι κάτω πεφυτευμένα, καὶ τοὺς κλάδους εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνατείνουσαι. Βούλει καὶ τῶν κλάδων τούτων τοὺς καρπούς ἰδεῖν; Ἄνοιξον ἡμῖν τοὺς τῆς πίστεως ὀφθαλμούς καὶ εὐθέως ἐπεδείξω σοι φύσιν καρπῶν θαυμαστῶν· ... σωμάτων πεφυρωμένων ἴασις καὶ ἀμαρτημάτων συγχώρησις καὶ κακίας ἀναίρεσις ... Πόσοι γοῦν ἐξ οὗ τὸ σῶμα ἐφυτεύθη τοῦτο ἐν τῇ γῆ, μυρίας

ἐτρύγησαν ἰάσεις ἀπὸ τῆς ἁγίας ταύτης θήκης, καὶ οὐκ ἀπέλειπεν ὁ καρπός».

Γιὰ τὴν Τιμὴ τῶν Ἁγίων

Πρέπει νὰ τιμοῦμε τοὺς ἁγίους ὡς φίλους τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὡς παιδιά καὶ κληρονόμους τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅπως λέει ὁ θεολόγος καὶ εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης: «Ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς τέκνα Θεοῦ γενέσθαι· ὥστε οὐκ εἰσὶν ἔτι δοῦλοι, ἀλλ’ υἱοί· οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ καὶ κληρονόμοι, κληρονόμοι μὲν Θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ». Οἱ ἅγιοι ἔχουν γίνεαι θησαυροφυλάκια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ καθαρὰ καταλύματα. «Ἐνοικήσω γάρ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω», λέει ὁ Θεός, «καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῶν Θεός».

Λοιπὸν τι πολυτιμότερον ὑπάρχει ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεῖς στὸ χέρι τοῦ Θεοῦ; Διότι ὁ Θεός εἶναι ζωὴ καὶ φῶς, καὶ αὐτοὶ ποὺ εἶναι μέσα στὸ χέρι τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶναι μέσα στὴ ζωὴ καὶ μέσα στὸ φῶς. Ὅτι πάλι κατοίκησε καὶ μέσα στὰ σώματά των ὁ Θεὸς διὰ μέσου τοῦ νοῦ, τὸ λέει ὁ ἀπόστολος: «Οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐνοικούντος ἐν ὑμῖν Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐστίν; Ὁ δὲ Κύριος τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐστίν». Καὶ «Εἰ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φθειρεῖ, φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ Θεός». Πῶς λοιπὸν δὲν πρέπει νὰ τιμοῦμε τοὺς ἐμψυχους ναοὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ; Αὐτοὶ ζωντανοὶ στέκονται μὲ παρρησία ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ Δεσπότης Χριστὸς μᾶς χάρισε ὡς σωστικὲς πηγὲς τὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων, ποὺ πηγάζουν μὲ πολλοὺς τρόπους τὴς εὐεργεσίας, ποὺ ἀναβρύνουν μῦρο εὐωδίας· καὶ κανεῖς νὰ μὴν ἀπιστῆ ἐπὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ γεγονότος! Γιατί, ἂν ἀπὸ σκληρὸ καὶ ἀπόκρημνο βράχο πῆγασε νερὸ στὴν ἔρημο, ἐπειδὴ ἔτσι τὸ θέλησε ὁ Θεός, καὶ ὁμοίως ἀπὸ τὴν σιαγόνα ὄνου—ὅταν δῖπασε ὁ Σαμψών—μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἀπίστευτο ἢ ἀνάβλυσις εὐωδιστοῦ μύρου ἀπὸ λείψανα μαρτύρων; Καθόλου γι’ αὐτοὺς ποὺ γνωρίζουν τὴν δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ τὴν τιμὴν ποὺ ἔχουν οἱ ἅγιοι ἀπ’ Αὐτόν.

Πῶς λοιπὸν ἐκδιώκονται μὲ αὐτὰ οἱ δαίμονες, ἀπομακρύνονται οἱ ἀρρώστειες, θεραπεύονται οἱ ἀσθενεῖς, ἀποκοτῶν τὸ φῶς των οἱ τυφλοὶ, καθαρίζονται λεπροὶ, παύουν οἱ πειρασμοὶ καὶ οἱ θλίψεις; Πρέπει κάθε Ὀρθόδοξος Χριστιανὸς νὰ συνειδητοποιήσῃ ὅτι κάθε καλὴ δόση κατέρχεται διὰ μέσου αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα τῶν φώτων σ’ αὐτοὺς ποὺ τὴ ζητοῦν μὲ ἀδίστακτη πίστη. Πόσο θὰ κοπιάζεις γιὰ νὰ βρῆς προστάτη νὲ σὲ παρουσιάσῃ σὲ θνητὸ βασιλέα ἢ ἄρχοντα καὶ νὰ μιλήσῃ σ’ αὐτόν γιὰ χάρι σου; Λοιπὸν δὲν πρέπει νὰ τιμοῦμε τοὺς προστάτες ὄλου τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους, ποὺ παρακαλοῦν τὸ Θεὸ γιὰ χάρι μας;

Διατὶ Βάλλονται Ὑποκάτω εἰς τὸ Θυσιαστήριον Λείψανα τῶν Ἁγίων

Ἔρχεται λοιπὸν ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰς τὸν παλαιὸν ἅγιον ναόν, ὅπου εἶχε βάλλει πρότερον τὰ λείψανα, καὶ ἀφοῦ εἶπῃ δύο εὐχάς, αἱ ὁποῖαι εὐχαριστίαν ἔχουσι πρὸς τὸν Θεόν διὰ τὴν δωρεάν τῶν μαρτυρικῶν λειψάνων, φέρει αὐτὰ ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς, καὶ ἐλθὼν εἰς τὸν νέον ναόν, τὰ βάλλει κάτω κατὰ τὴν τάξιν. Ἄς γίνεαι γνωστὸν πρὸς τοὺς πάντας Ὀρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς ὅτι δὲν εἶναι συκεχωρημένον καὶ νόμιμον νὰ ἐκτελεῖται ἢ καθιέρωσις ἑνὸς ναοῦ ἄνευ λειψάνων μαρτυρικῶν ἢ ὁσίων ἁγίων, καθότι οἱ μάρτυρες

εἶναι τὰ θεμέλια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας οἰκοδομηθέντα ἐπάνω εἰς τὸ θεμέλιον τοῦ Σωτῆρος. Διὰ τοῦτο πρέπει νὰ εἶναι αὐτοὶ εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, διότι τοῦτο εἶναι ἡ κυρίως Ἐκκλησία καὶ ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Τὰ λείψανα βάλλονται εἰς ναόν ὡς ἡγιασμένα, καὶ θυσιαστήρια Χριστοῦ, διότι ἐθυσιάσθησαν δι’ αὐτόν· καὶ βάλλονται δὲ εἰς δίσκον ἱερώτατον, ἐπειδὴ μετέχουσι τῆς ἰδίας τιμῆς τοῦ Δεσπότη, ὡς ἡγωνισμένοι δι’ αὐτόν· καὶ βάλλονται ἐπὶ τραπέζης καθιερωμένης, ἐπειδὴ συναπέθανον τῷ Χριστῷ, καὶ παρίστανται εἰς τὸν θεῖον θρόνον τῆς δόξης του. Διὰ τοῦτο τὰ ὑψώνει μὲ δίσκον καὶ ὑπὲρ τὴν κεφαλὴν ὁ Ἀρχιερεὺς, τιμῶν αὐτὰ κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπον καθὼς καὶ τὸ αἶμα τοῦ Δεσπότη. Ἄν πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς πιστοὺς ἀπλῶς λέγει ὁ Παῦλος· «Ἐμεῖς ἐστέ σῶμα Χριστοῦ καὶ μέλη ἐκ μέρους», πολλῶ μᾶλλον θέλουσι εἶναι σῶμα καὶ μέλη Χριστοῦ ὅσοι διὰ τὴν δόξαν του ἡγωνίσθησαν καὶ τὸν θάνατόν του ἐμιμήθησαν.

Ὁ Λυτρωτικὸς Διάλογος Κτιστοῦ καὶ Ἄκτιστου

Ἡ ἀνταπόκριση τοῦ κτίσματος στὴ θεία κλήση συντελεῖται στὴν Ὀρθοδοξία μὲ τὴν ἐκούσια (ἐλεύθερη) ἀποδοχὴ τῆς θεραπείας τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ὑπάρξεως, ποὺ αὐτὴ προσφέρει. Συνίσταται δὲ ἡ θεραπεία σὲ μία πορεία ποὺ ἀναλύεται σὲ τρία στάδια: α) κάθαρση τῆς καρδιᾶς ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη καὶ τοῦ νοῦ ἀπὸ τοὺς λογισμοὺς (καλοὺς καὶ κακοὺς), β) φωτισμὸ-ἐπίσκεψη τῆς καρδιᾶς ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ γ) θέωση, ἀποκατάσταση δηλαδὴ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ὑπάρξεως μὲ τὸν δοξασμό της, μέσα στὴν ἄκτιστη Ἁγιοτριαδικὴ χάρι. Αὐτὴ τὴ σωστικὴ πορεία ἀκολουθοῦν οἱ ἅγιοι (ὅπως καὶ παρουσιάζεται στὸν λόγο τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεῶν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου: «καὶ καθαίρεις, καὶ λαμπρύνεις, καὶ φωτὸς ποιεῖς μετόχους»). Μυστήρια καὶ ἄσκηση συμπορεύονται σὲ μία συμπληρωματικὴ σχέσι στὴν Ὀρθοδοξία. Ἡ ἄσκηση, ὡς «ἐκ τοῦ παρὰ φύσιν εἰς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ἐπάνοδο» (Ι. Δαμασκηνός, PG. 94, 976) καὶ τὰ ἅγια μυστήρια, ὡς μεταδοτικὰ τῆς χάριτος μέσα.

Κατανοεῖται, συνεπῶς, γιατί ἡ ἀντίθεση ἀσκητισμοῦ καὶ ἠθικισμοῦ εἶναι στὴν Ὀρθοδοξία ἀγεφύρωτη. Ὁ ἠθικισμὸς ρυθμίζει τὸ ἦθος, ὑποβάλλοντας στὴς ἐπιταγὰς κάποιας ἠθικῆς, βασιζόμενος στὴς φυσικὲς δυνάμεις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἔτσι καταλήγει ἀναπόφευκτα στὸν φαρισαϊσμό, δηλαδὴ τὴν «αὐτοδικαίωση» καὶ «ἐργοσωτηρία». Ὁ ἀσκητισμὸς—ἀντίθετα—ἐπιζητεῖ, μὲ τὰ θεόδοτα μέσα ποὺ διαθέτει, τὴν κάθαρση τῆς καρδιᾶς γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος (μὲ τὴν ἄκτιστη ἐνέργεια τοῦ Θεοῦ) ναὸς τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ὥστε νὰ ἀναβλύζῃ «τὸν καρπὸ του» (Γαλ. 5, 22). Ὁ Ὀρθόδοξος ἀσκητισμὸς ἀποκαθιστᾷ τὸν λυτρωτικὸν διάλογον κτιστοῦ καὶ ἀκτίστου, ὡς κοινωνία μεταξύ τους καὶ δυνατότητα θεώσεως τοῦ κτίσματος, δεδομένου, μάλιστα, ὅτι ἡ θέωση δὲν εἶναι ἀντιμισθία, ἀλλὰ χάρι. Ἡ ἄσκηση ἀπλῶς καθιστᾷ τὸν ἄνθρωπο δεκτικὸ τῆς σωτηρίας.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία Λειτουργεῖ Ἱστορικῶς (Ὡς Ἐσχολογικὴ Κοινωνία, Δηλ. Κοινωνία Θεώσεως)

Ἡ θεραπεία τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ὑπάρξεως ὡς ἀπελευθέρωσή της ἀπὸ τὴν θνητότητα καὶ τὴ φθορὰ συνεπιφέρει καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερία ὅλης τῆς κτίσεως, ὡς φύσεως, ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας

τῆς φθορᾶς» (Ρωμ. 8, 21). «Δεῖ γάρ τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀφθαρσίαν καὶ τὸ θνητὸν τοῦτο ἐνδύσασθαι ἀθανασίαν» (Α΄ Κορ. 15, 53).

Ἡ ἐμπειρία τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας φανερώνει—καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἄγνωστο στὴ Μὴ Ὁρθοδοξία—ὅτι ὁ λόγος αὐτὸς δὲν ἀφορᾷ σὲ καταστάσεις τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ παρόντος. Ἡ ὑπέρβαση τῆς φθορᾶς ἀπὸ τὸ κτιστὸ εἶναι μία πραγματικότητα ποὺ συντελεῖται μέσα στὸν ἱστορικὸ χρόνο, ὅπως ἀποδεικνύουν τὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων, μὲ τὴν ἀναστολή τῆς φυσικῆς φθορᾶς καὶ τῆς φυσικῆς διαλύσεως τοῦ κυτταρικοῦ τους συστήματος. Τὰ ἱερὰ λείψανα, ὅπως ἐκεῖνο τοῦ ἁγίου Σπυρίδωνος (†348) στὴν Κέρκυρα, εἶναι γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία μία ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπόδειξη τοῦ γογονότος τῆς κοινωνίας κτιστοῦ καὶ ἀκτίστου, ἀλλὰ συγχρόνως καὶ αὐτοβεβαίωσή της. Τὸ ἴδιο μπορεῖ νὰ λεχθῆ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ὑπέρβαση τῆς φθορᾶς στὴν ἴδια τὴν ἄλογη κτίση, ὅπως συμβαίνει μὲ τὴν ἀφθαρσία τοῦ ἁγιασμένου ὕδατος (ἁγιασμοῦ).

Μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ θεουργικὰ γεγονότα σώζεται διαχρονικὰ ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ ὄχι μὲ τίς μεταφυσικὲς πτήσεις καὶ τίς στοχαστικὲς ὠραιολογίες ἡμῶν κατ' ἐπάγγελμα θεολόγων...



Τὶς Ἐλέγχει Με Περί Σκανδάλου;

Μακαριστοῦ Γέροντος Παΐσιου τοῦ Ἀθωνίτου, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Λόγοι Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγορεύου Α΄».

Γέροντα, ἡ θεία Χάρις χάνεται ἀπὸ ἓναν κληρικό, ὅταν πέσει σὲ κάποιο θανάσιμο ἁμάρτημα;

Ὅχι· πῶς νὰ χαθῆ; Ἡ θεία Χάρις μπορεῖ νὰ ἀπομακρυνθῆ· ὄχι ὅμως νὰ χαθῆ. Ἐναν ἱερέα, ἅμα τὸν κάνουν ἀργό, ἔχει τὴν ἱεροσύνη, ἀλλὰ τὰ Μυστήρια δὲν ἐνεργοῦν. Δὲν ἔχει δύναμη πιά ὁ ἱερεὺς. Τὸ κυριότερο εἶναι ἡ Χάρις. Ἄν ἀποκατασταθῆ, τότε εἶναι τὰ Μυστήρια ἔγκυρα.

Θέλει πολλὴ διάκριση στὸ θέμα τῶν ἱερέων ποὺ ἔχουν κωλύματα. Χρειάζεται πολλὴ προσοχὴ νὰ μὴ δημιουργηθῆ μὲ ἀδιάκριτες ἀυστηρότητες σκάνδαλο στὸν κόσμο καὶ μπεῖ σὲ λογισμοὺς καὶ ἡ οἰκογένεια τοῦ ἱερέως. Νὰ παύη τίς Λειτουργίες μὲ τρόπο, γιὰ νὰ μὴ γίνεται κακὸ στοὺς πιστοὺς ἀντὶ γιὰ καλὸ. Γιατὶ τὰ κωλύματα τὰ ξέρει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ὁ ἱερεὺς· ἐὰν ὅμως παύση ἀμέσως, τότε καὶ οἱ πιστοὶ καὶ ἡ οἰκογένειά του θὰ μποῦν σὲ λογισμοὺς, καὶ ἔτσι τὸ κακὸ θὰ εἶναι μεγαλύτερο.

Βλέπω πῶς καμιά φορὰ ἐπιτρέπει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ εὐλαβεῖς κληρικοὶ νὰ πάθουν κάτι σωματικὸ, π.χ. νὰ τρέξη ἡ μύτη τους αἷμα ἢ νὰ πονᾷ τὸ στομάχι τους κ.λπ., καὶ νὰ ἐμποδίζονται ἀπὸ τὴν θεία Λειτουργία, καὶ ἔτσι νὰ ἀναπαύονται οἱ ἱερεῖς ποὺ ἔχουν κωλύματα καὶ πρέπει νὰ παύσουν νὰ λειτουργοῦν. Ἔρχεται καμιά φορὰ κανένας

ἱερεὺς στὸ Καλύβι ποὺ ἔχει κάποιο κώλυμα, ὁ καημένος, καὶ βλέπω ὅτι πρέπει νὰ σταματήσῃ νὰ ἱεουργῆ. Καμιά φορὰ ὅμως συμβαίνει ὁ ἐπίσκοπός του νὰ ἔχη διαφορετικὴ γνώμη. Μετὰ τι νὰ πῆς; Μόνον προσευχὴ μπορεῖς νὰ κάνης καὶ ἐπεμβαίνει ὁ Θεός.

Συγκεκριμένα, εἶχα πεῖ σὲ κάποιον καὶ τὸν προετοίμασα νὰ ἀφήσῃ τὴν ἱεουργία. Ὅταν τὸ εἶπε στὸν Πνευματικὸ του καὶ στὸν ἐπίσκοπό του, δὲν συμφώνησαν. Ἔτσι συνέχισε νὰ ἱεουργῆ, ἐνῶ εἶχε τὸ κώλυμα. Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο διάστημα τὸν χτύπησε ἓνα αὐτοκίνητο. Ἐνῶ ἦταν πάνω στὸ πεζοδρόμιο, ἀνέβηκε ἐκεῖ τὸ αὐτοκίνητο καὶ τὸν ἄφησε στὸν τόπο! «Φοβερὸν τὸ ἐμπέσειν εἰς χεῖρας Θεοῦ ζώντος»!

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας δὲν ἔχει καμιά ἔλλειψη. Ἡ μόνη ἔλλειψη ποὺ παρουσιάζεται, εἶναι ἀπὸ μᾶς τοὺς ἴδιους, ὅταν δὲν ἀντιπροσωπεύουμε σωστὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἀπὸ τὸν πῶς μεγάλο στὴν ἱεραρχία μέχρι τὸν ἀπλὸ πιστό. Μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι λίγοι οἱ ἐκλεκτοί, ὅμως αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι ἀνησυχητικό. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Αὐτὸς τὴν κυβερνάει. Δὲν εἶναι Ναὸς ποὺ κτίζεται μὲ πέτρες, ἄμμο, καὶ ἀσβέστη ἀπὸ εὐσεβεῖς καὶ καταστρέφεται μὲ φωτιά βαρβάρων, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός· «καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται· ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἂν πέσῃ, λικμήσει αὐτόν».

Ὁ Χριστὸς ἀνέχεται σήμερα μιὰ κατάσταση. Ἀνέχεται καὶ ἐνεργεῖ ἡ θεία Χάρις γιὰ χάρις τοῦ λαοῦ. Μιὰ μπόρα εἶναι· θὰ ξεκαθαρίσουν τὰ πράγματα· δὲν θὰ σταθοῦν. Εἶδες ποὺ ἀναφέρει στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο: «Λυχνάρι μισοσβησμένο δὲν θὰ τὸ φυσήξω. Καλάμι ραγισμένο δὲν θὰ τὸ ἀγγίξω». Αὐτὸ τὸ εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς γιὰ νὰ εἴμαστε ἀναπολόγητοι τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Κρίσεως. Βλέπεις, ὅταν τὸ λυχνάρι δὲν ἔχει ἄλλο λάδι στὴν κούπα καὶ μείνει μόνο λίγο λάδι στὸ φιτίλι, θὰ σβήσῃ μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο, ἔστω καὶ ἂν τὸ φιτίλι πάει μιὰ ἐπάνω μιὰ κάτω. Εἶναι σὰν τὸν ἐτοιμοθάνατο ποὺ ἔχει τίς τελευταῖες ἀναλαμπές. Ὁ Χριστὸς, ὅμως, δὲν θέλει νὰ τὸ φυσήξῃ καὶ νὰ τὸ σβήσῃ, γιατί μετὰ θὰ πῆ: «Εγὼ θὰ ἔκαιγα, ἀλλὰ μὲ φύσηξες καὶ ἔσβησα!» Τὶ σὲ φύσηξας; Ἡ κούπα δὲν εἶχε καθόλου λάδι! Οὔτε τὸ ραγισμένο καλάμι θέλει νὰ τὸ ἀγγίξῃ, γιατί μετὰ, ἂν σπάσῃ, θὰ πῆ: «Μὲ ἀγγίξες καὶ ἔσπασα!» Μὰ ἀφοῦ ἦσουν ραγισμένο καὶ θὰ ἔσπασες, τί μοῦ λὲς ὅτι σὲ ἀγγίξα καὶ ἔσπασες;

Ἐμεῖς οἱ μοναχοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ κληρικοί, σκορποῦμε ἀθεῖα ὅταν δὲν ζοῦμε σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο. Ὁ κόσμος ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τίς ἀρετές μας καὶ ὄχι ἀπὸ τὰ χάλια μας. Ἰδίως τὸ παράδειγμα τῶν μοναχῶν στοὺς κοσμικοὺς εἶναι πολὺ μεγάλο πρᾶγμα! Οἱ κοσμικοὶ ἀφορμῆ ζητοῦν γιὰ νὰ δικαιολογήσουν τίς ἁμαρτίες τους. Γι' αὐτὸ θέλει πολλὴ προσοχὴ. Βλέπεις, ἐμεῖς δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε αὐτὸ ποὺ λέει ὁ Χριστὸς, «τίς ἐλέγχει μετὰ ἀμαρτίας» ἀλλὰ «τίς ἐλέγχει μετὰ σκανδάλου», αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ ποῦμε. Ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ εἶπε ἐκεῖνο, γιατί ἦταν τέλειος Θεὸς καὶ τέλειος ἄνθρωπος. Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε ἄνθρωποι. Ἐχομε ἀτέλειες, ἔχομε πτώσεις, τέλος πάντων, ἀλλὰ δὲν κάνει νὰ γινόμαστε αἰτία νὰ σκανδαλίζεται ὁ ἄλλος.

Μοῦ ἔλεγε ἓνας στρατηγός: «Ἄν δὲν εἶχα τὴν πίστη ἀπὸ τὴν μάνα μου, θὰ τὴν εἶχα χάση ὅταν πῆγα στὴν Κύπρο τότε μὲ τὰ γεγονότα. Ἄνθρωπος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας νὰ φωνάζει ἀπὸ τὸ τηλέφωνο: «Σφᾶξτε τοὺς Τούρκους», στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, ἐνῶ ἡ διαταγή ἔλεγε: «Μὴν τοὺς πειράζετε!» Καὶ οἱ Φαρασιῶτες, ὅταν ἦρθαν στὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀπὸ τὴν Μικρὰ Ἀσία, παρασύρθηκαν ἀπὸ αἰρέσεις πού εἶχαν παρουσιασθεῖ ἐκεῖνα τὰ χρόνια ἐδῶ, γιατί ἔβλεπαν δεσποτᾶδες, παπᾶδες χωρὶς εὐλάβεια. Ἔβλεπαν στὴν Ἐκκλησία ἄλλου εἶδους κόσμος, χωρὶς πνευματικὴ ζωή, ὅποτε σκανδαλίσθηκαν. Εἶχαν ἄλλη εἰκόνα ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ. Παρουσιάσθηκαν καὶ οἱ Εὐαγγελικοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔλεγαν, «ἐμεῖς ἐφαρμόζουμε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο», καὶ οἱ καημένοι παρασύρθηκαν.

Ἄν ὁμως φταίη ἓνας δεσπότης, ἓνας παπᾶς, ἓνας καλόγερος, δὲν φταίει ὁ Χριστός. Ἀλλὰ οἱ ἄνθρωποι δὲν πᾶνε ὡς ἐκεῖ. «Ἀντιπρόσωπος τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν εἶναι;» λένε. Ναί, ἀλλὰ ἀναπαύεται ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν ἀντιπρόσωπο; Ἡ δὲν θὰ ἦταν πιὸ σωστὸ νὰ σκέφτονται τί τὸν περιμένει αὐτὸν τὸν ἀντιπρόσωπο στὴν ἄλλη ζωή. Γι' αὐτὸ μερικοὶ πού σκανδαλίζονται ἀπὸ μερικά γεγονότα καταλήγουν νὰ μὴν πιστεύουν, γιατί δὲν καταλαβαίνουν οἱ καημένοι ὅτι ὅπως, ἂν φταίη ἓνας χωροφύλακας, δὲν φταίει τὸ ἔθνος, ἔτσι κι ἂν φταίη ἓνας παπᾶς, δὲν φταίει ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ὅσοι ὁμως σκανδαλίζονται, ἀλλὰ ἔχουν καλὴ διάθεση, καταλαβαίνουν, ὅταν τοὺς ἐξηγήσεις. Αὐτοὶ ἔχουν καὶ ἐλαφρυντικά, γιατί μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν εἶχαν βοηθηθῆ καὶ νὰ ἔχουν ἄγνοια ἀπὸ μερικά πράγματα.

Γέροντα, γιατί κανένας δὲν παίρνει μία θέση μὲ τόσα σκάνδαλα πού γίνονται στὴν Ἐκκλησία;

Στὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ θέματα ὅλες οἱ καταστάσεις δὲν εἶναι νὰ πάρης θέση. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἀνέχεται κανεὶς μία κατάσταση κάνοντας ὑπομονή, ἕως ὅτου ὁ Θεὸς δεῖξει τί πρέπει νὰ κάνη. Ἄλλο εἶναι νὰ ἀνέχεται κανεὶς μία κατάσταση καὶ ἄλλο νὰ τὴν ἀποδέχεται, ἐνῶ δὲν πρέπει.

Ὑστερα, σὲ τέτοιες περιπτώσεις, ὅτι ἔχει νὰ πῆ κανεὶς νὰ τὸ πῆ μὲ σεβασμό, ἀνδρῖκια: ὄχι νὰ βρίζει, νὰ δημοσιεύη. Νὰ τὸ πῆ ἰδιαίτερος στὸ ἴδιο τὸ πρόσωπο στὸ ὁποῖο ἀφορᾷ τὸ θέμα μὲ πόνο, ἀπὸ ἀγάπη, γιὰ νὰ προσέξῃ μερικά πράγματα. Δὲν εἶναι εἰλικρινὴς καὶ εὐθὺς ἐκεῖνος πού λέει κατὰ πρόσωπο τὴν ἀλήθεια οὔτε ἐκεῖνος πού τὴν δημοσιεύει, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνος πού ἔχει ἀγάπη καὶ ἀληθινὴ ζωὴ καὶ μιλάει μὲ διάκριση, ὅταν πρέπει, καὶ λέει ἐκεῖνα πού πρέπει στὴν πρέπουσα ὥρα. Ἐκεῖνοι πού ἐλέγχουν μὲ ἀδιακρισία ἔχουν πνευματικὴ σκότηση καὶ κακία καὶ βλέπουν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δυστυχῶς σὰν κούτσουρα. Καὶ ἐνῶ τοὺς πελεκᾶνε ἀλύπητα καὶ ὑποφέρουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, αὐτοὶ χαίρονται γιὰ τὸ τετραγώνισμα πού τοὺς κάνουν, γιὰ «τὸν κυβισμό»!

Μόνον σὲ ἄνθρωπο πού ἔχει δαιμόνιο ἀρχικὸ δικαιολογεῖται νὰ θεατρίζῃ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους μπροστὰ στὸν κόσμον, νὰ τοὺς λέη τὸ παρελθόν τους (σὲ ὅσους βέβαια ἔχει δικαιώματα τὸ δαιμόνιο), γιὰ νὰ κλονίζῃ ἀδύνατες ψυχές. Τὸ ἀκάθαρτο

πνεῦμα, φυσικά, δὲν βγάζει στὴν φόρα τίς ἀρετὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ τίς ἀδυναμίες τους.

Οἱ ἐλευθερωμένοι ὁμως ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη τους, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἔχουν κακία, τὸ κακὸ τὸ διορθώνουν μὲ καλωσύνη. Ἄν δοῦν καμιὰ φορὰ κάπου λίγη ἀκαθαρσία πού δὲν καθαρίζεται, τὴν σκεπάζουν μὲ καμιὰ πλάκα, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀηδιάσῃ καὶ ὁ ἄλλος πού θὰ τὴν δῆ. Ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνοι πού ξεσκαλίζουν σκουπίδια μοιάζουν μὲ τίς κότες...

Τώρα ὁ διάβολος κάνει μουντζοῦρες πολλὰ καὶ μπλέκει πολὺ τὰ πράγματα, ἀλλὰ τελικὰ θὰ σπάσῃ τὰ μούτρα του. Μετὰ ἀπὸ χρόνια θὰ λάμψουν οἱ δίκαιοι. Καὶ λίγη ἀρετὴ νὰ ἔχουν, ἐν τούτοις θὰ φαίνονται, γιατί θὰ ἐπικρατῆ πολὺ σκοτάδι, καὶ ὁ κόσμος θὰ στραφῆ πρὸς αὐτούς. Αὐτοὶ πού σήμερα κάνουν τὰ σκάνδαλα, ἂν ζοῦν τότε, θὰ ντρέπονται...



Διὰ τὴν Προσευχὴν

Ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Νύσσης.

Ἡ προσευχὴ δὲν εἶναι ψυχρὸ καθήκον. Δὲν εἶναι τύπος Ἡοῦτε μηχανικὴ ἀπαγγελία λέξεων, πού δὲν ἀγγίζουν τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ δὲν μεταμορφώνουν τὴν ζωὴ μας. Εἶναι ἀναγκαιότης τῆς ψυχῆς.

Χωρὶς ἀέρα δὲν ὑπάρχει ζωὴ. Καὶ χωρὶς προσευχὴ δὲν ὑπάρχει πνευματικὴ ζωὴ. Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι ἡ δυναμικὴ στάση τῆς ψυχῆς, πού ὑψώνεται στοὺς φωτεινοὺς κόσμους τοῦ ἀπείρου Θεοῦ. Εἶναι ἡ φιλικὴ συνομιλία τοῦ πλάσματος μὲ τὸν Πλάστη. Ἀλλὰ ἡ «ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ» προσευχὴ ἔχει τίς προϋποθέσεις τῆς. Διαφορετικὰ πέφτει στὸ κενό. Μένει ἀνενεργή. Γίνεται τύπος καὶ χάνεται τὸ νόημά της.

Τὴ σημαντικότερη προϋπόθεση γιὰ μία γνήσια προσευχὴ, μᾶς τὴν παρουσιάζει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «τὸ γὰρ τί προσευξόμεθα καθ' ὃ δεῖ οὐκ οἶδαμεν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ Πνεῦμα ὑπερεντυγᾶνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις» (Ρωμ. 8:26) (δηλ. «ἐμεῖς δὲν ξέρουμε οὔτε τί οὔτε πῶς νὰ προσευχηθοῦμε. Τὸ Πνεῦμα ὁμως μεσιτεύει τὸ ἴδιο στὸ Θεὸ γιὰ μᾶς μὲ στεναγμοὺς πού δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἐκφραστοῦν μὲ λέξεις»).

Ἔτσι ἔζησαν τὴν ἐπικοινωνία μὲ τὸν οὐράνιο Πατέρα οἱ πνευματοφόροι καὶ πνευματοκίνητοι ἅγιοι καὶ πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Ἱεροὶ ὑμνογράφοι, ἅγιοι Πατέρες καὶ σοφοὶ Διδάσκαλοι κατέθεσαν τὸν πλοῦτο τῆς ἐξαγιασμένης καρδιάς τους, γιὰ νὰ ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς σήμερα ὅλον αὐτὸν τὸν ἀνεκτίμητο θησαυρό.

THE ORPHAN AND CHRISTMAS

A Christmas Eve story for all, translated from Pravoslavnaya Rus, No. 23, 1998, where it was reprinted from the book, Khristos-zhizn nasha (originally compiled by S. Symarokov, Harbin, 1942).

Life was hard, but they did have a mother. The young widow wore herself out trying to keep food on the table for her three children. The family was well acquainted with misery, but life had its happier moments. Even after a hard day's work, when the mother would come home dead tired, she would caress her children and speak tenderly to them, and they would feel that all was well. One would plant himself at her feet and smile at her gentle words. Another would climb onto her lap and, throwing back her curly head, would gaze into her mother's deep, pensive eyes; while the third would stand behind and embrace her neck with his thin arms, exclaiming repeatedly, "Mama, dearest mama!" Those were wonderful times for the children, and the mother, too, for she could enjoy a rest from her arduous labors.

There came a day, however, when the widow had worn herself down completely and could not even rise from her bed. Soon her body was laid to rest in the grave. Now the children were orphans indeed! They had lost their dearly beloved mother. Vanya remembered the anguished shrieks of his younger brother and sister: "Mama's dead, our dear Mama is dead!" He remembered how she was placed in a coffin, how she was carried out of the house, the funeral in the church, and, finally, the dreadful "thud, thud, thud," made by clumps of frozen earth being thrown onto the lid of the coffin after it had been lowered into the ground. Their dear mother was now in the grave, gone from them forever.

The orphans went home. There they huddled together, clinging to one another for comfort. And so they stood, not wanting to move, until one of them suddenly remembered, "The day after tomorrow is Christmas" he exclaimed. "Yes, Christmas," echoed the others. But their voices were sad. When their mother was alive, they would shout merrily, "Christmas! Christmas!" But now... The orphans were entrusted to the care of one of their relatives, a man who already had a number of his own children. He and his wife were not unkind, but the family was quite poor and they could barely feed their own children. The orphans sometimes had to go hungry because the family that sheltered them went hungry, too.

"Ah! Ours is a wretched lot," sighed the uncle from time to time. "You can bend over backwards, and still nothing comes of it. And now we've been saddled with these little ones..." Vanya, on hearing this, felt within his child's heart that his uncle was not angry at them, but rather that his words came from sorrow. As if to confirm his feelings, he heard his aunt: "Enough, Filipich!" she said to her husband. "It's a sin to complain about one's lot in life, and it's still more sinful to offend an orphan. Orphans are God's children." And she stroked Vanya tenderly on his head. Her words relaxed her husband's mood. He took their youngest son and swung him

above his head. "Ai, children. Hurry and grow up. When you're old enough to work, then we'll have a better life, God willing."

One day came and weeping and wailing could be heard from Uncle Filipich's cottage; and with good reason. Their horse had died. And what is a peasant without a horse? He's like a man without arms. The whole family was drowning in tears. "God will not abandon us, Filipich," said his wife. "But what am I to do without a horse?" he replied. "You can go work in town as a day-laborer," she said. "That brings in next to nothing!" was his quick reply. "Uncle," piped up Vanya, "I know now how to weave baskets. We can sell them." "That's good thinking, lad," responded his uncle and, waving his hand, he went out of the cottage.

Filipich began working in town as a hired man. He'd work all day, and in the evening he'd come home to his village, only two miles' distance. All of his pay would go towards feeding the family and the orphans. His nephew kept his word and sold the baskets he wove in town. Still, the money that the uncle and his nephew made together was only enough for food. Winter was approaching, and one child needed a coat, another needed a hat, a third something else... Altogether they needed quite a few things. Filipich was aware of this. He walked home, thinking to himself: "Here it is almost winter; we have to get in a supply of firewood, but to do it we need a horse. And the wife's coat is in tatters; how can she possibly go out to fetch water in the cold weather? Ai, poverty is bitter!" Filipich knit his brow, trying to think of some solution. Meanwhile, at home there awaited him news of a fresh calamity. Whether from poor feed, or because she was old, their last cow died. Filipich threw up his hands in despair.

"What's to be done?! We'll have to send the children out into the world," he thought. And indeed, no matter how much Filipich exerted himself, no matter how industriously his nephew worked weaving baskets, there was nothing to be done but to send the older lads out into the streets to beg. Again there were tears. And it was not only the children who cried; mother and father wept, too. They dressed their ten-year old son, Petya, and their orphaned nephew, Vanya, as warmly as possible. Then, blessing them with the sign of the Cross, they sent them off to town to ask alms "for Christ's sake."

Again, the Feast of Nativity drew near. Filipich spent the whole week in town working, not even coming home for the night; he wanted to earn as much as possible before the Feast in order to buy some presents. At last, the day before the Feast, he came home bearing his inexpensive purchases. There at home, the children awaited him eagerly. And what kind of gifts did he bring? If children of wealthy parents saw them, they would have walked away from them, but these poor children were glad even of such shabby and paltry gifts. The eldest son tugged on a worn, patched coat that barely reached his knees; a younger brother put on an old hat that almost covered his nose; their sister tried on a pair of boots that were closer to the size of her mother's. The food treats for the Feast day were of

the same poor quality, but the children rejoiced even in these. They gave thanks to God, and went to bed.

Here it was, the eve of Christ's Nativity and Petya and Vanya went to town to ask for alms. Around the time of major feasts, people were especially generous. In general, all kind Orthodox Christians have compassion for their less fortunate brethren in Christ, and each gives as he is able. At the bakery they gave generous loaves of white bread to the poor; at the gateway to homes belonging to the wealthy, the poor were given money; everywhere along the streets one could see passersby thrusting coins into the open hands of those reduced to poverty.

Petya and Vanya received their share. By midday Petya's bag was full, and he made his way home to the village. Vanya stayed later, wanting to bring back as much as he could for the family. Before he realized, the pale winter light had faded. The weather turned and it began to snow. As he hurried to go home, the storm picked up... Vanya trudged along through the growing darkness. He was tired, and the bag pulled on his shoulders. His hands grew numb. Overtaken by cold and fatigue, the boy sat down in the snow to rest. He was not afraid of the dark; it was not the first time he was making his way home so late. But the snow... Vanya got up and again pushed himself on his way. He shivered as the icy wind cut his cheeks. How tired he was. His legs felt as though they would buckle under him at any moment. Indeed, just then a strong gust of wind toppled him into the snow. "I'm going to freeze," he thought, "but I don't have much farther to go. I think I see lights..." Vanya tried to get up, but he had no strength. "Oh, how I wish I could go to sleep," he thought. "But if I go to sleep, the snow will cover me, I'll freeze and tomorrow is Nativity." Again Vanya made an effort to get up, and again he collapsed. "I'll fall asleep... I'll freeze... Nativity... Petya is at home..." His mind wandered. Another minute and he would fall asleep—and never wake up. Providentially, a troika (a three-horse drawn sled) was just then dashing along the same road. In his half-conscious state, Vanya heard the tinkling of the harness bells. "They must have gone by," he thought dreamily.

But the driver's sharp eyes had caught sight of him. "Sir!" he shouted to his passenger. "We just passed some dark shape." "Get along, keep going and make it quick. We'll be late for the party." "We'll make it, sir; the troika, God willing, will get us there in time. Do allow me to take a closer look. What if it should be some person?" "Well, all right, but step lively." "So it is," announced the voice of the driver through the snow. "A pauper lad; the poor thing, he was probably going home for Nativity."

The passenger, a baron, shuddered. He thought of his own children, at home, warm. "Quick, bring him here!" he shouted to the driver. "Can we save him? That would be the best Christmas present for the children." He wrapped the boy in

his fur coat. "Let's get a move on. I see lights ahead; there must be a village."

As the horses raced through the snow, the baron rubbed the boy's temples and hands and breathed warm air into his face. The horses flew into the street. "Stop at the first cottage!" The door opened, and the baron carried in the boy. He had some wine, and he began to rub the boy vigorously with the alcohol. He also employed other remedies, and within an hour Vanya opened his eyes and began breathing more normally. While the baron was bringing the boy around, the old women of the cottage fluttered about, doing what they could to help and whispering among themselves, "It's the orphan Vanya! The poor boy! And on the eve of Nativity! God saved him." The baron learned where Filipich lived and took Vanya there himself. While they were driving to the other side of the village, Vanya kept looking to the right of the baron, where he saw a beautiful woman holding in her arms an equally beautiful child. "How is it," Vanya thought to himself, "that he is so little and he doesn't even look cold. I'm much bigger, and I nearly froze."

The baron carried Vanya onto the warm stove and was appalled by the family's poverty. He questioned Filipich about everything, and said, "Tomorrow is Christmas. For Christ's sake, accept this as a gift," and he handed him a hundred-ruble note. Filipich was about to fall at the baron's feet, but the baron rushed out the door, and his horses sped along the snow, carrying the baron home for his family's Christmas party. Tomorrow, on the Feast of Christ's Nativity, he would tell his dear children how he had saved a poor orphan from death. "Today," reflected the baron, "is the happiest day of my life: God granted me to save a human life."

On the Feast of Nativity, Vanya described to all how beautiful the baron's wife was, and her adorable child. "But the baron was alone," he was told. "No, no," insisted Vanya. "I saw the baroness and the child." Then, he thought for a moment. "The baroness and the child looked a lot like the Mother of God and Christ that we have in the church." Then everyone understood just what Woman and what Child Vanya had seen. Filipich, thanks to the assistance of the baron, is now living more comfortably. His children and the orphans have grown up and are able to help him. For his part, Filipich has managed to put aside a hundred rubles. "These are the orphans' monies," he said to his wife. "God sent this money to them, and through them, to me, a sinner. As soon as they are out on their own, I'll give them these hundred rubles." "And you took it into your head to grumble at your fate," his wife said with a smile. "Yes, that was sinful of me. Who knows what would have become of us if it hadn't been for orphan Vanya!"

Each Christmas, the Filipich family has a moleben (a service of prayers) served for the health of their benefactor.



A BOLD STEP AGAINST ECUMENISM!

May every Orthodox jurisdiction follow the OCA Diocese of the Midwest's lead and withdraw their participation, affiliation and any type of dialogue with the National Council of Churches (NCC) & World Council of Churches (WCC).

Diocese of the Midwest Orthodox Church in America

45th Diocesan Assembly, October 10-12, 2006-09-23

Resolution Form

Title of Resolution: Leaving the NCC & WCC

Origin of Resolution: Reverend Bartholomew Wojcik

† † †

WHEREAS, the World Council of Churches affirms a heretical ecclesiology which states that, "Each church is the Church catholic and not simply a part of it. Each church is the Church catholic, but not the whole of it. Each church fulfils its catholicity when it is in communion with the other churches" (source: Called to be the One Church statement adopted at the Ninth WCC Assembly, February, 2006, Porto Alegre, Brazil); and

WHEREAS, the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, have confused liberal political ideology and sexual immorality with the truth of the Gospel and freedom in Christ; and

WHEREAS, V. Rev. Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky, as the Orthodox Church in America's representative to the NCC & WCC has participated in, and promoted, this supplanting of the Orthodox Faith with political disputes, particularly through his formal reading of the letter from the US Conference for the WCC to the 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil; and

WHEREAS, the Bible directs us to "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things" (Romans 14:1); and

WHEREAS, these repeated and ongoing public confusions and misrepresentations of the Orthodox Faith and Church has scandalized and offended numerous God-fearing Orthodox Christians; and

WHEREAS, this mis-characterization has led the Church to be falsely perceived as being a politically oriented denomination rather than the holy, sacramental Body of Christ whose faith and morals remain changeless; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Diocese of the Midwest calls upon His Beatitude, Metropolitan HERMAN to recall Fr. Leonid Kishkovsky as representative of the Orthodox Church in America to the NCC and WCC; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Diocese of the Midwest calls upon to the Orthodox Church in America to withdraw from formal membership, and active participation, in the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches forthwith.

THE ICON OF THE NATIVITY

From "The Meaning of Icons," by L. Ouspensky and V. Lossky.



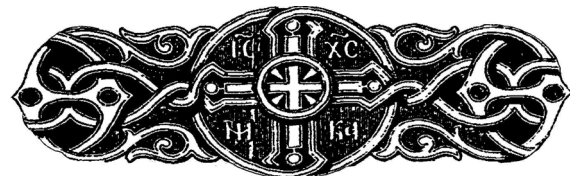
In its content the icon of Christ's Nativity has two fundamental aspects: first of all, it discloses the very essence, the immutable fact of the Incarnation of God; it places us before a visible testimony of the fundamental dogma of Christian faith, underlying by its details both the Divinity and the human nature of the Word made flesh. Secondly, the icon of the Nativity shows us the effect of this event on the natural life of the world, giving, as it were, a perspective of all its consequences./.../

[The figure of Joseph] emphasizes that in the Nativity of Christ "the order of nature is vanquished." He is not part of the central group of the Child and His Mother; he is not the father and is emphatically separated from this group. Before him, under the guise of an old and bent shepherd, stands the devil tempting him. On some icons he is represented with small horns or a short tail. The presence of the devil and his role of tempter acquires a particularly deep meaning in connection with this "feast of recreation."

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Here, on the basis of tradition, the icon transmits the meaning of certain liturgical texts, which speak of the doubts of Joseph and the troubled state of his soul. This state is expressed in the icon by his dejected attitude and is emphasized by the black mouth of the cave, which sometimes serves as a background to his figure. Tradition, transmitted... by the apocrypha, relates how the devil tempted Joseph telling him that a virgin birth is not possible, being opposed to the laws of nature.

This argument, assuming different forms, keeps on reappearing through the whole history of the Church. It is the basis of many heresies. In the person of Joseph, the icon discloses not only his personal drama, but the drama of all mankind—the difficulty of accepting that which is beyond words or reason—the Incarnation of God.



In general, remember this: that unless we make our religion and our treasure to consist in the same thing, religion will always be sacrificed.

Philosopher Epictetus

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

By Archbishop Averky.



Archbishop Averky
(+1976)

More than 100 years ago, St Ignatius, with his prophetic spirit, deeply penetrated the spirit of the universal apostasy of the last times. Here we are citing some of his characteristic thoughts, so current, even today:

“God permitted apostasy. We are helpless to stop this apostasy. Weak hands will have no power against it and nothing more will be required than the attempt to avoid 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... Only the certain Grace of God may stop this pernicious moral epidemic, and to postpone it for awhile; it is necessary to happen all that was foretold in the Scriptures... There is no one who could renew Christianity. Vessels of the Holy Spirit everywhere have dried up, even in the monasteries, those treasures of piety and grace... The salt has lost its savor. Among church shepherds exists merely a weak, unclear, and inconsistent understanding of the Word, which is destroying spiritual life. Christianity is in doing and not in words. It's difficult even to look at whom are entrusted, or into whose hands Christ's sheep befell, to whom their guidance and salvation is entrusted! But God allowed that... God's merciful long endurance postpones the complete breakdown for the sake of few saving themselves, while those who started on the road of perdition have already perished, or are reaching the peak of corruptness... Let the merciful Lord protect the remnant still believing in Him, but that remnant is few, and getting fewer.”

We are not powerful or strong enough to restrain apostasy, as holy Bishop Ignaty (Bryanchaninov) points out: “Do not attempt to stop it with your frail hand...” What should we do then?

“Stay away, guard your own self against it, and that will be enough for you. Get to know the spirit of the times, study it, in order to escape its influence as much as possible;” this is what the same holy Bishop Ignaty advises us to do.

And do not his words, written over a hundred years ago and so obviously referring to our times, breathe with a prophetic inspiration and an indubitable enlightenment from above: “Judging from the spirit of the times and from the wandering of minds, we must assume that the edifice of the Church, which has been shaking for quite a while, has now rocked

quickly and violently. There is no one to stop it or oppose it. The measures of support which are undertaken are borrowed from the elements of a world that is hostile to the Church, and will more likely quicken its fall than prevent it. May the merciful Lord cover the remainder of His faithful. But the remainder is quite scarce and is becoming scarcer and scarcer.”

So it seems that we have now reached this “quick and violent rocking of the edifice of the Church”! The enemy of mankind uses all possible means and methods to overthrow this edifice, in his efforts enjoying the support of open and hidden renegades from the true faith and Church, including even reigning hierarchs of some of the churches.

We are truly living in terrible times; there have never been such times in the history of Christianity, in the history of mankind! A time of nearly universal vacillation! And if we desire to stay true to Orthodoxy, this obligates us to much.

We must, as St. Ignatius instructs us, stay away and guard ourselves against the apostasy which is moving along in the world with gigantic steps; we must guard ourselves against the corrupt spirit of the times, in order to escape its influence. And in order to achieve this we must, first of all, understand and firmly remember that nowadays not all is truly Orthodox which bears this most holy and most precious name, that nowadays there is false Orthodoxy, which we must fear like the plague.

That true Orthodoxy is only that which does not accept or allow anywhere—be it in teaching or in church practice—any modernism contrary to the word of God and the rules of the Ecumenical Councils!

That true Orthodoxy neither approves of, nor encourages contemporary mores—the customs and fashions of the modern debased world, which lies in greater iniquity than in the times of the apostles, a totally godless world!

That true Orthodoxy thinks only of pleasing God and saving souls, and not of temporal earthly well-being, careers, material goods or acquisitions!

That true Orthodoxy is spiritual, not earthly and not attached to this world, to worldly experiences and feelings!



Every religion has its fundamentalists—Christianity no less than Islam. The difference between the two (as well as other major religions) is that over time—and through much struggle—true Christians developed an external, peaceful tolerance toward those who would offend or insult their faith; and, just as importantly, an internal discipline and intolerance toward members who would commit heinous acts of violence against innocent people in the name of their Lord. Islam, for the most part, still has that equation backwards.

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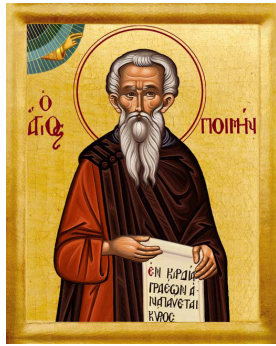
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HERRY CHRISTMAS

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SPEAKING IN “TONGUES?”

By George Karras, *Orthodox Heritage* Editor.

In the November 6, 2006 issue of Newsweek, p. 14, in an article by L. Miller titled “Beliefwatch: Spirit Filled,” we read that “charismatic Christianity is sweeping the country and the world, [and] speaking in tongues has become ... popular.”

We first wish to inform our readers that the highly heretical (and demonic) practice of speaking in tongues—strictly a Pentecostal practice in the past—has no place whatsoever in the religious practices of any well-informed Christian; it is simply not allowed. Those who claim that early Christians spoke in tongues misinterpret of Holy Scriptures. The so-called “emotional religious experience” alluded by the author of the article in question is nothing more than demonic activity from which every Orthodox Christian must stay far away!

Second, within the same article we also read that “... according to a survey by Baylor University, 37 percent of Americans say their place of worship would engage or allow speaking in tongues. A growing number of Roman Catholics now speak in tongues, as well as Episcopalians, Lutherans, ... and Baptists.”

While we were cognizant of the on-going degradation of Protestantism, we were completely unaware that these types of practices

are now becoming the norm among the Latins as well. In light of the recent meeting that the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew held in Constantinople with Pope Benedict XVI, we pray that the Orthodox Patriarch (and all of our hierarchy) exercised God-given caution and safeguarded Orthodox dogma, tradition and theology during those persistent talks of union. We also pray that they all take note of the degrading religious practices of the

Latins, some of whom apparently consider acceptable the incorporation of demonic activities into their heretical worship services.

Borrowing a few words from our Holy Bible (the words that the demons called out when they came upon Jesus, as He was readying to rid the demonically possessed man in Gadarenes*), we reverse the question to the supporters of ecumenism (the *heresy of all heresies*) and ask: “What

have we to do with them?”

May our Lord and His Most Holy Mother guide the Ecumenical Patriarch away from the on-going ecumenical movement and back to the bosom of authentic Orthodoxy.

† † †

(*)...he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. (Mk 5:6-7).

