

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]

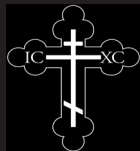
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH: ORTHODOX VS. PAPAL DOGMA

By Raphael Masterjohn, from "The Light of Orthodoxy," Vol. 1, No. 2.

From the Editor: We once again welcome with great joy the fiery words of an Orthodox layman as he takes the time, in his own way, to assert the Truth of Holy Orthodoxy and dispel the myths spread by Her enemies. May our Lord reward him for his continuing courageous stand and may all of us heed to this layman's humble words of truth.

† † †

Papal dogma asserts that the Papacy is built upon Peter, establishing this upon the following words of the Holy Bible: When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Mt 16:13-18).

According to Papal propaganda, spread broadly during the second millennium, Christ built His Church upon Simon who was renamed Peter (rock), and the Pope of Rome, being Peter's successor, remains the "head of the Church," thus having total authority over Her. Popes through the last 1,000 years claim that this authority came directly from Christ who chose Peter above the other Dis-

ciples, as the chief cornerstone on which He builds His Church.

The idea that Peter is the foundational rock for the Church of Jesus Christ is papal mythology, which St. Peter, in his first epistle, denies emphatically, thus remaining in total agreement with Orthodox doctrine: *If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.* (1Pet 2:3-8).

St. Paul, in the same spirit, refutes the Papacy's position and establishes Orthodoxy's authenticity, saying: *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* (1Cor 3:11).

Reviewing the above passages, it becomes very clear that both St. Peter and St. Paul establish beyond all doubt, the true foundation stone of the Church. They tear apart and assign to Hades all the lies and slander of the Papacy, and give support to all those who wage war against Christ's enemies, including those who dwell in Rome, living like kings. St. Peter's confession, revealed to him by the Father, *You are the Christ, Son of the Living God*, is further confirmed when he proclaims *Ye also, as lively stones* all who, like Peter, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of the Living God, are allowed

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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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to enter the Church, be baptized and receive the grace of the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul, the Apostle of the Nations, did not declare that Christ had *laid* a foundation, as the Papists assert, but that He alone is *the foundation* of the Church. He alone is the Truth that came down from Heaven. The fiery words of St. Paul set ablaze the Papal inventions, and Papacy will perish as wax before the His Divine Truth.

Orthodoxy is not one of many churches, but She is the one and only Church, against Which the gates of Hades have not prevailed, being the Body of Christ and the revealed Truth which came down from Heaven. This descent of Divine Truth and the preaching of the true Christian faith began on the day of Pentecost, and continue to our days. Every person who confesses *You are the Christ, Son of the Living God* becomes a living stone in the edifice of the Church. Peter firmly supports the Orthodox truths, overthrowing the fictional foundation of the Papacy. *If it be so that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to whom coming as a living stone, disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious, you also as living stones are built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ Wherefore also it is contained in Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believes on Him shall not be confounded.* (1Pet 2:3-6) The most perfect foundation that could be laid is the one who the Father has chosen and it cannot be Peter, for it says clearly he that believes in him shall not be confounded.

It is not faith in Peter that saves man, but faith in and confession of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Lover of man. St. Peter, a faithful and zealous follower of Jesus Christ, eventually became a vessel of Divine Grace. He became Christ-like,

but *he never became Pope-like*, desiring earthly power and dominion. Peter's fiery zeal for Christ motivated his offensive actions, always seeking to protect Christ and the many truths of our Faith.

Previously, his zeal caused him setbacks such as his denial. But after Pentecost, Peter and the other Apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, preached the Gospel and strengthened the infantile Church. Fearlessly, all the Apostles went about proclaiming the wonderful tidings of mankind's salvation. Simon Peter did not seek dominion over all the other Apostles, nor did he distort the meaning of Christ's words, by claiming he was given primacy or supreme authority. It is crystal clear, that St. Peter never conceived himself as having supremacy, lordship or infallibility, as the apostate, heretical and pseudo-Christian Popes have done. He accepted the opposition and correction of Paul when Paul sharply rebuked him for *not walking according to the truth of the Gospel: But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?* (Gal 2:11-14). Where is the primacy? Where is the dominion? Where is the infallibility?

Whoever adores the Pope-king as the vicar of Christ commits a double error. The first is believing that Christ needs a vicar, Which He never mentioned or would mention because

of His solemn promise is *Lo, I am with you even to the close of the age*. The second error is death to our souls, for if we adore the enemy of Christ we forfeit the true Christ and our own salvation. Christ said: *Upon this rock I will build my church*. There can never be two churches just as there can never be two Christs. There is but one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; there is only one Baptism for the remission of sins. False Christianity is bellicose toward Orthodoxy, and there are fishermen in both the Papacy and in Orthodoxy, where we sing: *Blessed are you O Christ our God, who made the fishermen become all-wise, by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them you drew the whole world into your net, Lover of man, glory to you!* (Pentecost troparion).

Papacy seeks to catch men in order to dupe them into worshipping a man in place of the Godman. Orthodoxy seeks to bring men into the saving Orthodox Ark of salvation, wherein dwells the Trinitarian God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, who alone lives in immortality and grants eternal life to those who love Him.

The false papal claims to Peter's supposed authority are not to be found in Holy Scripture as the Papacy propagandizes. The first epistle of Peter begins: *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...* (1Pet 1:1). *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ...* (1Pet 5:1). Peter's second Epistle begins the same way, without superiority or consciousness that he is the head of the Church. He ranks himself as one of many: *Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord...* (2Pet 1:1). He continues: *This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour.* (2Pet 3:1-2). The phrases: "an apostle," "I also am an elder," "us apostles," "who am also an elder," clearly show that Peter was not claiming superior authority over others, but an equality in agreement with Christ's commands.

Let us then surmise some apparent obvious antitheses between the word of St. Peter and those of the Latin Popes:

St. Peter: "I am an apostle." The Latin Popes: "I alone am the chief and first apostle."

St. Peter: "I am an elder." The Latin Popes: "I am the chief elder and Holy Father."

St. Peter: "... us apostles." The Latin Popes: "... are above all apostles."

The Lord commanded that we become like Him, saying: *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* (Mt 11:29).

Arrogance and haughtiness, pomp, self-aggrandizement and superiority do not belong to the followers of Jesus Christ. The claim of infallibility could only be derived from these defects, for God alone is infallible. He is our only Head and Lord and Master, and needs no vicar to replace Him, for: *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* (Mat 28:20), and *These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* (Jn 14:25-26).

His Church has survived the centuries just as he promised, not in the Papacy, not in Protestantism, but in the original Church which has changed nothing yet preserved everything.

This is Holy Orthodoxy, the Faith founded upon His Truth, as Her Founder Who came down from Heaven, guided into our human knowledge through the Holy Spirit and for the salvation of our souls. Hold firmly to this saving and true Orthodox Faith, for it is Paradise and earth and within her you will find that she is the dwelling place of the Trinity, Father, on and Holy Spirit, to whom be all glory and dominion forever.



Walk ye in Him (Col.2:6), live in Him: this is the supreme commandment. Do not adapt or change Him to yourself, but yourself to Him; do not mould Him in your image, but yourself in His. Only vain heretics—and those who foolishly loose their souls—mould, adapt and change Christ the Theanthropos [God-man] according to their desires and understanding. This is why there are so many 'false Christs' in the world and so many false Christians. The true Lord Christ—the Theanthropos, in the fullness of His evangelical historicity and reality—is wholly in His theanthropic Body: the Orthodox Church. He was in the time of the Apostles, is today, and will be forever."

Blessed Elder St. Justin Popovich (+1979)



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ON THOUGHTS, FANTASIES, AND DISTRACTIONS

By Elder Ephraim, from "Counsels form the Holy Mountain."

Fasting is not just abstinence from food, but primarily strict abstinence of the senses. When the senses are fed by external things, they transmit a corresponding amount of poison to the nous and the heart, which kills the poor soul's life in God. Our watchful fathers have so much to tell us about the holy fasting of the senses. Their entire teaching is mainly directed at the purification of the nous from sinful fantasies and thoughts, and the purification of the heart from feelings that defile it. Furthermore, they teach that we must eradicate every evil in its beginning to keep the soul clean. As soon as any evil thought whatsoever approaches even slightly, it is absolutely necessary that we drive it away and say the Jesus prayer right away. And when in this manner we confront the thoughts coming from the senses and the devil, very soon we will feel the joy and the profit derived from the fasting of the senses. If Eve had restrained her sense of vision, she would not have poisoned the offspring of her womb, that is, all the people who were born from her. In short, abstinence with the senses saves man from hell.

I pray, my child, that you resist egotistic and proud thoughts, for from them and from similar passions all the other evil passions originate, and by them a poor soul is pushed over the cliff of destruction.

Pay no attention to passionate thoughts; disregard them completely, since the ugliness of evil is written all over their face. Disregarding the thoughts suggested by the devil brings salvation. Humility is the best stratagem, for not engaging in a battle of rebuttal with them and fleeing for refuge in Christ through prayer is humility.

Passionate thoughts may also be expelled by means of rebuttal, but the fight is difficult and the soldier of Christ must be very experienced to get by without damage, because Satan is also an expert in the Scriptures and he cites arguments to trip up the soldier. Therefore, whatever he suggests to you through your thoughts—whether it is pride, vainglory, criticism, etc.—let it go in one ear and out the other. Since they are passionate thoughts, it is unnecessary to hold a conversation with them. Lock them out! Tell them, "I do not tolerate associating and speaking with heretical thoughts," and remain firm in your prayer.

Pay no attention to whatever the enemy says to you. As soon as he is about to whisper something in your ear, immediately say, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," or "Save me," rapidly and without stopping, and soon you will see that the thought—or rather the pressure to accept the thought—has weakened, and you will not remember what exactly he was trying to say.

This method is simpler and more effective than rebuttal—that is, to contradict the thoughts suggested—because after the demon has left and finished everything he had to say, there is nothing left behind as a remnant or shadow. Whereas with rebuttal, when he is defeated and departs, he leaves behind remnants and shadows of whatever he suggested to the soul, this is, faint memories of what one fought against. The first method—i.e., to take refuge immediately in the prayer—is relaxing, and the soul is quickly calmed. On the other hand, the second method—rebuttal—is laborious, and if the soul does not succeed with rebuttal, one is likely to be wounded in proportion to the demon's skill of persuasion.

Flee from sinful thoughts; cut off fantasies, the idol of provocativeness, because Satan—that "know-it-all"—wants to separate you from God your Creator. For when he makes a person guilty by means of sinful consent, the grace of the Holy Spirit leaves, just as a bee flies away from smoke, and then the soul is left without grace and joy, and full of despondency and sorrow. But when we oppose evil fantasies as soon as they first appear in the mind by destroying or repulsing them and immediately seize the sword of the spirit—the holy little prayer of our Jesus—with eagerness and zeal at once we shall see the knavish evil thought abandoning its post and conceding the victory to the governing mind, which the grace and mercy of God strengthened.

The cunning devil cannot tolerate seeing the holy guardian angel of our soul stand near us. This abysmal dragon strives to distance him in order to catch us bereft of a bodyguard and swoop down on us like a fearful tempest and devour us. And since he knows that only unchaste thoughts distance this angel, we see him rouse a multitude of filthy thoughts and fantasies of vain idols in order to defile the mind, heart, and body. But when the soldier of God realizes his malice, he seizes the weapon of Christ immediately and disperses his machinations.

My child, be careful with your imagination. All sins originate from the imagination; it is the root of sin. So be careful. As soon as a fantasy of a person or deed comes, of something you saw or heard, immediately drive it away from your mind with anger and the prayer. Say it rapidly and intensely, and at once entreat our Panagia mentally with pain to help you, and I trust in God that you will obtain the victory.

You were proud, and this is why the devil started fighting you. Humble yourself now; abase yourself; insult yourself mentally, and God, seeing your humility, will help you. Just as you avoid fire so that you do not get burned, and a snake so that you do not get bitten, likewise—and even more so—you should avoid the devil's fantasies! Be careful, I repeat, with filthy fantasies; because this is how great spiritual men have fallen and perished.

Be careful that your mind does not wander here and there, but affix it tightly to the name of Christ. Entreat Him as if He

were in front of you by invoking His name with pain of soul, and then you will see how much benefit you will derive.

Drive evil thoughts away quickly—kick them out! Shout, “Get out of here, you tramps, out of the temple of God, out of my soul!” Do not leave them inside yourself, because you run the risk of being wounded, and then you will weep and sigh. Be patient, my child. Flee from thoughts as from a fire, for they ravage, chill, and deaden the soul! But if we drive them away with anger, with vigilance, and the prayer, they give rise to great benefit.

So struggle; do not be afraid. Call upon our ready Physician. Not many entreaties are needed; He does not ask for money; He is not disgusted by wounds; He accepts tears like a good Samaritan; He nurses and attends to a person wounded by the noetic thieves. Therefore let us hasten to Him.

As for obscene thoughts, they spring from the imaginative part of the soul. That is, within the mind appear people, things, and deeds that the five senses of the body have gathered and transported into the storehouse of the imagination. And in time, the devil will present to the imagination people or things or songs, etc., that the senses have stored up, and in order to create thoughts he incites the passions so that he may sack the city of God—the heart, that is—and defile it.

Therefore, the whole trick is to drive away fantasies, people, and so on, as soon as they are depicted in our mind. And if we accomplish this, by the grace of God, the evil temptation is eradicated in its beginning and we win with little effort. But if the thoughts persist, we should resist by invoking the name of Christ and confronting those thoughts with anger.

Furthermore, when we see people who scandalize us, we should try not to let the image of them be deposited within us, but we should drive them away at once, lest these images are taken into the imaginative part of our soul, and thus enable the devil to fight us by showing them to us again later.

Regarding your blasphemous thoughts, my child, which the devil is putting in your mind, do not fear. It is due to the jealousy of the evil sower. The devil tries to choke the Christian’s soul with the idea that he himself is blaspheming, and in this way to poison his heart! Such thoughts should go in one ear and out the other. That is how much you should disregard them, because these thoughts are not yours.

I am telling you, my child, do not fear. I shall take the responsibility for them. When these thoughts come, say to Satan: “Bring whatever you want. From now on I couldn’t care less for anything you say, since all these things are contrivances of your malice!”

Even though blasphemous thoughts are clearly from the devil, nevertheless we are also partly responsible for them. How? We are responsible because of the hidden pride of our mind that thinks that we are important: this is revealed by

the blasphemous thoughts. They can also originate from our anger, wrath, hatred, etc. Therefore, along with disregarding them, we should take care to reproach ourselves inwardly and fight off every proud thought. Furthermore, we should be at peace with everyone, even if someone harms us.

Do not talk a lot. Stay away from back talk, quarreling, loquacity, and everything that issues from a careless tongue. Drive away evil thoughts and filthy fantasies from your mind as soon as they appear. For when they linger inside the mind and heart, they create a grave condition. Whereas when we are careful at the first appearance of the filthy fantasy and the filthy thought that follows, we remain in peace and enjoy the moral gratification of purity.

Therefore, my children, let us pay attention to ourselves every time various bad thoughts enter, because the same approach applies for every bad thought. Whatever kind it may be, when it finds the nous careless, it enters and creates—corresponding to the passion—the aforementioned unhealthy condition.

Therefore, since a monk is fought primarily by thoughts, the thing that saves him is watchfulness! Watchfulness (*nepsis*) is derived from the verb “*nefo*,” that is, to be careful, vigilant, alert, and on our guard. When we are careful, vigilant, alert, and on our guard, the house of our soul will be well-kept and we shall save our souls for which we struggle our whole life.

When a person is young, it is impossible not to be fought by filthy thoughts and fantasies. One must drive them away immediately and say the Jesus prayer, and they will leave. But once again they will return; once more he needs to drive them away through the prayer and watchfulness, that is, through the attention and vigilance of the nous.

One must be careful not to let the temptation form an image, because first a fantasy comes, then a thought, and then a filthy pleasure. So when through watchfulness we do not allow an evil fantasy to form and at the same time we say the prayer, we are delivered from the disturbance. In addition, we are crowned by God for our good intention and desire to please Him.



Prayer together with almsgiving can furnish us with countless good things from above. They can quench the fire of sin in our souls and can give us great freedom. Cornelius had recourse to these two virtues and sent his prayers up to heaven. Because of these two virtues he heard the angel say: Thy prayers and thy alms have gone up and been remembered in the sight of God (Acts 10:4).

St. John Chrysostom (Baptismal Instructions)

BRINGING UP CHILDREN

By Elder Porphyrios.



Elder Porphyrios was born on the 7th February 1906. The name he received at birth was Evangelos. His parents, Leonidas and Eleni Bairaktaris, were poor farmers and had difficulty in supporting their large family. For this reason his father left for America where he worked on the construction of the Panama Canal. Young Evangelos was the fourth child of the family.

As a boy he looked after sheep on the hills and had completed only the first class of primary school when, at the age of seven, he was obliged on account of his family's extreme poverty to go to a nearby town of for work. He worked there in a shop for two or three years. Thereafter he went to Piraeus to work in a general store owned by a relative.

At the age of twelve(!) he left secretly to go to the Holy Mountain. His longing was to imitate St. John the Hut-dweller whose life he had read and for whom he felt a special affinity. The grace of God led him to the hermitage of St. George in Kavsokalyvia where he lived in obedience to two elders, natural brothers, Panteleimon, who was a father confessor, and Ioannikios, who was a priest. He devoted himself with great love and in a spirit of utter obedience to the two elders who had a reputation for being exceptionally austere. He became a monk at the age of fourteen and took the name of Niketas. Two years later he took his final monastic vows of the Great Schema. Shortly thereafter God granted him supernatural gifts and was vested with power of foresight.

At the age of nineteen he became seriously ill and contrary to his personal wishes (and under the directive of his elders) had to leave the harsh climate of Holy Mountain. He returned to Evia where he went to live in the Monastery of St. Charalambos at Levka. A year later, in 1926, and at the age of twenty, he was ordained priest at the Church of St. Charalambos in Kymi by the Archbishop of Sinai, Porphyrios III, who gave him the name Porphyrios. At the age of twenty-two he became a confessor and spiritual father. For a time he was parish priest in the village of Tsakei in Evia. He lived for twelve years at the Monastery of St. Charalambos, serving as a spiritual guide and confessor, and then for three years in the deserted Monastery of St. Nicholas in Ano Vatheia.

In 1940, on the eve of Greece's entrance into the Second World War, Elder Porphyrios moved to Athens where he became chaplain and confessor in the Polyclinic Hospital. He himself said that he served there for thirty-three years as if it were a single day, devoting himself untiringly to his spiritual work and to easing pain and suffering. In 1955 he moved to the tiny Monastery of St. Nicholas in Kallisia, on the foothills of Mount Penteli. He

worked the land with great diligence while at the same time he carried out his copious work of spiritual guidance.

In the summer of 1979 he moved to Milesi, a village some thirty miles north of Athens and overlooking his native Evia, with the dream of founding a monastery there. To begin with, he lived in a small trailer under exceedingly adverse circumstances, and later in a simple room constructed from breeze blocks where he endured without complaint his many health troubles. In 1984 he moved into a room in a wing of the monastery which was under construction. In spite of the fact that the elder was seriously ill and blind, he worked constantly and unstintingly for the completion of the monastery. On the 26th February 1990 he was able to see his dream becoming reality when the foundation stone of the Church of Transfiguration was laid.

During the final years of his earthly life he began to prepare himself for his death. His desire was to return to the Holy Mountain and to his beloved Kavsokalyvia where, secretly and silently, just as he had lived, he would tender up his soul to her Bridegroom. He was often heard to say, "My desire now that I have grown old is to go and die up there." So it was that he came to his saintly end in his hermitage in Kavsokalyvia on the morning of December 2nd, 1991.

*The last words that were heard to pass from his lips were the words from our Lord's high-priestly prayer which he loved so much and repeated so often: **that they may be one.***

† † †

The sanctity of Parents is Necessary

We must see God in the faces of our children and give God's love to our children. The children should learn to pray. And in order for children to pray, they must have in them the blood of praying parents. This is where some people make the mistake of saying, "Since the parents are devout and pray, study Holy Scripture, and bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, it is natural that they will become good children." However, we often see the very opposite result on account of coercion.

It is not sufficient for the parents to be devout. They must not oppress the children to "make them good" by force. We may repel our children from Christ when we pursue the things of our religion with egotism. Children cannot endure coercion. Do not compel them to come with you to church. You can say, "Whoever wants can come with me now or come later." Leave God to speak to their souls. The reason why the children of some devout parents become rebellious when they grow up and reject the Church and everything connected with it and go off to seek satisfaction elsewhere is because of this pressure which they feel from their "good" parents. The so-called "devout" parents, who were anxious to make good Christians of their children with their human love, pressured their children and produced the opposite result. The children are pressured when they are young, and when they reach the age of sixteen, seventeen or eighteen years old, they end up

the opposite of what was intended. By way of reaction, they start to mix with bad company and to use bad language.

When children grow up in an atmosphere of freedom, and at the same time are surrounded by the good example of grown-ups, they are a joy to see. The secret is to be good and saintly and to inspire and radiate. The life of the children seems to be affected by the radiation of their parents. If the parents insist, “Come on now, go to confession, go and receive Communion,” and so on, nothing is achieved. However, what does your child see in you? How do you live and what do you radiate? Does Christ radiate in you? That is what is transmitted to your child. This is where the secret lies. And if this is done when the child is young, it will not be necessary for him or her to undergo “great travail” when it grows up. Solomon the Wise uses a beautiful image about exactly this subject, underlining the importance of a good start and good foundations: *He who seeks her [Wisdom] early shall have no great travail; for he shall find her sitting at his doors.* (Wis 6:14). The person who “seeks her early” is the person who occupies himself with Wisdom from an early age. Wisdom is Christ.

When the parents are saintly and transmit this to the child and give the child an upbringing “in the Lord”, then the child, whatever the bad influences around it, will not be affected because by the door of his or her heart will be Wisdom—Christ Himself. The child will not undergo great travail to acquire Wisdom. It seems very difficult to become good, but in reality it is very easy when from an early age you start with good experiences. As you grow up, effort is not required; you have goodness within you and you experience it. You don’t weary yourself; it is yours, a possession which you preserve, if you are careful, throughout your life.

With Prayer and Sanctity You Can Also Help Children at School

What is true for parents is also true for teachers. With prayer and sanctity you can also help children at school. The grace of God can overshadow them and make them good. Don’t attempt with human methods to correct bad situations. No good will come of this. Only with prayer will you produce results. Invoke the grace of God on all the children—for divine grace to enter their souls and transform them. That is what it means to be a Christian.

You teachers transmit your anxiety to the children, without realizing it, and this affects them. With faith, anxiety dissolves. What is it that we say? “We commit our whole life to Christ our God.”

Respond to the love of the children with discernment. And once they love you, you will be able to lead them to Christ. You will become the means. Let your love be genuine. Don’t

love them in a human way, as parents usually do. This does not help them. Love in prayer, love in Christ. This is truly beneficial. Pray for each child you see, and God will send His grace and will unite the child to Him. Before you enter the classroom, especially difficult classes, repeat the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ...” And as you enter, embrace all the children with your gaze, pray and then start your lesson, offering your whole self. By making this offering in Christ, you will be filled with joy. And in this way both you and the children will be sanctified. You will live in the love of Christ and of His Church, because you will become good during your work.

If a pupil causes a problem, make a general observation first, such as: “Children, we’re all here for a lesson, for a serious business. I’m here to help you. You are working hard to succeed in life, and I, who love you all very much, am also working hard. So please be quiet so that we can achieve our aim.” And while you’re saying this don’t look at the pupil who’s misbehaving. If he continues, address yourself to him, not with anger, but with seriousness and resolution. You need to be watchful and to keep control of the class to be able to influence their souls. The children are not at fault if they cause problems. It is the grown-ups who are to blame.

Don’t speak much about Christ and God to the children, but pray to God for the children. Words enter the ears, but prayer enters the heart. Listen to a secret. The first day you enter a class, don’t have a lesson. Speak to the children warmly and clearly and behave with love towards them. To begin with don’t speak to them at all about God or about the soul. This comes later. But on the day when you decide to speak to them about God, prepare yourself well and say: “There is a subject about which many people have great doubts. It is the subject ‘God.’ What’s your opinion about this?”

And then you will have a discussion. On another day you will broach the subject of the “soul.” Is there such a thing as the “soul?” Then you can talk about evil from a philosophical point of view. Tell them that we have two selves, a good and a bad. We must cultivate the good self. It is the good self that desires progress, kindness and love. We need to wake up this good self in order to become right-minded people in society. Remember that hymn: *O soul, my soul, arise, why are you sleeping?* Don’t tell them it like this, but with other words, for example: “Be bright and awake for good things—for education, for love. Only love makes all things beautiful and fills our life and gives it meaning. Our wicked self desires laziness and indifference. But that takes all flavor from life and takes away all meaning and beauty.”



All these things, however, require preparation. Love demands sacrifices and very often sacrifice of time. Make sure you have mastery of your subject and are ready to give to the children. Be prepared and say everything with love and above all with joy. Show them all your love and know what you want and what you are saying. But how to behave towards children is an art. I heard a lovely story about this. Listen...

There was a teacher who was being tormented by the behavior of one of the boys and wanted to expel him from school. In the meantime, however, a new teacher arrived and took over the class. The new teacher was told in advance about the problem pupil. He also heard that the boy in question was mad about bicycles. So, on the second day, when he entered the classroom he said: "Children, I've got a problem. I live far from the school and I want to get a bicycle so that I don't tire my feet out every day walking here, but I don't know how to ride one. Could any one of you teach me how to ride a bike?"

The mischievous boy jumped up at once and said, "I'll teach you, Sir."

"Do you know how to ride a bike?"

"Yes, Sir."

From that moment on they became best friends, to the point that the old teacher got upset when he saw them. He felt a sense of inadequacy that he had been unable to evoke respect from the boy.

There are often orphan children at a school. It's a hard thing to be an orphan. A child who is deprived of his or her parents, especially at an early age, becomes unhappy in life. But if he or she acquires spiritual parents in Christ and our Holy Lady, the child becomes a saint. Treat orphan children with love and understanding, but above all bring them into contact with Christ and the Church.

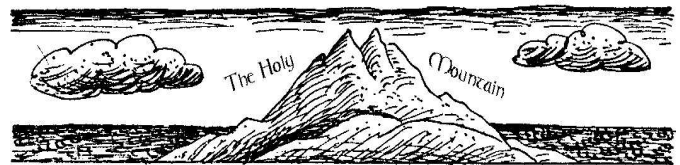
Teach Children to Seek God's Help

The medicine and great secret for children's progress is humility. Trust in God gives perfect security. God is everything. No one can say that I am everything. That cultivates egotism. God desires us to lead children to humility. Without humility neither we nor children will achieve anything. You need to be careful when you encourage children. You shouldn't say to a child, "You'll succeed, you're great, you're young, you're fearless, you're perfect!" This is not good for the child. You can tell the child to pray, and say, "The talents you have, have been given to you by God. Pray and God will give you strength to cultivate them and in that way you will succeed. God will give you His grace." That is the best way. Children should learn to seek God's help in everything.

Praise is harmful to children. What does Holy Scripture say? *O my people, those who call you blessed lead you astray, and pervert the path of your feet.* The person who praises us leads us astray and perverts the paths of our life. How wise God's

words are! Praise does not prepare children for any difficulties in life and they grow up badly adjusted; they lose their way and in the end they become failures. Now the world has gone haywire. Little children are constantly being praised. We are told not to scold children, not to go against their will and not to impose on them. The child learns to expect this, however, and is unable to deal maturely with even the slightest difficulty. As soon as it encounters opposition, it is defeated and drained of all strength.

Prime responsibility for the failure of children in life lies with their parents and thereafter with their teachers. They praise them constantly. They fill them with egotistical words. They do not lead them to the spirit of God and they alienate them from the Church. When the children grow up a little and go to school with this egotism, they abandon and disdain religion and they lose their respect for God, for their parents and for everyone. They become stubborn, hard and unfeeling, with no respect for religion or for God. We have produced a generation of egotists and not of Christians.



Our self-love and pride manifest themselves especially in impatience and irritability when some of us cannot bear the slightest unpleasantness intentionally, or even unintentionally, caused us by others; or obstacles lawfully or unlawfully, intentionally or unintentionally, opposed to us by men, or caused by the objects surrounding us. Our self-love and pride would like everything to be as we wish, that we should be surrounded by every honor and comfort of this temporal life; would like all men, and even—how far is pride carried!—all nature itself, to speedily and silently obey a sign from us; whilst, alas! We ourselves are very slow to faith and to every good work—slow to please the one Master of all. Christian! you must absolutely be humble, meek, and long-suffering, remembering that you are clay, dust, nothingness; that you are impure; that everything good that you have is from God; that your life, your breath and everything you possess are God's gifts; that for your sins of disobedience and intemperance you ought now to redeem your future blessedness in Paradise by the long-suffering which is indispensable in this world of imperfections and innumerable transgressions of the fallen men living together with us, and forming the numerous members of the one sin-sullied human race. *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* (Gal 6:2) He who is impatient and irritable does not know himself and the human race, and is unworthy of the name of Christian. In saying this, I pronounce judgment against myself, for I am the first of those who are afflicted with impatience and irritability.

St. John of Kronstadt (My Life in Christ, p. 185).

ORTHODOX ICONOGRAPHY

By St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco, from "Orthodox Life," vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 42-45.

Iconography began on the day our Lord Jesus Christ pressed a cloth to His face and imprinted His divine-human image thereon. According to tradition, Luke the Evangelist painted the image of the Mother of God; and, also according to tradition, there still exist today many Icons which were painted by him. An artist, he painted not only the first Icons of the Mother of God, but also those of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul and, possibly, others which have not come down to us.

Thus did Iconography begin. Then it came to a halt for a time. Christianity was cruelly persecuted: all that was reminiscent of Christ was destroyed and subjected to ridicule. Thus, during the course of the persecutions, Iconography did not develop, but Christians attempted to express in symbols what they wished to convey. Christ was portrayed as the Good Shepherd, and also in the guise of various personalities from pagan mythology. He was also depicted in the form of a vine, an image hearkening back to the Lord's words: *I am the true Vine... ye are the branches* (Jn 15:1, 5). It was also accepted practice to depict Christ in the form of a fish, because if one writes in Greek "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior" (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ) and then groups together the first letter of each word, one discovers that one has written the Greek word ἰχθύς (cap ΙΧΘΥΣ), "fish." And so, Christians depicted a fish, thereby calling to mind these words which were known to those who believed in the Savior. This also became known to the pagans, and consequently the image of the fish was also held suspect.

When, following the victory of Emperor Constantine the Great over Maxentius, freedom was given to Christians, Christianity quickly transformed the Roman Empire and replaced paganism. Then Iconography flourished with full force. We already see directives concerning Iconography at the first ecumenical councils. In some church hymns, which today are still frequently used, mention is also made of Iconography.

Now what are Icons? Icons are precisely the union between painting and those symbols and works of art which replaced Icons during the time of persecution. The Icon is not simply a representation, a portrait. In later times only has the bodily been represented, but an Icon is still supposed to remind people of the spiritual aspect of the person depicted.

Christianity is the inspiration of the world. Christ founded His Church in order to inspire, to transfigure the world, to cleanse it from sin and bring it to that state in which it will exist in the age to come. Christianity was founded upon the earth and operates upon the earth, but it reaches to Heaven in its structure; Christianity is that bridge and

ladder whereby men ascend from the earthly Church to the Heavenly. Therefore, a simple representation which recalls the earthly characteristics of some face is not an Icon. Even an accurate depiction, in the sense of physical build, still signifies nothing. A person may be very beautiful externally, yet at the same time be very evil. On the other hand, he may be ugly, and at the same time a model of righteousness. Thus, we see that an Icon must indeed depict that which we see with our eyes, preserving the characteristics of the body's form, for in this world the soul acts through the body; yet at the same time it must point towards the inner, spiritual essence. The task of the Iconographer is precisely to render, as far as possible and to as great an extent as possible, those spiritual qualities whereby the person depicted acquired the Kingdom of Heaven, whereby he won an imperishable crown from the Lord, for the Church's true significance is the salvation of man's soul. That which is on the earth perishes when we bring the body to the grave; but the soul passes on to another place. When the world comes to an end, consumed by fire, there will be a new earth and a new Heaven, as the Apostle John the Theologian says, for with the eyes of his soul he already foresaw the New Jerusalem, so clearly described in his sacred Revelation. The Lord came to prepare the whole world for this spiritual rebirth. To prepare oneself for this new Kingdom, one must uproot from within oneself those seeds of sin which entered mankind with our ancestors' fall into sin, distorting our pristine, grace-endowed nature; and one must plant within oneself those virtues which they lost in the fall. The Christian's goal is to change daily, to improve daily, and it is of this that our Icons speak.

In calling to mind the saints and their struggles, an Icon does not simply represent the saint as he appeared upon the earth. No, the Icon depicts his inner spiritual struggle; it portrays how he attained to that state where he is now considered an angel on earth, a heavenly man. This is precisely the manner in which the Mother of God and Jesus Christ are portrayed. Icons should depict that transcendent sanctity which permeated the saints. The Lord Jesus Christ is the union of all that is human and all that is divine; and when depicted in an Icon, the Savior must be painted so that we sense that He is a man, a real man, yet at the same time something more exalted than a man, that we not simply approach Him as we approach a visitor or an acquaintance. No, we should feel that He is One Who is close to us, our Lord Who is merciful to us, and at the same time an awe-inspiring Judge Who wants us to follow Him and wishes to lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, we must not turn away to one side or the other. We should not depict only the spiritual aspect of the saint, completely disregarding how he looked while alive on earth. This would also be an extreme. All saints should be depicted so as to convey their individual characteristics as much as possible; soldiers

should be portrayed arrayed for battle; holy hierarchs in their episcopal vestments... It is incorrect to depict bishops of the first centuries vested in the sakkos, for at that time bishops wore the phelonion, not the sakkos, and yet this is not such a great error, for it is far better to make a mistake in what is physical than in what is spiritual, to ignore, as it were, the spiritual aspect.

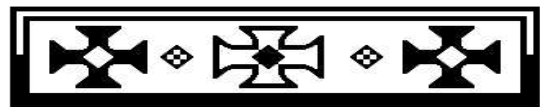
However, it is far worse when everything is correct in the physical, bodily sense, but the saint appears as an ordinary man, as if he had been photographed, completely devoid of the spiritual. When this is the case, the depiction cannot be considered an Icon. Sometimes much attention is spent on making the Icon beautiful. If this is not detrimental to the spirituality of the Icon, it is good, but if the beauty distracts our vision to such an extent that we forget what is most important—that one must save one's soul, must raise one's soul to the heights of Heaven,—the beauty of the depiction is already detrimental. It cannot be considered an Icon, but merely a painting. It may be very beautiful, but it is not an Icon. An Icon is an image which leads us to a holy, God-pleasing person, or raises us up to Heaven, or evokes a feeling of repentance, of compunction, of prayer, a feeling that one must bow down before this image. The value of an Icon lies in the fact that, when we approach it, we want to pray before it with reverence. If the image elicits this feeling, it is an Icon.

This is what our Iconographers were zealous about—those ancient Iconographers of the time before the conversion of Russia, of whom there were many, and our Russian Iconographers, too, beginning with the Venerable Alypius of the Kiev Caves, who painted a number of Icons of the Mother of God, some of which still survive. These wondrous Icons, which continued the Byzantine tradition of the painting of Icons which inspire compunction, were not necessarily painted in dark colors; frequently they were done in bright hues; but these colors evoked a desire to pray before such Icons. The holy hierarch Peter, a native of Galicia who later became Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, painted Icons, some of which were until recently to be found in the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow. An entire school of Iconography was established in Novgorod under the direction of the holy hierarch Alexis of Novgorod, a whole series of whose Icons have been preserved. The Venerable Andrew Rublev painted an Icon of the Holy Trinity which is now famous not only in the Christian world, but throughout the half-Christian world as well.

Unfortunately, this Orthodox movement as a whole started to collapse when Russia began to be infiltrated by Western influence. In certain respects, Russia's acquaintance with the European West was very beneficial. Many technical sciences and much other useful knowledge came from the West. We know that Christianity has never had any aversion to knowledge of that which originates outside itself. Basil the

Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom studied in pagan universities, and many writers, among whom were our spiritual authors and many of the best theologians, were well acquainted with pagan writers. The Apostle Paul himself cited quotations from pagan poets even in the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, not all that was Western was good for Russia. It also wrought horrible moral damage at that time, for the Russians began to accept, along with useful knowledge, that which was alien to our Orthodox way of life, to our Orthodox faith. The educated portion of society soon sundered themselves from the life of the people and from the Orthodox Church, in which all was regulated by ecclesiastical norms. Later, alien influence touched Iconography as well. Images of the Western type began to appear, perhaps beautiful from an artistic point of view, but completely lacking in sanctity, beautiful in the sense of earthly beauty, but even scandalous at times, and devoid of spirituality. Such were not Icons. They were distortions of Icons, exhibiting a lack of comprehension of what an Icon actually is.

The purpose of this article is, first of all, to promote an understanding of the true Icon, and secondly, to cultivate a love for the Icon and the desire that our churches and our homes be adorned with genuine Icons and not with Western paintings which tell us nothing about righteousness or sanctity, but are merely pleasant to look upon. Of course, there are Icons painted correctly in the Iconographic sense, but yet very crudely executed. One can paint quite correctly in the theoretical sense and at the same time quite poorly from a practical standpoint. This does not mean that, from the principle of Iconography itself, these Icons are bad. On the other hand, it happens that one can paint beautifully, yet completely ignore the rules of Iconography. Both such approaches are harmful. One must strive to paint Icons well in principle, method and execution. This is why we oppose certain people and their attempts to paint our churches, for they have the wrong approach, the wrong point of view. They may paint well, perhaps; but when the point of view is incorrect, when the direction is wrong, no matter how well the locomotive runs, it nonetheless slips off the track and is derailed. This is precisely what happens to those who execute their work technically and correctly, yet due to an incorrect approach and an incorrect point of view, they travel the wrong path.

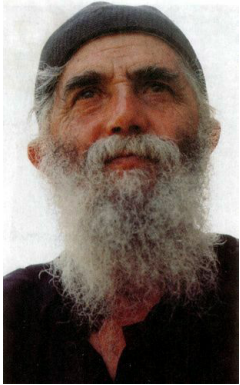


Love and self-control liberate the soul from its obsessions. Reading and reflection deliver the intellect from ignorance. Regular prayer brings the soul into the very presence of God.

St. Maximos the Confessor

RESPECT FOR TRADITION

By Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain.



Many of the holy Martyrs, whenever they were unfamiliar with a dogma, used to say: “I trust whatever the Holy Fathers have instituted”. If anyone dared to say those words, they would suffer martyrdom. In other words, although they did not know how to present any proof to their persecutors, they did, however, have faith in the Holy Fathers. They would think to themselves: “How can I not trust the Holy

Fathers? They were far more experienced, and virtuous, and saintly. How can I agree to something that is nonsense? How can I tolerate someone abusing the Holy Fathers?” We must have faith in Tradition. Nowadays, unfortunately, we notice that “European good manners” have shown up, and they strive to present a benevolent face. They try to be superior, but in the end, they head towards the worship of the two-horned devil. “Only one religion must exist” they tell you, and they flatten everything.

I’ve had people come to me too, who suggested: “All of us who believe in Christ should form one religion”.

I said to them: Now what you’re telling me is to take gold and copper—gold of so many carats quality—which they took so much trouble to purify, and then gather the metals and melt them into one mass. Is it right to mix them together again? Ask any goldsmith: “Should we mix inferior elements with gold?”

Well, the same trouble was taken to filter-clean the dogma. The Holy Fathers must have known something, when they forbade every association with a heretic. Nowadays they say: “We should all pray together—not only with a heretic, but also with a Buddhist and a fire-worshipper and a demon-worshipper. The Orthodox should also participate in these common prayers and conventions. It is a matter of presence.”

What do they mean by “presence”? They strive to solve everything with logic, in order to justify the unjustifiable. The “European spirit” is convinced that spiritual matters can also be made a part of the Common Market.

Some of the rather shallow Orthodox want to project “Missionary work”, so they convene meetings with the heterodox for the sake of being heard, and they think that this is the way to advertise Orthodoxy—by mingling in the same pot with cacodoxies.

Then we have the hyper-zealots at the other extreme: they even blaspheme the Sacraments of the New-Calendarists etc., and they excessively scandalize those souls who are

pious and have an orthodox sensitivity. The heterodox on the other hand usually attend meetings, they pose as know-it-alls, they take any good spiritual material that they find with the Orthodox, they take it to their own workshop, add their own colors and brand names and they present it as something original.

Today’s strange world is actually moved by such strange things, and it is eventually destroyed spiritually. But the Lord—when the time is right—will bring forth new Marks of Ephesus and the Gregories of Palamas, who will muster all of our scandalized brethren, who will confess the Orthodox faith, consolidate the Orthodox Tradition and give great joy to our Mother the Church.

If we were living patristically, we would all be enjoying a spiritual health that would have been the envy of all the heterodox; it would have made them abandon their sick fallacies and render them saved, without any sermons. At present, they are not moved by our holy Patristic tradition, because they are waiting to see our Patristic continuation—our true kinship with our Saints.

That which is obligatory for every Orthodox, is for them to sow the “benevolent anxiety” in the heterodox as well; in other words, to bring them to the realization that they are living a fallacy and that they should not light-heartedly relax their thoughts, for fear of depriving themselves in this life of the bounteous blessings of Orthodoxy, and in the life to come, the infinitely more and everlasting blessings of God.

I was once visited by some Catholic children who had good intentions, and were ready to acquaint themselves with Orthodoxy. “We want you to say something to us, so that we will be helped spiritually”, they told me.

“Look”, I replied, “find a book on Ecclesiastic History, and you will see how we once used to be together, and then see where you wound up. This will help you immensely. Do it, and the next time, we will talk about many things.”

In olden times, people used to respect something because it was their grandfather’s, and they used to safeguard it like an heirloom. I once met a very good lawyer. His house was very simply furnished, and it relaxed not only him, but his visitors also. He told me this, some time ago :

“A few years ago, Father, my acquaintances made fun of me because of the old, family furniture that I had. Now they come and admire them as valuable antiques. While I make daily use of them and enjoy them because they remind me of my father, my mother, my grandparents, and I am always emotionally touched, those acquaintances now go around collecting various old pieces of furniture, to the point that they have turned their lounges into curiosity shops, in an attempt to take their minds off their problems and forget their secular stress.”

In the past, one would hold on to a tiny little coin of insignificant value as though it were a vast fortune, only

because it was given to him by his mother or his grandfather. Nowadays, if someone has an expensive coin—a gold Pound for example—that was given to him by his grandfather, and that coin's value is slightly higher than its original value, he will give it away to be sold. He will not show any respect, nor will he be concerned about any mother or father. It's that "European spirit" that is slowly creeping in and is sweeping us all away....

I recall the first time that I visited the Holy Mountain—in one of the retinues, the Elder was a little old man, who was very pious. Out of piety, he had preserved from generation to generation, not only the stoles of his (spiritual) grandfathers, his predecessors, but also the moulds that had been used to make the stoles. He also had several old books and various manuscripts that he kept beautifully wrapped in his book-case, which was carefully closed so that they wouldn't collect dust. He never touched those books; he kept them wrapped up. "I am not worthy to read such books" he would say. "I will just read these simpler ones—the Gerontikon, the Ladder..."

Then a young monk came along (he finally didn't stay on the Mountain permanently) who had asked the elder: "Why do you keep all this junk here?" He made a move to take away the moulds and dispose of them—to burn them. The poor old man begged him with tears: "that was from my grandfather—why do you mind my keeping it? There are so many other rooms here—leave them be in a corner." Out of the piety that he had, he not only held on to the books, the heirlooms, the stoles, but even the moulds!

When there is a respect for small things, there will be an even greater respect towards the bigger things. When there is no respect for small things, then neither will there be for the bigger ones. This is how the Fathers maintained Tradition.



Priest of God! Believe with your whole heart; believe always in the grace given to you from God, to pray for God's people. Let not this gift of God be in vain in you, for by it you can save many souls. The Lord speedily hears your heartfelt prayer for His people, and is easily inclined to have mercy upon them, as He had at the prayers of Moses, Aaron, Samuel and the Apostles. Avail yourself of every opportunity for prayer—in church, when you celebrate the divine service or a sacrament, in private homes, at the ministering of sacraments, during prayers and thanksgivings; everywhere and at all times think of the salvation of God's people, and you shall also obtain great grace of God for yourself.

St John of Kronstadt (+1908)

THE DECALOGUE OF THE ORDAINED CHANTER

From the book "The Unwritten Typikon of the Eastern Orthodox Church", by Reader Ioannis H. Damarlakis, translated by Fr. Luke Hartung.

The Decalogue of the ordained chanter is as follows:

1. To stand at the hour of the Divine Services in a posture of regal humility without unnecessary movements, facial gestures, etc.

2. To always wear the holy rasso and to try to have his helpers also wear rassos. This gives solemnity.

3. To always chant from the books of our Byzantine Ecclesiastical Music, in accordance with the canon of the Œcumenical Synod of Laodicea "chanting from parchments".

4. To always chant the same — whether he is alone in the Church or whether the entire congregation is present—for in all occasions he chants to God, Who is everywhere present.

5. To unite the mood of the psalmody with the meaning of the hymn. For example, the diatonic tone is chanted one way on Holy Thursday and another on Pascha. Namely he should chant colorfully and not plainly.

6. To respect the liturgizing priests and his brethren and work peacefully with them.

7. From the moment in which he dons the holy rasso and begins to perform his holy duty, he should take leave of "every earthly care".

8. To pronounce the readings and chant the melodies pleasantly and meaningfully so that the faithful may understand and participate.

9. To know that every exaggeration during the time he chants causes irreparable damage.

10. He should participate in the things taking place in the divine services, so that the words of the troparion are not fulfilled in him that say: "Many times while chanting, I am found committing sin, [for with my tongue I pronounce songs of praise, yet in my soul I think unseemly things]" (from the Aposticha of the Praises, Third Tone, Monday morning)".

The ordained chanter as lower clergy must behave accordingly. His general appearance (attire, hair, etc.) should always "show" his office/ministry. He is first and foremost a "churchman" and to be successful in his work, he must live a life of virtue, "in study, in learning, in faith, in fasting, in patience and obedience".

There are two choirs, right and left. In today's understanding, the right is considered the first choir while the left the second. In older times the primacy switched between the two choirs each week; the right choir one week and the left choir the next. All that remains of this practice today is in the small vespers when the left choir has the primacy, while at great vespers it is the right.

Ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία θὰ Σημάνει τὰ Σημαντρα Γιατί ὁ Θεὸς τὸ Θέλει!

Τοῦ Διονύση Μακρῆ, «Στύλος Ὁρθοδοξίας», Τεύχος 82, Σεπτέμβριος 2007 (27/09/07).



Οἱ θέσεις τῆς νέας τουρκικῆς κυβέρνησης γιὰ τὴν μουσουλμανικὴ μαντίλα, γιὰ τὴν Κύπρο καὶ τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ παραβιάσεις στοιχειωδῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δικαιωμάτων στὴ γείτονα χώρα καθιστοῦν τὶς εὐρωπαϊκὲς κυβερνήσεις διστακτικὲς ἐναντι τῆς εὐρωπαϊκῆς προοπτικῆς τῆς. Ἐπιπλέον, οἱ ἐσωτερικὲς διαμάχες

ποῦ ἔχουν ξεσπάσει ἐξ ἀφορμῆς τοῦ κοσμικοῦ χαρακτήρα τοῦ κράτους τῆς Τουρκίας ἐνισχύουν τὴν καχυποψία καὶ ἐνδυναμώνουν τὴν ἀρνητικὴ διάθεση τῶν Εὐρωπαίων.

Τὰ γεγονότα αὐτὰ ὄχι μόνον καθυστεροῦν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐμποδίζουν τὴν ἔνταξη τῆς Τουρκίας καὶ κατ' ἐπέκταση δυσκολεύουν καὶ τὸ στόχο τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, ποῦ ἐδῶ καὶ λίγα χρόνια κατέθεσε αἴτηση γιὰ νὰ ἐνταχθεῖ στὴ μεγάλη εὐρωπαϊκὴ οἰκογένεια! Ἐκ τῶν πραγμάτων λοιπὸν θὰ ὑπάρξουν σύντομα μεγάλες ἐξελίξεις στὴν εὐρύτερη περιοχὴ, οἱ ὁποῖες θὰ ἀποσκοποῦν στὴν ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ τοπίου καὶ στὴ μεταβολὴ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων δεδομένων.

Ὁ πρωθυπουργὸς τῆς Τουρκίας εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅ,τι ἔχει καλὲς προθέσεις καὶ δὲν εἶναι τόσο σκληρός, ὅσο οἱ προηγούμενοι ἡγέτες. Φαίνεται νὰ θέλει καὶ νὰ ἐπιθυμῆ νὰ ἀφήσει τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ ἐλεύθερο καὶ εἶναι λιαν θετικὸς στὶς διαπραγματεύσεις μὲ τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο. Ἀλλὰ εἶναι ταυτόχρονα ἀναγκασμένος νὰ διατηρῆ τὶς ἀπαραίτητες πολιτικὲς ἰσορροπίες, κυρίως λόγω τῶν ἐθνικιστῶν καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀκραίων στοιχείων...

Ὁ κ. Ἐρντογάν ἔχει πλέον πεισθεῖ πὼς ἀπαιτεῖται μία θεαματικὴ πράξη ἐκ μέρους του, ὥστε νὰ δυνηθεῖ ὁ ἴδιος νὰ ἀλλάξει τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Τουρκίας στὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἐνωση. Καὶ ἡ θεαματικὴ αὐτὴ πράξη ἔχει νὰ κάνει μὲ τὴν ἐπαναλειτουργία τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Σοφίας, μὲ τὴν ἐπιστροφή τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας στοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους Χριστιανούς. Τὰ σημαντρα τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας θὰ ἀνοίξουν τὸ δρόμο γιὰ Ἄγκυρα καὶ Τέλ-Αβίβ καὶ θὰ σπᾶσουν τὸ γόρδιο δεσμὸ τῶν Εὐρωπαίων. Ἡ ἐπαναλειτουργία τοῦ ἱστορικοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας θὰ δώσει τὴ δυνατότητα στὴν Οὐάσιγκτον νὰ ἐνισχύσει τὶς πιέσεις πρὸς τὴν Ε.Ε. ἀλλὰ θὰ κλείσει καὶ τὰ στόματα τῶν Εὐρωπαίων.

Καὶ ὡς εἶναι φυσικὸ κάτι τέτοιο θὰ συνέβαλε ὥστε νὰ καμφθεῖ ἡ καχυποψία καὶ τῆς Ἀθήνας καὶ ἡ δυναμικὴ ποῦ θὰ δημιουργοῦσε ἡ κίνηση αὐτὴ θὰ βοηθοῦσε στὴν ἐπίλυση πολλῶν προβλημάτων καὶ θὰ εἶχε θετικὲς συνέπειες ἀκόμη καὶ στὴν ἐπίλυση τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ. Ἐπιπλέον ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία

καὶ οἱ Χριστιανικὲς ἀκολουθίες, οἱ προσευχὲς καὶ οἱ ὕμνοι στὸν Τριαδικὸ καὶ μόνον ἀληθινὸ Θεὸ μας θὰ μετέβαλαν τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη σὲ Χριστιανικὸ κέντρο παγκόσμιας ἀκτινοβολίας. Αὐτὸ θὰ ἐνίσχυε σημαντικὰ καὶ τὴν οἰκονομία τῆς γείτονος χώρας.

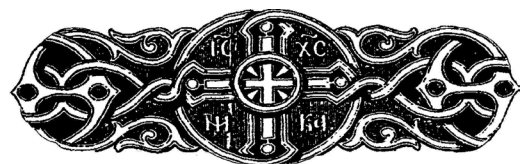
Πρὸς τὴν κατεύθυνση αὐτὴ καὶ σὲ μία προσπάθεια νὰ ἐνισχυθοῦν οἱ προσπάθειες τοῦ Τούρκου πρωθυπουργοῦ, ἡ Ἀθήνα θὰ πρέπει ἐδῶ καὶ τώρα νὰ θέσει ἐπὶ τάπητος τὸ ζήτημα τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας στὰ ἀρμόδια εὐρωπαϊκὰ ὄργανα.

Εἶναι βέβαιο μάλιστα πὼς τέτοια πρωτοβουλία ἀπὸ τὸν Τούρκο πρωθυπουργὸ θὰ ἀποτελοῦσε καὶ τὸ κίνητρο γιὰ νὰ δοξάσουν φανερὰ τὸν Τριαδικὸ μας Θεὸ τὰ ὀκτώ καὶ πλέον ἑκατομμύρια τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων κρυπτο-Χριστιανῶν τῶν Μικρασιατικῶν παραλίων καὶ τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου. Γιατί εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι ὁ φόβος καὶ ἡ τρομοκρατία τῶν ἀκραίων Τούρκων ἐθνικιστῶν ἀποτελοῦν τὴν αἰτία σὲ μεγάλο μέρος τῶν οἰκογενειῶν κυρίως τῶν Ἀλεβήδων νὰ ἀποκρύπτουν τὴν πραγματικὴ Ὁρθόδοξη Χριστιανικὴ πίστη τους.

Ὅταν λοιπὸν ὁ κ. Ἐρντογάν δημιουργήσει τὶς κατάλληλες προϋποθέσεις, ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ὄχι μόνον θὰ μποροῦν νὰ ἀσκοῦν ἐλεύθερα τὰ θρησκευτικὰ τους καθήκοντα, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἀποτελέσουν τὴ ζύμη γιὰ νὰ ἀνοίξει ἡ πύλη τῆς Εὐρώπης στὴν Τουρκία. Κάτι τέτοιο ἄλλωστε ἔγινε καὶ στὴ Μόσχα καὶ μετέβαλε οὐσιαστικὰ τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Ρωσίας σ' ὅλον τὸν πλανήτη.

Σὲ διαφορετικὴ περίπτωση, δηλαδὴ ἂν ὁ Ἐρντογάν δὲν προχωρήσει τάχιστα, τότε τὰ γεγονότα θὰ λάβουν τέτοια μορφή καὶ θὰ ἐξελίσσονται μὲ τέτοια ταχύτητα ποῦ ὅλοι θὰ τρίβουν τὰ μάτια τους. Γιατί ὅταν ὁ Παντοκράτωρ θέλει νὰ ἀνοίξει ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία τότε καμιά δύναμη δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν σταματήσῃ. Στὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ θὰ πρέπει νὰ ὑπενθυμίσουμε καὶ μία τουρκικὴ παροιμία ποῦ θέλει τὸν Ναὸ τῆς Σοφίας τοῦ Θεοῦ σκλαβωμένο γιὰ 555 χρόνια. Καὶ τὸ ἔτος ποῦ ἀναμένεται νὰ ἐπαληθευτεῖ ἡ παροιμία εἶναι τὸ 2008.

Δὲν εἶναι λοιπὸν τυχαῖο πὼς ἕνας ξενιτεμένος Ἑλληνοαμερικανός, ὁ Χρῆστος Σπύρου ἔχει ἀνοίξει ἐδῶ καὶ λίγα χρόνια τὸ ζήτημα τοῦ μεγάλου ναοῦ τῆς Βασιλεύουσας καὶ τρέφει ὁ ἴδιος βαθιὰ πίστη, πὼς ὁ ἀγώνας τοῦ σὺν Θεῷ θὰ ὀλοκληρωθεῖ τὸ ἐπόμενο ἔτος. Γιατί, ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία κτίσθηκε γιὰ νὰ ὑμνεῖτε ὁ Τριαδικὸς Θεός, ὁ Πατὴρ, ὁ Υἱὸς καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, κτίσθηκε γιὰ νὰ τελεῖται ἡ Θεῖα Εὐχαριστία, νὰ δοξολογεῖται ὁ Θεός. Καὶ δὲν κτίσθηκε γιὰ νὰ βεβηλώνεται ἀπὸ αἵρετικούς καὶ ἀλλόθρησκους...



Ἡ Δέσποινα ταραχτήκε καὶ δάκρυσαν οἱ εἰκόνες...
«Σώπασε κυρα-Δέσποινα, καὶ μὴ πολυδακρύξεις,
πάλλι μὲ χρόνους, μὲ καιρούς, πάλλι δικά μας θᾶνα».

Θέλω νὰ Μιλήσω Ἀπλὰ κι Ἀληθινὰ

Πρεσβυτέρου Σταύρου Τρικαλιώτη, Ἐφημερίου I. N. Αγίας Παρασκευῆς, Ἀττικῆς.

Ζοῦμε σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ παραλογισμοῦ, ὅπου οἱ λέξεις ἔχουν χάσει τὸ πραγματικὸ τους νόημα. Δὲν ὑπάρχει κοινὰ ἀποδεκτὸς κώδικας ἐπικοινωνίας. Ὁ καθένας λέει ὅ,τι θέλει, ὅπως τὸ θέλει. Παύσαμε νὰ ὁμιλοῦμε καθαρὰ καὶ ξάστερα, ὅπως λέει κι ὁ λαὸς μας. Ἄλλοτε ὁμιλοῦμε μὲ ὑπονοούμενα, ἄλλοτε διπλωματικά, ἄλλοτε συμφεροντολογικά, ἄλλοτε ἀποκρύπτουμε γεγονότα καὶ καταστάσεις.

Ἡ διγλωσσία—ἡ ὑποκριτικὴ δηλαδὴ ἔκφραση διαφορετικῶν ἀπόψεων ἀναλόγως πρὸς τὴν περίσταση—ἔγινε ἓνα ροῦχο ποῦ φοριέται πολὺ συχνὰ στὶς μέρες μας. Ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος θὰ μᾶς πεί ὅτι ὁ δίγλωσσος, ὅταν βρεθεῖ σὲ κάποια πολυπληθὴ συγκέντρωση, ἄλλα γεγονότα τὰ ἀναφέρει καὶ γιὰ ἄλλα σιωπᾶ, ἀνάλογα πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον του. Ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη μας προτρέπει: «*Ψίθυρον (αὐτὸν ποῦ κατακρίνει κρυφὰ καὶ σὲ στενὸ κύκλο) καὶ δίγλωσσον (διπρόσωπον) καταράσασθε, πολλοὺς γὰρ εἰρηνεύοντας ἀπώλεσαν.*» (Σοφία Σειράχ 28:13). Μία ἄλλη παρεμφερὴς πληγὴ στὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἐπικοινωνία εἶναι καὶ τὰ διαφορούμενα λόγια καὶ διατυπώσεις, οἱ διαφορετικὲς δηλαδὴ ἐκδοχὲς στὸν τρόπο κατανοήσεως μιᾶς λέξης. Ὅταν μάλιστα ἀφοροῦν θέματα δογματικά ἢ θέματα πίστεως, τότε ὁ κίνδυνος εἶναι ἐμφανής.

Εἶναι πολὺ σημαντικὰ ὅσα μᾶς λέει σχετικὰ ὁ πρύτανης τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν κ. Γεώργιος Μπαμπινιώτης: «Ἡ εἰλικρίνεια στὴ χρῆση καὶ ἔρμηνεία τῶν λέξεων εἶναι θέμα σεβασμοῦ τῶν ἀρχῶν τῆς ἐπικοινωνίας καὶ μαζί τῆς ἠθικῆς τῆς γλώσσας. Γιατὶ κάθε ἠθελημένη ἀλλοίωση τοῦ περιεχομένου τῶν λέξεων ποῦ χρησιμοποιεῖς ὁ ἴδιος ἢ κάθε παραποίηση τῆς σημασίας τῶν λέξεων ποῦ χρησιμοποιεῖς ὁ ἄλλος, ὀδηγοῦν σὲ στρέβλωση τῆς ἐπικοινωνίας καὶ νόθευση τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σχέσεων» (Τὸ Βῆμα, 14/4/2002).

Μερικὲς φορές κυριαρχεῖ στὶς σκέψεις μας ἓνας φτηνὸς λαϊκισμὸς εὐρείας καταναλώσεως. Ἄλλοτε παγιδευόμαστε στὴν στεῖρα κομματικὴ γραμμὴ καὶ γιατί ὄχι ἐκκλησιαστικὴ γραμμὴ—καλύτερα παραταξιακὴ—ποῦ ἔχει σχέση μὲ πρόσωπα καὶ ἰδιοτελεῖ συμφέροντα, ἢ ὅποια δυστυχῶς διχάζει καὶ δηλητηριάζει τὸ ποίμνιο, ποῦ συνθλίβει τὸ ἀνθρώπινο πρόσωπο, ποῦ τοῦ δίνει ἔτοιμα ἔρμηνευτικὰ ἐργαλεῖα. Ἄλλοτε χρησιμοποιοῦμε ἓνα λόγο ἀμφίσημο καὶ ἄλλοτε συνθηματικὸ. Δὲν μᾶς ἐνδιαφέρει τόσο νὰ πείσουμε τὸν ἄλλο μὲ λογικὰ ἐπιχειρήματα, ὅσο νὰ περάσουμε τὴ γραμμὴ μας, χρησιμοποιώντας δογματικά «κλισέ» καὶ φθινὴ προπαγάνδα.

Ἔτσι ὁμως χάνουμε τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς ἔκφρασης, τὴν χαρὰ τῆς πρωτοτυπίας. Γινόμαστε ἄνθρωποι καλοῦπια, «στρατιωτάκια ἀκούνητα, ἀμίλητα κι ἀγέλαστα», γιὰ νὰ θυμηθοῦμε ἓνα παιχνίδι ποῦ παίζαμε μικροί. Ἄν κάποιος τολμήσει νὰ ἀρθρώσει ἓνα λόγο ἀληθινό, ἐλεύθερο,

ἀπεγκλωβισμένο ἀπὸ νοσηρὲς νοοτροπίες καὶ σκοπιμότητες, ἅμα βγεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ «μανδρί», τὸν τρώει ὁ λύκος τῆς μοναξιάς, τῆς ἀπομόνωσης, τῆς περιθωροποίησης.

Κι ὁμως, ὅλοι μας θέλουμε οἱ ἄλλοι νὰ μᾶς ὁμιλοῦν τὴ γλώσσα τῆς ἀλήθειας· ὄχι νὰ ὑφιστάμεθα τὴν παραπλάνηση τῆς μισῆς ἀλήθειας, τῆς κομμένης καὶ ραμμένης κατὰ τὰ μέτρα καὶ σταθμὰ κάποιων ποῦ ἐπιδιώκουν τὸν ἔλεγχο τῆς κοινῆς γνώμης. Θέλουμε, μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, οἱ λέξεις ποῦ χρησιμοποιοῦμε νὰ ἔχουν ἓνα ἀντίκρουσμα, νὰ μὴν εἶναι λόγια τοῦ ἀέρα, κουβέντες ποῦ λέγονται σήμερα γιὰ λαϊκὴ κατανάληψη.

Ὁ Κύριός μας μᾶς συνέστησε νὰ μὴν ὀρκιζόμαστε καθόλου, ἀντιθέτως οἱ ἄλλοι ὀφείλουν νὰ μᾶς πιστεύουν μόνο μὲ τὴν ἀπλὴ διαβεβαίωση ἢ ἄρνησή μας: «*Ὁ λόγος σας ἄς εἶναι ναι ναι, ὄχι ὄχι. Τὸ ἐπιπλέον ἀπὸ αὐτὰ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν πονηρὸ*» (Ματθ 5:37). Ὁ ἴδιος δέχτηκε τὸν ὑπουλο πόλεμο τῶν ὑποκριτῶν Φαρισαίων, οἱ ὅποιοι τυφλωμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν φθόνον προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ τὸν παγιδεύσουν «ἐν λόγῳ». Ὁ λόγος τοὺς δηλαδὴ ὑπηρετοῦσε τοὺς σκοτεινοὺς σκοποὺς τοὺς. Ἐκεῖνος ὁμως ξεσκέπαζε τὴν ψευτιά τους καὶ τὰ δικολαβικά τους κατασκευάσματα. Συνήθως οἱ ψευτικοὶ λόγοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων δείχνουν μιὰ ἐσωτερικὴ φτώχεια, ἓναν εὐτελισμὸ τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσεως. Ὅχι σπάνια ὑποδηλώνουν καὶ μιὰ μετάθεση εὐθυνῶν, μιὰ ἐγωϊστικὴ καὶ ὠφελμιστικὴ ἀντίληψη γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ. Τὸ ψέμμα ἀρχίζει νὰ μπαίνει στὴ ζωὴ τῶν πρώτων ἀνθρώπων. Τὴν δηλητηριάζει ἤδη μὲ τὴν πτώση τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ τῆς Εὐᾶς. Εἰσηγητῆς καὶ πατέρας τοῦ ψεύδους εἶναι ὁ διάβολος, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε ἀνέκαθεν ὡς ἔργο του τὴ διαβολή, τὴ συκοφαντία.

Ἀντίθετα, ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι Πατέρας τῶν φώτων, τῆς ἀλήθειας. Ὁ Κύριός μας μᾶς ἔχει πεί: «*Γινώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς*» (Ἰωάν. 8:32). Ἡ ἀλήθεια παύει πλέον νὰ εἶναι ἀφηρημένη ἔννοια καὶ ἐνσαρκώνεται στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ ὁποῖος μᾶς εἶπε: «*Εγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ*» (Ἰωάν. 14:6). Ἐπομένως, ἂν θέλουμε νὰ γίνουμε ἀληθινοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ἄνθρωποι ἀτόφιοι καὶ φωτεινοί, πρέπει νὰ ἀγαπήσουμε τὸν Χριστὸ μὲ ὅλη μας τὴν καρδιά καὶ νὰ τοῦ ἐπιτρέψουμε νὰ φωτίσει εὐεργετικά τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ μας σκοτάδι.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀγαποῦν τὸ σκοτάδι, τὸ ψέμμα καὶ τὴν ὑποκρισία, ὅταν τὰ ἔργα τους εἶναι πονηρὰ καὶ σκοτεινά. Τότε μηχανεύονται ἐναντίον τοῦ διπλανοῦ τοὺς συκοφαντίες καὶ κατηγορίες. Δὲν ἀντέχουν τὸ Φῶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ γιὰ νὰ μὴν γίνουν φανερὰ τὰ ἔργα τους.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁμως τῆς ἀλήθειας πλησιάζει τὸν Χριστὸ (Ἐφεσ. 3:20-21), «καθαρίζεται ἐσωτερικά καὶ γίνεται δεκτικὸς τοῦ πνευματικοῦ φωτός, τὸ ὁποῖο καταφωτίζει τὸ νοῦ του, ὥστε νὰ κατανοεῖ πράγματα ποῦ ὑπερβαίνουν τὶς αἰσθήσεις του» (Ἅγιος Μάξιμος Ὁμολογητής). Μόνο τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μπορεῖ νὰ ὀδηγήσει τὸν ἄνθρωπο «*εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν*» (Ἰωάν 16:13).

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας καλεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο σὲ ἓνα

ειλικρινή διάλογο με τον έαυτό του. Σε μιιά όδυνηρή μά και συνάμα σωτήρια συνάντηση με τον παλαιό άνθρωπο που κρύβουμε μέσα μας, τον άνθρωπο της άμαρτίας και της φθοράς. Μας καλεϊ να βγάλουμε από πάνω μας σαν ένα βρώμικο ρούχο την ψευτιά και την ύποκρισία και να πλησιάσουμε τον διπλανό μας με αγάπη, σεβασμό και άνιδιοτέλεια.

Ό άνθρωπος που θά θελήσει να αποκαταστήσει γνήσιες ανθρώπινες σχέσεις και συνάμα να είναι αναπαυμένος με τη συνειδησή του θά τó επιτύχει μόνο διά του Μυστηρίου της Ίερως Έξομολογήσεως. Κατ' αυτήν τó Άγιον Πνεύμα «άναμορφώνει την ψυχή ή όποία έφθάρη από την άμαρτία και την κάνει άφθαρτη και μεταβάλλει σε μιιά καινούργια ζωή ό,τι πάλιωσε από ραθυμία και έφθασε στον άφανισμό» (Άγιος Κύριλλος Άλεξανδρείας).

Ό Μακρυγιάννης έλεγε με πόνο: «Άλήθεια, αλήθεια, πικριά όπου είσαι». Και πράγματι, ή αλήθεια όταν λέγεται είναι πικρή. Μοιάζει σαν τó νυστέρι του χειρουργού που μπαίνει βαθιά μες στο κόκκαλο για να καθαρίσει την πληγή. Η αλήθεια όμως πρέπει να λέγεται όποιοδήποτε κόστος κι άν έχει. Η απόκρυψη της αλήθειας, όσο περίτεχνα κι άν γίνεται, στρέφεται τελικά έναντίον του ίδιου μας του έαυτού. Οί άρχαίοι έλεγαν: «Άληθείας έχου», δηλαδή να είσαι προσηλωμένος στην αλήθεια και ό Πυθαγόρας τόνιζε: «Τό να κρύβεις την αλήθεια είναι σαν να θάβεις χρυσάφι».

Η αλήθεια είναι τόσο πολύτιμη που δέν μπορούμε να τή θυσιάσουμε και να τή θάβουμε χάριν των όποιοδήποτε σκοπιμοτήτων, έστω και χάριν της όμονοιας. «Μή προτίμα την όμόνοιαν της αληθείας» τονίζει ό ιερός Χρυσόστομος (Ε.Π.Ε. 17, 492). Ούτε και γι' αυτήν άκόμα την αγάπη—την μητέρα και τό θεμέλιο όλων των αγαθών—δέν πρέπει να αποκρύβουμε την αλήθεια. Άλλωστε χαρακτηριστικό της αγάπης προς τον πλησίον κατά τον Μέγα Βασίλειο είναι «να μήν έπιζητούμε τό δικό μας συμφέρον, αλλά όσα είναι συμφέροντα για τήν ψυχή και τό σώμα αυτού που αγαπούμε» (Ρ.Γ. 31, 771BC).

Όλέθριο ρόλο στην απόκρυψη της αλήθειας παίζουν και οί παντός είδους κόλακες, που άφθονούν στις μέρες μας και με τέχνη αποκρύπτουν την αλήθεια «προς ίδιον όφελος». Γι' αυτό και ό Ίσοκράτης κάνει την διαχρονική υπενθύμιση: «Μίσει τους κολακεύοντας όσπερ τους εξαπατώντας: άμφοτεροι γάρ πιστευθέντες τους πιστεύσαντας άδικοΰσιν» (Πρός Δημόνικον, 30, 1-3). Δέν μπορεί να ύπάρξει πρόοδος στην έπιστήμη, όταν αποκρύπτεται ή έπιστημονική αλήθεια. Δέν μπορούν να οίκοδομηθούν σωστές διαπροσωπικές σχέσεις, όταν δέν θεμελιώνονται στην αλήθεια και την άμοιβαία έμπιστοσύνη.

Ό άνθρωπος της έποχής μας έχει χάσει την έμπιστοσύνη του στον συνάνθρωπό του. Παντού κυριαρχεί ή καχυποψία. Τό ψεύδος θριαμβεύει. Στις διαφημίσεις, στην έννημέρωση (καλύτερα γράψε: έμμιση συσκότιση), στην πολιτική, στις

κάθε είδους συναλλαγές. Κανένας δέν είναι σίγουρος για κανένα. Η ζωή μας κατάντησε δύσκολη ή καλύτερα την καταντήσαμε δύσκολη, άνυπόφορη, άβέβαιη. Ό διπλανός μας έγινε ή κόλασή μας, άντι να άποτελει πηγή χαράς και παρηγοριάς. Φτάσαμε στο άκρον άωτον της ύποκρισίας, ώστε τα λεγόμενα ισχυρά Χριστιανικά κράτη να βαπτίζουν ξεδιάντροπα τον πιό φρικτό πόλεμο και τα πιό άνηλεή βασανιστήρια αντίσταση κατά της διεθνούς τρομοκρατίας κι άς κρύβονται από πίσω τα συμφέροντα των σωτήρων του πλανήτη.

Πότε επιτέλους θά μάθουμε να μιλούμε τη γλώσσα της αλήθειας, τη γλώσσα των παιδιών που περιμένουν από μας έναν καλύτερο κόσμο; Ό Γιώργος Σεφέρης έγραφε: «Δέ θέλω τίποτε άλλο παρά να μιλήσω άπλά, να μου δοθει έτούτη ή χάρη». Έγώ θά πρόσθετα «άπλά κι άληθινά και έν Χριστώ». Διότι ό Χριστός είναι ή μόνη Άλήθεια, ή Αύτοαλήθεια.

Θά κλείσω με τα λόγια του μακαριστού Γέροντα Ίουστίνου Πόποβιτς, ό όποιος διετράνωνε: «Η ζωή άνευ του Χριστού, ό θάνατος άνευ του Χριστού, ή αλήθεια άνευ του Χριστού, ό ήλιος άνευ του Χριστού και τα σύμπαντα χωρίς Αύτόν, όλα είναι τρομερά άνοησία, άνυπόφορον μαρτύριον, σισύφειον βάσανον, κόλασις! Δέν θέλω ούτε την ζωήν, ούτε τον θάνατον άνευ Σου, Γλυκύτατε Κύριε! Δέν θέλω ούτε την αλήθειαν, ούτε την δικαιοσύνην, ούτε τον Παράδεισον, ούτε την αιωνιότητα. Όχι, Όχι! Έσένα μόνον θέλω, Έσύ μόνον να είσαι εις όλα, έν πάσι, και υπεράνω όλων!... Η αλήθεια, εάν δέν είναι ό Χριστός, δέν μου χρειάζεται, είναι μόνον μιιά κόλασις». (Άνθρωπος και Θεάνθρωπος, έκδ. Άστήρ, σελ. 183-184, Άθήναι 1981).



Ό έχων ώπα άκούειν άκουέτω (Λουκ. 8:8)

Είναι δυσκολοκυβέρνητος και γι' αυτό πρέπει να τον συνετισθει. Έννοώ, δηλαδή, να πλήξουμε τη γλώσσα, τη θρησκεία, τα πνευματικά και ιστορικά του άποθέματα, ώστε να έξουδετερώσουμε κάθε δυνατότητά του να άναπτυχθει, να διακριθει, να επικρατήσει. Για να μη μας παρενοχλεί στα Βαλκάνια, να μη μας παρενοχλεί στην Άνατολική Μεσόγειο, στη Μέση Άνατολή, σε όλη αυτή τη νευραλγική περιοχή μεγάλης στρατηγικής σημασίας για μας, για την πολιτική μας.

Άήλωση Χένρι Κίσιγκερ για τον Έλληνικό Λαό
(Σεπτέμβριος 1994)

«Καὶ στὰ Δικά μας!!!...»

Ὁ Συμβολισμὸς τῆς Νεκρώσιμης Ἀκολουθίας καὶ ἡ Πορεία τῆς Ψυχῆς μετὰ τὸν Θάνατο, ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Λεμεσοῦ, Κύπρου.

Αὕτη τὴν εὐχή θ' ἀκούσει κανεὶς ὄχι μόνον σ' ἓνα γάμο, ἀλλά... καὶ σὲ μία κηδεία. Σὲ κηδεία; Βεβαίως. Ἴσως ἤδη κάποιοι ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀναγνώστες, οἱ ὁποῖοι εἶχαν κάποια στιγμή στὴ ζωὴ τους τὴν εὐλογία νὰ ἐπισκεφθοῦν τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, νὰ ἔχουν ἀκούσει μοναχοὺς νὰ εὐχονται ὁ ἓνας στὸν ἄλλον «καὶ στὰ δικά σου», μετὰ τὴν τελετὴ τῆς νεκρώσιμης ἀκολουθίας κάποιου ἀδελφοῦ τους.

Κι ἐμεῖς; Τί σκεφτόμαστε; Τί πιστεύουμε; Πῶς ἀντιμετωπίζουμε τὸν θάνατο; Φοβόμαστε; Λυπόμαστε; Κι ὅταν ὁ Κύριος καλέσει κοντὰ Του κάποιο ἀπὸ τὰ ἀγαπημένα μας πρόσωπα, ἐμεῖς πῶς ἀντιδράμε; Καὶ μὲ ποιὸν τρόπο φροντίζει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους ἀδελφούς μας;

Μὲ τὴ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία, τὰ μνημόσυνα καὶ τὶς εὐχὲς ὑπὲρ τῶν κεκοιμημένων, μεριμνᾷ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας γιὰ ὅλους ἐμᾶς μετὰ τὴν ἐξοδὸ μας ἀπ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμο. Ἐνῶ ἐμεῖς, πλημμυρισμένοι ἀπὸ θλίψη, προσφέρουμε στοὺς νεκροὺς ἀδελφούς μας τὶς τελευταῖες φροντίδες πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν ἐνταφιασμό τους. Φροντίδες στενὰ συνδεδεμένες μὲ τὶς ψυχικὲς μας ἀνάγκες οἱ ὁποῖες φανερώνουν μία μακρὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ παράδοση, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν σεβασμὸ, τὴν τιμὴ πρὸς τὴν ἱερότητα τοῦ σώματος, τὸ ὁποῖο ὑπῆρξε ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Ἡ ἄλειψη τοῦ νεκροῦ σώματος μὲ ἀρώματα καὶ ἡ ἐνδυσή του μὲ καθαρὰ, περιποιημένα ρούχα, φανερώνουν τὴν ἀνάγκη τῶν ἀνθρώπων νὰ δεῖξουν στοργὴ πρὸς τοὺς νεκρούς, ἀνακουφίζοντας τὸν πόνο τους καὶ κατευνάζοντας πιθανὲς τύψεις τους γιὰ μὴ σωστὴ φροντίδα καὶ ἐκδήλωση ἀγάπης, ὅταν ἐκεῖνοι βρίσκονταν ἀκόμη στὴ ζωὴ. Γιὰ ὅλες αὐτὲς τὶς φροντίδες μιλοῦν συχνὰ οἱ Πατέρες, πράγμα πὸ δείχνει πῶς τὶς ἐγκρίνουν καὶ δὲν τὶς ἀποδοκιμᾶζουν.

Ὁ ἱστορικὸς Εὐσέβιος, γράφει πῶς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ἐπαιρναν τὰ σώματα τῶν νεκρῶν στὰ χέρια τους, τὰ ἀγκάλιαζαν, τοὺς ἔκλειναν τὰ μάτια καὶ τὸ στόμα καὶ τὰ μετέφεραν στοὺς ὄμους γιὰ νὰ τὰ πλύνουν καὶ νὰ τὰ ντύσουν, ἀκόμη κι ἂν εἶχαν πεθάνει ἀπὸ λοιμὸ. Ἀντίθετα, οἱ εἰδωολάτρες, μόλις ἔβλεπαν κάποιον νὰ μολύνεται ἀπὸ μία τέτοια ἀσθένεια, τὸν ἀπέφευγαν, τὸν ἐγκατέλειπαν, ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ δικοὶ του ἄνθρωποι. Στὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ τονίσουμε πῶς ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας υἰοθέτησε τὴ φροντίδα τῶν νεκρῶν, ὄχι μόνον ἐπειδὴ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τιμᾷ τὸ σῶμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπειδὴ τὸ Ἅγιο Σῶμα τοῦ Κυρίου δέχτηκε φροντίδα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐνταφιαστές Του, τὸν Ἰωσήφ καὶ τὸν Νικόδημο.

Ἡ Νεκρώσιμος Ἀκολουθία

Τὰ κεντρικότερα σημεῖα τῆς νεκρώσιμης ἀκολουθίας σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ τυπικὸ πὸ ἀκολουθεῖται στὶς μέρες μας ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, συναντῶνται ἤδη ἀπὸ τὸν 5ο αἰῶνα.

Μὲ τὸ πέρασμα τῶν χρόνων, ἡ ἀκολουθία συμπληρώθηκε μὲ ψαλμικοὺς στίχους, ὕμνους καὶ τροπάρια καὶ ἀποτελεῖ σήμερα τὴν πλουσιότερη καὶ δραματικότερη ἀκολουθία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Ἡ ἀκολουθία τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης κηδείας ἐπιτυγχάνει: α) νὰ χρησιμοποιήσει τὴν εὐκαιρία τοῦ θανάτου γιὰ νὰ βοηθήσει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἀναπτύξει μία βαθύτερη κατανόηση τοῦ νοήματος καὶ τῆς προοπτικῆς τῆς ζωῆς, β) νὰ βοηθήσει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει τὰ συναισθήματά του γιὰ τὸν θάνατο, γ) νὰ ὑπογραμμίσει τὸ γεγονὸς ὅ,τι ὁ θάνατος γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ δὲν εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα ὅπως γιὰ ἐκείνους πὸ δὲν ἔχουν ἐλπίδα, δ) νὰ ἀναγνωρίζει τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τῶν συναισθημάτων θλίψεως, πὸ ὁ χωρισμὸς ἀπὸ ἓνα προσφιλὲς πρόσωπο δημιουργεῖ καὶ νὰ ἐνθαρρύνει τὴν ἔκφρασή τους.

Στὰ ἀναγνώσματα καὶ στὰ τροπάρια τῆς ἀκολουθίας αὐτῆς, τονίζεται ἔντονα τὸ μάταιο καὶ προσωρινὸ τῆς γήινης ζωῆς, ἐνῶ ἀντίθετα ἐξυμνεῖται ἡ ἀξία τῶν ἐπουρανίων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἡ τρυφή τοῦ παραδείσου. Ταυτόχρονα, ὅλοι ὅσοι συμμετέχουν στὴν ἀκολουθία, προσεύχονται καὶ ζητοῦν ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ νὰ ἐπιδείξει ἔλεος καὶ νὰ δώσει ἄφεση ἁμαρτιῶν στὸν κεκοιμηθέντα. Γιὰ συγχώρηση καὶ ἀνάπαυση ψυχῆς, πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν τέλεση τῆς νεκρώσιμης ἀκολουθίας, τελεῖται καὶ ἡ «Ἀκολουθία τοῦ Τρισαγίου», στὸν τόπο ὅπου βρίσκεται ἡ σορὸς τοῦ νεκροῦ.

Ἡ νεκρώσιμος ἀκολουθία, ἡ ὁποία τελεῖται γιὰ τοὺς λαϊκοὺς—ἄντρες καὶ γυναῖκες—εἶναι διαφορετικὴ ἀπ' αὐτὴ πὸ τελεῖται γιὰ τοὺς μοναχοὺς, τοὺς ἱερεῖς καὶ τὰ μικρὰ παιδιά. Ἡ εἰδικὴ ἀκολουθία πὸ πραγματοποιεῖται γιὰ τοὺς τελευταίους αἰτιάται στὶς ἠθικὲς διαφορὲς οἱ ὁποῖες χαρακτηρίζουν τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ καθενός. Διαφορετικὰ ἔζησε ὁ μοναχός, ἀλλιῶς ἔζησε ὁ ἱερέας καὶ ἀλλιῶς ἓνας πιστὸς καθημερινὰ μέσα στὴν κοινωνία.

Ἐπίσης, πρέπει νὰ ἀναφέρουμε πῶς ἡ ἀκολουθία τῆς κηδείας δὲν πραγματοποιεῖται κατὰ τὴν ἑβδομάδα τῆς Διακαινησίμου καὶ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς ἀποδόσεως τῆς Ἑορτῆς τοῦ Πάσχα. Αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες, ἐπειδὴ ἡ Ἐκκλησία πανηγυρίζει τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου, τελεῖται ἀντὶ τῆς Νεκρώσιμης ἀκολουθίας, ἡ Ἀναστάσιμη ἀκολουθία ἢ ἡ «Ἐπικήδειος Ἀκολουθία ἐν τῇ Διακαινησίμῳ Ἑβδομάδι».

Ἡ Σωτηρία τῆς Ψυχῆς...

... εἶναι πολὺ μεγάλο πράγμα! Πῶς ζεῖ ὁμως αὐτὴ μετὰ τὸν χωρισμὸ τῆς ἀπὸ τὸ φθαρτὸ σῶμα;

Μετὰ τὸν θάνατο, ἄγγελοι συνοδεύουν τὶς ψυχές, δικαίων καὶ ἀδίκων. Ἡ διαφορὰ ἐγκεῖται στὸ ὅ,τι οἱ ἀγαθὲς ψυχές, πὸ βρίσκονται ἐν μετανοίᾳ, περικυκλώνονται ἀπὸ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ φωτεινοὺς ἀγγέλους, ἐνῶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλὲς ἀπὸ πονηροὺς καὶ σκοτεινοὺς, δηλαδὴ τοὺς δαίμονες.

Τὰ «τελώνια» ὡστόσο, τὰ πονηρὰ πνεύματα δηλαδὴ, ὅπως ἐπισημαίνει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος, «διεκδικοῦν» ὅλες τὶς ψυχές. Χαίρονται δὲ γιὰ ὅσες ψυχές δὲν καταφέρνουν ν' ἀνέβουν πρὸς τὰ πάνω καὶ μένουν στὸ ἴδιο μέρος μαζί

μέ τις δυνάμεις τοῦ σκότους. Ὅργίζονται ἀντίθετα γιά τις ψυχές τῶν δικαίων, τις ὁποῖες παραλαμβάνουν πνεύματα ἅγια «εἰς τὸν καθαρὸν αἰῶνα».

Κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς διάβασης αὐτῆς τῶν ψυχῶν ἀπὸ τὸν παρόντα κόσμον στὴ μετὰ θάνατον ζωὴ, ὅπως διδάσκει ὁ Ἱερὸς Κύριλλος πατριάρχης Ἀλεξανδρείας, τὰ τελῶνια παραφυλάνε καὶ κατηγοροῦν τις ψυχές. Ἀναφέρει ἀρχικὰ πέντε τελῶνια (ὅσα καὶ οἱ αἰσθήσεις) τὰ ὁποῖα παραθέτουν στὶς ψυχές γιά τις μισητὲς πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ πράξεις τοῦς (ἁμαρτήματα φθόνου, ζήλειας, ὑπερηφάνειας, ὀργῆς).

Παράλληλα ὁμως μὲ τὴ δράση τῶν πνευμάτων τοῦ σκότους, οἱ ἅγιοι ἄγγελοι τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν ἐγκαταλείπουν τις ψυχές. Κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τοῦ τελωνισμοῦ προσφέρουν καὶ καταμετροῦν τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἔργα ποῦ διέπραξε ἡ κάθε μία ψυχὴ ξεχωριστά.

Ἐὰν ἡ ψυχὴ βρεθεῖ ὅ,τι ἔζησε «εὐσεβῶς καὶ θεαρέστως», παραλαμβάνεται ἀπὸ τοῦς ἄγγελους καὶ ὀδηγεῖται στὴ χαρὰ τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς. Ἐὰν ὁμως, βρεθεῖ ὅ,τι ἔζησε «ἐν ἀμελείᾳ καὶ ἄσωτιᾳ», ὀδηγεῖται, ἀπὸ τοῦς δαίμονες, στὶς φυλακὲς τοῦ Ἄδη.

Ἡ Ψυχὴ Συνεχίζει Νὰ Ζεῖ

Μετὰ τὸν θάνατο καὶ τὸ χωρισμὸ τῆς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ἡ ψυχὴ συνεχίζει νὰ ζεῖ, νὰ ὑπάρχει, νὰ ἔχει συνείδηση. Ἔχει τὴν ἴδια ὑπόσταση καὶ ὑπαρξή. Αὐτὸ ἄλλωστε βεβαίωσε καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κύριος τοὺς μαθητὲς του, μὴ φοβηθεῖτε ἀπὸ ἐκείνους, οἱ ὁποῖοι θανατώνουν τὸ σῶμα, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔχουν τὴ δύναμη νὰ θανατώσουν καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ (Ματθ. 10:28).

Ἡ ψυχὴ μετὰ τὸν χωρισμὸ τῆς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, βρίσκεται σὲ μία προσωρινὴ κατάσταση ἀναμονῆς καὶ προσμονῆς μέχρι τῆς μεγάλης, ἐνδόξου, φοβερᾶς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας τοῦ Κυρίου. Στὴν κατάσταση αὐτὴ θὰ παραμείνει ἡ ψυχὴ ἕως ὅτου γίνῃ ἡ τελικὴ καὶ γενικὴ κρίση τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ τὸν Σωτῆρα Χριστό. Τὴν κατάσταση αὐτὴ οἱ θεοφόροι Πατέρες τὴν ὀνόμασαν Μέση κατάσταση ἐπειδὴ ἡ ψυχὴ δὲν λαμβάνει τὴν τελεία καὶ πλήρη ἀνταπόδοση οὔτε τῆς ἀρετῆς οὔτε τῆς κακίας. Παραμένει σ' ἓναν «τόπο», τὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει νὰ φανταστοῦμε μὲ πνευματικὴ κι ὄχι ὑλικὴ ἔννοια. Ἡ ψυχὴ, ὅπως γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνός, ἐκεῖ ὅπου βρίσκεται καὶ ἐνεργεῖ δὲν περιέχεται μὲ σωματικὸ ἀλλὰ μὲ νοητὸ τρόπο διότι δὲν ἔχει «σχῆμα» ὥστε νὰ περιληφθεῖ σὲ σωματικὰ ὄρια.

Λέγεται πὼς ἡ ψυχὴ μπορεῖ νὰ βρίσκεται ἐδῶ, ἐκεῖ ἢ ἄλλοῦ, πὼς μπορεῖ νὰ πλανᾶται ἀκόμη καὶ στὴ γῆ. Κάτι τέτοιο ὁμως, δὲν ἰσχύει ἀφοῦ μόνον ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ ἐνεργεῖ παντοῦ καὶ μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο καὶ ἀνὰ πάσα στιγμή, ὡς «πανταχοῦ παρὼν καὶ τὰ πάντα πληρῶν». Οἱ ἄγγελοί του, ὡς ἅλλα πνεύματα, ἀπλῶς ἐνεργοῦν ταχύτατα καὶ κινοῦνται γρήγορα ἀπὸ τόπο σὲ τόπο, μὲ ἐτοιμότητα καὶ μεγάλη εὐκολία. Κάτι παρόμοιο πρέπει νὰ σκεφτοῦμε καὶ γιά τὴν ψυχὴ.

Σ' αὐτὸ τὸν «τόπο» οἱ ψυχές προγεύονται, ἐν ἀναμονῇ ὅπως εἶπαμε, τῆς μακαριότητος τοῦ Παραδείσου ἢ τῶν

τιμωριῶν τῆς Γεέννης. Ἡ ὀριστικὴ ἀνταπόδοση θὰ τοῦς δοθεῖ κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς καθολικῆς κρίσεως.

Συμβολισμοὶ τῶν Τελευταίων Φροντίδων

Στὶς τελευταῖες φροντίδες καὶ γενικῶς τὴν περιστολὴ τοῦ νεκροῦ δίνονται συχνὰ σημαντικοὶ συμβολισμοί.

Τὸ σταύρωμα τῶν χειρῶν τοῦ νεκροῦ ἐπάνω στὸ στήθος, συμβολίζει τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ ζωηφόρου Σταυροῦ.

Τὸ λευκὸ σάβανο καὶ τὰ καινούρια ροῦχα, συμβολίζουν «τὸ καινὸν ἔνδυμα τῆς ἀφθαρσίας», μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο περιβάλλεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, καθὼς εἰσέρχεται πλέον στὴν αἰωνιότητα.

Ἡ σορὸς στρέφεται πρὸς τὴν ἀνατολή. Ἡ στροφή αὐτὴ γίνετα μιμούμενη τὴν στροφή μας πρὸς τὴν ἀνατολὴ κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς. Στρεφόμεστε, λέγει, ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης, πρὸς τὴν ἀνατολή, ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα μας. Ἡ στροφή αὐτὴ φέρνει στὴ μνήμη μας τὴ φυγὴ ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο, τὸν ὁποῖο προσδοκοῦμε ν' ἀπολαύσουμε καὶ πάλι.

Γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ φέρετρο τοῦ νεκροῦ ἀνάβουμε λαμπάδες ἐπειδὴ, ὅπως λέει ὁ Ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, μ' αὐτὴ τὴ κίνηση δηλώνουμε ὅ,τι παραδίδουμε τοῦς νεκροὺς μας εἰς τὴν Ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ ὡς ἀθλητὲς. Οἱ ἀναμμένες λαμπάδες συμβολίζουν ἀκόμη τὴν πορεία τοῦ μεταστάντος ἀδελφοῦ μας ἀπὸ τὴ σκοτεινὴ ἐτούτῃ ζωὴ πρὸς τὸ ἀληθινὸ φῶς τῆς αἰωνιότητος.

«Αἰωνία ἡ Μνήμη...»

Ὁ ἐπίγειος θάνατος, ὁ χωρισμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, δὲν καταστρέφει τὴν σχέση τοῦ πιστοῦ μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, δὲν ἀπομακρύνει αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τὸν οἰκεῖο του χῶρο καὶ τὴν οἰκεία του κατάσταση, δὲν χωρίζει αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τὰ ἄλλα ἐν Χριστῷ συμέλη του. Ἄλλωστε, ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι αἰώνια, ὅπως καὶ οἱ ψυχές, ὅπως καὶ ὁ Θεός. Ὁ Θεὸς ποῦ εἶναι ἡ πηγὴ τῆς ἀγάπης.

Οἱ κεκοιμημένοι ἀδελφοί μας, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀνήκουν στὴν θριαμβεύουσα Ἐκκλησία, εὐχονται γιά ὅλους ἐμᾶς πρὸς τὸν Κύριο. Γιά τοῦς ζωντανούς ποῦ ἀγωνίζονται στὴ γῆ καὶ ἀνήκουν στὴ στρατευομένη Ἐκκλησία. Καὶ οἱ πιστοὶ ὁμως, ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ προσεύχονται καὶ παρακαλοῦν τὸν μεγάλο Κριτὴ γιά ἀνάπαυση τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἀδελφῶν τους.

Τὰ ἱερὰ μνημόσυνα ἔχουν νομοθετηθεῖ ἀπὸ τοῦς ἁγίους Ἀποστόλους. Οἱ μαθητὲς τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι ποῦ θέσπισαν νὰ θυμόμαστε τοῦς νεκροὺς «ἐπὶ τῶν φρικτῶν καὶ ἀχράντων καὶ ζωοποιῶν μυστηρίων». Τὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μνημόσυνον εἶναι ἡ μνημόνευση ἀπὸ τὸν ἱερέα τῶν κεκοιμημένων κατὰ τὴ Θεῖα Λειτουργία, ἀμέσως μετὰ τὸν καθαγιασμὸ τῶν Τιμίων Δώρων. Λανθασμένα, ἐπομένως, νομίζουμε πὼς μνημόσυνον εἶναι ἡ σύντομη Ἀκολουθία ποῦ τελεῖται μετὰ τὴ Θεῖα Λειτουργία.

Ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, ὑποστηρίζει πὼς οἱ εὐχές ὑπὲρ τῶν κεκοιμημένων προσφέρουν σ' αὐτοὺς «τινὰ παραμυθίαν» κάποια παρηγοριὰ δηλαδὴ. Οἱ ἅγιοι Ἀπόστολοι γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο τὰ νομοθέτησαν, ἐπειδὴ γνώριζαν ὅ,τι γίνετα στοῦς

ἀπελθόντας ἀδελφούς «πολύ κέρδος», «πολλή ὠφέλεια». Δὲν μποροῦμε, παρ' ὅλα αὐτά, νὰ ξέρομε μέχρι τίνος βαθμοῦ καὶ ποιά ἰσχὺ ἔχει ἡ ὠφέλεια αὐτὴ στὶς ψυχές. Πάντως, ἐπεξηγεῖ ὁ Π. Ν. Τρεμπέλας, ἀποκλείεται «μεταπήδηση» τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τὴν κατάστασι τῆς πονηρίας καὶ ἀθλιότητος στὴν κατάστασι τῆς ἀγιότητος καὶ μακαριότητος.

Κάθε ἓνας ὁμως, ἀπὸ τοὺς ζῶντες, ὁ ὁποῖος προσεύχεται γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ ἄλλου, ὠφελεῖ πρῶτα τὸν ἑαυτὸ του καὶ ὕστερα τὸν πλησίον του, λέγει ὁ Ἱερὸς Δαμασκηνός. Διότι δὲν εἶναι ἄδικος ὁ Θεός, ὥστε νὰ λησμονεῖ τὴν ὅλη Χριστιανικὴ διαγωγή μας καὶ τὸν κόπο τῆς ἀγάπης, ὅταν ὑπηρετοῦμε διὰ τὸ ὄνομά του τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας (Εβρ. 6:10). Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας καὶ ἡ μακρὰ παράδοσίς της, ἔχει θεσπίσει νὰ τελοῦνται τὰ ἱερὰ Μνημόσυνα, τὴν τρίτη ἡμέρα μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ προσφιλοῦ μας προσώπου, τὴν ἑννάτη ἡμέρα (ἐννιάμερα), τὴν τεσσαρακοστὴ ἡμέρα, καὶ στὸ ἓνα ἔτος.

Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὶς παραπάνω τακτὲς ἡμέρες, ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὄρισε καὶ τὸ Σάββατο ὡς ἡμέρα μνήμης τῶν Ἁγίων Μαρτύρων καὶ ὄλων τῶν κεκοιμημένων. Τὸ Σάββατο, ὡς ἑβδομη ἡμέρα τῆς δημιουργίας, εἶναι ἡ ἡμέρα πού ὁ σωματικὸς θάνατος ἐπιβλήθηκε στὸν ἄνθρωπο ὡς ποινὴ γιὰ τὴν παρακοή του. Ἐνῶ ἡ Κυριακὴ εἶναι «ἡ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ἡμέρα», ἡ ἡμέρα πού συμβολίζει τὴν ἀναμενόμενη αἰώνια βασιλεία καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασι τῶν νεκρῶν. Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες, ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὄρισε καὶ κοινὰ μνημόσυνα δυὸ φορὲς τὸ ἔτος. Τὸ πρῶτος τελεῖται τὸ Σάββατο πρὶν τὴν Κυριακὴ τῶν Ἀπόκρεω καὶ τὸ δεύτερο, τὸ Σάββατο πρὶν τὴν Πεντηκοστή.

Τὸ Σάββατο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν Κυριακὴ τῶν Ἀπόκρεω, ἡ Ἐκκλησία τελεῖ μνημόσυνο γιὰ ὄλους τοὺς κεκοιμηθέντες. Μὲ τὸ κοινὸ αὐτὸ μνημόσυνο δίνεται ἡ εὐκαιρία νὰ προσευχηθοῦμε ὑπὲρ ὄλων ἐκείνων τοὺς ὁποῖους «ἐκάλυψε τάφος ἐν πάσῃ χώρα». Ὑπὲρ ὄλων ἐκείνων πού πέθαναν σὲ ξένη χώρα μακριὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς συγγενεῖς τους, στὴ θάλασσα, στὸν πόλεμο ἢ σὲ θεομηνία. Τὸ Ψυχοσάββατο αὐτὸ ἔχει ὁμως, καὶ δεύτερο λόγο ὑπαρξῆς. Τὴν ἐπόμενη μέρα, τὴν Κυριακὴ τῶν Ἀπόκρεω, ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας ὑπενθυμίζει τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία τοῦ Κυρίου. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο τὸ Σάββατο παρακαλοῦμε τὸν Κύριο νὰ δεῖξει ἔλεος ὄχι μόνο σ' ἐμᾶς ἀλλὰ καὶ στοὺς προαπελθόντας ἀδελφούς μας, κατὰ τὴν ἑνδοξὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία Του.

Τὸ δεύτερο κοινὸ μνημόσυνο, τελεῖται ἐννέα ἡμέρες μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψη τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ, δηλαδὴ τὸ Σάββατο πρὸ τῆς Ἁγίας Πεντηκοστῆς. Κατὰ τὸ Ψυχοσάββατο αὐτὸ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μνημονεῖ ὄχι μόνο ὑπὲρ τῶν Χριστιανῶν, διότι ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Χριστοῦ «δὲν ὑπῆρχαν» Χριστιανοί. Μνημονεῖ ὑπὲρ ὄλων, ὅσοι κοιμήθηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς πρωτόπλαστους μέχρι σήμερα καὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι μετὰ τὴν καθαρότητα καὶ ἀγνότητα τῆς ζωῆς τους, λάτρεψαν τὸ Χριστὸ.

Κατὰ τὰ ἱερὰ μνημόσυνα, προσφέρονται καὶ κόλλυβα.

Ἡ συνήθεια αὐτὴ συναντᾶται ἀπὸ τὰ μέσα τοῦ Δ' αἰώνα. Παλαιότερα μοιράζονταν ἄρτος καὶ οἶνος μετὰ ἐλιές ἢ τυρὶ ἢ ρύζι. Ἡ προσφορὰ αὐτὴ εἶχε θέση ἐλεημοσύνης, καὶ ὅσοι ἔπαιρναν ἀπὸ αὐτά, εὐχονταν τὸ «μακαρία ἡ μνήμη αὐτοῦ». Στὶς μέρες μας, ὡς συνέχεια τοῦ ἐθίμου πού ἀναφέραμε πρὸ πάνω, προσφέρονται μικρὰ ψωμάκια καὶ καφέδες.

Τὰ κόλλυβα, σιτάρι βρασμένο, συμβολίζουν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀνάστασι τῶν σωμάτων. Ὑπενθυμίζουν σὲ ὅσους συμμετεῖχαν καὶ συμπροσευχήθηκαν κατὰ τὴν ἱερὴ τελετὴ τοῦ μνημοσύνου, ὅ,τι καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι σπόρος, ὁ ὁποῖος κατὰ τὸν θάνατό του θάβεται στὴ γῆ ὅπως τὸ σιτάρι. Τὸ σπέρμα δὲ αὐτὸ θὰ ἐξαναστηθεῖ καὶ πάλι μετὰ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ.

«Μετὰ τῶν Ἁγίων ἀνάπαυσον, Χριστέ, τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν δούλων Σου».

Κ α λ ὸ Πα ρ ἄ δ ε ι σ ο . . .



Ἐθνικὲς Ἐκλογές

Ὅταν πλησίαζε ὁ καιρὸς γιὰ τὶς ἐθνικὲς ἐκλογές, πολλοὶ προσκυνητὲς ἐρχόντουσαν καὶ ρωτοῦσαν τὸν Γέροντα Παῖσιο τὸν Ἀθωνίτη ποιά ἦταν ἡ γνώμη του καὶ ποῖον ἐκεῖνος θεωροῦσε ἄξιο, γιὰ νὰ ψηφίσουν.

Ὁ Γέροντας ἔλεγε:

«Νὰ ψηφίσετε ὅποιον βλέπετε ὅτι εἶναι ὁ καλύτερος, ὅποιος ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τὴν πατρίδα μας, αὐτὸν νὰ ψηφίσετε».

Τότε ἐκεῖνοι, ἐπὶ μονίμου βάσεως τοῦ ἀπαντοῦσαν:

«Γέροντα, ὄλοι τὸ ἴδιο εἶναι».

Κι ἐκεῖνος τοὺς ἔλεγε:

«Βρὲ παιδιά, κοιτάξτε ἐδῶ, ὄλες οἱ ἐλιές ἴδιες εἶναι καὶ ὄλες ἔχουν δάκο, ὁμως ἄλλες ἔχουν ἑκατὸ τοῖς ἑκατό, ἐνῶ ἄλλες πενήντα τοῖς ἑκατό. Ἐμεῖς, λοιπόν, ἐφόσον ἔχουμε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ ἐλιές, πρέπει νὰ κοιτάξουμε ποιὲς ἔχουν τὸ λιγότερο δάκο, γιὰτὶ διαφορετικὰ δὲ γίνεται».

Καὶ πάντα πρέπει νὰ ψηφίζουμε μετὰ δυὸ κριτήρια: (α) μετὰ τὸ πόσο ἀγαπᾷ ὁ ὑποψήφιος τὸ Θεὸ καὶ εἶναι συνειδητὸ μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ (β) μετὰ τὸ πόσο ἀγαπᾷ τὴν πατρίδα καὶ ἀποβλέπει στὸ γενικὸ καλὸ του τόπου καὶ ὄχι στὸ δικὸ του συμφέρον.

Ἐὰν κάποιος χρησιμοποιήσῃ κάποιο ἄλλο κριτήριον, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ δυὸ, τότε κινεῖται ἰδιοτελῶς καὶ δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸ πού κάνει Χριστιανικὸ· ἀργότερα θὰ ἐπιτρέψῃ ἡ θεία δικαιοσύνη νὰ τὸ πληρώσει».

«Μή Μου Χαλάτε τὴν Ἄσκησή μου»

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο, «Ὁ Μακαριστὸς Ἰάκωβος Τσαλίκης».

Όχειμῶνας τοῦ 1990/1991 πέρασε μαρτυρικά. Ὑπέφερε φοβερὰ ἐκεῖ στὰ βουνά, μὲ κρύο καὶ ὑγρασίες. Ἐβγαине λιγότερο ἀπὸ τὸ κελί. Σπάνια μποροῦσε νὰ κατέβει στὴν τράπεζα. Καὶ ὅταν ἐβγαине, ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐπιστρέφει γρήγορα, διότι οὔτε τὰ πόδια τὸν κρατοῦσαν, οὔτε ἡ καρδιά του τὸ ἐπέτρεπε. Κάθε τόσο, ἓνα σφίξιμο στὸ στήθος τὸν ἐπνιγε... Τὴ νύχτα, μὰ καὶ τὴν ἡμέρα, πάθαινε κρίσεις. Περνοῦσαν μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ... μὰ ὅλο καὶ δυσκολότερα. Καὶ κάθε τόσο ἔπρεπε νὰ παίρνει τὰ φάρμακά του... Τὰ φάρμακα ὁμως, γιὰ νὰ μὴ βλάπτουν τὸ στομάχι, θέλουνε καὶ φαγητό, καλὸ φαγητό. Σ' αὐτὸ ἀντιδρῶσε ὁ γέροντας. Ἀντέδρασε ὁμως καὶ τὸ στομάχι, πού ἐξασθένησε ἀφάνταστα καὶ τὸν ταλαιπωροῦσε πιά μὲ τὸ παραμικρό.

Τὰ ἐβλεπαν οἱ πατέρες τῆς Μονῆς, μεγάλη στεναχώρια, μὰ καὶ δὲν ξέρανε πὼς νὰ βοηθήσουν. Οἱ γιατροὶ ἐπιμένανε νὰ μὴν κουράζεται, νὰ μὴν ἐξομολογεῖ, νὰ μὴ λειτουργεῖ, καὶ νὰ τρώει καλὰ γιὰ τὰ φάρμακα. Ὅμως, οὔτε τὰ ἱερά του ἔργα μποροῦσε ν' ἀφήσει, οὔτε τὴν ἄσκησή του νὰ λιγοστεύει. Τοῦ ἦταν ἀδιανόητο. Νήστεψε αὐστηρὰ ἀπὸ τὸ τέλος Φεβρουαρίου καὶ ὅλο τὸ Μάρτιο... Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή. Ἐξαντλήθηκε ἐπικίνδυνα. Τὸ στομάχι μὲ τὰ φάρμακα πονοῦσε πολύ. Τὴ Μεγάλη Δευτέρα, 1η Ἀπριλίου, οἱ πατέρες τὸ διακινδύνεψαν. Δὲν μποροῦσε πιά νὰ βγεῖ. Στὸ κελὶ τοῦ πήγανε λίγα φασόλια μὲ δυὸ σταγόνες λάδι. Μόλις τὸ κατάλαβε στεναχωρήθηκε ἀφάνταστα. Μελαγχόλησε. Δὲν τὰ ἔφαγε καὶ διαμαρτυρήθηκε:

—Μὴ μοῦ χαλάτε τὴν ἄσκησή μου!

Γιὰ τέσσερες ἡμέρες δὲν ἔβαλε μπουκιά στὸ στόμα του, παρὰ τὴν κατάστασή του. Τὴ Μεγάλη Πέμπτη μόνο, μετὰ τὴ Λειτουργία, ἔφαγε κάτι. Μὰ γιόρτασε τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου μὲ ἀπερίγραπτη ἐσωτερικὴ λαμπρότητα. Τοῦ χαρίστηκαν ἠδύτατες πνευματικὲς ἐμπειρίες, εἶδε κι ἔζησε θαυμαστά... τὸ ἔβλεπε κανεὶς στὸ ἀπαστράπτον ἱλαρὸ του πρόσωπο... χαρὰ οὐράνια, φῶς θριάμβου, εἰρήνη ἀκατάλυτη... καθρέφτης παραδείσου τὸ πρόσωπό του!

Ὅλους τους μῆνες πού ἀκολούθησαν, συμπορεύτηκαν στὸ γέροντα οἱ μακάριες θεῖες ἐμπειρίες καὶ τὸ σωματικὸ μαρτύριο. Καὶ ὄχι μόνο αὐτό· ἀναπτύχθηκε μεταξὺ τούς πραγματικὴ ἄμιλα, πού τὴν παρακολουθοῦσαν οἱ πατέρες. Αὐξάνονταν οἱ θεῖες ἐμπειρίες καὶ τὰ χαρίσματα; μεγάλωσαν οἱ πόνοι, πύκνωναν τὰ μικροεμφράγματα. Πλήθαιναν οἱ θεραπευόμενοι μὲ τὶς προσευχὲς του; δυνάμωναν οἱ ἀσθένειές του καὶ οἱ πειρασμοὶ στὴ Μονή.

Τοὺς μῆνες αὐτοὺς διέθετε περισσότερες ὥρες γιὰ νοερά προσευχή. Ἐλεγε σιωπηλὰ μὰ συνεχῶς τὸ «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλό». Ἄλλοτε γονατιστός, ἀκουμπώντας τὸ δεξὶ του ἀγκώνα στὸ ξύλινο ἐρμάρι, ἄλλοτε ξαπλωμένος—ὅταν ἦταν ἀπόλυτη ἀνάγκη—καὶ ἄλλοτε γονατιστός, ἐνώπιον τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου, μὲ πετραχήλι.

Δὲν φαίνεται νὰ μίλησε γιὰ τὴ νοερά του προσευχή. Δὲν ἐξήγησε, δὲν πληροφόρησε. Ἴσως δὲν τὸν πίεσε κανεὶς νὰ μιλήσει σχετικὰ, γιὰ τὸ πὼς τῆς προσευχῆς αὐτῆς, γιὰ τὸ τί συμβαίνει σ' αὐτοὺς πού τὴν ἀσκοῦν καὶ μάλιστα γιὰ ὅσα τυχόν οἱ προοδευμένοι ἀπολαμβάνουν. Κι ἐνῶ δὲν ἤθελε νὰ μιλήσει μὲ τὰ χεῖλη, μίλαγε μὲ τὸ πρόσωπό του ὀλόκληρο. Καὶ ἴσως πιὸ εὐγλωττα. Στὸ πρόσωπό του ἔβλεπε ὁ μοναχὸς τὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῆς νοερῆς προσευχῆς. Δάκρυα, φωτεινότητα παντοῦ, στὸ πρόσωπο καὶ στὴ γενειάδα. Ἦταν ἡ πανίερη στιγμή πού ἡ νοερά προσευχή εἶχε γίνει καρδιακή· ἀνάβλυζε μέσα τοῦ ἀλάλητη χαρὰ καὶ τὸν ἔλουζε ἱλαρὸ φῶς.

Γιατί, φυσικά, νοερά προσευχή λίγο-πολύ κάνουνε ὅλοι. Μὰ σὲ λίγους αὐτὴ βαθαίνει καὶ γίνεται καρδιακή. Λίγοι κοπιάζουν πέρα τῶν κοινῶν μέτρων καὶ λίγοι ἀπολαμβάνουν τὶς θεῖες ἐμπειρίες, πού γεννιοῦνται στὴν καρδιακὴ χώρα καὶ πλημμυρίζουν τὸ εἶναι ὀλόκληρο.



ΕΓΚΥΚΛΙΟΣ

ΤΗΣ ΜΙΑΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗΣ
ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ

Πρὸς τοὺς ἀπανταχοῦ Ὁρθοδόξους



Τί Συμβολίζουν τὰ Ροῦχα τῶν Μοναχῶν;

Πηγή: Ὁρθόδοξη Μαρτυρία, τεῦχος 115.

Φῶς μοναχοῖς ἄγγελοι. Φῶς δὲ πάντων ἀνθρώπων καὶ μοναδικὴ Πολιτεία, εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ κατὰ μίμηση τῶν Ἀγγέλων· αὐτὴ στήριξε καὶ στηρίζει τὴν Οἰκουμένην.

Ὁ Χριστιανὸς ποὺ ἐνδύεται τὸ Μέγα καὶ Ἀγγελικὸ Σχῆμα εἶναι ἄξιος πολλῶν ἐπαίνων καὶ μακαρισμῶν. Ὄταν κάποιος, λοιπόν, προσέρχεται γιὰ νὰ ἀφιερῶσει τὴ ζωὴ του ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τῆς διανοίας του στὸ Νυμφίον Χριστό, τότε χαίρεται καὶ ἀγάλλεται ὁ Οὐρανὸς καὶ πανηγυρίζει ὁ κόσμος τῶν Ἀγγέλων, γιὰτὶ ἕνας ἀκόμα ἄνθρωπος τάχθηκε νὰ μιμηθεῖ τὴ ζωὴ τους. Ὁ μοναχὸς καὶ ἡ μοναχὴ ζοῦν καὶ κινοῦνται σὲ μία πνευματικὴ ὁδὸ, μὲ τὸ νοσταλγικὸ λόγον «ἐλθέτω χάρις καὶ παρελθέτω ὁ κόσμος οὗτος». Καὶ μαζί μὲ τὸν κόσμον παρέρχεται τὸ ὄνομα τὸ παλαιὸ καὶ λαμβάνει νέο ὄνομα, διότι ἐγκαταλείπει τὸν παλαιὸ ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἐνδύεται τὸ νέο ἄνθρωπον.

Τὴν ὥρα τῆς μοναχικῆς κουρᾶς προσέρχεται ὁ δόκιμος μοναχὸς ἀνυπόδητος, ἀσκεπτής, φορώντας μόνο ἓναν ἀπλὸ λευκὸ χιτῶνα, καὶ δηλώνοντας ἔτσι ὅ,τι ὅλα τὰ περιττὰ καὶ κοσμικὰ τὰ ἀπέριψε καὶ εἶναι ἔτοιμος νὰ ἐνδυθεῖ τὸ τιμημένο ράσο καὶ τὰ ἅγια ροῦχα τοῦ μοναχοῦ. Κατὰ τὴ μοναχικὴ κουρὰ ὁ δόκιμος μοναχὸς ἢ μοναχὴ ἐνδύεται τὸ λέντιον (ἢ ζωστικὸ ἢ ἀντερὶ) τὸ ὁποῖο εἶναι μαύρου χρώματος καὶ συμβολίζει τὸ χιτῶνα τῆς εὐφροσύνης καὶ τῆς ἀγαλλιάσεως ἀντὶ τῆς γυμνώσεως καὶ τῆς καταισχύνῃς (τὴν ὁποία φορέσαμε μὲ τὴν παρακοὴν μας καὶ ἀντὶ τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ τοῦ θανάτου ποὺ μᾶς προξένησε αὐτὴ ἢ παρακοὴ καὶ τὴν ὁποία φθορὰ ἀναιρεῖ τὸ μοναχικὸ σχῆμα μὲ τὴν ὑπακοὴν καὶ τὸν ἐνάρετο βίον). Ὁ χιτῶνας αὐτὸς ὀνομάζεται χιτῶνας δικαιοσύνης γιὰτὶ ἡ λέξις δικαιοσύνη σημαίνει κάθε ἀρετὴ, καὶ ὁ μοναχὸς φορώντας τὸ ὀφείλει νὰ γίνῃ πρόθυμος γιὰ κάθε ἀρετὴ. Μάλιστα τὸ μαῦρον χρῶμα του σημαίνει ὅ,τι θὰ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι πάντοτε ὀχρωμένον πίσω ἀπὸ τὸ πένθος γιὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία καὶ τὴν ξενιτεία γιὰ τὸν κόσμον.

Ἐπειτα ὁ μοναχὸς ἢ ἡ μοναχὴ ἐνδύεται τὸν ἀνάλαβον (τὸ πολυσταύρι), ὁ ὁποῖος φοριέται ἀπὸ τοὺς ὄμους μπροστὰ καὶ πίσω σταυροειδῶς καὶ σχηματίζει τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ σταυροῦ, ὄχι μία, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ φορὲς. Εἰκονίζει τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ Σταυροῦ καὶ σημαίνει ὅ,τι ὁ μοναχὸς ἀναλαμβάνει τὸ σταυρὸν τοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων του καὶ ἀκολουθεῖ τὸ Δεσπότη Χριστό. Καθὼς τὸ πολυσταύρι περιέχει πολλοὺς σταυροὺς καὶ περιβάλλει μπροστὰ καὶ πίσω τὸ σῶμα τοῦ μοναχοῦ καὶ τῆς μοναχῆς τὸ περιφράσσει καὶ τὸ ὀχυρώνει ἀπ' τὶς προσβολὰς τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ ἀπὸ κάθε κακῆ ἐπιθυμίας.

Ἐπειτα ζώνεται γύρω ἀπ' τὴ μέση του δερμάτινη ζώνη «εἰς νέκρωσιν σώματος καὶ ἀνακαίνισιν πνεύματος». Ἡ ζώνη ἀποτελεῖ σημεῖον σωφροσύνης, καθαρότητος καὶ νεκρώσεως τῶν κινήσεων τῆς σάρκας καὶ ἐπίσης σημεῖον ἰσχύος ἐναντίον τῶν παθῶν καὶ παράλληλα στήριξις στὶς πράξεις τῶν ἐντολῶν.

Κατόπιν, ὁ μοναχὸς ἢ ἡ μοναχὴ φορᾷ τὰ σανδάλια μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα ἐτοιμάζεται νὰ ἐφαρμόσει καὶ νὰ διαδώσει τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον τῆς εἰρήνης. Ἐπίσης, τὰ σανδάλια αὐτὰ τὸν προφυλάσσουν γιὰ νὰ μὴν προσκρούσουν τὰ πόδια του καὶ νὰ μὴν δαγκωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ νοητὸ ὄφι, ἀλλὰ νὰ ἐπιβαίνει πάνω σ' αὐτοὺς καὶ νὰ καταπατεῖ λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα (δηλαδὴ τὰ κρυφὰ καὶ φθονερὰ θηρία τῆς κακίας). Μὲ τὰ σανδάλια αὐτὰ θὰ τρέχει κατευθειαν τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, μέχρις ὅτου φτάσει στοὺς Οὐρανοὺς, ἐκεῖ ποὺ εἶναι τὸ πολίτευμα τῶν μοναχῶν, κατὰ τὸν Ἀπόστολον Παῦλον.

Κατόπιν ἐνδύεται τὸ παλλίον (ἐξώρασο) τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ ἀγγελικοῦ σχήματος, καὶ ὅπως λέγει στὴ μοναχικὴ κουρὰ, τὸ ἐνδύεται ὡς στολὴ ἀφθαρσίας καὶ σεμνότητος καὶ ὡς σημεῖον τῆς σκέπης τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν εὐλαβίαν τοῦ ζωῆ· ἀποτελεῖ τὴ θεῖαν περιβολὴν ποὺ τοῦ χαρίζει τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα.

Κατόπιν ἐνδύεται τὸ κουκούλιον τῆς ἀκακίας, ὡς περικεφαλαία ἐλπίδος γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μὲσω τῆς ἐκ Θεοῦ ἐπισκιάσεως τῆς χάριτος, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ὑψωση τοῦ νοῦ τοῦ μὲσω τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ τῆς ἀκακίας, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς εἶναι τὰ ἄδοξα νήπια, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Θεοῦ φύλαξιν καὶ περίθαλψιν τῆς κεφαλῆς μὲ ὅλα τὰ αἰσθητήρια. Τὸ κουκούλιον κρέμεται μπροστὰ καὶ πίσω, ἐκεῖ ὅπου βρίσκεται τὸ λογιστικὸ καὶ ἡ καρδιά.

Τελευταία, ἐνδύεται τὸ μανδύα, ὁ ὁποῖος θεωρεῖται τὸ τελειώτατον ἐνδύμα καὶ τὸ περιεκτικὸ ὅλων, σημαίνει δὲ τὴ φυλακτικὴ καὶ σκεπαστικὴ δύναμις τοῦ Θεοῦ, ταυτόχρονα τὸ συνεσταλμένο εὐλαβὲς καὶ ταπεινὸ τῆς Μοναχικῆς ζωῆς, ἐνῶ τὸ ὅ,τι δὲν ἔχει μανίκια σημαίνει ὅ,τι καθ' ὅλην τὴν ζωὴν τοῦ ὅλα τὰ μέλη του εἶναι νεκρὰ γιὰ κάθε κοσμικὴ ἐργασία καὶ ἁμαρτία.

Ἀφήνει μόνο ἐλεύθερον τὸ κεφάλιν τὸ ὁποῖον βλέπει πρὸς τὸ Θεὸν καὶ φρονεῖ τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἀνατρέχει μόνο πρὸς τὸ Θεόν. Ἀλλὰ, ὅπως εἶπαμε καὶ πρὶν, ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ κεφάλιν τοῦ μοναχοῦ ἢ τῆς μοναχῆς εἶναι σκεπασμένο μὲ τὸ κουκούλιον, γιὰ νὰ μὴ θεωρηθεῖ ὅ,τι ἔχει ἀσκεπὴ καὶ ἀκάλυπτα τὰ αἰσθητήρια.

Στὸ σύνολόν τους, ὅλα τὰ ροῦχα τοῦ μοναχοῦ εἰκονίζουν τὴ νέκρωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας. Ὡς τάφος εἰκονίζεται ὁ μανδύας καὶ ὡς ἐντάφια τὰ ὑπόλοιπα ροῦχα. Ὁ ἀνάλαβος καὶ τὸ Μεγάλον Σχῆμα δηλώνουν ὅ,τι εἶναι ἐσταυρωμένος ὁ μοναχὸς γιὰ τὸν κόσμον, ὅπως ἄλλωστε τὸ ὑποσχέθηκε. Τὸ κουκούλιον τοῦ εἰκονίζει τὸ σουδάριον, καὶ ἔτσι ὁλος ὁ μοναχὸς μιμεῖται μὲ τὸ σχῆμα του τὸν σταυρωθέντα Δεσπότην του, ὁ ὁποῖος πέθανε καὶ τυλίχθηκε στὰ σπάργανα καὶ στὸ σουδάριον.

Σὲ ὅλην τὴν ζωὴν πλέον, ὅ,τι φορᾷ, θὰ τοῦ ὑπενθυμίζει ὅ,τι συνεσταυρώθηκε μὲ τὸ Χριστόν καὶ συνεκρώθηκε μαζί Του καὶ ὀφείλει νὰ ἀγωνιστεῖ γιὰ νὰ συναναστηθεῖ καὶ νὰ συνανησθηθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀναφανεῖ συγκληρονόμος τῆς πατρικῆς Βασιλείας καὶ τῶν ἀγαθῶν τῶν ἐτοιμασμένων πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου...

THE CONDITION OF A SINNER

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Path to Salvation."

For the most part, the word of God depicts the sinner, who is faced with the necessity of renewal in repentance, as being submerged in deep slumber. The distinguishing characteristic of such people is not always outright depravity, but rather the absence in the strictest sense of inspired, selfless zeal for pleasing God, together with a decided aversion for everything sinful. Devotion is not the main concern of their cares and labors; they are attentive about many other things, but are completely indifferent to their salvation, and do not sense what danger they are in. They neglect the good life and lead a life that is cold in faith, though it be occasionally righteous and outwardly irreproachable.

Particulars for a Person Who Lacks Grace

That is the general characteristic. Here are the particulars for a person who lacks grace: Once he has turned away from God, the person dwells on himself, and makes self the main goal of his life and activity. This is because at this point, after God, there is for him nothing higher than self, especially because, having previously received every abundance from God and having now forgotten Him, he hurries and takes care to fill himself up with something. The emptiness that has formed inside him because of his falling away from God causes an unquenchable thirst inside him that is vague but constant. The person has become a bottomless abyss.

He makes every effort to fill this abyss, but he cannot see or feel it getting full. Thus, he spends his entire life in sweat, toil and great labors; he busies himself with various occupations in which he hopes to find a way to quench his unquenchable thirst. These occupations take up all his attention, all his time and all his activity. They are the highest good, in which he lives with his whole heart. Thus, it is clear why a person who makes self his exclusive goal is never himself; instead, everything is outside him, in things either created or acquired by vanity. He has fallen away from God, Who is the fullness of everything.

He himself is empty; it remains for him to seemingly pour himself out into an endless variety of things and live in them. Thus, the sinner thirsts, fusses, and troubles himself with occupations and numerous things outside himself and God. This is why a characteristic trait of sinful life is, in its disregard for salvation, *the care and trouble about many things* (cf. Lk 10:41).

The Care and Trouble about Many Things

The nuances and distinctions of this care and trouble about many things depend on the kinds of emptiness that have formed in the soul. There is the emptiness of the mind that has forgotten the One Who is everything; this gives rise to care and trouble about learnedness, inquisitiveness, questioning and curiosity. There is the emptiness of the will that has been

deprived of possession by the One Who is everything; this creates desire for many things, the longing to possess many things, so that everything is in our control, in our hands; this is self-interest.

There is the emptiness of the heart that has been deprived of the enjoyment of the One Who is everything; this forms a thirst for the satisfaction of many and various things, or a search for an infinite number of objects in which we hope to find pleasure for our senses, both internal and external. Thus, the sinner is continually troubled about learnedness, the possession of many things, and the desire for many pleasures. He amuses himself, he possesses, he questions. He goes around in circles his entire life. Curiosity beckons, the heart hopes to taste sweet things, and he is enticed by the will. Anyone can convince himself of this if he observes the movements of his soul over the course of only a single day.

If left alone, the sinner will continue going in circles, because this is our nature when it is enslaved to sin. However, when the sinner is in the company of others, the circles he goes around increase in number a thousandfold and become more convoluted. There is an entire world full of people who are continually doing things, questioning, amusing themselves, and scrounging about, whose every way in all of this has led to a system, placed everyone under its laws, and made these laws a necessity for everyone who belongs to this sphere. In this common alliance, they inevitably come into contact, rub up against each other, and in this rubbing succeed in elevating inquisitiveness, self-interest, and self-pleasure to the tenth, hundredth and thousandth degree, thereby placing all happiness, joy and life in this frenzy.

This is the world of vanity, in which occupations, ways, rule, connections, language, diversions, amusements, concepts—everything, from the smallest to the greatest thing—are permeated by the spirit of these three fiends of many cares and trouble mentioned above. It is what constitutes the dreary going around in circles by the spirits of worldly people. Being in living communion with this entire world, each sinner is caught up in its thousandfold net, and is so deeply entangled in it that it is invisible to him. Such a heavy burden lies on each worldly person and each of his parts, that he does not have the strength to be stirred in the smallest way by anything that is not worldly, because this would seem like raising a thousand-pound weight to him. Thus, no one undertakes such an unmanageable task, and no one thinks to undertake it; instead, everyone lives on, moving in the rut into which they have fallen.

The Seductions of the Prince of this World

Even worse is the prince of this world who is unparalleled in his cunning, spitefulness and experience in seduction. It is through the flesh and materialism with which the soul became mingled at the fall that he has free access to the

soul. In his approach, he kindles curiosity, self-interest, and pleasure-loving self-comfort in various ways. Through various enticements, he holds the soul in these things with no escape; through various suggestions he suggests plans for satisfying them and then either aids in fulfilling them, or thwarts them through instruction of other more ambitious plans. All this is accomplished with one purpose: to prolong and deepen a person's involvement in them. This is what constitutes the change of worldly misfortune and fortune, unblessed by God.

The prince of this world has an entire horde of servile spirits of malice that are subordinate to him. At each instant they scurry along every boundary of the inhabited world to sow various things in different places, deepen entanglement in the net of sin, repair traps that have become weak and broken, and especially to guard against anyone who might take it into his mind to rid himself of his bonds and escape to freedom. In the latter case, they hurriedly gather around the self-willed person. First they come one by one, then by detachments and legions until finally, the entire horde is there. This happens in various ways and forms so as to block all exits and mend the strands and nets, and, using the other analogy, to push back into the abyss any person who has begun to crawl out along its steep slopes.

The Invisible Kingdom of Spirits in which Each Sinner Is Immersed

This invisible kingdom of spirits has special places. There are the throne rooms, where plans are drawn up, instructions arrive and reports are received with the approval or reproaches of the chiefs. These are the inner sanctums of satan, as St. John the Theologian expressed it. On earth, in the middle kingdom of people, there are leagues of evil-doers, profligates, and especially nonbelievers and blasphemers, whose deeds, words and writings pour out sinful gloom everywhere and block out the divine light. The aggregate of worldly ways, pervaded with sinful elements that stupefy and draw one away from God, is the organ through which they express their will and power here.

This is the structure of the sinful sphere! Each sinner is immersed in it, but is kept there largely on account of some particular thing. This thing, perhaps, is in appearance tolerable, even laudable. Satan has a single concern; that is, where a person is completely occupied in his consciousness, attention, and heart, that God not be the sole occupier, but that something outside Him be attached to his mind, will, and heart, so the person has something in place of God and only cares about what he knows and what he enjoys and possesses. Here there are not only carnal and mental passions, but also specious things such as learnedness, artistry, and worldliness that can serve as the bonds of satan for keeping blinded sinners in his power and not allowing them to come to their senses.

The Inner Mood and Condition of the Sinner

If one looks at the sinner in his inner mood and condition, it happens sometimes that he is knowledgeable, but is blind with regard to divine things and the matter of his own salvation. Even if he constantly takes care and troubles over things, he is idle and careless in regard to arranging his own salvation; even if he continually experiences anxieties or pleasures of the heart, he is completely insensitive to everything spiritual. In this regard, all forces of being are afflicted by sin; and there is blindness, negligence and insensitivity in the sinner.

He does not see his own condition, and therefore does not sense the danger of his situation. He does not sense his danger and therefore does not take the trouble and care to be delivered from it. The necessity to change and be saved does not even enter his mind. He has complete, unshakable confidence that he is at his proper station in life, wants for nothing and must therefore leave everything the way it is. Therefore, he considers any reminder about another kind of life to be superfluous for himself; he does not listen, and cannot even understand what it is for. He avoids and shuns it.



Civilization is good, but—for it to be beneficial—the soul must also become civilized; otherwise, it is a catastrophe. St. Kosmas said, “Evil will come from the educated.”[*]

Although science has progressed so much, and made such great advances, with whatever they do to try to help the world, without realizing it, they are destroying it. God left man to rule over himself, as he wouldn't listen to Him, and so he suffers at his own hands. Man destroys himself with his inventions.

Elder Paisios the Athonite

[*] *This prophecy of St. Cosmas' refers to those educated people who don't have the fear of God.*



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ORTHODOX WISDOM

From the sermons of St. John Maximovitch.

To Our Youth

And the younger son said to his father, *Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.* (Lk 15:12). The parable of the prodigal son is a most instructive lesson for youth.

We see in the prodigal son the true character of carefree youth: light-mindedness, thoughtlessness, a passion for independence, in short, everything that usually characterizes the greater part of one's youth. The younger son grew up in his parents' house and having reached adolescence imagined that life at home was too restrictive. He thought that living under his father's rule and his mother's eye was unpleasant. He wanted to imitate his companions, who gave themselves up to the noisy pleasures of the world. He decided, "I am the heir of a rich estate. Would it not be better if I received my inheritance now? I could handle my wealth differently than my father does." Thus the light-minded youth was taken in by the deceitful glitter of the world's pleasures and decided to cast off the yoke of obedience and depart from his parent's home.

Today many are inspired by similar impulses, and if they do not leave their parents' house, do they not depart from the house of their Heavenly Father, from obedience to the Holy Church?

The yoke of Christ and his commandments seem difficult for immature minds. They imagine that it is not entirely necessary to follow what God and His Holy Church commands. It seems to them that they can serve both God and the world at the same time. They say: "We are already strong enough to withstand destructive temptations and attractions. We can, by ourselves, hold on to the truth and correct teachings. Allow us to improve our minds by many kinds of knowledge. Let us strengthen our wills amid temptations and pitfalls. Through experience our senses will be convinced of the foulness of vice!" Such desires are not better than the ill-considered request of the younger son to his father, *Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.*

Today we have light-minded youths who cease to heed the commandments and suggestions of the Holy Church. They stop studying the Word of God and the teachings of the holy fathers, and turn their attention to the 'wisdom' of false teachers, thus ruining the better part of their lives. They go to church less frequently or attend without attention, distracted. There is no time to be pious and practice virtues since they are too busy attending movies, going to parties, etc. In short, they give themselves up to the world more and more each day, and, finally, depart into a far country.

What is the result of such parting from the Holy Church? It is the same as the result of the prodigal son's parting from his parents' house. Light-minded youths waste their excellent energies and the talents of their soul and body very quickly, ruining for this life and eternity all the good they have done. Meanwhile there appears a mighty famine in that land—emptiness and dissatisfaction—a necessary result of wild pleasures.

A thirst for satisfaction appears, which is even more intensified by the gratification of base passions, and which finally becomes insatiable. It frequently turns out that the unfortunate lover of the world resorts to the pursuit of that which is base and shameful in order to gratify his passions, but is still not brought to his senses, unlike the prodigal son; he does not return to the path of salvation, but completes his ruin, both temporal and eternal!

The Virtues of Humility and Struggle

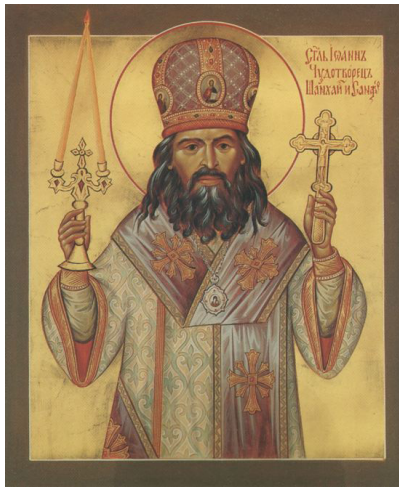
God's grace always assists a struggler, but this does not mean that a struggler is always in the position of a victor; sometimes the beasts did not touch the righteous ones, but by no means did they not touch them always. What is important is not victory or the position of a victor, but rather the labor of striving towards God and devotion to Him.

Great is the Apostle Paul, but he asks the Lord many times ("thrice" means not once, but many times) that the messenger of Satan depart from him, for he "buffets" him, making some sort of attacks that are difficult and averse to his spirit. But the Lord leaves him in such a position: *My grace is sufficient for thee.* (2 Cor 12:7-9)—enough assistance of grace and gifts are provided

for him. The Lord wants from the apostle the striving which cleanses his soul.

What is important is the state of the soul, the striving towards God, and not the stature of a victor. *Strength is made perfect in weakness.* (2 Cor 12:9). Though a man may be found in a weak state, that does not at all mean that he has been abandoned by God. The Lord Jesus Christ, according to the worldly view, was in trouble, but when the sinful world considered Him to be completely destroyed, in actuality He was victorious over death and hades.

The Lord did not promise us positions as victors as a reward for righteousness, but told us, In the world we shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, *I have overcome the world.* (Jn 16:33). The power of God is truly effective when a person asks for the help of God, acknowledging the weakness and sinfulness of his nature. This is why humility and the striving towards God are the fundamental virtues of a Christian.



THE PROPHECIES OF THE RIGHTEOUS DIMITRI TARABICZ

From the Serbian book "Prophecies from Kremna," translator unknown.

The following are a few excerpts from the prophecies of the Righteous Dimitri Tarabicz (recorded around the 1850s). He was an illiterate Serbian villager who lived in an extremely pious eremitic manner in the mid 19th century; most of his prophecies were recorded by his godfather, the priest Father Zacharias. Here are excerpts from parts that deal with a Great War ahead of us. It should be noted that many of his 20th century prophecies, especially those involving Serbia, have come true.

You see my god-father, when the world starts to live in peace and abundance after the Second Big War, all of that will be just a bitter illusion, because many will forget God and they will worship only their own human intelligence... And do you know my god-father, what is human intelligence compared to God's will and knowledge? Not even a single drop in the ocean!

Men will build a box and within will be some kind of gadget with images, but they will not be able to communicate with me already dead, even though this image gadget will be as close to this other world as hairs on the human scalp are close to each other. With the help of this image-gadget man will be able to see everything that is happening all over the world.

People will drill wells deep in the ground and dig out gold [another name for crude oil is "black gold"], which will give them light, speed and power, and the earth will shed tears of sorrow, because there will be much more gold and light on its surface than in its interior. The earth will suffer because of these open wounds. Instead of working in the fields, people will dig everywhere, in right and wrong places, but the real power will be all around them, not being able to tell them: "Come on, take me, don't you see that I am here, all around you."

Only after many years, people will remember this real power, and then they will realize how stupid it was to dig all those holes. This power will also be present in people but it will take a long time before they discover it and use it. Thus, man will live for a long, long time, not being able to know himself. There will be many learned men who will think through their books that they know and can do everything. They will be the great obstacle for this realization, but once men get this knowledge, then people will see what kind of delusion it was when they listened to their learned men. When that happens, people will be so sorry that they didn't discover it before, because this knowledge is so simple.

They will believe that their illusion is the real truth, although there will be no truth in their heads. Here at home it will be the same as all over the world. People will start to hate clean air and this divine freshness and all divine beauty and will hide in rankness. Nobody will force them to do that, but they will do it of their own free will. Here, in Kremna, many a field will become a meadow, and many a home will be abandoned, but then those who have left will come back to heal themselves by breathing fresh air.

In Serbia it will not be possible to distinguish a man from a woman. Everybody will dress the same. This calamity will come to us from abroad but it will stay with us the longest. A groom will take a bride, but nobody will know who is who. People will be lost and will become more and more senseless day by day. Men will be born not knowing who was their grand-father and great grand-father. People will think that they know everything, but not a thing they will know.

The Serbs will separate from each other, and they will say: "I am not a Serb, I am not a Serb." The unholy one will infiltrate this nation and bed with Serbian sisters, mothers and wives. He will sire such children that among the Serbs, since the beginning of the world, these will be the worst of offspring. Only weaklings will be born, and nobody will be strong enough to give a birth to a real hero.

At one time, we shall disappear from this land of ours. We shall go to the north, and then realizing our stupid deed, we shall return. When we come back, we shall wise up and chase away the unholy one, not to see him, in God's name, ever again...

The whole world will be plagued by a strange disease and nobody will be able to find a cure; everybody will say I know, I know, because I am learned and smart, but nobody will know anything. People will think and think, but they will not be able to find the right cure, which will be with God's help, all around them and in themselves.

Man will travel to other worlds to find lifeless deserts there, and still, God forgive him, he will think that he knows better than God himself. There, except of the eternal peace of God, he will see nothing, but he will sense with his heart and soul all of God's beauty and power. People will drive in rigs upon the moon and stars. They will look for life, but life similar to ours they will not find. It will be there, but they will not be able to understand it and see that it is life.

One who goes there, God forgive him, not believing in God as it is proper for an honourable and decent person, when he comes back he will say: "Oh, you people, who mention God's name with doubt, go there where I was, then you will see what is God's mind and power."

The more people will know, the less they will love and care for each other. Hatred will be so great between them that they will care more for their different gadgets than for their

relatives. Man will trust his gadget more than his first neighbor...

Among people of a nation, far in the north a little man will appear who will teach men about love and compassion, but there will be many Judas and hypocrites around him so that he will have many ups and downs. Not one of these hypocrites will want to know what is real human grace, but his wise books will remain, and all the words he will say, and then then people will see how self-deceived they were.

Those who will read and write different books with numbers will think that they know the most. These learned men will let their lives be led by their calculations, and they will do and live exactly how these numbers tell them. Among these learned men there will be good and evil men. The evil ones will do evil deeds. They will poison air and water and spread pestilence over the seas, rivers and earth, and people will start to die suddenly of various ailments. Those good and wise will see that all this effort and hard work is not worth a penny and that it leads to the destruction of the world, and instead of looking for wisdom in numbers, they will start to seek it in prayer.

WORLD WAR III

When they start to pray more, they will be closer to God's wisdom, but it will be too late, because the evil ones will already ravage the whole earth and men will start to die in great numbers. Then people will run away from cities to the country and look for the mountains with three crosses, and there, inside, they will be able to breathe and drink water.

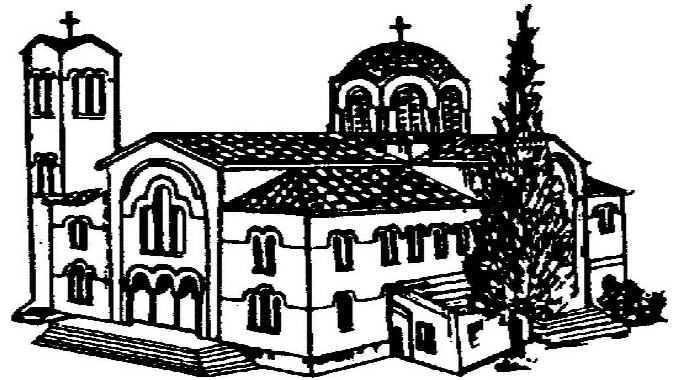
Those who will escape will save themselves and their families, but not for long, because a great famine will appear.

The greatest and the angriest will strike against the mightiest and the most furious! When this horrible war starts, woe to those armies that fly over skies; better off will be those who fight on ground and water.

People waging this war will have their scientists who will invent different and strange cannonballs. We [i.e., Serbians] will not fight in this war, but others will do battle over our heads. Burning people will fall from the sky over Pozega [a town in Serbia]. Only one country at the end of the world, surrounded by great seas, as big as our Europe [Australia?], will live in peace, without any troubles... Upon it or over it, not a single cannonball will explode!

Those who will run and hide in the mountains with three crosses will find shelter and will be saved. But not for long times, since the great famine will appear. Food will be plentiful all over the cities and villages, but all will be poisoned... Many in order to feed themselves will eat everything and will die immediately. Those who will fast and endure fasting, those are the ones who will survive, because the Holy Spirit will preserve them; those will also be the ones closer to God in the time of great famine and perdition.

In that time, far away in the Russian mountains, a young man named Mihail will appear. He will have bright face and his entire appearance will radiate with mercy ... he will come to the nearest Monastery and ring on all monastery bells, and to the people who will gather there around him, he will say: "You forgot about me (who I am), that I didn't die but am alive..." Mihail will go everywhere but mostly he will dwell in Constantinople... those who have ears let them hear.



He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.

(Malachi 3:3)

This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at the next Bible Study.

That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot then she thought again about the verse that says: *He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver*. She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy—when I see my image in it."

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.

THE RULES OF FASTING

From *"The Lenten Triodion,"* by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware. London, Faber and Faber, 1977.



Within this developed pattern of Lent, what precisely do the rules of fasting demand? Neither in ancient nor in modern times has there ever been exact uniformity, but most Orthodox

authorities agree on the following rules:

(1) During the week between the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and that of the Prodigal Son, there is a general dispensation from all fasting. Meat and animal products may be eaten even on Wednesday and Friday.

(2) In the following week, often termed the 'Week of Carnival', the usual fast is kept on Wednesday and Friday. Otherwise there is no special fasting.

(3) In the Week before Lent, meat is forbidden, but eggs, cheese and other dairy products may be eaten on all days, including Wednesday and Friday.

(4) On weekdays (Monday to Friday inclusive) during the seven weeks of Lent, there are restrictions both on the number of meals taken daily and on the types of food permitted; but when a meal is allowed, there is no fixed limitation on the quantity of food to be eaten.

(a) On weekdays in the first week, fasting is particularly severe. According to the strict observance, in the course of the five initial days of Lent, only two meals are eaten, one on Wednesday and the other on Friday, in both cases after the Liturgy of the Presanctified. On the other three days, those who have the strength are encouraged to keep an absolute fast; those for whom this proves impracticable may eat on Tuesday and Thursday (but not, if possible, on Monday), in the evening after Vespers, when they may take bread and water, or perhaps tea or fruit-juice, but not a cooked meal. It should be added at once that in practice today these rules are commonly relaxed. At the meals on Wednesday and Friday xerophagy is prescribed. Literally this means 'dry eating'. Strictly interpreted, it signifies that we may eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread and honey. In practice, octopus and shell-fish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil, not made from olives. But the following categories of food are definitely excluded:

- (i) meat;
- (ii) animal products (cheese, milk, butter, eggs, lard, dripping);
- (iii) fish (i.e. fish with backbones);
- (iv) oil (i.e. olive oil) and wine (i.e. all alcoholic drinks).

(b) On weekdays (Monday to Friday inclusive) in the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth weeks, one meal a day is permitted, to be taken in the afternoon following Vespers, and at this one meal xerophagy is to be observed [The early sources are not agreed concerning the application of the rule of xerophagy. The Council of Laodicea, Canon 50, and Theodore the Studite, *Doctrina Chronica*, 9 (P.G. xcix, 1700B), prescribe xerophagy on all weekdays in Lent; but John of Damascus, *On the Holy Fasts*, 5 (P.G. xcv, 69D), and Theodore Balsamon (Rallis-Potlis, *Syntagma*, vol. iii, p. 217) seem to envisage a less strict observance]

(c) Holy Week. On the first three days there is one meal each day, with xerophagy; but some try to keep a complete fast on these days, or else they eat only uncooked food, as on the opening days of the first week.

On Holy Thursday one meal is eaten, with wine and oil (i.e. olive oil).

On Great Friday those who have the strength follow the practice of the early Church and keep a total fast. Those unable to do this may eat bread, with a little water, tea or fruit-juice, but not until sunset, or at any rate not until after the veneration of the Epitaphion at Vespers.

On Holy Saturday there is in principle no meal, since according to the ancient practice after the end of the Liturgy of St. Basil the faithful remained in church for the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, and for their sustenance were given a little bread and dried fruit, with a cup of wine. If, as usually happens now, they return home for a meal, they may use wine but not oil; for on this one Saturday, alone among the Saturdays of the year, olive oil is not permitted.

The rule of xerophagy is relaxed on the following days:

(1) On Saturdays and Sundays in Lent, with the exception of Holy Saturday, two main meals may be taken in the usual way, around mid-day and in the evening, with wine and olive oil; but meat, animal products and fish are not allowed.

(2) On the Feast of the Annunciation (21 March) and Palm Sunday, fish is permitted as well as wine and oil, but meat and animal products are not allowed. If the Feast of the Annunciation falls on the first four days of Holy Week, wine and oil are permitted but not fish. If it falls on Great Friday or Holy Saturday, wine is permitted, but not fish or oil.

(3) Wine and oil are permitted on the following days, if they fall on a weekday in the second, third, fourth, fifth or sixth week:

- First and Second Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist (24 February)
- Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (9 March)
- Forefeast of the Annunciation (24 March)
- Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel (26 March)
- Patronal festival of the Church or Monastery

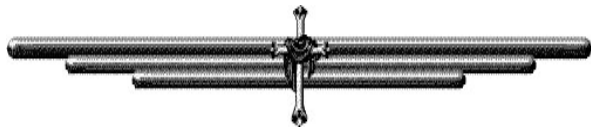
(4) Wine and oil are also allowed on Wednesday and Thursday in the fifth week, because of the vigil for the Great Canon. Wine is allowed—and, according to some authorities, oil as well—on Friday in the same week, because of the vigil for the Akathistos Hymn.

It has always been held that these rules of fasting should be relaxed in the case of anyone elderly or in poor health. In present-day practice, even for those in good health, the full strictness of the fast is usually mitigated. Only a few Orthodox today attempt to keep a total fast on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday in the first week, or on the first three days in Holy Week.

On weekdays—except, perhaps, during the first week or Holy Week—it is now common to eat two cooked meals daily instead of one. From the second until the sixth week, many Orthodox use wine, and perhaps oil also, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and less commonly on Mondays as well. Permission is often given to eat fish in these weeks.

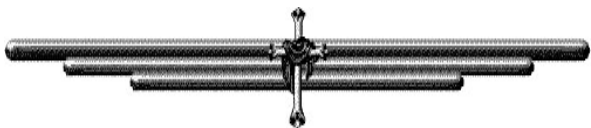
Personal factors need to be taken into account, as for example the situation of an isolated Orthodox living in the same household as non-Orthodox, or obliged to take meals in a factory or school canteen. In cases of uncertainty, each should seek the advice of his or her spiritual father. At all times it is essential to bear in mind that *you are not under the law but under grace* (Rom 6:14), and that *the letter kills, but the spirit gives life* (2 Cor 3:6).

The rules of fasting, while they need to be taken seriously, are not to be interpreted with dour and pedantic legalism; *for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Rom 14:17).



An old man said, “The prophets wrote books, then came our Fathers who put them into practice. Those who came after them learnt them by heart. Then came the present generation, who have written them out and put them into their window seats without using them.”

Sayings of the Desert Fathers



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 FRANCO-LATIN (ROMAN “CATHOLIC”) DEPARTURE FROM ORTHODOXY

By an Orthodox Christian, written in commemoration of the Holy Martyr, Saint Peter the Aleut.

Already in eighth century Western Europe, “the Frankish military leaders inserted themselves into the life of the Church. One by one the bishops, the successors of the Apostles and guardians of the Faith, were arrested, exiled and murdered. In their place the Frankish military leaders appointed themselves the new bishop. Indeed, St. Boniface complained that these military leaders posing as bishops never met in ecclesiastical council, nor wore the vestments of the Church, but rather wore military clothes, meeting together for war councils and ‘shed the blood of Christians like that of the pagans’” (Bell p. 18; and Migne, PL 89:744). Thus the beginning of incomplete Apostolic Succession was set in motion.

Then, when the unilateral insertion by Charlemagne into the Nicene Creed of the Latin error that the Holy Spirit had two Sources, the Father and the Son, advanced in western Europe, St. Photios was moved in the ninth century to defend the Orthodox Christian dogma that the Holy Spirit had one Source, the Father. The previous Oecumenical Synods also had declared that the Nicene Creed should not be altered, noting the fact that the Holy Spirit had guided His Church to true dogma as He had done and would continue to do (Acts 15:22, 28 and John 16:13). Nor was it right for any man to change the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who told us that the Source of the Holy Spirit is the Father (John 15:26). The seriousness of the issue could not be overstated.

Pope Leo III further reinforced the true dogma in the following manner: In St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican city-state one could find two silver tablets with the Nicene Creed, one engraved in Greek and the other in Latin, both without the addition of the Latin error. Pope Leo had them placed there early in the ninth century with the Latin inscription: HAEC LEO POSUI AMORE ET CAUTELA ORTHODOXAE FIDEI; which means I, Leo, place here for the love and protection of the Orthodox Faith (Vita Leonis, Liber Pontificallis, Ed. Duchesne, T. II, p.26).

However, this did not stop Pope Nicholas I and subsequent popes from accepting the Latin error; moreover, Pope Nicholas claimed to be superior to all other bishops in the East or West, though Archbishop Hincmar of Reims, who based his argument on Canon Law, disputed this (Vlas. Phidas, Ecclesiastic History, Athens 1973, p. 75). What’s more, it was abundantly clear that these claims were also not consistent with Holy Scripture or Church history either (Acts 15:22, 28). Nevertheless, this trend eventually led to the tragic Great Schism of 1054, and the subsequent unsupported declaration

of papal infallibility in 1870, which was not without internal dispute at that time as well.

Around a half century after the Schism, the Franks under papal authority seized the Holy Sepulchre from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and replaced the Orthodox Christian clergy with their bishops. The twelfth century Armenian historian Matthew of Edessa tells us, however, that the unique miracle of the Holy Light of Pascha did not descend until the Greek Orthodox Patriarch was restored. A similar event would happen about four and a half centuries later when the Armenians, who hold to monophysitism, would bribe the sultan to gain access to the Holy Sepulchre, but the Holy Light would split an outside column and go instead to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch who was praying in the courtyard. Miraculously, the Holy Light comes every Pascha to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, and every year the Holy Fire reveals its supernatural property by the fact that it doesn't burn for the first minutes.

In the thirteenth century even the Theotokos had forewarned the Orthodox Christian monks who lived on Mt. Athos that "her enemies and her Son's enemies" were going to invade. Quickly, the Papists attacked, tortured, hanged and beheaded many monks. The Martyrs for the Truth rejected the offer of life in return for participation in communion of the Papacy. The Papist attacks continued well into the twentieth century, as evidenced by living witnesses who attest to their family members' martyrdoms in Serbia under the Ustashe with the approval of Cardinal Stepinac. They too were offered communion with the Papacy in return for their lives, but they would not deny Christ.

In the fourteenth century, Barlaam and his followers drifted even further from the early Church by teaching that the Light at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor was created. Roman Catholicism teaches this error to this day; yet even the Jews knew that God's manifestation that is the Angel of the Lord in the Burning Bush, to the Holy Prophet, was not created but existed before creation (Romanides, Jewish and Christian Orthodox Dialogue). Barlaam also mocked the Orthodox practice of hesychastic prayer. During this difficult time, St Gregory Palamas became the great pillar of Orthodoxy. Moved by the Holy Spirit, he defended both hesychastic prayer and also that the Holy Transfiguration Light was uncreated. He knew that the experience of the divine uncreated Light or theosis perpetuated the truth of Orthodoxy. It revealed that the purpose for life was theosis, which is union with God. Conversely, the lack of this experience or not holding fast to the teachings of those who had this experience could only lead to rationalistic error. Furthermore, the lack of the experience of theosis was also the evidence that revealed the Catholic doctrine of Barlaam to be false indeed.

In the fifteenth century at the Council of Florence, St. Mark of Ephesus, the third pillar of Orthodoxy, defended Ortho-

doxy against the Latin errors regarding: the procession of the Holy Spirit; the primacy of the pope; and the later alterations of the purgatorial fire; as well as the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist. Over a hundred years later, on November 20th 1583, Patriarch Jeremias of Constantinople, Patriarch Sylvester of Alexandria and Patriarch Sophronios of Jerusalem, along with the agreement of the rest of the Bishops of the Synod signed the Sigillion, a part of which reads: Whosoever says that our Lord Jesus Christ at the Mystical Last Supper used unleavened bread as do the Hebrews and not leavened bread... let him be far from us and under anathema (Codex 772, St. Panteleimon Monastery; Holy Mountain and Codex 285, Sacred Kafsokalyvia Skete, Holy Mountain).

The use of unleavened bread and the removal of the epiclesis were not the only changes from the early Church's teachings regarding the Mysteries, but also every Latin Sacrament had been altered: Baptism became sprinkling; Confirmation became tainted with rationalism and separated itself by an interval of years from Baptism; Ordination now demanded celibacy, and the addition of cardinal made a fourth order that weakened the episcopacy given that cardinals are superior to bishops; Confessional prayers moved away from Christ and moved towards the ego; Unction became extreme and was offered only to those near death; and simple indissoluble Marriage except in the case of adultery became convoluted; however, the most horrible consequence of Roman Catholicism's departure from the Orthodox Christian Faith is, as the wonder-working St. Nectarios stated, that it "was deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ." (Zalalas, Love in Truth, p. 21) Indeed, the denial of the Uncreated in the Mystery of Holy Communion and the Church of Christ was a fatal blow to the Franco-Latins.

By the Sixteenth century, Catholics themselves noticed even more deviations from the early Church doctrine, like indulgences, and many of them protested. It was the beginning of a great splintering within Roman Catholicism. By the end of that century there were almost three hundred different denominations in the West. The same type of splintering, however, has yet to occur within Orthodoxy because there still has been no deviation from the Apostles' dogma to protest against. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?



Watch yourself with all diligence, lest the enemy steal near and robs you, depriving you of this great treasure, which is inner peace and stillness of soul.

The enemy strives to destroy the peace of the soul, because he knows that when the soul is in turmoil it is more easily led to evil.

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite

ON THOUGHTS WHICH INCLINE THE MIND TO REPENTANCE

By St. Paisius Velichkovsky.



St. Paisius
Velichkovsky (+1794)

There are three aspects of St. Paisius' life for which we venerate him: his personal holiness, his revival of monasticism and spirituality in Romania and Russia; and his translation from Greek into Slavonic and Romanian of many writings by the greatest Orthodox masters of prior centuries, edited into a collection which would be called the *Philokalia* ("Love of the Good"). For these reasons, he is a pivotal figure in Orthodox Church history.

St. Paisius grew up in a devout family, a reminder to us that Christian families are where saints are born and nurtured to begin their journey to heaven. Even as a child, St. Paisius had a profound inner spiritual life and love for God, which his parents and the general atmosphere of his household strongly encouraged. He loved church services and reading spiritual books, especially the lives of the Saints.

When he was 13, he went to the Kiev Theological Academy. But he longed for the monastic life and so, following the voice of his heart, he became a monk when he was 19. He wandered to Moldavia (northern Romania), where there were then a great many holy elders and hesychastic sketes. There he learned under his Elder Basil of Poiana Marului, the important lessons of obedience, humility and the practice of the "Prayer of the Heart."

Seeking further spiritual wealth, he went to Mt. Athos in northern Greece, which was, and still is, the greatest center of Orthodox monasticism. There he labored faithfully and was tonsured into the Lesser Schema, the secondary level of monastic obedience. Recognizing his gifts for spiritual leadership, other monks gathered around him. They insisted he become their priest.

He was ordained a priest and always celebrated the Divine Liturgy profoundly with tears of joy and compunction. Soon there were many monks in his brotherhood, composed of Slavs and Romanians. They had to move to find a place to develop their brotherhood. Eventually, with a blessing, they were invited to take over Neamts Monastery in Moldavia, which grew to become the spiritual center of Romanian Orthodoxy, amongst many great spiritual monasteries. St. Paisius was tonsured to the Great Schema, the highest level of monastic order, and elevated to Archimandrite, the highest honor of monastic priesthood. His personal holiness, and gifts of spiritual counsel, and administrative leadership resulted in his monastery growing to 1,000 monks, making it then the largest Orthodox monastery in the world.

While on the Holy Mountain, St. Paisius had gained great spiritual wisdom from reading the Church Fathers and observing the life of the Athonites. He was moved to translate and edit the Patristic writings, especially their writings on the Jesus Prayer and the ascetic practices, necessary to acquire the heights of inner illumination and union with God. He would continue his own personal translation work, despite all his responsibilities as abbot and elder, until his last days.

Neamt Monastery became a center for this sacred scholarly work, as St. Paisius attracted to his monastery and encouraged a whole army of gifted monastic translators who translated previously unknown works of the Fathers and liturgical services from Greek into Romanian and Russian. St. Paisius' collection, *The Philokalia*, profoundly contributed to the subsequent flowering of monasticism and spirituality in Russia and Romania in the 19th century.

In Russia, the spiritual life of the monasteries had been in decline for a century due to the harsh laws and interfering policies of Tsars Peter and Catherine, which severely restricted monasteries and the life of the Church. The famous Optina Monastery, southwest of Moscow, grew and flourished in the early 19th century as a direct result of St. Paisius' guidance through those taught by his disciples who settled there and developed the tradition of eldership. Optina, in turn, played a vital role in Russian spiritual revival through the 19th century, and into the 20th. It cultivated several revered elders (*startzi*) who offered spiritual direction to those monastic and lay people, including the great 19th century Russian writers such as Dostoyevsky, who came from across Russia for their blessing, prayers and counsel.

Through the prayers of our Holy Father Paisius, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us!

† † †

Remember, O my soul, the terrible and frightful wonder: that your Creator for your sake became Man, and deigned to suffer for the sake of you salvation. His angels tremble, the Cherubim are terrified, the Seraphim are in fear, and all the heavenly powers ceaselessly give praise; and you, unfortunate soul, remain in laziness.

At least from this time forth arise and do not put off, my beloved soul, holy repentance, contrition of heart and penance for your sins. Putting them off year after year, month after month, day after day, you will not at all desire with your whole heart to repent, and you will not find one to have compassion on you.

O with what torture you will then begin to repent without success. Having the opportunity today to do some good deed, do not put off until tomorrow, my beloved soul, holy repentance, because you do not know what today will bring forth or what misfortune might happen to you this night. For you do not know what the day or night will bring, whether a long life stands before you or not, or if you will

suddenly and unexpectedly receive a miserable and speedy death.

Now, my beloved soul, is the time of patience; now is the time to endure sorrow; now is the time to keep the commandments and fulfill the virtues; now is the time of sweet lamentation and tearful mourning. If you truly wish to be saved, my soul, be in love with sorrow and groaning, as previously you loved repose. Live as if you were daily dying; soon your life will pass by like the shadow of clouds before the sun, and you will be forgotten. The days of our life, as it were, are shed forth into the air; and so, do not hesitate even before the most difficult sorrow.

With regard to men: let us not speak of senseless sorrow, but even in reasonable sorrow, do not give yourself over to grief, do not be disturbed, do not run away; but consider yourself as dust before the feet of others. Without this you cannot be saved or escape eternal torment; for our life ends soon, and passes away in a single day. If a man will not crush himself piously through virtues, or will not sacrifice his own life for the fulfilling of God's commandments and the traditions of the Fathers, he cannot be saved.

And thus, my beloved soul, remember all the Saints: the Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Hierarchs, Holy Monks and Righteous ones, Fools-for-Christ and all who from the ages have pleased God. Where have you found Saints who did not subdue the flesh to the spirit or who did not suffer in difficult misfortunes, likewise suffered hunger and thirst, kept vigil and prayed day and night, had humility and contrition of heart, a childlike lack of malice, every mercy, an aid in every sorrow and need, various gifts and alms-giving, as much as possible? In a word, they had all the virtues, together with un hypocritical love. What they themselves did not wish and hated they did not do to others. And they did it with obedience, like bought slaves, working not as for a man, but as for God, with wise simplicity, but not appearing wise, as being insignificant, but only paying heed to their own salvation. O man! Death stands before you. If you labor, you will be revered with eternal life in the future age.

Virtue is acquired by every kind of forcing oneself. Therefore, if you wish to conquer the passions, cut off the love of pleasure; but if you are pursuing food, you will spend a life in passions; the soul will not be humbled if the flesh is not deprived of bread. It is not possible to deliver the soul from perdition while protecting the body from unpleasantness. Therefore let us return to what is primary.

If you wish to be saved, O my soul, to go first on the most sorrowful path which has been indicated here, to enter into the Heavenly Kingdom and receive eternal life—then refine your flesh, taste voluntary bitterness, and endure difficult sorrows, as all the Saints tasted and endured. And when a man is preparing himself and gives himself the command to endure for the sake of God all sorrows and pain which come

upon him, then light and painless seem for him all sorrows, unpleasantnesses and attacks of devils and men. He does not fear death, and nothing can separate such a one from the love of Christ.

Have you heard, my beloved soul, how the Holy Fathers spent their lives? O my soul! Imitate them at least a little.

Did they not have tears? O woe, my soul. Were they not sorrowful, thin and worn out in body? O woe, my soul. Did they not have bodily illnesses, great wounds and lamentation of soul with tears? O woe, my soul. Were they not clothed in the same infirm body that we have? O woe, my soul!

Did they not have the desire for splendid, sweet and light repose in this world and every bodily repose?

Yes, they desired these things, and their bodies in truth were afflicted, but they exchanged their desires for patience and their grief for future joy. They cut off everything once and for all. They considered themselves as dead men, and tormented themselves mercilessly in spiritual labors. Do you see, my soul, how the Holy Fathers labored, having no repose and suffering every kind of evil? They subjected the flesh to the spirit and fulfilled all the other commandments of God, and were saved.

But you, O pitiful soul, do not at all wish to force yourself, and you grow faint from small labors, grow despondent and do not at all remember the hour of death and weep over your sins; but you have become accustomed, my wretched soul, to eat to the fill, to drink to the fill and to be slothful. Do you not know that you are called voluntarily to torment? And yet you endure nothing. How then do you wish to be saved?

At least from this time forth, then: Arise, my beloved soul, and do what I shall tell you. If you cannot labor as the Holy Fathers did, then at least begin according to your strength.

Serve everyone with humility and simplicity of heart; acknowledging your infirmity and belittling yourself, say: "Woe to thee, my wretched soul; woe to thee, vile one; woe to thee, O all-defiled one, slothful, careless, sleepy, cruel; woe to thee, who hast perished!" And so, little by little it will come to tender-feeling, will shed tears, will come to itself and repent.



The salvation of the soul, concerning which you ask me, cannot be made easy except by a true spiritual instructor, one who forces himself first of all to fulfill all the commandments of the Lord, in accordance with the word of the Lord—*whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven* (Mt 5:19).

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

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HIS FLESH AND BLOOD...

From the book "Experiences during the Holy Liturgy," by Fr. Stefanos Anagnostopoulos.

Something of similar happened in our own century with Fr. Ieronimos the "One-Handed" of Aegina, who managed to survive in his own hand-built Hesycasterion until his falling asleep in 1966. A year before, in 1965, I had visited him with my Presbytera and after many counsels he made sure to relate to me, with much solemnity, about his ordination to the priesthood and how and why he gave it up.

In 1923, when he was still a deacon with the name Vasilios, Metropolitan Panteleimon of Karystia, while visiting him on Aegina, after much pressure, by force ordained him a priest. He then assigned him to the Hospital of Aegina, where he served as Chaplain. The name Ieronimos, he took a year after, from the holy Elder Ieronimos of Simonopetra, when he gave him the Great Angelic Schema, since he had already given-up the priesthood.

This took place the fortieth day after his ordination, during the Divine Liturgy. It was just after the Consecration of the Holy Gifts, and although the moment to commune had come, enraptured and transported as he was from the prayer and awe of his heart, he suddenly watched the Holy



Gifts within the Holy Chalice, take-on the form of Flesh and Blood. True flesh and true blood! Of course, he was utterly shattered by this otherworldly sight and for quite some time he remained praying before this most awesome mystery, shedding many scalding tears. Then, full of trembling, he came to the Beautiful Gates and made the Dismissal, without an explanation to anybody.

Then, for many hours he prayed with great intensity, pleading with God to show mercy, and to return His Most-holy Body and Blood to their natural form of bread and wine, which finally happened. Thereafter, that very night in-fact, he handed-in his resignation. From that time on, he said, his hands felt unable to "spear" the Lord during the Holy Preparation or, to "divide" Him after the Consecration. He did continue to serve in the Church at the Hospital as a chanter and homeliest.

Characteristically he said to me with great emphasis: "It is not possible, with my mortal and sinful hands to touch the Lord of Glory."

And as we were departing, after having kissed, he told me sententiously: "Be careful, my papa. Because very few priests are saved." To another cleric he once said very naturally: "If you don't see your Guardian Angel next to the Holy Altar, don't liturgize!"

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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AN ORTHODOX CONFESSION

WHICH LEADS THE INWARD MAN TO HUMILITY

From "The Way of a Pilgrim."

Turning my eyes carefully upon myself and watching the course of my inward state, I have verified by experience that I do not love God, that I have no religious belief, and that I am filled with pride and sensuality. All this I actually find in myself as a result of detailed examination of my feelings and conduct, thus:

I do not love God. For if I loved God I should be continually thinking about Him with heartfelt joy. Every thought of God would give me gladness and delight. On the contrary, I much more often and much more eagerly think about earthly things, and thinking about God is labor and dryness. If I loved God, then talking with Him in prayer would be my nourishment and delight and would draw me to unbroken communion with Him. But, on the contrary, I not only find no delight in prayer, but even find it an effort. I struggle with reluctance, I am enfeebled by sloth, and am ready to occupy myself eagerly with any unimportant trifle, if only it shortens prayer and keeps me from it. My time slips away unnoticed in futile occupations, but when I am occupied with God, when I put myself into His presence every hour seems like a year. If one person loves another, he thinks of him throughout the day without ceasing, he pictures him to himself, he cares for him, and in all circumstances his beloved friend is never out of his thoughts. But I, throughout the day, scarcely set aside even a single hour in which to sink deep down into meditation upon God, to inflame my heart with love of Him, while I eagerly

give up twenty-three hours as fervent offerings to the idols of my passions. I am forward in talk about frivolous matters and things which degrade the spirit; that gives me pleasure. But in the consideration of God I am dry, bored and lazy. Even if I am unwillingly drawn by others into spiritual conversation, I try to shift the subject quickly to one which pleases my desires. I am tirelessly curious about novelties, about civic affairs and political events; I eagerly seek the satisfaction of my love of knowledge in science and art, and in ways of getting things I want to possess. But the study of the Law of God, the knowledge of God and of religion, make little impression on me, and satisfy no hunger of my soul. I regard these things not only as a non-essential occupation for a Christian, but in a casual way as a sort of side-issue with which I should perhaps occupy my spare time, at odd moments. To put it shortly, if love for God is recognized by the keeping of His commandments (If ye love Me, keep My commandments, says our Lord Jesus Christ), and I not only do not keep them, but even make little attempt to do so, then in absolute truth the conclusion follows that I do not love God. That is what Basil the Great says: 'The proof that a man does not love God and His Christ lies in the fact that he does not keep His commandments'.

I do not love my neighbor either. For not only am I unable to make up my mind to lay down my life for his sake (according to the Gospel), but I do not even sacrifice my happiness, well-being and peace for the good of my neighbor. If I did love him as myself, as the Gospel bids, his misfortunes would distress me also, his happiness would bring delight to me too. But, on the contrary, I listen to curious, unhappy stories about my neighbor and I am not distressed; I remain quite undisturbed or what is

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still worse, I find a sort of pleasure in them. Bad conduct on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with ensure. His well-being, honor and happiness do not delight me as my own, and, as if they were something quite alien to me, give me no feeling of gladness. What is more, they subtly arouse in me feelings of envy or contempt.

I have no religious belief. Neither in immortality nor in the Gospel. If I were firmly persuaded and believed without doubt that beyond the grave lies eternal life and recompense for the deeds of this life, I should be continually thinking of this. The very idea of immortality would terrify me and I should lead this life as a foreigner who gets ready to enter his native land. On the contrary, I do not even think about eternity, and I regard the end of this earthly life as the limit of my existence. The secret thought nestles within me: Who knows what happens at death? If I say I believe in immortality, then I am speaking about my mind only, and my heart is far removed from a firm conviction about it. That is openly witnessed to by my conduct and my constant care to satisfy the life of the senses.

Were the Holy Gospel taken into my heart in faith, as the Word of God, I should be continually occupied with it, I should study it, find delight in it and with deep devotion fix my attention upon it. Wisdom, mercy, love, are hidden in it; it would lead me to happiness, I should find gladness in the study of the Law of God day and night. In it I should find nourishment like my daily bread and my heart would be drawn to the keeping of its laws. Nothing on earth would be strong enough to turn me away from it. On the contrary, if now and again I read or hear the Word of God, yet even so it is only from necessity or from a general love of knowledge,

and approaching it without any very close attention, I find it dull and uninteresting. I usually come to the end of the reading without any profit, only too ready to change over to secular reading in which I take more pleasure and find new and interesting subjects.

I am full of pride and sensual self-love. All my actions confirm this. Seeing something good in myself, I want to bring it into view, or to pride myself upon it before other people or inwardly to admire myself for it. Although I display an outward humility, yet I ascribe it all to my own strength and regard myself as superior to others, or at least no worse than they. If I notice a fault in myself, I try to excuse it, I cover it up by saying, 'I am made like that' or 'I am not to blame'. I get angry with those who do not treat me with respect and consider them unable to appreciate the value of people. I brag about my gifts: my failures in any undertaking I regard as a personal insult. I murmur, and I find pleasure in the unhappiness of my enemies. If I strive after anything good it is for the purpose of winning praise, or spiritual self-indulgence, or earthly consolation. In a word, I continually make an idol of myself and render it uninterrupted service, seeking in all things the pleasures of the senses, and nourishment for my sensual passions and lusts.

Going over all this I see myself as proud, adulterous, unbelieving, without love to God and hating my neighbor. What state could be more sinful? The condition of the spirits of darkness is better than mine. They, although they do not love God, hate men, and live upon pride, yet at least believe and tremble. But I? Can there be a doom more terrible than that which faces me, and what sentence of punishment will be more severe than that upon the careless and foolish life that I recognize in myself?

ON THE BEATINGS OF OUR LORD

By St. Symeon the New Theologian, from the book «Stavroanastasisima», published by the Holy Monastery of Saint Symeon the New Theologian.

Our Lord and God, albeit entirely blameless, condescended to beatings so that the sinners who would emulate Him would not only receive absolution of their sins, but would also become communicants in His divinity, through their obedience. He was God, and for our sake became a man. He was beaten, spat on and crucified, and with everything that the (divinely) Impassionate One underwent, it is as though He is teaching us, and saying to each one of us:

If you wish to become God, to gain eternal life and live with Me—something that your forefather did not achieve, because he strove to do it in the wrong manner—then humble yourself, just as I had humbled Myself for you; avoid the arrogance and pride befitting the demonic mentality; accept beatings, spittings, slappings; persevere throughout them all to the death, and do not be ashamed.

But, should you feel too ashamed to suffer something for the sake of My commandments, the way that I, your God, suffered for your sake, then I too shall consider it shameful, for you to be with Me during My glorious Coming and I shall say to My angels:

“This one here was ashamed to confess Me during My humiliation and he did not condescend to abandon the world and be alike to Me. Thus, now that he has been stripped of the perishable glory that my Father had given him (after the death of his flesh), I consider it shameful to even look upon him. Therefore cast him out, ...take away the impious, so that he may not see the glory of the Lord. (Is 26:10).”

Shudder, all you people, and be afraid, and show joyful patience with all the hubris, which God had likewise suffered for our salvation... God was beaten by a worthless servant, and yet, you do not condescend to suffer the same by your fellow-man? Are you ashamed of emulating God? How, then, will you reign alongside Him and be glorified along with Him in His Heavenly kingdom, if you will not suffer your brother patiently? If He had not condescended to becoming a man for your sake, and instead had left you lying there, in your fallen state of transgression to this day, wouldn't you now be in the deepest part of Hades, you wretch, along with the impious and the irreverent?

But what do we say to those who have actually abandoned everything and became poor, supposedly for the sake of the Heavenly kingdom?

So, my brother, you have become poor and you have thus far emulated Christ the Master and your God. You can see

Him, Who resides above all the Heavens, now living and associating with you. See, you are now walking alongside each other. Then someone comes along on your life's path and first slaps your Master, then slaps you. The Master Himself does not react against him, and yet you do? “Yes”, says the brother, “because the Master Himself had said to the one who struck Him: *if I have spoken wrongly, tell me what it was; but if I have spoken correctly, why do you strike me?*” (Jn 18:23)

But the Lord did not say these words as though talking back at the servant, as you may have imagined; it was because He had committed no sin, nor was any guile found in the words of His mouth. He uttered those words, so that it may not be imagined that - because He had supposedly sinned - the servant had justly struck Him, saying *is this how you reply to the high priest?* (Jn 18:22).

But we are not like Him—we, who are responsible for so many sins. Not to mention that, despite having suffered something far worse than a beating, He did not utter a word; instead,

He prayed for those who crucified Him.

He, even when mocked, displayed no indignation, and you grumble?

He tolerated their spitting, slapping and whippings, and you can't tolerate a single

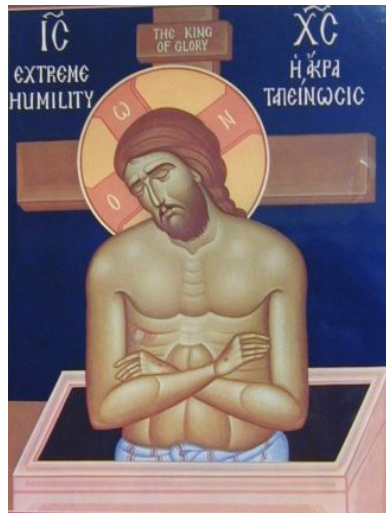
harsh word?

He accepted a Cross and the torture of the nails and a disgraceful death, and you do not condescend to perform the lowliest of ministries?

How, then, will you become a communicant in glory, if you do not condescend to becoming a communicant in His dishonorable death? Indeed, you have abandoned your wealth in vain, if you have not agreed to also lift up a Cross; in other words, to patiently suffer the onslaught of all tribulations; therefore, my brother, you are left all alone on the path of life, and you have unfortunately separated yourself from your sweetest Master and God!



The eyes of the Russian hermit Father Tychon were always full of tears. He would wipe them constantly with a wet handkerchief which he carried always in his hand. His stole was usually damp with tears, and the wooden cross he used to bless with, was worn out. He would often say that we ought to wash Jesus' feet with our tears all the days of our lives, and wipe them with our hair while prostrating ourselves before Him. In his own cell, the wooden cross before which he prayed was soaked with his tears.



OUR LORD IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

By St. John Maximovitch

When the Lord had finished the Mystical Supper with His disciples and given them His Instructions, He went with them to the Mount of Olives. On the way He continued His final teachings, after which He addressed the Heavenly Father with a prayer for His disciples and those who would believe their word (Jn 17).

On crossing the stream of the Cedron, the Lord and His disciples went into the garden of Gethsemane, where He had been accustomed to gather with them earlier. Here, He left His disciples, except for Peter, James and John, telling them to sit down for a time while He prayed. Then, He Himself with Peter, James and John went on a little further. He wanted to be on His own as much as possible, but knowing all that was going to happen, He began to sorrow, to be distressed and horrified, and He said to those with Him: *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch with Me.* And going a little further off, He fell face down on the earth and prayed.

Twice the Lord interrupted His prayer, and went up to Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Alas! They were there, but not watching: sleep had overcome them. In vain did their Divine Teacher exhort them to watch and pray, so as not to fall into temptation: *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38). The disciples again fell asleep and immediately the Savior departed from them in order to continue His prayer, which ended only when the hour of the betrayal of the Son of Man into the hands of sinners drew near. Jesus' intensity of prayer reached the highest degree—He came out in a bloody sweat which fell in drops on the earth (Lk 22:44).

What did Jesus pray about with such fiery intensity? What did He beseech the Heavenly Father, falling face down to the earth three times? *Abba, My Father! All is possible to Thee; O if only Thou wouldst grant that this cup be taken from Me. If it is possible, let this cup pass by Me; take this cup from Me. However, not as I will, but as Thou wilt; not My will, but Thine be done. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by Me, but I must drink of it, may Thy will be done.*

The Lord Jesus Christ was the God-Man. The Divine and human natures, without merging into each other and with-

out changing, *undivided and unseparated* (the dogma of the Chalcedonian Council) were united in Him in one Person. In accordance with His two natures, the Lord also had two wills. As God, Jesus Christ was of one substance with God the Father and had one Will with Him and the Holy Spirit. But as perfect man, consisting of a soul and a body, the Lord also had human feelings and a human will. His human will was completely obedient to His Divine will. The Lord subjected His human will to the Divine will—He sought only to do the will of the Heavenly Father (Jn 5:30); His spiritual food was *to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to finish His work.* (Jn 4:34).

But the work which was set before Him to finish was greater than any other, and even unfeeling, soulless nature was bound to be amazed at it. It was necessary for Him to redeem man from sin and death, and reestablish the union of man with God. It was necessary that the sinless Savior should take upon Himself all human sin, so that He, Who had no sins of His own, should feel the weight of the sin of all humanity and sorrow over it in such a way as was possible only for complete holiness, which clearly feels even the slightest deviation from the commandments and Will of God. It was necessary that He, in Whom Divinity and humanity were hypostatically united, should in His holy, sinless humanity experience the full horror of the distancing of man from his Creator, of the split between sinful humanity and the source of holiness and light - God.

The depth of the fall of mankind must have stood before His eyes at that moment; for man, who in Paradise did not want to obey God and who listened to the devil's slander against Him, would now rise up against his Divine Savior, slander Him, and, having declared Him unworthy to live upon the earth, would hang Him on a tree between Heaven and earth, thereby subjecting Him to the curse of the God-given law (Deut 21:22-23). It was necessary that the sinless Righteous One, rejected by the sinful world for which and at the hands of which He was suffering, should forgive mankind this evil deed and turn to the Heavenly Father with a prayer that the Divine righteousness should forgive mankind, blinded by the devil, this rejection of its Creator and Savior. Such a holy prayer could not fail to be heard, such a power of love was bound to unite the source of love, God, with those who even now would feel this love, and, understanding how far the ways of men had departed from the ways of God, would manifest



a strong determination to return to God the Father through the Creator's reception of human nature.

And now there came the time when all this was to come to pass. In a few hours the Son of Man, raised upon the cross, would draw all men to Himself by His own self-sacrifice. Before the force of His love the sinful hearts of men would not be able to stand. The love of the God-man would break the stone of men's hearts. They would feel their own impurity and darkness, their insignificance; and only the stubborn haters of God would not want to be enlightened by the light of the Divine greatness and mercy. But all those who would not reject Him Who called them, irradiated by the light of the love of the God-Man, would feel their separation from the loving Creator and would thirst to be united with Him. And invisibly the greatest mystery would take place—mankind would turn to its Maker, and the merciful Lord would joyfully accept those who would return from the slander of the devil to their Archetype. *Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* (Pss 84:10); righteousness has pressed close from Heaven, for the incarnate Truth has shone out on the cross from the earth. The hour had come when all this was about to take place.

The world did not suspect the greatness of the coming day. Before the gaze of the God-Man all that was to happen was revealed. He voluntarily sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the human race. And now He came for the last time to pray alone to His Heavenly Father. Here He would accomplish that sacrifice which would save the race of men. He would voluntarily give Himself up to sufferings, giving Himself over into the power of darkness.

However, this sacrifice would not be saving if He would experience only His personal sufferings—He had to be tormented by the wounds of sin from which mankind was suffering. The heart of the God-Man was filled with inexpressible sorrow. All the sins of men, beginning from the transgression of Adam and ending with those which would be done at the moment of the sounding of the last trumpet—all the great and small sins of all men stood before His mental gaze. They were always revealed to Him as God—*all things are manifest before Him*—but now their whole weight and iniquity was experienced also by His human nature. His holy, sinless soul was filled with horror. He suffered as the sinners themselves do not suffer, whose coarse hearts do not feel how the sin of man defiles and how it separates him from the Creator. His sufferings were the greater in that He saw this coarseness and embitteredness of heart, the fact that *men have blinded their eyes that they should not see, and do not want to hear with their ears and be converted, so that they should be healed.* He saw that the whole world was even now turning away from God Who had come to them in human form. The hour was coming and had already come (Jn 16:31) when even those who had only just declared their readiness to lay down their lives

for Him would be scattered. The God-Man would hang in solitude upon the Cross, showered with a hail of insults from the people who would come to see this spectacle. Only a few souls remained faithful to Him, but they, too, by their silent grief and helplessness would increase the sufferings of the heart of the Virgin's Son, overflowing with love. There would not be help from anywhere...

True, even in these minutes He would not be alone, for the Father was always with Him (Jn 8:19; 10:30). But so as to feel the full weight of the consequences of sin, the Son of God would voluntarily allow His human nature to feel even the horror of separation from God. This terrible moment would be unendurable for His holy, sinless being. A powerful cry would break out from His lips: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* And seeing this hour in advance, His holy soul was filled with horror and distress.

Still earlier, when some Hellenes came to see Jesus, He allowed His human nature to experience the approach of that dreadful hour. When these *sheep from another fold* came to Him, the God-Man saw that the hour when everyone would come to Him as He was raised upon the cross, was near. His human nature shuddered, His soul was in distress. But Jesus knew that without His sufferings the salvation of men was impossible, that without them His earthly activity would leave a trace as small as that of a grain which lies for a long time on the surface of the earth before being dried up by the sun. It was therefore at that time that He appealed to His Father not to allow human weakness to prevail over all the thoughts and feelings of His human nature: *Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? And yet for this purpose have I come to this hour.* (Jn 12:27).

And as if heartened by the remembrance of why He had come to the earth, Christ prays that the Will of God for the salvation of the human race be carried out: *Father, glorify Thy name.* (Jn 12:28)—glorify it on earth, among men, show Thyself to be not only the Creator but also the Savior (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, Bk 4). *I have glorified it and will glorify it again* (Jn 12:28) came a voice from Heaven announced that the time for the fulfillment of the Mystery which had been hidden from the beginning of the age was coming (Col 1:26; Eph 1:9; 3:9).

And now that time had already come. If before the human nature of Christ had shuddered and been troubled at the thought of what was to come, what did it experience now, when in expectation of the coming of His enemies and betrayer He for the last time prayed alone to God? The Lord knew that every prayer of His would be answered (Jn 11:42), He knew that if He would ask the Father to deliver Him from torments and death, more than twelve legions of angels would appear (Mt 26:53) to defend Him. But had He not come for this? So that at the last moment He should refuse to carry out that which He had fore-announced in the Scriptures?

However, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The spirit of Jesus now burns (Rom 12:11), wishing only one thing—the fulfillment of the Will of God. But by its nature, human nature abhors sufferings and death (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, chapters 18, 20, 23, 24; Blessed Theodoret; St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, word 6, *On the Remembrance of Death*). The Son of God willingly accepted this weak nature. He gives Himself up to death for the salvation of the world. And He conquers, although He feels the approaching fear of death and abhorrence of sufferings. Now these sufferings will be particularly terrible, terrible not so much in themselves, as from the fact that the soul of the God-Man was shaken to its depths.

The sin of man that He takes upon Himself is inexpressibly heavy. This sin weighs Jesus down, making the sufferings that are to come unendurable.

Christ knows that when His sufferings reach their peak, He will be completely alone. Not only will no man be able to relieve them *I looked for one that would sorrow with Me and there was none, for one that would comfort Me and none was found.* (Pss 68:21). *I looked, but there was none to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold.* (Is 63:5). But in order that He should feel the full weight of sins, He would also be allowed to feel the burden of separation from the Heavenly Father. And at this moment, His human will can wish to avoid the sufferings. But it will not be so. Let His human will not diverge for one second from His Divine Will. It is about this that the God-Man beseeches His Heavenly Father. If it is possible for mankind to re-establish its unity with God without this new and terrible crime against the Son of God (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius* Bk 4), then it is better that this hour should not come to pass. But if it is only in this way that mankind can be drawn to its Maker, let the good Will of God be accomplished in this case, too. May His Will be done, and may the human nature of Jesus, even at the most terrible moments, not wish anything other than the fulfillment of the will of God, the completion of God's economy. This is precisely what Christ prayed for in the garden of Gethsemane: *He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him Who was able to save Him from death.* (Heb 5:7).

He offered up prayers and supplications to Him Who was able to save Him from death, but He did not pray for deliverance from death. It is as if the Lord Jesus Christ spoke as follows to His Father: **Abba, My Father, the Father of Him Whom Thou has sent to gather into one the people of Israel and the scattered children of God—the people of the Gentiles, so as to make out of two one new man and by means of the cross reconcile them with Thee. All is possible to Thee, all is possible that is in accord with Thy boundless perfections. Thou knowest that it is natural for human nature to abhor sufferings, that man would always like to see good days** (Pss 34:14) **But he Who loves Thee with all his heart, with**

all his soul and with all his mind wishes only that which is pleasing to Thy good and perfect will. I have come down to earth to fulfill Thy wise will and for this purpose I have communed with flesh and blood, assuming human nature with all its weaknesses, except the sinful ones. I also have wished to avoid sufferings, but only on one condition—that this is Thy holy will. If it is possible that the work of economy should be completed without a new and terrible crime on the part of men; if it is possible for Me not to experience these mental sufferings, to which in a few hours' time will be united the terrible sufferings of the human body; if this is possible—deliver Me then from the experiences and temptations which have already come upon Me and which are still to come. Deliver Me from the necessity of experiencing the consequences of the crime of Adam. However, this request is dictated to Me by the frailty of My human nature; but let it be as is pleasing to Thee, let not the will of frail human nature be fulfilled, but Our common, pre-eternal Council. My Father! If according to Thy wise economy it is necessary that I offer this sacrifice, I do not reject It. But I ask only one thing: may Thy will be done. May Thy will be done always and in all things. As in Heaven with Me, Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thee there is one will, so may My human will here on earth not wish anything contrary to Our common will for one moment. May that which was decided by us before the creation of the world be fulfilled, may the salvation of the human race be accomplished. May the sons of men be redeemed from slavery to the devil, may they be redeemed at the high price of the sufferings and self-sacrifice of the God-Man. And may all the weight of men's sins, which I have accepted on Myself, and all my mental and physical sufferings, not be able to make My human will waver in its thirst that Thy holy will be done. May I fulfill Thy will with joy. Thy will be done."

The Lord prayed about the cup of His voluntary saving passion as if it was involuntary. (Sunday service of the fifth tone, canon, eighth hirmos), showing by this the two wills of the two natures, and beseeching God the Father that His human will would not waver in its obedience to the Divine will (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, 24). An angel appeared to Him from the Heavens and strengthened his human nature. (Lk 22:43). His human nature, while Jesus Who was accomplishing the exploit of His self-sacrifice prayed still more earnestly, being covered in a bloody sweat. And for His reverence and constant obedience to the will of the Father, the Son of God was heard. Strengthened and reassured, Jesus rose from prayer (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, 24). He knew that His human nature would not waver any more, that soon the load of the sins of men would be taken away from Him, and that by His obedience to God the Father He would bring human nature that had gone astray to Him. He went up to His disciples and said: *You all sleep and rest.*

It is finished, the hour has come: Lo! the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go, he who betrays Me is at hand. Pray that you do not fall into temptation.

Coming out to meet those who had come for Him, the Lord voluntarily gave Himself into their hands. And when Peter, wishing to defend His Teacher, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, the Lord healed the servant, and reminded Peter that He was voluntarily giving Himself up: *Put your sword into its sheath: am I not to drink the cup which the Father has given Me? Or do you think that I cannot now ask My Father and He will send Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, that this must come to pass?* And willingly drinking the whole cup of mental and physical sufferings to the bottom, Christ glorified God on earth; He accomplished a work which was no less than the very creation of the world. He restored the fallen nature of man, reconciled Divinity and humanity, and made men partakers of the Divine nature (2Pet 1:4).

Having accomplished the work which *the Father gave Him to do*, Christ was glorified also in His human nature with that glory which He as God had *before the world was* (Jn 17:5), and sat in His humanity at the right hand of God the Father, waiting until His enemies should be laid at the footstool of His feet (Heb 10:13).

Having been made for all those who obey Him the cause of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9), Christ remains even after His ascension *known in two natures without confusion*" (Dogmatikon of the sixth tone), *bearing two wills according to each nature unto the ages* (Sunday canon of the fifth tone, troparion of the eighth eirmos), but His glorified body cannot now suffer and does not need anything, while in accordance with this His human will, too, cannot diverge from His Divine will in anything. But with this flesh Christ will come again on the last day *to Judge the living and the dead*", after which, as King not only according to His Divinity, but also according to His humanity, He will be subject to God the Father together with the whole of His eternal kingdom, so that *God may be all in all*. (1 Cor 15:28).



No matter how much the waves of temptation rise up against your soul, always hasten to Christ. The Saviour will always come to your aid and will calm the waves. Simply believe that the Lord has providentially arranged such experiences for your soul's healing. Do not reject them, trying to seek your own bodily peace and imaginary tranquility; for it is better to be shaken, and yet endure. If you will gain an insight from this, it will greatly lighten your struggle; and you will gain more peace than if you do not.

St. Leo, the Optina Elder

BEING ORTHODOX

By St. John of Kronstadt

Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

(Jn 1: 47)

Our Lord Jesus Christ said this of a certain Nathanael, an Israelite who dwelt in the Galilean town of Cana, when the latter, on the advice of his friend Philip, went to meet Jesus Christ to be assured whether He was the Messiah promised to Israel.

Philip said to Nathanael, *We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!* But Nathanael said to him, *Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?* Philip then said to him, *Come and see.* When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, He said, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!* Nathanael said to Him, *Whence knowest Thou me?* Jesus answered him, saying, *Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee*, i.e., I knew all your thoughts, your faith, your hope for the Messiah, your future ministry.

The Lord Who knows the hearts of men apparently touched the very heartstrings of Nathanael, his inmost thoughts, desires, aspirations, showing His divine omniscience plainly to him. Thus was Nathanael brought to faith in Christ, and he cried out, *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!*, and became His disciple.

Why is it that during the Great Fast, on the day called the "Sunday of Orthodoxy," it is this particular Gospel which is prescribed to be read? Because the Lord's words to Nathanael reveal the character of the true, or Orthodox, Christian and, in general, the character of the true Church of Christ. *Behold, an Israelite indeed*, the Lord said of Nathanael, *in whom is no guile*, i.e., behold a man who rightly, directly, firmly thinks, reasons, believes, hopes, speaks and acts, since Nathanael directly, immediately believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and never wavered in his faith and hope, never changed his mind concerning His divine Person. Should not the true Christian be like him? Should not the divinely instituted society of Orthodox Christians also be such? Should not the Orthodox Church be such, and is it not such?

What high praise did He Who searches the hearts and reins render unto Nathanael in the words: *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!* What high praise there is for that Christian of whom the Lord says, *Behold a Christian indeed, in whom is no guile!*, and for that Church of which the Lord will say, *Behold a Church indeed, in which is no guile, or vain human inventions*, i.e., which is wholly true in all its doctrines, mysteries, divine services, directives, and its entire organization.

And just such men were our holy favorites of God; such has the whole Orthodox Church been from the beginning up to now, as is borne witness by an impartial history of the Church and by God Himself through the divers signs and wonders

wrought in the Church. It is, as the Apostle says, *the pillar and ground of Truth, it is a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.*

To preserve the Orthodox Faith, rivers of the blood of the apostles, the prophets and the martyrs were poured forth; and many tortures were borne by the venerable fathers and other champions of the Faith. But what about us, the children of the Orthodox Church? Are we preserving this precious inheritance, the Orthodox Faith; are we following its teachings, commandments, canons, rules, counsel? Do we love to offer service to God? Are we renewed thereby, are we hallowed each and every day, are we setting ourselves aright, are we attaining the perfection which the saints have reached? Are we becoming perfect in love for God and our neighbors; do we cherish our Faith; do we regard the mercy of God as the greatest thing, and that we have the good fortune to belong to the Orthodox Church is the first and greatest happiness in our life? What answer would we give to these questions if we were to respond according to our conscience?

To our shame, we must admit that in many Orthodox Christians, the Orthodox Faith is not only absent in their heart, but it is also not on their tongue; among them it has vanished entirely, or has been turned into total indifference with regard to any religion whatever—Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, Mohammendan, or pagan. We hear that one may please God in every religion, i.e., that every religion is supposedly pleasing to God, and that falsehood and truth, righteousness and unrighteousness are matters about which God does not care.

This is what ignorance of their own Faith, ignorance of the spirit and history of their Church, estrangement from its life and divine services, has brought many to—an eclipse of any understanding of Orthodoxy, heterodoxy and other religions! The annals of modern events relate that somewhere in Russia a certain headmaster, during the examination of his students, referred to the story of the sacrifice of Isaac as stupid. This is darkness, chaos, pernicious ignorance! The Christian, as a member of the Church, must know his own Faith and strive to live according to that Faith, to achieve salvation by means of that Faith, because the enemies of our salvation never sleep; they seek our destruction every hour and every day. The Orthodox Christian must not dismiss his Faith as a concern merely of certain people, or as a disposable toy appropriate only for children, or something fit only, as it were, for the uneducated common folk.

It would not be out of place to remind those who think thus of the venerable antiquity of our Faith, which is contemporary with the beginning of the human race, and of its direct origin with God and that men of high birth, vocation, position and gender lived and attained salvation in this Faith—glorious kings and wise philosophers, law-givers and the greatest orators, nobles and simple folk, rich and poor, men and women, the beauty and glory of the human race. To the glory of the

Orthodox Faith one ought also to say that no other religion than the Orthodox Faith is capable of bringing man to moral perfection or holiness and the pleasing of God, as is shown by the history of the Church and the in-corrup, wonder-working remains of the holy favorites of God and the miraculous feats of the saints of the Orthodox Church, whereby they became perfectly pleasing unto God, becoming clairvoyant and working wonders even during their lifetime. Thus must it be for the sane mind: only a perfect Faith with all its divine powers, with the full spiritual armor of God, is able to bring one to perfection, against the passion-fraught flesh, the world and the devil.

And if now many even Orthodox Christians live badly, their manner of life, even if truly ungodly, cannot in the least, of course, be held against the Orthodox Faith, which is unshakable in its principles of Truth and holiness, in accordance with the promise of the Savior Himself and the testimony of history. Such people, although they have departed from us, were not ours in essence, but only in name...

Yea, my brethren, only the Orthodox Faith purifies and sanctifies human nature which has been defiled by sin... Do you wish to be assured of this? Read the history of the lives of the saints, the history of the Church, and you will see this for yourselves. You will see wolves transformed into lambs, fornicators into angelic righteous men and women, misers into paragons of charity, lovers of pleasure into ascetics; you will see people of power and earthly grandeur and luxury in humble monastic garb... These were true Christians indeed; these were angels in the flesh, citizens of Heaven while still on earth... This is what our Orthodox Faith can do with those who sincerely hold to it and follow its direction!

But why does it not produce such a salvific change within us? Because of disbelief and lack of faith, flippancy, depravity and un-repentance of heart, because of the passions which have intensified and gained dominion over us, because we have withdrawn from the Church, and because many are not in the least imbued with the spirit and life of the Church, and many are only weakly, only formally, insincerely, attached to it. Because all the modern lusts have been engendered within us... For us to be genuine Orthodox Christians, we must first of all have living, constant fellowship with the Orthodox Church, i.e., participation in its prayers, teachings, mysteries, we must earnestly study our Faith and become imbued with it, live in its spirit, be guided by its rules, commandments, precepts; and most important, we must restore within us by true and profound repentance the image of the true Orthodox Christian, according to the image of the saints, ancient and recent, according to the model of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who says: *I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you* (Jn. 13: 15), that the Lord may also say to us, as He once said of Nathanael, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!* Amen.

FOR CHRIST IS RISEN, O GLADNESS ETERNAL!

By Archbishop Averky (+1976)

Christ is Risen!

It is the Day of Resurrection, let us be radiant, O ye people; Pascha, the Lord's Pascha: for from death to life, and from earth to Heaven, Christ God hath brought us, as we sing the hymn of victory.

(Eirmos, Ode I, Paschal Canon)

We greet you, beloved in Christ brothers and sisters, with these joyous words, which consistently arouse in us a special, lofty, joyful spirit, a surge of spiritual strength, and a bright hope in a better future which awaits us.

We also send this joyous Paschal greeting to you, our dear sufferers, the Russian Orthodox people who are persecuted and suffering in Russia under the yoke of cruel labor for the holy Faith, if only our voice will reach you [Editor's Note: this was written in 1963, while Russia was still under the Communists].

In these times in which we are living, filled with many sorrows, the only comfort for all of us is our holy Faith, with its lofty promises, radiant hope, its expectations which bring peace to the soul. For truly, never before has evil, now victorious almost everywhere in the world and infiltrating deep into the life of man and even into the fold of our Church, reached such strength, such a level of tension. We can only oppose this evil with our holy Faith—this evil which triumphantly proceeds along the path of lies and all manner of unrighteous deception, and which defeats people who do not believe in Truth, but rather have loved falsehood.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. (1 Jn 5:4). In this way we are comforted by the beloved disciple of Christ who stood at the very Cross of the Lord, saw all the inexpressible sufferings of the Lord, and then was vouchsafed to be the first to come to His open tomb, believe, and with His other disciples and followers, to experience the great joy of His Resurrection (Jn 20:2-8).

This greatest miraculous event, unprecedented in the history of man, the Resurrection of Christ, is the foundation of our holy Faith, its cornerstone. Christ arose, having defeated human falsehood and death itself, to which He was sentenced by this falsehood. Truth triumphed over lies, life conquered

death, and this so naturally finds a bright joyous response in our hearts, oppressed by falsehood and which tremble in the face of death. This is why our Paschal service is so festive and joyous, this is why we rejoice so much and our hearts, as though on their own, sing praise to the Risen Christ on this brightest of days, the feast of His Resurrection, this truly *feast of feasts, and triumph of triumphs. Let the Heavens be glad as it meet, and let the earth rejoice, and let the whole world, both visible and invisible, keep festival: for Christ is risen, O gladness eternal.* (Troparion, Ode I, Paschal Canon)

Indeed this is not just imaginary, as some people superficially try to prove, who are the most unfortunate of people, stagnating in the blindness of stubborn unbelief. The truth of Christ's glorious Resurrection is beyond the slightest doubt, by virtue of the fact that its reality was witnessed by many people of very different walks of life, who saw the Risen Christ at different times and not just once. Besides, it would be totally impossible to understand and explain differently that unusual fervor, that extraordinary animation of spirit which made the initially shy and timid apostles into brave and fearless



preachers of Christ's teaching throughout the whole world. One must keep in mind that the Lord's disciples, in preaching the Gospel of Christ, taught people not just empty Christian morals, but, as can be clearly seen from the *Acts of the Apostles*, first and foremost preached about the crucified Christ and His Resurrection from the dead on the third day,

accompanying and confirming their preaching with many miraculous signs. This preaching of the resurrected Lord captured and conquered men's hearts and made people His zealous followers, ready to seal their unshakable faithfulness to Him with their blood.

Only the great truth of the Resurrection of Christ can explain the exceptionally rapid spread of the Christian faith over the whole face of the earth amid the most unfavorable conditions and situations. What else could compel thousands upon thousands of people throughout the centuries to endure indescribable torments, to shed their blood, and to give up their life for Christ? What other force could compel the rich, the noble, men of high rank, and even emperors of the proud pagan world to humbly bow down before the foot of the Cross of Christ and glorify His Resurrection? Indeed, what could compel many thousands of men and women to renounce the vain blessings, comforts, and pleasures of this world which lies in evil, and to withdraw to the deserts, mountains, caves,

and precipices to live a God-pleasing life in unceasing prayer, silence, fasting, and struggles, so as to more certainly unite with Christ in the after-life, which He opened to us through His glorious Resurrection from the dead?

Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, who experienced the life-creating power of the Risen Christ countless times in his astounding life, says, *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable* (1Cor 15:14), for as he himself explains, *if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.* (1Cor 15:19). Saint Paul, to whom Christ appeared many times, though he was not a disciple during His earthly life, testifies with conviction: *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept* (1Cor 15:20), for *as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* (1Cor 15:22).

Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1Cor 15:24-26).

This is the very source of our radiant joy on the feast day of the glorious Resurrection of Christ. The Resurrection of Christ is for us the joyous and convincing affirmation of the final triumph of God's Truth, the triumph over evil, the triumph over death. However, to be a participant of this final triumph of God's Truth and to celebrate this victory over evil with Christ, the victory over death, we must be "crucified with Christ" while in this earthly life so as to join in His Resurrection.

With the help of God's Grace, given to us by virtue of Christ's deeds, we must defeat evil (i.e., sin) within ourselves. Receiving the holy Sacrament of Baptism, we are obligated to do this. In the wonderful reading which the Church has assigned for Great and Holy Saturday, the holy Apostle Paul asks, *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life... Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom 6:3-4; 9; 11). This is the clear teaching of the word of God for us on the power and meaning of the great and glorious event of the Resurrection of Christ.

How can one allege and teach otherwise, as do contemporary heretics, dreaming of the establishment of some sort of earthly "Kingdom of God." They are prepared to legitimize the sinful attachment of mankind, which has betrayed the Risen Christ, to this world which lies in sin, with all its vain blessings, comforts, and pleasures. ...*From earth to Heaven,*

Christ God hath brought us... by His Resurrection, so how and why, after this, would we return to earth, from which we have been torn away, although temporarily we must continue to walk upon it? To rejoin ourselves to the world [i.e., earthly things] is callous ingratitude to the Risen Christ, an audacious mockery of the holiness of His Resurrection!

No! If we Christians are not "Christians only by name," we must do away with earthly life, filled with sinful passions. "We celebrate the death of death, the destruction of Hades, the beginning of another life eternal..." and all our thoughts and feelings must be directed toward "the unwaning day of Christ's kingdom," which awaits us, and toward which we must strive with our whole heart.

"Let us purify our senses from everything earthly, and we shall behold Christ, radiant with the unapproachable light of the Resurrection, and we shall clearly hear Him say, Rejoice!, as we sing the hymn of victory."

"Let us also ... be divinely glad; *for Christ is risen..., for Christ is risen, O gladness eternal.*"

[Pascha, 1963]



The Orthodox priest is the incarnation of the absolute, the expression of the constant, stable and unshakable, the trumpet of Heaven, the image of in-corruption, the mile-marker of eternity. May he remain forever unchanged, even in his external appearance, as a reminder and symbol of the ages and of the unchanging truths which he represents.

Blessed Elder Epiphanius of Athens



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THE GREAT MIRACLE OF ORTHODOXY THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Gathered from various Orthodox pamphlets.

T rue Orthodoxy, how much our Lord Jesus Christ loves you, to send his Holy Light and blaze down our hearts with Heavenly jubilation, light up our minds and raise our hope?

Every Holy Saturday, at noon, in the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem reoccurs the Great Miracle of the Holy Light that stirs, affects rejoices and gives delight and faith to those who have the honor and blessing to be there for the ceremony of the Holy Light.

Description of the Annual Miracle

1. Preparation of the Holy Sepulchre: In the morning of the Holy Saturday, before the ceremony of the Holy Light takes place a very thorough check of the tomb and after that they seal it with a mixture of honey and wax that was prepared in the morning. This check takes place so that everyone is ascertaining that there is nothing in the Holy Sepulcher that can cause a fire or create a flame. After the tomb is sealed, the authorities affix the wax with their seals. All the other doctrines that have rights in the Holy Sepulcher show great interest in this procedure. This interest is by no means accidental. If for one year the miracle of the Holy Light doesn't happen when the Greek Orthodox Patriarch performs the ceremony, the other doctrines will try to undertake the precedence in the Holy Sepulcher.

The examination begins at 10:00 and finishes at 11:00. While this takes place, Orthodox Arabs demonstrate in the church for the Orthodox rights. It must be recorded that this ostentatious check of the Holy Sepulcher is conducted by the representatives of the Armenians and several other doctrines.

2. The Ceremony of the Holy Light: The ceremony of the Holy Light takes place at 12:00 and constitutes of three stages:

a) The Litany, b) The entry of the Patriarch in the Holy Sepulcher and c) The prayers of the Patriarch in order for the Holy Light to come out.

Following the tradition, at noon of the Holy Saturday the Greek Orthodox Patriarch with his escort—archpriests, priests and deacons and the Armenian Patriarch—enter the Holy Sepulcher, while the bells strike mournfully. Before the entry of the Patriarch the keeper of the Sacristy of the Holy Temple carries the unsleeping oil lamp, (it is put out that day in order that it be lit with the Holy Light). From the interior entry of the Temple of Apostle Jacob the Patriarch enters in the sanctuary and seats on the Patriarchal throne. Then the representatives of the Armenians, the Arabs, the Copts and others pass and kiss the hand of the Patriarch so that they will have the right to receive the Holy Light.

According to the privileges if they don't kiss the hand of the Orthodox Patriarch they do not have the right to receive the Holy Light from his hands. Immediately afterwards

begins the Holy Litany that goes three times around the Holy Sepulcher and then it stops in front of the Holy Sepulcher where the officials stand.

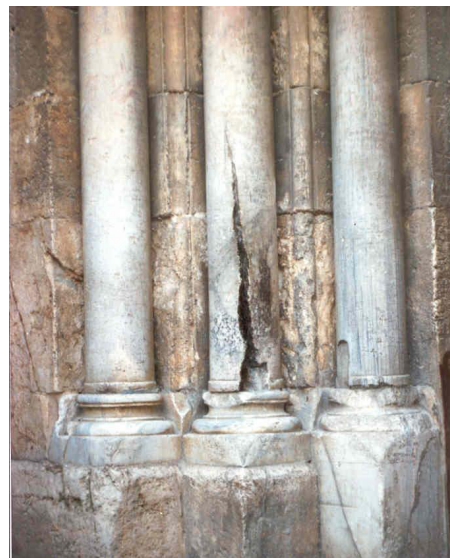
After the litany, the Holy Sepulcher is unsealed and the Patriarch takes off his pontifical vestments and remains only with his white priest's tunic. The governor of Jerusalem and the police director examine the Patriarch in front of everybody so that everybody is assured that he is not carrying anything that can transmit light (create a flame). After this, his Beatitude, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem takes the (extinct) torches and enters the Holy Ciborium. All the lamps are off and nothing is on in the Holy Temple and the Holy Sepulcher.

3. How the Holy Light Comes Out: Inside the Holy Sepulcher the Patriarch prays kneeling and reading the special

wishes requesting our Lord Jesus Christ to send His Holy Light as a gift of sanctification for the people. And in the absolute quietness at the hour, when the patriarch prays a wheeze is heard and almost simultaneously blue and white lightning's



The Holy Light delivered to the faithful within the church of the Holy Sepulcher, on each and every Holy Saturday



The column struck by the Holy Light in 1549 to miraculously deliver the Holy Light onto the hands of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch who was standing behind it

of Holy Light penetrate from everywhere, as though millions of photographic flashes turn on embracing the walls and all the lamps light up miraculously. In the Holy Sepulcher the torches the Patriarch holds while he prays are instantaneously lit by the Holy Light. The crowd bursts out in cheers while teardrops of joy and faith run from the eyes of the people.

For a few minutes the Holy Light does not have the attributes of fire. This happens the first minutes after the patriarch comes out of the Holy Sepulcher and gives the Light to the people. Anyone can touch the fire of the 33 candles and does not burn. After 33 minutes the flame becomes normal.

A Miracle of Orthodoxy—1549 A.D.

As far as the claim that it proves the truth of Orthodoxy the following incident occurred in the 16th century. The split column where the Holy Fire went thru to light the candles of the Orthodox Patriarch is still there and is displayed in the depicted photograph. A tremendous lesson for all heresy loving pseudo Orthodox Hierarchs and clergy...

In the year 1549 A.D., the Arabs occupied Jerusalem, the Armenians took advantage of their presence. They approached the Moslem governor with gifts of gold, and asked for the privilege to receive the Holy Light. This they asked and this they succeeded. They also implored to him that the Orthodox be forbidden entrance to the Holy Sepulchre for the sacred ritual.

Holy Saturday dawned and the most Holy Church of the Resurrection was closed to all the Orthodox. Even the Patriarch and the clergy were not allowed to enter. The Patriarch was kneeling at the entrance of the Most Holy Church. He was holding in his hand the bundle of the thirty three candles and praying. Tears streamed down his face as he pleaded to God: "Lord, You who abhors injustice, heed the prayers of our children. Grant that Your glory may appear through Your miracle and do not deprive Your Holy Light from Your faithful people."

On that fateful Holy Saturday in 1549, the Divine Light did not visit the Holy Sepulchre where the Armenians were in charge and waiting. Instead before the amazed eyes of clergy and pilgrims, the Holy Light flashing brilliantly, struck the column the Patriarch was standing behind with the sound of a forceful wind. Instantly the stone column was split and blackened near the bottom. And the light appeared and lit the candles of the Patriarch. The column is still there on the left hand side of the entrance to the Sepulchre (and depicted within the photo in the previous page).

The Holy Light symbolizes and reminds us in a miraculous way the Resurrection of Christ. It is a Godsend miracle through centuries from the light of the world, and this light is Christ for the world. Science cannot explain this great miracle and this time in its honor science never tried to explain it not even theoretically. Besides how can anyone explain a genuine miracle?

HUMAN LOGIC AND THE WILL OF GOD FOR CHILDBEARING

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from the Book: "Family Life," published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti, Greece (2002), translated from Greek by Fr. Luke Hartung.

Ofentimes couples express to me their insecurity regarding the topic of childbearing, and they ask my opinion. Some only want one or two children, while others want to have many. It would, however, be to their advantage to leave the issue of childbearing to God—to entrust their lives to divine providence and not try to implement their own plan. They must have faith that God, Who cares for the birds of the air, will care much more for their children. There was once a sailor who married at eighteen years old. He was poor, and so was the girl he married. They rented a basement to live in. The girl also found a little work. In this way they lived quite sparingly. Just imagine it: for a table they used a leftover crate from some peaches they once bought. Later they began having children, living very frugally in order to raise them. And yet, little by little, they became prosperous homeowners.

Some people try to get everything else set up first and only afterwards think about children. They don't consider God in the slightest. Again others say: "Life is hard today; one child is enough, for even him you'll raise with difficulty"; and they don't have other children. They don't understand how greatly they sin with such an approach, not giving themselves over to God with faith. God is merciful: as soon as He sees that they can't cope, it's not hard for Him not to give them more children.

So many people go into marriage without considering that they should plan on having children and raising them in a Christian manner. They don't want many children so they won't have to be bothered; instead they have dogs and cats in their houses . . . They tell me that now in America, instead of having a dog at home, there is a kind of pig, which is very expensive and doesn't grow so big. They've made it that way so as to be able to keep it in their homes. They don't want to have children because it's a pain to wash and care for them; but instead they're cleaning piggies! At least a dog can keep watch. But to have pigs in your home? Unbelievable! In Australia I saw they had an old peoples' home for dogs and cats . . . , and even a cemetery for animals! The way people are going they'll start raising mice to make canned cat food to feed their cats with; they'll raise rabbits and bunnies to can up into food to feed their dogs with, while other people are dying of hunger. Nowadays, if someone were to kill a dog, he might actually get into more trouble than if he were to kill another person. Of course, depending on what breed the dog was . . . where will it end!?! . . . when in our day a man is worth less than a dog.

Ἡ Θυσία τοῦ Ράσου

Θ. Θεοφυλάκτου.



Πέρασαν πάνω από 400 ολόκληρα χρόνια φοβερῆς σκλαβιάς. Ἕνας λαός, ὁ εὐγενέστερος λαὸς τῆς γῆς, ὁ Ἑλληνικός, στενάζει κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ βαρὺ πέλμα τοῦ Τούρκου δυνάστη. Οἱ συντελέσαντες διὰ τῶν πολυαριθμῶν

θυσιῶν, στὴν διατήρηση τῆς ἐλευθερίας πολλῶν λαῶν, εἶναι ὑπόδουλοι. Ἡ φωτοδότρα Ἑλλάς, ἡ τόσο σπουδαία εὐεργετήσασα τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα, ἄλυσοδεμένη. Οἱ ἀδούλωτοι Ἕλληνες, σκλάβοι. Τί φοβερό! Καὶ ὅμως ἀληθές. Ὁ βάρβαρος Ἀσιάτης, ἀφου ἐκπύρθηκε τὴν βασιλίδα τῶν πόλεων, τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἀπλώνει τὰ βέβηλα χέρια του καὶ θέτει κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ὑπερήφανα πέλματά του τὸν ἐκλεκτότερο λαὸ τῆς γῆς. Τὰ φανατισμένα στίφη τοῦ Ἰσλάμ σφάζουν, λεηλατοῦν, πυρπολοῦν, ἰσοπεδώνουν. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ καταχθόνιο σχέδιό τους. Νὰ ἐξαφανίσουν τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ φυλὴ. Νὰ σβήσουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀπὸ τὸν χάρτη, τοὺς Ἕλληνες ἀπὸ τὴν Εὐρώπη, τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ἀπὸ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο.

400 χρόνια σκλαβιάς! Ποιὸς στάθηκε κοντὰ στὸν λαό; Ποιὸς ἄκουσε τὸν ὄνομα του; Ποιὸς ἐπέδεσε τὰ τραύματά του; Ποιὸς σπόγγισε τὰ δάκρυά του; Ποιὸς παρηγόρησε τὸν ὑπόδουλο λαὸ μας; Ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ναί, ἡ Ἐκκλησία! Ὅταν τὸ ἔθνος αἰμορραγοῦσε, ὅταν τὸ δάκρυ καὶ ὁ πόνος εἶχαν γίνει καθημερινὴ τροφή τοῦ λαοῦ μας, τότε ἡ Ἐκκλησία στάθηκε κοντά, πολὺ κοντὰ στὸν χεμαζόμενο λαό.

Κάτω ἀπὸ τοὺς θόλους τῶν ἱερῶν ναῶν καὶ μέσα στὰ ἐρημητήρια τῶν ἱερῶν Μονῶν, ὁ σκλαβωμένος Ἕλληνας βρίσκει τὴν παρηγοριά του. Ναοὶ καὶ Μοναστήρια γίνονται οἱ προμαχῶνες καὶ τὰ πνευματικὰ ὀρμητήρια τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ ἔθνους. Ἐδῶ σφυρηλατεῖται ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ψυχὴ. Ἐδῶ καλλιεργεῖται ἡ θερμουργὸς ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴν Πατρίδα. Ἐδῶ διατηρεῖται ἄσβεστη ἡ φλόγα γιὰ τὴν Ἐλευθερία τοῦ Γένους. Ἐδῶ ἀναπτερόνεται τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ Ἕλληνα καὶ διατηρεῖται ἀδιάσπαστη ἡ ἐνότητα τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Ἐδῶ τὰ σκλαβόπουλα, κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ θαμπὸ φῶς τοῦ καντηλιοῦ, μαθαίνουν ἀπὸ τὸν σεβάσιμο κληρικὸ νὰ διαβάζουν καὶ νὰ γράφουν ἑλληνικά. Ἐδῶ ὁ ἀνώνυμος ρασοφόρος, μὲ τὴν φλογισμένη τοῦ καρδιά, γίνεται ὁ δάσκαλος, ὁ καθοδηγητής, ὁ μοναδικὸς ἐμπνευστὴς τῶν ἰδανικῶν τῆς φυλῆς. Κάθε ναὸς καὶ μία κιβωτὸς τοῦ ἔθνους. Κάθε ρασοφόρος καὶ μία καιόμενὴ λαμπάδα, πού φωτίζει. Κάθε κληρικὸς καὶ ἓνας πυρπολητὴς τοῦ πνεύματος.

Ἀλήθεια! Ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ ἀπαριθμήσει τοὺς ἀγῶνες καὶ

τὴν θυσία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας! Ρασοφόροι, ἐπόνυμοι καὶ ἀνώνυμοι, προσφέρονται θυσία καὶ γίνονται ὀλοκαύτωμα στὸν ἱερὸ βωμὸ τῆς Πατρίδος. Κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῆς ἐπαναστάσεως ἔξι χιλιάδες ρασοφόροι θυσιάζονται, ποτίζοντας μὲ τὸ αἷμα τοὺς τὸ δέντρο τῆς Ἐλευθερίας. Ὁ Πατριάρχης Γρηγόριος ὁ Ε' ἀπαγχονίζεται στὴν μεσαία πύλη τοῦ Πατριαρχείου. Ὁ Ἀθανάσιος Διάκος ἐπιδειξίας ἀφθαστο ἥρωισμὸ σoubλίζεται στὴν Ἀλαμάννα. Ὁ Παπαφλέσσας καθαγιάζει μὲ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ τὰ ἱερὰ χρώματα στὸ Μανιάκι. Ὁ Ἰωσήφ Ρωγῶν χύνει τὸ αἷμα τοῦ στὸ Μεσολόγγι. Ὁ Ἡσαΐας Σαλῶνων καὶ τόσοι ἄλλοι ἀνώνυμοι ρασοφόροι γίνονται τὰ ἱερὰ σφάγια καὶ προσφέρονται θυσία, στὸ ἱερὸ θυσιαστήριο τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς Πατρίδος. Δὲν εἶναι ὑπερβολὴ νὰ ποῦμε –διότι ἀποτελεῖ ἱστορικὴ ἀλήθεια– ὅτι ἐὰν τὸ ράσο δὲν γινόταν φλάμπουρο καὶ σημαία ἐπαναστάσεως, ἡ ἐπανάσταση δὲν θὰ γινόταν. Ἐὰν γινόταν, δὲν θὰ εἶχε τὴν ἐπιτυχία, τὴν ὁποία σημείωσε.

Κανένα ἔθνος δὲν ἔχει νὰ ἐπιδείξει τόσους θυσιασθέντες κληρικούς, ὅσους τὸ Ἑλληνικό. Διὰ τὸν λόγο αὐτὸ ὀφείλουμε, ὄλοι ἐμεῖς οἱ νεώτεροι Ἕλληνες, νὰ παραδειγματιζόμαστε ἀπὸ τὴν θυσία τῶν σφαγιασθέντων κληρικῶν καὶ νὰ ἀποδίδουμε πάντα τὸν ὀφειλόμενο σεβασμὸ στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τοὺς κληρικούς της.

Σεβασμὸς στὸ ράσο! Σεβασμὸς στὴν Ἐκκλησία! Σεβασμὸς στὴν Μητέρα καὶ τροφὸ τοῦ ἔθνους!



Στάχια ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀγρὸ τοῦ Γέροντος Παΐσιου

Αὐτὸ πού ἔχει σημασία εἶναι νὰ ἀναπαύεται ὁ Χριστός, ἡ Παναγία καὶ οἱ Ἅγιοί μας σὲ κάθε ἐνέργειά μας καὶ τότε θὰ ἔχουμε τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἁγίων μας καὶ θὰ ἀναπαύεται τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα σὲ μᾶς. Κανένας ἄδικος τελικὰ δὲν ἔκαμε προκοπή, ἐνῶ τοὺς δίκαιους τοὺς σκέπτεται ὁ Θεός.

Ἄν κάποιος εἶναι νευριασμένος ἢ θυμωμένος καὶ βρίζει, δὲν ἔχει εὐλογία τὸ ἔργο πού κάνει, ἐνῶ ἂν ψάλλει ἢ λέει τὴν εὐχὴ ἀγιάζεται τὸ ἔργο του. Τὸ πρῶτο εἶναι δαιμονικό, τὸ δεύτερο Θεϊκό.

Ἡ πνευματικὴ τοποθέτηση εἶναι νὰ χαίρεσαι μὲ τὰ ἁντίθετα ἀπ' αὐτὰ πού χαίρονται οἱ κοσμικοί. Νὰ μὴ ζητᾶμε τὴ δική μας ἀνάπαυση. Νὰ κοιτάζει κανεὶς τί ἀναπαύει τὸν ἄλλο. Τότε ἀναπαύεται καὶ ὁ Θεὸς στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος παύει νὰ εἶναι ἄνθρωπος, θεώνεται.

Ἄν ποτισθεῖ τὸ ξύλο μὲ λάδι δὲν σαπίζει. Ἄν τὰ παιδιά ποτισθοῦν μὲ τὴν εὐλάβεια καὶ τὸ φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ, δὲν ἔχουν ἀνάγκη στὴ μετέπειτα ζωὴ τους. Ὅταν τὰ παιδιά μιλοῦν μὲ ἀναίδεια στοὺς μεγαλύτερους, διώχνουν τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ (ἀγριεύουν, κάνουν ἀταξίες).

Ὁ Ἐθνομάρτυρας Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Ε΄

Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Γεωργίου Δ. Μεταλληνού, ἀπὸ τὴν ἔφημερίδα «Ἐπάλξεις», 1-4-2000.

Ὁ Γρηγόριος Ε΄ (1746-1821) εἶναι ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐπιφανέστερους πατριάρχες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (1797-1798, 1806-1808, 1818-1821) ἔθνομάρτυρας ἀπὸ τοὺς διαπρεπέστερους τοῦ ἀπελευθερωτικοῦ ἀγώνα, Ἅγιος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (10 Ἀπριλίου), ἀνήκει ἐξίσου στὴν Ἐκκλησία, στὸ ἔθνος καὶ τὴν Παιδεία. Παράλληλα πολυσυζητημένη μορφή, λόγῳ τῆς ἐμπλοκῆς του στὶς ἰδεολογικὲς συγκρούσεις τοῦ νεότερου Ἑλληνισμοῦ.

Βιογραφικὰ

Τὸ κοσμικὸ του ὄνομα ἦταν Γεώργιος Ἀγγελόπουλος. Γεννήθηκε στὴν Δημητσάνα ἀπὸ γονεῖς ἀσήμους καὶ φτωχοῦς. Ἡ φιλομάθειά του ὅμως τὸν ὤθησε στὴν σπουδὴ. Σπούδασε ἀρχικὰ στὴ σχολὴ τῆς γενέτειράς του καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ 1756 γιὰ δυὸ χρόνια στὴν Ἀθήνα. Μὲ τὴ βοήθεια ἐνὸς θείου του, νεωκόρου στὴ Σμύρνη, μπόρεσε νὰ φοιτήσῃ ἄλλα πέντε χρόνια στὸ περίφημο Γυμνάσιό τῆς.

Ἦταν ὅμως φύση ὄχι μόνον φιλομαθῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀσκητικῆ. Ἀναθρεμμένος σὲ κλίμα παραδοσιακό-ἡσυχαστικό, ἀκολούθησε τὸ χάρισμά του καὶ στράφηκε στὸ μοναστικὸ βίον. Τὸν ἐρωτᾷ του γιὰ τὸ μοναχισμό ἐνίσχυσε ἡ περιφημὴ Μονὴ Φιλοσόφου στὴν πατρίδα του καὶ ἡ ἀπὸ τὴν παιδικὴ ἡλικία σχέση του μαζί τῆς. Ἡ κουρὰ του ἔγινε στὶς Στροφάδες καὶ πῆρε τὸ ὄνομα Γρηγόριος. Στὴ συνέχεια θὰ σπουδάσῃ στὴν Πατμιάδα Σχολὴ (θεολογία καὶ φιλοσοφία) κατορθώνοντας νὰ ἀποκτήσῃ ὑψηλὴ γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ παιδεία. Ξαναγυρίζει στὴ Σμύρνη, ὅπου χειροτονεῖται διάκονος ἀπὸ τὸν Σμύρνης Προκόπιο, ὑπηρετώντας ὡς ἀρχιδιάκονός του.

Γρήγορα ὅμως γίνεται πρεσβύτερος καὶ πρωτοσύγκελος. Τὸ 1785 ὁ Προκόπιος ἐκλέγεται Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης καὶ ὁ Γρηγόριος χειροτονεῖται ἐπίσκοπος καὶ ἀνέρχεται στὸ Μητροπολιτικὸ θρόνο τῆς Σμύρνης. Ἡ πλούσια δραστηριότητά του τὸν κάνει πλατιά γνωστὸ καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὸν Μάιο τοῦ 1797, μετὰ τὴ χηρεία τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Θρόνου, ἐκλέγεται πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὡς Γρηγόριος Ε΄. Ἡ παραμονὴ του στὸν Οἰκουμενικὸ Θρόνο συνδέεται μὲ πλῆθος περιπετειῶν καὶ δυσχερειῶν. Αὐτὸ φαίνεται καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνώμαλη πορεία τῆς Πατριαρχίας του. Ἐκθρονίζεται καὶ ἐξορίζεται τὸ 1798. Ἀποσύρεται στὴ Μονὴ Ἰβήρων τοῦ Ἄθωνα, ὅπου μένει ἐπτὰ χρόνια, ἐπιδιδόμενος στὴν ἀσκησὴ καὶ μελέτῃ. Στὶς 23 Σεπτεμβρίου 1806 καλεῖται γιὰ δευτέρη φορά ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς στὸν Πατριαρχικὸ Θρόνο.

Τὰ προβλήματα ὅμως δὲν παύουν. Ἡ ἀλλαγὴ τῆς

τουρκικῆς πολιτικῆς καὶ ἡ ἐπανάστασι τῶν Γενιτσάρων ἐπιφέρουν καὶ νέα πτώσι τοῦ Γρηγορίου, πὺ ἐξορίζεται στὴν Πριγκηπόνησο καὶ τὸ 1810 ἀποσύρεται πάλι στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, ὅπου μένει ἄλλα 9 χρόνια. Ἐκλέγεται ὅμως καὶ γιὰ Τρίτη φορά Πατριάρχης (15 Δεκεμβρίου 1818) καὶ ἐπιστρέφει στὴν Πόλη τὸν Ἰανουάριο τοῦ 1819. Ἡ Τρίτη Πατριαρχία του συνδέεται μὲ κρισιμότερες στιγμὲς τοῦ Γένους. Ἡ θέση του γίνεται ὄλο καὶ πὺ ἐπικίνδυνη καὶ ἡ Πατριαρχία του λήγει μὲ τὴ μαρτυρικὴ του θυσία. Ἀφοῦ τὴ νύχτα τοῦ Πάσχα (10 Ἀπριλίου 1821) μαζί μὲ 8 ἄλλους ἀρχιερεῖς τέλεσε τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία τῆς Ἀναστάσεως συνελήφθη, κηρύχθηκε ἐκπτώτος καὶ φυλακίστηκε. Ἀλλὰ στὶς 3 τὸ ἀπόγευμα τῆς ἴδιας μέρας ἀπαγχονίστηκε στὴ μεσημβρινὴ πύλη τοῦ Πατριαρχείου. Ἐπὶ τρεῖς ἡμέρες τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἔμεινε μετέωρο, δεχόμενον τοὺς ἐξευτελισμοὺς τοῦ μανιασμένου ὄχλου. Μιὰ σπεῖρα Ἑβραῖοι ἀγόρασαν τὸ νεκρὸ, τὸν περιέφεραν στοὺς δρόμους καὶ τελικὰ τὸν ἔριξαν στὸν Κεράτιο. Ὁ Κεφαλλονίτης πλοίαρχος Νικόλαος

Σκλάβος βρῆκε τὸ σκῆνωμα καὶ τὸ μετέφερε κρυφὰ στὴν Ὀδησσό, ὅπου τάφηκε στὸν Ἑλληνικὸ ναὸ τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος.

Δράσι

Παρὰ τὸ σύντομο διάστημα τῆς Πατριαρχίας του (συνολικὰ 6 χρόνια) ὁ Γρηγόριος ἀνέπτυξε σημαντικὴ δράσι. Ἦδη στὴ Σμύρνη ἀφοσιώθηκε στὸ κήρυγμα καὶ σὲ κοινωνικὴ δράσι, εὐεργετικὴ γιὰ τὸ ποιμνίό του καὶ ἐνίσχυσε σημαντικὰ τὴν παιδεία.

Τὴν ἀγάπη του γιὰ τὴν παιδεία καὶ τὸ φωτισμὸ τοῦ Γένους μέχρι τὸ μαρτύριό του δείχνουν οἱ σωζόμενες Ἐγκύκλιό του. Παράλληλα ἔδινε διέξοδο στὰ θεολογικὰ ἐνδιαφέροντά του, προσανατολίζοντας τὰ στὸ διαφωτισμὸ τοῦ ποιμνίου του, τοποθετώντας ὅμως τὸ διαφωτιστικὸ του ἔργο στὰ πλαίσια τῆς Ἑλληνορθόδοξης—Ρωμαϊκῆς παράδοσης, πὺ καθορίστηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁγίους Πατέρες. Προσπαθεῖ ἔτσι νὰ ἐκλαϊκεύσει τὴν πατερικὴ γνώσι γιὰ νὰ στηρίξει τὴν πίστι.

Γι' αὐτὸ μεταφράζει καὶ ἐκδίδει τοὺς ΠεριἹερωσύνης λόγους τοῦ Ἱ. Χρυσοστόμου. Στὴν Πόλη ἀργότερα θὰ ἐκδώσει στὸ Πατριαρχικὸ τυπογραφεῖο τὰ Ἠθικὰ τοῦ Μ. Βασιλείου, ἐξήγησι τῶν ὁμιλιῶν του στὴν Ἐξαήμερο καὶ Κυριακοδρόμιο σὲ ἀπλὴ γλῶσσα. Τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον του γιὰ τὴν παιδεία μένει ἀδιάπτωτο, ἐκφραζόμενο μὲ πλῆθος εὐεργετικῶν ἐνεργειῶν. Θέλει ὅμως διαφωτισμὸ ρωμαϊκό, ἑλληνότροπο, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ δὲν κρύβει τὴν ἐπιφυλακτικότητά του ἀπέναντι στὸν δυτικὸ διαφωτισμὸ καὶ τὸν προοδευτισμὸ τῆς ἐποχῆς, ὄχι γιὰ λόγους τυφλῆς συντηρητικότητος, ἀλλὰ κυρίως ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιθυμία νὰ διασώσει τὴν ρωμαϊκὴ παράδοσι, στὴν ὁποία ὀλόκληρος ἀνήκε καὶ τὴν ὁποία ἔβλεπε νὰ ἀπειλεῖται ἀπὸ ἰδεολογικὰ ρεύματα, κατευθυνόμενα ἀπὸ τὴν Γαλλικὴ Ἐπανάστασι καὶ



τόν αντιχριστιανισμό της.

Στην Πόλη μερίμνησε για τη στέγαση του Πατριαρχείου, διαρρύθμισε τὸν Πατριαρχικὸ ναό, ἐργάστηκε γιὰ τὴν ἀνόρθωση τοῦ ἠθικοῦ βίου. Κατὰ τὶς τρεῖς Πατριαρχίες τοῦ ἐκδίδει πλῆθος τόμων, σιγγιλίων, ἐγκυκλίων, ἐπιστολῶν ποὺ ἀποβλέπουν στὴν εὐστάθεια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὑποδειγματικὴ θὰ εἶναι ἡ σταθερὴ προσήλωσή του στοὺς ἱεροὺς κανόνες καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ παράδοση. Ὁργανώνει τὴ λειτουργία τῆς Συνόδου τοῦ Πατριαρχείου, μεριμνᾷ γιὰ τὴν παιδεία καὶ τὸ ἦθος τῶν εἰσερχομένων στὸν κλῆρο, ὄντας ὁ ἴδιος ὑψηλὸ παράδειγμα ἀσκητικοῦ βίου, σὲ σημεῖο ποὺ νὰ προκαλεῖ γι' αὐτὸ ἀντιδράσεις. Ἐπιδεικνύει παράλληλα θαυμαστὴ σύνεση καὶ ἀξιοπρέπεια ἀπέναντι στοὺς κρατοῦντες. Ἡ νομιμοφροσύνη τοῦ—τόσο σκανδαλιστικὴ γιὰ τοὺς ἐπικριτές του—δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κατανοηθεῖ καὶ ἐρμηνευθεῖ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν διάθεσή του νὰ μὴν προκαλεῖ ἐπεμβάσεις τῆς ἐξουσίας στὰ ἐσωτερικά της Ἐθναρχίας. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ οἰκονομικὰ προβλήματα τοῦ θρόνου τράβηξαν τὴν προσοχή του. Ἐλυσε μὲ ἐπιτυχία τὸ χρονίζον ζήτημα τῶν Κολλυβάδων, ρύθμισε τὴ λειτουργία τῶν ναῶν, ἐνδιαφέρθηκε γιὰ τὰ ληξιαρχικὰ βιβλία καὶ τὸ Κιβώτιο τοῦ Ἐλέους, ἔλαβε εὐστοχες ἀποφάσεις γιὰ τὶς προικοδοσίες καὶ τοὺς ἀρραβῶνες, γιὰ τοὺς γάμους καὶ τὰ διαζύγια, τὴν ἀναδιοργάνωση τῶν μοναστηριῶν κ.λ.π. Ἔργο τεράστιο, θαυμαστὸ γιὰ μίαν φύση ἀσκητικὴ, ὅπως ὁ Γρηγόριος.

Στάση στὸ Ἐθνικὸ Ζήτημα

Ὁ Γρηγόριος ἀνέβηκε στὸν Πατριαρχικὸ θρόνο σὲ μίαν κρίσιμη καὶ πολυτάραχη ἐποχὴ ποὺ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν κοσμογονία τῆς Γαλλικῆς Ἐπανάστασης καὶ τοὺς ναπολεόντειους πολέμους. Ἡ Ἱερὰ Συμμαχία διαμορφώνει τὴν ἀντίπερα ὄχθη καὶ ὁ εὐρωπαϊκὸς χώρος συγκλονίζεται ἀδιάκοπα ἀπὸ τὶς σφοδρὲς συγκρούσεις καὶ τὴν πολυδαίδαλη δράση τῆς διπλωματίας. Ἡ ὀθωμανικὴ πολιτικὴ ἀναπροσανατολίζεται μὲ γρήγορο ρυθμὸ, ὅπως καὶ ἡ ρωσικὴ καὶ τὰ συμμαχικὰ μέτωπα ἀλλάζουν συνεχῶς ὄψη. Παράλληλα ἐξαπλώνονται στὴν Ἀνατολὴ οἱ ἐπαναστατικὲς (ὄχι μόνον πολιτικὰ) ιδέες τῆς Γαλλικῆς Ἐπανάστασης καὶ ὁ ριζοσπαστικὸς ἀγγλογαλλικὸς διαφωτισμὸς, ὁ ὁποῖος μὲ τὴν ἐκρηκτικότητά του γίνεται γιὰ τοὺς Ἀνατολικοὺς σύμβολο τῆς ἀσέβειας καὶ τῆς ἀθεΐας. Οἱ καιροὶ ὅμως ἀλλάζουν καὶ γιὰ τοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς ὑπόδουλους Ρωμοὺς. Σημειώνεται μεγάλη πρόοδος στὸ ἐμπόριο καὶ στὴν παιδεία. Ἰδιαίτερα ἀναπτύσσονται οἱ κοινότητες τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐσωτερικὰ ὀργανώνεται ἡ αὐτοδιοίκηση καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τῶν κοινοτήτων. Ἀντίθετα, τὰ ἐσωτερικὰ τῆς Μεγάλης Ἐκκλησίας παρουσιάζουν πολλὰ προβλήματα.

Χαλάρωση καὶ ἀρρυθμία, ἀλλαξοπατριαρχίες, δράση τῶν ἱεραποστόλων καὶ τῆς ξένης προπαγάνδας, καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα δημιουργοῦν ὅλα ἓνα κλίμα ἀντίξοο καὶ ἀπρόσφορο γιὰ ὁμαλὴ δημιουργικὴ πορεία. Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ κλίμα ὅμως κλήθηκε νὰ κινηθεῖ καὶ νὰ δράσει ὁ Γρηγόριος. Ἡ κριτικὴ ποὺ ἀναπτύχθηκε γύρω ἀπὸ τὴ δράση του, εἶναι τελείως

ἀντιφατικὴ. Κινεῖται μεταξὺ ἀπόλυτης ἐξιδανίκευσης καὶ ἀπόλυτης ἀπόρριψης, γιὰτὶ καὶ στὴν περίπτωση τοῦ Γρηγορίου δὲν ἀποφεύχθηκε ἡ ἰδεολογικὴ ἐρμηνεία καὶ χρῆση τῆς Ἱστορίας. Ἀξιοσημείωτο εἶναι ὅτι ἡ κριτικὴ δὲν περιορίστηκε στὸ χῶρο τῆς ἱστορικῆς ἐπιστήμης, ἀλλὰ ἐπεκτάθηκε καὶ στὸν χῶρο τῆς (ἀνεύθυνης) μυθιστοριογραφίας— λογοτεχνίας, ἡ ὁποία τροφοδοτεῖ τὸ λαϊκὸ αἶσθημα καὶ δημιουργεῖ παραπλανητικὲς ἐντυπώσεις.

Γιὰ τὸν ἱστορικὸ ὅμως ὑπάρχει ἡ πραγματικότητα, ποὺ προσφέρεται γιὰ ἀνοικοδόμηση ἀντικειμενικῆς κρίσης, μὲ τὴν προϋπόθεση βέβαια τῆς ἀποδέσμευσης ἀπὸ τὶς ὁποιοσδήποτε θεολογικὲς δεσμεύσεις. Ἀκόμη ἀπαιτεῖται μετὰθεση δικῆς μας στὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Γρηγορίου καὶ ἐσωτερικὴ συμμετοχὴ στὴ μαρτυρικὴ πορεία του, γιὰτὶ στοὺς ὁποιοσδήποτε ἀναχρονισμοὺς δὲν βρίσκεται ποτὲ ἡ λύση.



Ἡπροσευχὴ ὡς πρὸς τὴν ποιότητά της εἶναι συνουσία καὶ ἔνωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὸν Θεόν, καὶ ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἐνέργειά της, σύστασις καὶ διατήρησις τοῦ κόσμου, συμφιλίωσις μὲ τὸν Θεόν, μητέρα τῶν δακρύων, καθὼς ἐπίσης καὶ θυγατέρα, συγχώρησις τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων, γέφυρα ποὺ σώζει ἀπὸ τοὺς πειρασμοὺς, τοῖχος ποὺ μᾶς προστατεύει ἀπὸ τὶς θλίψεις, συντριβὴ τῶν πολέμων, ἔργο τῶν Ἀγγέλων, τροφὴ ὅλων τῶν ἀσωμάτων, ἡ μελλοντικὴ εὐφροσύνη, ἐργασία ποὺ δὲν τελειώνει, πηγὴ τῶν ἀρετῶν, πρόξενος τῶν χαρισμάτων, ἀφανὴς πρόοδος, τροφὴ τῆς ψυχῆς, φωτισμὸς τοῦ νοῦ, πέλεκυς ποὺ χτυπᾷ τὴν ἀπόγνωσις, ἀπόδειξις τῆς ἐλπίδος, διάλυσις τῆς λύπης, πλοῦτος τῶν μοναχῶν, θυσιαυρὸς τῶν ἡσυχαστῶν, μείωσις τοῦ θυμοῦ, καθρέπτης τῆς πνευματικῆς προόδου, φανέρωσις τῶν μέτρων, δήλωσις τῆς πνευματικῆς καταστάσεως, ἀποκάλυψις τῶν μελλοντικῶν πραγμάτων, σημάδι τῆς πνευματικῆς δόξης ποὺ ἔχει κανεῖς.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κλίμακος



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

Νεοελλήνων Πασχα

Του Χριστού Γιανναρά, από το βιβλίο του «Εορτολογικὰ Παλιωδοῦμενα», Ἐκδ. ΑΚΡΙΤΑ.

Οἱ δυο λέξεις «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη» ἔγιναν χαιρετισμός, γιατί κάποτε μετέφεραν, πραγματικά, μιὰ βεβαιότητα χαρᾶς. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι κοινωνοῦσαν αὐτὴ τὴ βεβαιότητα, συναντιόντουσαν καὶ ἤθελαν αὐτὴν πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα νὰ δηλώσουν. Χριστὸς ἀνέστη: ἀναστήθηκε ὁ Χριστὸς, ἄρα δὲν τελειώνουν ὅλα στὸ θάνατο. Καὶ πάνω σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν προοπτικὴ τῆς ζωῆς ποὺ νικάει τὸ θάνατο, ἔχτιζαν τὴν καθημερινότητα τοῦ βίου.

Ὅχι γιὰ νὰ ψευτοπαρηγορηθοῦν μὲ φαντασιώσεις, ἀλλὰ γιατί ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν ἐμπειρικὴ βεβαιότητα ἀντλοῦσαν νόημα καὶ περιεχόμενο καὶ ἀξίες ζωῆς. Ἄν ὁ Χριστὸς ἀνέστη, ὁ μύχιος πυρήνας τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μας, τὸ ὑποκείμενο ἢ ἡ προσωπικότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δὲν τελειώνει μὲ τὸν βιολογικὸ θάνατο. Τότε ἀκόμα καὶ ἡ πολιτικὴ, ἡ οἰκονομία, οἱ κοινωνικοὶ θεσμοὶ παίρνουν ἄλλο νόημα καὶ ἄλλη προοπτικὴ. Ἄν ἡ εὐθύνη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δὲν τελειώνει σὲ κάποια συμβατικὰ ὄρια ὀρθολογισμοῦ καὶ τυπικῶν ὑποχρεώσεων, ἂν ἡ εὐθύνη γιὰ τὶς πράξεις του ἀναφέρεται τελικὰ σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν ἐρωτικὴ παραφορὰ μιᾶς σταυρωμένης γι' αὐτὸν καὶ ἀναστημένης Ἀγάπης, τότε καὶ ἡ πολιτικὴ εἶναι μιὰ διακονία ἀγάπης, μιὰ αὐτοπαραίτηση καὶ αὐτοπροσφορά, ἓνας ἔρωτας νὰ ὑπηρετήσεις τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου καὶ τὶς ἀνάγκες τους.

Στὸν δικό μας τόπο καὶ στὴ δική μας ἑλληνικὴ παράδοση αὐτὴ ἡ πίστη στὴν Ἀνάσταση, ἡ ἀναφορὰ σὲ ἓναν Θεὸ ὄχι τιμωρὸ καὶ δικαστὴ, ἀλλὰ μανικὸ ἔραστή καὶ Νυμφίο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἦταν ὁ ἄξονας ποὺ ὀργάνωνε τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὴ συνοχὴ τοῦ κοινωνικοῦ σώματος. Αὐτὴ ἡ πίστη ἔδινε ταυτότητα στὸν Ἕλληνα. Θυμᾶστε τὸ πρῶτο Σύνταγμα τῆς Ἐπιδαύρου τὸ 1822; Μόλις ἔστησαν ἐλεύθερη τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοὶ οἱ μαρτυρικοὶ ἀγωνιστές, θέλησαν νὰ ὀρίσουν στὸ Σύνταγμα ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ Ἕλληνας πολίτης τοῦ νεοσύστατου κράτους. Καὶ δὲν εἶχαν ποῦ ἄλλοῦ νὰ ἐντοπίσουν τὴν ἑλληνικὴ ιδιότητα παρὰ μόνο στὴν πίστη: «Ὅσοι αὐτόχθονες κάτοικοι τῆς Ἐπικρατείας τῆς Ἑλλάδος πιστεύουσιν εἰς Χριστόν, εἰσὶν Ἕλληνες».

Ἄν ξαναφέρναμε στὸ Σύνταγμα σήμερα αὐτὸν τὸν ὀρισμὸ τοῦ Ἕλληνα, μὲ πόσους πολῖτες θὰ ἀπόμεινε αὐτὴ ἡ δύσμοιρη πατρίδα; Δεκαετίες τώρα, ξεριζώνουμε πεισματικά κάθε πίστη καὶ κάθε ἐλπίδα καὶ κάθε ἀληθινὸ ἔρωτα ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ λαοῦ. Ρημάξαμε τὶς ψυχὲς μὲ τὴ νέκρα τῆς «προοδευτικῆς» ξιπασιάς, πιθηκισμοῦ δῆθεν μοντέρνων ιδεῶν ποὺ ἀφήνουν ἄριζο καὶ ἀνέστιο τὸν ἄνθρωπο σὲ φοβερὴ ἐρημία καὶ μοναξιά. Δεκαετίες ὀλόκληρες ὁ Ἑλληνοχριστιανισμὸς λειτούργησε σὰν στεῖρα συμβατικὴ ἰδεοληψία, γιὰ νὰ πνιγεῖ τελικὰ μέσα στὸν περίγelo τῆς χουντικῆς ἐκμετάλλευσης τοῦ «Ἑλλὰς Ἑλλήνων Χριστιανῶν».

Καὶ ἦρθε ἡ τελευταία ὀκταετία, ὅπου συστηματικὰ πιά καὶ μεθοδευμένα ξεριζώθηκε κάθε ὑπόλειμμα σεβασμοῦ καὶ μνήμης τῆς πνευματικῆς μας παράδοσης. Ἀπὸ τὰ ἀλφαβητάρια τοῦ Δημοτικοῦ ἐξαλείφθηκαν, μὲ φανατισμένο πείσμα, ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ λέξεις Χριστὸς, Παναγία, ἐκκλησιά, γιορτὴ, πανηγύρι, προσευχή. Μοναδικὴ μνεία γιορτῆς στὸ ἀλφαβητάρι τῆς Α' Δημοτικοῦ ἢ διαδήλωση γιὰ τὴν ἐπέτειο τοῦ Πολυτεχνείου. Τὰ βιβλία τοῦ Γυμνασίου καὶ τοῦ Λυκείου νὰ χλευάζουν καὶ νὰ κατασκευοφαντοῦν τὸ Βυζάντιο, νὰ προπαγανδίζουν τὸν πιὸ χυδαῖο ὑλισμὸ μὲ φανατισμὸ ποὺ δὲν γνώρισε οὔτε ἡ σταλινικὴ περίοδος.

Ἡ καταστροφή ποὺ συντελέστηκε, εἰδικὰ στὴν παιδεία, τὰ τελευταία ὀχτὼ χρόνια εἶναι ἐφιαλτικὴ. Ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια τοῦ ἠθους καὶ τῆς ἐλπίδας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐλπίδας πέρα ἀπὸ τὴ ζωώδη ἐπιβίωση καὶ τὴν καταναλωτικὴ ὑστερία, γι' αὐτὰ δὲν μιλάει κανεὶς.

Προτεραιότητα ἠθους στὴν πράξη εἶναι ἡ μόνη μας ἐλπίδα. Ὅχι ἀπλῶς γιὰ ὀρθολογικὴ συνέπεια, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ ἀναστηθοῦν καὶ πάλι ἄξονες ζωῆς σὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τόπο. Εἶναι εὐχὴ καὶ ἀπαίτηση.



Ἦ Χριστιανέ, νὰ κοινωνήσεις μὲ φόβο Θεοῦ. Νὰ κοινωνήσεις μὲ πίστι. Νὰ κοινωνήσεις μὲ ἀγάπη. Δηλαδή, στὴν ψυχὴ σου τὴν ὥρα τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας πρέπει νὰ βασιλεύει τὸ εὐγενέστερο ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ αἰσθήματα, ἡ ἀγάπη. Ἡ ἀγάπη, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ πῆ καὶ νὰ ἐπαναλάβει τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ: «Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασιν τί ποιοῦσιν» (Λούκ. 23:34).

Ἀλλὰ, δυστυχῶς, οἱ πιὸ πολλοὶ δὲν κοινωνοῦν μ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπη. Αὐτοὶ μοιάζουν μὲ κάποιον ποὺ νήστευσε, καὶ τὴ Λαμπρὴ πῆγε νὰ κοινωνήσει, ἀλλ' ὅταν μέσα στὸ ναὸ εἶδε τὸν ἐχθρό του, ταράχθηκε τόσο πολὺ, ὥστε ξέχασε καὶ τὸν τόπο καὶ τὴ στιγμὴ τὴν ἱερή, κι' ἔβγαλε μαχαίρι νὰ τὸν σκοτώσει. Καὶ θὰ τὸν σκότωνε, ἂν δὲν τὸν συγκρατοῦσαν! Σκληρὲς καρδιές, ποὺ δὲν μαλακώνουν οὔτε μπροστὰ στὴ Θεϊκὴ φωτιὰ τῆς ἀπέραντης ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἀπὸ τὸ φυλλάδιον «Σταχυολογήματα τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου», ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη»

Ἀτενίζοντας τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἐν Σιωπῇ

Ἀπὸ τὸν Παναγιώτη Σημάτη, Ἐφημερίδα «ΕΡΕΥΝΑ» Αἰγίου, 27 Ἀπριλίου 2005.

Κάθε χρόνο, ὅταν φτάνει ἡ Μεγάλη Ἑβδομάδα, ὁ πιστὸς προσκαλεῖται γιὰ μία ἐπανατοποθέτηση τῆς ζωῆς του μπρὸς στὸ μυστήριο τοῦ Πάθους τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀτενίζει καθηλωμένους ἐκεῖ στὰ μεσοῦρανα, στὸ Σταυρὸ Του, προσκαλώντας μας καὶ προκαλώντας ταυτόχρονα πιστοὺς καὶ λιγότερο πιστοὺς. Καὶ ποιὸς ἄραγε θὰ μπορούσε νὰ διαβεβαιώσει ὅτι προσπέρασε τὸ Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ αἰώνιο αὐτὸ σκάνδαλο τῆς λογικῆς ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀγγέλων, χωρὶς κλυδωνισμοὺς ἀμφιβολιῶν, χωρὶς κραδασμοὺς στὸ ἐπίπεδο τῶν αὐτονόητων ἐνδοκοσμικῶν βεβαιότητων;

Φέτος ιδιαίτερα, καὶ ἐνῶ ἀκόμη εἶναι νωπὲς οἱ ἐντυπώσεις ἀπὸ τὰ σκάνδαλα ποὺ ἦρθαν, καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ θὰ ἔρθουν, θὰ ἀντικρίσουμε καὶ πάλι τὸ Χριστό. Ἴσως φέτος νὰ φαντάζει περισσότερο μόνος: δεμένος σὰν κακοῦργος, περιτριγυρισμένος καὶ λοιδορούμενος ἀπὸ τὸν ὄχλο καὶ τὸ ἀρχοντολόι τῆς πολιτικῆς καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ «καιροῦ ἐκείνου»: μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς Του ἀποσυναρμολογημένους, διασκορπισμένους καὶ ἀνήμερους νὰ τοῦ προσφέρουν κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἄρνηση τοῦ Πέτρου.

Κι αὐτὸς σιωπηλός, νὰ ἀτενίζει ὄλους, ὅπως τότε τὸν Πέτρο πρὶν λαλήσει ὁ πετεινός, καὶ νὰ ἀναμοχλεύει μέσα μας ὅλες τὶς ἀρνήσεις κι ὅλες τὶς προδοσίες στὸ πρόσωπό Του, ὅλα τὰ πάθη κι ὅλες τὶς πληγές.

Νὰ μᾶς κοιτᾷ μὲ μίαν ἀπέραντα μεγαλόπρηπη Σιωπῇ—ὄση κι ἡ ἀγάπη Του—ποὺ θεραπεύει τὴν κούφια καὶ ὑβριστικὴ πολυλογία τῶν «ἐκπροσώπων» Του, κάθε μεγαλόστομη καὶ ὑπερφίαλη καπηλεία τῆς Σιωπῆς καὶ τοῦ Πάθους.

Μία ἀγιασμένη, πονεμένη Σιωπῇ γιὰ τοὺς πόνους καὶ τὶς ἀποτυχίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὄλων τῶν αἰώνων, μυστικὴ φωνὴ στὰ μύχια τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Μία μεγαλειώδης, εὐγλωττη, κατανυκτικὴ Σιωπῇ Ἀγάπης.

«Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐσιώπα». Στὸν πόνο καὶ στὸν θρίαμβο. Καὶ ὅταν ἔκανε τὰ θαύματα, καὶ ὅταν δεχόταν τὰ ραπίσματα. Καὶ ὅταν εἰσέρχεται θριαμβευτικὰ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα «μετὰ βαΐων καὶ κλάδων», καὶ ὅταν ἐρωτᾶται ἀπὸ τὸν ἀρχιερέα Καϊάφα, τὸν Πιλάτο, τὸν βασιλιὰ Ἡρώδη: «Οὐδὲν ἀποκρίνη; οὐκ ἀκούεις πόσα σου καταμαρτυροῦσιν; Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐσιώπα».

Σιωπᾷ ὅταν ὁ ὄχλος καὶ οἱ στρατιῶτες τὸν χλευάζουν, ὅταν τὸν προκαλοῦν λέγοντας: «Σῶσον σεαυτὸν εἰ Υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ». Ὅταν καταφέρουν στὸ ἅγιο πρόσωπό Του ραπίσματα καὶ μὲ σαρκαστικὴ εἰρωνεία τὸν ἐξωθοῦν νὰ «προφητεῦσει» ποιὸς τὸν ράπισε. Ἀναποδίδει στὴν παράλογη πρόκληση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης κακότητος τὴν πορφυρὰ Σιωπῇ τῶν σταυρωμένων Του χεριῶν, τὴ ματωμένη καρδιὰ τῆς Ἀγάπης.

Σιωπᾷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς μπροστὰ στὴν μισαλλοδοξία ἐχθρῶν, στὴν ἀλαζονεία καὶ τὴν ὑποκρισία τῶν «φίλων», γιὰτί οἱ λέξεις δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ποῦν τίποτα περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσα πολυσημάντα μαρτυροῦν τὰ πάθη, ὁ Σταυρὸς καὶ ἡ Ἀνάστασή Του.

Ἡ Σιωπῇ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἶναι διακριτικὴ συνομιλία, ἕνας ἀέναντος διάλογος ἀγάπης μὲ τὶς ψυχές, ὅταν τὰ λόγια καθίστανται ἀνήμερα νὰ διασπᾶσουν τὰ τεῖχη τοῦ ὀρθολογισμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀμφιβολίας ποὺ ἔχουν ἐρμητικὰ σφραγίσει τὰ «ῶτα» μας. Ὅταν τὰ πάθη ἔχουν ἀλλοιώσει τὴν «λογικὴ» ψυχὴ μας καὶ τὴν ἔχουν παραδώσει στὸ παράλογό της τυχαιότητος, τὸ χαιτικό ἐνήδονο κυνήγι τῆς ὁδύνης.

Συνομιλεῖ καὶ τότε «ἐν τῇ σιωπῇ» ὁ Χριστὸς μαζί μας, γιὰτί ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποτὲ δὲν παύει νὰ εἶναι Εἰκόνα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποτὲ δὲν χάνει τὴν ἰκανότητα νὰ διαισθάνεται, νὰ ξέρει, νὰ «καταλαβαίνει πολὺ περισσότερα πράγματα ἀπ' ὅσα μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφράσει», ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀκούσει. Ὁ Σιωπῶν Χριστὸς τοῦ Πάθους, μᾶς ἔχει ἐξασφαλίσει τὸ προνόμιο, ὥστε «νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ» νὰ μποροῦμε νὰ ψιθυρίζουμε τὸ «μνήστητί μου, Κύριε» τοῦ ληστοῦ, ἀκόμα καὶ πάνω στὸ σταυρὸ τῆς πιὸ μεγάλης ντροπῆς, τῆς πιὸ μεγάλης ἀπελπισίας.

Ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Σιωπῆς, εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀγάπης, ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀναμονῆς, δηλαδὴ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἐλευθερίας: κανένα δὲν ἐξαναγκάζει, μὰ ἀγαπᾷ, σιωπᾷ καὶ περιμένει τὴν μετάνοιά μας. «Ἡ σιωπῇ εἶναι ὁ ἐσχατολογικὸς τρόπος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖον μιλεῖ καὶ πράττει ὁ Θεός. Ὅποιος ἀγαπᾷ δὲν φλυαρεῖ... μὰ ὑποφέρει καὶ ὑπομένει».

Ἡ Σιωπῇ τοῦ Λόγου! Τὰ λόγια εἶναι τὰ ἐργαλεῖα τῆς χρονικότητος. Ἡ κατανόηση τῆς οὐσίας τῶν λόγων εἰσάγει στὴν αἰωνιότητα τοῦ ὑπέρ-λόγου, ἐκεῖ ὅπου τὰ λόγια εἶναι περιττά. Ἡ «σιωπῇ εἶναι ἡ γλῶσσα τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ. «Ἡ σιωπῇ μυστηρίον ἐστὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ μέλλοντος: οἱ δὲ λόγοι ὄργανόν ἐστὶ τούτου τοῦ κόσμου» (Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος).

Ἡ Σιωπῇ τοῦ Λόγου λογοποιεῖ τὴν παράλογη λογικὴ τοῦ πεπτωκότος ἀνθρώπου. Σιωπηλὰ ἀνασκάπτει τὶς καρδιές, ἀποκόπτει τὰ καρκινώματα τοῦ ἄλογου ἐγωῖσμοῦ, δένει τὰ τραύματα, ζωντανεῖ τὴν ἐρειπωμένη πίστη, ἐτοιμάζει τὴν ἐξανάσταση.

Μέσα στὴν σιωπῇ συντελεῖται ἡ θεανθρώπινη συνάντηση. «Ἰδοῦ, ὁ Νυμφίος ἔρχεται ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς νυκτός». Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖ, στὴ σιγῇ τῆς ἡσυχίας, «τῶν ὑπερφυῶν γεύεται ἀγαθῶν καὶ ὑπερκοσμίων ἀπολαύει καλῶν, καὶ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγάπης καθίσταται χώρα: καὶ οὕτω ἐρωτοληπτεῖται καὶ χαίρει καὶ εὐθυμεῖ» (Ἄγ. Κάλλιστος). «Ὁ φίλος τῆς σιωπῆς προσεγγίζει τὸν Θεὸ καὶ συνομιλώντας μυστικὰ μαζί Του, φωτίζεται ἀπ' Αὐτόν» (Ἰωάννης Κλίμακος).

Ὅσοι αὐτὴ τὴν Μεγάλην Ἑβδομάδα κατορθώσουμε—ἀτενίζοντας τὸν Ἰησοῦ—ν' ἀφουγκραστοῦμε ταπεινὰ τὴ πολύφθογγη Σιωπῇ Του, ἀποφασίσουμε «ἐν μετανοίᾳ» νὰ ἐναποθέσουμε στὰ χέρια Του τὴν ζωὴ μας καὶ μποῦμε στὴ σιωπῇ τοῦ «ὄλβιου» τάφου, θὰ μᾶς χαρίσει ἄλλη μία φορὰ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου Του τὴν «ἐκ νεκρῶν Ἀνάσταση».

Προσκύνημα στο Μοναστήρι του Αγίου Κοσμά του Αίτωλου στο Κολικοντάσι της Αλβανίας

Του Μιχαήλ Γ. Τρίτου, αναπληρωτού καθηγητού Αριστοτελείου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης, από την έφημερίδα «Ορθόδοξος Τύπος», 21-09-2007.



Ότι αισθάνεται ο Ορθόδοξος Ρωμὸς ὅταν ἀτενίζει τὸ κατ' ἐξοχὴν μνημεῖο τοῦ Γένους, τὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία, τὸ ἴδιο νιώθει ἐπισκεπτόμενος τὸ προσφάτως ἀνακαινισθὲν καθολικὸ τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς τοῦ Μεγάλου Διδάχου καὶ Φωτιστοῦ τοῦ δούλου Γένους Πατρο-Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ, στὸ Κολικόντασι τῆς Μεγάλης Μουζακιάς, στὴν Ἀλβανία.

Ὁ ἁγιασμένος καὶ Πανορθόδοξος καταξιωμένος αὐτὸς χώρος φυλάσσει τὸν τάφο (καὶ μέχρι πρότινος τὰ λείψανα τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ), ὁ ὁποῖος ὑπῆρξε τὸ μεγαλύτερο κεφάλαιο τῆς φυλῆς μας στὰ χρόνια τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας, ἡ ἐπιφανέστερη λαοπαιδευτικὴ καὶ νεοπατερικὴ μορφή τῆς νεοελληνικῆς ἐθνότητος, ὁ ἐπιβλητικότερος λαϊκὸς ἀναγεννητὴς τῶν τελευταίων χρόνων τῆς σκλαβιάς, καὶ ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς λίγους ποὺ ἔκαναν θετικὴ προεργασία καὶ ἐξασφάλισαν στὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦ 21 ἐγγυήσεις ἐπιτυχίας.

Εἶχαμε καὶ φέτος τὴν ἐξαιρετικὴ εὐλογία νὰ παρακολουθήσουμε τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία, ποὺ τέλεσε ὁ Σεβασμιότατος Μητροπολίτης Βερατίου, Αὐλώνας καὶ Κανίνης κ. κ. Ἰγνάτιος, συμπαραστατούμενος ἀπὸ πλειάδα Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ἀλβανῶν Ἱερέων. Πλῆθος πιστῶν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλβανία καὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα εἶχε κατακλύσει τὸν χώρο τῆς Ἱστορικῆς αὐτῆς Μονῆς, γιὰ νὰ παρακολουθήσει τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία καὶ τὴ λιτάνευση τῆς σεπτῆς εἰκόνας καὶ τῶν λειψάνων τοῦ ἁγίου. Συγκινητικὲς ἐκδηλώσεις εὐλάβειας καὶ τιμῆς στὸν Ἅγιο Κοσμᾶ ἐκτυλίχθηκαν τὸν τάφο του, ὁ ὁποῖος βρίσκεται κατὰ μῆκος τοῦ κατεστραμμένου ναοῦ τῶν Εἰσοδίων τῆς Θεοτόκου.

Ὅλοι ἔπαιρναν γιὰ φυλακτὸ χῶμα ἀπὸ τὸν τάφο του. Γυναῖκες ἔβγαζαν τὰ καλύμματα τῶν κεφαλῶν τους, τὰ τοποθετοῦσαν στὸν τάφο τοῦ ἁγίου γιὰ εὐλογία, καὶ στὴ συνέχεια τὰ ξαναφοροῦσαν. Οἱ μάνες σήκωναν τὰ μικρὰ παιδιά, γιὰ νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἁγίου. Ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες ἀναβαν καθ' ὅλη τὴν διάρκειά τῆς ἡμέρας κεριὰ στὸν τάφο τοῦ Πατρο-Κοσμᾶ καὶ δὲν ἀπομακρύνονταν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ, παρὰ μόνον ὅταν αὐτὰ καίγονταν. Ἀλλόθρησκες

μουσουλμάνες γυναῖκες τοποθετοῦσαν τὰ ροῦχα τῶν παιδιῶν τους κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα γιὰ εὐλογία. Μετὰ τὸ πέρας τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας, ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ λαοθάλασσα ξεχύθηκε στοὺς γύρω ἀπὸ τὴ Μονὴ χώρους, νὰ γευματίσει καὶ νὰ γλεντήσει κατὰ τὸν παραδοσιακὸ Ἑπειρωτικὸ τρόπο.

Ἡ Ἱερὰ Μονὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ βρίσκεται βόρεια τῆς Ἀπολλωνίας, στὴν ἀνατολικὴ ὄχθη τοῦ Ἄψου ποταμοῦ, κοντὰ στὸ χωριὸ Κολικόντασι τῆς Μεγάλης Μουζακιάς. Χτίστηκε μεταξὺ Αὐγούστου 1813 καὶ Ἰουνίου 1814, ἀπὸ τὸν Ἄλῃ Πασᾶ τὸν Τεπελενλή, ὅταν αὐτὸς περιέλαβε στὸ πασαλίκι του τὸ Μπεράτι καὶ τὴν περιοχὴ του. Ὁ Ἄλῃς, μπαίνοντας στὸ Μπεράτι, θυμήθηκε τὸν Πατρο-Κοσμᾶ, καὶ κάλεσε τὸν Μητροπολίτη Βελιγραδίων, τὸν ὁποῖον πρόσταξε νὰ κάνει τὴν ἀνακομιδὴν τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ νὰ κτισθῇ καὶ μοναστήριον ἐπ' ὀνόματι τοῦ ἁγίου τιμῶμενον, ἐπειδὴ τὸν γνώρισε ὡς ἀληθὴ ἄνθρωπο τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Στὸ ἐξωτερικὸ τῆς κόγχης τοῦ Ἱεροῦ γίνεται ἀναφορὰ στὸν Ἄλῃ Πασᾶ. ΑΝΗΓΕΡΘΗ ΕΚ ΒΑΘΡΩΝ Ο ΘΕΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΙΕΡΟΣ ΟΥΤΟΣ ΝΑΟΣ ΔΙΑ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΓΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΤΡΟΠΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΥΨΗΛΟΤΑΤΟΥ ΒΕΖΥΡ ΑΛΗ ΠΑΣΙΑ ΑΠΟ ΤΕΠΕΛΕΝΗ.

Τὸ καθολικὸ τῆς Μονῆς εἶναι ρυθμοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ σταυροειδοῦς. Ὁ τροῦλος εἶναι ὀκταγωνικὸς μὲ κωνικὴ κεραμόσκεπη στέγη καὶ τέσσερα μονόλοβα παράθυρα. Στὴ δυτικὴ πλευρὰ ὑπάρχει δίλοβο κωδωνοστάσιο μὲ ρωμαϊκὸ γλυπτὸ στὸ κέντρο. Τὸ τέμπλο εἶναι ξυλόγλυπτο, ἔργο τοῦ 19ου αἰῶνος.

Τὰ λείψανα τοῦ ἁγίου φυλάσσονται στὴν Ἀρχιεπισκοπὴ στὰ Τίρανα γιὰ λόγους ἀσφαλείας. Εἶναι τοποθετημένα σὲ μία ἀπλὴ ξύλινη λάρνακα. Ἀπὸ τὸ σκελετὸ τῶν λειψάνων λείπουν: Ἡ κᾶρα, ποὺ κλάπηκε τὸ 1917 ἀπὸ αὐστρουγγαροὺς καὶ πιθανὸν βρίσκεται σήμερα σὲ μουσεῖο τῆς Βιέννης. Ἡ κάτω γνάθος, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ ἁγίου Νικολάου Ἄνδρου. Ἡ κερκὶς τῆς δεξιᾶς χειρὸς, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὸν Ἱερὸ Ναὸ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ Κονίτσης. Ἐπίσης μικρὰ τεμάχια ἀπὸ τὰ δάκτυλα χειρῶν καὶ ποδιῶν τοῦ ἁγίου βρίσκονται σὲ διάφορα μέρη, ὅπως στὰ Γιάννινα, τὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Δουσίκου καὶ ἄλλου. Τεμάχιο λειψάνου τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ δώρισε πρόσφατα ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀλβανίας Ἀναστάσιος στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος, κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσημη ἐπίσκεψή του σ' αὐτήν. Τὸ Ἱερὸ λείψανο ἔχει ἀποθησαυριστῆ στὸ Μητροπολιτικὸ Ναὸ Ἀθηνῶν. Ἐπίσης τμήμα λειψάνου, δόθηκε στὴ Ἱερὰ Μονὴ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ Αἰτωλοακαρνανίας.

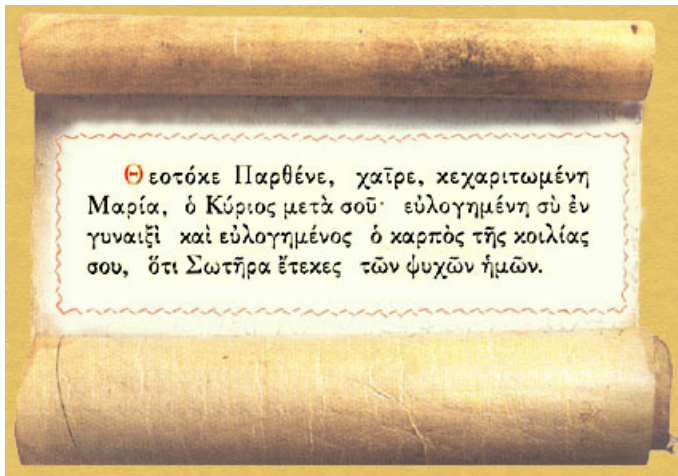
Γιὰ τὸ πὼς σώθηκε ἡ Μονὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ ἀπὸ τὴν καταστρεπτικὴ μανία τοῦ ἀθεϊστικοῦ καθεστώτος τοῦ Ἐμβέρ Χότζα, ὁ Χρῆστος Μητρὸς ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη Φιέρι τῆς Ἀλβανίας ἀπεκάλυψε τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ὅταν τὸ 1968 μὲ νόμο τοῦ ἀλβανικοῦ κράτους ἀπαγορεύθηκε κάθε θρησκευτικὴ ἐκδήλωση, ἦρθε διαταγὴ ἀπὸ τὰ Τίρανα νὰ γκρεμισθοῦν οἱ Ἐκκλησίες καὶ νὰ εξαφανισθοῦν οἱ σταυροὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς Χριστιανικοὺς τάφους. Ὁ ἀστυνομικὸς διοικητὴς τοῦ Φιέρι πήρε μαζί του τὸ ἀρμόδιο συνεργεῖο καὶ πήγαν στὸ Μοναστήρι, προκειμένου νὰ τὸ

έξαφανίσουν. Γνωρίζοντας την εὐλάβεια τῶν Ἑλλήνων στὸν ἅγιο Κοσμᾶ, ἔδωσε ἐντολὴ νὰ ξεκινήσει τὸ ἔργο τῆς κατεδαφίσεως ἀπὸ τὸν τάφο τοῦ ἁγίου. Ὅταν οἱ ἐργάτες ἔδωσαν τὸ πρῶτο χτύπημα στὸ Ἱερὸ μνημεῖο, τότε μιὰ δυνατὴ βοή ἔσπασε τὴν ἡσυχία τοῦ χώρου καὶ μιὰ δυνατὴ φωτιὰ ξεπήδησε μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν τάφο τοῦ ἁγίου. Ἐντρομοὶ οἱ παριστάμενοι ἐτράπησαν σὲ φυγὴ καὶ δὲν ἐπανήλθαν παρὰ τὶς ἀπειλὲς τῶν Τυράνων καὶ παρὰ τὴν καθησυχαστικὴ δὴλωση τοῦ καθεστῶτος ὅτι δῆθεν, ἐξερράγη ξεχασμένη ἀπὸ τὸν Β΄ Παγκόσμιο πόλεμο βόμβα. Ἔτσι δὲν βεβηλώθηκε ὁ τάφος τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ καὶ τὰ χαριτόβρυτα λείψανα τοῦ παρέμειναν ἐκεῖ βάλσαμο στὶς πληγὲς τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ ἐλπίδα πὼς «θάρθη τὸ ποθούμενον» (Ἀρχιμ. Τιμοθέου Ἡλιάκη, Παρακλητικὸς Κανὼν... Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ, Νέα Φιλαδέλφεια 1997, σελ. 61).

Ἡ Ἱερὰ Μονὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ εἶναι ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ σπουδαιότερα μνημεῖα τοῦ Γένους. Ὑστερα ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνακαίνιση τοῦ καθολικοῦ, ποῦ ἐγινε μὲ πρωτοβουλία τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀναστασίου, ὑπολείπεται ὁ ἐξωραϊσμός τοῦ γύρω χώρου καὶ ἡ ἀσφαλτόστρωση τοῦ δρόμου, ποῦ ὀδηγεῖ σ' αὐτό. Θὰ ἦταν εὐχῆς ἔργον ἢ ΕΡΤ κάθε χρόνο νὰ μετέδιδε τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία ἀπὸ τὸ ἱστορικὸ αὐτὸ μοναστήρι τιμώντας μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ τρόπο τὸν μεγάλο ἔθναπόστολο καὶ φωτιστὴ τοῦ δούλου Γένους.

Τώρα, ποῦ τὰ πράγματα ἔχουν ἡρεμήσει στὴ γείτονα χώρα, μποροῦν ἄνετα νὰ ὀργανώνονται προσκυνηματικὲς ἐκδρομὲς στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ, ὅπου φυλάσσεται ὁ χαριτόβρυτος τάφος του, καθὼς καὶ στὴν παρακείμενη Ἱερὰ Μονὴ τῆς Ἀρδενίτσας· ἐκεῖ εἶχαν ἐγκλεισθεῖ οἱ μαθητὲς τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ μετὰ τὴ σύλληψη τοῦ διδασκάλου τους καὶ ἐκεῖ μόνασε ὁ Διδάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους Νεκτᾶριος Τέρπος, πρόδρομος τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ.

Κάθε προσκύνημα στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ στὸ Κολικόντασι τῆς Ἀλβανίας, ποῦ ἔκτισε ἓνας ἀλλόθρησκος, ἀλλὰ ἰδιαίτερα εὐλαβούμενος τὸν ἅγιο, ὁ Βεζύρ Ἀλὴ Πασᾶς, εἶναι ἓνα πνευματικὸ ἀναβάπτισμα στὰ ζεῖδωρα νάματα τῆς μαχόμενης Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τῆς πολυματωμένης Ρωμοσύνης.



Οἱ Τρεῖς Τρόποι Ἄλωσης τοῦ Ἔθνους καὶ τῆς Πατρίδας

Γεράσιμος Παναγιωτάτος-Τζάκης, Δικηγόρος-Ἐπικοινωνιολόγος, «Ἀντίβαρο», Μάιος 2007.

Ἄν κοιτάξει κανεὶς προσεκτικὰ τὴν ἱστορία, θὰ διαπιστώσει ὅτι σὲ κάθε περίοδο ὑπῆρχαν παγκόσμιες δυνάμεις-φόβητρα καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη πλευρὰ λαοὶ καὶ μικρὰ κράτη ποῦ δέχονταν πίεση ἐδαφικὴ, πολιτικὴ, πολιτιστικὴ, καὶ οἰκονομικὴ. Πάντοτε, γιὰ νὰ πετύχουν τὸ σκοπὸ τῆς ὑποδούλωσης τῶν πρὸ ἀδυνάμων κρατῶν καὶ λαῶν, οἱ ἰσχυροὶ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν μερικὲς ἐπάλληλες μεθόδους ἀλλὰ καὶ ἓνα σύνολο ἐγγωρίων σὲ κάθε χώρα ἐκπροσώπων, οἱ ὅποιοι ἀναλάμβαναν τὸ ρόλο προώθησης τῶν ξένων συμφερόντων κατὰ τῆς ἴδιας τους τῆς πατρίδας.

Οἱ τρεῖς κύριοι τρόποι τῆς προσπάθειας αὐτῆς εἶναι:

- (1) Ἡ ἄσκηση παντοειδῶν πιέσεων πρὸς τὴν κυβέρνησι μίας χώρας νὰ ἀσκεῖ δουλοπρεπὴ ἐξωτερικὴ πολιτικὴ.
- (2) Ἡ ἀλλοίωση τῆς πληθυσμιακῆς σύνθεσης καὶ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ ἑνὸς ἔθνους μέσω τῆς ἀθρόας, χωρὶς ὄρια, λαθρομετανάστευσης, καὶ
- (3) Ἡ ἀποδόμηση τῆς ἐθνικῆς πατριωτικῆς συνείδησης μέσω καταστροφῆς τῆς παιδείας καὶ τῶν πολιτιστικῶν προτύπων.

Ἡ Ἑλλάδα ἀποτελεῖ διαχρονικὰ ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ κύρια θύματα-στόχους τῆς πρακτικῆς αὐτῆς.

Ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἐξωτερικὴ πολιτικὴ, μὲ κάποιες ἐξαιρέσεις μικρῆς διάρκειας, ἡ ἀσκούμενη πολιτικὴ ὑφίσταται τὸ βάρος τῆς πρόσδεσης στὰ συμφέροντα τῶν ἰσχυρῶν, αὐτῶν ποῦ χρησιμοποιοῦν θεσμοὺς καὶ διεθνῆς δίκαιο ἀνάλογα μὲ τὶς ἐπιδιώξεις τους καὶ τὶς ὑποκριτικὲς εὐαισθησίες τους. Τὰ χρόνια 1996-2004 ἀποτελέσαν τὸ τρανότερο πρότυπο αὐτῆς τῆς λογικῆς. Κατὰ τὴν περίοδο αὐτὴ, ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς λαὸς ἔνωσε στὸ πετσί τοῦ τί σημαίνει ἐνδοτισμός καὶ ἐθνικὲς ὑποχωρήσεις. Ἡ ἀναγνώριση ζωτικῶν συμφερόντων τῆς Τουρκίας σὲ Αἰγαῖο καὶ Θράκη, ἡ δημιουργία τοῦ σχεδίου Ἄναν ποῦ χάριζε τὴν Κύπρο στὴν Τουρκία, ἡ μὴ ἄσκηση κυριαρχικῶν δικαιωμάτων τῆς χώρας ποῦ ἀπονέμονται ἀπὸ τὸ διεθνῆ δίκαιο, ἡ ἀνάληψη τοῦ ρόλου προαγωγοῦ τῆς πάσης θυσίας εὐρωπαϊκῆς πορείας τῆς Τουρκίας, ἡ ἀνοχὴ τῆς νταηλίδικης συμπεριφορᾶς τῆς στὴν Κύπρο καὶ τὸ Αἰγαῖο, ὁ ἐνταφιασμός τοῦ ζητήματος τῆς ὀνομασίας τοῦ κρατιδίου τῶν Σκοπίων, εἶναι μερικὲς ἀπὸ τὶς δεσμεύσεις τῆς περιόδου ἐκείνης. Ἡ Νέα Διακυβέρνηση ψηφίστηκε ὄχι γιὰ νὰ ἀνεχθεῖ νωχελικὰ τὶς δεσμεύσεις αὐτὲς ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ ἀπομακρυνθεῖ ἀπὸ αὐτὲς καὶ νὰ ἀσκήσει ἐθνικὰ υπερήφανη ἐξωτερικὴ πολιτικὴ. Καλὸ θὰ εἶναι νὰ τὸ ἔχει ὑπόψη καθ' ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῶν θητειῶν τῆς, ἂν δὲν θέλει νὰ ἀπογοητεύσει κι αὐτὴ τοὺς πολίτες ποῦ πίστεψαν ὅτι μπορεῖ νὰ ἀλλάξει τὰ πράγματα πρὸς καλύτερη κατεύθυνση.

Ὁ δεῦτερος τρόπος ἄλωσης εἶναι μέσω τῆς ἀνεξέλεγκτης

λαθρομετανάστευσης. Η μετανάστευση είναι φαινόμενο που άγγιζει όλες τις ευρωπαϊκές χώρες. Αποτελεί ένα πρόβλημα, ένα αναγκαίο κακό που οφείλεται στην άνιση κατανομή του πλούτου στον πλανήτη. Οι ίδιοι οι οικονομικοί μετανάστες αναζητούν μία καλύτερη ζωή, να ξεφύγουν από τη μιζέρια που ζούν στις χώρες προέλευσής τους. Η χώρα μας, όπως και οι άλλες χώρες, ασφαλώς και οφείλει να βοηθήσει όσους μπορεί, όσους άντεχουν ή κοινωνία και η οικονομία μας χωρίς να υποστούν ζημιά. Είναι όμως σαφές ότι εδώ το ζήτημα έχει ξεφύγει. Όλες οι χώρες έχουν ορίσει ένα επίσημο ή άτυπο όριο, περίπου στο 5% του πληθυσμού τους. Μόνο η Ελλάδα, που λόγω οικονομικής και πληθυσμιακής ιδιαιτερότητας θα έπρεπε να είχε ορίσει πρώτη τέτοιο ποσοστό, δεν έχει κάνει τίποτα. Αφήνει λοιπόν να χρησιμοποιούνται οι μετανάστες ως μέσο αλλοίωσης της πληθυσμιακής σύνθεσης της χώρας μας, ως μέσο διατάραξης της κοινωνικής και εθνικής μας συνοχής, αφού η υποδοχή και αφομοίωση τόσο μεγάλου αριθμού ξεπερνά καταφανώς τις δυνατότητες της χώρας. Και το κακό είναι ότι όλα αυτά προβάλλονται ως δήθεν καλό, με το σόφισμα-δόγμα της δήθεν πολυπολιτισμικότητας. Κάθε αντίθετη φωνή ένοχοποιείται ως δήθεν ξενοφοβική και ρατσιστική. Από ποιούς; Από αυτούς που αν μπορούσαν θα μετέτρεπαν τον πατριωτισμό σε ποινικό αδίκημα. Και το τελικό ερώτημα είναι: ποιός ρώτησε τον Έλληνα λαό αν θέλει από ζηλευτό άμιγές έθνικά κράτος να μετατραπεί, τεχνητά και βίαια, σε πολυπολιτισμική κοινωνία-άχαρμά;

Επειδή οι δυο πρώτοι τρόποι που περιγράφηκαν συναντούν αντιδράσεις μεγάλες από το λαό, το σύστημα ψάχνει να βρει τρόπο ώστε μακροπρόθεσμα να απαλλαγεί όριστικά από τις αντιδράσεις αυτές. Πώς θα το πετύχει; Αν οι επόμενες γενιές δεν γνωρίζουν την ιστορία της πατρίδας τους, τις επιτυχίες της, αυτά που υπέστη από άλλα κράτη. Στόχος εδώ είναι η αποδόμηση της εθνικής ταυτότητας και συνείδησης, ή αλλοίωση της εθνικής μνήμης και ιστορίας και η μεταφύτευση μίας άλλης, πλαστικής και κατασκευασμένης ιστορίας που θα δημιουργεί πολίτες υποτακτικούς, μορφωτικά ήλιθιους που θα είναι άπλοοι καταναλωτές των προϊόντων των πολυεθνικών εταιριών και πειθήνια όργανα της κάθε εξουσίας. Είναι έλπιδοφόρα ή τεράστια αντίδραση έναντιον του άθλιου βιβλίου ιστορίας της ΣΤ' Δημοτικού, το οποίο συμβολίζει αυτή την προσπάθεια δημιουργίας ενός λαού ραγιά. Γιατί αν τυχόν αυτό περάσει, τότε οι έμπνευστές του θα προχωρήσουν στην αλλαγή και των υπόλοιπων βιβλίων ιστορίας προς την κατεύθυνση αυτή και η λογική του ραγιαδισμού θα μπει άργα ή γρήγορα στο DNA του λαού μας.

Η συντριπτική πλειοψηφία των Ελλήνων μοιράζεται αυτούς τους προβληματισμούς. Αντιμετωπίζει όμως τις εξελίξεις με το φόβο και την απαισιοδοξία ότι μάλλον δεν μπορεί να αλλάξει αυτή η μοιραία για την πατρίδα μας πορεία. Αυτό είναι λάθος. Οι ισχυροί πάντα πίεζαν τον Έλληνα λαό και πάντα έβρισκαν και τους ντόπιους

Νενέκους και Έφιάλτες για να προσπαθήσουν να περάσουν τα σχέδιά τους. Η συντριπτικότερη πλειοψηφία, όμως, είμαστε οι πατριωτικοί πολίτες. Αν εμείς είμαστε διαρκώς σε έγρηγορη και αγωνιζόμαστε με επιχειρήματα, οι εκπρόσωποι της έθελόδουλίας θα απομονωθούν και τα σχέδια αυτά δεν θα περάσουν.



Ο Έλληνικός λαός είναι απείθαρχος και δυσκολοκυβέρνητος και γι' αυτό πρέπει να τον πλήξουμε βαθιά στις πολιτισμικές του ρίζες. Τότε ίσως συνεισθεθεί. Έννοω δηλαδή να πλήξουμε την γλώσσα, τη θρησκεία, τα πνευματικά και ιστορικά του αποθέματα, ώστε να εξουδετερώσουμε κάθε δυνατότητά του να αναπτυχθεί, να διακριθεί, να επικρατήσει, για να μην μās παρενοχλεί στα Βαλκάνια, στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο, στη Μέση Ανατολή, σε όλη αυτή τη νευραλγική περιοχή μεγάλης στρατηγικής σημασίας για μās, για την πολιτική των Η.Π.Α.

Χένρι Κίσιγγκερ (Σεπτέμβριος 1994)

[Άποσπασμα από την κλασική πιά όμιλία του Τέκτονος Χένρι Κίσιγγκερ (Εβραϊκής καταγωγής), τον Σεπτέμβριο του 1994, κατά τη βράβευσή του από Αμερικανούς επιχειρηματίες στην Ουάσινγκτον, παρουσία στρατιωτικών, πολιτικών και επιχειρηματιών της Αμερικανικής έλίτ.]



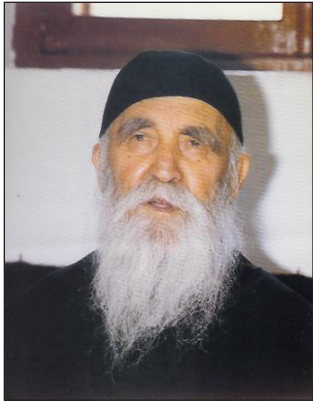
Ούτε τα πλούτη να σās κάνουν έντύπωση, ούτε οι δόξες, αλλά πάντοτε να βαδίζετε δίκαια. Το ψωμί σας να το τρώτε με τον τίμιο ιδρώτα σας κι όχι με αδικίες. Αυτά που θα κερδίζεταί με την τιμιότητά σας, να μην τα σκορπίζεταί άσκοπα. Να ζείτε τίμια και ταπεινά και όσο μπορείτε να απλώνεταί το χέρι σας στην έλεημοσύνη. Να μην σκέπτεστε μόνο τι θα φάτε, τι θα φορέσετε, τι μεγάλο σπίτι θα κτίσετε. Περισσότερο να προτιμάτε τα σπίτια των θλιμμένων και όχι των χαρούμενων. Εάν κάνετε έργα καλά, θα έχετε μεγάλο μισθό από τον Θεό. Θ' αξιοθεείτε να δείτε θαύματα και στην άλλη ζωή, θα έχετε άπέρανη αγαλλίαση.

Μία παραστρατημένη γυναίκα πήγε στη μονή να βρέθηκαν εκεί κι είχαν ακούσει για αυτήν, άρχισαν να την κουτσομπολεύουν άσχημα. Όταν ο Γέροντας τελείωσε τις πλησίασε και σε τόνο άρκετο αυστηρό τις επέληξε λέγοντας: «Αυτή η γυναίκα σήκωσε μία πέτρα κι έσεεις με πέτρα γεμίσατε ένα τσουβάλι με το κουτσομπολιό σας και δεν μπορείτε να το σηκώσετε».

Γέροντας Γεώργιος Καρσιλίδης (+1959)

THE IMPIETY OF PEOPLE...

Source: Paternal Counsels Vol. II, Elder Filotheos Zervakos, translated by Fr. Nicholas Palis, "Orthodox Kypseli" Publications, Thessaloniki (2005).



Elder Filotheos Zervakos
(+1980)

The impiety, corruption, senselessness and lack of conscience of people, both laypeople and clergymen, men and women, rich and poor, generals and soldiers, rulers and the ruled over has reached a high point and is speedily progressing in leaps and bounds till it reaches the greatest and most dangerous cliff top.

And what is it that restrains the just wrath and the righteous anger of our merciful and infinitely compassionate God? It is

His infinite compassion, immeasurable mercy, and unimaginable suffering on behalf of us sinners, the intercessions of His all immaculate Mother and of all the Saints, and the little virtue, faith, hope and love of the few people, their prayers and petitions to the Lord for the salvation of the whole world; it is also the lack of evil in the babes and infants—although even the majority of children receive from their evil and corrupted parents as an inheritance and partake of the wickedness, the evil and bad habits of their birth-givers

One dares ask: how much longer? How long will His wrath be contained? Until the cup of intolerance is full, which, as it seems to many, has been filled and has begun to pour out not completely, but little by little, so that we can understand how awful it is to sin and not repent. Thus, through the God-given instinct of fear, we may cease sinning and enraging God, who is our most loving-caring Father, the Provider, the Ruler, the Protector and Granter of all good things.

Unfortunately nothing, but nothing scares or intimidates us, we have become worse than the irrational beasts; they know their protector and master. Man, however not only does not know Him, but even blasphemes against Him. When animals happen to pass by a slippery place and slip or fall, they remember the fall and they do not pass by that area again; they often prefer death rather than passing through that place. And man who is more senseless and foolish than the animals, when he happens to fall in a certain area and becomes wounded, wounded in his soul, he does not think of the fall, the harm, but he runs there again and again, with joy. Have mercy, have mercy O Lord upon such minds. These minds are senseless and do not heed even to the counsel or advice of a father, a mother, a brother, a spiritual father, a teacher or a priest or a spiritual guide.

Be careful, guard yourself, depart from the place of evil, do not approach that place or that person, do not do that sin, it is dangerous, it is a double death, the death of body and soul, it is hell! Most people will not only refuse to accept such counsel, but they even get mad, angry, they become hostile towards the doctor. For these reasons, the people of today's generation, aside from the other "normal" sins which they commit, they also have pride, and being prideful they neither receive counsel, nor correction nor repentance. The teacher, whether he is a priest or a spiritual father, must be careful to invent medicines and appropriate ways so that he can successfully correct them. He should neither be silent, nor should he censure them harshly and abruptly, because strict censures are bruises to prideful and impious ones, and if he abruptly censures them, he will lose them completely.

The teacher must become wise and very discerning, and because no one is wise in this world on his own, he must ask God, the granter of true wisdom, through fervent prayer, to give him the gift of wisdom and prudence, like Solomon, so that he can skillfully guide our souls. The same medicine that often heals a person, may be harmful to others—so you see how the teacher and the priest must have the gift of discernment. Be aware that a good, sweet, mild, humble mannered method benefits more of the faithful than that of strictness and inflexibility. To the scorners, the hostile, the impious, the lewd and rude people, he should not give the holy things. To the heretics after the first and second counsel let him give up.

All impious people have a very specific mission, to abolish faith in Christ. And if you ask them why they are taking up with such zeal the struggle to annihilate the Christian faith, they respond that they aim to enlighten people. Let us examine the "enlightenment" which they received from their lack of faith, their life and lifestyle witnesses. They, being false and devious hypocrites, promising freedom and equality, deceive many, and after placing them under their own authority, instead of freeing people, they make them their slaves, and instead of equals, they make them miserable and thrice-wretched. The type of enlightenment they received is witnessed by the most unfortunate condition of their own homeland. Let us not forget the blood which flowed like rivers especially in the Orthodox Christian empire of Russia, during the Communist era. The teachings of the "enlightened" flatter the flesh, annihilate the spirit, quench the censuring of the conscience, loosen the passions which in turn tyrannize us, deifies fleshly pleasure and push man to evil things; that is what we find at the core of every foul desire and inhuman deed, and it is for this reason that they are imparted so easily and multiply abundantly, whereas they are healed and wiped out with great difficulty.

These people who are perverse in mind accuse and rebuke all the Holy Prophets, Apostles, Teachers, Martyrs, Confessors

and Preachers of the faith. But whoever wishes to learn the truth, let him read the lives and the writings of the Saints. That person will quickly understand that these were most pious people, impartial, truth-loving, adorned with every virtue and righteousness, and, having the grace of the Holy Spirit richly within themselves (from which they were inspired and enlightened) they did God-pleasing works, they did signs and miracles, they spoke and prophesied. Let them examine and let them observe both the life of the unbelievers and atheists such as the communists and the rest of those who criticize sacred things and he will see that they are lovers of slaves, greedy, haughty, prideful, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, senseless, without compassion, ruthless, slanderers, unrestrained, untamed, traitors, insolent, big-headed, pleasure loving rather than God-loving. They are instruments of the wicked spirit, of the good-hating and all-evil Devil, who uses them, just like he used the idolaters and heretics of various former times, in order to fight the Church of Christ. But while some of the faithful may suffer, the Church being fought will again triumph, because *the gates of Hell shall not overcome Her*. Such impious and all wicked destroyers flee from my beloved, so that He would not swiftly destroy their soul, for *their throat is an open sepulchre* (Pss 5:10), *their tongue a sharp sword* (Pss 57:4), *their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear* (Pss 58:4), *they have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips*. (Psalm 140:3).

Close your ears when they speak the words of disbelief. Flee from their speech, as you flee from fire and the pollution of the plagues. *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause. Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit... My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path*. (Prov 1:10-15). Thus the Holy Spirit counsels us through the mouth of the wise Solomon.



Frequently the fathers of Mount Athos say: "If we were to remain silent when our Faith needs defending against heresies, what then would be the point of our staying on these cliffs all these many years?" Dogmas cannot enter the Common Market as material goods can.

When questioned as to whether or not miracles occur in other religions, an Athonite elder replied: "There is a difference! Even Hodja is a miracle worker. By using magic, he tries to make light appear. In contrast, we Orthodox ignore any light coming from the devil. Some hold their noses, pull their ears, rub their eyes, and cause illusions. We ask God for a miracle, not the devil. We fight evil day and night."

From the Athonite Gerondikon

ST. JOHN'S OF KRONSTADT FINAL WORDS

Extracted from his diary.



Owing to my old age (79 years) each day represents God's special grace, each hour and every minute: my physical strength has become exhausted, but in compensation my spirit is brisk and burns toward my beloved Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. How many pledges of grace from God have I received and am receiving; I trust this will also be in the future life, after death; while death is a birth unto life everlasting, but God's mercy and love of mankind. God be praised! Fifty-two years of my priesthood have passed by God's grace and mercy; I am still alive, although ailing. For so many years of blessed priesthood I shall be unable to thank the Lord, One in the Trinity. I served as I could, as I was able, and tried to do my best, but I made mistakes, was unwell, was strongly attracted by the enemy. Cover up, O Lord, all my sins with Thy mercy! What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast granted me the mercy to have been born and brought up in the Orthodox Faith and Church and in our dear, priceless homeland, Russia, in which the Orthodox Church has been implanted from remotest times. I thank and praise Thee, the best I can, by Thy grace! Lord, there are no words in the human tongue worthy to thank Thee for all those countless blessings, revealed by Thy goodness to me, a sinner, throughout the course of my life, which has passed before Thy Face, Gracious Father! Even until now, already the seventy-ninth year hast Thou protected and saved me daily, and now especially, because of my enemies, seeking to swallow me up for the reason that I am Thy servant, though an unworthy one. But grant unto me, O Lord, the grace to thank Thee perfectly and to achieve a pure life, created for me through penance; grant that I may avoid the deceptive attractions of multifarious sin, which battles against me and wants to steal me away from Thee. Grant me to glorify Thee, loudly, loudly in this godless world.



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 CONTINUING STRUGGLE OF THE ORTHODOX IN KOSOVO

KOSOVO ALBANIANS KIDNAPPED SERBS AND SOLD THEIR ORGANS!

From "Pravda," Feb. 4, 2008.

Carla del Ponte, a former prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the Hague, now Switzerland's Ambassador to Argentina, made a sensational announcement. Her autobiographical book "The Hunt" reveals that Serbian Orthodox men have been kidnapped and their organs sold to international traffickers.

Carla del Ponte's announcements have already caused a swift response of Serbia's criminal case institutions. The District Court of Belgrade has already started a hearing on the kidnapping and subsequent disappearance of 300 young Serbians, who, as del Ponte claims, were transported to Albania and had there their internal organs removed.

These villainous crimes compare to the horrors of Third Reich; they were committed by the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) whose co-leader was the present-day prime minister of Kosovo Hashim Thaci. His profile and experience, as reported by his Albanian political opponents, contains the evidence of dozens of crimes committed by him when he was the field commander fighting against the Serbians in Kosovo.

According to Simo Spasich, the head of the Missing in Action Families Union, he met Carla del Ponte several times and gave her the documents, containing evidence of Kosovo's Serbians kidnapping and killing in concentration camps. However even after the prosecutor visited the house where the organs have been removed, in the town of Burel in northern Albania to see herself medical equipment and blood that proved del Ponte was right, no further investigation was conducted or even proposed.

Belgrade's Press provided evidence that many Serbian organizations tried to make ICTY investigate crimes such as these which were committed by Albanians in Kosovo; they even provided them detailed maps of the concentration camps in the northern territory of Kosovo and in north Albania. However, no investigation was ever initiated. In the recent interview to the Italian newspaper "La Stampa," Carla del Ponte emphatically stated that today's war crimes pursuit is solely based and pre-occupied with politics. It is not by chance that her book was released only after Prishtina proclaimed independence...

According to Belgrade's newspaper "The Press," the entire criminal business was controlled personally by Hashim Thaci. He earned millions of dollars on the human organs' trade. This is what the former judge of the District court of Prishtina, Danic Marincovic, tried to say during the proceedings

against Slobodan Milosevic in the Hague. She also said that the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), headed at that time by France's Minister of Foreign Affairs Bernard Kouchner, prohibited any investigation of the cases of Serbian Orthodox kidnapping disappearance.

Meanwhile Carla del Ponte and her former assistant Florence Artman stated that the UN administration, under whose jurisdiction Kosovo has been existing for many years, prohibited any attempts to charge Albanians of these crimes. In one of the interviews Artman confessed that it was the members of the UNMIK that didn't let "iron Carla" institute a criminal case against Albanians that kidnapped people and traded their organs.



Before and After views of the church of the Holy Virgin Hodegetria which was destroyed by the Albanians

† † †

The church of the Holy Virgin Hodegetria was built by Dragoslav, the then chief court governor, in 1315, in Musutiste, about 10 km southeast of Suva Reka in Kosovo. His inscription above the entrance was one of the oldest and most beautiful epigraphic texts of its kind. It was an edifice with a semi-dome, had an inscribed cross in the ground plan and a semi-round apse. The wall was built of alternating rows of bricks and stone cubes. The frescoes of the Musutiste School, painted between 1316 and 1320 and famed for their plasticity and the saints' typology, were known as the best examples of Serbian art. That earned them a place in the company of other mature artistic works of the Palaeologus era from the first quarter of the 14th century. Two throne icons of Christ and the Virgin Mary dated back to the year 1603.

THE CROSS IS THE SIGN OF CHRISTIANITY

By the New Hieromartyr John, Archbishop of Riga and Latvia, who, for his unyielding witness to the Truth suffered many persecutions and was burned alive by communist assassins in the night of October 12, 1934.

From that time, Jesus began to show to His disciples that it is necessary for Him to go away to Jerusalem, and to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised the third day. And Peter took Him to himself and began to rebuke Him, saying, "May God be gracious to Thee, Lord; this in no wise shall be to Thee." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offense to Me, for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men."
(Mt. 16:21-23)

This revelation of the Lord concerning the sufferings which awaited Him, struck His disciples like a thunderclap from a clear sky. Earlier, He had told them that His path was also their path: The servant is not greater than his master. *He who does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.* (Mt 10:38). And in the lives of Christ's true disciples there is a time of suffering passion when each must enter his own Jerusalem, ascend his Golgotha and the fateful cross, and take up the fateful cup - even unto death.

Even the sons of this world each have their own Golgotha. Unforeseen and uninvited, suffering enters the house. You must suffer whether you like it or not. The bitter "must." This "must" is bitter even for the faithful disciple of Christ. And the cross of suffering frightens even him. In his soul is heard the voice of Peter: 'have mercy on yourself, do not let this happen, protect yourself.' And this is not surprising, for after all, the Great Sufferer Himself prayed: *If it be possible, take this cup from Me.* (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). This "must" is altogether necessary and we are powerless to stand against it. *From that time, Jesus began to show to His disciples that it is necessary for Him to go away to Jerusalem, and to suffer many things...*(Mt 16:21). If the way of the Lord leads to Jerusalem, if His fate is to be decided by the scribes, the Pharisees, the elders, then it is natural that He must suffer and be killed. This Jerusalem towards which Christ directed His steps is not the Heavenly Jerusalem, but an earthly city filled with the spirit of this world, which had fallen

away from its God, not recognizing, not comprehending the visitation of the Lord.

This is the same Jerusalem which, at the altar of the Lord, killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to it (Mt. 23:37; Lk 11:47-51). And the world, my brothers, even unto this day stands on that same foundation. Perhaps it does not have the same outward appearance. Nowadays they do not crucify people on crosses as they did Peter, nor are people stoned like Stephen. People have become too indifferent towards faith to suffer for its sake.

Our path is less rocky and whoever murmurs at the harshness and the evil of this world should know that he is far from suffering unto blood. Nevertheless, now as never before, the words of the Lord contain a sacred truth: *If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world—but I chose you for Myself out of the world—therefore the world hateth you.* (Jn 15:19). It cannot do otherwise.



The natural desire of man's heart is to live at peace with everyone. Many a youthful heart has decided to follow the path of reliance on oneself: "I want to get along with everyone; I must not antagonize anyone." But even the best-intentioned soon realize that this is impossible. Even the meekest lamb is sure to meet on his way a ferocious wolf that says: "You are a thorn in my side."

He who believes must confess his faith. He who desires to serve God in this world must act according to his faith. But every confession inevitably arouses antagonism and every action is sure to meet with hostility. To see that his honest persuasion and striving are not recognized by the world; that his good deeds are everywhere met with opposition; that there where he sows only love, he must reap evil—this is obviously very grievous to the follower of Christ. And he is often ready to ask, together with his Master: *What evil has been done to you? Or how have I offended thee?* (from the hymns of Great and Holy Friday of Passion Week). The truth which you proclaim and which you confess and which the world cannot gainsay, or the righteousness manifest in your life which silently reproaches the world, or the peace of the Lord written on your face which the world cannot forgive, or the Heavenly other-worldliness of your behavior which shames and accuses their earthly way of life - this is how you have offended the world. And the world would sooner pardon you of ten vices and crimes which get you on a level with others, than forgive one good deed which elevates you above the rest. Why did Cain murder Abel? Because Cain's actions

were evil and the actions of Abel were good and righteous (1 Jn 3:12). Why did the scribes and Pharisees condemn the Savior? Because He was Light and darkness cannot abide the light (Jn 3:16-21).

Do not be astonished then, my dear brothers, if the world hates you. It is to be expected. This is nothing unusual. Do not let evil mockings and the vicious hatred of evil doers lead you astray. Go along the straight road with the name of the Lord, through the world which lies in evil and think in yourself "I must..." and the world cannot do otherwise. It would not be the world if it did not prefer the lies of its errors to truth; egoism to love; its laziness to zeal for God; worldly vanity to righteousness. I am not a disciple of Christ, not His soldier, if I do what is pleasing to everyone, if I go along the broad path together with the crowd instead of keeping to the narrow path where there are few travelers.

And so let us step forward in the name of the Lord with the conscious awareness that "I must."

There is another aspect to this "I must." When the Son of Man told His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and there to suffer much and to die, He was aware that this was necessary even for Himself. *Because He was obedient unto death, even death on the cross, God raised Him up and gave Him a name above every name.* (Phil 2:8-9). If the Heavenly Father so willed that even His only-begotten Son would drink from the cup of suffering, is it for us sinners who are so imperfect to shun this cup of suffering, this school of suffering, when we are such a long way from perfection and still have so much to learn in order to become worthy disciples of the Great Sufferer?

Some think: 'How much more fervently and willingly I would serve my Lord if only my life's path were easier, if it were not so thickly strewn with sharp rocks.' In saying this, you yourself obviously do not know who and what you are, what is beneficial for you and what is harmful, what you need and what you do not need. It is true when they say that a man tolerates least of all his own well-being. Days of happiness, days of success, when everything goes according to one's own wishes - how many times have such days woven a fatal net which captures the soul? What dissoluteness grows on man's heart, like rust on the blade of an unused battle-sword, or like a garden which becomes overgrown if not tended by the gardener's shears.

Tell me, O Christian, what preserves you from haughtiness which so easily penetrates even the strongest hearts, even the hearts of Christ's disciples? Is it not the cross of suffering? What humbles the passionate inclinations of the flesh

which so quickly and easily spread in times of well being and prosperity, like insects in a swamp on a sunny day? What teaches you to shun this uncleanness? Is it not the rod of misfortunes and sorrows? What arouses you from the sleep of self-assurance, lulled to sleep as we so easily are by times of happiness: Or what is more conducive to a routine of laziness than cloudless, carefree days of prosperity? At such times a storm can only be regarded as a blessing. What will draw you out of the dangerous state of insensibility? Will not sorrows? Will not illness? What tears us away from our worldly attachments, the love for the world and all that is in it? Is it not necessity and misfortunes? Do not trials teach us to take life more seriously? Do not sorrows teach us to be prepared for death?

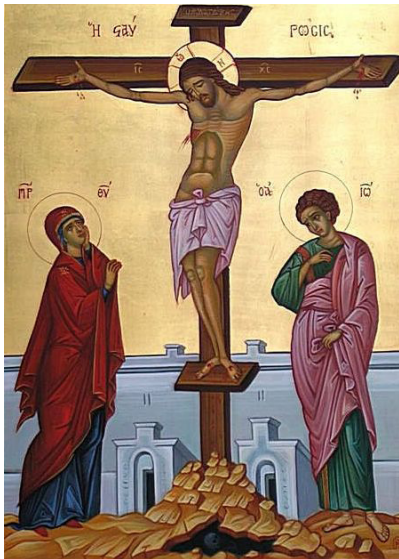
Wild brambles of the heart cannot be uprooted without the pruning shears of the Heavenly Gardener and the good fruit of truth and righteousness will not grow without the rain of tears and sorrows. Nowhere can true obedience be better

tested than in the bearing of the bitter cup of sorrows, when one can only say: *...not my will, but Thine be done, Father.* (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42). And submission to God's will is never manifested so clearly as in days and hours of storm when in the midst of menacing and frightful waves the Christian gives himself totally into the hands of Him Whose very hand holds these waves and tempests.

When can the steadfastness, courage, and strength of a soldier of Christ be better demonstrated than when trials and obstacles must be turned into deeds, than in the war against evil, or in times of danger? All the noble strength of the Christian soul, of the Christian character shines

forth most brightly in times of distress, misfortunes and sufferings. All the miracles of God's grace are most evident in times when the waters of grief and misfortunes flood our souls and we are forced to recognize our helplessness, our weakness and draw all strength and understanding from Almighty God.

Or, when God Himself chastises you and calls you to account, are you going to ask "what for" and "why"? Or when the Lords sends you to the school of the cross, will you say: "I have not need of its teachings"? Rather you must say: "I need this; I must go to this school of the cross; I must suffer with Christ in order to be raised with Him" (Rom 6:3-8; 2Tim 2:11-12). When the Lord chastens me I must think and feel like a child chastened by the loving right hand of the Lord, like a grapevine under the pruning shears of the gardener, like iron beneath the smith's hammer, like gold in the purifying fire. This "I must" is of God and I must not shrink from it.



If you, my friends, agree to what I say, here in the house of God, then hold onto this principle when you are visited by grief, and yours becomes the way of the cross. These are basic truths which must be repeated before each bed of sickness and with each student entering the school of sorrows. Pastors know this. He who preached these truths a thousand times to others must repeat them for himself in every situation. Thou, Lord, help us to understand more fully and to plant deep within ourselves this lesson of the divine “I must.”

Even the ancient Greeks and other people bowed before the divine will, before sacred duty, before immutable destiny, man’s dependence upon Providence. The submission of one’s will before this divine “I must,” the exact fulfillment of divine decrees—in the wise this was called wisdom, in heroes, it was courage, in the righteous, sanctity. How much more willingly must we Christians fulfill our duty when we know that we are not being led by blind faith, but by the good will of the Father which led even Christ to Golgotha and the Cross, but through Golgotha and the Cross to the glorious Resurrection? And so we must put our faith and trust in Him even when we cannot comprehend the meaning of the guidance. Mankind would have been deprived of so much goodness, such glory and blessedness, if the Savior had hearkened to the voice of Peter: “defend yourself.”

Let each soul bow before the divine “I must;” for the will of God is good, perfect, guiding all men to salvation. And you, O son of dust and corruption, bend your neck under His almighty hand before which your strength is as nothing. Trust to divine wisdom before which your light is but a dark shadow. Give yourself over to the fatherly guidance of Him who desires not enmity and sorrows, but peace and blessedness for all mankind. When you submit your thoughts and your will to His thought and will, then no cup will be for you too bitter, and no cross too heavy. You will be able to withstand it. Such is the will of God.

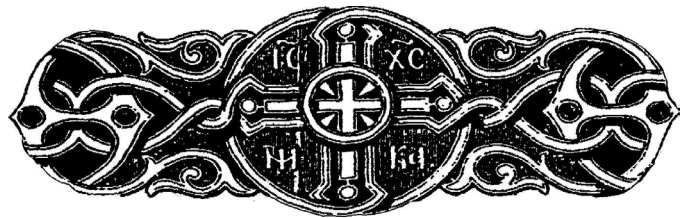
If your spouse, children, friends, and everyone you love surround you; if they try to persuade you to have pity on yourself, not to destroy yourself - do not look at their tears, do not listen to their pleadings. Point to the Heavens and say: “Do not burden my heart; thus it is pleasing to God and I must. You are reasoning according to man’s wisdom and not God’s.” And if from your own heart there cries out the voice of flesh and blood, and begins to persuade you: “...this cannot happen to you; defend yourself...”—turn away from this counsel of your own heart and follow after that which glorifies God.

We can more easily bear our afflictions if we keep in mind the example of the Savior. See with what peaceful and holy determination He goes to His Passion. And then follow Him along the path of the cross until with His last breath

you hear from His lips the divine words: *It is finished.* (Jn 19:30). And then ask yourself: are not you inspired by this example? Do you not understand now the commandment: *...he who wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow after Me.* (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23)? Do you not share the conviction of that disciple who said: *I cannot wear a crown of roses when my Savior is wearing a crown of thorns?* At the cross of Christ even the most suffering souls among us can find consolation. I have endured, and even now endure much, but my Divine Savior endures still more.

And if you find this example too lofty, read what the holy Apostle Paul says: *Thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils in the city in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* (2Cor 11:23-30). See what he endured for Christ’s sake, how many times he was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and then understand how far we are from him.

Everywhere the cross is the sign of Christianity. A Christian cannot be without his cross. Amen.



ON LOVE AND FORGIVENESS TOWARDS THE BRETHREN

My child, always justify your brother and reproach yourself. Never justify your deeds. Learn to say, “Bless”—in other words, “Forgive me”—and humility will dwell within you. Have patience and overlook your brother’s faults, remembering God’s forbearance towards your own faults. Love as Jesus loves you and as you want others to love you. Hold on to silence, constant prayer, and self-reproach, and then you will see how much mourning and tears and joy you will feel. But if you fail to hold on to them, in other words, if you neglect to apply them, then coldness and dryness will replace the above graces.

Love the brethren. Your love will show when, despite all your brother’s weaknesses, you count them as nothing and love him. Love will keep you from all sins. Think of nothing but your own sinfulness. Reproach yourself constantly—this is the best path.

From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain”
From the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim

THE MYSTERY AND THE PROCESS OF DEATH

An Interview with Pavel Chirila, Professor and Doctor at the St. Irene's Hospital, Bucharest (Romania), from the Greek Orthodox magazine "Ecclesiastical Impact," March 2007.

Question: Tell us something about death, something that comes spontaneously to you, something you consider extremely important.

Answer: What comes spontaneously to mind is that death is a terrible mystery, as we chant in the funeral service, which is a poem by St. John Damascene. This is related to the fact that the soul is violently detached from the harmony of its union with the body. It is also a sad event, because it is related to man's corruptibility and mortality which is manifested in all life.

In addition, it brings to my memory the Service of the Resurrection of Christ, which we Orthodox celebrate with splendor. We hold lit candles in our hands and sing triumphantly the paean of victory: *Christ is risen from the dead, by death He has trampled down death, and on those in the tombs He has bestowed life.* This beautiful image shows our attitude towards life and death. We are corruptible and mortal, but we possess the "medicine of immortality," which is the resurrected Christ. Employing modern terminology, we may say that by the incarnation of the Son and the union of human with the divine nature in the person of Logos, a "spiritual cloning" has taken place; our mortal nature has been united with the life of God. This is why death has changed its name and is now called dormition (falling asleep) and the places where the departed ones are buried are called cemeteries ("dormitories" in Greek), not burial grounds.

So, when I see people holding a lit candle and chanting *Christ is Risen* on the night of the Resurrection of Christ, I understand better that we should regard death as a process of passing from the "land of Egypt" to the "land of Promise," from death to life, which takes place in Christ, and as a hope for our resurrection which again takes place in Christ. It would be very fortunate if we were to anticipate death in this position, holding the candle of the Resurrection and chanting Christ is Risen. After all, we are "strangers and pilgrims" in this life, our true country is elsewhere. I am always impressed by the words of St Nikolaos Cabasilas (14th century) that while we live here on earth we are like an embryo in his mother's womb, and at the moment of death we are born, we get out of that womb. This is why in the Orthodox Church the saints are celebrated on the day of their dormition or their martyrdom, not on the day of their physical birth.

Question: We understand from the Holy Scripture that there are two kinds of fear: a holy fear, which is fear of God and the beginning of wisdom according to the psalmist, and

another kind of fear inspired by demons, which is pathological fear. To what category does the fear of death belong?

Answer: Indeed, there is a fear of God which is energy of the grace of God and the beginning of salvation, that is, man fears/respects God and starts obeying His commandments, and there is a fear inspired by demons which causes anxiety and anguish. However, besides these two fears there is also another fear so-called psychological fear, which is related to a person's insecurity and emotional inadequacy.

The fear of death means something different for each person. For secular and atheist people, it is related to the course to "nothingness," that is, they think that they leave the only existing world and end up in the nothingness of non-existence. This is something that does not exist for us Orthodox. For Christians, the fear of death is related to the soul's departure from the world they know, the friends and relatives, and its entry into another world they do not know yet. They do not know how they are going to live, what will happen with God's judgment which follows death. This is why hope and proper preparation is needed.

Of course, those Christians who have reached the illumination of the nous and deification and have been united with Christ transcend the fear of death, as exemplified by the life of the Apostles, the Martyrs and in general the Saints of the Church. In reading the Synaxaria we see phrases like: "on this day saint (so and so) is perfected in peace" or "is perfected by the sword," etc. It has to be underlined that in Greek the verb "teleioutai" means "is perfected," is led to perfection, and differs from the verb "teleionei," which means "ceases to exist." We may also say that the life of the senses ("vios") is terminated by death, while life ("zoe") is perfected but not terminated.

What is important is that, with the spiritual life we live, we should defeat the fear of death and feel death as a path towards an encounter with Christ, the All holy Virgin and the saints.

Question: We know from the Holy Tradition that at a person's death, angels, saints as well as demons are present. What can you tell us about this?

Answer: From the teaching of Christ and the whole tradition of the Church we know that both angels and demons exist, and they are not personifications of good or evil, but individual beings created by God. Demons were angels who lost communion with God. Many saints proved worthy to see angels, as well as demons of temptation, while in this life.

According to the teaching of our Fathers, angels and saints, even Christ and the All holy Virgin, appear to those about to die in order to support them, to strengthen them to avoid the fear caused by death. The demons also appear, especially when they are able to influence certain people because of their passions, and they demand power over their souls. We are reminded of this in the prayer to the All holy Virgin in

the Compline (“Apodeipnon”): *At the hour of my death, care for my miserable soul and drive the dark faces of evil spirits far from it.*

From the teaching of the Church, it is well known that each person has a “guardian angel” protecting him, and this is why there is a special prayer to the guardian angel in the service of the Apodeipnon. Fr. Paisios the Athonite used to tell me that he would often see his guardian angel beside him and embrace him. He used to say that we must strive to reach salvation, so that our guardian angel, who has been to so many pains to protect us and help us in our life, may not go empty-handed to God, if we are not saved due to our indifference.

I remember with emotion that my father, when he entered the Church, would go to the northern gate of the holy Altar and kiss the icon of Archangel Michael and ask him to receive his soul in due time, when he had repented, protect it from evil demons, and lead it to God. Perhaps this prayer, among everything else, helped him have a good dormition and a happy, smiling face in the coffin.

Question: We read in the Holy Scripture that mercy has exceeded judgment. Does this mean that almsgiving absolves a multitude of sins?

Answer: We have to see what mercy means. In reality, mercy is the feeling of divine grace, the love of God. When we pray saying *Lord have mercy*, we ask God’s mercy, God’s grace. He who experiences divine grace is generous to his brothers with all sorts of charity, expressed by prayer, theological words, material contributions, and thus puts into practice the beatitude *blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy* (Mt 5:7). In this sense, it can be said that the feeling of God’s mercy and almsgiving transcends judgment.

He who has been transformed spiritually and has been united with God does not fear judgment, for what Christ said applies to him: *I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life.* (Jn 5:24).

According to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, there are three judgments. The first occurs throughout our life, when we are faced with the dilemma of whether to follow the will of God or to reject it, when we have to choose between a good and an evil thought. The second judgment takes place when the soul exits the body, according to St. Paul’s words *people are appointed to die once, and then to face judgment* (Heb 9:27). The third and final judgment will be at the Second Coming of Christ. The first judgment is important.

St. Symeon the New Theologian says that, when a person is united with Christ in this life and sees the uncreated Light, then the judgment has already taken place for him and he does not wait for it at the Second Coming of Christ. This reminds us of the words of Christ I mentioned earlier.

At this point I would like to repeat the saying by St. Basil the Great and other Fathers of the Church that there are three categories of those who are saved, that is, the slaves, who follow the will of God in order to avoid hell, the wage-earners who struggle to earn Paradise as a reward, and the sons who obey God’s will out of love for God. So, throughout our life we must advance spiritually and pass from the state of the slave to the state of the wage-earner and from there to the mentality of the son. This means to pass from fear and recompense to love. To love Christ, because He is our Father, our mother, our friend, our brother, our bridegroom and our bride. This way we transcend the judgment.

Question: Tell us something about sudden death.

Answer: The assessment of sudden death depends on each one’s viewpoint. For secular people, sudden death is good, accepted and desirable, because they will not suffer and they will not be tormented by illnesses and old age. For believing Christians, though, sudden death is bad, because they are not given the possibility to prepare better for their encounter with Christ and the Heavenly Church. When someone visits a high-ranking official, he prepares accordingly. We should do the same with respect to our encounter with Christ.

Preparation, by repentance, is essential. This is why Elder Paisios of everlasting memory used to say that cancer is a saintly illness because it has filled Paradise with saints, meaning that a long illness prepares people with prayer and repentance. According to the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, pain cures pleasure.

In any case, death is the most certain event. We see it around us, everything dies, all living creatures, our friends, our relatives. What is not certain and is unknown to us is the hour of death, when death will come. It may happen while sleeping, while walking, while traveling, while working, while entertaining ourselves, etc. This is why we should pray to God daily, as the Church does: *For the completion of our lives in peace and repentance, let us ask the Lord and For a Christian end to our lives, peaceful, without shame and suffering, and for a good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ, let us ask the Lord.*

In the teaching of the holy Fathers, we come across the truth that one of the greatest gifts a person can have is the daily “memory of death.” When this is maintained with the grace of God it leads man not to despair, hopelessness, psychological fear, but to inspiration, to prayer, creativity, even in human affairs, because he tries to finish his tasks and prepare properly. When we live each day as if it were the last day in our life, then even sudden death will find us ready.

Question: Which is the correct expression: the hour of death or the moment of death?

Answer: This depends on how one interprets the words “hour” and “moment.” In speech we often use the word

“hour” meaning the moment. But I understand that your question refers to whether death is a process or a moment.

What can be said is that there is a process of death, that is, long illnesses lead man gradually to death, but the separation of soul and body takes place at a specific moment by the will of God.

This moment is important, because man’s mode of existence changes and we cannot know how it will be from then on. We know the state where the soul is attached to our body, which communicates with the creation through the senses. We do not know by experience what is going to happen then and how we will be. At present we usually see the world created by God, people, friends, the beauty of earth, not angels and demons. Then, however, the soul will not see through the senses of the body but will see what is presently invisible. This is why the saints want to be conscious and pray during the process of death, in order to leave this world with prayer and to have the strength and grace of God accompanying them.

We have to say that the privilege of being able to pray during these hours and receive communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, in order to be surrounded by the grace of God when the soul leaves the body, is eliminated in our days with so-called life support equipment in Intensive Care Units. From a Christian viewpoint, the hour and moment of death requires an appropriate preparation, that is, confession, Holy Communion, Holy Unction, prayer by family and friends, our own prayer. However, in Intensive Care Units it is impossible to maintain such an ecclesial-pastoral ministry. Thus, because of modern techniques and drugs, more and more people die in our days being unconscious of what goes on at that hour and moment. This is an important problem. Modern medical methods pose a dilemma. “Prolongation of life or obstruction of death?...” With everything that is offered by medical science the question is: is our life prolonged so that we repent and devote it to God or is death obstructed, which creates a lot of pain, physical and existential?

In any case, it is a great blessing from God for someone to die surrounded by his beloved ones who pray and, above all, to die living in the Church, with Holy Communion, prayer, the blessing of his Spiritual Father, the grace of God and the prayers of the saints. Our permanent wish should be a death like the one depicted in the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos, with her in the middle surrounded by the love of Christ, the Apostles, the Hierarchs.

Question: Some people die unexpectedly. Is it true that God takes someone when his probability of salvation is at the maximum?

Answer: We Christians absolutely believe that we have been created by our God of Love and immense compassion and that God directs our life, He gives life to us and He takes it when He considers it to be the right moment. We also know

that God loves man whom He created and wants his salvation. Therefore, it is certain that God allows each man’s death to occur at the most appropriate moment.

Of course, God’s love does not abolish the freedom of man. Man has the ability to act positively or negatively, to respond to the love of God or to reject Him.

Since you said that some people die unexpectedly, I would like to remind you, that we should remember death continuously; we should not feel that we are going to live eternally on earth, because this is a spiritual sickness. There is an alternation between life and death, similar to the alternation between day and night. Modern molecular biology stresses that death is inextricably linked with life, because among the genes there are the genes of aging, which are found in the mitochondria. So, from the moment of our conception, death exists in the DNA, and we see death in our body with the death of cells and, generally, with aging, the passing of years, wrinkles, illnesses, everything which theologically is called corruptibility and mortality. We should not be myopic and behave like an ostrich.

In this process we should know that God did not create us to die, that death is a consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve, and that God loves us and cares for us. He is our affectionate father. It is not correct on the one hand to pray with the “Lord’s Prayer,” the well-known “Our Father,” and call God “Father,” and on the other hand to live as orphans.

Question: Orthodox faith attaches particular importance to repentance. We thank you Lord for giving repentance to us. Can repentance on the time of death be so great that a man is saved, even though he is burdened by great sins?

Answer: In our Orthodox Tradition it is known that sin is not something moralistic; it is something ontological, namely, the course from life according to nature to life contrary to nature. Thus, repentance is man’s return from life contrary to nature to life according to nature. With sin man lost his communion with God, with his brother and with the creation. With repentance he acquires this communion once again. So, repentance is associated with a progression in man’s liberation from everything enslaving him. The Fathers described this progression in three words: purification, illumination, deification and this is what is called therapy. This happens throughout life. Therefore, salvation is related to therapy. The physician of the body examines us, makes a diagnosis and recommends an appropriate therapeutic method which we should apply. The same holds true for the illness of the soul.

A confession at the time of death opens for man the way to salvation. If he did not have time to be cured spiritually, then the Church with Her prayers helps man to salvation, bearing in mind that perfection is endless; it is a dynamic, not a static state.

Throughout our life we must have this “spirit of repentance.” We should consider how we were created by God and the point we have reached because of sin. If we read carefully the book of Genesis, according to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, and see how Adam and Eve lived and what they became afterwards because of sin, then repentance will develop inside us.

So, someone who has the “spirit” of repentance throughout his life feels this repentance at the hour of death, and actually he feels it to a great degree. On the contrary, when he lives his life without repentance it is difficult to show repentance at the last moment.

My Elder, Metropolitan of Edessa Kallinikos of everlasting memory, lived continuously with the memory of death. When he was told by the doctors that he has a tumor in the brain, he confessed right away, he wrote his will, he prayed and had absolute faith in God, saying: “Perhaps God said to me ‘stop; I don’t need you any more.’” He would pray continuously saying “your Will be done.” He gave himself up to God and had a peaceful and saintly end, similar to his whole life.

Therefore, even though there is a possibility for someone who had some spark of love for God in him to repent at the hour of death, we should repent when we are healthy, so as to have the ability to be cured, that is, to proceed from self-love to the love of God and love of men, to reach selfless love out of selfish love.

Question: After man’s death, what are the links between the soul and this world?

Answer: Although the soul is separated from the body, man’s hypostasis still exists. As we see in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man is conscious of his state, of his relatives who are still alive and he cares for them. Thus, after death, men care for their beloved ones and ask God for their salvation. All our prayers to the saints are based on this truth. Of course, this link between the soul and living persons is spiritual, not material.

In the book of the Revelation, St John describes the celestial Divine Liturgy; one can thus see these relations of the saints with us and their prayer for all people living on earth. This is why our Fathers depicted in the Divine Liturgy this uncreated Divine Liturgy which takes place in the Heavens, in the uncreated Temple. In the Divine Liturgy we live the atmosphere of the Heavenly Liturgy and we anticipate it.

We ourselves often feel the love and protection of the saints, as well as of those close to us who have departed from this world, and wish to meet them. A spiritual child of mine was very happy at the hour of death, because, as she said, she would meet this Heavenly Church.

Therefore, the soul continues to live after its exit from the body, it is not led to non-existence. If a person lived in repentance during his life, then his soul after exiting the body will enter this Heavenly Divine Liturgy and will pray, like

a spiritual priest, for the whole world, and will wait for the resurrection of the body. Then the soul will enter the body so that the body too participates in this Heavenly Paschal celebration.

Question: What advice should we give to those close to us regarding our attitude to a person about to die on the day, or at the hour or the moment of death?

Answer: The process of death is very important for each man, because in front of him is the road to salvation or the road to eternal perdition. Unfortunately, in these circumstances, many people look only after the physical health of their relatives and friends without regard for their eternal course. This is why we should take care that a person who is about to die confesses, receives Holy Communion, receives the grace of God through the sacrament of Unction and does everything that our Church has available. In particular, we should live the last moments of the life of our beloved one in prayer. We should consider not simply that we are losing our relative, our friend, but that he is moving from one way of existence (with body and senses) to a different way of existence, without body. So, intense prayer is what is needed at that time.

I remember the last moments of my Geronda; I was beside his bed and could not offer anything else, I just prayed to God for his soul to be received by angels. An aunt of mine who was present thought that I was sad, as I concentrated and prayed. But I was just praying, because that moment is holy and crucial.

Overall, we must experience daily, as St. John Chrysostom says, that the present life is an “inn.” We entered this inn, we live, but we must take care to depart in good hope, without leaving anything here in order not to lose what is there. Furthermore, all of us Christians should realize that death has been defeated by the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ, that communion with Christ is a continuous transcendence of death and of the fear of death, that the exit of the soul from the body is a course towards the Heavenly Church and the encounter with Christ, the All holy Virgin and the saints, that the soul will return to the body, and the body will be resurrected and live eternally, according to the way it lived on this earth. St. Maximus the Confessor writes that from the moment of death, and especially after the last Judgment, there are two possibilities: those who are in communion with Christ will live in “eternal well-being” and the rest in “eternal woeful being.” So, everyone will enjoy “eternal being.” The difference is between “well” and “woeful.”

Therefore, our advice to the relatives and friends of those about to die is to have faith in Christ and confidence that we are not just citizens of this world, but we are travelers guided to our true country, which is Heaven. Our citizenship is above in Heaven. The desire for the Heavenly land should overwhelm us.

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

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THE FALL OF MAN

By St. John Maimovitch

The world was created good and called to the joy of life in union with the Source and Creator of life, the Lord God.

The first to sin and to be torn from this union were angels. The angelic realm was split: some remained with God; others, in their pride, desired to live their own life, independent of God. The angelic world was split and sin was born there, but the earthly world remained good. And then the devil, which means “the one cast down from Heaven,” began to strive to join the earthly realm to himself.

The highest creation on earth, man, had been given a commandment by God not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Why was the commandment given? This tree was just like all the others, and in itself it had no outstanding characteristics. No, the knowledge of good and evil was not in the tree itself, and not for this reason was the commandment given. The Lord gave it because man was created free, and the Lord desires of man a freely-willed striving and longing for union with God. The commandment was given because only through its fulfillment could man express his freely-willed



striving toward God and love for Him. And blessedness consists simply of communication with God through love of Him.

The devil is burdened by his separation; he is perpetually in a state of wrath and vengeance, and it comforts him to attract others. The devil never appears as his true self, but takes on various appearances. Then in paradise he took on the appearance of a serpent, and gave man the idea that the commandment had not been given for the expression of man's love of God, but so that man would not become like God. The devil planted the thought that the command was issued, not out of God's love, so that man would dwell in God's love, but because God desires to dominate, and to prevent man from being as God, and coming to know the endless and limitless joy of being.

When man came to believe this diabolical idea, he was instantly separated from God. Everything changed, and man could no longer enjoy life in God and speak with God freely and straightforwardly as children speak. There was no peace, no joy, and man began to hide from God. Everything changed, the link between God and man was destroyed and nature ceased to heed man. Weeping entered the world, and the soul became burdened.

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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]

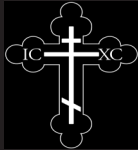
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DEVELOPMENT OF THE HEART

By St. Theophan the Recluse.

Developing the heart means developing within it a taste for things holy, divine, and spiritual; thus, when it finds itself amidst such things, it would feel as though it were in its element. Finding them sweet and blessed, it would be indifferent to all else, with no taste for anything else; and even more—it would find anything else revolting. All of man's spiritual activity centers in the heart. The truths are impressed in it, and good dispositions are rooted into it. But its main work is developing a taste for the spiritual. When the mind sees the whole spiritual world and its different components, various good beginnings ripen in the will. The heart, under their influence, should taste sweetness in all of this and radiate warmth. This delight in the spiritual is the first sign of the regeneration of a soul deadened by sin. Therefore the heart's development is a very important point even in the early stages.

The work directed at it is all of our Church services in all forms—common and personal, at home and in church—and it is mainly achieved through the spirit of prayer moving within it.

Church services, that is, all the daily services, together with the entire arrangement of the church's icons, candles, censuring, singing, chanting, movements of the clergy, as well as the services for various needs; then services in the home, also using ecclesiastical objects such as sanctified icons, holy oil, candles, holy water, the Cross, and incense—all of these holy things together acting upon all the senses—sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste—are the *cloths that wipe clean* the senses of a deadened soul. They are the strongest and the only reliable way to do it. The soul becomes deadened by

the spirit of the world, and possessed by sin that lives in the world. The entire structure of our Church services, with their tone, meaning, power of faith, and especially the grace concealed within them, have an invincible power to drive away the spirit of the world. In freeing the soul from the world's onerous influence, it allows the soul to breathe freely and to taste the sweetness of spiritual freedom. Walking into church we walk into a completely different world, are influenced by it, and change according to it. The same thing happens when we surround ourselves with holy objects. Frequent impressions of the spiritual world more effectively penetrate within and more quickly bring about a transformation of the heart. Thus:

(1) It is necessary to establish a pattern of going to church as often as possible, usually to Matins, Liturgy and Vespers. Have a longing for this, and go there at the first opportunity—at least once a day—and if you can, stay without leaving. Our church is heaven on earth. Hasten to church with the faith that it is a place where God dwells, where He Himself promised to quickly hear prayers. Standing in church, be as if you are standing before God in fear and reverence, which you express through patient standing, prostrations, and attention to the services without wandering thoughts, relaxation or crudeness.

(2) You must not forget other services—personal services, be they in church or at home. Neither must you neglect your home prayers with all their churchly tone. You should remember that home services are only a supplement to church services and not a replacement. The Apostle, commanding us not to deprive ourselves of a synaxis, informed us that all the power of services belong to common worship.

(3) You must observe all Church solemnities, rituals, customs, and rubrics, and

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cover yourself with them in all their forms, so that you would always abide in a particular atmosphere. This is easy to do. Such is the nature of our Church. Only accept it with faith.

But what gives the most power to church services is a prayerful spirit. Prayer is an all-encompassing obligation, as well as an all-effective means. Through it the truths of the faith are also impressed in the mind and good morals into the will. But most of all it enlivens the heart in its feelings. The first two go well only when this one thing [prayer] is present. Therefore prayer should begin to be developed before anything else, and continued steadily and tirelessly until the Lord grants prayer to the one who prays.

The beginnings of prayer are applied at conversion itself, for prayer is the yearning of the mind and heart towards God, which is what happens at conversion. But inattentiveness or inability can extinguish this spark. Then right away you should begin with the aim of kindling a prayerful spirit. Besides conducting services and participating in them, the closest thing related to this is personal prayer, wherever and however it is performed. There is only one rule for this—accustom yourself to praying. For this you must:

- (1) Choose a prayer rule—evening, morning and daily prayers.
- (2) Start with a short rule at first, so that your unaccustomed spirit will not form an aversion to this labor.
- (3) Pray always with fear, diligence and all attention.
- (4) This requires: standing, prostrations, kneeling, making the sign of the Cross, reading, and at times singing.
- (5) The more often you do such prayer the better. Some people pray a little every hour.
- (6) The prayers you should read are written in the prayer book. But it is good to get used to one or another, so that the spirit would ignite each time you begin it.

(7) The rule of prayer is simple: standing at prayer, with fear and trembling say it as if you were speaking into God’s ear, accompanying it with the sign of the Cross, prostrations and falling down, corresponding to the movement of the spirit.

(8) Once you have chosen a rule you should always fulfill it, but this does not prevent you from adding something according to the heart’s desire.

(9) Reading and singing out loud, in a whisper, or silently is all the same, for the Lord is near. But sometimes it is better to pray one way, other times another.

(10) You should firmly keep in mind the limits of your prayers. It is a good prayer that ends with your falling down before God with the feeling that *Thou Who knowest the hearts, save me.*

(11) There are stages of prayer. The first stage is bodily prayer, with reading, standing and prostrations. If the attention wanders, the heart does not feel, and there is no eagerness; this means there is no patience, toil or sweat. Regardless of this, set your limits and pray. This is active prayer. The second stage is attentive prayer: the mind gets used to collecting itself at the hour of prayer, and says all with awareness, without being stolen away. The attention blends with the written words and repeats them as its own. The third stage is prayer of the feelings—the attention warms the heart, and what was thought with attention becomes feeling in the heart. In the mind was a compunctionate word, in the heart it is compunction; in the mind—forgiveness, in the heart—a feeling of its necessity and importance. Whoever has passed on to feeling prays without words, for God is a God of the heart. Reading may stop at this, just as may thought; then there is only abiding in feeling with the known signs of prayer. Such prayer comes very little at first. The prayerful feeling comes over you in church or at

home... This is the common advice of the saints—do not let this leave your attention: when the feeling is present, cease all other activity and stand in it. St. John of the Ladder says: “An angel is praying with you.” Attention to this manifestation of prayer ripens the development of prayer, and inattention decimates both the development and the prayer.

(12) However, no matter how perfect one has become in prayer, the prayer rule should never be abandoned but should always be read as prescribed and always begun with active prayer. Mental prayer should come with it, and then prayer of the heart. Without the rule, prayer of the heart is lost, and the person will think that he is praying, but in fact he is not.

(13) When the prayerful feeling ascends to ceaselessness, then spiritual prayer begins—a gift of the Spirit of God which prays for us. This is the last stage of attainable prayer. But it is said that there is also prayer that is incomprehensible to the mind, or surpasses the limits of awareness (as described by St. Isaac the Syrian).

(14) The easiest means for ascending to ceaseless prayer is the habit of doing the Jesus Prayer and rooting it within yourself. The most experienced men of spiritual life who were enlightened by God found this to be the one simple and all-effective means for confirming the spirit in all spiritual activities, as well as in all spiritual ascetic life; and they left detailed guidelines for it in their instructions.

By laboring in asceticism we seek purification of the heart and renewal of the spirit. There are two ways to find this: the first is the way of activity, that is performing those ascetic labors that we have previously outlined; and the second is that of the mind—turning the mind to God. In the first way the soul is purified and receives God, in the second God burns away all impurity and comes to abide in the purified soul.

Considering the latter as belonging to the Jesus Prayer alone, St. Gregory the Sinaite says: “We acquire God by either activity, labor, or the artful calling on the Name of Jesus.” He then supposes that the first way is longer than the second; the second is quicker and more effective. Others after him have given first place to the Jesus Prayer. It illuminates, strengthens, enlivens, conquers all enemies visible and invisible, and leads us to God. That is how powerful and effective it is! The name of the Lord Jesus is the treasury of blessings, strength and life in the spirit.

From all this it is evident that any penitent, or anyone beginning to seek the Lord, can and should be taught complete instructions in doing the Jesus Prayer. From there he can be brought into all other practices, because through this he will become strong more quickly, ripen sooner spiritually and enter the interior world. Not knowing this, other people, or at least a large part of them, stop with bodily activities and those of the soul, and waste nearly all their labor and time.

This activity is called an “art.” It is very simple. Standing with awareness and attention in the heart, pronounce ceaselessly: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*, without picturing any sort of image or face, but with faith that the Lord will see you and attend to you. In order to become strong in this, you should assign a time in the morning or the evening—fifteen minutes, a half hour, or more—however much you can, just for saying this prayer. It should be after morning or evening prayers, standing or sitting. This will place the beginnings of a habitual practice. Then during the day, force yourself minute-by-minute to say it, no matter what you are doing. It will become more and more habitual, and then it will start working as if by itself during any work or occupation. The more resolutely you take it up, the faster you will progress.

Your awareness should be kept unfailingly in the heart, and during the practice your breath should lighten as a result of the tension with which you practice it. But the most important condition is faith that God is near and hears us. Say the prayer into God’s ear. This habitual practice will draw warmth into the spirit, later enlightenment, then bring ecstasy. But acquiring all of this sometimes takes years. At first this prayer is only active prayer, just like any other activity. Then it becomes mental prayer, and finally it takes root in the heart.

Some have gone astray from the right path through this prayer. Therefore it should be learned from someone who knows it. Deception comes mostly from placing the attention on the head rather than the chest. Whoever has the attention centered in the heart is safe. Even safer is the one who falls down before God every hour in contrition, with the prayer that he be delivered from deception.

The Holy Fathers gave detailed instructions on this activity. Therefore, whoever takes up this work should read these instructions and throw out all else. The best instructions are by St. Hesychius, St. Gregory the Sinaite, St. Philotheus of Sinai, St. Theoleptus, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Nilus of Sora, Hieromonk Dorotheus, in the prologue to Elder Barsanuphius, and in the life of St. Paisius.

Whoever becomes practiced in this, having gone through everything set forth above, is a practitioner of Christian life. He will quickly ripen in his purification and in Christian perfection, and will acquire his desired peace in being with God.

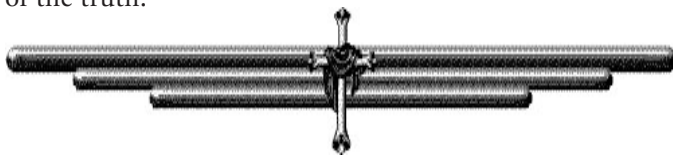
This is the activity for the powers of the soul, which are adaptable to the movement of the spirit. Here we see how every one of them is adapted to the life of the spirit, or to spiritual feeling. But they also lead to the fortification of the primary conditions for being within, namely: mental activity—the concentration of attention; activity of the will—vigilance; activity of the heart—sobriety. Prayer covers them all and encompasses them all. Even the production of it is

nothing other than the interior work we have previously described.

All of these activities are assigned for the development of the powers of the soul in the spirit of a new life. This is the same as infusing the soul with spirit, or elevating it to the spirit and blending with it. In fallenness they are united to a contrary purpose. At conversion the spirit is renewed, but in the soul there still remains a cruel streak of unsubmitiveness and an aversion to the spirit and everything spiritual. These activities, penetrated with spiritual elements, cause the soul to grow into the spirit and blend with it. It is clear from this how essential these activities are and what a disservice those people do to themselves who abandon them. They themselves are the reason that their labors are fruitless. They sweat but see no fruit; they soon grow cold, and then everything comes to an end.

But we must remember that all the fruits of these labors come from the spirit of zeal and quest. It conducts the renewing power of grace through these activities and brings down life into the soul. Without it, all these activities are empty, cold, lifeless, and dry. Reading, prostrations, services and everything else are unfruitful when there is no inner spirit. They can teach vainglory and pharisaism, which become its sole support. This is why someone who has no spirit falls away when he meets with any opposition. Why, they themselves are a torture. For the spirit transfers power to the soul, which makes the soul so well disposed to these activities that it can not get enough of them and wants to have recourse to them always.

Thus it is extremely necessary when doing these activities to always bear in mind that the spirit of life must burn within, and we must in humility and pain of heart fall down before God our Savior. This state is fed and preserved best of all by prayer and prayerful activity. We must watch that we not stop with the activities alone just because they also nourish the soul. This might cause us to remain with them in soul at the cost of the spirit. This happens perhaps most often with reading, and generally any study and integration of the truth.



Whether we pray for ourselves or for others, the prayer must be from the heart. The problems of others should become our problems. You have to prepare for prayer. Read a bit of the Gospel or the Gerontikon and then pray. It requires an attempt to take the mind to the divine space. Study is like a gift which God gives us to direct us to greater spirituality. With study the soul is warmed.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

WHAT HAS THE FEASTS OF FEASTS LEFT IN OUR SOULS?

By Saint John of Kronstadt.



And so, the Feasts of Feasts has passed by us: and the Royal Gates in the Lord's temples are shut; and the services are no longer as triumphant as it was during Holy Week. What then, brethren, has this feast left in our souls?

Christian holidays, you see, do not pass before us, one after another, just to leave our souls idle, but in order to discharge us from

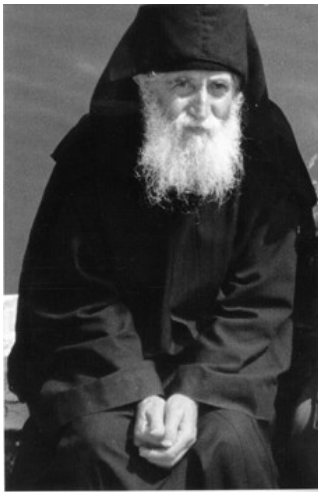
the cares and affairs of life's concerns; to put it another way: the Lord provides us with holidays in order that we might temporarily put aside thinking about, concerning ourselves with, rejoicing at, grieving over, that which is worldly, earthly, quick to pass; but instead, that we might meditate upon, concern ourselves with, rejoice at, that which is heavenly and eternal. It was precisely for this reason, as well, that the holiday just past was given to us.

The Lord made us worthy of beholding the All-Radiant Feast of Christ's Resurrection in order that we might descry in it the first-fruits of the universal resurrection of all mankind in the last days of the world: *Christ rose from the dead, being the first fruits of those who had died* (1 Cor 15:20), says the Word of God. It was for us, you see, that the Lord suffered, died, was buried, and arose: His death, burial and resurrection is, as it were, our own death, burial and resurrection. It is for this reason that we sang during the Matins of Bright Week: *Yesterday was I interred with Thee, O Christ; conjointly with Thee do I rise today.* (Paschal Canon Ode 3, Troparion 2).

Yes, we, all of us, invariably shall rise up; and we all look for and await the resurrection of the dead. This is as certain as it is certain that there will be a day tomorrow. Has this ever entered your heads; have you given any thought to this during the holiday? Yet it was necessary to think upon this, without fail. All the great holidays of the Church – and the Feast of Pascha in particular – remind us of our redemption, through Jesus Christ, from the age to come.

A PRIVATE LETTER BY ELDER PAISIOS THE ATHONITE CONCERNING ECUMENISM

By Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite.



The Holy Mountain, January 23, 1969

Reverend Fr. Haralambos,

In as much as I see the great uproar which is happening in our Church because of the various movements of groups in favor of unification [of churches], as well as the interaction of the Oecumenical Patriarch with the Pope, I was pained as Her child, and considered it good, besides my prayers, to send a small thread (which I have

as a poor monk), that it too may be used as a means of stitching together the multipart garment of our Mother. I know you will show love and share it only with your religious friends. Thank you.

First of all, I would like to ask forgiveness from everyone for being bold to write something when I am neither holy nor a theologian. I trust everyone will understand me, that my writing is nothing more than an _expression of my deep pain for the unfortunate stance and worldly love of our father Patriarch Athenagoras.

It appears he loved another modern woman—which is called the Papist Church—because our Orthodox Mother has not made an impression on him at all, for She is so modest. This love, which was heard from Constantinople, caused a sensational impression of sorts among many Orthodox, who nowadays live in an environment of such meaningless love, in cities across the entire world. Moreover, this love is of the spirit of our age: the family will lose its divine meaning from just such kinds of love, which have as their aim breakup and not union.

With just such a worldly love the Patriarch takes us to Rome. While he should have shown love first to us his children and to our Mother Church, he unfortunately sent his love very far away. The result, it's true, delighted the secular children who love the world—who have this worldly love—, but completely scandalized us, the children of Orthodoxy, young and old, who have fear of God...

With sadness I must write that among all the “unionists” I've met, never have I seen them to have either a drop or shred of spirituality. Nevertheless, they know how to

speak about love and union while they themselves are not united with God, for they have not loved Him.

I would like tenderly to beseech all our unionist brothers: Since the issue of the union of the Churches is something spiritual, and we have need of spiritual love, let's leave it to those who greatly love God and are [genuine] theologians, like the Fathers of the Church—not the legalists—who have offered up and continue to give themselves in service to the Church (instead of just buying big candles), and who were and are lit by the fire of love for God rather than by the lighter of the church sacristan...

We should recognize that there exist not only natural but also spiritual laws. Therefore, the future wrath of God is not averted by a convocation of sinners (for then we shall receive double the wrath), but by repentance and adherence to the commandments of the Lord.

Also, we should know well that our Orthodox Church does not have even one shortcoming. The only apparent insufficiency is the shortage of sober Hierarchs and Shepherds with a Patristic foundation. “Few are chosen.” This should not, however be upsetting. The Church is Christ's Church, and He governs Her. It is not a Temple built by the pious from rocks, sand and mortar, which is then destroyed by the fire of barbarians; the Church is Christ Himself. “And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” (Matt. 21:44-45)

When He must, the Lord will bring forth the Mark of Ephesuses and Gregory Palamas, so as to bring together all our scandalized brethren, to confess the Orthodox Faith, to strengthen the Tradition, and to give great joy to our Mother, the Church.

In times past we see that many faithful children of our Church, monastics and laymen, have unfortunately broken away from Her on account of the unionists. In my opinion, separation from the Church each time the Patriarch makes a mistake is not good at all. From within, close to the Mother Church, it is the duty and obligation of each member to struggle in their own way. To cease commemoration of the Patriarch; to break away and create their own Church; and to continue to speak insultingly to the Patriarch: this I think, is senseless.

If, for this or that occasional deviation of the Patriarchs, we separate ourselves and make our own Churches—may God protect us!—we'll pass up even the Protestants. It is easy for one to separate but difficult to return. Unfortunately we have many “churches” in our times, created either by big groups or even just one person. Because there happened to be a church in their kalyve (I am speaking about things happening on the Holy Mountain), they figured they could create their own independent Church.

If the unionists gave the Church the first wound, the aforementioned give the second.

Let's pray that God will illumine all of us, including our Patriarch Athenagoras, that union of these "churches" will come about first; that tranquility would be realized within the scandalized Orthodox fold; so that peace and love would exist among the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Then let's think about union with other "Confessions"—and only if they sincerely desire to embrace Orthodox Dogma.

I would further like to say that there does exist another, third group, within our Church. They are the brethren who remain as Her faithful children, but who don't have spiritual concord between themselves. They spend their time criticizing one another, and not for the general good of the struggle. The one monitors the other (more than himself) to see what he will say or write so as to ruthlessly nail him. However, if this person had said or written the same thing, he'd certainly have supported it with numerous passages from the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers.

Great harm comes of this; for while the one injures his neighbor, the other strikes him back before the eyes of all the faithful. Often times, disbelief is sown in the souls of the weak, because they are scandalized by such people. Unfortunately, some from among us make senseless claims against the others. We want them to conform to our own spiritual character. In other words, when someone else doesn't harmonize with our own character, or is only mildly tolerant—or even a little sharp—with us, immediately we jump to the conclusion that he is not a spiritual person.

We're all needed within the Church. All the Fathers, both the mild and the austere, offered their services to Her. Just as the sweet, sour, bitter and even pungent herbs are necessary for a man's body (each has its own flavor and vitamins), the same is true of the Body of the Church. All are necessary. The one fills up the spiritual character of the other, and all of us are duty bound to endure not only the particular spiritual character, but even the human weaknesses we each have.

Again, I come sincerely asking pardon from all for being so bold to write. I am only a simple monk, and my work is to strive, as much as I am able, to divest myself of the old man, and to help others and the Church, through God, by prayer. But because heartbreaking news regarding our Holy Orthodoxy has reached even my hermitage, I was greatly pained, and thus considered it good to write that which I felt. Let's all pray that God grants His Grace, and may each of us help in his own way for the glory of our Church.

With much respect to all,
Monk Paisios

A DARK DAY IN HISTORY

By Srdja Trifkovic, from the "Chronicles Magazine," July 2007.

On May 29, 1453, the city of Constantinople fell to the Muslims. It was a dark day for Christendom and for all civilized humanity. Her pleas ignored in the West, her supplies running out after six weeks' siege, her soldiers outnumbered 15 to one, Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos knew that his cause was hopeless. Like Prince Lazar at Kosovo, some 64 years earlier, he chose martyrdom.

On May 22 the moon, symbol of Constantinople since its founding, rose in dark eclipse, fulfilling an old prophecy on the city's demise. Four days later the Bosphorus was shrouded by thick fog, a phenomenon unknown in eastern Mediterranean in late spring. When the final assault started on the 29th and the walls of the city were shattered, the Emperor discarded his purple cloak and led the last defenders to charge into the breach. The Turks were never able to identify his body; the last Roman Emperor was buried in a mass grave along with his soldiers. The inability to identify the fallen Emperor gave rise to the folk stories about the King who was turned to marble (Marmaromenos Vasilius) and awaits the time that he will come to life again and take over his rightful place in a free Constantinople.

When it was all over, bands of Turks went on a rampage. Pillaging and killing went on for three days. The blood ran down the steep streets from the heights of Petra toward the Golden Horn. All the treasures of the Imperial Palace were promptly removed. Books and icons were burnt on the spot, once the jeweled covers and frames had been wrenched off. In the monastery of the Holy Savior, the invaders first destroyed the icon of the Mother of God, the Hodigitria, the holiest icon in all Byzantium, painted by St. Luke himself.

When the Turks burst into the Hagia Sophia, Sir Steven Runciman tells us (in his "Fall of Constantinople"):

The worshippers were trapped. A few of the ancient and infirm were killed on the spot; but most of them were tied or chained together. Many of the lovelier maidens and youths and many of the richer-clad nobles were almost torn to death as their captors quarreled over them. The priests went on chanting at the altar till they too were taken... The inhabitants were carried off along with their possessions. Anyone who collapsed from frailty was slaughtered, together with a number of infants who were held to be of no value... [The city] was now half in ruins, emptied and deserted and blackened as though by fire, and strangely silent. Wherever the soldiers had been there was desolation. Churches had been desecrated and stripped; houses were no longer habitable and shops and stores battered and bare.

Sultan Mohamed II is said to have been shaken by the spectacle as he rode through the burning streets, but the same carnage and bestiality was to be repeated, in one form or

another, dozens of times over hundreds of years. The massacre at Chios serves as another example. Eugene Delacroix's depiction of *The Massacre at Chios*: Greek families awaiting death or slavery is a masterpiece of horror depicting the systematic extermination of the entire population of an Aegean island. It graphically illustrated how being a Greek, Armenian, Serb, or indeed any other Christian, in the Ottoman Empire meant living in daily fear of murder, rape, torture, kidnap of one's children, slavery, and genocide. Indeed, the last century of Ottoman rule—from the defeat of Napoleon until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War—witnessed a more thorough and tragic destruction of the Christian communities in the Middle East, Asia Minor, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, than at any prior period.

The tragedy of Christian communities under Turkish rule, as Gladstone rightly pointed out, was not “a question of Mohammedanism simply, but of Mohammedanism compounded with the peculiar character of a race.” The Turks, in his view, “were, upon the whole, from the black day when they first entered Europe, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. Wherever they went, a broad line of blood marked the track behind them, and, as far as their dominion reached, civilization disappeared from view. They represented everywhere government by force as opposed to government by law.”

The Ottoman Empire gave up the ghost right after the Great War, but long before that it had little interesting to say, or do, at least measured against the enormous cultural melting pot it had inherited and its splendid opportunities between East and West. Not even a prime location at the crossroads of the world could prompt creativity that was not there.

Today the Turkish Republic is a populous nation that has developed a culture based on a blend of European-style nationalism, which is very un-Ottoman, and an underlying Islamic ethos inherited from the Empire. Kemal Ataturk (the architect of the 1923 Hellenic genocide) hoped to impose a strictly secular concept of nationhood, but political Islam has reasserted itself. Popular Islamic political movements of the past three decades have produced a Turkish-Islamic synthesis whose “post-Islamist” upholders are firmly in power in Ankara. Their success is due to the fact that most Turks remain Muslim in their beliefs, values, and world outlook. The Kemalist dream of secularism has never penetrated beyond the military and a narrow stratum of urban elite centered in Istanbul, and today it is in retreat. The Kemalist edifice, uneasily perched atop the simmering Islamic volcano, will remain tentative at best.

The re-emergence of an empire centered on the Bosphorus is unlikely, for now, but less so than the integration into the European Union of a democratic, secular and stable Turkey. Until Turkey loses its continuing territorial ambitions and integrates herself into a stable democracy (which is a far cry from her current state) she will remain a nation that exists under the dark clouds of the genocides committed by her people and governments of past.

The freeing of Hagia Sophia from the four “ugly bars” imprisoning her is even less likely, for now; but miracles do happen, and therefore this one can happen. On this melancholy anniversary let us pray that it will happen.

† † †

Editor's Note: It is asserted that the sack of Constantinople could have been avoided if and only if the Orthodox Church had fully given in to the papal ambitions of authority and accepted the “union” offered by Rome. In specific, in 1451, Pope Nicholas V conveyed the following extortion to the Ambassadors of Emperor Constantine Palaiologos: “If you, with your nobles and the people of Constantinople, accept the decree

of union, you will find us and our venerable brothers, the cardinals of the holy Roman church, ever eager to support your honour and your empire. But if you and your people refuse to accept the decree, you will force us to take such measures as are necessary for your salvation and our honour.”

The extorting remarks of Rome were never followed up with the accompanying promises of support. The fake union that was

proclaimed by some shortly thereafter had no impact to the future of Constantinople. The West never followed up with the Pope's promises of military support and salvation from the Ottomans. Sir Steven Runciman characterizes the impact of this fake union with the Latins best within his book “The Fall of Constantinople:”

“After the union had been proclaimed there was no more open opposition. Gennadius (the Ecumenical Patriarch kept silence in his cell. The bulk of the people accepted the accomplished fact with sullen passivity; but they worshipped only in the churches whose priests were untainted. Even many of its supporters hoped that if the city were spared the decree would be amended. Had the union been followed quickly by the appearance of ships and soldiers from the West its practical advantages might have won it general support. The Greeks, with the doctrine of economy in their minds, could have reflected that the abandonment of their religious loyalties would be well compensated by the preservation of the Christian Empire. But as it was, *they had paid the price demanded for Western aid, and they were cheated.*”



Hagia Sofia Amongst the Four Ugly Bars of Slavery

I ANTICIPATE THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

By the late Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Christodoulos (+2008).

The common Resurrection of the dead comprises a dogma of our Holy Orthodox faith. We confirm it in the Symbol of our Faith—our Creed: *I anticipate the resurrection of the dead and the life of the aeon to come.*

Our life has four stages. The first is our terrestrial life. It is the life that we live on Earth. The second stage is the one after our physical death, the so-called “interim-state.” The third stage is life after the resurrection of bodies and the fourth is the life of the aeon to come. That is when the mystery of the “eighth day” begins.

However, if someone does have doubts regarding the bodily resurrection, we need to mention that this resurrection will certainly take place because it was uttered by the unerring mouth of our Lord. In John’s Gospel, these words of the Lord appear: *the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hearken to it shall live.* The voice of Christ will be heard and everyone will live; everyone will be resurrected. Immediately after, the Lord Himself completed His phrase, saying: *Do not wonder at this; for a time will come when all those who are in graves shall hear His voice, and those who pursued good deeds shall proceed to a Resurrection of Life, while those who have pursued foul deeds (shall proceed) to a Resurrection of Judgment.*

It is very clear, that these words of our Lord are referring to bodily resurrection, which will be taking place when the voice of Jesus Christ is heard. But even St. Paul the Apostle, when expressing the same truth, tells us: *...for he shall sound the trumpet, and the dead shall arise, incorruptible.* The holy Apostle was referring to the trumpet sounded by the Angel, thereby announcing the resurrection of the dead bodies, after which, the dead would arise, in incorruptible form. As for those who have doubts about those bodies coming alive—and especially all the deceased of the distant past—there is the vision of the Prophet Ezekiel, where the Prophet, having received the command by God to preach to the bared bones, he indeed proceeds to preach and immediately after, the bones re-acquire flesh and soul: they come alive and they stand upright.

Furthermore, it is only proper and fair for the bodily resurrection to take place before the Second Coming, inasmuch as the bodies—along with their souls—will appear together before the Throne of the unyielding Judge, in order to obtain His response to the way of life that they jointly lived. And that is why Man is not only a soul. St. Paul clearly informs us that we shall present ourselves before the Judge, with our body, in order that each of us may receive the appropriate judgment for all the things we have done. Body and soul

have lived together, and will therefore either enjoy Heaven together, or be together in Hell.

There are some who wonder how this resurrection can it be possible when the physical body has disintegrated a long time ago? This body will also be resurrected, because Christ’s Body was resurrected. The Holy Bible refers to Him as *the Firstborn of all creation* and as the One who *became the first among the reposed.* This means that whatever took place with Christ will also be taking place with us, because Christ is the recapitulation and the summation of our entire life. Our Lord is the Head of our body and we are the members. Subsequently, since the Head was resurrected, the entire body will be resurrected also. But we shall not be resurrected on our own as was the case with the Lord’s Resurrection; instead, we shall be resurrected, when the voice of the Lord is heard.

The blessed Chrysostom says the following: *If the body is not resurrected, then Man is not resurrected. Because Man is not just a soul. Man is body and soul. Therefore, if only the soul is resurrected, then Man is resurrected in half, and not in whole. Besides, we are not speaking literally when referring to the “resurrection of the soul”, because only the body is resurrected, since only the body is subject to deterioration.*

The bodily resurrection is a miracle. It will be the miracle of the Power of God. And just as a seed is sown in the earth unto deterioration and rises up un-deteriorated, so is our body sown in a state of deterioration, it is buried and disintegrates in the earth, to be resurrected and risen in incorruptibility.

This resurrection, according to Clement of Rome, will take place, regardless where we may be scattered—either in the sea, or on land, or even if devoured by wild beasts or by vultures—God will resurrect us with His power, because the entire world is in His hand.

What the “New” Bodies Will Be Like

Justifiably, one may ask what our bodies will be like after our resurrection. Will they look like they did before death, or not? The answer is that our bodies will basically be the same as before, but with different characteristics. In reply to this question, the blessed Chrysostom says that *the body will be the same one, but it will also not be the same.*

The blessed Makarios says that our body will have preserved its nature after the resurrection in the same manner as iron, which, when subjected to heat will turn glowing red, but without ceasing to be iron.

Saint Theodore of Mopsuestia gives us another image—that of sand and glass. As we all know, glass is composed of sand. However, when it is turned into glass, it is no longer sand. Therefore, between our pre-resurrection body and the one that we shall have after the resurrection, there will be a sameness as well as a difference.

One difference that we must state is that the old body is cloaked with deterioration, whereas the new one with incorruptibility. This body, after the common resurrection,

will be immortal. The image used by the holy Apostle Paul is a very characteristic one. The seed is buried in the soil, it then deteriorates, and eventually a new plant will sprout from that seed, which comes alive and develops. Of course it is of the same nature as the seed that was sown. That is to say, if one sows a seed of wheat, wheat will sprout from it, however, it will be better than the one that was sown. Furthermore, one seed is sown, but multiple seeds will sprout from it. From all this, we can surmise the attributes that our post-resurrection body will have—the first one being incorruptibility.

In his attempt to approach this mystery, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem resorts to the example of water. Water, he says, has certain characteristics when it is in a liquid state, other ones when it solidifies, and yet others when it is vaporous. We shall likewise undergo a change. Thus, since our body will possess the characteristic of incorruptibility, it means that it will not suffer illnesses or feel pain, nor will it grow old—we will all have the “same age,” according to the tradition of our Church, which we encounter in our hymnological texts. In other words, we will no longer have the handicaps that we had in this lifetime or the various illnesses, nor will we have the so-called “natural” passions such as hunger, thirst, becoming tired and needing to rest, physical pain, etc.

The second characteristic of immortality indicates that we no longer die, and that we shall be eternal. Our model will be the Body of the Resurrected Christ. A third characteristic of ours will be the transformation of our body. The new body will be far better and superior to the previous one. It will not consist of matter, it will be weightless, it will be mass-less and will not take up space, in the manner that our Lord had a body which His disciples had seen after the Resurrection, yet without that Body hindering Him from entering the room where His disciples were “sequestered,” nor hindering Him from being simultaneously in different places—as verified by His various post-Resurrection appearances.

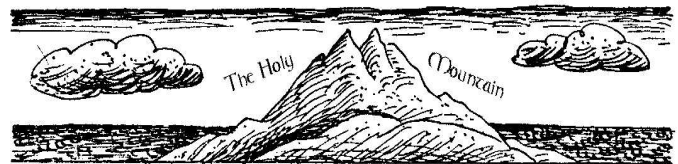
The qualities that our new body will have will be new qualities. That body will partake of the glory of the Resurrected and Ascended Jesus Christ. The Lord was not resurrected only as the firstborn of all Creation; He also brought His resurrected Body into the heavens, on the day of His Ascension. And it is for this reason that the Feast of the Ascension is of such importance to us, because it signifies the eternal glorification of our body, next to the Body of the Resurrected Christ, in the glory of Heaven. Our body will be beautiful, with its former characteristics. Our physical remembrances will become spiritual ones. That is why yet another characteristic will be spirituality. We will no longer be preoccupied with material or sensual matters. Being spiritual, our body will no longer have any need for maintenance or sustenance.

On the basis of all that we said regarding our resurrected body, we must reach the conclusion that our “just reward”—

that is, the inheritance of Heaven or our exclusion from it (aka Hell) will be of a spiritual, not material character. There will be conditions that will fill us with joy, if we are together with God and savor His presence, otherwise, they will fill our souls with great pain, sorrow and sadness. We will be “justly rewarded” accordingly, if we are far away from God; we will not enjoy His presence within us. That would be the worst kind of torture, because our conscience—according to the dogmatic theologians of our Church—*then being extremely refined and sensitized, will check us in a tortuous and painful manner*; our conscience will have then be rid of the laziness with which it was burdened during the present lifetime.

According to the Fathers of the Church, people will shine, in direct proportion to the measure of their virtue. That is why the Lord had said *in the house of My Father there are many mansions*. This indicates that Heaven will also have certain gradations. Saints who have pleased God will be in a different state than certain other Christians. Nevertheless, everyone who will be in Heaven will feel the utmost joy. In fact, the Fathers use a charming parallel, in order to describe that everyone will feel satisfied: *Each person will be holding a vessel in his hands. In some, the vessel will be a small one, while in others, the vessel will be larger. However, everyone's vessel will be full to the brim.*

Following the resurrection, a general judgment will take place. It will be the final judgment. We shall appear with our resurrected bodies and souls united, as they are now, before the Throne of the unyielding God.



Slander is a great evil. Just as the little rudder steers the whole ship wherever it wants, likewise the tongue leads a person either to good or to evil. The holy father's greatly censure judging other people's sins, faults, or evil habits.

When we judge our brother, we condemn ourselves to a great sin. But when we cover our brother, God will also protect us from great sins. When we expose our brother, we drive the grace of God away from us and He permits us to fall into the same sins so that we learn that we are all weak and that the grace of God supports us. Whoever guards his tongue guards his soul from great sins and grievous falls.

The chief cause of criticism and slander is pride and egotism, because one considers oneself better than the others. For this reason it is very beneficial for a person to think of himself as below everyone, so that he considers his brother better than him in order that, with the help of God, he may be delivered from this evil.

**From the book “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,”
the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim**

CLERGY ETIQUETTE

By Fr. David and Presvytera Juliana Cownie, A Guide to Orthodox Life, pp. 90-96.

This is a guide for properly addressing Orthodox clergy. Most of the titles do not exactly correspond to the terms used in Greek, Russian, or the other native languages of the various Orthodox Churches, but they have been widely accepted as standard English usages.

Greeting Clergy in Person: When we address Deacons or Priests, we should use the title “Father.” For Bishops we should use “Your Grace.” Though all Bishops (including Patriarchs) are equal in the Orthodox Church, they do have different administrative duties and honors that accrue to their rank in this sense. Thus, “Your Eminence” is the proper title for Bishops with suffragans or assistant Bishops, Metropolitan, and most Archbishops (among the exceptions to this rule is the Archbishop of Athens, who is addressed as “Your Beatitude”). “Your Beatitude” is the proper title for Patriarchs (except for the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, who is addressed as “Your All-Holiness”). When we approach an Orthodox Presbyter or Bishop (but not a Deacon), we make a bow by reaching down and touching the floor with our right hand, and say: “Bless, Father” (or “Bless, Your Grace,” or “Bless, Your Eminence,” etc). The Priest or Bishop then answers, “May the Lord bless you,” blesses us with the Sign of the Cross, and we kiss then his hand.

We should understand that when the Priest or Bishop blesses us, he forms his fingers to represent the Christogram “ICXC” a traditional abbreviation of the Greek words for “Jesus Christ” (i.e., the first and last letters of each of the words “IHCOYC XRICTOC”). Thus, the Priest’s blessing is in the Name of Christ, as he emphasizes in his response to the believer’s request for a blessing. Other responses to this request are used by many clergy, but the antiquity and symbolism of the tradition which we have presented are compelling arguments for its use.

The reason that a lay person kisses the hand of a Priest or Bishop is to show respect to his Apostolic office. More importantly, however, since both hold the Holy Mysteries, we show respect to the Holy Eucharist when we kiss their hands. In fact, St. John Chrysostom once said that if one were to meet an Orthodox Priest walking along with an Angel, that he should greet the Priest first and kiss his hand, since that hand has touched the Body and Blood of our Lord. For this reason, we do not normally kiss the hand of a Deacon. While a Deacon holds the first level of the Priesthood (Deacon, Presbyter, Bishop), his service does not entail blessing the Mysteries. When we take leave of a Priest or Bishop, we should again ask for a blessing, just as we did when we first greeted him.

In the case of married clergy, the wife of a Priest or Deacon is also informally addressed with a title. Since the Mystery of Marriage binds a Priest and his wife together as “one flesh,” the

wife shares in a sense her husband’s Priesthood. This does not, of course, mean that she has the very Grace of the Priesthood or its office, but the dignity of her husband’s service certainly accrues to her. The various titles used by the national Churches are listed below. The Greek titles, since they have English correspondents, are perhaps the easiest to use in the West:

Greek: Presvytera (Pres-vee-té-ra)

Russian: Matushka (Má-toosh-ka)

Serbian: Papadiya (Pa-pá-dee-ya)

Ukrainian: Panimatushka (Pa-nee-má-toosh-ka), or Panimatka (Pa-nee-mát-ka)

The wife of a Deacon is called “Diakonissa [Thee-a-kó-neesa]” in Greek. The Slavic Churches commonly use the same title for the wife of a Deacon as they do for the wife of a Priest. In any case, the wife of a Priest should normally be addressed with both her title and her name in informal situations (e.g., “Presvytera Mary,” “Diakonissa Sophia,” etc).

Greeting Clergy on the Telephone: Whenever you speak to Orthodox clergy you should always begin your conversation by asking for a blessing: “Father, bless.” When speaking with a Bishop, you should say “Bless, Despota [Thés-po-ta]” (or “Vladika [Vlá-dee-ka]” in Slavonic, “Master” in English). It is also appropriate to say, “Bless, Your Grace” (or “Your Eminence,” etc.). You should end your conversation by asking for a blessing again.

Addressing Clergy in a Letter: When we write to a clergyman (and, by custom, monastics), we should open our letter with the greeting, “Bless, Father.” At the end of the letter, it is customary to close with the following line: “Kissing your right hand...” It is not appropriate to invoke a blessing on a clergyman, as many do: “May God bless you.” Not only does this show a certain spiritual arrogance before the image of the cleric, but laymen do not have the Grace of the Priesthood and the prerogative to bless in their stead. Even a Priest properly introduces his letters with the words, “The blessing of the Lord” or “May God bless you,” rather than offering his own blessing. Though he can do the latter, humility prevails in his behavior, too. Needless to say, when a clergyman writes to his ecclesiastical superior, he should ask for a blessing and not bestow one.

Formal Address: Married Deacons in the Orthodox Church are addressed as “The Reverend Deacon.” If they are Deacons who are also monks, they are addressed as “The Reverend Hierodeacon.” If a Deacon holds the honor of Archdeacon or Protodeacon, he is addressed as “The Reverend Archdeacon” or “The Reverend Protodeacon.” Deacons hold a rank in the Priesthood and are, therefore, not laymen. This is an important point to remember, since so many Orthodox here in America have come to think of the Deacon as a kind of “quasi—Priest.” This is the result of Latin influence and poor teaching. As members of the Priesthood, Deacons must be addressed, as we noted above, as “Father” (or “Deacon Father”).

Orthodox Priests are addressed as “The Reverend Father,” if they are married Priests. If they are Hieromonks (monk-Priests), they are addressed as “The Reverend Hieromonk.” Priests with special honors are addressed in this manner: an Archimandrite (the highest monastic rank below that of Bishop), “The Very Reverend Archimandrite” (or, in the Slavic jurisdictions, “The Right Reverend Archimandrite”); and Protopresbyters, “The Very Reverend Protopresbyter.” In personal address, as we noted above, all Priests are called “Father,” usually followed by their first names (e.g., “Father John”).

Bishops in the Orthodox Church are addressed as “The Right Reverend Bishop,” followed by their first name (e.g., “The Right Reverend Bishop John”). Archbishops, Metropolitans, and Patriarchs are addressed as “The Most Reverend Archbishop” (“Metropolitan,” or “Patriarch”). Because they are also monastics, all ranks of Archpastors (Bishops, Archbishops, Metropolitans, or Patriarchs) are addressed by their first names or first names and sees (e.g., “Bishop John of San Francisco”). It is not correct to use the family name of a Bishop—or any monastic for that matter. Though many monastics and Bishops use their family names, this is absolutely improper and a violation of an ancient Church custom.

All male monastics in the Orthodox Church are called “Father,” whether they hold the Priesthood or not, and are formally addressed as “Monk (name),” if they do not have a Priestly rank. If they are of Priestly rank, they are formally addressed as “Hieromonk” or “Hierodeacon.” Monastics are sometimes addressed according to their monastic rank; for example, “Rasophore-monk (name),” “Stavrophore-monk (name),” or “Schemamonk (name).” The Abbot of a monastery is addressed as “The Very Reverend Abbot,” whether he holds Priestly rank or not and whether or not he is an Archimandrite by rank. Under no circumstances whatsoever is an Orthodox monk addressed by laymen as “Brother.” This is a Latin custom. The term “Brother” is used in Orthodox monasteries in two instances only: first, to designate beginners in the monastic life (novices or, in Greek, dokimoi [“those being tested”]), who are given a blessing, in the strictest tradition, to wear only the inner cassock and a monastic cap; and second, as an occasional, informal form of address between monastics themselves (including Bishops).

Again, as we noted above, a monk should never use his last name. This reflects the Orthodox understanding of monasticism, in which the monastic dies to his former self and abandons all that identified him in the world. Lay people are also called to respect a monk’s death to his past. (In Greek practice, a monk sometimes forms a new last name from the name of his monastery. Thus a monk from the Saint Gregory Palamas Monastery [Moni Agiou Gregoriou Palama, in Greek] might take the name Agiogregorites.)

The titles which we have used for male monastics also apply to female monastics. In fact, a community of female monastics

is often called a “monastery” rather than a convent (though there is nothing improper, as some wrongly claim, in calling a monastery for women a “convent”), just as the word “convent,” in its strictest meaning, can apply to a monastic community of males, too. Women monastics are formally addressed as “Nun (name)” or “Rasophore—nun (name),” etc., and the Abbess of a convent is addressed as “The Very Reverend Abbess.” Though traditions for informal address vary, in most places, Rasophore nuns are called “Sister,” while any monastic above the rank of Rasophore is called “Mother.” Novices are addressed as “Sister.” [Ed Note: In Greek the Abbot and Abbess are commonly referred to as Elder and Eldress (Geronda or Gerondissa). It is also common to refer to nuns, not just novices, as Sister (name).]

There are, as we have noted, some differences in the way that Orthodox religious are addressed. What we have given above corresponds to a reasonably standardized vocabulary as one would find it in more traditional English—language Orthodox writings and among English—speaking Orthodox monastics. The influx of Latin converts into Orthodox monasticism and the phenomenon of “monasticism by convenient rule, instant tradition, and fabrication” are things that have also led to great confusion in the use of English terminology that corresponds more correctly to the vocabulary of traditional Orthodox monastics.



Is there a proper way to address and sign letters to fellow Orthodox?

Lay people may greet each other with a simple request for prayers and close their letters in the same way. The flowery exhortations that were especially popular in the nineteenth-century Russian Church (“Christ is in our midst,” “Glory be to God,” inter alia), and usually taken from the Liturgy, are not traditional forms of greeting for clergy or for lay people. Nor are the greetings exchanged between great Church Fathers and the Saints. Though these high-sounding exhortations are very popular now, since they appeal to the Protestant evangelical piety which has invaded the Church, when used by the poor Christians that we are today, they are at odds with the humility which derives from a piety engendered by submission to Christ and to the traditions of His Church.



The priest’s cassock is the flag of the Church of our Christ. For this reason, we who wear it must try hard to honor it with a holy life; so that those who don’t wear it will honor it and respect it.

Blessed Elder Amphilochios of Patmos (+1971)

“THE SEVEN				DEADLY SINS”			
<i>1. Pride</i>		<i>2. Avarice</i>		<i>3. Lust</i>		<i>4. Envy</i>	
<i>5. Gluttony</i>		<i>6. Anger</i>		<i>7. Slothfulness</i>			
<i>Egoism</i>	<i>Sacrilege</i>	<i>Incest</i>	<i>Sub Divisions</i>	<i>Murder</i>	<i>Insatiability</i>	<i>Blasphemy</i>	<i>Negligence</i>
<i>Vainglory</i>	<i>Perjury</i>	<i>Bestiality</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Drunkenness</i>	<i>Use of foul language</i>	<i>Drowsiness</i>
<i>Hypocrisy</i>	<i>Theft</i>	<i>Sodomy</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>Malice</i>	<i>Abolishing fasting</i>	<i>Hatred</i>	<i>Idleness</i>
<i>Stubbornness</i>	<i>Untruth</i>	<i>Adultery</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>Betrayal</i>	<i>Smoking and Narcotics</i>	<i>Cursing someone</i>	<i>Lack of Prayer</i>
<i>Disobedience</i>	<i>Injustice</i>	<i>Fornication</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>Deceit</i>	<i>Overeating</i>	<i>Beating someone</i>	<i>Lack of Church attendance</i>
<i>Boastfulness</i>	<i>Rapacity</i>	<i>Caressing or "heavy petting"</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>Quarreling</i>	<i>Wasting food</i>	<i>Obscene ges-</i>	<i>Lack of spiritual reading</i>
<i>Conceit</i>	<i>Mercilessness</i>	<i>Masturbation</i>	<i>6th</i>	<i>Jealousy</i>	<i>Eating strange foods</i>	<i>Abusive name-calling</i>	<i>Contempt</i>
<i>Irony</i>	<i>Gambling</i>	<i>Abnormality (contrary to nature)</i>	<i>7th</i>	<i>Ingratitude</i>	<i>Secret eating</i>	<i>Intolerance</i>	<i>Laziness</i>
<i>Embellishment</i>	<i>Hardness of Heart</i>	<i>Immoral</i>	<i>8th</i>	<i>Conspiracy</i>	<i>Eating defiled foods</i>	<i>Slothfulness</i>	<i>Distortion of the Gospel</i>
<i>Fantasy</i>	<i>Simony</i>	<i>Immoral Shows and Entertainment</i>	<i>9th</i>	<i>Perjury</i>	<i>Vomiting from overeating</i>	<i>Enmity through the use of witchcraft</i>	
			<i>10th</i>	<i>Slander</i>			
			<i>11th</i>	<i>False Accusation</i>			
			<i>12th</i>				
						THE END AND GLORY BE TO GOD	

CHRISTIANS DO NOT WORSHIP THE UNIVERSE

By Athenagoras the Athenian (philosopher and Christian).

Beautiful without doubt is the world, excelling, as well in its magnitude as in the arrangement of its parts, both those in the oblique circle and those about the north, and also in its spherical form.

Yet it is not this, but its Artificer, that we must worship. For when any of your subjects come to you, they do not neglect to pay their homage to you, their rulers and lords, from whom they will obtain whatever they need, and address themselves to the magnificence of your palace; but, if they chance to come upon the royal residence, they bestow a passing glance of admiration on its beautiful structure: but it is to you yourselves that they show honour, as being "all in all." You sovereigns, indeed, rear and adorn your palaces for yourselves; but the world was not created because God needed it; for God is Himself everything to Himself, light unapproachable, a perfect world, spirit, power, reason. If, therefore, the world is an instrument in tune, and moving in well-measured time, I adore the Being who gave its harmony, and strikes its notes, and sings the accordant strain, and not the instrument. For

at the musical contests the adjudicators do not pass by the lute-players and crown the lutes.

Whether, then, as Plato says, the world be a product of divine art, I admire its beauty, and adore the Artificer; or whether it be His essence and body, as the Peripatetics affirm, we do not neglect to adore God, who is the cause of the motion of the body, and descend "to the poor and weak elements," adoring in the impassible air (as they term it), passible matter; or, if any one apprehends the several parts of the world to be powers of God, we do not approach and do homage to the powers, but their Maker and Lord. I do not ask of matter what it has not to give, nor passing God by do I pay homage to the elements, which can do nothing more than what they were bidden; for, although they are beautiful to look upon, by reason of the art of their Framer, yet they still have the nature of matter. And to this view Plato also bears testimony; "for," says he, "that which is called heaven and earth has received many blessings from the Father, but yet partakes of body; hence it cannot possibly be free from change." If, therefore, while I admire the heavens and the elements in respect of their art, I do not worship them as gods, knowing that the law of dissolution is upon them, how can I call those objects gods of which I know the makers to be men? Attend, I beg, to a few words on this subject.

Ὁ Προβολέας τοῦ Διαβόλου

Τοῦ πρεσβ. Διονυσίου Τάτση, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος».

Στὸ ἐξωτερικὸ ἀρχονταρίκι τοῦ κελιοῦ του, ὁ Γέροντας Παΐσιος ἄκουγε πονεμένους καὶ μπερδεμένους ἀνθρώπους καὶ σπάραζε ἡ καρδιά του. Ἦθελε νὰ τοὺς βοηθήσει οὐσιαστικά, ἀρχίζοντας μὲ τὴ διδασκαλία κι ἐπισφραγίζοντας τὴν προσπάθεια μὲ θερμὴ προσευχὴ τὸ βράδυ. Γνώριζε πολὺ καλὰ ὅ,τι ὁ ἴδιος δὲν μπορούσε νὰ βοηθήσει κανέναν, πίστευε, ὁμως, ὅ,τι ὁ Θεὸς ὅλα μπορεῖ νὰ τὰ κάνει, γιὰ αὐτὸ καὶ προσευχόταν μὲ πόνο.

Τὸ ἔργο του ἦταν δύσκολο, γιατί συναντοῦσε τὴν ἀντίδραση τοῦ διαβόλου. Ὁ Γέροντας εἶχε διαπιστώσει πολλές φορές ὅ,τι ὁ διάβολος μὲ λύσσα πολεμοῦσε τὸ πνευματικὸ του ἔργο.

Κάποτε εἶχαν πάει στὸ καλύβι του δύο ἀνθρωποι, πού ἀντιμετώπιζαν σοβαρὰ προσωπικὰ προβλήματα. Ὁ Γέροντας τοὺς ἄκουσε μὲ προσοχὴ καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ τοὺς ἀναφέρει διάφορα παραδείγματα, προκειμένου νὰ τονώσει τὴν πίστη τους στὸ Θεό. Ἐβλεπε ὅ,τι οἱ ἀνθρωποι αὐτοὶ διγοῦσαν νὰ τὸν ἀκούσουν.

Ὅταν ἡ συζήτηση εἶχε φτάσει στὸ «εὐαίσθητο σημεῖο», ἐφανίστηκε στὸ σύρμα τοῦ φράχτη μία ὁμάδα ἐπισκεπτῶν. Ὁ Γέροντας διέκοψε, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς χαιρετήσει καὶ νὰ τοὺς ὀδηγήσει σὲ κάποιο σημεῖο τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ κελιοῦ. Ξαναπῆγε κοντὰ στοὺς δύο ἀδελφούς γιὰ ὀλοκληρώσει τὴ σκέψη του. Δὲν πέρασαν δύο λεπτά καὶ ἀκούστηκε μία φωνὴ ἀπ' τὴν κάτω πόρτα τῆς αὐλῆς:

- Πάτερ, ἀπὸ ποῦ θὰ μποῦμε;

Ἦταν μία ἄλλη παρέα. Ὁ Γέροντας τοὺς ἀπάντησε:

- Ἐλᾶτε ἀπὸ πάνω. Πάρτε λουκούμια καὶ νερὸ καὶ καθίστε.

Ὁ Γέροντας εἶχε χάσει τὸν εἰρμὸ τῶν σκέψεών του. Ἀρχισε πάλι ἀπ' τὴν ἀρχή. Οἱ συνεχεῖς διακοπές τὸν πίεζαν κι ἐνίωθε ἄσχημα. Δὲν μπορούσε νὰ φτάσει στὸ δίδαγμα, πού ἤθελε νὰ προσφέρει στοὺς δύο συνομιλητές του. Ἐφτὰ φορές τὸν διέκοψαν διάφοροι ἐπισκέπτες. Τελικὰ ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ βάλει δύο φρουροὺς ἀπ' τοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς ἐπισκέπτες. Πῆρε ἕναν ἀπ' τὸ χέρι καὶ τοῦ εἶπε. Νὰ σταματάει τοὺς ἐπισκέπτες πού θὰ ἔρχονταν, λέγοντάς τους, ὅ,τι πρέπει νὰ ἔχουν ὑπομονὴ καὶ νὰ περιμένουν. Τὸ ἴδιο εἶπε καὶ σὲ κάποιον ἄλλο, πού τὸν τοποθέτησε στὴν ἐπάνω πόρτα. Ἐτσι ὁ Γέροντας μετὰ ἀπὸ ἀρκετὴ ὥρα κατάφερε νὰ τελειώσει τὴ συζήτηση μὲ τοὺς δύο πονεμένους ἀδελφούς. Ὅταν τοὺς ἀποχαιρετοῦσε, τοὺς ἐξήγησε τί εἶχε συμβεῖ:

- Ἐβλεπε ὁ διάβολος, ἀδελφοί, ὅ,τι ὁ Θεὸς σᾶς ἔστειλε ἐδῶ, γιὰ νὰ τονωθείτε, πνευματικά καὶ δὲν τὸ ἄντεχε. Τὸ ἔκανε ἀπ' ἐδῶ, τὸ ἔκανε ἀπ' ἐκεῖ κι ἔστειλε ὅλους τοὺς ἐπισκέπτες μαζεμένους, γιὰ νὰ μὲ διακόπτουν καὶ νὰ μὴ μπορέσω νὰ σᾶς βοηθήσω. Ἄς εἶναι ὁμως. Ἄντε νὰ πηγαίσετε στὴν εὐχὴ τῆς Παναγίας.

Ὁ Γέροντας ἐνίωθε ἱκανοποίηση, πού βοήθησε τοὺς δύο ἀδελφούς, καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ μετράει τοὺς ἐπισκέπτες, πού ἤδη εἶχαν μαζευτεῖ. Ἦταν πολλοί. Ξεπερνοῦσαν τοὺς τριάντα. Τοὺς εἶπε νὰ μαζευτοῦν ὅλοι στὸ ὑπαίθριο ἀρχονταρίκι, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς κερᾶσει. Μετὰ κάθισε κι αὐτὸς κοντὰ τους, καὶ ἀφοῦ τοὺς ἔριξε μία ματιά, κατέβασε τὸ κεφάλι του καὶ περίμενε. Ἐνας ἀπ' τοὺς ἐπισκέπτες ἄνοιξε τὴν κουβέντα:

- Γέροντα, δὲν μᾶς λέτε κάτι, γιὰ τὸ διάβολο πού τόσο μᾶς ταλαιπωρεῖ καὶ μᾶς ἀπομακρύνει ἀπ' τὸ Θεό;

- Γιὰ τὸ διάβολο νὰ μιλήσουμε ἢ γιὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους; Ἐγώ, βέβαια, δὲν ξέρω γιὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους. Γιὰ τὸ διάβολο, ὁμως, μπορῶ νὰ σᾶς πῶ δύο ἱστορίες.

Ὁ Γέροντας περίμενε λίγο νὰ πιοῦν τὸ νερὸ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι καὶ ἄρχισε:

- Ὅταν ἦμουν στὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Στομίου στὴν Κόνιτσα, ὁ διάβολος προσπαθοῦσε νὰ μὲ παρασύρει χρησιμοποιώντας διάφορους τρόπους. Ἐνα βράδυ, μετὰ τὸ ἀπόδειπνο, ἔλεγα τὴν εὐχὴ στὸ κελὶ καθισμένος σ' ἕνα σκαμνί. Εἶχα μία καλὴ κατάσταση. Ξαφνικὰ ἀκούω διάφορα ὄργανα, κλαρίνα καὶ νταούλια. Παραξευτέηκα. «Τὶ εἶναι τοῦτα πάλλ», εἶπα. «Τὸ πανηγύρι πέρασε. Ποιοὶ παίζουν τώρα ὄργανα ἐκεῖ στὸν ξενώνα;». Σηκώθηκα ἀπ' τὸ σκαμνί καὶ κοίταξα ἀπ' τὸ παράθυρο ἔξω. Ἦταν παντοῦ ἡσυχία. Τότε κατάλαβα ὅ,τι ὁ διάβολος ἤθελε νὰ διακόψω τὴν προσευχή.

- Ακούγονταν καθαρὰ τὰ ὄργανα, Γέροντα, ρώτησε ἕνας ἀπ' τὴν παρέα. Μήπως νομίζατε ὅ,τι κάτι ἀκούγονταν;

- Τὶ λές, βρὲ παλικάρι; Ἄκουγα τὰ ὄργανα, ὅπως ἀκούγονται καὶ στὸ πανηγύρι στὶς 8 Σεπτεμβρίου. Εἶχαν ὄρεξη οἱ ὄργανοπαῖχτες τοῦ διαβόλου. Ἄντηχοῦσαν οἱ ρεματιές.

- Μετὰ, Γέροντα, ἡσυχάσατε; Σταμάτησαν οἱ πειρασμοί;

- Ὁχι. Ὁ διάβολος δὲν ἀπογοητεύεται εὐκολα. Ἐγὼ ξανακάθισα στὸ σκαμνί, γιὰ νὰ συνεχίσω τὴν εὐχὴ. Προσπάθησα νὰ συγκεντρωθῶ, ἀλλὰ δὲν μὲ ἄφησε. Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγη ὥρα γέμισε τὸ κελὶ μου μὲ δυνατὸ φῶς. Ξαφνιάστηκα πάλι. Εἶδα ἀκόμα τὴν ὁροφὴ νὰ ἐξαφανίζεται καὶ νὰ μπαίνει στὸ κελὶ μία φωτεινὴ στήλη, πού ξεκινοῦσε ἀπ' τὸ ὕψος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. Στὴ κορυφὴ αὐτῆς τῆς στήλης ὑπῆρχε ἕνας ξανθὸς νέος, πού ἐμοίαζε μὲ τὸ Χριστό. Δὲν ἔβλεπα, ὁμως, ὀλόκληρο τὸ πρόσωπό του. Σηκώθηκα ἀπ' τὸ σκαμνί, γιὰ νὰ δῶ καλύτερα. Ἐκεῖνη τὴ στιγμὴ μία ἐσωτερικὴ φωνὴ μὲ διαβεβαίωσε ὅ,τι εἶδα τὸ Χριστό. Ἐγὼ ἀντέδρασα ἀμέσως. Ἐκανα τὸ σταυρὸ μου καὶ μονολόγησα: «Ποιὸς εἶμαι ἐγώ, πού ἀξιώθηκα νὰ δῶ τὸ Χριστό; Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἀνάξιος». Αὐτὸ ἦταν. Τὸ φῶς καὶ ὁ δῆθεν Χριστὸς χάθηκαν. Ἡ ὁροφὴ ἦταν στὴ θέση της.

- Αὐτές οἱ καταστάσεις δὲν προκαλοῦν φόβο, Γέροντα; Νομίζω ὅ,τι ἐγὼ προσωπικὰ δὲν θ' ἄντεχα, εἶπε ἕνας ἄλλος.

- Τι νὰ ἔκανα; Μποροῦσα νὰ τὸν ἀποφύγω τὸν διάβολο; Ὅμως, πρέπει νὰ ξέρετε ὅ,τι χρειάζεται θάρρος καὶ προσευχή. Μὴ νομίζετε ὅ,τι ὁ διάβολος εἶναι πολὺ δυνατός. Δειλός καὶ φοβητσιάρης εἶναι.

- Δὲν πρέπει, ὅμως, νὰ τὸν πιστεύουμε. Τι νὰ σᾶς πῶ! Κάποτε προθυμοποιήθηκε νὰ μ' ἐξυπηρετήσει. Θυμᾶμαι, πού ὅταν ἔφυγα ἀπ' τὸ Στόμιο καὶ πῆγα στὸ Σινᾶ, στὸ ἀσκητήριο τῆς Ἁγίας Ἐπιστήμης, ὁ διάβολος συχνὰ μ' ἐνοχλοῦσε. Ἐκεῖ τὸ κελλάκι εἶχε τέσσερα σκαλάκια καὶ πιὸ πέρα ὑπῆρχαν διάφορες σπηλιές. Ὅταν εἶχε ἀστροφεγγιά, μοῦ ἄρρεσε νὰ βγαίνω ἔξω καὶ νὰ τρυπῶνω σὲ κάποια σπηλιά, γιὰ νὰ κάνω τὴν προσευχή μου πιὸ ἔντονη; Μία φορά λοιπὸν φόρεσα τὴν κάπα μου καὶ βγῆκα ἔξω. Δὲν εἶχε πολὺ φῶς. Εἶχα ἓνα τσακμάκι καὶ τὸ ἀναβόσβηνα, γιὰ νὰ βλέπω τὰ σκαλοπάτια καὶ τὰ βράχια. Κάποια στιγμή τὸ τσακμάκι δὲν ἄναβε. Τότε ἓνα δυνατό φῶς, σὰν νὰ ἦταν ἀπὸ προβολέα, ἦρθε ἀπ' τὸν ἀπέναντι βράχο καὶ φώτισε τὰ πάντα γύρω. Ἐγὼ ἀγρίεψα λίγο καὶ ψιθύρισα: «Νὰ μοῦ λείψουν τέτοια φῶτα». Καὶ ἀμέσως ξαναμπήκα στὸ κελί. Εὐθύς τὸ φῶς χάθηκε. Εἶδατε τὸν διάβολο, μοῦ ἀχρήστεψε τὸ τσακμάκι καὶ θέλησε νὰ μ' ἐξυπηρετήσει.

- Σκέφθηκε: «Κρίμα δὲν εἶναι αὐτός ὁ καλὸς καλόγερος νὰ παιδεύεται; Ἄς τοῦ δώσω ἐγὼ φῶς!». Εἶδατε καλοσύνη! Ἦθελε νὰ μὲ φωτίσει!

- Γέροντα, μετὰ ἀπὸ μία τέτοια παρουσία τοῦ διαβόλου, τί νιώθει κανεὶς. Αἰσθάνεται δυνατός ἢ τὸν μαραζώνει ὁ φόβος;

- Εἶναι φοβερὸ νὰ βλέπεις τὸν διάβολο δίπλα σου. Ὅμως, ἐμεῖς ἔχουμε τὸ Χριστὸ μέσα μας καὶ μποροῦμε ν' ἀντιμετωπίζουμε τὸν διάβολο χωρὶς πανικό. Εἶναι μεγάλο κατόρθωμα νὰ τὸν διώχνεις ἀπὸ κοντά σου μετὰ τὴν προσευχή.

- Γέροντα, σ' εὐχαριστοῦμε γιὰ τὶς ἐμπειρίες, πού μᾶς διηγήθηκες, εἶπαν ὅλοι μετὰ μία φωνή.

- Τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν Παναγία νὰ εὐχαριστεῖτε, εἶπε ὁ Γέροντας καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ τοὺς ἀποχαιρετάει.



Ἡ θεϊκὴ πληροφορία τῆς εὐπρόσδεκτης προσευχῆς εἶναι ἡ θεία παρηγοριὰ πού νιώθει μετὰ τὴν προσευχὴ ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Ἀνάλογα μετὰ τὴν θυσία καὶ τὴν προσευχὴ πού κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του ἢ γιὰ τὸν συνάνθρωπό του, θὰ δεχθεῖ καὶ τὴν θεία βοήθεια. Γιατὶ ὅποιος κουράζεται γιὰ τὸν πλησίον του ἀπὸ καθαρὴ ἀγάπη, ξεκουράζεται μετὰ τὴν κούραση. Ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνος πού ἀγαπάει τὸν ἑαυτό του καὶ τεμπελιάζει, κουράζεται καὶ μετὰ τὸ νὰ κάθεται.

Γέροντας Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης (+1994)

Ἡ Γαστριμαργία

Ἀπὸ τὸ φυλλάδιο «Πῶς θὰ Σωθοῦμε», ἐκδ. Ἰ. Μ. Παρακλήτου.

Ἡ γαστριμαργία εἶναι ἓνα ἐλάττωμα, ἓνα πάθος, πού ἡμας παρακινεῖ νὰ τρῶμε καὶ νὰ πίνουμε περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσο χρειάζεται τὸ σῶμα μας γιὰ νὰ συντηρηθεῖ. Οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες, καὶ μάλιστα ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, λέει ὅ,τι πρόκειται γιὰ βαριὰ ἁμαρτία, ὅπως ἀποδεικνύεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους: Αὐτὴ ἐξόρισε τὸν Ἀδὰμ ἀπὸ τὸν παράδεισο, αὐτὴ προκάλεσε τὸν μεγάλο κατακλυσμὸ, αὐτὴ ἔκανε τοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες εἰδωλολάτρες, αὐτὴ ἔριξε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σὲ μύρια ἄλλα κακά.

Ἡ γαστριμαργία εἶναι ἡ θύρα, μέσ' ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία περνοῦν πολλὰ πάθη καὶ ἁμαρτήματα, μετὰ πρώτη τὴν πορνεία. Ὅποιος, λοιπὸν, νικήσει τὴν γαστριμαργία, πολὺ εὐκολὰ θὰ νικήσει στὴ συνέχεια καὶ τ' ἄλλα πάθη, πού αὐτὴ τρέφει.

Στὴ γαστριμαργία συνήθως πέφτουμε μετὰ πέντε τρόπους, δηλαδὴ σὲ σχέση: α) Μετὰ τὸ χρόνο, ὅταν τρῶμε συχνότερα ἀπ' ὅσο πρέπει ἢ νωρίτερα ἀπὸ τὴν κατάλληλη ὥρα. β) Μετὰ τὴν ποσότητα, ὅταν τρῶμε καὶ πίνουμε περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσο μας χρειάζεται. γ) Μετὰ τὴν ποιότητα, ὅταν ἐπιζητοῦμε πλούσια, ἀκριβὰ καὶ ἐξεζητημένα φαγητά. δ) Μετὰ τὸν τρόπο, ὅταν τρῶμε μετὰ βουλιμία. Καὶ ε) μετὰ τὴν μέριμνα, ὅταν σπαταλᾶμε μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ πολυτιμοῦ χρόνου τῆς ζωῆς μας σὲ γαστρονομικὲς φροντίδες καὶ ἀσχολίες.

Ἡ γαστριμαργία εἶναι πάντοτε ἁμαρτήματα, πλὴν ὅμως ὄχι θανάσιμα, ὅταν ἀπλὰ προτιμᾶς τὰ πιὸ νόστιμα καὶ φροντισμένα φαγητά ἢ δὲν τηρεῖς μετὰ ἀπόλυτὴ ἀκρίβεια τὸν κανόνα τῶν καθορισμένων γευμάτων ἢ τρῶς περιστασιακὰ λίγο περισσότερο κ.ο.κ. Γίνεται ὅμως θανάσιμα, ἅ) ὅταν προξενεῖ βλάβη καὶ σκάνδαλο στὸν πλησίον, β) ὅταν γνωρίζεις ὅ,τι θὰ πάθεις κάποια ζημιὰ (λ.χ. σοβαρὴ ἀσθένεια) καὶ δὲν ἐγκρατεῦσαι, γ) ὅταν ξοδεύεις πάρα πολλὰ χρήματα γιὰ νὰ τρῶς πλούσια, τὴ στιγμή πού ὁ πλησίον σου στερεῖται τὰ ἀναγκαῖα καὶ δὲν τὸν ἐλεεῖς, καὶ δ) ὅταν χωρὶς νὰ ἐμποδίζεσαι ἀπὸ κάποια ἄρρώστια, δὲν τηρεῖς τὶς καθορισμένες ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας νηστείες.

Αὐτὰ ὅλα εἶναι θανάσιμα ἁμαρτήματα. Μὰ κι ἂν δὲν ἦταν, θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ πολεμοῦσαμε τὴν γαστριμαργία, γιατί μᾶς βλάπτει καὶ σωματικά. Εἶναι πιὰ πασίγνωστο, πῶς οἱ κοιλιόδουλοι καὶ οἱ μέθυστοι καταστρέφουν τὴν ὑγεία τους, φθείρουν τὸν ὀργανισμό τους καὶ ἔχουν κακὸ τέλος. Ἀπεναντίας, οἱ λιτοδίαιτοι ἔχουν ὡς τὰ γεράματά τους καλὴ ὑγεία, ζωτικότητα καὶ εὐρωστία.

Μεγαλύτερη ἀξία, βέβαια, ἀπὸ τὴν ὑγεία τοῦ σώματος ἔχει ἡ ὑγεία τῆς ψυχῆς, πού βλάπτεται ἐπίσης ἀπὸ τὴν γαστριμαργία, ἀφοῦ, ὅπως εἶπαμε, ἀπ' αὐτὴ γεννιοῦνται πολλὰ ἄλλα πάθη. Γιὰ νὰ λυτρωθεῖς λοιπὸν ἀπὸ τὸ ἐλάττωμα τοῦτο, πρόσεξε ὅσα θὰ διαβάσεις παρακάτω.

Πρῶτα-πρῶτα μὴν ξεχνᾶς, πόσο μεγάλο εἶναι τὸ βάρος, πόση ἢ ταλαιπωρία πού προξενοῦν στὸ στομάχι τὰ πολλὰ καὶ καρυκευμένα φαγητά, καὶ πόσο μικρή, ἀντίθετα, ἢ ἀπόλαυσή τους, πού δὲν κρατάει παρὰ μόνο ὄση ὥρα τὰ ἔχεις στὸ στόμα σου. Μόλις περάσουν τὸ λαιμό, δὲν μένει πιά ἴχνος νοστιμιᾶς καὶ ἡδονῆς. Πές μου, ἀπὸ τὰ τόσα συμπόσια καὶ τὰ γιορταστικά τραπέζια στὰ ὁποῖα βρέθηκες, ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς λιχουδιές πού γεύτηκες, ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ γλυκόπιστα κρασιά πού δοκίμασες, τί σοῦ ἔμεινε; Ἀσφαλῶς τίποτα. Εἴτε ἔφαγες εἴτε δὲν ἔφαγες, τὸ ἴδιο εἶναι. Γι' αὐτό, ὅταν ὁ λογισμὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία σὲ σπρώχνουν στὴ γαστριμαργία, ξεγέλασε τα με τὴ σκέψη πὼς ἔφαγες καὶ ἤπιες ἤδη, καὶ πὼς ἢ ἀπόλαυση πέρασε. Καὶ πράγματι, ἂν ἀπόψε ἐσὺ ἀπολαύσεις διάφορα γευστικά φαγητά καὶ ποτά, καὶ ἕνας φτωχὸς ἢ ἕνας ἀσκητὴς περάσει μόνο με ψωμί καὶ νερό, πές μου, αὔριο τὸ πρωὶ θὰ ἔχετε καμιὰ διαφορὰ στὴν αἴσθηση τῆς γεύσης; Ὅχι, θ' ἀποκριθεῖς. Καὶ σωστά. Θὰ ἔχετε ὁμως, προσθέτω ἐγώ, διαφορὰ στὴν ψυχικὴ κατάσταση, γιατί ἐσὺ θὰ ἔχεις ὄχι μόνο τὸ στομάχι σου βαρὺ, ἀπ' τὰ μπαχαρικά καὶ τὸ κρασοπότι, μὰ καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ σου βαριά ἀπ' τὴν κραιπάλη, ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνος θὰ ἔχει καὶ τὸ στομάχι του ἑλαφρὺ καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ του ὠφελημένη με τὸ μισθὸ τῆς φτώχειας καὶ τῆς ἀσκήσεως.

Ὑστερα, νὰ θυμᾶσαι πάντα τὶς ζημιές πού σοῦ προξενεῖ αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος, τὴ σπατάλη, τὸν κόπο, τὸ χασομέρι, τὶς ἀρρώστιες, τὴν ἀπροθυμία στὰ πνευματικὰ ἔργα, καὶ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα τὴν αἰώνια πείνα καὶ δίψα, πού σὲ περιμένει μετὰ τὸν σωματικὸ θάνατο στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ. Γιατί ὁ Κύριος τὸ εἶπε ξεκάθαρα: «Οὐαὶ ὑμῖν οἱ ἐμπελησμένοι, ὅ,τι πεινάσετε—ἀλλήμονο σ' ἐσὰς πού τώρα εἶστε χορτάτοι, γιατί θὰ πεινάσετε.» (Λουκ. 6:25).

Νὰ θυμᾶσαι ἀκόμα τὸ μεγάλο δεῖπνο, γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο μίλησε ὁ Χριστὸς (Λουκ. 14:16-24) καὶ ὅπου εἴμαστε ὅλοι καλεσμένοι. Ἄν ποθεῖς ν' ἀπολαύσεις τὸ πανευφρόσυνο καὶ τρισευλογημένο οὐράνιο δεῖπνο, πού θὰ διαρκέσει αἰώνια, ἀσκήσου τώρα στὴν ἐγκράτεια, πού θὰ σοῦ ἐξασφαλίσει τὶς προϋποθέσεις τῆς συμμετοχῆς σ' αὐτό. Γιατί πραγματικὰ εἶναι « μακάριος ὃς φάγεται ἄριστον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ—μακάριος ὃποιος θὰ πάρει μέρος στὸ τραπέζι τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ» (Λουκ. 14:15). Νὰ θυμᾶσαι, τέλος, τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Λυτρωτοῦ μας, πού νήστεψε στὴν ἔρημο σαράντα ἡμέρες καὶ μετὰ κατατρόπωσε τὸ διάβολο (Ματθ. 4:1-11), καθὼς καὶ τόσων ἁγίων καὶ ἀσκητῶν, πού, ὅπως διαβάζουμε στὰ συναξάρια, ἔκαναν καταπληκτικὰ θαύματα κι ἔβγαζαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τὰ δαιμόνια, χάρι στὴν προσευχὴ καὶ τὴ νηστεία τους. Αὐτό, ἄλλωστε, τὸ βεβαίωσε καὶ ὁ Κύριος, λέγοντας ὅ,τι «τοῦτο δὲ τὸ γένος οὐκ ἐκπορεύεται εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ καὶ νηστείᾳ— τὸ γένος τῶν δαιμόνων δὲν βγαίνει παρὰ μόνο με προσευχὴ καὶ νηστεία» (Ματθ. 17:21).

Πρέπει, ὁμως, νὰ ξέρεις καὶ τοῦτο, πὼς ὅποιος νηστεύει καὶ ἐγκρατεῦται ἀπὸ φαγητὰ καὶ ποτὰ με γογγυσμὸ καὶ ἀπροθυμία, χάνει τὸ μισθὸ του. Ὁ γνήσιος ἐργάτης τῆς ἐγκράτειας εἶναι ἰλαρὸς, ὀλοπρόθυμος, ὅλος ἀγαλλίαση, γιατί ξέρει πόσο ὠφελεῖται ἀπ' αὐτὴν καὶ τὸ κάνει κατ' εὐδοκία Θεοῦ.[1] Ὅποιος πάλι νηστεύει γιὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπαρέσκεια, δὲν ἐκπληρώνει τὸ σκοπὸ τῆς ἐγκράτειας, πού εἶναι ἡ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Πιὸ πολὺ ἀπὸ τὴν πολυφαγία νὰ φοβᾶσαι τὴν πολυποσία, γιατί τὸ κρασί, τὸ ρακὶ καὶ ὅλα τὰ ὅμοια ποτὰ θολώνουν τὸ νοῦ καὶ διεγείρουν τὰ σαρκικὰ πάθη. Ὅταν μάλιστα φτάσει νὰ πιεῖ κανεὶς τόσο πολὺ, ὥστε νὰ μεθύσει, χάνει τὸν ἔλεγχο τῶν πράξεών του, γίνεται παιχνίδι στὰ χέρια τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων, καὶ μπορεῖ νὰ φτάσει ἀκούσια ὡς τὸ ἐγκλημα. Γι' αὐτό πρέπει νὰ φυλάγονται ἀπὸ τὴν οἰνοποσία ὅσοι ποθοῦν σωτηρία ψυχῆς, καὶ προπαντὸς οἱ νέοι, οἱ κληρικοὶ καὶ οἱ μοναχοί.

Ἡ σάρκα, ἀδελφέ, εἶναι ἐχθρὸς πανοῦργος καὶ δόλιος. Ὅσο τὴν τρέφεις καὶ τὴν περιποιεῖσαι, τόσο σὲ πολεμᾷ καὶ σὲ σπρώχνει στὴν ἁμαρτία. Ὅσο τὴν ἀφήνεις νηστική καὶ τὴν ταλαιπωρεῖς, τόσο ἐξασθενίζει καὶ ὑποχωρεῖ. Ἄν, λοιπόν, θέλεις νὰ τὴν ὑποτάξεις στὸ νοῦ, πολέμησέ τὴν με τὴν ἐγκράτεια, τὴ μητέρα τῶν ἀρετῶν καὶ τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ.

† † †

[1] Εὐδοκία: Εἶναι ἡ καλὴ διάθεση, ἡ ἐπιδοκιμασία, ἡ εὐνοια, ἡ πλήρης εὐαρέσκεια. Ὅ,τι ἔγινε, γίνεται καὶ θὰ γίνε, λαμβάνει χώρα εἴτε «κατ' εὐδοκία Θεοῦ» εἴτε «κατὰ παραχώρησή Του». Στὴν «εὐδοκία» ἐνεργεῖ ὁ Θεὸς «ἐπηρεασμένος» ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπακοὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἐνῶ στὴν «παραχώρηση» ὁ Θεὸς ὑποχωρεῖ, ἐπειδὴ «Τὸν ἐπηρεάζει» τὸ θέλημα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (ὁ ἐγωισμὸς του). Ὅ,τι κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος «κατ' εὐδοκία Θεοῦ» τὸν ἀγιάζει καὶ τὸν ὀδηγεῖ στὴ σωτηρία. Ὅ,τι κάνει «κατὰ παραχώρηση τοῦ Θεοῦ» τὸν ὀδηγεῖ στὴ δοκιμασία ἢ στὴν ἀπώλεια τῆς σωτηρίας του, ἐὰν δὲν μετανοήσει.



Ρωτήσαμε τὸν Γέροντα Πορφύριο γιὰ μία συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση νὰ μᾶς πεῖ πὼς ἐργάζεται ὁ διάβολος, κι ἄρχισε νὰ μᾶς ἐξηγεῖ.

- Νά! Μᾶς ἔλεγε, αὐτὸ τὸ δαιμόνιο στηρίζεται ἐκεῖνο τὸ δαιμόνιο, κι ἐκεῖνο συντηρεῖ τὸ ἐξῆς δαιμόνιο. Ἄν ὁ ἄνθρωπος κτυπήσει τὸ βασικὸ δαιμόνιο, τότε καταρρέουν καὶ τὰ ἐπόμενα. Κλειδί δὲ στὸν πνευματικὸ ἀγώνα εἶναι ἡ νηστεία καὶ ἡ λογικὴ διατροφή, ἀλλὰ θεμέλιο καὶ βάσεις εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, ἡ ταπείνωσης καὶ ἡ ἐρώτησης, ἢ ὑποταγὴ σὲ γέροντα. Ὁ ἀγώνας πού γίνεται με τὸ θέλημά μας εἶναι μπερδεμένος.

Ὁ Ἐθνικός Ὕμνος τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων

Τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Χολέβα, Πολιτικοῦ Ἐπιστήμονος ἀπὸ τὸ «Ἀντίβαρο».



**Διονύσιος Σολωμὸς
(1798-1857)**

Κάθε Μάϊο ἡ μνήμη μας στρέφεται στὸν ἱστορικό ἐκεῖνο Μάϊο τοῦ 1823, ὅταν ὁ Διονύσιος Σολωμὸς ἔγραφε μέσα σὲ σύντομο διάστημα τὶς 158 στροφές τοῦ Ὕμνου εἰς τὴν Ἐλευθερίαν.

Ὁ Σολωμὸς βρισκόταν στὴν γενέτειρά του Ζάκυνθο καὶ παρακολουθοῦσε ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ τὴν πολιορκία τοῦ Μεσολογγίου. Ἦταν ἐγκατεστημένος στὸ σπίτι τοῦ φίλου του Στράνη, στὸν ὁμώνυμο λόφο λίγο πῶς ἐξῶ ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη. Λέγεται μάλιστα ὅ,τι σὲ

στιγμές βαθεῖας συγκινήσεως φώναζε: «Βάστα καημένο Μεσολόγγι!» καὶ ἔγραφε. Ἐνεπνέετο ἀπὸ τὸν δίκαιο ἀγῶνα τῶν Ἑλλήνων πὸν εἶχε ξεκινήσει δύο χρόνια πρὶν.

Ὁ ἐπαναστατημένος Μωρηῆς ἀπέιχε μερικὰ μίλια ἀπὸ τὶς ἀκτές τῆς Ἀγγλοκρατούμενης Ζακύνθου καὶ τὰ νέα τῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως ἔφθαναν γρήγορα. Τὸ ποίημα τοῦ Σολωμοῦ μελοποιήθηκε ἀργότερα ἀπὸ τὸν Κερκυραῖο συνθέτη Νικόλαο Χαλκιοπούλο Μάντζαρο, καὶ τὸ 1865, μὲ Βασιλικὸ Διάταγμα, ὁρίσθηκε νὰ παιανίζεται ὡς ὁ Ἐθνικός Ὕμνος τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Ὁ ποιητὴς δὲν πρόλαβε νὰ ζήσει αὐτὴ τὴν χαρὰ, διότι εἶχε πεθάνει τὸ 1857. Τούλάχιστον πρόλαβε νὰ δεῖ ἓνα μικρὸ μέρος τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐλεύθερο. Ὁ Ὕμνος του εἶχε ἐπιδράσει θετικὰ στὸ ἠθικὸ τῶν ἐπαναστατῶν, ὅπως εἶχε συμβῆ καὶ μὲ τὸν Θούριο τοῦ Ρήγα. Εἶναι ἄραγε συμπτωματικὸ ὅ,τι ὁ Σολωμὸς γεννήθηκε τὸ 1798, δηλαδὴ τὴν χρονιά κατὰ τὴν ὁποία στραγγαλίσθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους στὸ Βελιγράδι ὁ Ρήγας Βελεστινλῆς;

Πολλὰ ἔχουν γραφεῖ καὶ λεχθεῖ γιὰ τὸ ποίημα αὐτό, τὸ ὁποῖο προκαλεῖ ρίγη συγκινήσεως σὲ κάθε Ἕλληνα, ἐντὸς ἢ ἐκτὸς Ἑλλάδος. Πιστεύω ὅ,τι πρέπει νὰ μείνουμε λίγο περισσότερο στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Χριστιανικὴ διάσταση τοῦ ἔργου. Ὁ Σολωμὸς θεωρεῖ καὶ διακηρύσσει ὅ,τι ὁ Ἀγῶνας τοῦ Γένους δὲν γίνεται μόνο γιὰ τὴν Ἐλευθερία τῆς Πατρίδος, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἡ θρησκευτικὴ τοῦ Σολωμοῦ εἶναι διάχυτη σὲ πάμπολλα ἔργα του. Εἶναι δὲ ἐντυπωσιακὴ ἡ σύνδεσή του μὲ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ἂν λάβουμε ὑπ' ὄψιν ὅ,τι ἔλειψε πολλὰ χρόνια σπουδάζοντας στὴν Ἰταλία μὲ Ρωμαιοκαθολικούς δασκάλους. Ὁ καθηγητὴς Ἡρακλῆς Καλλέργης γράφει σχετικά:

«Ἄς προσθέσουμε ὅ,τι, ὅσο ὁ Σολωμὸς προχωρεῖ στὴ μελέτη τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας καὶ ὅσο ἐμβαθύνει

στὸ νόημα τῆς ποίησης, τόσο ἡ θρησκευτικότητά του συνδέεται στενότερα μὲ τὰ ἰδανικά τῆς πατρίδας καὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Ὅσο περνοῦν τὰ χρόνια, ἡ πίστη του παίρνει Ἑλληνικότερο χρῶμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἰδανικὸ τῆς πατρίδας θεμελιώνεται στὴν θρησκευτικὴ αὐτὴ πίστη καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ παίρνει δύναμη καὶ βάθος. Ἡ συνύφανση αὐτῆ τῶν δύο ἰδανικῶν, πὸν ὀρίζουν ὀλόκληρο τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Σολωμοῦ, ἐκδηλώνεται ἐκτυπα στὸν «Ὕμνον εἰς τὴν Ἐλευθερίαν», ὅπου, καθὼς παρατηρεῖ ὁ ἀείμνηστος καθηγητὴς Νικόλαος Τωμαδάκης, ἡ Ἐλευθερία, ἡ Ἑλλάδα καὶ ἡ θρησκεία ὀρίζονται μὲ νέα πλατύτητα ὄρια, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν παράδοση, τὴν πίστη τοῦ Ἐθνους καὶ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ τοῦ παρόντος, ἐνῶ μετὰ ἀπὸ τόσους αἰῶνες ποιητικῆς ἀδράνειας ἐνώθησαν πάλι ὁ θαυμασμός πρὸς τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ ἡ πίστη στὴ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ». (Ἄρθρο «Ὁ Θρησκευτικὸς Σολωμὸς», περιοδικὸ Κρητικὸ Ὁρίζοντες, τεῦχος ἀρ. 9, Ἡράκλειο 1999).

Τὸ κατ' ἐξοχὴν σημεῖο τοῦ Ὕμνου ὅπου ὁ ποιητὴς διατρανώνει τὴν πνευματικὴ συμπόρευση Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ Ἑλληνισμοῦ εἶναι οἱ στροφές 88 – 92, πὸν ἀναφέρονται στὴν πρώτη πολιορκία τοῦ Μεσολογγίου. Τὶς παραθέτουμε, διότι δυστυχῶς πολλοὶ συμπατριῶτες μας γνωρίζουν μόνον τὶς δύο πρῶτες στροφές τοῦ ὕμνου.

Πηγες εἰς τὸ Μεσολόγγι
Τὴν ἡμέρα τοῦ Χριστοῦ,
Μέρα πὸν ἄνθισαν οἱ λόγγοι
Γιὰ τὸ τέκνο τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Σοῦλθε ἐμπρὸς λαμποκοπῶντας
Ἡ Θρησκεία μ' ἓνα Σταυρό,
Καὶ τὸ δάκτυλο κινῶντας
Ὅπου ἀνεῖ τὸν οὐρανό,

Σ' αὐτό, ἐφώνηξε, τὸ χῶμα
Στάσου ὀλόρθη, Ἐλευθερία·
Καὶ φιλῶντας σου τὸ στόμα
Μπαίνει μὲς στὴν ἐκκλησιά.

Εἰς τὴν Τράπεζα σιμώνει,
Καὶ τὸ σύγνεφο τὸ ἀχνό
Γύρω-γύρω της πυκνώνει
Ποῦ σκορπάει τὸ θυμιατό.

Ἄγρικαίει τὴν ψαλμωδία
Ὅπου ἐδίδαξεν αὐτή·
Βλέπει τὴ φωταγωγία
Στοὺς Ἁγίους ἐμπρὸς χυτή.

Εἶναι ἀξιοσημεῖωτο ὅ,τι γιὰ νὰ ἐξηγήσει τὸν στίχο «μέρα πὸν ἄνθισαν οἱ λόγγοι» ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ποιητὴς γράφει στὶς σημειώσεις του πὸν συνοδεύουν τὸν Ὕμνο: *Ἀγαλλιάσθω ἔρημος καὶ ἀνθείτω ὡς κρίνον.* (Ἡσαΐας κεφ. λε'). Ἐνῶ σαφὴ ἀναφορὰ στὸ κεφ. κα' τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως τοῦ Ἰωάννου κάνουν οἱ στροφές 97 καὶ 98 τοῦ Ὕμνου:

Μέ φωνή πού καταπαίθει
 Προχωρώντας όμιλεῖς·
 Σήμερον' άπιστοι, έγεννήθη,
 Ναί τοῦ κόσμου ό Λυτρωτής.
 Αὐτός λέγει... Άφοκρασθήτε.
 Έγώ εἰμ' Άλφα, Όμέγα έγώ·
 Πέστε πού θά άποκρυφθήτε
 Έσεῖς όλοι άν όργισθῶ;

Η προσήλωση τοῦ Σολωμοῦ στήν Όρθόδοξη Έκκλησία γίνεται φανερή καί άπό τόν θρῆνο του γιά τόν άπαγχονισμό τοῦ Άγίου Πατριάρχου Γρηγορίου Ε'. Ό θρῆνος καταγράφεται στίς στροφές 135 καί 136 τοῦ Ύμνου.

Όλοι κλαῦστε· άποθαμένους
 Ό άρχηγός τῆς Έκκλησιᾶς·
 Κλαῦστε, κλαῦστε· κρεμασμένος
 Όσάν νάτανε φονιάς.

Έχει όλάνοικτο τό στόμα
 Π' ώρες πρώτα εἶχε γευθεῖ
 Γ' Άγιον Αἶμα, τ' Άγιον Σῶμα·
 Λές πός θε νά ζαναβγεῖ.

Ποιά ἦταν τά ιδανικά τῶν άγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821; Σαφῶς ἡ Χριστιανική Πίστη καί ἡ Έλευθερία τῆς Πατρίδος. Αὐτά δηλώνουν τά κείμενά τους. Κι όμως, σήμερα κάποιος άμφισβητοῦν τήν Ιστορία, θέλουν νά τήν ζαναγράψουν γιά δικούς τους ιδιοτελεῖς σκοπούς. Άς μήν βιάζονται, όμως, διότι ματαιοπονοῦν. Μέσα στόν Έθνικό Ύμνο τῶν Έλλήνων, ό Διονύσιος Σολωμός διερμηνεύει ξεκάθαρα τά αίσθήματα όλων τῶν έξεγερμένων Ρωμηῶν καί βάζει αὐτά τά λόγια στό στόμα τῆς Έλευθερίας (στροφές 148 καί 149):

Τέτοια άφήστενε φροντίδα·
 Όλο τό αἶμα όπου χυθεῖ
 Γιά θρησκεία καί γιά πατρίδα
 όμοιαν έχει τήν τιμή.

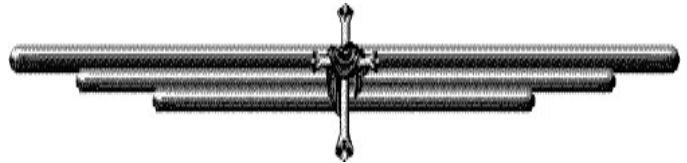
Στό αἶμα αὐτό πού δέν πονεῖτε
 Γιά πατρίδα, γιά θρησκεία,
 Σᾶς όρκίζω άγκαλιασθήτε
 Σάν άδέλφια γκαρδιακά.

Ό Ύμνος εἰς τήν Έλευθερίαν τοῦ Σολωμοῦ μπορεῖ κάλλιστα νά όνομασθεῖ καί ό Έθνικός Ύμνος τῶν Όρθόδοξων. Γι' αὐτό καί ό π. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός παρατηρεῖ χαρακτηριστικά:

«Μέσα στό πλαίσιο αὐτό μποροῦν νά θεωρηθοῦν Όρθόδοξα οἱ άναφορές του στό ύπερκόσμιο φῶς. Στήν ποίησή του κυριαρχεῖ ἡ οὐράνια φωτοχυσία. Η έλευθερία—ό μόνιμος έρωτάς του—εἶναι λουσιμένη στό φῶς: “Φῶς τό χέρι, φῶς τό πόδι, κι όλα γύρω σου εἶναι φῶς”. Έντελῶς πασχάλινῆ ἡ άτμόσφαιρά του: “Νῦν πάντα πεπλήρωται φωτός, οὐρανός τε καί γῆ καί τά καταχθόνια” (ἴδε στροφή 95 τοῦ Ύμνου). Τό φῶς όμως αὐτό δέν εἶναι φυσικό-κτιστό, διότι άναβλύζει άπό τήν άγία Τράπεζα(“γλυκοφέγγει άπ' τῆ θυρίδα τῆς

άγιας Τράπεζας τό φῶς”. Εἰς τόν θάνατον τοῦ Λόρδου Μπάυρον, στροφή 111) καί εἶναι οὐράνιο (“τό φῶς πού σέ στολίζει... σάν ἡλίου φεγγοβολή καί μακρόθεν σπινθηρίζει δέν εἶναι, όχι, άπό τῆ γῆ”. Ύμνος εἰς τήν Έλευθερίαν, στροφή 94).» (Άπό τό βιβλίό του Ίχνηλασία Πνευματικῆς Σχοινοβασίας, έκδ, Τέρτιος, Κατερίνη 1999, σελ. 212).

Ό Διονύσιος Σολωμός δίδει μαρτυρία Όρθοδοξίας καί Έλληνισμοῦ. Αὐτοί πού άρνοῦνται τήν σύνδεση τῆς Όρθοδοξίας μέ τήν εθνική μας ταυτότητα μήπως θέλουν άραγε νά καταργήσουμε καί τόν Έθνικό μας Ύμνο;



Στατιστικά Εφιαλτικά

Άπό ένα Έλληνορθόδοξο φυλλάδιο—τοῦ 2001!

Καρπός τῆς φυγοτεκνίας, τῆς άποφυγῆς τῆς τεκνογονίας καί τῶν έκτρώσεων εἶναι ό έθνικός μαρασμός. Χθές ἡ Ελλάδα ἦταν παιδότοπος, σήμερα εἶναι γηροκομεῖο, αὔριο θά εἶναι νεκροταφεῖο.

Τά 30 τελευταῖα χρόνια μειώθηκαν οἱ γεννήσεις κατὰ 35%, ἐνῶ αὐξήθηκαν οἱ θάνατοι κατὰ 45%. Τό 1980 ἡ Ελλάδα ἦταν δεύτερη στό δείκτη γονιμότητας, ἀνάμεσα στίς χῶρες τῆς ΕΕ. Τό 1999 κατέχει τῆ 12^η θέση.

Τό 1969 οἱ γεννήσεις ἦσαν 154.077, οἱ θάνατοι 71.825. Τό έτος 1999 οἱ γεννήσεις ἦσαν 100.265, οἱ θάνατοι 103.102. Σήμερα οἱ γεννήσεις εἶναι 98.000, οἱ θάνατοι 120.000. Τό 1998 στό μαιευτήριο «Άλεξάνδρα» τό 65% τῶν γεννήσεων ἦσαν άπό άλλοδαπές μητέρες.

Τό 1980 εἶχαμε 1.000.000 παιδιά στό Δημοτικό. Τό 1990 813.353. Τό 2000 643.475. Σέ 30 χρόνια δέν θά ύπάρχει μαθητής στό Δημοτικό! Τό 1990 εἶχαμε 7.653 δημοτικά. Τό 2000 6.367. Δηλαδή σέ δέκα χρόνια έκλεισαν 1.300 σχολεῖα άπό έλλειψη παιδιῶν. Σέ πέντε χρόνια οἱ άλλοδαποὶ μαθητές παρουσίασαν αὐξηση 300%. Οἱ Ἕλληνες μαθητές εἶχαν μείωση 30%. Έπομένως τό 2.030 οἱ άλλοδαποὶ μαθητές θά εἶναι 600.000, ἐνῶ οἱ Έλληνες μαθητές 300.000, πρωτοβάθμιας καί δευτεροβάθμιας παιδείας.

Τό 2030 τά άνω τῶν 60 ἐτῶν άτομα θά εἶναι τό 35%. Τά μέχρι 20 ἐτῶν θά εἶναι τό 15%. Έργαζόμενοι τό 34%.

Τό Έθνος πεθαίνει καί όχι άργά...

Τό ύπουργεῖο Έθν. Άμύνης στή 18 Αὐγούστου 1999 προανήγγειλε τρεῖς καινοτομίες: Στράτευση στά 18—θητεία στρατιωτική καί γιά τίς γυναῖκες—μισθοφορικό στρατό.

Ό στρατός μας, εἶπε, εἶναι συνολικά 85.000. Τό 2014 θά εἶναι 55.000. Καί νά σκεφτοῦμε, ότι τό 1912 ἡ Ελλάδα τῶν 2.500.000 έκατομμυρίων κατοίκων διέθετε 250.000 στρατιῶτες!

Τί έχουν νά ποῦν οἱ νεκροθάφτες τοῦ Έθνους;

Κωνσταντίνος ΙΑ΄ Παλαιολόγος—Ἡ Τελευταία Ὁμιλία του πρὸς τὸν Λαόν (ὀλίγον πρὸ τῆς Ἀλώσεως)

Ἀπὸ τὸ Χρονικὸν τοῦ Μεγάλου Λογοθέτου Γεωργίου Σφραντζῆ ἢ Φραντζῆ, ἐκδοθὲν ἐν Κερκύρα ἔτει 1477.

Εμεῖς μὲν, εὐγενέστατοι Ἄρχοντες καὶ ἐκλαμπρότατοι δῆμαρχοι καὶ στρατηγοὶ καὶ γενναιότατοι στρατιῶται καὶ πᾶς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ τίμιος λαός, καλὸς οἴδατε ὅτι ἐφθασεν ἡ Ὠρα καὶ ὁ ἐχθρὸς τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν βούλεται ἵνα μετὰ πάσης τέχνης καὶ μηχανῆς ἰσχυροτέρως στενοχωρήσῃ ἡμᾶς καὶ πόλεμον σφοδρὸν μετὰ συμπλοκῆς μεγάλης καὶ συρρηξέως ἐκ τῆς χέρσου καὶ θαλάσσης δώσῃ ἡμῶν μετὰ πάσης δυνάμεως, ἵνα, εἰ δυνατόν, ὡς ὄφισ τὸν ἰὸν ἐκχύσῃ καὶ ὡς λέων ἀνήμερος καταπῆ ἡμᾶς. Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω καὶ παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς ἵνα στήτε ἀνδρείως καὶ μετὰ γενναίας ψυχῆς, ὡς πάντοτε ἕως τοῦ νῦν ἐποιήσατε, κατὰ τὸν Ἐχθρῶν τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν. Παραδίδωμι δὲ ὑμῖν τὴν ἐκλαμπροτάτην καὶ περίφημον ταύτην πόλιν καὶ πατρίδα ἡμῶν καὶ βασιλεύουσαν τῶν πόλεων.

Καλῶς οὖν οἴδατε, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι διὰ τέσσερά τινα ὀφείλεται κοινῶς ἔσμεν πάντες ἵνα προτιμήσωμεν ἀποθανεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ ζῆν, πρῶτον μὲν ὅπερ τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν καὶ εὐσεβείας, δεύτερον δὲ ὅπερ πατρίδος, τρίτον ὅπερ τοῦ βασιλέως ὡς Χριστοῦ Κυρίου, καὶ τέταρτον ὅπερ συγγενῶν καὶ φίλων. Λοιπὸν, ἀδελφοί, ἐὰν χρεώσται ἔσμεν ὑπὲρ ἐνὸς ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀγωνίζεσθαι ἕως θανάτου πολλὰ μᾶλλον ὅπερ πάντων ἡμεῖς, ὡς βλέπετε προφανῶς, καὶ ἐκ πάντων μέλλομεν ζημιωθῆναι.

Ἐὰν διὰ τὰ ἐμὰ πλημμελήματα παραχωρήσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὴν νίκην τοῖς ἀσεβέσιν, ὅπερ τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν τῆς Ἁγίας, ἦν Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ οἰκείῳ αἵματι ἡμῖν ἐδώρησατο, κινδυνεύομεν, ὃ ἔστι κεφάλαιον πάντων. Καὶ ἐὰν τὸν κόσμον ὅλον κερδίσῃ τις καὶ τῶν ψυχῶν ζημιωθῆ, τί τὸ ὄφελος; Δεύτερον πατρίδα περίφημον τοιούτως ὑστερούμεθα καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἡμῶν. Τρίτον βασιλείαν τὴν ποτε μὲν περιφανῆ, νῦν δὲ τεταπεινωμένην καὶ ἐξουθενωμένην ἀπωλέσαμεν, καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ τυράννου καὶ ἀσεβοῦς ἄρχεται. Τέταρτον δὲ καὶ φιλάτων τέκνων καὶ συμβίων καὶ συγγενῶν ὑστερούμεθα. Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ ἀλιτήριος ὁ ἀμηνρᾶς πενήκοντα καὶ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας ἄγει σήμερον ἀφ' οὗ ἡμᾶς ἐλθὼν ἀπέκλεισεν καὶ μετὰ πάσης μηχανῆς καὶ ἰσχύος καθ' ἡμέραν τε καὶ νύκτα οὐκ ἐπαύσατο πολιορκῶν ἡμᾶς καὶ χάριτι τοῦ παντεπόπτου Χριστοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν τειχῶν μετὰ αἰσχύνῃς ἄχρι

τοῦ νῦν πολλάκις κακῶς ἀπεπέμφθη. Τὰ νῦν δὲ πάλιν, ἀδελφοί, μὴ δειλιάσητε, ἐὰν καὶ τοῖχος μακρόθεν ὀλίγον ἐκ τῶν κρότων καὶ τῶν πτωμάτων τῶν ἐλεπόλεων ἔπεσε, διότι, ὡς ὑμεῖς θεωρεῖτε, κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἐδιορθώσαμεν πάλιν αὐτό.

Ἡμεῖς πᾶσαν τὴν ἐλπίδα εἰς τὴν ἄμαχον δόξαν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀνεθέμεθα, οὗτοι ἐν ἄρμασι καὶ οὗτοι ἐν ἵπποις καὶ δυνάμει καὶ πλήθει, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν πεποιθήσαμεν, δεύτερον δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμετέραις χερσὶ καὶ ῥωμαλεότητι, ἦν ἐδώρησατο ἡμῖν ἡ θεία δύναμις. Γνωρίζω δὲ ὅτι αὕτη ἡ μυριαριθμητὸς ἀγέλη τῶν ἀσεβῶν, καθὼς ἡ αὐτῶν συνήθεια, ἐλεύσονται καθ' ἡμῶν μετὰ βαναύσου καὶ ἐπλημένης ὄφρυος καὶ θάρσους πολλοῦ καὶ βίας, ἵνα διὰ τὴν ὀλιγότητα ἡμῶν θλίψωσι καὶ ἐκ τοῦ κόπου στενοχωρήσωσι, καὶ μετὰ φωνῶν μεγάλων καὶ ἀλαλαγμῶν ἀναριθμητῶν, ἵνα ἡμᾶς φοβήσωσι. Τὰς τοιαύτας αὐτῶν φλυαρίας καλῶς οἴδατε, καὶ οὐ χρῆ ἰσχυρῶς λέγειν περὶ τούτων. Καὶ ὦρα ὀλίγοι τοιαῦτα ποιήσωσι, καὶ ἀναριθμητοὺς πέτρας καὶ ἕτερα βέλη καὶ ἐλεβολίσκους, ὡσεὶ ἄμμον θαλασσῶν ἀνωθεν ἡμῶν πτήσουσι, δι' ὧν, ἐλπίζω γάρ, οὐ βλάψωσι, διότι ὑμᾶς θεωρῶ καὶ λίαν ἀγάλλομαι καὶ τοιαύταις ἐλπίσι τὸν λογισμὸν τρέφομαι, ὅτι εἰ καὶ ὀλίγοι πάνυ ἔσμεν, ἀλλὰ πάντες ἐπιδέξιοι καὶ ἐπιτήδειοι ῥωμαλεοὶ τε καὶ ἰσχυροὶ καὶ μεγαλήτορες καὶ καλῶς προπαρασκευασμένοι ὑπάρχετε. Ταῖς ἀσπίσιν ὑμῶν καλῶς τὴν κεφαλὴν σκέπεσθε ἐπὶ τῇ συμπλοκῇ καὶ συρρηξί. Ἡ δεξιὰ ὑμῶν ἢ τὴν ῥομφαίαν ἔχουσα μακρὰν ἔστω πάντοτε. Αἱ περικεφαλαῖαι ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ θώρακες καὶ οἱ σιδηροῖ ἱματισμοὶ λίαν εἰσὶν ἱκανοὶ ἅμα καὶ τοῖς



Ὁ Μαρμαρωμένος Βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἑλληνορθοδόξων

λοιποῖς ὅπλοις, καὶ ἐν τῇ συμπλοκῇ ἔσονται πάνυ ὠφέλιμα, ἃ οἱ ἐναντιοὶ οὐ χρῶνται, ἀλλ' οὔτε κέκτηνται.

Καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσωθεν τῶν τειχῶν ὑπάρχετε σκεπόμενοι, οἱ δὲ ἀσκεπεῖς μετὰ κόπου ἔρχονται. Διό, ὦ συστρατιῶται γίνεσθε ἔτοιμοι καὶ στερεοὶ καὶ μεγαλόψυχοι διὰ τοὺς οἰκτιρμούς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μιμηθῆτε τοὺς ποτε τῶν Καρχηδονίων ὀλίγους ἐλέφαντας, πὼς τοσοῦτον πλῆθος ἵππων Ῥωμαίων τῇ φωνῇ καὶ θεᾷ ἐδίωξαν, καὶ ἐὰν ζῶν ἄλογον ἐδίωξε πόσον μᾶλλον ἡμεῖς ἢ τῶν ζῶν καὶ ἀλόγων ὑπάρχοντες κύριοι, καὶ οἱ καθ' ἡμῶν ἐρχόμενοι ἵνα παράταξιν μεθ' ἡμῶν ποιήσωσιν ὡς ζῶα ἄλογα καὶ χείρονές εἰσιν. Οἱ πέλται ὑμῶν καὶ ῥομφαῖοι καὶ τὰ τόξα καὶ ἀκόντια πρὸς αὐτοὺς πεμπέτωσαν παρ' ἡμῶν. Καὶ οὕτως λογίσθητε ὡς ἐπὶ ἀγρίων χοίρων καὶ πληθὺν κυνήγιον, ἵνα γνώσωσιν οἱ ἀσεβεῖς ὅτι οὐ μετὰ ἀλόγων ζῶων ὡς αὐτοί, παράταξιν ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ μετὰ κυρίων καὶ αὐθεντῶν αὐτῶν καὶ ἀπογόνων Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ῥωμαίων.

Οἴδατε καλῶς ὅτι ὁ δυσσεβὴς αὐτὸς ὁ ἀμηνρᾶς καὶ

ἐχθρὸς τῆς ἁγίας ἡμῶν πίστεως χωρὶς εὐλογον αἰτίας τινος τὴν ἀγάπην ἦν εἶχομεν ἔλυσεν, καὶ τοὺς ὄρκους αὐτοῦ τοὺς πολλοὺς ἠθέτησεν ἀντ' οὐδενὸς λογιζόμενος καὶ ἐλθὼν αἰφνιδίως φρούριον ἐποίησεν ἐπὶ τὸ στενὸν τοῦ Ἀσωμάτου, ἵνα καθ' ἐκάστην ἡμέραν δύνηται βλέπειν ἡμᾶς. Τοὺς ἀγροὺς ἡμῶν καὶ κήπους καὶ παραδείσους καὶ οἴκους πυριαλώτους ἐποίησε, τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ἡμῶν τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὄσους εὗρεν, ἐθανάτωσε καὶ ἠχμαλώτευσεν, τὴν φιλίαν ἡμῶν ἔλυσεν. Τοὺς δὲ τοῦ Γαλατᾶ, ἐφιλιώσε, καὶ αὐτοὶ χαίρονται, μὴ εἰδότες καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ ταλαίπωροι τὸν τοῦ γεωργοῦ παιδὸς μῦθον, τοῦ ἐψήνοντος τοὺς κοχλίας καὶ εἰπόντος. Ὡ ἀνόητα ζῶα, καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς.

Ἐλθὼν οὖν ἀδελφοί, ἡμᾶς ἀπέκλεισε, καὶ καθ' ἐκάστην τὸ ἀχανές αὐτοῦ στόμα χάσκων, πῶς εὗρη καιρὸν ἐπιτήδειον ἵνα καταπῆ ἡμᾶς καὶ τὴν πόλιν ταύτην, ἦν ἀνήγειρεν ὁ τρισμακάριστος ἐκεῖνος καὶ τῇ πανάγνῳ δεσποίνῃ ἡμῶν Θεοτόκῳ καὶ ἀειπαρθένῳ Μαρίας ἀφιέρωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο τοῦ κυρίαν εἶναι καὶ βοηθὸν καὶ σκέπην τῇ ἡμετέρα πατρίδι καὶ καταφύγιον τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ἐλπίδα καὶ χαρὰν πάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὸ καύχημα πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσιν ὑπὸ τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου ἀνατολήν. Καὶ οὗτος ὁ ἀσεβέστατος τὴν ποτε περιφανῆ καὶ ὁμφακλίζουσαν ὡς ῥόδον τοῦ ἀγροῦ βούλεται ποιῆσαι ὑπ' αὐτόν. Ἡ ἐδοῦλωσε σχεδόν, δύναμαι εἰπεῖν, πᾶσαν τὴν ὑφ' ἡλίον καὶ ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς Πόντον καὶ Ἀρμενίαν, Περσίαν καὶ Παμφλαγονίαν, Ἀμαζόνια καὶ Καππαδοκίαν, Γαλατίαν καὶ Μηδίαν, Κολχούς καὶ Ἴβηρας, Βοσποριανούς καὶ Ἀλβάνους, Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν καὶ Μεσσοποταμίαν, Φοινίκην, Βακτριανούς καὶ Σκύθας, Μακεδονίαν καὶ Θετταλίαν, Ἑλλάδα, Βοιωτία, Λοκροὺς καὶ Αἰτωλοὺς, Ἀκαρνανίαν, Ἀχαΐαν καὶ Πελοπόννησον, Ἡπειρον καὶ τὸ Ἰλλυρικὸν Λύχιντας κατὰ τὸ Ἀδριατικόν, Ἰταλίαν, Τουσκίνους, Κέλτους καὶ Κελτογαλάτας, Ἴβηρίαν τε καὶ ἕως τῶν Γαδεῖρων, Λιβύαν καὶ Μαυριτανίαν καὶ Μαυρουσίαν, Αἰθιοπίαν, Βελέδας, Σκουδὴν, Νουμιδίαν καὶ Ἀφρικὴν καὶ Αἴγυπτον, αὐτὸς τὰ νῦν βούλεται δουλώσει καὶ τὴν κυριεύουσαν τῶν πόλεων, ζυγῶ ὑποβαλεῖν καὶ δουλεῖα καὶ τὰς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας ἡμῶν, ἐνθα ἐπροσκυνεῖτο ἡ Ἁγία Τριάς καὶ ἐδοξολογεῖτο τὸ πανάγιον, καὶ ὅπου οἱ ἄγγελοι ἠκούοντο ὑμνεῖν τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὴν ἔνσαρκον τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου οἰκονομίαν, βούλεται ποιῆσαι προσκύνημα τῆς αὐτοῦ βλασφημίας καὶ τοῦ φληναφοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου Μωάμεθ, καὶ κατοικητήριον ἀλόγων καὶ καμήλων.

Λοιπὸν ἀδελφοί καὶ συστρατιῶται, κατὰ νοῦν ἐνθυμηθῆτε ἵνα τὸ μνημόσυνον ὑμῶν καὶ ἡ μνήμη καὶ ἡ φήμη καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία αἰωνίως γενήσεται.



ΠΑΛΙ ΜΕ ΧΡΟΝΟΥΣ
ΚΑΙ ΚΑΙΡΟΥΣ
ΠΑΛΙ ΔΙΚΑ ΜΑΣ ΘΑΝΑΙ

Καταστροφή Τραγικότερη τῆς Μικρασιατικῆς

Τοῦ Χρήστου Γιανναρά, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐφημερίδα «Ἡ Καθημερινή», 28-4-1996.

Ὁ πρῶτον πρωθυπουργὸς κ. Γεώργιος Ράλλης ἀποτελεῖ μία προσωπικότητα τοῦ πολιτικοῦ χώρου, καθολικὰ σεβαστή. Σημάδεψε τὸν πολιτικὸ μας βίον, ἐνσαρκώνοντας, μὲ τρόπο σθεναρὸ καὶ ἀσυμβίβαστο, ἓνα ὑπόδειγμα σοβαρότητας, μετριοπάθειας καὶ ἀξιοπρέπειας. Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἔκανε σὲ καιροὺς καταγιστικῆς πλημμυρίδας τοῦ πιὸ ἀμοραλιστικοῦ λαϊκισμοῦ. Ἡ διαφωνία, σὲ ὀρισμένα θέματα, μὲ πολιτικούς τῆς δικῆς του σοβαρότητας, εἶναι γόνιμη πρόκληση οὐσιώδους προβληματισμοῦ. Δὲν σημαίνει ἀμφισβήτηση τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τῆς εὐρύτερης προσφορᾶς του.

Ὁ κ. Ράλλης ὑπεραμύνθηκε ἐπανειλημμένα μὲ ἄρθρα του τὴν γλωσσικὴ μεταρρύθμιση ποὺ ὁ ἴδιος, ὡς ὑπουργὸς Παιδείας, πραγματοποίησε τὸ 1976. Τολμῶ νὰ ἔχω κάποιες ἀντιρρήσεις στὰ ἐπιχειρήματά του καὶ στὶς θέσεις του μὲ τὴν ἐμπειρία τοῦ δασκάλου καὶ τῆς καθημερινότητος τοῦ ἀπλοῦ πολίτη.

Τὸ πιὸ ἀληθινό, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἰσχυρότερο ἐπιχείρημα τοῦ κ. Ράλλη, εἶναι ὅ,τι ἡ μεταρρύθμισή του ἀλλοιώθηκε καὶ κακοφόρμησε μετὰ τὸ 1982. Ἄς μοῦ ἐπιτραπεῖ νὰ καταθέσω (γιὰ πολλοστὴ φορὰ) τὴν ἐκτίμησή μου ποὺ τὴν πιστεύω ρεαλιστικὴ καὶ καθόλου συναισθηματικὴ ἢ κομματικὰ μεροληπτικὴ: Ὅ,τι ἀπὸ τὸ 1982 καὶ μετὰ συντελέστηκε στὴν παιδεία καταστροφή, ποὺ γιὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀποδεικνύεται τραγικότερὴ τῆς Μικρασιατικῆς.

Γιατὶ τὸ 1922 χάθηκαν ὀριστικὰ πανάρχαιες κοιτίδες τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὸ 1982 χάθηκε τὸ συνεκτικὸ στοιχεῖο καὶ θεμέλιο τῆς διαχρονικῆς ἐνότητος τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ τῶν Ἑλλήνων: ἡ γλωσσικὴ συνέχεια. Χάθηκε μὲ τὴν κατάργηση τῆς διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀρχαίων, τὸν ἐξοστρακισμό τῆς μεταγενέστερης λόγιας γλωσσικῆς παράδοσης, χάθηκε μὲ τὸ ἐγκλημα τῆς εἰσαγωγῆς τοῦ μονοτονικοῦ. Ἡ ἀνεπανόρθωτη πιὰ καταστροφή θὰ ἐρχόταν ἔτσι κι ἀλλιῶς μὲ τὴν πολιτικὴ ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ 1981. Ὅμως, συνέπεσε ἡ μεταρρύθμιση Ράλλη νὰ ἔχει ἀνοίξει τὸ δρόμο.

Ὑπάρχουν ἄλλοι ἀρμοδιότεροι ἀπὸ μένα γιὰ νὰ ὑπομνήσουν στὸν σεβαστὸ πολιτικὸ κάποια καίρια καὶ στοιχειώδη δεδομένα: Ὅ,τι ἡ γλῶσσα πλάθεται ἀπὸ τὸν λαό, τὶς ἀνάγκες καὶ τὶς εὐαισθησίες του, δὲν μπαίνει στὸν γύψο μὲ κρατικὰ διατάγματα δίχως νὰ προκληθοῦν τερατογενέσεις. Ὅ,τι σὲ μία προηγμένη γλῶσσα συνυπάρχει ὀργανικὰ ἡ λόγια ἔκφραση, μὲ τὴ δημῶδη. Ὅ,τι στὴν Ἑλλάδα δὲν ταυτίζεται συλλήβδην ἡ λόγια γλῶσσα μὲ τὴν πλαστὴ κοραϊκὴ «καθαρεύουσα».

Ἡ κρατικὴ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς δημοτικῆς στῆ δημόσια διοίκηση ὡς «ἐνιαίου καὶ δόκιμου γλωσσικοῦ ὄργανου»,

ὅπως τὴ θέλησε ὁ κ. Ράλλης, γέννησε μία καινούργια «καθαρεύουσα» (γλῶσσα πού ἐπρεπε ὅπωςδὴποτε νὰ «καθαρεύει» ἀπὸ λόγια στοιχεῖα), τεχνητὴ καὶ ψεύτικη, συχνὰ ὀλότελα κωμικὴ: Ἐναν τραγέλαφο κακῆς λόγιας σύνταξης μὲ ὄρους δημῶδους ἰδιώματος. «Δὲν καταργήσαμε τὴν ἀρχαιογνωσία στὰ σχολεῖα», λέει ὁ κ. Ράλλης. «Καθιερώσαμε νὰ διδάσκονται τὰ ἀρχαῖα κείμενα ἀπὸ δόκιμες μεταφράσεις».

Κάποιος ἀρμοδιότερος ἀπὸ μένα πρέπει νὰ τοῦ ὑπομνήσει τὴν καισαρικὴ διαφορά: Ὅ,τι εἶναι ἄλλο πράγμα ἢ πληροφορία πού παρέχει τὸ περιεχόμενο τοῦ ἀρχαιοελληνικοῦ κειμένου, καὶ ριζικὰ ἄλλο ἢ γλωσσικὴ παιδεία πού τὸ ἴδιο τὸ πρωτότυπο κείμενο προσφέρει. Ἄν τὸ Ἑλληνόπουλο δὲν προλάβει νὰ διδαχθεῖ τὸ «περιεχόμενο» κάποιων ἀρχαίων κειμένων, ἢ ζημιὰ δὲν εἶναι ἀνεπανόρθωτη—ἀρκεῖ νὰ ἔχει μάθει νὰ καταφεύγει σὲ δόκιμες μεταφράσεις ὅποτε τὸ θελήσει. Ἄν ὅμως τὸ Ἑλληνόπουλο χάσει τὴν «αἴσθηση» τῆς δοτικῆς, τὸν ἐθισμό στὴ νοηματικὴ τῆς λειτουργία, ἂν δὲν μπορεῖ πιά νὰ τραγουδήσει «ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ τίκτεται ἐν φάντῃ τῶν ἀλόγων», ἢ καταστροφὴ τοῦ γλωσσικοῦ του αἰσθητηρίου εἶναι πολιτιστικὸ ἔγκλημα. Ἀκριβῶς γιατί ἀποκόβεται τὸ Ἑλληνόπουλο ἀπὸ τὴ δυνατότητα μέθεξης στὴ συνέχεια τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ του, χάνεται ἢ συνοχὴ τῆς πρότασης πού κόμιζε πάντοτε αὐτὸς ὁ πολιτισμός.

Εἶχε πεῖ κάποτε ὁ ἀειμνηστὸς Παπανοῦτσος: «Δὲν μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ μιλήσει καὶ νὰ γράψει σωστὰ τὴ δημοτικὴ, ἂν δὲν πατάει στέρεα στὴ γνώση τῆς ἀρχαίας κλασσικῆς γλώσσας».

Ἀναθεματίζουν ὅλοι σήμερα, καὶ ὁ κ. Ράλλης ἐπίσης, τὸν «κακὸ τρόπο» μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο διδάσκονταν τὰ ἀρχαῖα Ἑλληνικὰ στὰ σχολεῖα μας πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ 1976. Καὶ δὲν θέλουν νὰ δοῦν ὅ,τι χάρη σὲ ἐκεῖνο τὸν «κακὸ τρόπο», ἢ ζωντανὴ καθημερινὴ γλῶσσα, ἀκόμα καὶ τῶν μὴ λόγιων Ἑλλήνων, διέσωζε τότε τὴν ὀρθὴ κλίση τῶν τριτοκλίτων, τὴ σωστὴ ἐκφορά τῶν ἐπιρρημάτων, τὴ διάκριση τοῦ στιγμιαίου ἀπὸ τὸ διαρκές στοὺς χρόνους τῶν ρημάτων, καὶ πλῆθος ἀκόμη ἐκφραστικῶν δυνατοτήτων πού σήμερα ἔχουν σχεδὸν ἀφανιστεῖ. Ἡ ἀνεπιτήδευτη καθημερινὴ γλῶσσα ἦταν κατάσπαρτη μὲ τύπους καὶ ἐκφράσεις τῆς λόγιας, τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἢ καὶ τῆς ἀρχαιοελληνικῆς παράδοσης. Λειτουργοῦσε, ἔστω ἀνεπίγνωστα, ἢ συνέχεια τῆς γλώσσας, ἢ συνέχεια τοῦ Γένους τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

Αὐτὴ τὴ συνέχεια τὴν ἀρνιόταν πάντοτε μὲ στρατευμένο πείσμα μία μερίδα «προοδευτικῶν» διανοουμένων. Ἀγαθὰ τὰ κίνητρά τους: ὁ μὲ κάθε θυσιά ἐξευρωπαϊσμός τῆς χώρας. Ἀλλὰ τραγικὰ ἐπιπόλαιη καὶ προῖον ὀλιγομάθειας ἢ στρατηγικὴ τους. Αὐτοὺς διάλεξε τότε ὁ κ. Ράλλης σὰν εἰδικούς καὶ ἐκπροσώπους ἀρμόδιων φορέων γιὰ νὰ στήσει τὸ μεταρρυθμιστικὸ του ἐγχείρημα. Δὲν ἠθελε νὰ ὑστερήσει καὶ ἢ παράταξί του σὲ «προοδευτικὴ

πρωτοπορία». Ὅσες φωνῆς τὸν προειδοποιοῦσαν, τὶς ἀγνόησε.

Ἡ ἀπόδοση ἱστορικῶν εὐθυνῶν δὲν ἔχει κανένα νόημα. Ἡ καταστροφὴ ἔχει συντελεστεῖ καὶ εἶναι ἀνεπανόρθωτη. Ἄν ὁ σεβαστὸς μου κ. Ράλλης πάρει στὰ χέρια τοῦ γραπτὰ τῶν σημερινῶν φοιτητῶν μας, εἶμαι σίγουρος ὅ,τι θὰ παραιτηθεῖ ἀπὸ κάθε προσπάθεια υπεράσπισης τῆς γλωσσικῆς του μεταρρυθμίσεως. Ἄν καὶ ἀρκεῖ νὰ διαβάσει ἐφημερίδες, νὰ ἀκούει ραδιόφωνο καὶ τηλεόραση.

Ἡ Ἑλλάδα αὐτοκαταδικάστηκε στὴν πολιτιστικὴ περιθωριοποίησι καὶ σὲ ἐπιταχυνόμενη ὀπισθοδρόμησι. Ἡ Ἑλλάδα τέλειωσε ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμὴ πού αὐτοκαταργήθηκε γλωσσικά.



Ἐδῶ σὲ τούτῃ τὴν ἄκρῃ πού κάθομαι εἶμαι μακάριος. Ἀντίκρυ μου κάθεται μιά φτωχὴ χήρα μὲ τὸν ἀδελφὸ τῆς τὸν Χαράλαμπο. Παραπέρα εἶναι ἄλλοι τέτιοι φτωχοὶ ὁ κώστας ὁ κουτσός, ψάλτης καὶ καντηλανάφτης, ὁ μπάριμπα-Λιάς ὁ μπαλωματῆς, κανονάρχος ἢ κυρά Οὐρανία, πού σὰν ἦτανε κορίτσι πήγαινε στὸν ἅγιο Ἐλισσαῖο πού ψέλνανε ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης κι ὁ Μωραϊτίδης, ὁ κοσμογυρισμένος καπετάν Ἡρακλῆς Γιαβάσογλου καὶ κάμποσοι ἄλλοι. Ὅλοι τοῦτοι ἔχουνε ἀπάνω τοὺς τὴν ταπεινώσι καὶ τὴν χάρη τῆς θεοσσέβειας, πού τὰ νοστιμεῦει ὅλα. Εἶναι πάντα καλοδεκτικοί, πλούσιοι σὲ αἰσθήματα, χαρούμεμοι, γιατί «καρδίας ἡσυχαζούσης, τὸ πρόσωπο θάλλει» καὶ «ἄνθρωπος ὀλιγομέριμος καὶ ἐλπίζων ἐπὶ Κυρίῳ, πρῶος ἔστι καὶ ἡσύχιος».

Φώτης Κοντογλου

Ἄς εἶναι εὐλογημένη ἢ ἀγάπη τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη ὄλων ἀνάστησα οἰκογένεια, παιδιά, ἐγγόνια, ἔχτισα σπίτια, περιμάντρωσα καὶ φύτεψα περιβόλι, χρώματα ὅσα θέλω, μουσαμάδες, φίλους πολλούς καὶ καρδιακούς. Ὅσο μοῦ μέλλεται ἀκόμη δὲν θὰ πάψω νὰ ψελλίζω τὸ «Πάτερ ἡμῶν» μπροστὰ στό πορφυρὸ καὶ χρυσὸ ἡλιοβασίλεμα, στὴν μπλάβη μεσημεριάτικη θάλασσα, στὸ βαθύ μαῦρο τῆς ἑναστῆς νύχτας καὶ στὸ μελιχρὸ τριανταφυλλί τῆς καλοκαιριάτικῆς αὐγῆς...

Ὁ μεγάλος ζωγράφος Σπῦρος Βασιλείου

ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND THE ANTICHRIST

By St. John Maximovitch.

It is proper for us to speak of the Dread Judgment and the signs of the end of the world. No one knows that day: only God knows it, but the signs of its approach are given in the Gospels and the Revelations (Apocalypse) of St. John the Theologian.

For the most part, Revelations speaks symbolically and cryptically of the events of the end of the world and of the Dread Judgment, but the Holy Fathers have explained them, and there is the pure authentic tradition of the Church that also tells us the signs of the approach of the end of the world and the Dread Judgment.

Before the end of life on earth there will be confusion, wars, civil strife, hunger, and earthquakes. People will suffer from fear; their hearts will fail from awaiting disasters. There will be neither spiritual life nor the joy of being alive, but a tortuous state of falling away from life. The falling away will not be from spiritual life only, but also from faith. The Son of Man, when He comes—*will He find faith on the earth?*

People will become proud and ungrateful, refuting the Law of God. Together with a falling away from spiritual life, there will also be a diminishing of moral life. Good will be exhausted and evil will grow. It is about this time that the holy Apostle John the Theologian speaks in his divinely-inspired work, the Apocalypse. He himself says that he was *in the spirit*—meaning that the Holy Spirit Itself was in him—when the fate of the Church and the world was revealed to him in various symbols. That is why this is a Divine Revelation. He presents the fate of the Church in the image of a woman who hides in the wilderness during these times. She is not obvious in life. This is what is happening now in Russia (*Ed., was happening, at the time of this article's publication*).

In worldly life, those forces preparing for the appearance of the Antichrist will be of primary significance. The Antichrist will be a man, not the devil incarnate. *Anti* is a word meaning “old,” or “instead of,” or “against.” That man will

want to exist instead of Christ, to take His place and to have that which is Christ's. He will want to have the same kind of influence and power over the entire world. Indeed, he will obtain that power before he perishes and the entire world perishes. He will have a helper, a magus, who will do his will through the power of false miracles, and kill those that do not recognize the power of the Antichrist. Before the destruction of the Antichrist, two righteous men will appear to condemn him. The magus will kill them, and for three days their bodies will lie unburied, and the Antichrist and his servants will rejoice to the utmost. Then suddenly these righteous men will be resurrected, and the entire army of the Antichrist will suddenly fall down dead, killed by the force of the Holy Spirit.

But what is known about the person of the Antichrist? His exact origin is unknown. His father is completely unknown and his mother a vile, false virgin. He will be a Jew from the tribe of Dan. The indication of this is that Jacob, when dying, prophesied about the future heirs of his children, and concerning Dan, he said that among his heirs *shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path that biteth the horses' heels so that his rider shall fall backwards*. This symbolizes that the Antichrist shall act through cleverness and evil.

In Revelation, St. John the Theologian speaks of the salvation of the sons of Israel, saying that before the end of the world many Jews will be converted to Christ, but in the list of tribes that are saved, there is no mention of the tribe of Dan. The Antichrist will be very clever and gifted, with a certain ability to deal with people. He will be charming and gentle. The appearance of the Antichrist is already being prepared before his coming: *The mystery doth already work...*

First of all, the forces preparing for his coming fight against lawful monarchical rule. The holy Apostle Paul says that the Antichrist cannot appear until *the one who restraineth* is put aside. John Chrysostom explains that *the one who restraineth* refers to a lawful, pious regime. Such a power struggles with evil. The *mystery* working in the world does not want this, does not want the struggle against evil by the power of a pious ruler—quite the opposite. It wants the rule of lawlessness, and



The Second Coming of our Lord

when it achieves this, nothing more will stop the appearance of the Antichrist.

He will not only be clever and charming, he will be merciful and do works of charity for the sake of bolstering his control. And when he strengthens his control to the point where the entire world recognizes him, then he will reveal his face. He will choose Jerusalem because it was precisely there that the Saviour revealed His Divine teaching and His Person, and the whole world was called to the blessedness of virtue and salvation. But the world did not accept Christ and crucified Him in Jerusalem, and during the Antichrist's reign, Jerusalem will become the capital of the world that has accepted his rule.

Reaching the summit of power, the Antichrist will demand people acknowledge that he has achieved what no earthly power and no one else has been able to do, and will demand worship of himself as an exalted being—a god. He will do only what pleases people, under the condition that they recognize him as the Supreme Power. He will provide opportunities for Church life, allow her to hold services, and promise that wonderful temples will be built, provided that he be recognized as “Supreme Being” and worshipped.

He will have a personal hatred for Christ. He will thrive on this hatred and will rejoice in people's apostasy from Christ and the Church. There will be a mass falling away from the faith, during which many bishops will betray the faith, and point to the wonderful position of the Church as justification. A search for compromise will be the characteristic state of the people's faith. Directness of confession will vanish. People will subtly justify their fall, and solicitous evil will support such a general state of mind. People will grow used to apostatizing from the truth and will be accustomed to the sweetness of compromise and sin.

The Antichrist will allow people anything as long as they, falling down before him, worship him. This will not be a new attitude toward people: the Roman Caesars were also prepared to grant Christians freedom if they would recognize the emperor's divinity and supreme divine power. They martyred Christians only because they confessed: “One God do we worship, and Him alone do we serve.” The whole world will be conquered by him, and he will then reveal his hatred for Christ and Christianity.

How will we see the coming plight so we can ready ourselves? With our spiritual sight. Even now, righteous people see at death that which other people around them do not see. The trumpets will sound in souls and consciences. Everything will become clear in the human conscience.

The Prophet Daniel, speaking of the Dread Judgment, tells of the Ancient of Days upon His throne, and before Him a river of fire. Fire is a purifying element. Fire burns sin; sin also is burned up by sorrow. If sin has become part of a man, it burns the man himself. Then fire will flare up inside man.

Seeing the Cross, some will rejoice and others will fall into despair, confusion, horror. Thus people will be separated instantly. In the Gospel narrative, some stand on the right hand, others on the left hand of the Judge—they are separated by their inner consciousness. The very state of a person's soul casts him to one or the other side, to the right or to the left. However much more consciously and diligently a person strove toward God in his life, so much the greater his joy when he hears the words: “Come, ye blessed.” And on the other hand, the same words will kindle a fire of horror and suffering in those that did not desire Him, or avoided or fought or mocked Him in their lives.

The Dread Judgment knows no witness or court records. Everything is inscribed in the souls of men, and these inscriptions, these “books,” will be opened. Everything will become clear to all and to oneself; the state of a person's soul sends him to the right or the left. Some will go to the place of rejoicing, others to the place of horror. When the books have been opened, it will become clear to all that the root of all transgressions is in a man's soul.

Consider a drunkard or a fornicator: when the body dies, some think the sin, too, has died. No—the inclination to sin was in the soul, and to the soul the sin was sweet. And if the soul has not repented of this sin, has not freed itself of it, it will come to the Dread Judgment with the same desire for the sweetness of sin and “never sate this desire.” There will be the suffering of hatred and wrath in this soul. This is the state of hell. *The fiery Gehenna*—this is the inner fire, the fire of weakness and anger, and here will be the wailing and the gnashing of teeth of powerless wrath.

Contrast this with the blessed ones that do his commandments, who will have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the Heavenly Kingdom. To them, *the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.* (Rev 22:17-21)

Amen.



It is better to be silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt.

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

THE PLAN FOR THE NEW AGE AND GLOBALISM

An excerpt from the article "The One World Church goal is a Religion of the Future," by Fr. Seraphim Rose et. al.

It is interesting to note that 1975, the year that "Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future came out," was a banner year for the "new religious consciousness." This was the year which the deceased occultist Alice Bailey (1880-1949)—one of the major builders of the present-day New Age movement and an avowed enemy of Orthodox Christianity—had designated for her disciples to publicly disseminate hitherto secret teachings to all available media. During that year David Spangler and a host of other New Age spokesmen and organizations began their public work.

The goals of today's New Age movement were mapped out well in advance in the writings of occultist and medium Helen Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, and later by Alice Bailey, Nicholas Roerich (author of the Agni Yoga writings), Teilhard de Chardin (the evolutionary thinker and paleontologist) [See Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*, pp. 21, 26-29], and H. G. Wells. According to Blavatsky, the purpose of the Theosophical Society was "to oppose the materialism of science and every form of dogmatic theology, especially the Christian, which the Chiefs of the Society regard as particularly pernicious." (Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 3, 1888, p. 386). Incidentally, Blavatsky appears as a character in the Harry Potter books, under the anagram "Vlabatsky." In the words of Teilhard, these goals include a "convergence of religions" in tandem with a "confluence" of political and economic forces toward World Government, [Teilhard de Chardin, *How I Believe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 41]. Today, some New Age circles speak of "The Plan" for a "New World Order," which would include a universal credit system, a universal tax, a global police force, and an international authority that would control the world's food supply and transportation systems. In this Utopian scheme, wars, disease, hunger, pollution, and poverty will end. All forms of discrimination will cease, and people's allegiance to tribe or nation will be replaced by a planetary consciousness.

Some of the major architects of the New Age movement maintain that this "Plan" can be traced back to the fall of Lucifer and his angels from heaven. Alice Bailey wrote that the revolt of the angels against God was part of "the divine plan of evolution," for by it the fallen angels "descended from their sinless and free state of existence in order to develop full divine awareness on earth." [Alice Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1957), p. 118].

In this total reversal of Christian theology, the Fall of man was really an ascent to knowledge, for by it man's "eyes

were opened" to good and evil [This is also the view of the feminist theologians of the Re-imagining movement, who honor Eve for having partaken of the forbidden fruit]. Thus, wrote Helen Blavatsky: "It is but natural ... to view Satan, the Serpent of Genesis, as the real creator and benefactor, the Father of Spiritual mankind. For it is he who was the 'Harbinger of Light,' bright radiant Lucifer, who opened the eyes of the automaton created by Jehovah.... Indeed, [mankind] was taught wisdom and the hidden knowledge by the 'Fallen Angel,'" [Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1888; revised ed. 1970), pp. 243, 513]. As man's "benefactor," Lucifer continues to assist man's evolution. In the words of David Spangler, a disciple of the writings of Blavatsky and Bailey, Lucifer is "the angel of man's evolution." [David Spangler, *Reflections on the Christ* (Scotland: Findhorn Community Press, 1978), p. 37].

Within New Age esoteric societies it is taught that, for the furtherance of "The Plan," mass "planetary initiations" will occur. According to Benjamin Creme—another follower of Blavatsky and Bailey—"revitalized" Christian churches and Masonic lodges will be used for the purpose of giving these initiations. And as we have seen, David Spangler has stated that these initiations will be "Luciferic" at their esoteric core. Reiterating the teachings of Alice Bailey, who "channeled" them from a discarnate entity called "Djwhal Khul," Spangler writes: "Lucifer works within each of us to bring us to wholeness as we move into the New Age ... each of us is brought to that point which I term the Luciferic initiation ... Lucifer comes to give us the final ... Luciferic initiations ... that many people in the days ahead will be facing, for it is an initiation into the New Age." [David Spangler, *Reflections on the Christ* (Scotland: Findhorn Community Press, 1978), pp. 40, 44].

As "The Plan" approaches fulfillment, the one-world religion acquires its final shape. "The day is dawning," wrote Alice Bailey, "when all religions will be regarded as emanating from one great spiritual source; all will be seen as unitedly providing the one root out of which the universal world religion will inevitably emerge." [Alice Bailey, *Problems of Humanity* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1947; revised ed. 1964), p. 140]. Helen Blavatsky said that this universal religion was "the religion of the ancients," the memory of which was "the origin of the Satanic myth" of Christians. "The religion of the ancients," Blavatsky wrote, "is the religion of the future." [Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 378; his *Unveiled*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1877; revised ed. 1972), p. 613].

"The Plan" reaches its apotheosis with the coming of the New Age Messiah: the so-called "Maitreya—the Christ." David Spangler speaks in anticipation of this event: "From the depths of the race a call is rising for the emergence of a saviour, an avatar, a father-figure ... who can be for the race

what the ancient priest-kings were in the dawn of human history” [David Spangler, *Explorations: Emerging Aspects of the New Culture*, Findhorn Publications Lecture Series, 1980, p. 68]. According to Alice Bailey, “angels” will appear with this false Christ in order to convince people that they should follow him. Thus, the final stage of the “New Age” reversal of Christianity will be the worship of the antichrist, *whose coming is after the power of satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.* (II Thes. 2:9).

It should be pointed out that many New Agers today would not be aware of, much less subscribe to, all the points of “The Plan.” As we have seen, the movement incorporates a diverse array of groups, ideas and practices. If it can be called a “conspiracy,” this is certainly not because all New Agers are working together secretly, on an organizational level, toward fulfillment of “The Plan.” Ultimately, “The Plan” is being orchestrated not on a human but on a demonic level, and the architects of the New Age movement are, to a large degree, only mouthpieces of ideas that are not their own.

The New Age movement is only the “spiritual” side of a much broader movement which has mushroomed in the recent decades. This is the multi-faceted movement toward “globalism,” which is very much in the interest of those whose goals may not be religious at all.

In recent years, international investment bankers and corporations have made enormous strides toward their goal of world finance hegemony and a global economic system. In 1980 the following warning was issued by Admiral Charles Ward, a former member of the elite Council on Foreign Relations, which includes major government figures, heads of multinational corporations, and representatives of the largest banking firms in the world: “The most powerful cliques in these elitist groups have an objective in common—they want to bring about the surrender of the sovereignty and the national independence of the United States. A second clique of international members in the CFR ... comprises the Wall Street International bankers and their key agents. Primarily, they want the world banking monopoly from whatever power ends up in the control of global government.” [Rear Admiral Chester Ward, *Review of the News*, April 9, 1980, pp. 37-38]. More recently, in 1993, the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Les Gelb, announced on television: “You had me on [before] to talk about the New World Order... I talk about it all the time... It’s one world now... Willing or not, ready or not, we are all involved... The competition is about who will establish the first one-world system of government that has ever existed in the society of nations. It is control over each of us as individuals and over all of us together as a community.” [The Charlie Rose Show, May 4, 1993. Quoted in Tal Brooke, *One World* (Berkeley, Calif.: End Run Publishing, 2000), pp. 7-8].

This vision of the future has been shaping the foreign policy of many governments, not least that of the United States. A clear declaration of the globalist agenda was made in 1992 by Strobe Talbott, longtime personal friend of President Bill Clinton, Deputy Secretary of State during the Clinton administration, and one of the chief architects of the U.S.-led military intervention in the Balkans: “Nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single, global authority.” In Talbott’s view, nations are nothing more than social arrangements: “No matter how permanent and sacred they may seem at any one time, in fact they are all artificial and temporary... It has taken the events in our own wondrous and terrible [20th] century to clinch the case for world government.” [Strobe Talbott, “The Birth of a Global Nation,” *Time* magazine, July 20, 1992].

With the establishment and expansion of the European Union, the creation of the Euro currency, the advances toward a cashless society, the control of former Eastern-bloc countries by Western financial interests, the formation of an international criminal tribunal by the United Nations, and the consolidation of state armies as “peacekeeping” forces under the United Nations and NATO, we see what appear to be the forerunners of such a one-world system. Some of these developments are not necessarily evil in themselves. Taken together, however, they help to set up a global apparatus which can make way for the rising “religion of the future.” Such was the expectation of Alice Bailey, who in the 1940s wrote: “The expressed aims and efforts of the United Nations will be eventually brought to fruition, and a new church of God, gathered out of all religions and spiritual groups, will unitedly bring to an end the great heresy of separateness.” [Alice A. Bailey, *The Destiny of the Nations* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1949), p. 52].

Robert Muller, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, expressed the same belief on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in 1995: “At the beginning the United Nations was only a hope. Today it is a political reality. Tomorrow it will be the world’s religion.” [Robert Muller, *My Testament to the UN: A Contribution to the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations* (Anacortes, Washington: World Happiness and Cooperation, 1995), p. 4]. A proponent of the teaching of both Alice Bailey and Teilhard de Chardin, Muller says that mankind’s goal should be “to see the religions globalize themselves urgently in order to give us a universal, cosmic meaning of life on Earth and give birth to the first global, cosmic, universal civilization.” [Robert Muller, *2000 Ideas and Dreams for a Better World*, Idea 1101, July 16, 1997].

Today, those with a globalist agenda in the political and financial sectors work alongside globalists in the religious sector, particularly with “interfaith” organizations such as the United Religions Initiative (founded as a religious

counterpart to the United Nations), the Temple of Understanding (an official consultant of the United Nations Economic and Social Council), and the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (a revival of the World's Parliament of Religions, which first convened in Chicago in 1893).

In the last decade, witchcraft has played a prominent role in the interfaith movement. At the centennial conference of the Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago in 1993, Wicca took center stage. As "Covenant of the Goddess" officer Don Frew notes, "We Witches found ourselves the media darlings of the conference!... By the end of the nine days, the academics attending the Parliament were saying, 'In 1893, America was introduced to the Buddhists and Hindus; in 1993, we met the Neopagans.'... From that point on, Neopagans would be included in almost every national or global interfaith event." (Don Frew, "The Covenant of the Goddess & the Interfaith Movement," quoted in Brooks Alexander, *Witchcraft Goes Mainstream*, p. 211.)

Although "interfaith" organizations usually affirm that their only aim is to promote "understanding" and "dialogue" among religions, it is apparent that in some cases this aim is only a first step in a larger program: the "convergence of religions" in the New Age. As William Swing, Episcopal Bishop of California and founder/director of the United Religions Initiative, expressed it in his book *The Coming United Religions*: "The time comes ... when common language and a common purpose for all religions and spiritual movements must be discerned and agreed upon. Merely respecting and understanding other religions is not enough." [Bishop William Swing, *The Coming United Religions* (United Religions Initiative and CoNexus Press, 1998), p. 63].

Bishop Swing imagines all the world's religions as paths up a mountain, converging from below on a single point, a "unity that transcends the world." At the top of the mountain, the esoteric believers from each faith would "intuit that they were ultimately in unity with people from other religions because all come together at the apex, in the Divine. Everyone below the line would be identified as exoteric." [Bishop William Swing, *The Coming United Religions* (United Religions Initiative and CoNexus Press, 1998), pp. 58-59].

Like Blavatsky, Bailey and Teilhard before him, Bishop Swing looks to this convergence of religions with messianic expectancy. In his opening address to the 1997 summit conference of the United Religions Initiative, he proclaimed: "If you have come here because a spirit of colossal energy is being born in the loins of the earth, then come here and be a midwife. Assist, in awe, at the birth of new hope."

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. [Mt 11:15].

THE MURDER OF PATRIARCH GREGORIOS

The Greek Patriarch was lynched on Pascha, 1821.



Eastern Orthodox people have celebrated the Paschal season, the time of renewal and new life. Many Greeks and others remember Pascha Day, 1821, when the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregorios, fell to a Turkish lynch mob, an act that kicked off a racial genocide campaign against white Christians in Anatolia.

The Ottomans divided their subjects into millets, racial and religious groups subject to specific tax and legal codes. By 1821 the Ottoman Empire was already "the sick man of Europe," overextended and ripe for rebellion by the teeming millions of oppressed on its European fringe. Ever since that dark day in 1453 when Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire fell to the Turkish hordes, the Patriarch of Constantinople served as the legal representative, or Ethnarch, of the Greek millet in what was by now Turkey.

The Greek revolution of 1821 threw off the Ottoman yoke, the first in what would become a series of successful uprisings that would eventually drive the Turks out of the Balkans. Needless to say, Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II was shamed and infuriated by the success of the Hellenes, and took out his frustration on those helpless Greeks still within his grasp.

On Easter Sunday, 1821, Ottoman officials working on the orders of the Sultan marched Patriarch Gregorios out of the Patriarchal Cathedral in Constantinople shortly after the end of the Easter service. Still clad in his holy vestments, Gregorios was strung up and hanged on the gate of the Cathedral, cut down, and his body flung into the Bosphorus, the strait dividing Europe and Asia. Greeks managed to save the body, which today reposes in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens.

Shortly after his murder, Turks went on a looting, killing and raping rampage through the Greek quarter of the city that once was the Greeks' own capital and the jewel of the Western World.



The lover of silence draws close to God. He talks to Him in secret and God enlightens him.

St. John Climacus

ON MARITAL RELATIONS, ABSTINENCE, AND THE MARRIED VS. CELIBATE LIFE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, translated by Fr. Luke Hartung from the Book: "Family Life," published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist—Souroti, Greece (2002).

Regarding the Topic of Marital Relations, Elder Paisios Wrote in One of His Epistles:

—Concerning marital relations of married priests and laity, which you related to me: since the Holy Fathers do not define “how” [to have marital relations] exactly, we must conclude that it is not defined, for everyone cannot be put into the same mold. The Fathers leave it to the discernment, zeal, spiritual sensitivity and strength of each person. That I may be more easily understood, I will share instances of spiritual warriors—again, married priests and laymen—whom I have known.

Among them there are those who came together after their marriage and had one, two, or three children, and afterwards lived in chastity. Others come together once a year for childbearing, but otherwise live as brother and sister. Some abstain only during fasting periods; and others are not able to attain even this. I also know some who come together once in the middle of the week, so as to be three days before and after Holy Communion. Some stumble over even this, for which reason Christ’s first word when He appeared to the Apostles after His Resurrection was, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you . . . Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained”. [1]

The aim is to battle [against the lust of the flesh] with discernment and zeal according to one’s spiritual strength. In the beginning, youth naturally does not help in the battle; but as the years pass and the flesh begins to wear down, one’s spirit is able to rise up, giving married couples a little taste of the divine pleasures. In other words, they begin physiologically to withdraw from the fleshly pleasures, seeing them more and more as worthless. Thus, even married couples, in a way, “make amends” and arrive at Paradise upon the restful path after many twists and turns. [2] The monastics, however, climb sheer cliffs and scale boulders to ascend to Paradise.



Elder Paisios’ Grave at the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, in Souroti, Greece

You must keep in mind that, according to the Apostle Paul, the issue of relations is not for you to determine on your own, but rather “with consent” [of your spouse]. Even when mutual consent happens, caution is required. The stronger must take the position of the weaker. Many times, so that the one does not sadden the other, he or she will consent, but inwardly they are afflicted. This happens particularly with women who have little fear of God and rather “lively” flesh.

Due to a lack of discernment, certain pious men, hearing that their wives [agree with their desire to abstain], proceed indiscriminately into long periods of abstinence, causing their wives to suffer great anxiety. Such a husband thinks that his wife has moved on to virtue and wants to live a more pure life for greater periods. However, temptation often comes to her to have a male friend; and when this happens, her conscience is pricked.

These husbands, perceiving that their wives ostensibly do not have desire [for relations], redouble their abstinence.

They think in this way that they have advanced more spiritually, even to the point of no longer desiring such things of the flesh. The cause naturally is both the wife’s justifiable self-centeredness and jealousy, feeling she is to blame. When she sees the husband wanting to live a more spiritual life, the wife puts pressure on herself to rise to the occasion.

Both spouses having a similar constitution has great significance in the matter. When it happens that one is milder while the other lively, a sacrifice must be made on the part of the stronger towards the more ailing. This way, little-by-little, in helping the ailing to gain control of their health, with health the two will advance together. [3]

Forgive me for going off on a rabbit trail, for the work of a monk is the prayer rope, not these matters. But so as not to sadden you, I write out of necessity a few of those things—which I “know from afar”—which burden our brethren in the world and give place to the enemy.

Sts. Joakeim and Anna Are the Most Dispassionate Couple

—Geronta, tell us about Saints Joakeim and Anna, the ancestors of God. You once started to speak of them.

—Since I was little I’ve had a great veneration for the Holy Ancestors. Surely I’ve told one of you about wanting them to give me the name Joakeim when they made me a monk. We owe them so much! Saints Joakeim and Anna are the

most dispassionate couple ever! They didn't have a fleshly mind in the slightest.

That's how God created man, and that's how He wanted people to beget children: dispassionately. However, after the Fall, passion jumped into the relationship between man and woman. As soon as a dispassionate couple appeared, that were as God had created man, and as He wanted humans to procreate, the Panagia, that pure creature, was born; and after that, Christ became incarnate. It makes me think that Christ would have come down to earth even sooner, had a pure couple such as Saints Joakeim and Anna appeared sooner.

The Roman Catholics have fallen into delusion and wrongly believe, out of misguided devotion, that the Panagia was born without having ancestral sin. Whereas in truth, the Panagia was not exempt from the ancestral sin, but rather was begotten as God had originally intended mankind to be begotten after its creation. That is, She was all-pure [4] because Her conception was without pleasure. The Holy Ancestors, after fervent prayer to God that He would grant them a child, came together not out of carnal desire, but out of obedience to God. This is something I experienced on Sinai. [5]

Abstinence in Married Life

God "created all things, very good." (Gen 1:31) A man feels physical attraction towards a woman, and the woman towards the man. If this attraction did not exist then no one would have ever set out to start a family. Instead, they'd have reflected upon the difficulties they'd have to face later in family life, in raising children, etc., and would have decided not even to begin.

In those years after the Fall of the first-created, the carnal mind in some people might have been five percent, in others ten percent, thirty percent, and so on. Today, however, where is anybody going to be found who has a carnal mind of only five percent, that is, one who has a pure mind! At any rate, to all people God has given the potential to attain dispassion if they struggle with *philotimo*. [6]

Husbands and wives should never forget that man is not only flesh but also spirit, and in this way restrain themselves. They must struggle to subjugate the flesh to the spirit. If they struggle to live spiritually, with the guidance of their spiritual father, little by little they will begin to taste of the delights from on high—spiritual and heavenly delights—and they won't seek after carnal things.

Both The Married and Celibate Life Are Blessed

—Geronta, what should someone answer to young children who ask if the monastic life is higher than the married life?

—First, help them to understand what is man's destiny and the meaning of life. Next, explain that the Church blesses both of these paths, because both are able to lead them to Paradise if they live according to God's will. Let's say that two people set out on a pilgrimage. The first goes by bus,

while the other goes on foot; but they both have the same destination. God rejoices in the first just as he is amazed by the second. What's bad is when the one who goes by footpath judges the one who goes by bus, or vice versa.

It's good for youth who think about monasticism to know that the monk's vocation is very great: it is to become an Angel. Christ told the Sadducees that in the next life, in Heaven, we will live as Angels. For this reason many youth, those with much *philotimo* become monastics and begin the angelic life in this life.

One should not, however, think that whoever goes to the monastery will be saved just because they've become monastics. Each person will answer before God whether he sanctified the life he chose. In other words, *philotimo* is needed everywhere. God does not make some people successful and others good-for-nothing. Whoever is without *philotimo*, regardless of the path they chose to follow, will end up good-for-nothing, whereas the one with *philotimo* prospers, wherever he is found, because divine Grace is found within him. There are married people who live very virtuously and who become sanctified. A family man who loves God and is drawn by divine eros is able to make great spiritual progress. In the meantime his children are endowed with virtues, a good family is created, and he shall receive a double portion from God.

Each youth must have as his aim to become holy, with *philotimo* and without anxiety, thus sanctifying the life he or she will choose. Does he want marriage? Then let him marry, but let him struggle to become a good family man, and to live a holy life. Does he want monasticism? Then let him become a monk, but let him struggle to become a good monk. In short, let him measure his own strength that he may be able to advance along one of the two paths. For example, if a girl sees that she doesn't have the strength to become a nun, then she should tell God humbly: "My God, I am weak; I can't live as a nun; send me a man who will help me so that I can create a good family and live spiritually." God will grant this to her. If she marries and makes a good family, living according to the Gospel, God will not ask from her more than this.

Of course, there are young people of whom God asks little, but due to their *philotimo*, they struggle greatly and offer more to Him by choosing the monastic life. These shall receive double crowns. In other words, if a person senses a calling for married life, but wants, because of *philotimo*, to sacrifice everything and embrace monastic life, this greatly moves God. But this person must be careful to examine their motives to ensure they are pure and not due to pride. Thenceforth God will eliminate all obstacles [hindering the chosen path].



[1] i.e. The Elder's reference to this particular passage suggests these people have need of Confession.

[2] The Elder is not saying that marital relations are inherently sinful but the lust which inevitably goes hand in hand with them.

[3] The Elder equates a “milder” nature (i.e. lesser desire for physical relations) to spiritual “health”. While he parallels the “lively” nature (i.e. greater desire for physical relations) with spiritual “ailment”.

[4] The Theotokos was born according to nature and not virginally. She is “all-pure,” for, as St. John the Damascene writes in his work “On the Nativity of our All-holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary,” she was conceived “chastely” (Cf. *Patrologia Graeca* 96, 669A), and also increased in holiness because of her spiritual struggle, the good beginning of which she received from her parents, repulsing “every superfluous and soul-damaging thought before experiencing them.” (Ibid. 676B).

[5] Geronta Paisios lived ascetically on Mt. Sinai in the asketerion of Saints Epistimi and Galaktioin from 1962 until 1964. He did not reveal this event to us.

[6] Philotimo is that deep-seated awareness in the heart that motivates the good that a person does. A philotimos person is one who conceives and enacts eagerly those things good. Through the ages of Hellenic history, philotimo, often interpreted as “love of honor,” was considered as the highest value, which regulates proper in-group behavior. One who has philotimo exhibits a special sense of honor, dignity, obligation, self-respect and a high regard for teamwork. In ancient times, it was considered an “extremely sensitive region of men’s souls, one that gave forth gallantry, nobility and moral pride.” Elder Paisios had this to say about philotimo: The righteous Christian does not practice good acts for his own benefit, i.e. in order to be rewarded or to avoid hell and gain paradise, but rather because he prefers good to evil. Everything else is a natural consequence of the good that fills our soul without having asked for it. This way, good has dignity; otherwise, it originates from the cheap attitude of “give and take.”



An Athonite ascetic used to say, “One first gives himself totally to God, and then God cleanses him and gives him back to the people. When such a person believes that he is the worst of all, then one of his “Lord have mercies” said on behalf of the world is worth more than someone else’s one thousand “Lord have mercies.”

From an Athonite Gerontikon

ON PRIDE AND VAINGLORY

From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim.

Thoughts of pride and vainglory are formidable and difficult to fight against. But before the humility of Jesus, they literally lose their strength. The truth shall set you free from every sin and passion. (Jn 8:32).

The Holy Fathers write: “When you see Pilate and Herod reconcile, know that they are preparing to kill Jesus. And when you see vainglory and pride attacking you, know that they are plotting to destroy your soul!” Fear and trembling should seize you when you discern such thoughts; for in proportion to the magnitude of your pride, the providence of God prepares to chasten you with trials so that you may learn to think humbly. Force yourself to be humble, and when you see thoughts of pride, lay hold of a whip and start lashing yourself. The bodily pain will drive away the pain of your soul, and God, Who sees how much you are struggling, will provide you with the corresponding strength, for according to our intention and struggle, Jesus sends His almighty power.

Just think how many people have preached, written, and dogmatized; they filled the world with books, as did Origen who wrote many books and saved many people and strengthened a multitude of others to become martyrs; yet in the end he was labeled as the founder of a heresy and fell away from God.

Alas! How much evil does pride create in man! God reckons no man’s works as his own, since man is merely a faucet, a tap—not the spring! And how can the faucet consider the water flowing through it as its own work, since it knows that the spring causes the water to flow? Even so, forgetfulness is a most evil teacher of the soul, for had it remembered the truth, it would not have gone mad.

What made Lucifer fall? Was it not haughty thinking? Let this be a lesson for us, for one acquires experience and caution not only from one’s own misfortunes, but also from one’s neighbor’s.

How did great ascetics, who had renounced everything, fall and reach the point of demonic possession and then return to the world so that monasticism was blamed? They fell because they thought that they were better and more virtuous than the others, and that they were supposedly accomplishing something.



You will be able to check envy if you rejoice with the man whom you envy whenever he rejoices, and grieve whenever he grieves.

St. Maximos the Confessor

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

By Fr. Michael Pomazansky from "Orthodox Dogmatic Theology," St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press (1994), pp. 234-237.

In the Greek text the word "in One," is expressed as a numeral (en mian). Thus, the Symbol of our Faith confesses that the Church is one. In specific, we confess that (a) the Church is one as viewed from within itself, i.e., not divided, and (b) She is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself.

Its unity consists not in the joining together of what is different in nature, but in inward agreement and unanimity. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Eph 4:4-6).

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock, of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ comprised the subject of His High-Priestly Prayer before His sufferings on the Cross; the Lord prayed *that they all may be one (That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me—Jn 17:21).*

The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which comes in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order.

The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is: that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the inward mystical life in sanctity of the more perfect of its members. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of men in the body; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly, by means of words, the faith of Christ.

The Church does not lose its unity because side by side with the Church there exist Christian societies which do not belong to it. These societies are not in the Church, they are outside of it.

Furthermore, the unity of the Church is not violated because of temporary divisions of a non-dogmatic nature. Differences between Churches arise frequently out of insufficient or incorrect information. Also, sometimes a temporary breaking of communion is caused by the personal errors of individual hierarchs who stand at the head of one

or another local Church, or it is caused by their violation of the canons of the Church, or by the violation of the submission of one territorial ecclesiastical group to another in accordance with anciently established tradition. Moreover, life shows us the possibility of disturbances within a local Church which hinder the normal communion of other Churches with the given local Church until the outward manifestation and triumph of the defenders of authentic Orthodox truth. Finally, the bond between Churches can sometimes be violated for a long time by political conditions, as has often happened in history. [1] In such cases, the division touches only outward relations, but does not touch or violate inward spiritual unity.

The truth of the One Church is defined by the Orthodoxy of its members, and not by their quantity at one or another moment. St. Gregory the Theologian wrote concerning the Orthodox Church of Constantinople before the Second Ecumenical Council as follows: "This field was once small and poor ... This was not even a field at all. Perhaps it was not worth granaries or barns or scythes. Upon it there were no stacks or sheaves, but perhaps only small and unripe grass which *grows upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up. Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom* (Pss 128:6-8), and which do not call upon themselves the blessing of those who pass by. Such was our field, our harvest. Although it is great, fat, and abundant before Him Who sees what is hidden ... still, it is not known among the people, it is not united in one place, but is gathered little by little as the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat, *as the grape gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat.* (Micah 7: 1). Such was our previous poverty and grief." (Farewell Sermon of St. Gregory the Theologian to the Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council).

"And where are those," says St. Gregory in another Homily, "who reproach us for our poverty and are proud of their wealth? They consider great numbers of people to be a sign of the Church, and despise the small flock. They measure the Divinity (the Saint has in mind here the Arians, who taught that the Son of God was less than the Father) and they weigh people. They place a high value on grains of sand (that is, the masses) and belittle the luminaries. They gather into their treasure-house simple stones, and disdain pearls" (St. Gregory the Theologian, Homily 33, Against the Arians).

In the prayers of the Church are contained petitions for the ceasing of possible disagreements among the Churches: *Cause discords to cease in the Church; quickly destroy by the might of Thy Holy Spirit all uprisings of heresies.* (Eucharistic Prayer at the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great). *We glorify Thee ... Thou one rule in Trinity, and beg for forgiveness of sins, peace for the world, and concord for the Church ... Grant peace and*

unity to Thy Church, O Thou Who lovest mankind! (Sunday Canon of Nocturne, Tone 8, Canticle 9).



[1]. Two examples from recent church history may serve to illustrate the character of these temporary divisions:

In the early 19th century, when Greece proclaimed its independence from the Turkish Sultan, the parts of the Greek Church in Greece itself and in Turkey became outwardly divided. When the Patriarch of Constantinople, who was still under Turkish authority, was forced by the Sultan to excommunicate the “rebels” in Greece, the Orthodox in Greece refused to accept this act as having been performed under political coercion, but they did not cease to regard the Patriarch as a member of the same Orthodox Church as themselves, nor did they doubt that his non-political sacramental acts were grace-giving. This division led to the formation today of two separate local Churches (in full communion with each other): those of Greece and those of Constantinople.

In the 20th century Russian Orthodox Church, a church administration was formed in 1927 by Metropolitan Sergius (the Moscow Patriarchate) on the basis of submission to the dictation of the atheist rulers. Parts of the Church in Russia (the Catacomb or True Orthodox Church) and outside (the Russian Church Outside of Russia) refuse up to now to have communion with this administration because of its political domination by Communists; but the bishops of the Church Outside of Russia (about the Catacomb Church it is more difficult to make a general statement) did not deny the grace of the Mysteries of the Moscow Patriarchate and still felt themselves to be one with its clergy and faithful who try not to collaborate with Communist aims. When Communism fell in Russia, these church bodies are once more in communion, leaving to a future free council all judgments regarding the “Sergianist” period.



THE IDIOT

By Dostoyevsky.

“Pavlicheff was a man of bright intellect and a good Christian, a sincere Christian,” said the prince, suddenly. “How could he possibly embrace a faith which is unchristian? Roman Catholicism is, so to speak, simply the same thing as unchristianity,” he added with

flashing eyes, which seemed to take in everybody in the room.

“Come, that’s a little too strong, isn’t it?” murmured the old man, glancing at General Epanchin in surprise. “How do you make out that the Roman Catholic religion is unchristian? What is it, then?” asked Ivan Petrovitch, turning to the prince.

“It is not a Christian religion, in the first place,” said the latter, in extreme agitation, quite out of proportion to the necessity of the moment. “And in the second place, Roman Catholicism is, in my opinion, worse than Atheism itself. Yes, that is my opinion. Atheism only preaches a negation, but Romanism goes further; it preaches a disfigured, distorted Christ, it preaches Anti-Christ—, I assure you, I swear it!

This is my own personal conviction, and it has long distressed me. The Roman Catholic believes that the Church on earth cannot stand without universal temporal Power. He cries ‘non possumus!’ In my opinion the Roman Catholic religion is not a faith at all, but simply a continuation of the Roman Empire, and everything is subordinated to this idea, beginning with faith. The Pope has seized territories and an earthly throne, and has held them with the sword. And so the thing has gone on, only that to the sword they have added lying, intrigue, deceit, fanaticism, superstition, swindling; they have played fast and loose with the most sacred and sincere feelings of men; they have exchanged everything for money, for base earthly POWER! And is this not the teaching of Anti-Christ?

How could the upshot of all this be other than Atheism? Atheism is the child of Roman Catholicism, as it proceeded from these Romans themselves, though perhaps they would not believe it. It grew and fattened on hatred of its parents; it is the progeny of their lies and spiritual feebleness. Atheism! In our country, it is only among the upper classes that you find unbelievers; men who have lost the root or spirit of their faith; but abroad whole masses of the people are beginning to profess unbelief, at first because of the darkness and lies by which they were surrounded; but now out of fanaticism, out of loathing for the Church and Christianity!”

The prince paused to get breath. He had spoken with extraordinary rapidity, and was very pale. All present interchanged glances, but at last the old dignitary burst out laughing frankly. Prince N. took out his eye-glass to have a good look at the speaker.

The German poet came out of his corner and crept nearer to the table, with a spiteful smile. “You exaggerate the matter very much,” said Ivan Petrovitch, with rather a bored air. “There are, in the foreign Churches, many representatives of their faith who are worthy of respect and esteem.”

“Oh, but I did not speak of individual representatives. I was merely talking about Roman Catholicism, and its essence—of Rome itself. A Church can never entirely disappear; I never hinted at that!...”

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ON FLEEING SIN'S DESTRUCTIVE PLACES AND WAYS.

By St. Theodore the Studite.

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

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

But one whose senses are unbridled and who lets in desires like streams, stirs up a most dreadful storm for themselves.

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

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

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

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

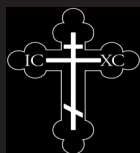
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

By St. Cyril, Patriarch of Jerusalem (+386), from "Discourse on Mary Theotokos by Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem."

And it came to pass that for ten years after our Lord rose from the dead, according to what the Ancient History of Josephus and Irenaeus and the Hebrew authorities say, John and Mary lived in the same house in Jerusalem. And on a certain day, the holy Virgin Mary called John and said unto him, "Go and summon to me Peter and James, and let them come to me here in this place." And John went in haste and summoned them, and they came, and the three [Apostles] sat down before her.

And she said unto them, "Hearken unto me, O ye whom God hath chosen to preach the Gospel throughout the world. Ye have seen with your own eyes the mighty deeds and wonders which God performed in the time when He was in the world with you, and ye have no need of any to bear testimony to you. Ye three did He take up to the Mount of Olives; and your ears did hear the Voice of the Father bearing witness concerning Him, saying, *This is My beloved Son, in Whom is My desire.* Ye saw the sufferings which the Jews inflicted upon Him when He was raised upon the Cross, and that His Father raised Him up from the dead on the third day. And I went to the tomb, and He appeared unto me, and He spake unto me, saying, Go and inform My brethren what things ye have seen. Let those whom My Father hath loved come to Galilee. And He came in to you, the door being closed, and He spake unto you concerning the Kingdom which is in the heavens. And at the end of forty days ye were all gathered

together in one place on the Mount of Olives, and he was there with you. And the Lord came again to you, and he said unto you, *I have fulfilled the dispensation which was laid down for Me in the world, and I am now going up to my Father.* And ye replied, 'Wilt thou depart and leave us I orphans?' He said, *When I go I will send unto you the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, in My place, after many days, even until Pentecost. But behold, to her who was unto Me a dwelling-place I was a Son in the flesh, and she is under your care now. But I will be with you until the end of the world.*

And when He had said these things unto us He separated Himself from us a little, and ascended the mountain on the east, and mounted upon the Cherubim, and departed into the heights in the flesh; the flesh which He had received from me. And thousands of thousands, and tens of thousands of tens of thousands [of angels] sang hymns to Him, and they followed Him with their eyes until He entered Heaven. And we saw two men who were standing close to him, and they said, *Ye men, why are ye looking up into heaven? This is Jesus Whom they crucified, and Who is being carried up into heaven, and He it is Who shall come to judge the quick and the dead.* And after the end of ten days He sent upon you the Holy Spirit, Who gave you power to do mighty works, according to your ability. Put not behind you the commandments of the Son of God; fear ye not the destruction of the kings and governors of the earth in such wise that ye shall put behind you the instructions of our Lord and Master.

Now therefore, be not grieved in your hearts at what I shall say unto you. The time of my visitation hath drawn nigh, and I must lay down my body so that my soul and my spirit may depart to the Lord, in order that He may give unto

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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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me the things which He hath promised to me. For my Lord came unto me on the evening of the Sabbath, as I was standing in prayer, and He said unto me, *Dost thou know Me?* And I said unto Him, 'Thou art my Lord and my beloved Son; what is it that Thou commandest me to do?' And He said unto me, *Inform Peter and John concerning these things, for it is they who shall lay their hands upon thine eyes. Now three more days have yet to pass before I shall come for thee and take thy soul and thy body into My city of the Jerusalem of heaven. And all My saints shall marvel at the glory which I shall give unto thee in that place, for it is thou who shalt make God and His angels to be reconciled with man. And thou shalt be more exalted than all the saints, and I will make My angels to hymn thee at all times, for thou resemblest them in thy purity and thy virginity.*

All the angels and all the hosts of heaven shall rejoice when thou comest to meet them. The Patriarchs and the prophets shall come forth to meet thee, and they shall exult because the mother of the Lord hath come to them, for they were not able to see her in the flesh. Behold, when they see her they shall praise her through God the Father. All the virgins who are in the heavens shall rejoice with thee when thou shalt meet them, and those who have preserved their virginity shall come forth to thee, and shall bow in homage before thee, saying, Well hast thou come (i.e. Welcome)! O mother of all virgins! It was time for thee to come unto us, O thou mother! Grieve thou not, O mother, about thy holy body, neither about what shall happen unto it, nor about where they shall lay it.

What man is there who hath been begotten by the flesh who shall not taste death, and whose body shall not return to the earth wherefrom I took him? I tasted death, but I rose from the dead on the third day, I destroyed him that held the power of death. I will hide thy body in the earth and I will make My angels to keep it

in the earth always, and no man whatsoever shall find thy body in the earth in the place wherein I shall place it, until the day wherein I shall raise it up incorruptible. And sweet odors shall arise from out of thy body until the day wherein it shall rise up. They shall build a great and glorious church over thy body, and it shall be more splendid than a palace of kings. Haste thee [to do] the commandment; of the Apostles, and give an ordinance to the virgins. I will come with My angels, and I will hide thy body and thy soul; so then thou shalt not be afraid of Death when he shall come to thee. Now therefore call unto us all the virgins, and I will give them an ordinance."

And the Apostles did according to what she told them; and when the virgins had come unto her they saluted her and she said unto them, "I declare unto you that I am about to depart to the Jerusalem of heaven"; and they paid no attention to the words. And Mary took hold of the hand of one of them who had waxed exceedingly old, that is to say, Mary Magdalene, out of whom the Christ had cast several devils, and she said unto the virgins, "Behold your mother from this time onwards. Give rest to her spirit, even as she hath given rest to me in my days. Observe the customs which ye arranged to keep with the Christ when ye were with Him."

These things did she say unto the virgins, but she did not inform them about her death. And she turned to the Apostles, and she said unto Simon Peter, "Simon Peter, whom the Lord loved, and preserved for the kingdom that is in the heavens, be merciful, even as your Father Who Is in the heavens is merciful. James and John, watch over the Church, and be kind and gracious to every man. And thou, O Peter, go thou into the house of thy disciple Bifros, and take the pieces of fine linen which thou didst commit to his care, and bring them hither to me." And Peter did according as she told him, and he brought the pieces of fine linen which had been com-

mitted to the care of Bifros. And she said unto James, "Rise up, take a stater, and go to the sellers of sweet perfumes, and bring its value in spices to me hither"; and he did according as she told him.

And when the day wherein she was to be taken arrived, the Virgin Mary said unto John, "Rise up, light a great number of lamps, both large and small, for the evening hath come." And she took the pieces of fine linen, and spread them out upon the ground, and she poured out upon them her sweet spices, and she stood up on them, and said unto the Apostles, "Let us pray to the Lord, so that He may have mercy upon us."

And she spread out her hands towards the east, and she made supplication to the Lord, saying, "I give thanks unto Thee, O Lord God Almighty, and to Thine Only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, because He came to us, and built for Himself a fleshly tabernacle in my womb, according as He wished. I brought Him forth without pollution, without blemish. I nursed Him with anxious care, and it was He Who nourished me. I give thanks unto Him because Thy Holy Spirit came into me. And now, my Lord, the time hath come when Thou shalt draw nigh unto me, and shalt be gracious unto me. Scatter all the stones of stumbling that are before me and [all] obstacles, and let all those that are in my path, both on the left hand and on the right hand, flee before me. Stand Thou near me with gladness. Let the powers of darkness be ashamed, for nothing of theirs hath been found in me; Open unto me the gates of righteousness, and let me go in through them, and I will make manifest Thy holy name, O my God. Let the Dragon flee before me, for I have freedom of speech before Thee. May the river of fire be tranquil when I come unto Thee, and may it allow me cross over it, for unto Thee belongs the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

And when she had said these things, she lay down upon the pieces of fine linen and the sweet spices, and her face was towards the east. And behold, the Lord Jesus Christ came unto her upon the Cherubim, with the angels before Him, and He came and stood at His mother's head, and He said unto her, *Be not afraid of Death, for the Life of the whole world is with thee, but it is necessary that at least thou shouldst Glance at him with thine eyes, and he will not come except he be commanded to do so.* And Jesus said unto Death, *Come, O thou who art in the chambers of the south.* And when Mary saw him she cast her soul into the bosom of her Son, and He wrapped it up in a cloth of delight. And the Apostles laid their hands upon her eyes, and she fell asleep with a good



falling asleep on the night of the twentieth day of Tobe, in the peace of God!

And the Lord said unto the Apostles, *Take up her bed carefully, and take it to the Valley of Jehosaphat, which is opposite the Mount of Olives, the place where I broke bread in days of old. Set down there the bier whereon is the body, and withdraw yourselves because of the threatening of the Jews, for they will pursue you wishing to slay you. And I will hide the body according as it pleaseth Me.* Thereupon the Apostles took up the body and placed it upon a bier.

And when the morning had come a great multitude was gathered together in the city, and the virgins cried out. And straightway Peter and John lifted up the body to carry out to the place of which the Saviour had told them, and a great multitude of people sang psalms and hymns before it, saying, "The Lord ...," and a multitude of angels sang hymns before her. And when they arrived at the Temple of the Jews all the members of the Sanhedrin were gathered together in the Temple on that day, and they heard the singing of the hymns over her holy body.

And they said, "Who is this who hath died in the city this day?" And [the people] said unto them, "It is the mother of the Nazarene, that is, Jesus, who hath died, and they are taking her out to bury her." And they passed a decree unanimously, saying, "We must not let her be buried in the city; lest mighty deeds be worked

[at her tomb] similar to those which her Son performed, and lest the people believe in her, and they change our Law." And the high priests and the scribes said, let us go and burn her body with fire, so that no man will ever be able to find it." And the Jews lighted a fire, and they pursued [the Apostles] with the bier whereon was the body of the Virgin. And when the Apostles had arrived at the Valley of Jehosaphat, they looked behind them and they saw the Jews pursuing them, and they dropped the bier upon the ground, for they were afraid that the godless Jews would kill them. And whilst the Jews were rushing on to overtake them the Apostles betook themselves to flight and escaped.

Now the body of the holy Virgin they could not find, and all that they found was the wooden bier, and they lighted a fire and threw the bier into it. And they went into every place, saying, "Perhaps her body hath been carried away secretly," but they could not find it. And a very strong sweet smell emanated from the place whereon the body of the Virgin had been laid, and a mighty voice came from heaven, saying unto them, *Let no man give himself the trouble of seeking after*

the body of the Virgin until the great day of the appearing the Saviour. And the Jews fled greatly ashamed; and they came to the city and told their neighbors what had happened, and they commended them, saying, "Tell no man whomsoever what hath happened."

Now, therefore, O my beloved, these are the things which we were able to discover for our discourse on the life of the holy Virgin Mary. The whole time of her life was sixty years. She gave birth to our Lord when she was fifteen years; she followed the Saviour when He was preaching for three and a half years after she gave Him birth, and after the Saviour rose from the dead she lived eleven years and a half more. Her earthly life ended on the twentieth day of the month Tobe. Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, reigneth over us. And after the righteous Emperors, Constantine and his son, rose up we built a holy church in the name of the holy Virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord, on the day of her holy commemoration.

And let us send up to her thanksgiving, saying, "Remember us, O true Queen, and do thou plead on our behalf before God, so that He may shew mercy unto us and so that we may celebrate a festival to Him at all times." Let us give alms to the poor in the name of the Virgin, [so that] she may not forsake us in the place to which we are going. Let us ascribe glory unto her by the utterances of our lips, and let us say, "Through thee honours have been bestowed upon the city by our God." And again, *The death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord.* (Pss 116:15) And again, *The sound of rejoicing and salvation is in the habitation of the righteous.* (Pss 118:15) And now the time hath arrived for us to offer up the Holy Offering, the Body and Blood of Jesus the Christ, our Lord, and moderation in everything is good. By the Will of God we will give the remainder of the exegesis in the holy shrine. Let us then bring to an end our discourse at this place, and let us ascribe glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, life-giving and consubstantial, now and always, and for ever and ever. Amen.

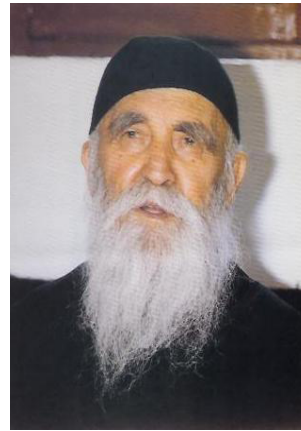


Just as it was only through her that the Son came to us, was seen on earth and lived among men, after previously being invisible to all, so from now on to endless eternity all progress towards the manifestation of divine light, every revelation of divine mysteries, and all forms of spiritual gifts are beyond everyone's grasp without her. She was the first to receive the all-pervading *fullness of Him Who fills all things* (Eph 1:23; 4:10), and she brought Him within reach of all—distributing to each as he is able to receive, in proportion to the measure of his purity such that she is both the treasure-house and Mistress of God's riches.

St. Gregory Palamas

ECUMENISM, ORTHODOXY AND HERESY

By Blessed Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980), the remarkable confessor and spiritual guide, vigorous defender of the Orthodox Christian Faith, itinerant preacher, and illuminating writer!



Rise up Chrysostomes, Gregories, Germanuses, Tarasiuses, Nikifori, Fotii and the rest, the old and recent Holy Patriarchs of Constantinople, who sacrificed yourselves for your flocks, to see who is on your throne. You, like the good shepherds have sacrificed your souls for your own sheep, while the present ones sacrifice their sheep for themselves and they open the door and invite the

wolves to come in and destroy the flock.

When has a Patriarch fallen in such a slide, that he voluntarily struggles to deliver his flock to the wolves to be torn apart? The cause is pride, the root and cause of all sins, all the evil, all heresies, calamities and sorrows and even greater than the calamities and unhappiness, the deprivation of God's grace.

The wolf shepherds, false teachers, false prophets and false christs, were expelled from Christ's flock and as unrepentant, they were placed under everlasting anathemas by the Holy Fathers, who are the true imitators of the Chief Shepherd Christ and His followers, the good, true and divine shepherds, the preservers of the decent and holy seven Ecumenical Synods.

The Orthodox Church is not used to innovations like the Westerners and the Protestants, who after their separation and without ceasing have taken up to perform innovations or reforms, to such a disrespectful and insane degree to innovate all the mysteries and holy tradition and deleting many...

There are two reasons that make the present day Arch-hierarchs to innovate and reform the Church, first pride, which makes most of the hierarchs, save some, to believe they are wiser than the Holy Fathers, and secondly gluttony and love of self. By most of them becoming, lovers of the flesh, they were abandoned by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

If the Patriarch does not accept but rejects the suggestions of the Government of the Holy Synod, Arch-hierarchs, priests and lay followers, and insists on the union (of the Churches), then he should be renounced. For in case they do not oppose but retreat and say that they will follow the Patriarch, then there would be a far reaching destruction. Then I would have nothing else to say but woe to the Orthodox Church of Greece. Woe and to the Greek nation. For it shall be immeasurably worse than the subjugation to the Muslim and the false prophet Mohammed.

If the Pope wishes the union, let him recognize and confess all his deceits, heresies and innovations made by various Popes from the beginning and over a period of time, having separated themselves from the Orthodox Church, he will be received only if he repents, cries bitterly and humbles himself.

If they do not reject pride, both Patriarch and Pope, and do not humble themselves, imitating our Lord, not only would they not succeed but instead they will increase the separation and they will create many scandals, disturbances, confusions and great damage to and loss of their flocks. If they would imitate the Lord and humble themselves, the union will succeed, they will benefit themselves and their flocks and the name of the Father in Heaven will be glorified through them like through the Apostles, for the "Lord opposes the proud and raises the humble".

Papism is the Forerunner of the Antichrist

Orthodoxy was firmed up by the Holy Apostles and the enacting Fathers through the seven Ecumenical Synods, while illumined by the Holy Spirit. Papism is the forerunner of the antichrist, for the Pope having been captured by arrogance and conceit, and wishing to have the highest authority of the Church and State, he tore the Church of Christ.

The Pope worshipers have fallen in many false beliefs and heresies modifying the mysteries of the Orthodox Church. Instead of the baptism they are sprinkling, instead of the mystery of communion they have Jewish unleavened bread. They got rid of the fasts and even the holy oil, nor can they perform blessings by sprinkling with holy water because they are excommunicated and thus their blessing does not hold.

I would not refrain to mention something I witnessed myself when I went to the Holy Mountain for pilgrimage. When the Emperor Constantine Michael and Patriarch Vekkos who were Pope worshipers went to the Holy Mountain during the period 1170-1200, they were pressing the monks to receive the Papism and to co-celebrate with the papists. Those that had accepted and co-celebrated, their bodies remained in-corrup but give off a foul odor. Those that refused to co-celebrate and were killed by the papists, their relics give off a pleasant odor. I wish through the grace of the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind, to give you strength and reject the dream of deceit and languish and return to the bosom of the Church.

If the present Hierarchs do not accept the decisions, the Canons and the traditions given by the divine Apostles and Holy Fathers of the Church but ignore them, who would then respect their own?

The Church and State and their leaders of the present evil days sleep the heaviest sleep of negligence and laziness, and if they do not wake up, as well as the clergy and the people to repentance in the service of God's commandments, of the virtues and good works, they will have to answer during the great judgment and will be punished.

Hold Fast to your Faith

Hold onto your faith firmly and remain immovable on the traditions of the Divine Fathers, for we have arrived at the age that even the strong in faith are lost. Toil by studying and learning, for everything good is achieved with hard work and suffering. We shall not feel the labor of virtue when we consider the clouds of martyrs and saints and in the future we shall be glorified.

How happy and blessed we shall be, if through a little toil we shall be judged worthy to camp in the lovely camps of Paradise and inherit the goods of the Heavenly Kingdom of God.

The apostle Paul, the mouth of Christ, commands: Do not communicate in the works of sterile darkness that you may not become controlled. In cases where our Orthodox Faith is ignored or slandered, it is permissible to check it and have just anger, most justifiable, but silence is not permissible. But the checking must be done with discernment and prudence not with disturbance and anger, but with divine anger. God does not give up His Church and to those who fight her He will humble them and they will be smashed like a ceramic roof, but those who hold their Orthodox faith and confession till death, shall be blessed.

I bless you from the heart to never be timid in your struggles, even if you see the enemies of the Church becoming stronger... The one that struggles for the Orthodox faith and for our holy Church has the Almighty God for an ally, while the one that struggles for deceit has the ever cunning devil for ally, the weak master of darkness, of lies and all heresies, fallacies and wickedness. There is nothing more honorable, modest and holier when one struggles for the faith. And if while struggling he is killed by the enemies, without bending, he is the brightest victor and he will receive the trophy of the call above and the heavenly crown. So fight for the faith and struggle until death, to become worthy heir of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the present time, when the Church is attacked in many ways and means by many and diverse fighters, your effort in confronting and combating will succeed, with God's help and will save some from today's flood of sin.

I congratulate you for your zeal for the dissemination of the Christian truths and for the benefit of the Christians. We should know that according to the toil and willingness each one works, rewards will be given by the wage giver Christ. While there is time, let us work spiritually and sow with labor so that we may reap in peace.



Have the heart of a son towards God, the mind of a judge toward yourself, and toward your neighbor the heart of a mother.

Elder Cleopa of Romania (+1998)

OUR HOLY TRADITION IS A SOURCE OF FAITH

By the Rev. Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos Vlachos, from the book: *"The Revelation of God,"* pp. 30-32.

What, exactly, is "Holy Tradition"? How is it associated with Orthodoxy, the Holy Bible and Divine Revelation?

The New Testament itself mentions the term "Tradition" as something that applied along with the Scripture, which essentially constitutes proof of the fact that the Scripture is only a part of this "Tradition."

I could quote numerous passages from the New Testament, but I will confine myself to the most characteristic. In Thessalonians, the Apostle had said: *Therefore, my brethren, stand fast and keep the traditions that you were taught, either by word of mouth, or by an epistle of ours.* (2Thess 2:15) So, apart from the Epistles, Christians are called upon to also enforce all those things that were verbally handed down to them by the Apostles.

In his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle praises them for preserving the traditions. *And I praise you, my brethren, for you have remembered everything of mine, and you have held on to the traditions, exactly as I delivered them to you.* (1Cor 11:2) In the same Epistle, (Corinthians I), he mentions a *previous epistle* of his (1Cor 5:9). We are highlighting this, only so that we might be aware that other texts had also existed, which however were not salvaged, so that they might be included in the Canon of the New Testament.

To the Christians in Philippi, he wrote: *...which you have learnt, and received, and heard from and seen in me and have thus acted, and the God of peace is with you.* (Phil 4:9) They had to uphold not only those things that were written in the epistle, but also those things that they had heard, and seen, and received from others. From this, it becomes clearly evident that the Holy Bible does NOT contain God's entire Revelation.

St. John the Evangelist wrote: *I have much to write to you, but I did not want to do it with paper and ink; but I am hoping to come to you and speak to you, mouth to mouth, so that your joy may be fulfilled.*" (2Jn 1:12) Here, as in his third Epistle 6:13, St. John the Evangelist reassures them that he did not write down everything that he had to tell them. He promised to analyze even more truths, *mouth to mouth*, through direct and personal communication with them.

But even the Gospels themselves do not describe Christ's entire life in detail, nor do they mention all of the miracles that He performed while He lived on earth. John's Gospel ends with these words: *And there are many other things that*

Jesus did, which, if each one of them was written down, the whole world itself would not have enough space to hold the books that would have described them. Amen. (Jn 21:25)

Therefore, only some passages were recorded in the New Testament, so that this would act as a distinct verification of the truth that the Holy Bible is only a portion of the whole Truth that was delivered by Christ to the saints, who had in turn lived that Truth in the Holy Spirit. So, whenever we regard the Holy Bible as the one and only source of divine Revelation, we are in fact mutilating whatever Truth and whatever Revelation God had delivered to His friends (the saints) and has been preserved within the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

On the subject of Tradition, Fr. Athanasios Yevtic wrote: "Tradition is the most theological of all inheritances;" in other words, the inheritance that he (Damascenos) received "from a theologian father"—meaning the theologian Gregory. This "receiving" of the "inheritance" (which is called Tradition in the Orthodox Church) is not merely the receiving of a "teaching," because then, the Fathers would not have been called "Fathers," but simply "teachers" and "pedagogues." The Apostle Paul wrote: *Even if you have tens of thousands of teachers, you do not have many Fathers; for, in Jesus Christ, through the Gospel, I have given birth to you.* So, according to the Apostle, "tradition" is "to be borne of the Fathers, in Christ, through the Gospel, and to receive Christ and to form Him inside us." (Saint John the Damascene: "The Theotokos," Hossios Ioannis Rossos Publications, p. 234)

Tradition is not something other than the Orthodox faith, in other words, Orthodoxy. The term "Orthodoxy" means "the upright glory," or, the upright faith or upright teaching regarding God, and all the related issues that lead to man's salvation. But, this upright faith was revealed by God, to those who were worthy of this Revelation; to those who had reached theosis and were able to "receive" this Revelation of God. The saints, however, did receive this Revelation, and they handed it down to their spiritual children, who were re-born thanks to it.

It is not a typical handing down of a teaching, but a transfusion of an entire "lifestyle," which resurrects man who has "died" on account of his sins, and leads him to theosis. Thus, because the saints are the only ones who receive and hand down this upright faith, that is the reason why we uphold that "Tradition" relates to "Orthodoxy." "Tradition" is not about a handful of teachings that are externally transmitted from mouth to mouth; it is a transmission of life, which Christ brought to the world, in the Holy Spirit, and transmitted it to mankind. These are no superficial forms; they represent the rebirth and the theosis of man. They also demonstrate to mankind the path and the manner of theosis.

A SYNOPSIS OF THE SEVEN HOLY OECUMENICAL SYNODS

By an Orthodox Christian.

All seven Oecumenical Synods took place prior to the Schism of 1054 and significantly before the Protestant Reformation. Thus, during the first millennium of Christianity, there was only one visible Christian Church, the same Church of which our Lord Jesus Christ said *the gates of hell shall not prevail against,* (Mt 16:18) and which He would *guide into all Truth* (Jn 16:13). There is still only one Church, that being the Orthodox Church, *which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.* (1Tim 3:15) There exist no other options, no branches, and no alternatives. Those who claim otherwise have fallen into heresy.

The 1st Oecumenical Synod

It was convened by the first emperor of the Byzantine Empire, St. Constantine the Great.

The First Council, of the 318 holy fathers who assembled in Nicaea in 325 to condemn Arius, a priest in Alexandria, who denied that the Son of God is consubstantial with the Father. The fathers of the First Council also ordained that the whole Church should celebrate Pascha according to the same reckoning (as the Orthodox Church celebrates to this day). The Symbol of our Faith (the Nicene Creed) was also partially composed.

The 2nd Oecumenical Synod

It was convened by Emperor Theodosius the Great.

The Second Council, of the 150 holy fathers, assembled in Constantinople in 381 to condemn Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Symbol of our Faith was expanded during this Council to include the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

The 3rd Oecumenical Synod

It was convened by Emperor Theodosius II.

The Third Council, of the 200 fathers who assembled in Ephesus in 431 to condemn Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who called Christ a mere man and not God incarnate. Changes to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed were **forbidden** with punishment of deposition for clerics and excommunication for laity.

The 4th Oecumenical Synod

It was convened by Emperor Marcian and the Empress Pulcheria.

The Fourth Council, of the 630 who assembled in Chalcedon in 451 to repudiate the doctrine of monophysitism and to also describe and delineate the “hypostatic union” and two natures of Christ, human and divine. It adopted the Chalcedonian Creed also known as the “Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union” or the “Two-Nature Doctrine.” This and all subsequent ecumenical synods are not recognized by the heretical Mono-

physites (the Coptic “church” inclusive). Eutyches, the teacher of this heresy, was condemned; he was an archimandrite in greater Constantinople, who insisted that there was only one nature in Christ, the divine, after His Incarnation. The Council also condemned Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who illegally received Eutyches back into communion and who had deposed St. Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople, because he had excommunicated Eutyches.

The 5th Oecumenical Synod

It was convened by Emperor Justinian and the Empress Theodora.

The Fifth Council, of the 165 who assembled in Constantinople for the second time in 553 to condemn teaching attributed to the followers of Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the teacher of Nestorius. Origen theological demise with the Church arose through several heretical and extreme views adopted by him and his followers, the Origenists. Among these were the preexistence of souls, universal salvation and a hierarchical concept of the Trinity. This council reaffirmed decisions and doctrines explicated by previous Councils, and also condemned new Arian, Nestorian, and Monophysite writings.

The 6th Oecumenical Synod

It was convened by Emperor Constantine Pogonatus.

The Sixth Council in 680, of the 170 who assembled in Constantinople for the third time, to condemn the Monothelite heresy, which taught that there is in Christ but one will, the divine. Monothelitism (from a Greek word meaning “one will”) is a particular teaching about how the divine and human relate in the person of Jesus, known as a Christological doctrine. Specifically, Monothelitism teaches that Jesus Christ had two natures but only one will. This is contrary to the orthodox interpretation of Christology, which teaches that Jesus Christ has two wills (human and divine) corresponding to his two natures. The following were condemned, among others: Honorius, Pope of Rome; Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul, and Peter, Patriarchs of Constantinople; and Cyrus, Patriarch of Alexandria.

The 7th Oecumenical Synod

It was convened by Emperor Constantine and his mother Irene the Athenian.

The Seventh Council in 787, of the 350 who assembled in Nicaea for the second time restoring the veneration of icons and ending iconoclasm.

† † †

St. Gregory Palamas states that in every age there are Prophets, who in the Holy Spirit, are found worthy of experiencing God. It is necessary for us to trust these Prophets. Thus, some are Prophets initiated into revealed truths and others respect, honor and listen to them. Either we will have our own personal experience or trust those who have it. Both of these two groups are to be found in Orthodoxy. (“Ellines Pateres tis Ekklisias,” pp.496-498).

So when the Arians taught that the Son of God was less than the Father, St. Athanasios the Great was inspired by the Heavenly King, the Comforter and Spirit of Truth, to fight off this false teaching; along with the miracles given through St. Spyridon and St. Achilleus.

And when the followers of Macedonius denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Gregory of Nyssa were raised up to say that it was not so; along with the miracle given through St. Meletios.

And when the Nestorians taught that the Theotokos gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ not as the Incarnate Word of God but merely as a human child, St. Cyril of Alexandria was stirred to proclaim that it was proper indeed to say the Theotokos gave birth to the Incarnate Word of God; noting also the fearful and untimely death of Nestorius.

And when the Monophysites distorted the teaching of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of our Lord Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit, knowing the hearts of men and the inner meaning of the words they speak, moved St. Leo the Great to write the Orthodox Christian dogma; along with the miracles of St. Peter and St. Euphemia the Great Martyr. Many others, to their earthly detriment, defended Orthodoxy against this heresy too, like St. Symeon the Stylite, St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Euthymios the Great and St. Savvas the Sanctified.

And when the false teachings of Origen persisted, like the preexistence of souls and that even the demons would be saved, St. Eutychios, Patriarch of Constantinople, was stirred to proclaim that it was not so; along with the miracles given through his life. St. Methodios stood steadfastly against the false teachings of Origen as well.

And when the Monothelites continued to confuse the divine and human natures, wills and energies of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit gave St. Maximos the Confessor the ability to speak—even with his tongue removed—in order to affirm that we should give glory unto Christ our God, Who, though but one hypostasis, has in very truth two natures, wills and energies.

And when the Iconoclasts tried to destroy icons, the Holy Spirit inspired St. John of Damascus and St. Theodore the Studite to defend them and the Dispensation; along with the countless miracles that God wrought through many of His holy icons, like the Icon-Not-Made-With-Hands, Panaghia Glykofiloussa, and Panaghia Portaitissa.

The Church always defends the Truth of the Faith, above all regarding our God, the Dispensation and the Mysteria; the Truth would always remain in His one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; it can be no other way because the Word of God told us it would be so: *The Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all Truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come.* (Jn 16:13)

A... THIEF FOR GOD!

Source: "Letters of the Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain," Vol.3, pages 74-77, 2nd ed., published by the Holy Monastery "St. John the Theologian."

In spiritual life, things are reversed. If you keep the unpleasant things for yourself, you will feel wonderful. If you give the unpleasant things to another person, then you will feel bad. When you embrace injustice and you offer excuses for your neighbor's actions, that is when you will be receiving the exceedingly wronged Christ into your heart; that is when Christ will reside inside you on a permanent lease [!], and will fill you with peace and joy. Just give it a try, won't you my children? Try living this kind of joy! Learn how to rejoice with this kind of spiritual joy, and not the secular kind of joy. Every day will then be like Easter Day!

There is no greater joy than the one you feel when you accept being wronged. I wish everyone would wrong me! Honestly, the sweetest spiritual joy that I ever felt was inside the attacks of injustice. Have you any idea how much joy it gives me, to be called "deluded"? "Thank God", I say to myself; "I will receive wages from this insult, whereas if they called me a saint, I would be indebted". Nothing is sweeter than being wronged!

One morning, somebody was knocking on the door of my hut with the little piece of metal hanging there. I looked out of my window to see who it was, because it was still too early to open. I saw a young man with radiant features standing outside, and it was obvious to me that he must have spiritual experiences, since the Grace of God had made it so apparent in his countenance. That was why, although I was preoccupied, I interrupted whatever I was doing, I opened the door and showed him in; I offered him a drink of water and very politely began to ask him about his life, because I could tell that he had a spiritual content.

"What line of work are you in, my child?" I asked him.

"What line of work, father?" He replied. "Well, basically, I grew up in prison. I have spent most of my years in there. I am presently twenty-six years old."

"My goodness, child, what have you been doing that made them lock you up in a prison?" I asked him

So he opened up his heart to me:

"Ever since I was a little boy" he said, "I was always deeply pained whenever I saw people living in misery. I had come to know all of those who were suffering, not only in my own parish, but in other parishes also. Well, seeing how the priest in my own parish was constantly collecting money with the other church council members and using it to construct buildings, offices etc., or spending it on various ornamental projects, I realized that all the poor families were being totally neglected. I can't judge whether these projects were necessary or not, but I could see that there were many un-

fortunate people around. So, I would secretly go and steal the money that they collected through their fund-raisers. I would take quite a bit of the money, but I wouldn't take all of it though."

And he continued: "Then I would go and purchase food and various other things, I would secretly leave them outside the homes of the poor, and then—before they could unjustly arrest someone else—I would immediately go to the police and say to them: 'I stole the money from the church and I spent it' and I would say nothing more. They then beat me and cursed me, calling me a bum, a thief... but I wouldn't say anything. Then they would put me in jail. This went on for years. The entire town that I lived in—about thirty thousand inhabitants—as well as certain other towns, all knew me and they all called me a bum and a thief. I always kept silent, and I felt immense joy. In fact, I was imprisoned for three whole years at one time. Sometimes they would put me in jail by mistake, and when they eventually located the culprit, they would release me. If they didn't catch the culprit, I would remain in jail for as long as the guilty party had to stay. That's why I told you, father, that I have spent most of my life in jail."

Having listened to him very carefully, I told him:

"My child, no matter how good it may seem, it really isn't a good thing to do and you should not repeat it. Listen to what I have to say to you. Will you listen to my advice?"

"I will listen to your advice, father", he said.

"You must move out of the town that you live in", I told him, "and go to another, unfamiliar environment, in the town of ... and I will ensure that you get connected with good people. You must go to work and you must help—as much as you can—all the suffering people there, from your earnings, because that is more precious. But, even if one doesn't have anything to give to the poor but his heart aches for them, then his charity is even more precious, because he is giving alms with the blood of his heart. Because, if he did have something and offered it, he would still feel joy, but, when he doesn't have anything, he will surely feel pain in his heart."

The young man promised to heed my advice, and he left, feeling quite happy. Seven months later, I received a letter from Korydallos prison [2], in which he wrote the following:

"I am quite sure, my beloved father, that you are surprised to see that I am writing to you from prison once again, after all the advice that you had given me and the promises that I had given you. Please be aware that this time, I am serving time for an imprisonment that I have already served, one that I have been punished for already; it is most probably on account of some sort of mistake. It is **fortunate that human justice is nonexistent, because spiritual people would be shortchanged, as they would lose their heavenly wages.**"

When I read these last words, I truly felt great admiration for that young man, who had taken spiritual life so seriously and who had grasped the deeper meaning of life so profoundly! A thief for God! He had Christ inside him. He couldn't stop himself from feeling the joy that he felt... He was enjoying a divine lunacy, a veritable festivity!

"Geronda, can there truly be joy, from within such humiliation?"

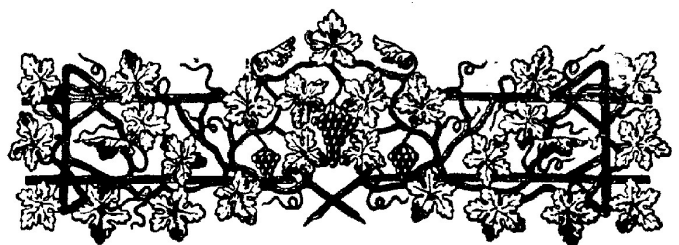
"Joy came from within the injustice. This was a secular person; he hadn't read any prayer books or Patristic texts, yet, while he was being unjustly beaten and thrown in jail as a bum, a rascal, a thief and was indeed being humiliated, he wouldn't say a word and would confront everything so spiritually! Such a young person, yet he did not concern himself with his reinstatement or freedom; he only cared about helping others! More often than not, the major thieves are never imprisoned, not even once, whereas this poor soul was imprisoned for the same thing twice, and was also unjustly imprisoned for other thefts, until the true culprit was found! Ah, but the joy that he had inside him could not be found in all of the townspeople put together... The joy of thirty thousand folks couldn't compare with his joy!"

Geronda Paisios continued: "That is what I mean when I say that a spiritual person has no sorrows. When love increases to such a degree that the heart is aflame with divine love, there can be no place for sorrow. Our greater love for Christ overcomes all the pains and the sorrows that people bring upon us."

† † †

[1] Permanent lease is a legal provision for those paying rent, giving them an indefinite extension of stay in the premises rented, even after the original lease has expired.

[2] Korydallos the largest, better known prison in Greece, named after its location, in central Greece, near Peiraeus.



Teach yourselves "to bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), and to respect each other and if somebody hears words from someone which are unpleasant to him, or if he suffers something against his will, he should not get discouraged or irritated immediately. This is so that he will not be found fainthearted, neglected and weak, in time of struggle, unable to accept any offence. Rather you must have a strong heart that you might be slow to anger, so that your love of others can prevail in all things.

St. Dorotheos
"Practical Teaching on the Christian Life"

DORMITION OF THE TEOTOKOS: OUR SECOND PASCHA

By Fr. Rostislav Sheniloff.



The great and wondrous summer holiday—the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God—from olden times has been regarded by Orthodox Christians in the light of a second Pascha.

Pascha itself—the Holy Resurrection of Christ—was a turning point in the history of mankind. With His resurrection the Lord Jesus Christ opened for us the gates of paradise, the gates of that

place of bliss which was originally intended for man—the crown of all creation, and which became closed to us because of the sin of pride and disobedience to God on the part of our forebears.

But centuries passed, and God Himself came down to earth, became incarnate in the form of man, and once again opened to us the gates of paradise, having manifested—instead of pride—the greatest humility, instead of disobedience—complete obedience even unto death on the cross, and instead of sin He—the most pure and absolutely sinless—took upon Himself the burden of all the sins of the world.

With these three qualities—humbleness, obedience and purity of nature—the Lord showed us the highest example of what man can be like, of what he should be like, and of what the Creator intended him to be.

However, we may well think, dear brethren, that only God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ, could be such an ideal man, while a mere mortal could never attain such perfection. But to show us the error of such thinking, we have before us the Mother of God, Who is the highest example of the attainment of such perfection, and Who teaches us with her entire life and her dormition that man can attain perfection precisely by means of these three qualities—humbleness, obedience to the will of God, and moral purity.

The Holy Virgin was so humble, that she wished to be even the lowest servant of the maid who would become the Mother of God. The Holy Virgin was so humble, that having herself become the Mother of God, she did not become haughty, but modestly performed her great service.

The Holy Virgin was so obedient to the will of God, that having heard from the Archangel concerning her forthcoming service, so extraordinary and unknown to any mortal, she meekly replied: *Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.* The Holy Virgin was so obedient to the will of God, that having heard from the elder Symeon of the future painful torment to which

her heart would be subjected, she humbly accepted her share in the sufferings on the cross of her Son and God.

Concerning the extraordinary purity of the Holy Virgin—we are presented with proof of it from her very birth. How pure she must have been if the high priest led her, a mere three-year-old child, and a female at that, into the holiest of holies!

In the prayers before communion the Church warns us to beware of partaking of the Holy Mysteries while being in a state of uncleanness, in order not to burn ourselves, for these particles of Divinity are fiery. How pure must have been the Holy Virgin, if she contained God Himself in her womb and was not burned!

The Gospel tells us that nothing unclean will enter the Heavenly Realm. How pure must have been the Holy Virgin, if she not only entered the Kingdom of Heaven, but having passed through the gates of death like all mortals, she was taken up into heaven together with her body and placed right next to the Throne of the triunal God Himself!

In the Dormition of the Mother of God, it is these three qualities of hers which are commemorated—humbleness, obedience and purity,—which have elevated her, a mere mortal, above all earthly creatures and above the entire heavenly host, which have made her more honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim, which have made her the Queen of heaven and earth.

Let us try, dear brethren, to emulate the high example of the Mother of God and, while celebrating her wondrous holiday, let us remember that even in her Dormition she never abandons us. Amen.



If recompense is bestowed according to the measure of love for God, and if the man who loves the Son is loved of Him and of His Father and becomes the dwelling place of Both, and They mystically abide and walk in him, as it is recorded in the Master's Gospel, who, then, will love Him more than His Mother? For, He was her only-begotten Son, and moreover she alone among women gave birth knowing no spouse, so that the love of Him that had partaken of her flesh might be shared with her twofold. And who will the only-begotten Son love more than His Mother, He that came forth from her ineffably without a father in this last age even as He came forth from the Father without a mother before the ages? How indeed could He that descended to fulfill the Law not multiply that honor due to His Mother over and above the ordinances of the Law?

St. Gregory Palamas

From his homily "On the Dormition of Our Supremely Pure Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary"

THEOSIS (DEIFICATION) AND OUR HOLY ORTHODOXY

By Elder George, Abbott of the Holy Monastery of Saint Gregory at Holy Mountain, translated from Greek by the Holy Monastery of the Pantocrator, Melissohori, Greece.

In the Orthodox Church of Christ, man can achieve theosis because the Grace of God, according to the teaching of the Holy Bible and of the Church Fathers, is uncreated. God is not only essence, as the Westerners believe, but also energy. If God was only essence, we would not be able to join, to commune with Him, because the essence of God is awe-inspiring and inaccessible to man, according to *You can not see My face; for there shall no man see Me, and live.* (Ex 33:20).

Let us mention some specific example regarding humans. If we touch a live bare high-voltage cable, we would die. However, if we connect a light bulb to the cable we are illuminated. The energy of the electric current we see, enjoy, and it helps us. Its essence we cannot hold. Something similar, if we may say, happens with the uncreated energy of God.

If we could be connected with the essence of God, we could also become, in essence, gods. Namely, everything would have become god-like, there would have been a confusion and in result nothing would have essentially been god. Namely, what they believe in the eastern religions, such as Hinduism, where god does not

personally exists, but is a vague power, scattered over all the world, on the people as well as on the animals and on the materials (Pantheism).

If again God had only incommunicable divine essence without His energies, He would have remained a self sufficient God, closed into Himself and non-communing with His creations...

With these, His uncreated energies, God created the world and continues to sustain it. He gives essence and existence to our world with His essence creating energies. He is present in nature and sustains the universe with His sustaining energies. He enlightens man with His enlightening energies. He sanctifies him with His sanctifying energies. And finally He makes him god with His Godly energies. So with His uncreated energies, Holy God enters nature, in the world, in history, in the lives of people.

The energies of God are divine energies. They are also God without being His essence. They are God that is why they make man god. If the energies of God were not divine, uncreated energies, then they would not be God, they would not be able to make us god, to join with God. There would have been an unbridgeable distance between God and people. However, by

God having divine energies and with these energies joining with us, we can communicate with Him and join with His Grace, without equating with God, as it would have happened if we were joining with His essence.

We therefore join with God through His uncreated energies, and not through His essence. This is the mystery of the Orthodox Faith and of our life.

This, the Western Fallacy cannot accept. Because they are rationalists, they cannot differentiate between essence and energies of God and thus maintain that God is only essence. For this they cannot speak about the theosis of man. For how could man be made god since they do not accept uncreated but created the divine energies? So, how can something created namely, outside of God Himself make god the created man?

During the 14th century there occurred a great disturbance in the [Orthodox] Church, which was instigated by a western monk, Varlaam. He heard that the Agiorite monks [from Holy Mountain Athos] were speaking about theosis. He was informed that they became worthy, after a great struggle, cleansing themselves from the passions and with a lot of prayer,

to join with God, to receive experience of God, to see God. He heard that they could see the uncreated light, which was seen by the Apostles at the Transfiguration of the Saviour at mount Tabor.

However, Varlaam having the western, rationalist spirit, could not perceive the genuine divine experiences of these humble monks, so he started to accuse the Agiorites that they were possibly deceived,

were heretics and idolaters. He would say, for example that it was impossible for anyone to see the Grace of God, because he (Varlaam) did not know anything about the difference of essence and uncreated energies of God.

Then, the Grace of God brought forth a great and enlightened teacher of our Church, the Agiorite St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki. With great wisdom and enlightenment from God, but also from personal experience, he said and wrote a lot and taught (according to the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition of the Church), that it is the uncreated light of the Grace of God, and it is divine energy that those Agiorite men who became godly (through theosis) actually see this light as the highest and paramount experience of theosis and that they are indeed seeing in this the light of God. This is the glory of God, the brilliance, the Taborian light, the light of Resurrection of Christ and of the Pentecost and the illumined cloud of the Old Testament. Actual uncreated light of God and not symbolic as Varlaam and his likes falsely believed.

Subsequently, the Orthodox Church with three great Synods in Constantinople, justified St. Gregory Palamas and declared that the life in Christ is not simply the moralizing of man but



also his theosis, which means participation in the glory of God, vision of God, of His Grace and of His uncreated light.

Until today, the Westerners consider the divine Grace to be created, the energy of God. This is one of our many differences, which must be taken seriously into consideration in the theological dialogue with the Roman Catholics. The basic differences between the Orthodox Church and the Papists are not confined to merely the “Filioque” and the jurisdictional “primacy” and “infallibility” of the Pope, It is also the above. If the Roman Catholics do not accept that the Grace of God is uncreated, we cannot join with them, **even if they accept everything else.** For by whom and how will theosis be realized, if the divine Grace is created and not uncreated energy of the Most Holy Spirit?



THE PROTECTRESS OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

Source: “An Athonite Gerondikon”—St. Athanasios of Holy Mountain is commemorated on July 5th.

A great while after St. Athanasios of Athos had started constructing the Great Lavra (around 961), he faced a great economic difficulty: he had neither the money to pay the craftsmen’s wages, nor did he have any food. So he started out for Karyes, the Holy Mountain’s capital, to find out what he ought to do.

After he had walked for two hours, suddenly there appeared before him a glorious lady, who asked him, “Abba Athanasios, where are you going? Why have you abandoned the project which you have started, a project which pleases God? Go back and finish it!”

Astonished, he looked at her with awe and asked, “Who are you? My lady, how do you know me, and how do you order me to return? With what can I continue the monastery’s construction, since no means are left for it?”

Then she told him that she was the Mother of God. She ordered him to return, and she promised that she would take care of the money and the food supplies. The saint asked her to give him a sign in confirmation of this. “Here, hit with your staff this rock,” she told him, and immediately fresh water sprang from the rock - which to this day is still flowing.

St. Athanasios returned to his monastery where he found money, and his storage bins were full of food, even as the Theotokos had promised. With renewed desire and zeal he continued, and soon the monastery was completed (963), and he gave thanks and glory many times to her blessed name.

ON CONDEMNATION

Source: “Counsels from the Holy Mountain—from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim.”

Experience has shown that it is wrong to accuse and condemn someone without letting him defend himself. As also the sacred Gospel says: *Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?* (Jn 7:51)

If we are not attentive, many sins of condemning others heap up within us, and then repentance is needed. How often a person repents because he spoke! Let us bear in mind the words of Abba Arsenios: “I have often repented for speaking, but I have never repented for keeping silent.”

If we are often deceived by the sense of touch, how much more so we are by people’s words. Therefore, much attention is needed, for the *devil prowls around roaring to devour us.* (1 Pet. 5:8). A Christian ought to be like the many-eyed Cherubim, for evil has multiplied greatly, especially the sin of condemnation, which is as common as “bread and cheese.” May God cleanse us and sanctify us for His glory.

Do not let the sun go down on the wrath of your brother. (Eph 4:26). That is, let no one be angry and enraged against his brother past the setting of the sun.

Have you heard about that brother who was negligent and lazy, who did not go to the all-night vigils and did not do his duties, whom the brethren knew to be a negligent monk? When he fell ill and the hour of his death drew near, the brethren gathered to hear something beneficial, or to comfort him, or in case he wanted to say something to them, but they saw him joyful, cheerful.

One brother was scandalized and said, “What is this we see in you, brother?” We see that you are joyful even though you are approaching death. But we have the thought that you were not a violent monk (A “violent” or “forceful” monk or person is one who strives vigorously to *do violence to his nature constantly* (Ladder 1:4), for *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.* (Mt 11:12)), so how do you have such courage and a cheerful face? How do you justify yourself?”

“Yes, brethren,” he said, “indeed I was a negligent person and I did not fulfill my duties. But I achieved one good thing, by the grace of God: not to condemn any brother and not to scandalize anyone; and never did I let my heart have something against any brother of the monastery when the sun set. And inasmuch as I did not judge any brother, I believe that God will not judge me either, for He said, *Judge not, that you be not judged* (Mt 7:1) and since I did not judge, I will not be judged.”

The brethren marveled and said, “Brother, you found the way of salvation very easily.” And the brother died with much joy.

Do you see how the Fathers struggled and how they found the way of salvation?

Ἐπὶ τῆς Θεομήτορος

Ἀγίου Σιλουανοῦ τοῦ Ἀθωνίτου.

Ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ κατέχεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε, ὦ, πῶς εἶναι ὅλα εὐχάριστα, ἀγαπημένα καὶ χαρούμενα. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ὅμως συνεπάγεται θλίψη· καὶ ὅσο βαθύτερη εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, τόσο μεγαλύτερη εἶναι καὶ ἡ θλίψη.

Ἡ Θεοτόκος δὲν ἀμάρτησε ποτέ, οὔτε κἂν μετὰ τὸ λογισμό, καὶ δὲν ἔχασε ποτὲ τὴ Χάρη, ἀλλὰ καὶ Αὐτὴ εἶχε μεγάλες θλίψεις. Ὅταν στεκόταν δίπλα στὸ Σταυρό, τότε ἦταν ἡ θλίψη Τῆς ἀπέραντη σὰν τὸν ὠκεανὸ καὶ οἱ πόνοι τῆς ψυχῆς Τῆς ἦταν ἀσύγκριτα μεγαλύτεροι ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο τοῦ Ἀδάμ μετὰ τὴν ἔξωση ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο, γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπην Τῆς ἦταν ἀσύγκριτα μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ Ἀδάμ στὸν Παράδεισο. Κι ἂν ἐπέζησε, ἐπέζησε μόνο μετὰ τὴν Θεϊκὴ δύναμιν, μετὰ τὴν ἐνίσχυση τοῦ Κυρίου, γιὰ τὴν θέλημά Του νὰ δῇ τὴν Ἀνάστασιν καὶ ὕστερα, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψίν Του, νὰ παραμείνῃ παρηγοριὰ καὶ χαρὰ τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τοῦ νέου Χριστιανικοῦ λαοῦ.

Ἐμεῖς δὲν φτάνουμε στὴν πληρότητα τῆς ἀγάπης τῆς Θεοτόκου, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ δὲν μπορούμε νὰ ἐννοήσωμε πλήρως τὸ βάθος τῆς θλίψεώς Τῆς. Ἡ ἀγάπη Τῆς ἦταν τέλεια. Ἀγαποῦσε ἅπειρα τὸ Θεὸ καὶ Υἱὸ Τῆς, ἀλλ' ἀγαποῦσε καὶ τὸ λαὸ μετὰ μεγάλη ἀγάπην. Καὶ τί αἰσθανόταν τάχα, ὅταν ἐκεῖνοι, ποὺ τόσο πολὺ ἀγαποῦσε ἡ Ἰδία καὶ ποὺ τόσο πολὺ ποθοῦσε τὴ σωτηρίαν τους, σταύρωναν τὸν ἀγαπημένο Υἱὸ Τῆς;

Αὐτὸ δὲν μπορούμε νὰ τὸ συλλάβωμε, γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μας γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἶναι λίγη. Κι ὅμως, ἡ ἀγάπη τῆς Παναγίας ὑπῆρξε ἀπέραντη καὶ ἀκατάληπτη, ἔτσι ἀπέραντος ἦταν καὶ ὁ πόνος Τῆς ποὺ παραμένει ἀκατάληπτος γιὰ μᾶς.

Ἄσπιλε Παρθένε Θεοτόκε, πές σ' ἐμᾶς τὰ παιδιὰ Σου, πῶς ἀγαποῦσες τὸν Υἱὸ Σου καὶ Θεό, ὅταν ζοῦσες στὴ γῆ; Πῶς χαιρόταν τὸ πνεῦμα Σου γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ Σωτῆρα Σου; Πῶς ἀντίκρυζες τὴν ὁμορφίαν τοῦ προσώπου Του; Πῶς σκεφτόσουν ὅτι Αὐτός εἶναι Ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ τὸν διακονοῦν μετὰ φόβου καὶ ἀγάπης ὅλες οἱ Δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν;

Πές μας, τί ἐνοιωθε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου, ὅταν κρατοῦσες στὰ χέρια Σου τὸ Θαυμαστὸ Νήπιον; Πῶς τό ἀνέτρεφες; Πῶς πονοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου, ὅταν μαζὶ μετὰ τὸν Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἀναζητοῦσες τρεῖς μέρες στὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ; Ποιὰν ἀγωνία ἔζησες, ὅταν ὁ Κύριος παραδόθηκε στὴν σταύρωση καὶ πέθανε στὸ Σταυρό;

Πές μας, ποιὰ χαρὰ αἰσθάνθηκες γιὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασιν

ἢ πῶς σπαραγοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου ἀπὸ τὸν πόθον τοῦ Κυρίου μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψιν;

Οἱ ψυχές μας λαχταροῦν νὰ γνωρίσουν τὴ ζωὴ Σου μετὰ τὸν Κύριον στὴ γῆ· ἀλλὰ Σὺ δὲν εὐδόκησες νὰ τὰ παραδώσῃς ὅλ' αὐτὰ στὴ Γραφή, ἀλλὰ σκέπασες τὸ μυστήριόν Σου μετὰ σιγῆς.

Πολλὰ θαύματα καὶ ἐλέη εἶδα ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριον καὶ τὴ Θεοτόκον, ἀλλὰ μοῦ εἶναι τελείως ἀδύνατον ν' ἀνταποδώσω κάπως αὐτὴν τὴν ἀγάπην.

Τι ν' ἀναταποδώσω ἐγὼ στὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκον, ποὺ δὲν μετὰ περιφρόνησε ἐνῶ ἡμῶν βυθισμένος στὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ μ' ἐπισκέφθηκε σπλαγγνικὰ καὶ μετὰ συνέτισε; Δὲν Τὴν εἶδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα μοῦ ἔδωσε νὰ Τὴν ἀναγνωρίσω ἀπὸ τὰ γεμάτα χάριν λόγια Τῆς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα μου χαίρεται καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μου παρασύρεται τόσο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπην πρὸς Αὐτήν, ὥστε καὶ μόνῃ ἡ ἐπίκλησις τοῦ ὀνόματός Τῆς γλυκαίνει τὴν καρδιά μου.

Ὅταν ἡμῶν νεαρός ὑποτακτικός, προσευχόμενος μιὰ φορὰ μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Θεομήτορος καὶ μῆκε τότε στὴν καρδιά μου ἡ προσευχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἄρχισε ἀπὸ μόνῃ τῆς νὰ προφέρεται ἐκεῖ.

Μιὰ ἄλλη φορὰ ἄκουγα στὴν ἐκκλησίαν τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τῶν προφητειῶν τοῦ Ἡσαΐα, καὶ στίς λέξεις «Λούσασθε καὶ καθαροὶ γίνεσθε» (Ἡσ. 1:16) σκέφτηκα: «Μήπως ἡ Παναγία ἀμάρτησε ποτέ, ἔστω καὶ μετὰ τὸ λογισμό;». Καί, ὦ τοῦ θαύματος! Μέσα στὴν καρδιά μου μιὰ φωνὴ ἐνωμένη μετὰ τὴν προσευχὴ πρόφερε ρητῶς: «Ἡ Θεοτόκος ποτὲ δὲν ἀμάρτησε, οὔτε κἂν μετὰ τὴν σκέψην».

Ἔτσι τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα μαρτυροῦσε στὴν καρδιά μου γιὰ τὴν ἀγνότητά Τῆς.

Ἐν τούτοις κατὰ τὸν ἐπίγειον βίον Τῆς δὲν εἶχε ἀκόμα τὴν πληρότητα τῆς γνώσεως καὶ ὑπέπεσε σ' ὀρισμένα ἀναμάρτητα λάθη ἀτέλειας. Αὐτὸ φαίνεται ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον· ὅταν ἐπέστρεφε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἱερουσαλὴμ, δὲν ἤξερε ποὺ εἶναι ὁ Υἱὸς Τῆς καὶ τὸν ἀναζητοῦσε τρεῖς μέρες μετὰ τὸν Ἰωσήφ (Λουκ. 2:44-46).

Ἡ ψυχὴ μου γεμίζει ἀπὸ φόβον καὶ τρόμον, ὅταν ἀναλογίζομαι τὴ δόξα τῆς Θεομήτορος.

Εἶναι ἐνδεής ὁ νοῦς μου καὶ φτωχὴ καὶ ἀδύναμη ἡ καρδιά μου, ἀλλὰ ἡ ψυχὴ μου χαίρεται καὶ παρασύρομαι στὸ νὰ γράψω ἔστω καὶ λίγα λόγια γι' Αὐτήν. Ἡ ψυχὴ μου φοβᾶται νὰ τὸ ἀποτολμήσῃ, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀγάπη μετὰ πιέζει νὰ μὴν κρύψω τίς εὐεργεσίες τῆς εὐσπλαγγνίας Τῆς.

Ἡ Θεοτόκος δὲν παρέδωσε στὴ Γραφή οὔτε τίς σκέψεις Τῆς, οὔτε τὴν ἀγάπην Τῆς γιὰ τὸν Υἱὸ καὶ Θεὸ Τῆς, οὔτε τίς θλίψεις τῆς ψυχῆς Τῆς κατὰ τὴν ὥραν τῆς



σταυρώσεως, γιατί ούτε και τότε θα μπορούσαμε να τα συλλάβουμε. Η αγάπη της για το Θεό ήταν ισχυρότερη και φλογερότερη από την αγάπη των Χερουβείμ και των Σεραφείμ κι όλες οι Δυνάμεις των Αγγέλων και Αρχαγγέλων εκπλήσσονται μ' Αυτήν.

Παρ' όλο όμως που η ζωή της Θεοτόκου σκεπαζόταν, θα λέγαμε, από την άγια σιγή, ο Κύριος όμως φανέρωσε στην Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία μας πώς η Παναγία μας αγκαλιάζει με την αγάπη της όλο τον κόσμο και βλέπει με το Άγιο Πνεύμα όλους τους λαούς της γης και, όπως και ο Υιός της, έτσι κι Εκείνη σπλαγχνίζεται και έλεει τους πάντες.

Ω, και να γνωρίζαμε πόσο αγαπά η Παναγία όλους, όσους τηρούν τις εντολές του Χριστού, και πόσο λυπάται και στενοχωριέται για κείνους που δεν μετανοούν! Αυτό το δοκίμασα με την πείρα μου.

Δεν ψεύδωμαι, λέω την αλήθεια ενώπιον του Θεού, πώς γνωρίζω πνευματικά την Άχραντη Παρθένο. Δεν Την είδα, αλλά το Άγιο Πνεύμα μου έδωσε να γνωρίσω Αυτήν και την αγάπη της για μ'ε. Χωρίς την ευσπλαγχνία της ή ψυχή μου θα είχε χαθεί από πολύν καιρό. Εκείνη όμως ευδόκησε να μ' επισκεφθή και να με νουθετήσει, για να μην άμαρτάνω. Μου είπε: «Δεν μ' άρέσει να βλέπω τα έργα σου». Τα λόγια της ήταν ευχάριστα, ήρεμα, με πραότητα και συγκίνησαν την ψυχή. Πέρασαν πάνω από σαράντα χρόνια, μα η ψυχή μου δεν μπορεί να λησμονήσει εκείνη τη γλυκειά φωνή και δεν ξέρω πώς να ευχαριστήσω την αγαθή και σπλαγχνική Μητέρα του Θεού.

Άληθινά, Αυτή είναι η βοήθειά μας ενώπιον του Θεού και μόνο τ' όνομά της χαροποιεί την ψυχή. Άλλα κι όλος ο ουρανός κι όλη η γη χαίρονται με την αγάπη της.

Άξιοθαύμαστο κι άκατανόητο πράγμα. Ζη στους ουρανούς και βλέπει άδιάκοπα την δόξα του Θεού, αλλά δεν λησμονεί κι έμ'ε τους φτωχούς κι αγκαλιάζει με την ευσπλαγχνία της όλη τη γη κι όλους τους λαούς.

Κι Αυτή την Άχραντη Μητέρα Του ο Κύριος την έδωσε σ' έμ'ε.

Αυτή είναι η χαρά και η έλπίδα μας. Αυτή είναι η πνευματική μας Μητέρα και βρίσκεται κοντά μας κατά τη φύση σαν άνθρωπος και κάθε Χριστιανική ψυχή έλκύεται από την αγάπη προς Αυτήν.



Πίνε πρόθυμα τον έξευτελισμό από κάθε άνθρωπο σαν να είναι «ύδωρ ζωής»... Διότι τότε θα προβάλλει στην ψυχή σου άγνότητα αναφαιρέτη και τ' όφωσ του Θεού δεν θα λείψει από την καρδιά σου.

Όσιος Ιωάννης τής Κλίμακος

«Φτύστο να μην Άβασκαθει»!!!..

Από ένα ένημερωτικό Έλληνορθοδοξο τεύχος του Επισκόπου Ηλείας κ. Γερμανού.

Θά αναφερθοΰμε σ' ένα άλλο παράξενο θρησκοληπτικό «έθιμο» του Έλληνορθόδοξου λαού: την βασκανία (τ' λεγόμενο «μάτι»).

Είναι σ' όλους γνωστό ότι η βασκανία (μάτιασμα) συγκαταλέγεται στις «άπ' έξω» λεγόμενες ασθένειες. Στις άρρώστιες δηλαδή που δεν όφείλονται σ' όργανική πάθηση, αλλά προκαλούνται από τ' όν σατανά, τ' όν όποιον ό λαός όνομάζει «ό έξω άπ' εδώ», από απέχθεια.

Ενώ λοιπόν η βασκανία προέρχεται από τ' όν σατανά, οί άνθρωποι, άντι να καταφεύγουν στή δύναμη του Θεού, στην Εκκλησία, πηγαίνουν στις έξορκίστριες, δηλαδή σ' άχρίστιανους και άντίχριστους που σ' τελική άνάλυση λειτουργούν σαν όργανα του διαβόλου.

Γι' αυτό άς προσέχουμε. Ό Χριστιανός ποτέ δεν καταφεύγει σ' άξόρκια, ότιδήποτε («Σολομωνικό» ή «άγιωτικό») και άν λέγουν οί έξορκίστριες. Ό πιστός καταφεύγει μόνο σ' όν Θεό και στην Εκκλησία Του, που του δίνει τή δύναμη «να πατάει και πάνω σ' εφίδια και πάνω σ' σκορπιούς, και πάνω σ' κάθε δύναμη του έχθρου» (Λουκ. 10:19).

Είναι διαδεδομένος δυστυχώς μεταξ' του λαού ό λόγος «φτύστο να μην άβασκαθει», όπως και η πράξη του φτυσίματος. Πώς όμως επικράτησε αυτό και ποιά είναι η σημασία του; Να πώς:

Σύμφωνα με την λαϊκή θρησκοληψία λοιπόν, «κάθε τί καλό και ώραίο τ' όφθονούν τ' άπονηρά πνεύματα και τ' ό βασκαίνουν». Λάθος αυτό διότι ό Πονηρός όλους τους ανθρώπους θέλει να βλάψει και όχι μόνο τους όμορφους... Όπότε σου λέει ό θρησκόληπτος: «Θά προσπαθήσω να άσχημύνω τ' όμορφο, για να μη βασκαίνεται!» Και τί έχει πρόχειρο κατάλληλο μέσο άσχήμιας; Τ' ό φτύσιμο!

Συγχρόνως, όμως, τ' ό φτύσιμο τ' ό ξέρουμε όλοι μας άποτελεί και πράξη έξευτελισμού και διαπόμπευσης του προσώπου που φτύνεται. Λες και οί ξεματιάστρες με τ' όν τρόπο αυτό δουλεύουν για λογαριασμό του άκάθαρτου πνεύματος που γι' αυτό άκριβώς ένδιαφέρεται: για τ' όν μόλυσμό του ανθρώπου και για τ' όν έξευτελισμό του!!!..



Δέν πρέπει να μαλώνετε ή να πολεμάτε τ' ά παιδιά σας, αλλά τ' όν σατανά που πολεμά τ' ά παιδιά σας. Να τ' όους λέτε λίγα λόγια και να κάνετε πολλή προσευχή.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος

Ἡ Δύναμη τῆς Ἐξομολογήσεως καὶ ἡ Σωστή Ἐξομολόγησις

Γέροντος Παϊσίου Αγιορείτου.

Νὰ Δένουμε τὸ Τραῦμα μας

- Γέροντα, ὅταν στὸν ἀγώνα μου ἔχω πτώσεις, πανικοβάλλομαι.

- Μὴ φοβᾶσαι. Ἀγώνας εἶναι καὶ θὰ ἔχουμε καὶ τραύματα. Μὲ τὴν ἐξομολόγησις αὐτὰ θεραπεύονται. Βλέπεις, οἱ στρατιῶτες στὸν πόλεμο, ὅταν τραυματίζονται ἐπάνω στὴν μάχη, τρέχουν ἀμέσως στὸν γιατρό, δένουν τὸ τραῦμα τους καὶ συνεχίζουν νὰ πολεμοῦν φιλότιμα. Ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ ἀποκτοῦν καὶ πείρα ἀπὸ τὸν τραυματισμὸ καὶ προφυλάγονται καλύτερα, ὥστε νὰ μὴν ξανατραυματισθοῦν. Ἔτσι καὶ ἐμεῖς, ὅταν τραυματιζώμαστε πάνω στὸν ἀγώνα μας, δὲν πρέπει νὰ δειλιάζουμε, ἀλλὰ νὰ τρέχουμε στὸν γιατρό—στὸν πνευματικὸ—νὰ τοῦ δείχνουμε τὸ τραῦμα μας, νὰ θεραπευώμαστε πνευματικά, καὶ πάλι νὰ συνεχίζουμε «τὸν καλὸν ἀγώνα». Κακὸ εἶναι ὅταν δὲν ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε τοὺς φοβεροὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς ψυχῆς, τὰ πάθη, καὶ δὲν ἀγωνιζώμαστε, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐξοντώσουμε.

- Γέροντα, μερικοὶ ἀπὸ φιλότιμο δὲν πάνε νὰ ἐξομολογηθοῦν. «Ἀφοῦ μπορεῖ νὰ ξανακάνω τὸ ἴδιο σφάλμα, λένε, γιὰ ποιοὺ λόγους νὰ πάω νὰ τὸ ἐξομολογηθῶ; Γιὰ νὰ κοροϊδεύω τὸν παπά;».

- Αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ! Εἶναι σὰν νὰ λήη ἕνας στρατιώτης, ὅταν τραυματίζεται: «Ἀφοῦ ὁ πόλεμος δὲν τέλειωσε καὶ μπορεῖ πάλι νὰ τραυματισθῶ, γιατί νὰ δέσω τὸ τραῦμα μου;». Ἀλλὰ, ἂν δὲν τὸ δέση, θὰ πάθη αἰμορραγία καὶ θὰ πεθάνη. Μπορεῖ ἀπὸ φιλότιμο νὰ μὴν πηγαίνουν νὰ ἐξομολογηθοῦν, τελικὰ ὅμως ἀχρηστεύονται. Ὁ διάβολος, βλέπεις, ἐκμεταλλεύεται καὶ τὰ χαρίσματα. Ἄν δὲν καθαρίζουμε μὲ τὴν ἐξομολόγησις τὴν ψυχὴ μας, ὅταν πέφτουμε καὶ λερωνώμαστε, μὲ τὸν λογισμὸ ὅτι πάλι θὰ πέσουμε καὶ θὰ λερωθοῦμε, προσθέτουμε λάσπες πάνω στὶς παλιῆς λάσπες καὶ εἶναι δύσκολο μετὰ νὰ καθαρίσουν.

Ἡ Ἀνάγκη γιὰ Ἐξομολόγησις

- Γέροντα, ὁ Ὅσιος Μάρκος ὁ Ἀσκητῆς λέει: «Ὁ γνωστικὸς ἐξομολογεῖται στὸν Θεὸ ὄχι μὲ τὴν ἀπαρίθμησις τῶν παραπτωμάτων του, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἐπερχομένων θλίψεων». Τί ἐννοεῖ;

- Καὶ τὸ ἕνα πρέπει νὰ γίνεται καὶ τὸ ἄλλο. Ἐξομολογεῖται ὁ πιστὸς στὸν πνευματικὸ, ἐξομολογεῖται καὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ ταπεινὰ στὸν Θεό, ἀπογυμνώνοντας τὸν ἑαυτό του: «Θεέ μου, ἔσφαλα, εἶμαι τέτοιος, τέτοιος». Συγχρόνως ὁμοίως δέχεται καὶ τὶς θλίψεις ποῦ τοῦ συμβαίνουν σὰν φάρμακο. Ὁ Ἅγιος δὲν λέει νὰ μὴν κἀνης τὴν πρώτη καὶ τὴν δεύτερη ἐξομολόγησις, ἀλλὰ μόνο νὰ ὑπομένῃς τὶς θλίψεις. Τί θὰ πῆ «ἐξομολογοῦμαι;». Δὲν θὰ πῆ

«ὁμολογῶ ἔξω αὐτὸ ποῦ ἔχω μέσα μου»; Ἄν ἔχῃς μέσα στὸ καλὰ, «ἐξομολογεῖσαι τῷ Κυρίῳ», δηλαδὴ δοξολογεῖς τὸν Θεό. Ἄν ἔχῃς κακὰ, ἐξομολογεῖσαι τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου.

- Γέροντα, τὴν πρώτη φορὰ ποῦ θὰ πάη κανεὶς γιὰ ἐξομολόγησις, θὰ μιλήσῃ στὸν πνευματικὸ γιὰ ὅλη τὴν προηγούμενη ζωὴ του;

- Τὴν πρώτη φορὰ θὰ κἀνη μία γενικὴ ἐξομολόγησις. Ὅπως ὁ ἀσθενής, ὅταν μπῆ στὸ νοσοκομεῖο, δίνει τὸ ἱστορικὸ του, π.χ. λέει: «εἶχα μία πάθησις στοὺς πνεύμονες, ἀλλὰ τώρα ἔχει περάσει, ἔχω κἀνει μία ἐγχείρησις μὲ ὀλικὴ ἢ τοπικὴ νάρκωσις κ.λπ.», ἔτσι καὶ στὴν πρώτη ἐξομολόγησις, ἂς προσπαθήσῃ κανεὶς νὰ πῆ στὸν πνευματικὸ λεπτομέρειες ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴ του, καὶ ἐκεῖνος θὰ βρῆ τὴν πληγὴ, γιὰ νὰ τὴν θεραπεύσῃ. Πολλὲς φορὲς ἕνα χτύπημα ποῦ δὲν τοῦ δίνεις σημασία ἔχει ὕστερα συνέπειες. Βέβαια, τὴν πρώτη φορὰ ποῦ θὰ πάη στὸν πνευματικὸ, θὰ ἔχη νὰ πῆ, ἂς ὑποθέσουμε, ἕκατὸ ἁμαρτίες. Τὴν δεύτερη θὰ ἔχη νὰ πῆ ἕκατὸν δέκα, γιατί θὰ τὸν πολεμήσῃ περισσότερο ὁ διάβολος, ἐπειδὴ ἐξομολογήθηκε καὶ τοῦ χάλασε τὴ δουλειά. Τὴν Τρίτη φορὰ μπορεῖ νὰ πῆ ἕκατὸν πενήντα, ἀλλὰ ὕστερα θὰ ἐλαττώνεται συνέχεια ὁ ἀριθμὸς, μέχρι ποῦ θὰ πηγαίνει γιὰ ἐξομολόγησις καὶ θὰ ἔχη νὰ πῆ ἐλάχιστες ἁμαρτίες.

Ἡ Σωστή Ἐξομολόγησις

- Γιατί μερικὲς φορὲς, ἐνῶ ἡ συνείδησις μᾶς ἐλέγχει, δὲν κάνουμε τὸν ἀνάλογο ἀγώνα, γιὰ νὰ διορθωθοῦμε;

- Αὐτὸ μπορεῖ νὰ συμβῆ καὶ ἀπὸ ἕνα τσάκισμα ψυχικὸ. Ὅταν εἶναι κανεὶς πανικοβλημένος ἀπὸ κάποιον πειρασμὸ, θέλει νὰ ἀγωνισθῆ, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔχει διάθεσις, δὲν ἔχει ψυχικὴ δύναμις. Τότε πρέπει νὰ τακτοποιηθῆ ἐσωτερικὰ μὲ τὴν ἐξομολόγησις. Μὲ τὴν ἐξομολόγησις παρηγοριέται, τονώνεται καὶ ξαναβρίσκει μὲ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸ κουράγιο γιὰ ἀγώνα. Ἄν δὲν τακτοποιηθῆ, μπορεῖ νὰ τοῦ ἔρθῃ καὶ ἄλλος πειρασμὸς, ὅποτε, θλιμμένος ὅπως εἶναι, τσακίζεται περισσότερο, τὸν πνίγουν οἱ λογισμοί, ἀπελπίζεται καὶ μετὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγωνισθῆ καθόλου.

- Καὶ ἂν αὐτὸ συμβαίνει συχνά;

- Ἄν συμβαίνει συχνά, πρέπει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ τακτοποιηθῆ συχνά, νὰ ἀνοίγῃ τὴν καρδιά του στὸν πνευματικὸ, γιὰ νὰ παίρῃ κουράγιο. Καὶ ὅταν τακτοποιηθῆ, πρέπει νὰ βάλῃ τὴν μηχανὴ νὰ τρέξῃ, νὰ ἀγωνισθῆ φιλότιμα καὶ ἐντατικά, γιὰ νὰ πάρῃ καταπόδι τὸν ἔξω ἀπὸ ἴδω.

- Γέροντα, ὅταν δὲν αἰσθάνονται τὴν ἀνάγκη γιὰ ἐξομολόγησις, τί φταίει;

- Μήπως δὲν παρακολουθεῖς τὸν ἑαυτό σου; Ἡ ἐξομολόγησις εἶναι μυστήριον. Νὰ πηγαίνῃς καὶ ἀπλὰ νὰ λὲς τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου. Γιατί, τί νομίζεις; Πείσμα δὲν ἔχεις; Ἐγωισμὸ δὲν ἔχεις; Δὲν πληγώνεις τὴν ἀδελφὴ;

Δέν κατακρίνεις; Μήπως ἐγὼ τὶ πηγαίνω καὶ λέω; «Θύμωσα, κατέκρινα...» καὶ μοῦ διαβάξει ὁ πνευματικὸς τὴν συγχωρητικὴ εὐχή. Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ μικρὲς ἁμαρτίες ἔχουν καὶ αὐτὲς βάρος

Ὅταν πήγαιναν στὸν Πάπα-Τύχωνα νὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ, δὲν εἶχα τίποτα σοβαρὸ νὰ πῶ καὶ μοῦ ἔλεγε: «Ἄμμουδα, παιδάκι μου, ἄμμουδα!» Οἱ μικρὲς ἁμαρτίες μαζεύονται καὶ κάνουν ἓνα σωρὸ ἄμμουδα, ποὺ εἶναι ὅμως βαρύτερη ἀπὸ μία μεγάλη πέτρα. Ὁ ἄλλος ποὺ ἔχει κάνει ἓνα ἁμάρτημα μεγάλο, τὸ σκέφτεται συνέχεια, μετανοεῖ καὶ ταπεινώνεται. Ἐσὺ ἔχεις πολλὰ μικρά. Ἐάν ὅμως ἐξετάσης τίς συνθήκες μὲ τίς ὁποῖες ἐσὺ μεγάλωσες καὶ τίς συνθήκες μὲ τίς ὁποῖες μεγάλωσε ὁ ἄλλος, θὰ δῆς ὅτι εἶσαι χειρότερη ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον. Νὰ προσπαθῆς ἐπίσης νὰ εἶσαι συγκεκριμένη στὴν ἐξομολόγησή σου. Δὲν φθάνει νὰ πῆ κανεὶς λ.χ. «ζηλεύω, θυμῶνω κ.λπ.», ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ πῆ τίς συγκεκριμένες πτώσεις του, γιὰ νὰ βοηθηθῆ. Καί, ὅταν πρόκειται γιὰ κάτι βαρὺ, ὅπως ἡ πονηριά, πρέπει νὰ πῆ καὶ πὼς σκέφθηκε καὶ πὼς ἐνήργησε· ἀλλιῶς κοροϊδεύει τὸν Χριστό.

Ἄν ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν ὁμολογῆ τὴν ἀλήθεια στὸν πνευματικὸ, δὲν τοῦ ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ σφάλμα του, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσει νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει, παθαίνει ζημιὰ, ὅπως καὶ ὁ ἄρρωστος κάνει μεγάλο κακὸ στὴν υγεία του, ὅταν κρύβει τὴν πάθησή του ἀπὸ τὸν γιατρό. Ἐνῶ, ὅταν ἐκθέτη τὸν ἑαυτό του ὅπως ἀκριβῶς εἶναι, τότε ὁ πνευματικὸς μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν γνωρίσει καλύτερα καὶ νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει πιὸ θετικά.

Ὑστερα, ὅταν κανεὶς ἀδικήση ἢ πληγῶση μὲ τὴν συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ ἑναν ἄνθρωπο, πρέπει πρῶτα νὰ πάη νὰ τοῦ ζητήση ταπεινὰ συγχώρηση, νὰ συμφιλιωθῆ μαζί του, καὶ ἔπειτα νὰ ἐξομολογηθῆ τὴν πώση του στὸν πνευματικὸ, γιὰ νὰ λάβει τὴν ἄφεση. Ἔτσι ἔρχεται ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἄν πῆ τὸ σφάλμα του στὸν πνευματικὸ, χωρὶς προηγουμένως νὰ ζητήση συγχώρηση ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ πλήγωσε, δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ εἰρηνεύσει ἢ ψυχῆ του, γιατί δὲν ταπεινώνεται. Ἐκτὸς ἂν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ πλήγωσε ἔχει πεθάνει ἢ δὲν μπορῆ νὰ τὸν βρῆ, γιατί ἄλλαξε κατοικία καὶ δὲν ἔχει τὴν διεύθυνσή του, γιὰ νὰ τοῦ ζητήση, ἔστω καὶ γραπτῶς, συγγνώμην, ἀλλὰ ἔχει διάθεση νὰ τὸ κάνει, τότε ὁ Θεὸς τὸν συγχωρεῖ, γιατί βλέπει τὴν διάθεσή του.

- Ἄν, Γέροντα, ζητήσουμε συγχώρηση καὶ δὲν μᾶς συγχωρήση;

- Τότε νὰ κάνουμε προσευχὴ νὰ μαλακῶση ὁ Θεὸς τὴν καρδιά του. Ὑπάρχει ὅμως περίπτωση νὰ μὴ βοηθᾷ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μαλακῶση ἡ καρδιά του, γιατί, ἂν μᾶς συγχωρήση, μπορεῖ νὰ ξαναπέσουμε στὸ ἴδιο σφάλμα.

- Γέροντα, ὅταν κανεὶς κάνει ἓνα σοβαρὸ σφάλμα, ὑπάρχει περίπτωση νὰ μὴν μπορῆ νὰ τὸ ἐξομολογηθῆ ἀμέσως;

- Γιατί νὰ τὸ ἀφήσει; Γιὰ νὰ ξινίσει; Ὅσο κρατᾶς ἓνα χαλασμένο πράγμα, τόσο χαλαεῖ. Γιατί νὰ ἀφήσει νὰ περάσουν ἓνας-δυὸ μῆνες, γιὰ νὰ πάη στὸν πνευματικὸ νὰ τὸ ἐξομολογηθῆ; Νὰ πάη τὸ συντομώτερο. Ἄν ἔχη μία πληγὴ ἀνοιχτή, θὰ ἀφήσει νὰ περάσει ἓνας μῆνας, γιὰ νὰ τὴν θεραπεύσει; Οὔτε νὰ περμενὴ νὰ πάη, ὅταν θὰ ἔχη πολὺ χρόνο ὁ πνευματικὸς, γιὰ νὰ ἔχη πιὸ πολλὴ ἄνεση. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἓνα σφάλμα, τὰκ-τὰκ νὰ τὸ λήη ἀμέσως καὶ μετὰ, ὅταν ὁ πνευματικὸς θὰ ἔχη χρόνο, νὰ πηγαίνει γιὰ πιὸ πολὺ, γιὰ μία συζήτηση κ.λπ.

Δὲν χρειάζεται ὥρα πολλή, γιὰ νὰ δώσω εἰκόνα τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μου. Ὅταν ἡ συνείδηση δουλεῖ σωστά, δίνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος μὲ δυὸ λόγια εἰκόνα τῆς καταστάσεώς του. Ὅταν ὅμως ὑπάρχει μέσα του σύγχυση, μπορεῖ νὰ λήη πολλὰ καὶ νὰ μὴ δίνει εἰκόνα. Νά, βλέπω, μερικοὶ μου γράφουν ὀλόκληρα τετράδια, εἴκοσι-τριάντα σελίδες ἀναφορᾶς μὲ μικρὰ γράμματα, καὶ μερικὲς σελίδες ὑστερόγραφο... Ὅλα αὐτὰ ποὺ γράφουν μποροῦσαν νὰ τὰ βάλουν σὲ μία σελίδα.

Τὰ Ἐλαφρυντικὰ στὴν Ἐξομολόγησή μας Γίνονται Ἐπιβαρυντικὰ γιὰ τὴν Συνείδηση

- Ὅταν, Γέροντα, κατὰ τὴν ἐξομολόγησι μίας ἁμαρτίας δὲν νιώθει κανεὶς τὸν πόνο ποῦ ἔνωσε, ὅταν ἔκανε τὴν ἁμαρτία, σημαίνει ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει πραγματικὴ μετάνοια;

- Ἄν ἔχη περάσει καιρὸς ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ ἔκανε αὐτὴν τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἐπουλώνεται ἡ πληγὴ, γι' αὐτὸ δὲν νιώθει τὸν ἴδιο πόνο. Αὐτὸ ποὺ πρέπει νὰ προσέξει, εἶναι νὰ μὴ δικαιολογῆ τὸν ἑαυτό του κατὰ τὴν ἐξομολόγησι. Ἐγὼ, ὅταν πάω νὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ καὶ πῶ λ.χ. «θύμωσα» —ἀσχετα ἂν χρειάζοταν νὰ δώσω καὶ σκαμπίλι— καὶ δὲν ἀναφέρω τὸ θέμα γιὰ νὰ μὴ μοῦ δώση ἐλαφρυντικὸ ὁ πνευματικὸς.

Ὅποιος ἐξομολογεῖται καὶ δικαιολογεῖ τὸν ἑαυτό του, δὲν ἔχει ἀνάπαυση ἐσωτερικὴ, ὅσο ἀσυνείδητος καὶ ἂν εἶναι. Τὰ ἐλαφρυντικὰ ποὺ χρησιμοποιεῖ στὴν ἐξομολόγησι του γίνονται ἐπιβαρυντικὰ γιὰ τὴν συνείδησή του. Ἐνῶ, ὅποιος ὑπερβάλλει τὰ σφάλματά του, γιατί ἔχει λεπτὴ συνείδηση, καὶ δέχεται καὶ μεγάλο κανόνα ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ, αὐτὸς νιώθει ἀνέκφραστη ἀγαλλίαση. Ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι ποῦ, ἂν κλέψουν λ.χ. μιὰ ρώγα, νιώθουν σὰν νὰ πῆραν πολλὰ καλὰ σταφύλια καὶ σκέφτονται συνέχεια τὸ σφάλμα τους. Δὲν κοιμούνται ὅλη τὴν νύχτα, μέχρι νὰ τὸ ἐξομολογηθοῦν. Καὶ ἄλλοι, ἐνῶ ἔχουν κλέψει ὀλόκληρα καλὰ σταφύλια, δικαιολογοῦν τὸν ἑαυτό τους καὶ λένε πὼς πῆραν ἓνα τσαμπί. Αὐτοὶ ὅμως ποὺ ὄχι μόνο δὲν δικαιολογοῦν τὸν ἑαυτό τους, ἀλλὰ μεγαλοποιοῦν τὸ παραμικρὸ σφάλμα τους καὶ στενοχωριοῦνται καὶ ὑποφέρουν πολὺ γιὰ μία μικρὴ τους ἀταξία, ξέρετε τί θεία παρηγοριὰ νιώθουν; Ἐδῶ βλέπετε τὴν θεία δικαιοσύνη, πὼς ὁ Καλὸς Θεὸς ἀνταμειβεῖ.

Ἔχω παρατηρήσει ὅτι ὅσοι ἐκθέτουν τὰ σφάλματά τους ταπεινὰ στὸν πνευματικὸ καὶ ἐξευτελίζονται, λάμπουν, γιατί δέχονται τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἔνας ἀπόστρατος μὲ πόση συντριβὴ μοῦ διηγήθηκε ὅ,τι εἶχε κάνει ἀπὸ ὀκτὼ χρονῶν παιδάκι. Ἔνα τόπι εἶχε πάρει ἀπὸ ἓνα παιδάκι γιὰ μίαν μόνο νύχτα—τὴν ἄλλη μέρα τοῦ τὸ ἔδωσε—καὶ ἔκλαιγε, γιατί τὸ στενοχώρησε. Ὄταν ἀποστρατεύθηκε, ἔψαξε καὶ βρῆκε ὅσους εἶχε λυπήσει, ὅταν ὑπηρετοῦσε—ἄσχετα ἂν ἐκτελοῦσε καθήκον τῆς ὑπηρεσίας του—καὶ τοὺς ζήτησε συγγνώμη! Μοῦ ἔκανε ἐντύπωση! Ὅλα τὰ ἔπαιρνε ἐπάνω του. Μένει τώρα σὲ ἓνα χωριὸ καὶ τὰ χρήματά του τὰ δίνει ἐλεημοσύνη. Ὑπηρετεῖ καὶ τὴν ἡλικιωμένη μάνα του, ἐνενηντα πέντε χρόνων, κατάκοιτη μὲ ἡμιπληγία καί, ἐπειδὴ βλέπει τὸ σῶμα τῆς, ὅταν τὴν φροντίζει, τὸν πειράζει ὁ λογισμὸς. «Ἄν ὁ Χάμ ποὺ εἶδε τὴν γύμνωση τοῦ πατέρα τοῦ τιμωρήθηκε, λέει, τότε ἐγώ...». Συνέχεια ἔκλαιγε. Τὸ πρόσωπό του ἦταν ἀλλοιωμένο. Πόσο διδάχθηκα ἀπὸ τὴν συντριβὴ του!

- Μπορεῖ, Γέροντα, νὰ μεγαλοποιηθεῖς τὰ σφάλματά σου, γιὰ νὰ δείξῃ ὅτι κάνει λεπτὴ ἐργασία;

- Ἐκεῖνο εἶναι ἄλλο· τότε ὑπερηφανεύεται ἀπὸ τὴν ταπείνωση.

Μετὰ τὴν Ἐξομολόγηση

- Γέροντα, μετὰ τὴν ἐξομολόγηση δικαιολογεῖται νὰ νιώθῃς βάρος;

- Γιατί νὰ νιώθῃς βάρος; Μὲ μίαν σωστὴ ἐξομολόγηση σβήνουν ὅλα τὰ παλιά. Ἀνοίγονται νέα δεφτέρια. Ἔρχεται ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀλλάζει τελείως ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Χάνονται ἡ ταραχὴ, ἡ ἀγριὰδα, τὸ ἄγχος καὶ ἔρχονται ἡ γαλήνη, ἡ ἡρεμία. Τόσο αἰσθητὸ εἶναι αὐτὸ ἀκόμη καὶ ἐξωτερικά, ποὺ λέω σὲ μερικοὺς νὰ φωτογραφηθοῦν πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξομολόγηση καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἐξομολόγηση, γιὰ νὰ διαπιστώσουν καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι τὴν καλὴ ἀλλοίωση, γιατί στὸ πρόσωπο ζωγραφίζεται ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ πνευματικὴ κατάσταση. Τὰ μυστήρια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κάνουν θαύματα. Ὅσο πλησιάζει κανεὶς στὸν Θεάνθρωπο Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, θεώνεται, καὶ ἐπόμενο εἶναι νὰ ἀκτινοβολῇ καὶ νὰ προδίδεται ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία Χάρη.

- Δηλαδή, Γέροντα, μετὰ ἀπὸ μίαν εἰλικρινὴ ἐξομολόγηση νιώθεις ἀμέσως χαρὰ;

- Ὅχι πάντοτε. Μπορεῖ καὶ νὰ μὴ χαρῆς ἀμέσως, ἀλλὰ σιγά-σιγά γεννιέται μέσα σου ἡ χαρὰ. Μετὰ τὴν ἐξομολόγηση χρειάζεται ἡ φιλότιμη ἀναγνώριση. Νὰ νιώθῃς ὅπως αὐτὸς ποὺ τοῦ χαρίζεται ἓνα χρέος ποὺ ἔχει, καὶ ἀπὸ φιλότιμο αἰσθάνεται εὐγνωμοσύνη καὶ ὑποχρέωση πρὸς τὸν εὐεργέτη του. Νὰ εὐχαριστῆς τὸν Θεό, ἀλλὰ συγχρόνως νὰ ζῆς καὶ τὸ ψαλμικό: «τὴν ἀνομίαν μου ἐγὼ γινώσκω καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία μου ἐνώπιόν μου ἐστὶ διὰ παντός», γιὰ νὰ μὴν ξεθαρρεῖς καὶ ἐπαναλαμβάνῃς τὰ ἴδια σφάλματα.

- Γέροντα, διάβασα κάπου ὅτι οἱ δαίμονες θὰ μᾶς βασανίσουν στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ ἓναν κακὸ λογισμὸ ποὺ δὲν ἐξομολογήθηκε.

- Κοίταξε, ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος μετανοήσῃ καὶ πῆ στὸν πνευματικὸ ὅ,τι θυμόταν, χωρὶς νὰ ἔχῃ τὴν πρόθεση νὰ κρύψῃ κάτι, τελείωσεν τὰ ταγκαλάκια δὲν ἔχουν καμμία ἐξουσία ἐπάνω του. Ὄταν ὅμως δὲν ἐξομολογήθῃ ἐν γνώσει του μερικὲς ἁμαρτίες του, θὰ βασανίζεται στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ γι' αὐτές.

- Γέροντα, ὅταν κάποιος ἐξομολογήθηκε νεανικὰ τοῦ σφάλματα, ἀλλὰ πάλι τὰ σκέφτεται καὶ ταλαιπωρεῖται, εἶναι σωστὴ ἀντιμετώπιση;

- Ἄν ἔχῃ πολλὴ συντριβὴ γιὰ τὰ νεανικὰ τοῦ σφάλματα καὶ τὰ ἐξομολογήθηκε, δὲν ὑπάρχει λόγος νὰ ταλαιπωρεῖται, ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ τὰ συγχώρησε ἀπὸ τὴν στιγμή ποὺ τὰ ἐξομολογήθηκε. Στὸ ἐξῆς δὲν πρέπει νὰ σκαλίζῃ τὰ παλιά, ἰδίως σαρκικὰ ἁμαρτήματα, γιατί μπορεῖ νὰ πάθῃ ζημιὰ. Στὸν πόλεμο π.χ. πέφτει μίαν χειροβομβίδα δίπλα σὲ ἓναν στρατιώτη, ἀλλὰ τὸν φυλάει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ δὲν σκάζει. Ὄταν τελειώσῃ ὁ πόλεμος, βρίσκει ὁ στρατιώτης τὴν χειροβομβίδα ποὺ δὲν ἔσκασε καὶ ἀρχίζει νὰ τὴν περιεργάζεται, καὶ τελικὰ ἀνατινάξεται στὸν ἀέρα σὲ καιρὸ εἰρήνης.



«Βασιλεῦ οὐράνιε...»

«Πάτερ ἡμῶν, ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς...»

Αὐτὲς οἱ δυὸ προσευχὲς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ἀκλείνουν μέσα τους ἀσύλληπτη δύναμι. Ἀπὸ γήινους καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὺς μποροῦν νὰ μᾶς κάνουν οὐράνιους καὶ ἁγίους.

Χρησιμοποιήστε αὐτὲς τὶς θεῖες προσευχὲς σὰν ἱαματικὰ φάρμακα κατὰ τῶν προσβολῶν τῶν δαιμόνων, ποὺ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ σᾶς ὀδηγήσουν σὲ ἀμέτρητες πτώσεις καὶ παραβάσεις τοῦ θείου νόμου.

Μὴν ὑποτάσσεσθε ποτὲ στὸν πονηρὸ, ποὺ μὲ δόλια τεχνάσματά σᾶς σπρώχνει στὴν ἁμαρτία. Νὰ ἀπομακρύνετε τοὺς πειρασμοὺς μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ τὴ σκέψι ὅτι εἶστε παιδιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Αὐτὸς σᾶς ἐνισχύει στὸν πνευματικὸ σας ἀγῶνα καὶ Αὐτὸς θὰ σᾶς στεφανώσῃ γιὰ τὴ νίκη σας μὲ τὸ ἁμαράντινο στεφάνι τῆς βασιλείας Του, δοξάζοντάς σας στοὺς ἀπέραντους αἰῶνας.

Γένοιτο, Κύριε!

Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τῆς Κρονστάνδης

Οι Προδότες

Θ. Θεοφυλάκτου.

Πέρασαν 34 ολόκληρα χρόνια από τότε που τα βάρβαρα στίφη του Άττίλα με την δύναμη των όπλων των ΗΠΑ και του NATO έξαπέλυσαν, ύπουλα και πονηρά, στρατιωτική επίθεση έναντιόν ενός κράτους, μικρού μόνον, αλλά ελεύθερου, ύστερα από πολλά δεινά σκλαβιάς και άποικιοκρατίας, ή τελευταία των όποιων ήταν της άλλοτε ισχυρᾶς Βρετανίας.

Ναί! Ύστερα από τους ήρωικούς αγώνες του Κυπριακού Έλληνισμού 1955-1959 και την ήρωική αντίσταση την οποία προέβαλε, ή Κύπρος κατέστη κράτος ελεύθερο και ανεξάρτητο μέλος της Βρετανικής Κοινοπολιτείας, μέλος του ΟΗΕ και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένώσεως.

Οί Άγγλοι, άφοϋ έδειξαν τὸ ἀληθινὸ τους πρόσωπο καὶ ἀπεκάλυψαν τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους, μὲ ὅλη τους τὴν θηριωδία, ἐκάμησαν. Ἡ Ἀγγλικὴ βαρβαρότητα μὲ τὸν γνωστὸ εὐγενέστατο Χάρντινκ συναγωνίσθηκαν σὲ βαρβαρότητα τὸν Ἀδόλφο Χίτλερ, τὸν ὁποῖον ὑποτίθεται ὅ,τι πολέμησαν, μιμήθηκαν ὅμως τὸν τρόπο ἐξοντώσεως τῶν ἀντιπάλων τους.

Ἡ πονηρὰ Ἀλβιόνα, στραγγάλισασα τὴν ἐλευθερία τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ, ἀνέμειξε στὴν ὑπόθεση τῆς Κύπρου, ὡς μὴ ὄφειλε, καὶ τὸν βάρβαρο Ἀσιάτη, τὸ γνωστὸ λυκόσκυλο, τὸν χωροφύλακα τῶν ΗΠΑ τῆς περιοχῆς, γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ διὰ μέσου τῆς Τουρκίας νὰ περνᾷ τὰ θελήματά της καὶ νὰ ὑποστηρίξει τὰ ἄνομα συμφέροντά της.

Ἀλήθεια! Γιατὶ ἀκόμη παραμένουν στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Μεγαλόνησο στρατιωτικὲς βάσεις τῶν Ἀγγλῶν; Τί σχέση ἔχουν μὲ τὴν Κύπρο οἱ Ἀγγλοι, τὴν στιγμή που δὲν ὑπάρχει Ἀγγλος πολίτης στὴν Κύπρο; Καὶ ὕστερα, ἀφοϋ συνεχίζουν νὰ παραμένουν οἱ ἀγγλικὲς βάσεις, γιὰτὶ δὲν πληρώνουν τὰ ἐνοίκια τῶν βάσεων ὡς ἔντιμοι καὶ δίκαιοι ἐνοικιαστές;

Αὐτὸ θὰ πεῖ ἀγγλικά συμφέροντα.

Οἱ Ἀγγλοι πρόδωσαν τὴν Κύπρο καὶ ἔπαιξαν θαυμάσια τὸν ρόλο τοῦ Πιλάτου. Στὸ ἄτιμο παιχνίδι τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ δράματος οἱ κυρίως ἔνοχοι εἶναι οἱ Ἀγγλοι, διότι στὴν δική τους θέση τοποθέτησαν τοῦ Τούρκου, γιὰ νὰ μποροῦν ἄνετα νὰ παίξουν τὸν ρόλο τοῦ διαιτητοῦ καὶ νὰ προωθοῦν τὰ πονηρὰ καὶ ἄνομα συμφέροντά τους.

Δὲν πρέπει νὰ λησμονοῦμε ὅ,τι τὴν Κύπρο τὴν πώλησαν οἱ Τούρκοι τὸ 1878 ἀντὶ πολλῶν λιρῶν παραιτηθέντες διὰ συμφωνιῶν παντὸς κυριαρχικοῦ δικαιώματος. Καὶ αὐτὸ που ἔγινε εἶχε ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα οἱ Τούρκοι νὰ παύσουν νὰ ἔχουν βλέψεις στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Μεγαλόνησο. Τὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια τὰ ὁποῖα εἰσέπραξαν δὲν τοὺς παρείχαν κανένα δικαίωμα

νὰ ἔχουν διεκδικήσεις καὶ δικαιώματα. Νὰ ὅμως ποὺ οἱ Τούρκοι ἄδραξαν τὴν εὐκαιρία, ποὺ τοὺς ἔδωσαν οἱ Ἀγγλοι, καὶ ἤγειραν ἀξιώσεις. Ἡ Κύπρος εἶναι ἄλλωστε τόσο κοντὰ τους καὶ ἀπέχει μόνον 50 ναυτικὰ μίλια καὶ ἐπομένως, ἔχει κάθε λόγο νὰ διεκδικεῖ τὴν κατάκτησή της. Αὐτὸ ἔλεγαν οἱ Ἀγγλοι γιὰ νὰ δικαιολογήσουν τὴν συμπεριφορὰ τους.

Καὶ δυστυχῶς, τὸ λάθος ἔγινε. Ἐνῶ ἐμεῖς συζητούσαμε μὲ τοὺς Ἀγγλους ἀποικιοκράτες, ἐνεπλάκημεν σὲ συζητήσεις μὲ τοὺς Τούρκους, οἱ ὁποῖοι οὔτε λογικὴ διαθέτουν, οὔτε ἀκοὴ ἔχουν, οὔτε ἀπὸ δίκαιο γνωρίζουν, οὔτε διεθνεῖς συμφωνίες σέβονται, ἀλλὰ ἔχουν ὅλα τὰ γνωρίσματα τῆς πονηρίας, τῆς ἐκδικητικότητος, τοῦ μίσους, τῆς ἀρπακτικότητος καὶ τῆς αἰμοδιψίας. Ἀποτέλεσε ἀστοχία τῆς τότε Ἑλληνικῆς Κυβερνήσεως ποὺ ἀπεδέχθη στὴν τράπεζα τῶν συνομιλιῶν, γιὰ θέματα τῆς Κύπρου, νὰ παρίσταται καὶ ἐκπρόσωπος τῆς Τουρκίας. Τὸ θέμα ἀφοροῦσε ἀποκλειστικῶς τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Μεγαλόνησο, τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ κανέναν ἄλλον. Ἀλλὰ τὸ λάθος, δυστυχῶς, ἔγινε καὶ ἀπὸ τότε μέχρι σήμερα συνεχίζεται, κατὰ τὸν πλέον ἄθλιο τρόπο, εἷς βάρος τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ.

Ἄττίλας: Ἐνα ὄνομα τοῦ ἀνήκει στὶς μελανὲς σελίδες τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἱστορίας. Ἐνα ὄνομα ἄγνωστο στοὺς πολλούς. Γνωστὸ μόνον σὲ ὅσους ξεφυλλίζουν τὴν ἱστορία. Τὸ ὄνομα αὐτὸ ἀνήκει στὸν ἀρχηγὸ τῶν Οὐννων, μίας βαρβαρικῆς καὶ ἀπολίτιστης φυλῆς. Μὲ τὰ βάρβαρα αὐτὰ στίφη, ὁ Ἄττίλας σκοροποῦσε τὸν ὄλεθρο καὶ τὴν καταστροφὴ σ' Ἀνατολὴ καὶ Δύση. Στὸ πέρασμά του σάρωνε ὅ,τι εὔρισκε μπροστά του.

Πολὺ δικαιολογημένα, οἱ λαοὶ ποὺ δέχθηκαν τὴν καταστροφικὴ του μανία, ὀνόμασαν τὸν Ἄττίλα «θεία μάστιγα». Τὸ ὄνομα αὐτό, ποὺ ὅταν ἀκούγεται, προκαλεῖ φρίκη καὶ ἀποτροπιασμό, ἔκαμαν γνωστὸ ἐδῶ καὶ τριάντα δυὸ χρόνια οἱ βάρβαροι Τούρκοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὁμολογουμένως, ἔχουν πολλὰ κοινὰ μὲ τοὺς Οὐννους. Οἱ στρατοκράτες τῆς Ἀγκυρας πεθύμησαν δόξα Ἄττίλα. Σχεδίασαν μία κατακτητικὴ ἐπιχείρηση καὶ τὴν βάπτισαν «Ἄττίλα». Τὸ σχέδιο «Ἄττίλα» θέσαντες εἷς ἐφαρμογὴν, κατέλαβαν τὸ 40% τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ ἐδάφους.

Ναί, 20 Ἰουλίου 1974! Τὴν ἡμέρα αὐτὴ ἐπετέθησαν ὑπούλως οἱ πάνοπλοι βάρβαροι καὶ κτύπησαν τὸ ἄοπλο νησί. Οἱ ὀλιγάριθμοι Ἑλληνες θηριομάχησαν καὶ ἀντιμετώπισαν τοὺς ἐπιδρομείς. Μὰ ὁ «Ἄττίλας» θριάμβευσε. Πυρπόλησε σπίτια, ἰσοπέδωσε περιβόλια, λήστεψε καταστήματα, ἀτίμασε γυναῖκες, ἔσφαξε μικρὰ παιδιά. Ἄνοιξε ὀμαδικοὺς τάφους καὶ πέταξε μέσα τοὺς ἀμάχους ποὺ φόνευσε ἐν ψυχρῷ. Βεβήλωσε τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς, μετέβαλε σὲ στάβλους τὰ θυσιαστήρια καὶ ἔσφαξε ἱερεῖς. Κατέστρεψε τὰ πάντα. Ρήμαξε κυριολεκτικὰ τὸν τόπο. Ξεσπίτωσε διακόσιες χιλιάδες

Ἕλληνες, οἱ ὅποιοι ζοῦν πολλὰ χρόνια πρόσφυγες, μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἰδιαίτερή τους πατρίδα. Ὑπέστησαν τὰ πάνδεινα οἱ Κύπριοι ἕως ὅτου ἐγκατασταθοῦν μόνιμα εἴτε μέσα στὴν ὑπόλοιπη Ἑλληνικὴ Κύπρο, εἴτε μέσα στὴν μητέρα Ἑλλάδα. Βυθίστηκε τὸ νησί στὸν πόνο, στὸ δάκρυ καὶ στὸ ἀπέραντο πένθος.

Καὶ ὅλα αὐτά; Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπαθῆ βλέμματα τῆς πολιτισμένης (;) ἀνθρωπότητας! Τι ἔκαμαν καὶ τί κάμνουν οἱ ἰσχυροὶ τῆς γῆς; Ἄναψαν, ἀπλῶς, τὸ «πράσινο» γιὰ νὰ περάσει ὁ «Ἀττίλας» καὶ ἀρκέστηκαν στὶς τυπικὲς φιλοφρονήσεις. Τι ἔκαμαν καὶ τί κάμνουν τὰ Συμβούλια Ἀσφαλείας καὶ οἱ Ὅργανισμοὶ τῶν Ἠνωμένων Ἐθνῶν καὶ τῶν Συμβουλίων τῆς Εὐρώπης; Ἀπλῶς, καταδίκασαν τὸν εἰσβολέα καὶ τίποτε περισσότερο. Καὶ τὸ φοβερότερο ὅλων, τοποθέτησαν στὴν ἴδια θέση δολοφόνο καὶ θύματα. Μίλησαν καὶ μιλοῦν μὲ τὴν ἴδια γλῶσσα στὸν ἔνοχο καὶ τοὺς ἀθώους. Ὅλοι ἔμειναν καὶ μένουν βουβοὶ μπροστὰ στὸ δράμα τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ λαοῦ. Τὸ μόνο ποὺ κατόρθωσαν καὶ στὸ ὁποῖο ἐπέτυχαν πλήρως, ἦταν ὁ σφιχτὸς κλοιὸς καὶ ἡ φορτικὴ πίστη στὴν Ἑλλάδα, ὥστε νὰ μὴν ἀπλώσει χεῖρα βοήθειας στὴν βαριὰ τραυματισμένη Κύπρο.

Ἔτσι βαίνουν τὰ πράγματα ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸ στὸ χειρότερο καὶ ἡ τραγωδία συνεχίζεται χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχουν ἐλπίδες ἐξαναγκασμοῦ τοῦ «Ἀττίλα» νὰ ἐγκαταλείψει τὸ μαρτυρικὸ νησί. Καὶ ὁ «Ἀττίλας» ἀποθρασύνεται. Στριφογυρίζει τὰ βλέμματά του, ἀγριεύει. Τὸ Αἰγαῖο τὸν μαγεύει. Νέα σχέδια καταρτίζει. Τὰ γεράκια τῆς Ἄγκυρας ἀπειλοῦν. Ὁ «Ἀττίλας» πρὸ τῶν πυλῶν τοῦ Αἰγαίου. Γυμνάσια καὶ κόντρα γυμνάσια. Προκλήσεις πάνω στὶς προκλήσεις. Ἀπειλὲς πάνω στὶς ἀπειλές. «Τὸ Αἰγαῖο ἀνήκει στὸν Ἀττίλα» φωνάζει. «Τὸ Αἰγαῖο εἶναι προέκταση τῆς Ἀνατολίας. Κακῶς κατέχουν τὰ πλουτοφόρα αὐτὰ ἐδάφη οἱ πανοῦργοι Ἕλληνες». Ὁ «Ἀττίλας» θεριεύει. Βγάζει ἀφροὺς ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα. Ἡ κατάσταση ὀξύνεται. Τὸ πολεμικὸ θερμομέτρο ἀνεβαίνει. Ὁ Ἀττίλας λυσσᾷ. Ἡ Ἑλλὰς ἤρεμα, ψύχραμα καὶ ἀποφασιστικά, στέκεται ἔτοιμη νὰ ὑπερασπισθεῖ τὸ πάτριον ἔδαφος.

Ὁ κίνδυνος, λοιπόν, εἶναι προφανής. Τὸ τουρκόπουλο μὲ λύσσα περιφέρεται στὶς ἀκτὲς τοῦ Αἰγαίου. Τὰ μεγάλα ἀφεντικὰ χαϊδεύουν προκλητικὰ τὸν ἀτίθασο «Ἀττίλα». Εἰς βάρος τῆς Ἑλλάδος παίζεται ἓνα ἄτιμο παιχνίδι. Ἀγνοοῦν, ὅμως, ὅ,τι αὐτὸς ὁ μικρὸς λαός, ὅσον κι ἂν φαίνεται μικρός, θὰ ὀρθωθεῖ ὡς γίγας καὶ θὰ σαρώσει τὶς ὀρδὲς τοῦ «Ἀττίλα» Οἱ «Μεττερνίχοι» θὰ τρίβουν τὰ μάτια τῶν, ὅπως τὸ 1821. Οἱ ἀδικοῦντες τὴν Ἑλλάδα, πολὺ γρήγορα θὰ ἀντιληφθοῦν ὅ,τι οἱ Ἕλληνες δὲν φοβοῦνται τοὺς πολυάριθμους ἐχθρούς, οὔτε τοὺς ἰσχυρότερους ἐξοπλισμούς.

Ἡ Ἑλλὰς δὲν θὰ ὑποκύψει στοὺς ἐκβιασμούς. Ἡ Ἑλλὰς εἶναι ἔτοιμη νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει ἀποφασιστικὰ τὸν

«Ἀττίλα» ποὺ μουγκρίζει ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πόρτα τῆς. Οἱ Ἕλληνες διαθέτουν ὑπομονὴ καὶ καρτερία. Στέκονται ψύχραμοι. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν τὰ ὄρια ἐξαντληθοῦν, τότε ὑψώνουν τὸ ἀνάστημα τῶν καὶ δίδουν ράπισμα ἠχηρό. Τότε κάθε Ἕλληνας γίνεται λιοντάρι. Αὐτὸ ὡς τὸ σκεφθεῖ καλά ὁ «Ἀττίλας», πρὶν ἀκόμη ξεκινήσει.



Ἄξιον Ἔστιν **Ὡς Ἀληθῶς Μακαρίζεις Σε τὴν Θεοτόκον,** **τὴν Ἀειμακάριστον καὶ Παναμώμητον** **καὶ Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ Ἡμῶν!**

Ἀπὸ Ἐνα Ἐλάχιστο Μοναχὸ τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς τοῦ Ὁσίου Γρηγορίου Ἁγίου Ὁρους καὶ Ἀνάξιο Τέκνο τῆς Θεοτόκου.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν ὡς ἀληθῶς μακαρίζεις Σε τὴν Θεοτόκον... γιατί πρώτη Σὺ μὲ τέλεια ἐμπιστοσύνη προσέφερες τὴν ἐλευθερία Σου ἀγαπητικὰ στὸν Θεὸ καὶ διόρθωσες τὴν ἀνυπακοὴ τῶν πρωτοπλάστων.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν... γιατί δὲν γνώρισες ἀμαρτία ἢ μολυσμὸ καὶ παρουσιάσες στὸν Θεὸ ἀγνή καὶ καθαρὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπινὴ φύσι, ὅπως ὁ Ἴδιος τὴν ἔπλασε.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν... γιατί τριῶν ἐτῶν κοράσιον ἐκουσίως καὶ πασιχαρῶς εἰσηλθες στὰ Ἅγια τῶν Ἁγίων, ὕψωσες τὸν νοῦν Σου στὸν Θεὸ καὶ μὲ ἀδιάλειπτο προσευχὴ καὶ θεωρία (θέα) τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνώθηκες μαζί Του καὶ πρέσβευσες στὸν Δημιουργὸ γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν... γιατί καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἐξοδὸ Σου ἀπὸ τὰ Ἅγια τῶν Ἁγίων καὶ ὡς μνηστευμένη μὲ τὸν δίκαιο Ἰωσήφ διατήρησες ἄθικτη τὴν ἀγιότητα καὶ παρθενία Σου.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν... γιατί μὲ ταπείνωση καὶ πίστη δέχθηκες τὸν Ἀρχαγγελικὸ χαιρετισμὸ καὶ εὐαγγελισμὸ ὅ,τι ἀσπόρως καὶ ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου θὰ συλλάβης καὶ θὰ κυοφορήσης καὶ γέννησης τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν... γιατί τόση ἦταν ἡ εὐωδιὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς Σου ποὺ ἔκανε τὸν Θεὸ νὰ ἐρασθῆ τὸ κάλλος Σου, Τὸν εἴλκυσες καὶ τρόπον τινὰ Τὸν ἀνάγκασες νὰ σαρκωθῆ στὴν ἀγία μήτρα Σου.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν... γιατί ἐλεύθερα ἔδωσες τὴν συγκατάθεσή Σου στὸν Θεὸ καὶ συνήργησες στὴν σάρκωσι τοῦ Υἱοῦ Του ποὺ δὲν θὰ σαρκωνόταν χωρὶς τὴν ἰδική Σου ἐκούσια συνεργασία.

Ἄξιον ἔστιν... γιατί ἐννέα μῆνες ἐκυοφόρησες τὸν Πλάστη Σου, ἔγινες Χώρα τοῦ Ἀχώρητου, γέννησες

τὸν Προαιώνιο, θήλασες καὶ ἔθρεψες τὸν Τροφέα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ κράτησες στὴν ἀγκαλιά Σου τὸν τὰ πάντα βαστάζοντα.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί ταπεινά διακόνησες τὸν Υἱόν Σου στὴν διδασκαλία καὶ τὸ σωτήριο ἔργο Του καὶ ἦσουν διακριτικὰ κοντὰ Του βοηθώντας Τον στὴν ἐκπλήρωση τῆς ἀποστολῆς Του.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί συνέπασχες μαζί Του στὸ ἄχραντο καὶ ἐκούσιο Πάθος Του, καρτερικὰ παραστεκόσουν στὴν Σταύρωσί Του καὶ δεχόσουν ὑπομονετικὰ τὴν ρομφαία τοῦ πόνου ποὺ περνοῦσε τὴν καρδιά Σου.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί δίκαια πρώτη Σὺ ἀπὸ τὶς μυροφόρες γυναῖκες καὶ τοὺς μαθητές Του εἶδες τὸν Ἀναστάντα καὶ μετέβαλες εἰς χαρὰν τὴν λύπην Σου.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί μετὰ τὴν εἰς οὐρανοὺς Ἀνάληψί Του στάθηκες κοντὰ στοὺς Ἀποστόλους καὶ μαθητές Του ὀδηγώντας καὶ βοηθώντας τους στὸ ἀποστολικὸ τους ἔργο καὶ τὴν διάδοση τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιὰ τὴν ἔνδοξο κοίμησιν καὶ μετάστασιν καὶ ἀναστασί Σοῦ πρὸ τῆς κοινῆς Ἀναστάσεως καὶ στὰ δεξιά του Υἱοῦ Σου καθέδρα Σου, ἀπ' ὅπου συνεχίζεις ἀκοίμητα καὶ μητρικὰ νὰ φροντίζεις καὶ νὰ πρεσβεύεις γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί ἐξακολουθεῖς νὰ προΐστασαι τῶν λυτρωμένων ἀπὸ τὸν Υἱό Σου ἀνθρώπων καὶ νὰ εἶσαι παρούσα σὲ κάθε σύναξιν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὀδηγώντας ὅλους τους πιστοὺς στὸν Μονογενή Σου.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί μόνη Σὺ εἶσαι Νύμφη Ἀνύμφευτη, Μητέρα καὶ Παρθένος πρὸ τοῦ τόκου, ἐν τῷ τόκῳ καὶ μετὰ τὸν τόκον καὶ μόνη Σὺ ἔχοντας τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἀγάπης ἔκανες γόνιμη τὴν παρθενία Σου καὶ πρόξενον Ζωῆς.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί μόνη Σὺ ἐφανέρωσες τὴν ἀληθινὴ ἐλευθερία τῶν τέκνων τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἔσωσες τὴν ἀξιοπρέπεια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί Σὺ αἰώνια ἀνυψώνεις, ἐλευθερώνεις καὶ δοξάζεις τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τῆς δείχνεις τὴν μοναδικὴ ἀποστολὴ τοῦ φύλου της.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί πρώτη Σὺ ἔπαθες τὴν κατὰ Χάριν θέωσιν καὶ εἶσαι θεὸς μετὰ τὸν Θεόν, δεύτερη μετὰ τὴν Ἁγία Τριάδα, σύνορον καὶ γέφυρα τοῦ κτιστοῦ κόσμου καὶ τοῦ Ἀκτίστου Δημιουργοῦ.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί μὲ τὴν ἰδική Σου παράκλησιν καὶ ἐπιστάσιν ὁ Υἱός Σου ἐφύτευσε ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὸ Ἅγιο τοῦτο Ὅρος, τὸ περιβόλι Σου, ὡς ἄλλον ἐπίγειο παράδεισον, καὶ συνάθροισες πλῆθος μοναχῶν γιὰ νὰ λατρεύουν νύκτα καὶ ἡμέρα τὴν Τρισήλιον Θεότητα.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιὰ τὶς ἅγιες, χαριτόθρυτες, εὐωδιάζουσες, θαυματουργές εἰκόνες Σου ἐδῶ στὸ Ἁγιώννιον Ὅρος καὶ ἀπανταχοῦ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἰδιαίτερος γιὰ τὴν ἅγια Εἰκόνα τὸ «Ἄξιον ἐστίν» ἐνώπιον τῆς

ὁποίας γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἀπὸ ἀγγελικὸ στόμα ἔψαλη ὁ γλυκύτατος ὁμώνυμος ὕμνος.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί πρόσφατα εὐδόκησες μὲ τὴν ἅγια εἰκόνα Σου νὰ ἐπισκεφθεῖς τὴν πόλιν τῶν Ἀθηνῶν νὰ εὐλόγησες καὶ παρηγόρησες τὸν λαό Σου, νὰ χαροποιήσες σεβάσιμους Ἱεράρχες, Πρεσβυτέρους, Διακόνους, Μοναχοὺς, Μοναχές καὶ ἀναρίθμητα πλήθη Λαϊκῶν, ὅλους συνάγοντας ὑπὸ τὴν σκέπη Σου, ὅλους τους Ὁρθοδόξους Ἑλληνας ἐνώνοντας.

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί καὶ πάλι ρήτορας τοῦ ἀθεϊσμοῦ πολυφθόγγους ἀπέδειξες ὡς «ἰχθύας ἄφωνους».

Ἄξιον ἐστίν... γιατί καὶ τὴν ἰδική μου ἁμαρτωλὴ ψυχὴ παρηγορεῖς καὶ Σὺ εἶσαι ἡ ἐλπίδα μου γιὰ τὴν παρούσα καὶ τὴν μέλλουσα ζωὴ, τὴν ἀπολογία μου στὸ Βῆμα τοῦ Υἱοῦ Σου, καὶ στὴ μητρικὴ Σου προστασία μετὰ Θεὸν ἀναθέτω τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ τὰ προσφιλῆ μου πρόσωπα τώρα καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἔξοδό μου ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο αὐτό.

«Ἄξιον ἐστίν» καὶ πάλι καὶ πολλὰ φορὲς!

Ἄξιον ἐστίν μακαρίζεις Σε τὴν Θεοτόκον.

Χαῖρε ὑπερευλογημένη Κυρία Θεοτόκε!

Χαῖρε τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἰδική μας Μητέρα!

Χαῖρε Προστάτις καὶ Ἐφορε τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὅρους Σου!

Χαῖρε Μυριώννιμε Παρθένε!

Ἄξιον ἐστίν, Πορταίτισσα, Γοργοϋπήκοε, Ὁδηγήτρια, Γαλακτοτροφοῦσα, Γερόντισσα, Οἰκονόμισσα, Μυροβλύτισσα, Γλυκοφιλοῦσα, Παραμυθία, Ἐπακούουσα, Φοβερά Προστασία!

Χαῖρε Νύμφη Ἀνύμφευτε!

Χαῖρε καὶ δέχου καὶ τοὺς ἰδικούς μου πτωχοὺς λόγους σὰν βρεφικὰ ψελλίσματα ἀγάπης καὶ λατρείας σὲ Σένα καὶ τὸν Μονογενή Σου Υἱόν...



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

REDEEMING THE TIME

By James (Seraphim) Blackstock, "St. Seraphim's Fellowship," 2771-29 Monument Rd., Unit 161, Jacksonville, Fl 32225 (Seraphim8@Comcast.net).

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven. Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving. Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Col 4:1-6)

† † †

The following is what transpired in one day at the Florida State Penitentiary, by the Grace of God.

It was a very hot day! Around 101 degrees and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. The humidity was high and both the priest and I had beads of sweat on our foreheads. As we approached the ominous building, the main entrance gate to the Florida State Prison began to open automatically, apparently controlled by some unseen guard. After going through the first gate we stood in a completely fenced-in area, surrounded by huge thick rolls of razor wire, 12 feet high, facing a second steel gate. The first gate closed behind us. Only when the first gate was completely closed, did the second one open to us. We walked up the steps and entered the double doors only to be confronted by another steel barred gate. This one lead to a counter where two guards worked behind thick bullet-proof glass. Here we identified ourselves and the guards checked a list for our names. Warden Bryant had already made arrangements for us to be permitted entry on this date. We were coming to administer the Sacraments to an inmate incarcerated on the Death Row. Today, he would be received into the Orthodox Church.

We entered our personal codes into the hand biometric imprint machine and then placed our right hand on the plate where a scan was made of our entire hand in order to verify our identities. Then, another barred steel gate opened where we had to empty our pockets and pass through a very sensitive metal detector. Once we were cleared, another series of barred steel gates opened a path down a long corridor that ended at yet another steel gate. This one was next to a control room where many guards behind the thick glass made another check of our entry documents and pressed the buzzer to open the gate to another area that was totally barred in.

There were entry gates going in three different directions; we waited for the gate on the right to slowly open with the now familiar sound of metal on metal. Ahead of us was a long hallway with thick steel doors on either side marked with letters A, B, C etc. We were headed for "Q" wing so we had a long walk. Along the way, guards were stationed at some of the wings and you could see racks along the walls where chains with handcuffs and feet restraints were hanging, waiting for their next use. The inmates are always fettered hand and foot with these chains when they are moved anywhere within the prison.

We finally arrived at "Q" and waited for the guard to turn the lock on the outside of the door. Then we waited for the inside guard to place his key into his side of the lock to allow our entry into the wing.

The "Q" wing is a part of the Death Row. On the upper floors of this wing are those inmates that have shown themselves to be a danger to anyone and everyone and are kept behind solid steel doors with no bars, and only a 12" square of very thick bullet proof glass with small holes drilled through it so that conversation can take place. Few people are allowed to visit these men. The basement of this wing contains only three cells and the Death Chamber.

We were escorted down the stairs where we were confronted by another barred entry and a lone guard sitting behind a desk. He was expecting us, so he let us in to his area where we signed

the registry and were permitted through another gate into the Death Watch Cells. We were greeted by Mark, he was expecting us and very glad to see us.

Mark has been on the Death Row for more than 17 years. He was raised a Baptist and his father is an ordained Baptist Minister. He and I have been talking every week for the last 7 months. I have acted as his friend and catechist and have introduced him to the Orthodox Church. I have been able to bring him many books and have sent him a series of letters on repentance that introduce one to the reality of the passions. We would talk every week about some aspect of our faith and we have come to know each other pretty well. In anticipation of our visit here today, I had previously brought Mark documents on the Rite of Chrismation and a book to help him prepare for his confession.

The priest used a table in front of the cell to lay out everything he needed for the administration of this Mysterion. After he lit a candle in front of the icon on the little table, he approached Mark in order to hear his confession and I stepped back and talked with the guard until they were finished.

This prison is a giant concrete and steel box that just bakes in the sun. There is no air conditioning and it is like an oven



inside, it is filled with an ominous heat in the summer and an unbearable cold in the winter. We were all sweating profusely as we began the sacrament.

The presence of God was very noticeable. I was surprised that in this terrible place, this man-created hell, all you could feel was God's presence. The Scriptures began to jump into my mind and heart: *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.* (Lk 15:10). And *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea. Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.* (Pss 139:7-11).

I watched the countenance on Mark's face change. It was shining and he was at peace. When we left, I knew the Angels were rejoicing in heaven and the newly illumined man could face death knowing all of his sins had been forgiven. For the next thirteen days Mark would be prayed for by a great number of priests and monks. Some of these men would write to Mark, welcoming him into the Orthodox Church and exhorting him to be on guard, to be alert and watchful and to pray unceasingly until his execution. Mark's name was also given to five prison inmates, in another State, who were tonsured monks by Metropolitan Isaiah. These men would write to Mark as well and offer him encouragement and direction. Mark was to be executed in thirteen days, on July 1st.

Shortly after this wonderful day, I received a personal letter from Mark. It was the last letter he ever wrote. He addressed me as Jimmy in the letter. Oddly, no one has ever called me by that name except my family when I was a little boy. Here is the letter:

June 16, 2008

Hey, it's Jimmy Blackstock! What's going on my friend? I'm hoping you are doing well. I'm doing okay. I wanted to drop you a few lines and let you know how much I appreciate everything you have done for me. All that time you spent with me over on "Q" Wing. Teaching me and opening my eyes. God does definitely work in mysterious ways. I am very thankful to have met you.

The Chrismation ceremony was a very moving experience. It gave me a real sense of "belonging" on so many different levels. Most importantly that I belong to God. Every time you said "SEALED", I felt a real sense

that my friend was turning me over to God. I don't know why I was so nervous about Confession. As it turned out there was no need to be. It was a very emotional experience, but uplifting. And when Father said I was absolved of my sins, I could "feel" it. And then Communion. It was all a very awesome experience. And you led me to that glorious experience. And I thank you.

All of my appeals are exhausted, so I want to take this opportunity now to tell you how much I appreciate all that you have done for me my friend. Thank you. And God Bless you.

Mark Schwab

Mark was executed on July the 1st at 6:00 p.m. There were 37 people who witnessed the execution, mostly press. Mark was very quiet (saying the Jesus Prayer) and compliant. When he was placed on the gurney, he just looked up. They had to try twice to find a vein. He had no final words. When the State of Florida began the lethal injection, the sodium pentothal put him to sleep and then they administered the lethal drugs that stopped his heart. His mouth opened slightly and he turned very pale. He was pronounced dead at 6:12PM.

Among the witnesses, was the family of the victim. They showed little emotion and I pray that they will find closure and forgiveness for Mark. I know that this poor family went through a living hell and I can only pray that somehow God will grant them peace and forgiveness in their hearts. The articles that appeared in the papers and the reports on



Network News are very matter of fact. They informed people as to the terrible and heinous crime that Mark committed, and it was indeed terrible and heinous; but nothing is ever said about how someone may have come to repentance and new life. Mark was truly a different person than he was seventeen years ago. His life and his eternal future were changed. The World looks down on someone who "finds religion" in prison, especially one who is to be executed. We are told the darkness of the evil he perpetuated but that is only half of the story. You now know the "rest of the story."

There were many outside the prison who were demonstrating both for and against the Death Penalty. Some were holding up signs to forgive and others were holding up signs that said "Rot in Hell" but it will always be like that! A sick and dying world, filled with passion, blindly heading for their own time of death. Me, I had a song in my heart... Eonia i mnimi, eonia i mnimi, eonia aftou i mnimi! May his memory be eternal!

There are 388 men on Florida's Death Row. I visit them all and minister directly to more than fifty of them. There are four more inmates awaiting Baptism now. All of these men

need your prayers, and I need your prayers. I am the only Orthodox man who visits these Death Row Inmates. Many times it is a challenge and I am faced with many difficult questions by the inmates and even the chaplains of the institution. Most of the men incarcerated here are Southern Protestants who have nothing to do but read and memorize the Bible. I have never met so many experts in religion as I have in the prisons. I have to be prepared to answer questions from men from many different backgrounds; Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Pentecostals and Catholics to name a few. I also encounter Zen Buddhists, Moslems and Pagans. Many times I have no idea what to say to these men, but I keep coming back, every week, and after a while they start to open up to me. I do some serious praying before I enter one of these institutions, because I know that this is the devil's house and he doesn't like to lose one of his own.

I am really no different than most of you. You are perhaps the only hope for many in your life to learn about Jesus. Not from your words necessarily, but from your life. What they see in you. We are so rich in Orthodoxy, we have very deep Truth and we have Dogma, but what are we, as individuals, doing about it? We have many challenges in this age of pluralism. We have challenges in unity, in ethnic churches, in ecumenism, but the biggest challenge we face is ourselves. Obviously we are filled with passions and we need virtues. We are filled with opinions with convictions and with polemics born of the flesh. It does no good to be filled with right ideas and convictions and suffer from spiritual constipation. With all my heart, I encourage you to act on your Faith. Reach out to your neighbor, invite them to Liturgy, mow the lawn for them if they are under the weather, give them a book to read, but most of all, pray for them. Let them see the light in you. Many of the people you know will go to hell!

A monk once told me a story of a vision beheld by some elder and I am afraid I cannot remember who it was, but the image, that was born of this story remains in me. The Elder saw the trees in the Fall of the year and said that the leaves that fell from the trees were as the souls of men who were going to hell. There are very few leaves that remain on any trees in the Fall, most fall to the ground. This idea is held up in our Holy Scriptures: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:13-14).

According to the CIA World Fact book, as of July, 2005, there were approximately 6,446,131,400 people on the planet, and the death rate was approximately 8.78 deaths per 1,000 people a year. According to my desktop calculator, that works out to roughly 56,597,034 people leaving us every year. That's about a 155,000 deaths a day. Most of these people will go to Hell. Does your heart not break for them?

In another place God tells us: Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. (Joel 3:14)

God always answers our prayers for someone's salvation. If for some reason a person is living a life without God and is not in a position to receive God's Grace, then God puts those prayers in a Bank. When the time comes that that person's heart opens, then God draws those prayers out of the Bank and floods that person with Grace. These prayers are always efficacious.

As Orthodox Christians we are to be salt and light. Ask yourself, am I salt and light to my neighbor, friends, boss, family and even strangers?

Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Mt 9:37-38)

Asking for your prayers, in Christ's Mercy,
James (Seraphim) Blackstock.

† † †

St. Seraphim's Prison Fellowship is located in Jacksonville, Fl. We need volunteers to write letters to prisoners and to pray. Please contact us (Seraphim8@Comcast.net) for information and details about how you can help.



Going to town one day to sell some small articles, Abba Agathon met a cripple on the roadside, paralyzed in his legs, who asked him where he was going. Abba Agathon replied, "To town, to sell some things." The other said to him, "Do me the favor of carrying me there."

So he carried him to town. The cripple said to him, "Put me down where you sell your wares." He did so. When he had sold an article, the cripple asked, "What did you sell it for?" and he told him the price. The other said, "Buy me a cake," and he bought it. When Abba Agathon sold a second article, the sick man asked, "How much did you sell it for?" And he told him the price of it. Then the other said, "Buy me this," and he bought it.

When Agathon, having sold all his wares, wanted to go, he said to him, "Are you going back?" and he replied, "Yes." Then he said, "Do me the favor of carrying me back to the place where you found me." Once more picking him up, he carried him back to that place.

Then the cripple said, "Agathon, you are filled with divine blessings, in heaven and on earth." Raising his eyes, Agathon did not see a man; it was an angel of the Lord, come to test him.

From "An Athonite Gerondikon"

UNIA: THE DORIAN HORSE OF PAPIISM

By Archim. Gen. Raptopoulos, from the book "Papism and Early Fighters of Orthodoxy," published by the Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Xenii (translated by the Greek Orthodox Monastery of Pantokrator – Melissohori Thessalonikis, Greece).

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (Mt 7:15)

† † †

Unia: What is the meaning of this word? It is a Polish word and its meaning is "union." The one that belongs to Unia is called Uniate. Every Uniate has his life's purpose to draw Orthodox Christians to the falsehoods of Papism. If, however, this is what a lay Uniate wishes, the desire for proselytizing Orthodox to Papism is that much more for the Uniate clergy.

With great yearning the Pope seeks to fully subordinate the Orthodox under his jurisdiction and to his falsehoods. He wishes to become the "head" of the Church. This yearning he has had for a very long time—since the 6th century, and especially since he officially separated from the Orthodox Church in 1054. Yes, since that time! He has tried in so many ways to succeed in his goal! But he has (thus far) succeeded in nothing. So, in his embarrassment and contemplation of what he should have done better and more effectively, he created the Uniate "church."

How It All Started

Unia was first founded by the Latins during their Laterano Synod of 1215, by Pope Innocente the 4th. Limited efforts were made until the 16th century. It was then that officially and inexplicably Unia was created in Poland by two Jesuits, Possevin and Skarga. These two monks were architects of the Polish Uniate establishment. And this was done in their efforts to proselytize the Orthodox of Poland and southwest Russia. They were greatly helped by the king of Poland, Sigismundus the 3rd, who was brought up by the two Jesuits until his 21st year of age.

Under the protection of Sigismundus the 3rd, the two Jesuits officially set up their satanic task. In 1587 the two Jesuits induced the king of Poland to call the Synod at Brest in Lithuania, the Archbishop of Kiev presiding. The topic of the synod was the union of the Orthodox with the Latin Church. The result of the synod was substantially nothing.

So, a second Synod was called again at Brest on Dec 2, 1594. In this synod, the primacy of the Pope and the Filioque were recognized. This pleased the Pope. In fact two bishops were sent to Rome to declare officially the decision of the Synod to Pope Clemente the 8th. However the union was not realized. For this reason the Polish king ordered in 1596 to reconvene the Synod at Brest, to officially declare the union with Rome.

And What Happened?

The archbishop of Kiev with other hierarchs declared the union, but the people reacted. Clerics, aristocrats and the public, led by Constantine Ostrogoski, publicly protested. They disapproved the events and declared their devotion to the early Church and to the Patriarch of Constantinople. A tragic event in the history of the Orthodox Church was then unleashed by the Latin. This event is the story that uncovered the true meaning, the face of Unia and the intentions of the Latin Pope.

Unia as the "Dorian Horse"

Unia looks very different to what it actually aims to represent. It appears Orthodox; and why? The Uniate clerics are dressed like the Orthodox clerics. They wear the rassa and have beards. They possess the total appearance of an Orthodox cleric. Their Churches are in everything Orthodox-looking. They lack those cold Latin statues that give the appearance and the feeling of an idolatric temple. Instead of statues they have icons. And the whole structure of the Church, inside and outside, is Orthodox in appearance. Their "divine liturgy" is performed in every language of each country in which it exists and always acts in a proselytizing manner. The "same" (in appearance but not in grace) divine liturgy. No simple Orthodox Christian could possibly suspect anything different from Orthodoxy. Thus, our Orthodox brethren could easily find themselves being advised by Uniates priests and worshipping in Uniate Churches.

All these constitute the Dorian horse. It is the wolf in sheepskin. Inside the Dorian horse hide the Latin Pope's men whose goal is to subordinate every Orthodox to the Vatican. To Latinitize them. To murder the Orthodox faith, the only true faith. Have we not seen this through the ages? Is it not always under the nice sheepskin that wolves aspiring to devour Orthodox hide? And those wolves are the mortal enemies of Orthodoxy. They are the camouflaged Frankish priests. They are as they are called in the 1989/24-3-1907 encyclical of the Patriarch Joakim 3rd "wolves in the form of sheep." Wolves that we must beware, as we were forewarned by our Lord Himself. Who doesn't remember His words? *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (Mt 7:15).* They are wolves and you easily understand this when you hear them during their "liturgy," commemorating the Pope of Rome, the one who possesses abysmal hatred against the Orthodox Faith.

Reverting to the Use of Force

The Uniates, crafty men of the Pope, often use this as a means to proselytize Orthodox Christians to the falsehoods of Papism. They use the Dorian horse, the sheepskin, the "camouflage." They use craftiness and deceit. However, if these means do not prove adequate, then they revert to the use of force. They have devised a thousand and two ways to force the Orthodox into submission to the Pope.

There are three recent characteristic occasions, which have happened in cities of Slovakia and which the Director of the Holy Synod's official Publication, John Hatziphotis, uncovers.

First Event

In the city of Mihalovce, the Uniates applied psychological and physical force on the Orthodox bishop John. They took over his Church and Diocese headquarters and forced him to move with all his bishopric to an old tavern. Groups of Uniate monks cut off the water, fuel and electricity, thus destroying his electronic equipment that were at the new "Diocese." The same Bishop John suffered a heart attack shortly thereafter and was transferred to the Branov Hospital.

Second Event

In the city of Medgilaborce on 23 October 1991, the Uniates, with the support of 80 policemen entered the Orthodox Church and removed all the Orthodox icons.

Third Event

In the city of Stropkov, on 11 January 1992, the Uniates and Roman Catholics together started to destroy the house of the Orthodox priest, where in a room was a small Church used by the parish. They destroyed the roof, cut off the electricity and telephone and finally they evicted the priest, who now performed the services in a small wooden house, where the faithful brought some icons, which they guarded carefully so that the Uniates wouldn't take them and burn them.

Slaughters and Executions

Which slaughter and executions should we report first? And from when shall we start? Unia drips with blood. Blood from so many of her innumerable victims who refused to worship the Pope and accept his falsehoods. But let us note some typical bloody events that bring shame the Uniates and the Pope.

In Poland

The first blood was poured abundantly by the Uniates in Poland and southwest Russia. The Polish king Sigismundus, through the prompting of the two Jesuits, Possevin and Skarga, and when he realized that through the pseudo-synods of Brest in Lithuania he accomplished basically nothing, he declared in 1596 the open persecution of the Orthodox who refused to surrender to the Pope. A river of blood was poured by this persecution. The representative of the Patriarchate of Constantinople Archimandrite Nikiphoros was arrested and thrown in prison where he died of hunger. The representative of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Poland, Kyrrill Lukaris and later Patriarch of Alexandria, just managed to escape and thus avoid imprisonment and certain death. In this persecution therefore, (the first one that Sigismundus declared with the prompting of the Uniates) several Orthodox were murdered, others were exiled and many others were tortured. All of the Orthodox Churches and holy monasteries were turned over to the Uniates. Unia's intentions for all Orthodox in Poland

and southwest Russia were clearly submission through destruction and / or death.

The description of the ever memorable Metropolitan Germanus of Thyatera on this persecution is noteworthy: "From the Orthodox some were expelled, some had their arms and legs smashed, others were bayoneted and others were killed at the stake, while the women had their breasts cut off while their children were burnt on skewers."

In Czechoslovakia

When the Communists took over Czechoslovakia, the Papist Uniates found the opportunity to openly attack all Orthodox Christians with awesome savagery. Let us hear the Metropolitan Dorotheos of Prague and all Czechoslovakia describe just a few of the vandalisms by the Uniates in the following areas.

1. Litmanova, in the area Star-Loumbova: The Church was destroyed and a concerted and systematic persecution was unleashed on all Orthodox.

2. Klenova, in the area of Houmene: During the Pascha of 1969, the Uniates fired at the Church, injuring several worshippers.

3. Stopkov, in the area of Svintik: The Uniates destroyed the Church. They climbed on the bell steeple and broke off the Orthodox triple Cross. They brought down the priest's house and threw his furniture on the street and destroyed it.

4. Tsekov, in the area of Trembosov: They took over the Church by force during the Divine Liturgy. The priest performing the Liturgy was beaten up so badly that he needed long hospital care. And this was the least. The worst was that the priest did not manage to complete the Divine Liturgy.

5. Malee Zalouzitce, in the area of Mihalovce: In this village there were 42 Orthodox and 28 Uniate families. The Uniates and the Catholics gathered 3000 followers from the county to destroy the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox defended their Church and protected it from desecration, but lots of blood was spilled. In the end the Uniates succeeded in taking over the church. And even though a lot of Orthodox blood was spilled (literally covering the road and the Church compound), it did not stop the Uniate "priests" from stepping in and entering the Church of the Orthodox, to perform their "liturgy."

6. At Kousmitce, in the area of Trembisov: The Church was destroyed and the priest was severely beaten by the fanatical Uniates. They beat him mercilessly and with no pity; he was saved by a few government officials and allowed to go to the city for treatment. At the same time, the Uniates were shouting and demanding to hang him!

The Metropolitan of Prague vainly protested to the Vatican. The Vatican kept quiet. What could it say since it created Unia and since it blesses its crimes in all Orthodox countries? As the Hierarchy of Czechoslovakia correctly noted, "Vatican's silence speaks for itself."

In Serbia

As the “Orthodox Press” wrote in November of 1961, “the biggest slaughter of the Orthodox since the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ was executed in Serbia for the benefit of Papism.”

And who were the butchers? Who else but the Papist Uniates? They are the specialist butchers of those who do not submit to the Franks but wish to die Orthodox. Thus the Papist Uniates, known as Ustashi, on April of 1941, after the overtaking of Yugoslavia by the Germans and Italians, they acted as they wished. However it was the Vatican that ordered them to action.

Their leader the infamous Ante Pavelic, was named to his post with the blessing of the Vatican and of Mussolini. So then, fully ready and allied with the Germans and Italians, they commenced with their macabre task. They entered north-west Yugoslavia and they started the slaughter. They started with the priests. All Orthodox priests of the area were rounded up, were tied with wires to temporary crosses and were then executed mainly by stoning. They then invited the Orthodox people to convert to Catholicism, under the threat of death. Then 800,000, from very young children in elementary school to old people, gave one and only answer: “NO. We wish to die for the Orthodox faith of our ancestors”.

The Uniates then gave the signal for the general slaughter. The atrocities that the Ustashi committed on the defenseless Serbian population were the worst in World War II. There exist several books and web sites displaying facts, pictures and historical accounts of the related events (WARNING: The photographs within these sites and books are quite explicit and are not recommended for young children). Approximately 800,000 Orthodox were killed after great tortures. They died but did not succumb, they did not become Latins, they did not worship the Pope. May the memory of these 800,000 Orthodox martyrs be eternal.

In Ukraine

In Ukraine, the Uniates confiscated so many Orthodox Churches, that the Orthodox Church there had so few churches for her needs. The savagery and hatred of the Uniates against the Orthodox was expressed in various ways. We provide here one event. One day the Uniates arrested the Orthodox vicar who was earlier a Uniate and later returned to Orthodoxy. Revenging his return to Orthodoxy, these wolves in sheepskins took the Orthodox cleric and forcefully drowned him in the river.

Where is therefore the love of the Pope, of the Vatican, of the Roman Catholic Church when it commits so many crimes with her infamous Unia? What is the meaning of the famous theological dialogue, when the Pope continuous to maintain Unia, this detachment of death? Let us not be deceived. The Pope wishes to subordinate all Orthodox to his falsehoods or he stands ready to exterminate them.

Unia and her crimes stand as the loud voice of truth and represent an absolute shame for the tactics, methods and ambitions of the Vatican. May the memory of the many Orthodox martyrs at the hands of the Uniates serve as loud voice of reason for all those who wish to enslave Orthodoxy to the evil forces of ecumenism and full subjugation to the Latin Pope.

† † †

Editor’s Note: For those who wish to study the historical events surrounding the Uniate crimes of recent past (in Serbia—by the Ustashi) we recommend a book titled “The Vatican’s Holocaust,” by Avro Manhattan. Mr. Manhattan (1914-1990) was the world’s foremost authority on Roman Catholicism in politics. A resident of London, during WWII, he operated a radio station called “Radio Freedom” broadcasting to occupied Europe. He was the author of over 20 books including the best-seller “The Vatican in World Politics,” going through 57 editions. He was a Great Briton who risked his life daily to expose some of the darkest secrets of the Papacy. His books were #1 on the Vatican’s “Forbidden Index” for the past 50 years! In “The Vatican’s Holocaust,” he presents a factual and sensational account of the most horrifying religious massacre of the 20th century. Revelations of forced conversions, mass murder of non-Catholics, extermination camps, disclosures of Catholic clergy as commanders of concentration camps; data is documented with names, dates, places, pictures and eyewitness testimony.

Another revealing and more accessible source of historical information about the same events is available on the Web at <http://pavelic-papers.com/misc/about.html>, and is titled “The Pavelic Papers.” It presents historical information, data, and historical documents related to the Ustashi crimes upon the Serbian people under the leadership of Ante Pavelic and with the guidance of Alojzije Stepinac (the Latin Archbishop of Zagreb—later Cardinal—and head of the Croatian Catholic Church, and a favorite of Pope Pius XII) and the blessings of the Vatican.



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 DEATH OF INFANTS

By Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos Vlachos, from the Book: "Life After Death", By Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos Vlachos, p. 94-108 (edited for length).

There is a small treatise by St. Gregory of Nyssa entitled "Concerning infants snatched away prematurely", that is to say, taken from life before they had tasted the life for which they were born. The treatise was written for Governor Hierios of Cappadocia, who had asked St. Gregory of Nyssa what we ought to know about those who depart from life very early, whose death is joined with their birth.

In setting out to elaborate this theme, St. Gregory of Nyssa takes the opportunity to praise the governor in fine words, calling him an "excellent" and "esteemed head." Beyond the expressions of polite address, it appears from the introduction that the Governor of Cappadocia had many qualities and gifts. He was distinguished by an indifference to material wealth as well as by an interest in men's souls, which he held in the treasury of his love. In other words, he loved people and was not characterized by self-seeking. Among Hierios' other gifts was that he sought to be informed about the working of the divine economy. He was asking why one person's life extends into old age while another's is finished just as he is entering life.

The problem is really existential. St. Gregory puts it very beautifully. At his birth, a human being enters on the scene of life, draws a breath of air, beginning the process of living with a cry of pain, pays the tribute of a tear to Nature, just tastes life's sorrows before any sweets have been his, and before his joints have consolidated, tender as he is, he dies, perhaps because he was left exposed as a newborn child, or because he has suffocated, or because some illness has suddenly put a stop to his life. Along with this fact, the question is also put as to whether the infant will be judged by the Judge like other people, whether he will receive a reward cooled by the dew of benediction, or whether he will be burned in the purifying fire. And this uncertainty arises because the child has done nothing in his life, neither bad nor good. For where there is no giving, there is no giving in return. Consequently, if there is no action and choice in infants, there is no reason for them to earn what we are hoping for. If the infant enters the Kingdom of Heaven in spite of this, then it is in a more advantageous position than those who have lived and struggled in their lives. And, if we think in this way, everyone is better off not to live long.

He confesses from the start that these great topics belong to the unsearchable thoughts of God, and therefore he exclaims with the Apostle: *How rich and deep are the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgements, how undiscoverable his ways! Who has ever known the mind*

of the Lord? (Rom 11:34-35). Nevertheless he proceeds to the matter in hand, because he believes in the divine grace which illumines all who have it. Without presenting his thoughts rhetorically in antithetical words, he proceeds to deal with the topic by a rational sequence.

The **first** point he makes is that human nature comes from God. Furthermore, the cause of the origin of all beings is in God and not in themselves. Uncreated nature, which is God's, surpasses every sense of dimension; it neither increases nor decreases, and is beyond any definition. By contrast, created nature is changeable, it increases and decreases. Human nature is composite, made up of heterogeneous elements, the noetic and the sensible, and it is a living image of the divine and transcendent power. Noetic nature belongs to the angelic and bodiless powers, which dwell in supramundane space, because that space is the most suitable for their bodiless nature. By contrast, sensible nature is not analogous to the noetic. Therefore in order that the earth might not be unfortunate and lack an inheritance from noetic nature, God created mankind, so that the noetic and the sensible might be united in his nature. In other words, man is a summing up of the whole creation, since he is composed of noetic and sensible.

The **second** point is that aim of the creation of man is that God should be glorified by noetic nature in the whole creation. Just as the body is maintained in life by the foods of the earth precisely because it is earthly, so there exists also an intelligible life by which our noetic nature is maintained. Just as the food going in and out of our body leaves a power in it, so also the noetic is given life by its participation in essential being. Life is participation and communion with God. And naturally this participation is knowledge of God at the depth at which the soul is able to contain it. Ignorance of God, of course, means non-participation in God.

Withdrawal from this life is a fall and ignorance. Since the fall of man, God has been working to cure the evil in us. It is evil to be withdrawn from God and to have no communion with Him, and the cure for this is to return into life again and attain communion with God. Human nature was formed by God so that it might hope for knowledge of Him and be brought towards it. Man was created with the sole purpose to be united with God. Thus the enjoyment of this life and the fulfillment of man's purpose, which is theosis, is not a repayment and a reward, but a natural condition. And not to participate in God is not a punishment, but an illness of man's soul and of his whole being.

St. Gregory takes our eyes as an example. The capacity of our eyes to see is not a prize and a reward, but a natural condition of healthy eyes. And the inability to participate in vision is not a condemnation and the result of punishment, but a man's illness. Therefore the happy life is innate and proper "to those who have purified their senses." But those who have spiritually unclean eyes and do not know God do not

participate in God. This is not a punishment, but a natural state of illness of the noetic part of their souls.

The **third** point, which is connected with the preceding ones, is that the good which is hoped for is by nature proper to the human race. And naturally this pleasure is, in one way, called a repayment. Enjoyment of this life is not a matter of justice, but a natural state of health of the soul. St. Gregory says this because of the way the question was put: How will the infant be judged or where he will be sent, since he did neither evil nor good in his life? St. Gregory says that the problem is not to be put in this way since it is not a matter of justice, but of a natural state of the health or illness of human nature.

This can be understood by the use of an example. Let us suppose that two men have an eye disease, and one of them submits to the cure and takes whatever medical science advises, even if it is disagreeable, while the other not only does not accept any advice from the doctor, but also lives intemperately. The first, for a natural reason, will enjoy his light, while the second, for a natural reason, will be deprived of his light.

If this is the natural course and natural ending of a man, in whom, according to his way of life, the eye of his soul is either cured or not, the case is somehow different with the infant. Since he has not had the illness in the first place and does not need to be purified and cured, he is living according to nature and therefore, as he is inexperienced in evil, he is not prevented by any illness of the soul from enjoying participation in the Light.

This teaching of St. Gregory of Nyssa gives us the opportunity of underlining here that the soul of man is not impure at birth, but pure. Man from his birth experiences illumination of the nous. Therefore we see that even infants can have noetic prayer, corresponding of course to the images and representations of their age. When a person is created, his nous is in a state of illumination. We have observed many times that there are infants who pray, even in their sleep. A monk of the Holy Mountain says that when small children turn their attention in some direction and laugh without a reason, it means that they see their angel. What happens in the lives of saints, for whom it is altogether natural to be with the angels, happens in little children.

Therefore Orthodox theology does not teach what theology in the West says, that man inherits the guilt of the ancestral sin. For we believe that at birth a person has a pure nous: his nous is illuminated, which is the natural state. The inheritance of ancestral sin lies in the fact that the body inherits corruptibility and mortality, which, with the passage of time, and as the child grows and passions develop, darkens the noetic part of his soul. Indeed the developed passions linked with corruptibility and mortality and darkness of the environment darken the noetic part of the souls of children.

Here is what St. Gregory of Nyssa says about the purity of the souls of infants: "Whereas the innocent babe has no such plague before its soul's eyes obscuring its measure of light, it continues to exist in that natural life; it does not need the soundness that comes from purgation, because it never admitted the plague into its soul at all." The infant's nous is pure, it has not been ill, it is distinguished by health and the natural state and therefore is not prevented at all from partaking of the divine Light.

St. Gregory always makes use of examples from the present life to explain the life which is to come. He states that there is an analogy between the present way of life and that of the future. Just as infants are suckled and fed with milk at first, but later are fed with other foods one after the other at the appropriate time, it is the same with the soul. It always takes part in life in the fitting order and sequence. This was said by the Apostle Paul, who first fed the Corinthians with milk and then gave solid food to those who reached the intelligible age.

There is a difference between the infant and the mature man in what pleases them. The man is pleased by his enterprises, by social recognition, by gifts and honours from others, by family life, by entertainments, shows, hunting, and so on, while the infant is pleased by milk, the nurse's embrace, and the gentle rocking which brings peaceful sleep.

The same is the case with spiritual age, in relation to spiritual blessings. Those who have nourished their souls with virtues in this life will in the future life enjoy divine comfort in proportion to the habit which they have acquired in this life. However, the soul which has not tasted virtue but is also not sickened with evil can also share the good to the depth to which it can contain the eternal blessings, empowered by the vision of Him Who is.

Thus infants, although inexperienced in evil, will share in divine knowledge, divine light, empowered by the vision of God, by divine grace; and naturally with the vision of God they will advance to more perfect knowledge. Actually God manifests Himself to all, "giving himself as much as the person in question accepts."

The **fourth** point which St. Gregory analyses is why God permits a baby to die at such an age. Having analyzed previously that as far as participation in the divine Light is concerned, the number of years which we have lived does not play a great role, he now goes on to explain why God permits sudden departure from this life.

In answer to this question he says that no one can put the blame on God in cases where women murder their children because of illicit pregnancy. But as to the cases in which infants leave this world through some infirmity even though their parents have cared for them and prayed for them, we must look at them within God's Providence. For perfect providence is that which does not simply heal the sufferings which

have taken place, but it protects the person from even tasting things which would happen in the future. Whoever knows the future, as is the case with God, will naturally prevent the baby from growing up, so that he will not be brought to a bad end. Thus in the latter cases it is precisely because He sees the infant's bad future that God does not permit him to live. God does this out of love and charity, without essentially depriving him of any of the future blessings, as we have seen.

In order to make this economy of God understandable, St. Gregory offers a beautiful and descriptive example. Let us suppose that there is a rich table with many appetizing foods. Let us go on to suppose that there is a supervisor who, on the one hand knows the qualities of each food—which one is harmful and unsuitable and which is suitable for eating—and on the other hand is very familiar with the temperament of each dinner guest. Let us still further suppose that this supervisor has absolute authority to permit one person to eat the food and prevent another, so that each one will eat what is suitable for his temperament and the sick person will therefore not be tormented nor the healthy one fall into loathing because of excess of food. If the supervisor should find out that one person had become drunk from much food and drink, or another was beginning to be drunk, he would get him out of that particular place. There is the case of a man who was put out of that place and turned against the supervisor, to accuse him of depriving him of the good things through envy. But if he were to look carefully at those who remained and suffered from sickness and headaches because of drunkenness, and expressed themselves with ugly words, then he would thank the supervisor for saving him from the pain of overeating.

This example matches human life. Human life is a table at which there are abundant foods. Life, however, is not sweet as honey, but also has various disagreeable foods such as salt and vinegar, which make human life difficult. Some foods arouse boasting, others make those who share them go into a frenzy, losing their heads, and in others they cause sickness. The supervisor of the table, who is God, takes away from that table promptly him who behaved properly in order not to be like those who suffer from excess of pleasure because of their gluttony.

In this way divine providence cures illnesses before they are yet manifest. Since God, with His prognostic power, knows that the newborn child will make bad use of the world when he grows up, He removes him from the banquet of life. The newborn child is detached from life so that he will not use his gluttony at the table of this life. On this point too we see the great love and philanthropy of God.

The **fifth** point, which results from the foregoing, is the question of why God makes a distinction in His choice, why He takes one away providentially, while He lets the other become so bad that we wish that he had never been born. Why

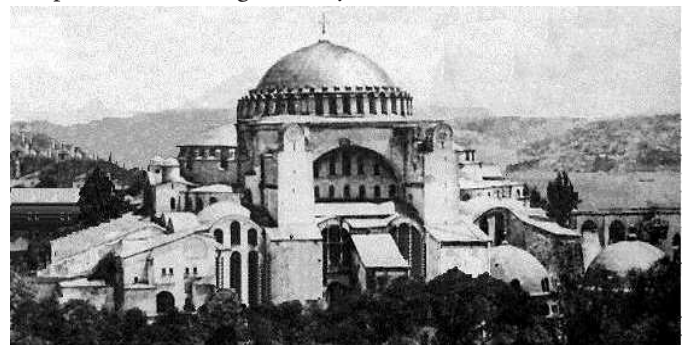
is the baby taken from this life providentially while his father is left, who drinks at the banquet until his old age, strewing his evil dregs on himself as well as on his fellow-drinkers?

St. Gregory maintains that what God arranges is not fortuitous and without reason. God is word, wisdom, virtue and truth, and He will not accept what is unrelated to virtue and truth. Thus sometimes, for reasons which we have mentioned, babies are snatched from life early, and sometimes God permits something different, because He has a better end in view.

It is also permitted and granted by God that evil people should remain in life so that some benefits may be derived. Referring to the Israelites, he says that God permitted Egypt to oppress them in order to teach the Israelite people, just as He also brought the Israelites out of Egypt so that they would not become like the Egyptians and acquire their customs.

Therefore infants are snatched away from life prematurely in order that they do not fall into more dreadful evils. If some live and become evil, this has other reasons which are in the Providence and wisdom of God. Nevertheless some benefits will come, since God does not do anything without a reason and a purpose.

The fact is that the infants who depart from life prematurely neither find themselves in a painful state nor become equal to those who have struggled to be purified by every virtue. They are in God's Providence. Anyway, the journey to God and participation in the uncreated Light is a natural state of the soul, and infants cannot be deprived of this, because by the power of divine grace they can attain deification.



As man I deliberately transgressed the divine commandments, when the devil, enticing me with the hope of divinity, dragged me down from my natural stability into the realm of sensual pleasure; and he was proud to have thus brought death into existence, for he delights in the corruption of human nature. Because of this, God became perfect man. In this way, by enticing the insatiable serpent with the bait of the flesh, He provoked him to open his mouth and swallow it. This flesh proved poison to him, destroying him utterly by the power of the Divinity within it; but to human nature it proved a remedy restoring it to its original grace by that same power of the Divinity within it.

St. Maximos the Confessor

THE CANONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES

By George Karras.

The Apostolic Canons were declared to be a part of Orthodox canon law during the Council in Trullo. This particular council of Constantinople, held in 692 under Emperor Justinian II (i.e., prior to the great schism), is generally known as the Council in Trullo, because it was held in the same domed hall where the Sixth Oecumenical Council had met.

Both the Fifth and the Sixth Oecumenical Synods had omitted to draw up disciplinary canons, and as this council intended to complete both in this respect, it also took the name of **Quinisext** (Concilium Quinisextum), i.e. Fifth-Sixth. It was attended by 215 bishops. Basil of Gortyna in Illyria, which belonged to the Roman patriarchate, was the papal legate. It should be noted that the Seventh Oecumenical Synod at Nice ascribed the Trullan canons to the Sixth Ecumenical Synod.

The council's intent was to make a body of discipline to serve thenceforth for the whole Church, and it was distributed into 102 Canons. Among those are the eighty-five canons authored by the Holy Apostles. In the Council's records the following is recorded:

It has also seemed good to this holy Council, that the eighty-five canons, received and ratified by the holy and blessed Fathers before us, and also handed down to us in the name of the holy and glorious Apostles, should from this time forth remain firm and unshaken for the cure of souls and the healing of disorders. And in these canons we are bidden to receive the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles [written] by Clement. But formerly through the agency of those who erred from the faith certain adulterous matter was introduced, clean contrary to piety, for the polluting of the Church, which obscures the elegance and beauty of the divine decrees in their present form. We therefore reject these Constitutions so as the better to make sure of the edification and security of the most Christian flock; by no means admitting the offspring of heretical error, and cleaving to the pure and perfect doctrine of the Apostles.

Among the eighty-five Apostolic Canons we read:

Canon XLV

Let a bishop, presbyter, or deacon, who has only prayed with heretics, be excommunicated: but if he has permitted them to perform any clerical office, let him be deposed.

Canon XLVI

We ordain that a bishop, or presbyter, who has admitted the baptism or sacrifice of heretics, be deposed. For what concord hath Christ with Belial, or what part hath a believer with an infidel?

Canon L

If any bishop or presbyter does not perform the one initiation with three immersions, but with giving one immersion

only, into the death of the Lord, let him be deposed. For the Lord said not, Baptize into my death, but, "Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Canon LXII

If any of the clergy, through fear of men, whether Jew, heathen, or heretic, shall deny the name of Christ, let him be cast out. If he deny the name of a clergyman, let him be deposed. If he repent, let him be received as a layman.

Canon LXIV

If any clergyman or layman shall enter into a synagogue of Jews or heretics to pray, let the former be deposed and let the latter be excommunicated.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Lk 8:8)



ONLY WITH A PURE HEART IS ONE ABLE TO SEE GOD

By the Blessed Surgeon St. Luke, Archbishop of Simferopol, translated from Greek by Christos Karamitsos.

Every time before Christ healed someone, He asked that person if he believed. And only if he believed, He performed the miracle.

Every time a miracle occurs, the Holy Spirit acts, and for someone to receive the Holy Spirit an open heart is necessary, and it is made open by faith. Just as the reception of radio waves necessarily requires an antenna, similarly for the reception of divine grace a pure heart full of faith is needed.

Our Lord does not impose His grace on anyone. One asks for faith, hope and love and only then does the Lord give His grace: when by faith one's heart is opened before Him. This happening is a great mystery, and this mystery happened every time Christ performed miracles.

The Holy Apostle Paul says that all the essence of the gospel message is found in hope, faith and love. Consequently, it is necessary that we have a strong and steadfast faith for us to be Christians and inheritors of divine grace.

If you believe that the electron exists without seeing it, then by what right do you say that our faith in God, Who also has not been seen by anyone, is unreasonable?

I will say that we too know God by His energies; by the manifestations of His power; by how He acts in our hearts; by the grace that we feel. Not anyone can prove faith. Many have tried to prove that God exists and many that He does not exist. But never has anyone been able to prove one or the other. Only with a pure heart can one see God...

Faith is the most valuable treasure on Earth and we must guard it more than anything else.

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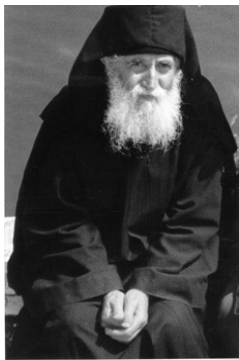
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CHOOSING A PROFESSION

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from the book "Family Life," published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti, Greece (2002), translated by Fr. Luke Hartung.



Geronda, some parents try to steer their children towards their own professions, and often get very pushy at it.

—No, they don't manage well. Parents shouldn't pressure their children unwillingly to do that which they enjoy themselves. I knew one young man who wanted to study theology and become a priest, but his mother wouldn't let him; she forced him to go into medicine. The young man had studied Byzantine music and chanted;

had made his own musical instrument; had learned the tones on his own; and knew the music by heart. He had a gift. He wrote troparia and services. As soon as he finished high school he took the entrance exams and got into Theological School. His mother suffered nervous shock from her anxiety. She would come to me later and beg me: "Pray for me to get well, Father, and I'll let my child do whatever he wants." When she got well she again refused to let him do what he wanted. Later he abandoned it all and finally wasted away.

I say to the young people who are perplexed about what discipline to follow: "See what field you like so as to do that which

is natural to you." If what they are thinking of doing does not come naturally to them, I try to help them give their hearts to that which is natural to them. In other words, I help them follow the discipline they want and keep a profession that is within their capability—provided they do so in harmony with God.

Does someone have a calling to music? He should become a musician or a good chanter who, with his life and with his chanting, will help whomever hears him love the Church and prayer. Does he have a calling to paint? He should become a painter or iconographer, and make icons with piety, which will work miracles. Does he have a calling to a certain discipline? Let him dedicate himself to it and work with *philotimo*.

You see, it is noticeable early which calling one has. Once in the monastery in Stomio a man came with his two nephews. The one, who was six or seven years old, sat next to us and constantly asked us different questions. I asked him, "What will you become when you grow up?" "A lawyer!" He told me. We couldn't find the other one, so I asked his uncle, "Where did the other kid go? He might fall off a cliff or something." So we went outside to find him and heard banging coming from the wood shop. We went in and what did we see? The counter top that we had sanded down and which was very smooth, he had completely destroyed with a hammer! "What will you become when you grow up?" I asked him. "A cabinet maker!" he tells me. "May you become one," I told him. "Okay, so you destroyed the counter top! It's alright!"

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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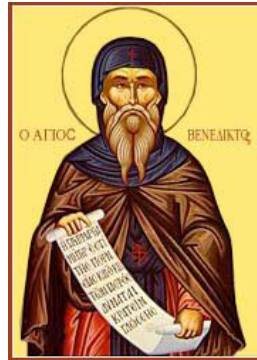
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THE TWELVE STEPS OF HUMILITY

By St. Benedict of Nursia (+547)



St. Benedict (whose name means “blessed”) was born in Nursia, a small town about 100 kilometers northeast of Rome, and lived in the early Christian world when there was in existence only the “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”. He struggled in asceticism from his youth in deserted regions, where his example drew many who desired to emulate him. Hence, he ascended Mount Cassino in Campania and built a monastery there. The Rule that he gave his monks, which was inspired by the writings of St. John Cassian, St. Basil the Great, and other Fathers, became a pattern for monasticism in the West; because of this, he is often called the first teacher of monks in the West.

His search for asceticism started at early life, when, at the age of fourteen, his parents sent him to Rome to study. Unsettled by the immorality around him, he decided to devote himself to a different sort of life. At first he settled near the church of the holy Apostle Peter in the village of Effe-dum, but news of his ascetic life compelled him to go farther into the mountains. There he encountered the hermit Romanus, who tonsured him into monasticism and directed him to live in a remote cave at Subiaco. From time to time, the hermit would bring him food.

For three years the Saint waged a harsh struggle with temptations and conquered them with the grace of God. People soon began to gather to him for guidance. The number of disciples grew so much, that the

Saint divided them into twelve communities. Each community was comprised of twelve monks and was a separate skete. The Saint gave each skete an abbot (the head of the community) from among his experienced disciples, and only the novice monks remained with St. Benedict for instruction. The strict monastic rule that St. Benedict established for the monks was not accepted by everyone, and more than once he was criticized and abused by dissenters.

Finally he settled in Campagna and on Mount Cassino he founded the Monte Cassino monastery, which for a long time was a center of theological education for the Western part of the Orthodox Church. The monastery possessed a remarkable library. St. Benedict wrote his Rule, based on the experience of life of the Eastern desert-dwellers and the precepts of St. John Cassian the Roman.

The Rule of St. Benedict dominated Western monasticism for centuries. The Rule prescribed the renunciation of personal possessions, as well as unconditional obedience, and constant work. It was considered the duty of older monks to teach the younger and to copy ancient manuscripts. This helped to preserve many memorable writings from the first centuries of Christianity. Keeping the monastic Rule was strictly binding for everyone and was regarded as an important step on the way to spiritual perfection.

St. Benedict was granted by the Lord the gift of foresight and wonderworking. He healed many by his prayers, and he foretold the day of his death in 547. The main source for his Life is the second Dialogue of St. Gregory. He is commemorated on March 14.



Brothers, divine Scripture calls to us saying: Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Lk 14:11; 18:14). In saying this, therefore, it shows us that

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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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every exaltation is a kind of pride, which the Prophet indicates he has shunned, saying, *Lord, my heart is not exalted; my eyes are not lifted up and I have not walked in the ways of the great nor gone after marvels beyond me* (Pss 130:1). And why? *If I had not a humble spirit, but were exalted instead, then you would treat me like a weaned child on it's mothers lap* (Pss 130:2).

Accordingly, brothers, if we want to reach the highest summit of humility, if we desire to attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the humility of this present life, then by our ascending actions we must set up that ladder on which Jacob in a dream saw *angels descending and ascending* (Gen 28:12). Without doubt, this descent and ascent can signify only that we descend by exaltation and ascend by humility. Now the ladder erected is our life on earth, and if we humble our hearts the Lord will raise it to heaven. We may call our body and soul the sides of this ladder, into which our divine vocation has fitted the various steps of humility and discipline as we ascend.

The first step of humility, then, is that a man keeps *the fear of God always before his eyes* (Pss 35:2) and never forgets it. He must constantly remember everything God has commanded, keeping in mind that all who despise God will burn in hell for their sins, and all who fear God have everlasting life awaiting them. While he guards himself at every moment from sins and vices of thought or tongue, of hand or foot, of self-will or bodily desire, let him recall that he is always seen by God in heaven, that his actions everywhere are in God's sight and are reported by angels at every hour.

The Prophet indicates this to us when he shows that our thoughts are always present to God, saying: *God searches hearts and minds* (Pss 7:10); again he says: *The Lord knows*

the thoughts of men (Pss 93:11); likewise, *From afar you know my thoughts* (Pss 138:3); and *The thought of man shall give you praise* (Pss 75:11). That he may take care to avoid sinful thoughts, the virtuous brother must always say to himself: *I shall be blameless in his sight if I guard myself from my own wickedness* (Pss 17:24).

Truly, we are forbidden to do our own will, for Scripture tells us: *Turn away from your desires* (Sir 18:30). And in the Prayer too we ask God that His *will be done* in us (Mt 6:10). We are rightly taught not to do our own will, since we dread what Scripture says: *There are ways which men call right that in the end plunge into the depths of hell* (Prov 16:25). Moreover, we fear what is said of those who ignore this: *They are corrupt and have become depraved in their desires* (Pss 13:1).

As for the desires of the body, we must believe that God is always with us, for *All my desires are known to you* (Pss 37:10), as the Prophet tells the Lord. We must ten be on guard against any base desire, because death is stationed near the gateway of pleasure. For this reason Scripture warns us, *Pursue not your lust* (Sir 18:30).

Accordingly, if *the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the wicked* (Prov 15:3), if at all times *the Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see whether any understand and seek God* (Pss 13:2); and if every day angels assigned to us report our deeds to the Lord day and night, then, brothers, we must be vigilant every hour or, as the Prophet says in the psalm, God may observe us *falling* at some time into evil and so *made worthless* (Pss 13:2). After sparing us for a while because he is a loving father who waits for us to improve, he may tell us later, *This you did, and I said nothing* (Pss 49:21).

The second step of humility is that a man loves not his own will nor takes pleasure in the satisfaction of his desires; rather

he shall imitate by his actions that saying of the Lord: *I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me* (Jn 6:38). Similarly we read, "Consent merits punishment; constraint wins a crown."

The third step of humility is that a man submits to his superior in all obedience for the love of God, imitating the Lord of whom the Apostle says: *He become obedient even to death* (Phil 2:8).

The fourth step of humility is that in this obedience under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions, his heart quietly embraces suffering and endures it without weakening or seeking escape. For Scripture has it: *Anyone who perseveres to the end will be saved* (Mt 10:22), and again, *Be brave of heart and rely on the Lord* (Pss 26:14). Another passage shows how the faithful must endure everything, even contradiction, for the Lord's sake, saying in the person of those who suffer, *For your sake we are put to death continually; we are regarded as sheep marked for slaughter* (Rom 8:36; Pss 43:22). They are so confident in their expectation of reward from God that they continue joyfully and say, *But in all this we overcome because of him who so greatly loved us* (Rom 8:37). Elsewhere Scripture says: *O God, you have tested us, you have led us into a snare, you have placed afflictions on our backs* (Pss 65:10-11). Then, to show that we ought to be under a superior, it adds: *You have placed men over our heads* (Pss 65:12).

In truth, those who are patient amid hardships and unjust treatment are fulfilling the Lord's command: *When struck on one cheek, they turn the other; when deprived of their coat, they off their cloak also; when pressed into service for one mile, they go two* (Mt 5:39-41). With the Apostle Paul, they bear with false brothers, *endure persecution and bless those who curse them* (2Cor 11:26; 1Cor 4:12).

The fifth step of humility is that a man does not conceal from his abbot any sinful thoughts entering his heart, or any wrongs committed in secret, but confesses them humbly. Concerning this, Scripture exhorts us: *Make known your way to the Lord and hope in him* (Pss 36:5). And again, *Confess to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy is forever* (Pss 105:1; Pss 117:1). So too the Prophet: *To you I have acknowledge my offense; my faults I have not concealed. I have said: Against myself I will report my faults to the Lord, and you have forgiven the wickedness of my heart* (Pss 31:5).

The sixth step of humility is that a monk is content with the lowest and most menial treatment, and regards himself as a poor and worthless workman in whatever task he is given, saying to himself with the Prophet: *I am insignificant and ignorant, no better than a beast before you, yet I am with you always* (Pss 72:22-23).

The seventh step of humility is that a man not only admits with his tongue but is also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value, humbling himself and saying with the Prophet: *I am truly a worm, not a man, scorned by*

men and despised by the people (Pss 21:7). *I was exalted, then I was humbled and overcome with confusion* (Pss 87:16). And again, *It is a blessing that you have humbled me so that I can learn your commandments* (Pss 118:71, 73).

The eighth step of humility is that a monk does only what is endorsed by the common rule of the monastery and the example set by his superiors.

The ninth step of humility is that a monk controls his tongue and remains silent, not speaking unless asked a question, for Scripture warns, *In a flood of words, you will not avoid sinning* (Prov 10:19), and, *A talkative man goes about aimlessly on earth* (Pss 139:12).

The tenth step of humility is that he is not given to ready laughter, for it is written: *Only a fool raises his voice in laughter* (Sir 21:23).

The eleventh step of humility is that a monk speaks gently and without laughter, seriously and with becoming modesty, briefly and reasonably, but without raising his voice, as it is written: "A wise man is known by his few words."

The twelfth step of humility is that a monk always manifests humility in his bearing no less than in his heart, so that it is evident at the Work of God, in the oratory, the monastery or the garden, on a journey or in the field, or anywhere else. Whether he sits, walks or stands, his head must be bowed and his eyes cast down. Judging himself always guilty on account of his sins, he should consider that he is already at the fearful judgment, and constantly say in his heart what the publican in the Gospel said with downcast eyes: *Lord, I am a sinner, not worthy to look up to heaven* (Lk 18:13). And with the Prophet: *I am bowed down and humbled in every way* (Pss 37:7-9; Pss 118:107).

Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will quickly arrive at that *perfect love* of God which *casts out fear* (1Jn 4:18). Through this love, all that he once performed with dread, he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue. All this the Lord will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his workman now cleansed of vices and sins.



Unfortunate is he who immoderately loves the comforts of life, and has surrounded himself with all possible comforts. He will shun every discomfort; he will become effeminate and unaccustomed to patience, whilst the life of a Christian is a rough way, a cross, requiring great patience. Therefore, Christian wrestler, do not love the comforts of this world, but love Christ, the cross-bearer.

St. John of Kronstadt

THE MYRRH-STREAMING ICONS OF HAWAII

By Their keeper, Reader Nectarios, from the Holy Theotokos of Iveron Russian Orthodox Church, a parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, Honolulu, Hawaii.

From the Editor: St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, AZ and St. Paisius Serbian Orthodox Monastery in Safford, AZ were recently blessed with a visit by the Myrrh-Streaming Icon of the Holy Theotokos of Iveron from Hawaii. Many of the pilgrims were blessed to venerate the miraculous icon and have a first-hand experience of just one the many modern-day miracles of our Holy Orthodoxy.

This article was written some time ago (at the request of the Hawaiian parish's priest) by the holy icons' keeper, in whose home the two icons began streaming myrrh, when he was asked to describe in his own words what had happened.

† † †

Dear Beloved in Christ, In humility and with extreme trepidation, I will attempt to relate to you what actually occurred before rumors spread, evolve, and eventually become untruths. Many have asked me to explain the events that have taken place regarding the two myrrh-streaming icons at the Holy Theotokos of Iveron Russian Orthodox Church in Honolulu, Hawaii. It has been hard to put into words the events that have taken over my life. I can't imagine how others would have reacted if they were in my shoes, God only knows. I pray God will guide me, and my family, to do and say things that are not contrary to His Will. I will attempt to tell the story of how these humble icons came into my life and how they changed it. Everything I write here is true.

The icons in question are two:

(1) One is a mounted-print made, I believe, at the Sofrino Church factory near Moscow. It is an exact copy of the Montreal Myrrh-streaming Iveron Icon of the Holy Theotokos; this was the icon cared for by Blessed Martyr Brother José Muñoz. It is a small icon, roughly 7 x 9 inches and approximately one inch thick. My parish priest, Fr. Anatole Lyovin, gifted it to me for my Name's Day. He said he purchased it at a church bookstore in Toronto when the parish in which he had grown up celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. The icons from Sofrino have a distinctive style

with a beautiful silk-screen riza (or oklad) built into the icon. This is done so that those who cannot afford beautiful and very expensive icons can have something equally beautiful from Sofrino for less.

(2) The second icon is a hand-painted icon in the shape of a Cross with the image of Our Lord's crucifixion in the traditional Byzantine style of iconography. A Greek monk from the Holy Mountain Athos painted it. It is roughly 8x11 inches and approximately 1-1/2 inches thick. I purchased a set of two near identical Cross icons and gave one to my father as a gift; I kept the other.

Before I relate to you the full story of the icons, let me say how it all began ...

Sometime around June or July of 2007, my wife and I noticed a hint of the scent of roses in the area surrounding our icon corner in our home chapel. Something made us look at our Cross icon of Christ (located behind our family reliquary), we noticed a small bead of liquid around the side wound on the image of the Christ, where the "soldier pierced His side with a lance." The liquid smelled very sweet, like myrrh. My experience with myrrh had been quite limited, my only contact being a cotton ball soaked with myrrh from the Montreal Myrrh-streaming Iveron Icon and several cotton balls of myrrh from the Myrrh-streaming St. Nicholas Icon. We told no one of this and proceeded to "keep an eye" on the icon for any new developments or any possible continuation of the "streaming." The bead of myrrh eventually dried out and we eventually forgot about it.

During the last week of September, I began to notice an unbelievably strong smell of myrrh, at home, in my car, even at work. I couldn't explain it. Was it all in my head? I asked my wife and she said she didn't smell anything. I spoke with several other people who visited our home, and they too said they didn't smell anything.

(One of these people was our Serbian Orthodox kuma (god-mother)—she, too, couldn't smell anything.) I was convinced it was all in my imagination. This was on September 27th, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross.

Then in the first week of October, my wife and I were extremely ill and missed Vespers that night. We don't miss too many of the church's divine services, so we did take notice of the date, October 6th (Feast day of the Conception of St. John the Baptist). Around 10:30 pm, that night, I was working in



my office, which also doubles as our home chapel where our icon corner is located. My cat walked into the office and began to sniff around as if he smelled something. I did not smell anything. He proceeded to walk toward the area where our reliquaries are kept. I thought this was strange since he would never go near the reliquaries; amazingly something always stopped him, and he's a nosy cat. Yet this time he stood on his hind legs and sniffed around, I assume in order to figure out what the smell was. I still didn't smell anything.

I proceeded to pick him up and then I noticed the scent. It was so strong, even overwhelming. Never have I smelled anything like that in my life. I couldn't explain why I hadn't smelled it before. It was like a thousand roses had fallen into the room. I crossed myself and guarded myself with the Jesus Prayer. I put the cat down and proceeded to look at the icons. I admit I was afraid to look at the icons near the reliquaries. I finally came to the icon of the Cross and noticed that the bead of myrrh by the side-wound of Christ was still dry, for a split second I regained some composure, even as the smell of roses was getting stronger. I then looked down and my hand was wet—it was myrrh.

How did it get there? The icon was dry? Or was it? I then noticed that the left knee of the image of Our Lord was forming a bead of myrrh right before my eyes. I then called out to my wife. She came running, and when I asked her if she had spilled anything on the icons, she said no. She hadn't gone near them. I showed her the icon. She was in shock. I told her the smell is too strong. Help me look at the other icons. So she did. In my office I have two bookshelves, at the top of them are icons. We have many icons, maybe too many. I stood on my toes to reach for the icons at the top of my bookshelves. My wife did the same. Finally I grabbed the icon of Iveron given to me by Fr. Anatole. It was completely wet. And then the smell got even stronger. Even my wife could smell it. For those of you who don't know my wife, her sense of smell is very limited; she is only capable of smelling citrus scents. We were afraid. We asked one another if we cleaned or anointed the icons recently, and both of us said 'no'. 'What is going on?' I asked. I put the icons back where they were; we took a few pictures with our digital camera. Then I said an Akathist to the Mother of God in honor of her Iveron Icon and went to bed, or at least tried to.

The next day, Sunday October 7th, after much debate, we left the icons at home and went to church. After the Liturgy we spoke to our kuma, who instructed us to speak with the priest immediately. We told Fr. Anatole what had happened. He listened patiently and said, 'Bring the icons to church!' We then arranged with the priest, to bring the icons to church the next Wednesday, October 10th. Up until that Wednesday, the icons continued to stream. I collected the myrrh on cotton and before them I said prayers for my sister who was ill and for several other people. [Fr Anatole's Note: The next day, his

sister called her father to say that her doctor cannot explain it, but that her pancreas, which had completely stopped functioning had returned to its normal state and that her diabetes was under control.]

We couldn't wait until Wednesday.

On Wednesday October 10th, we brought the icons to church and placed them on two analogia (lecterns) in the center of the church. Fr. Anatole inspected them and wiped them down with cotton and proceeded to start the service of the Akathist Hymn of the Iveron Icon. After the service, the icons were wiped down again; they had streamed a little during the service. Fr. Anatole confirmed to us that it is 'definitely streaming myrrh' and that it is 'a very pure myrrh'. The smell of roses filled the air. I asked him what we were to do? He asked us to leave the icons in church for the time being. No one knew about the icons; they were safe at church.

The next Saturday, October 13th, just happened to be "clean the church day." We were preparing our church for the upcoming feasts; our parish feast day (November 24), Christmas, the Serbian bishop's visit, etc. So my wife, myself and another person were put in charge of cleaning. While we were cleaning the church we couldn't take our eyes off the two myrrh-streaming icons, which slowly streamed while we were cleaning. The smell of roses was quite pungent. The icons seemed to exude a strong smell of roses. The Icon of the Mother of God seems to smell more like 'roses' than the other icon. The Cross has a spicier smell to it. I can't explain it. While we were cleaning the church, our kumovi (Colette and her family) came to see the icons. Not many folks could wait for Vespers that evening. Colette later remarked to me that she's the 'doubting Thomas' and really couldn't believe it until she saw it for herself. Understandable. She didn't realize that the icons were actually streaming as we were cleaning. (They don't stream continuously.) She venerated the Cross and kissed the feet of Our Lord. She got a nice helping of myrrh in her mouth. Like the doubting Apostle Thomas who put his fingers in Christ's Hands and Side, she put her mouth right in the myrrh, where myrrh wasn't supposed to be! I couldn't help but laugh.

The next day, Sunday October 14th, was the Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God, and Fr. Anatole revealed the icons to the people. The icons streamed quite heavily; there was enough myrrh for everyone. They have continued streaming ever since. Many have come to see the icons, Russians, Greeks, Serbs, Roman Catholics, Protestants. All who approach the icons feel the Grace of God! There have been days when the icons have been completely dry, while on other days they are covered in myrrh. Yet whether they stream or not, they continuously give off an extremely strong scent of roses. It is truly a great miracle! I sometimes wonder if it is a warning.

Now that I look back, it seems that ‘revelation’ has been the central theme of late. The icons initially revealed themselves to us on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. We revealed them to our priest on the Feast of the Conception of St. John the Baptist. He was the one man who revealed Christ to the world. Our priest revealed the myrrh-streaming icons to the church on the Feast day of the Protection of the Mother of God. These cannot be coincidences!

Our parish is dedicated to the original Myrrh-streaming Iveron Icon, an icon that had never traveled to Hawaii. Br. José wanted to come here, but never made it. I must confess to you, sometimes I feel that our fellow Orthodox brethren on the mainland have forgotten our little parish, our little community. Living out here in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, we struggle to survive as an Orthodox parish. Struggle to pay the bills, struggle to make the rent. I sometimes wonder, when will we have a church of our own? Has the Lord forgotten us? Are we to struggle forever? Have we done something wrong? Have we angered You, O Lord? Whether or not our fellow clergy, our fellow Orthodox faithful have forgotten us, one thing is clear... The Most Holy Mother of God has not forgotten us. She has not abandoned us. She will not abandon us! Through these icons, I now have hope that there IS a light at the end of the tunnel. Whether or not we are blessed to have a church of our own, it really doesn't matter; God has shown us that He has not forgotten us! And that's all that is needed. God is telling us that He is real! Dare we ignore this revelation? Dare we turn our backs on this great miracle? Dare we forget Christ? May God forgive us if we do.

In Christ's Love,
Rdr. Nectarios



The Christian has no reason to have in his heart any ill-feelings whatsoever against anyone—such ill-feeling, like every other evil, is the work of the devil. The Christian must only have love in his heart; and as love cannot think of evil, he cannot have any ill-feeling against others. For instance, I must never think that anyone else is evil or proud without having concrete reasons to think so, or I must not think that it will make him proud if I show him respect, or that if I forgive him he will again offend me and will mock me. We must never allow evil, in any form, nestle within our heart; but evil generally appears in too many forms.

St. John of Kronstadt

IN PROTECTION OF HIS INNOCENTS

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas, August 12, 2008.

Editor's Note: The aim of this article's inclusion within this issue of "Orthodox Heritage" is neither to politicize the message (or the content of our humble publication) nor to favor the candidate of any specific party. It is, rather, to make a plea to all Orthodox faithful to ensure that the issue of the legalized murder of innocent children via abortion is of paramount significance as they approach the polls on November 4, 2008.

We are cognizant of the fact that current economic conditions and on-going wars are prevalent among today's news media articles. We can not help but realize, that no matter how distressed our economy becomes, we are still blessed to live in one of the wealthiest nations that have existed in the history of humanity. Furthermore, a soldier (or a civilian) in any war, whether this war is righteous or not, has a chance at some level of defense and can at least run to a shelter away from falling bombs or even use a weapon for his / her defense. A child in the womb, however, has no ability to either defend himself/herself or run to any shelter as the deadly weapons of the abortionist approach him/her.

† † †

"Verily, I say unto you, insofar as ye did it to one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it to Me."

[Mt 25:40]

Late in the evening yesterday, the Lord brought these words spontaneously to my sinful heart; and before I had time to ponder on what was the Lord's purpose, I believe He immediately revealed it to me: that these holy words, from the Word, apply to all human life, from conception onwards. Then I experienced pain in my soul, as I reflected on what has happened to 50 million of His "brethren" since January 22, 1973: they have been brutally murdered within—and sometimes almost completely outside—the wombs of their mothers. What was their crime? They were conceived! And six of the U.S. Supreme Court Judges (May God have mercy on their souls.), determined that a woman's "right to privacy" (nowhere found in the U.S. Constitution) superseded the child's "right to life" (as stated in the Declaration of Independence).

For 35 years, we have legally slaughtered these "least" of Christ's "brethren" and placed them on the satanic altar, before the three-headed false-god of privacy, pleasure and profit. For 35 years, many lawyers, judges and politicians—with much help and funding from such groups as Planned Parenthood, N.O.W., and N.A.R.A.L, have dehumanized the child in the womb, referring to it by such names as, "unwanted tissue," "the product of conception," and "an undesired pregnancy." For 35 years, physicians and other 'help'-care personnel, hospitals and other abortion chambers, and groups like Planned Parenthood (a federally funded [This needs to be stopped immediately!], non-profit organization) have shared in tens of billions of

dollars in this slaughter of the innocents. Reflecting on this ungodly condition in which our nation finds itself, I turned to the Book of the Prophet Ieremias (Jeremiah). These words were given to him by God's Holy Spirit, and are in the singular tense; because they refer to the nation of Israel as a whole: *... Thou hast done wickedly in corrupting thy ways; and in thine hands hast been found blood of innocent souls ...* [Jer 2:34].

Today, I believe that the "thou" in this verse applies directly to our Nation. Can there be more "innocent blood" than the souls and bodies—the human beings—being formed in the wombs of their mothers? And even for those of us who may be personally against this legalized murder, if we have not done anything—not even a word in defense of the pre-born child, do we not have some of this innocent blood on our own hands? The human beings that are born can speak for themselves to refute the injustices and untruths of others; and they can hire legal defense to overcome a false charge against them. But what recourse is available to the child in the womb? Who will speak up for them? Who will defend them against this ungodly law that permits them to be slaughtered for profit? Who will demand legal action against those clinics that are buying parts of aborted babies for experimentation? It must be me and you!

One good way to start is by casting our vote for them—and the 50 million little martyrs that perished before them—in the Presidential election on November 4, 2008. In other words we must vote only for the candidates—in **all** the races—that will defend the child-in-the-womb's right to life. Therefore, at least one of the presidential candidates cannot receive our vote; if we are sincere in our desire to vote for the "little ones," who cannot vote. His name is Barack Hussein Obama. My brothers and sisters in Christ, I cannot imagine anyone in this nation who could be more pro-death (because that is the real meaning behind the term "pro-choice") than this man. When he was a state senator, he 3-times voted against a bill that would have required a physician to care for a child that was born alive during an abortion. In other words, Mr. Obama was saying—in plain English—that the abortion procedure has the right to a dead baby, even if it is born alive! Now there is a national law that requires such protection, and he has publicly voiced his opposition to it. He was not a U.S. Senator, at the time of the vote. For your information, however, the Senate—filled with pro-death senators—voted unanimously for this Bill; and even the pro-death groups NARAL & NOW supported it!

Listen to his own words as to what he plans to do if he is elected: "[T]he **first** (my emphasis) thing I'd do as president is, is sign the Freedom of Choice Act ..." With a majority in both houses, he could indeed get this bill to his desk. Even the ACLU states that such a bill would eliminate all restrictions to abortions, now existing in several states. And in his stern criticism of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to uphold the federal ban of the horrendous partial birth abortion procedure,

here is what he had to say about the types of judges he would put on the bench. Filled with euphemisms and hypocrisy, his words become even more dangerous than disgusting: "Justice Roberts [the Chief Justice] said he saw himself just as an umpire but the issues that come before the Court are not sport, they're life and death. And we need somebody who's got the heart—the empathy—to recognize what it's like to be a young teenage mom. The empathy to understand what it's like to be poor or African-American or gay or disabled or old—and that's the criteria by which I'll be selecting my judges."

In the Holy Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I rebuke these words Mr. Obama! Indeed, "life and death" are involved; but why does an innocent child have to die a brutal death? What has caused you to have a "heart," which is so cold it would not even try to save a child born alive during an abortion? It is a wonder you can even have a heart, when you justify the gruesome partial birth abortion procedure, during which: only a portion of the child's head remains in the birth canal, then the doctor inserts scissors in the back of the child's head to create a hole, after which he uses a powerful suction devise to draw out the child's brains. Where is all of your "empathy" for the pre-born child, whose brutal murder is "justified" by its "crime" of having been conceived? Indeed, Mr. Obama, I rebuke your words in Jesus' Name!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, this election has only one issue that is of paramount importance: the life of the child in the womb. How can we worry about the condition of our—sometimes up, sometimes down—economy, while we ignore the fact that over one million of our pre-born babies are slaughtered for profit every year within our hospitals and abortion chambers? How can we justify spending billions of dollars protecting the environment, and various endangered species of creatures; and sit by passively, while billions of dollars are being made creating a new "endangered species," the child in the womb? Of what importance can we place upon various multi-billion dollar health care proposals, when **none** of them protect the pre-born child from being slaughtered? Why are many people so quick to condemn the war in Iraq, and the loss of nearly 4000 lives there in four years of battle, while—at the same time—adamantly remaining "pro-choice," when it comes to showing concern for the more than 4,000 of God's most innocent ones who are being killed everyday in our Nation? What importance can we place upon any other issue, as long as this demonic slaughter of the innocents continues?

I give thanks to God and praise His Holy Name for raising up so many valiant defenders of the little ones in-utero—those who are directly involved with National, State and Local pro-life groups, as well as the many pregnancy centers, and all those throughout our land who give their time, talents and/or resources in support of these groups. Through their godly efforts, they may even be helping to wipe away some of the immaculate blood that especially is upon the hands of those

unrepentant souls who have performed, received, or supported the deaths of these holy innocents. However, how much longer will God remain silent to this most evil crime against those whom He has created in His image and likeness?

In St. Iakovos' (James) epistle, he proclaims that God's mercy triumphs over His judgment [2:13]. For the past, 35 years we have been living witnesses of this. In spite of the tens of millions of His innocents that we have legally put to death, He—in His great mercy—has not permitted us to receive any tsunamis, earthquakes, or floods, which have killed millions of people in other lands during the past 35 years. However, when will He send us the justice that we deserve? When will He put into action the words He gave to the holy God-seer Moses, *Cursed is he, who shall have taken a bribe to crush the life of innocent blood.* [Deut 27:25]?

It is past time for all of us to stand up and take care of the least of Christ's brethren, for—in doing so—we are doing it to Him. However, if we choose not to stand up for His little ones in the womb, then we need to prepare to face the possibility of hearing these words of our Master on that fearful Day: *Verily I say unto you, insofar as ye did it not to one of the least of these, neither did ye do it to Me.* (Mt 25:40)

Therefore, I entreat all of us to do at least three things for all the pre-born babies in our land, the first one needing to be done daily, until we depart this life: (1) Pray for God to give us the grace to be delivered from these satanic acts in which God's children are legally killed. Let us also pray that, again through God's grace and each day: one doctor will stop doing abortions; one mother will choose to allow her child to be born; one pro-choice politician will repent and become pro-life; and one pro-choice family member or friend will also repent and take up the banner of caring for these least of Christ's brethren. (2) Contact the pro-life group in your local area, and get involved in whatever we can with their efforts. At the very least, we should give them a donation to support their virtuous cause; but let us try to do even more. (3) On November 4, 2008, vote **only** for the candidates—nationally, state-wide and locally, from President to the local director of parks and recreation—who are solidly pro-life. If you must vote for a pro-abortion candidate, it would be better for your soul to remain home on November 4th. Otherwise, if your pro-abortion candidate is helped to get elected through your vote, then you will become an accessory to every abortion that he/she votes to defend; and you will have to accept that you will have a share of their innocent blood on your hands as well.

I know these are very strong words, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ; but as a Greek Orthodox priest, I feel compelled from the depths of my heart to do what little God will permit this sinful unworthy priest to do, to help people stay out of the fires of Hell. Please, my beloved fellow children of the living God, I beg you: do not help elect a pro-death

President! Stand up for those whose legs are still being formed in the wombs of their mothers! Speak up for those, who may never be able to utter their first words! Vote for those who may never be able to vote! Choose life! Choose life!

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

Unworthy priest,
+Demetrios



Now why does God allow this unpleasant sort of solution? You will say, “Isn’t God capable of finding an easier method?”

This is a great temptation for many Christians: “Why isn’t God able to intervene?” However, if He intervenes, my brother, you will tell Him that He is controlling you! He is binding your freedom! Why does God choose this seemingly worse solution? It is because God loves and He wants to show His love. He offers His Son to be crucified! He could have used another method to save the world but He wants to save the world with love; and salvation moved by love is a deep mystery. It constitutes a mere fold of the love of God.

St. Isaac the Syrian reveals this for us. When I first read it, I was not all that impressed. I am afraid you may feel this way initially as well. Now, I am totally satisfied with it. Let’s look at his 81st homily: “In the final analysis of all these things, Our God and Lord, due to His strong love for His creation...,” and this is the key: **strong, great love, burning love.** The Greek word is pathos. “He gave His Son to a death on the cross.” *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to suffer death for it.* (Jn 3:16)

This was not because God could not save us in a different way, but because this was the way that God found to show and teach us His immense love. Our mind cannot grasp this! He touched us; He drew near to us through the death of His Son to show us how much He loves us! He loves us exceedingly and if He had something even more precious than this He would have given it to us. All this was accomplished so our human race could find its way back to Him, to draw near Him. And because of His great love, He did not wish to bind our freedom. Even though He could do this, He chooses to let us come to Him in the spirit of love.

All these things my friends express the mystery behind those things that “must” take place. With this solution the love of God is made obvious. At the same time, the freedom of the individual is preserved! God is truly Wonderful!

Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios

From “Homilies on the book of the Revelation”

[Translated from Greek by Constantine Zalalas]

THE DAY OF THE LORD DRAWS NEAR

By St. Gregory the Great.

St. Gregory (540-603) abandoned a political career to become a monk. He was elected Pope of Rome in 590 and is considered one of the Great Fathers of the Church.



† † †

Our Lord and Redeemer, desiring to find us prepared, warns us of the evils that are to accompany the end of the world, so that He may keep us from the love of it. He makes known the disasters that will herald its approaching end, so that should we be unwilling to serve God in times of tranquility, we may, made fearful by these happenings, at least be anxious concerning the judgment now at hand.

For a little prior to this passage of the holy Gospel which you, my Brethren, have just heard, the Lord forewarned us, saying: Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be great earthquakes in divers places, and famines, and pestilences (Lk 21:10). Then having said certain other things in between, He adds this warning which you have just now heard: There will be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring (v. 25). From among all these things we now see that some have already come to pass; the others that now fill us with dread are to come in the future.

For we behold nation rising against nation, and their distress prevails upon the earth, more now in these our times than we have read of in history. You are aware how frequently we have heard from other parts of the world that earthquakes have devastated innumerable cities. Pestilences we suffer without easing. Signs in the sun and moon and stars we have not yet clearly beheld: but that these are not far off we gather from the alteration of the heavens.

Just as before Italy was given over to be smitten by the heathen sword, we beheld fiery hosts in the sky, and saw Him glittering there who was afterwards to shed the blood of humanity. Extraordinary confusion of the waves has not yet risen. But since much that was foretold has happened, we cannot doubt that the events which remain shall come in time, for the witness of what has been fulfilled is the pledge of that which is to follow.

We tell you these things, dearest Brethren, in order that your souls may awaken to an eagerness for security, and lest you become torpid in a security that is false, and become lax through ignorance of Christian truth, but rather that

you may become solicitous, and that anxiety may strengthen you in doing good, reflecting on this which the voice of the Redeemer added: Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken (v. 26).

Whom else does the Lord call by the name of Powers of heaven unless the Angels, the Archangels, the Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, and Powers, who at the coming of the Just Judge will then appear visibly to our eyes, to the end that they may sternly exact an account of that which the Invisible Lawgiver now patiently suffers? Whereto is added: And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with great power and glory; as though He were openly to say: They shall see Him come in power and majesty to Whom, present in lowliness, they turned a deaf ear, and so the more sharply will they then feel His severity, the more they now refuse to humble their hearts before His patience.

Since these words were directed at the reprobate, He then turns to speak words of comfort to the elect. For He says: When these things come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh. It is as if the Truth openly warns His Elect by saying: When the evils of this world mount up, when dread of the judgment is shown even by the trembling powers, lift up your heads, that is, be joyful in your hearts, because the world, of which you are not friends, is drawing to its end; the redemption you have been seeking is coming close. In Scripture the head is often used for the soul, because as the members are ruled by the head, so thoughts are governed by the soul. To lift up your heads therefore means to raise the heart to the joys of the heavenly fatherland.

They, therefore, who love God, are bidden to be glad, and to rejoice, because of the end of the world; since soon they will meet Him Whom they love, and that is passing away which they have never loved. Far be it then from any of the faithful who desire to see God that they should grieve over the stricken world, which we must know will end in these catastrophes. For it is written: Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4). Who therefore does not rejoice at the approaching end of the world, testifies that he is its friend, and by this he is revealed as an enemy of God. But let this be far from the faithful, far from the hearts of those who believe through their faith that there is another life, and who love it in very deed. Let them grieve over the ruin of the world who have planted the roots of their hearts deep in the love of it, who neither look for the life to come, nor are even aware that it is. But we who have learned the joys of our heavenly home must hasten to it as speedily as we may. We should desire to go there with all haste, and to arrive by the shortest way. And with what miseries does not the world urge us forward? What sorrow, what misfortune is there, that does not press upon us? What is this mortal

life but a way? And what folly would it be, let you carefully consider, to be weary with the fatigue of the way, and yet not eager to finish the journey!

That the world is to be trodden on, and despised, Our Redeemer then teaches us, by a timely similitude: Behold the fig tree and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see and know that summer is now at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand (v. 29-31). This is as if He were openly to say: as from the fruit on the trees you know that summer is near, so from the ruin of the world you may know that the kingdom of God is likewise near. From which it may be truly gathered that the fruit of the world is ruin. To this end it arises, that it may fall. To this end it germinates, that whatever it has brought forth from seed will be consumed in disaster. But happily is the Kingdom of God compared to summer, because then the clouds of our sadness will pass away, and the days of our life shall be resplendent in the glory of the eternal Sun. /.../

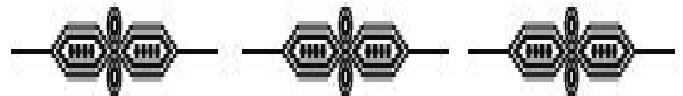
The world is oppressed by new and ever-increasing miseries. How many survive of the innumerable multitude of men you may see, yet each day new scourges beset them, sudden disasters fall on them, new and unheard-of disasters arise. Just as the body in youth is vigorous, the heart strong and steady, the shoulders upright, and the lungs vigorous, but in old age the figure is no longer upright, the shrunken neck is bowed, the chest labors with frequent sighs, strength fails us, and the speaker is impeded by a faltering breath. Although feebleness is yet absent, yet infirmity in our bodily senses is now our normal state of health. So in its early years, the world flourished as in its pristine strength, vigorous to propagate the offspring of mankind, blooming in the health of its bodies, fat with the richness of life. Now it is falling into its own old age, and, as if near to death, is oppressed with growing miseries.

Do not then, my Brethren, love that which you know cannot endure. Keep before your minds the apostolic counsels wherein we are admonished: Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (I John 2:15). The day before yesterday, Brethren, you heard that an ancient plantation was uprooted by a sudden storm, that houses were destroyed, churches razed to their foundations. How many were there, safe and well on the previous evening, who believed that in the morning they would fulfil some task, yet that very night were they of a sudden overtaken, caught in the trap of this disaster? But we must carefully keep in mind that in the doing of these things it is the Invisible Judge that moves the breath of the faintest breeze, that awakens the storm from even one small cloud, or razes the foundations of so many buildings. But what shall happen when the Judge shall visibly appear, and when His anger burns against the wicked, if we cannot now endure His wrath when He inflicts upon us the least

tempest? Before the face of His wrath what flesh shall stand, if He it is that moves the wind, and shakes the earth, incites the storms, and lays low so many buildings? Paul reflecting on this severity of the Judge to come, says to us: It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). The Psalmist gives voice to the same reflection: God, our God, shall come openly, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall be kindled before Him, and round about Him there shall be a very great tempest (Ps. 49:3). Tempest and fire shall accompany the severity of this justice, because the tempest shall search out those whom the fire will burn.

Beloved Brethren, keep that day before your eyes, and then whatsoever may seem burdensome will become light in comparison. Of that day is it said by the mouth of the Prophet: The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and very speedy and exceeding swift; the sound of the day of the Lord is made bitter and harsh. A mighty day of wrath is that day, a day of affliction and distress, a day of desolation and destruction, a day of gloominess and darkness, a day of cloud and vapor, a day of the trumpet and cry... (Zeph. 1:14-16). Of this day the Lord has spoken by the mouth of the prophet Haggai: I shall shake the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land (Hag. 2:22).

Behold, as we have said, He moves the tempest, and the earth cannot endure it. What will it do when He moves the heavens? What can we say of the terrors we now see, except that they are but heralds of the wrath to come? And let us keep in mind that these present afflictions are as far below the last tribulations, as is the person of the herald below the majesty of the judge he precedes. Reflect with all your mind upon this day, my dearest Brethren. Remedy what is now defective in your present life. Amend your ways. Conquer evil temptations by standing firm against them. Repent with tears of the sins you have committed. For the more you make ready against the severity of His justice by serving Him in fear, the more serenely shall you behold the Coming of that Eternal Judge, Who with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth, world without end. Amen.



We reject the Orthodox Theanthropic Faith, this organic bond with our Lord Jesus the God-Man and His undefiled Body, the Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles, Fathers and Ecumenical Synods - and wish to become 'organic members' of this heretical, humanistic, man-devouring, and man-worshipping assembly, which is composed of 263 heresies, each one of them spiritual death!"

+Blessed Fr. Justin Popovich (+3/25/79)

[From his comments of the on the grave ramifications of Orthodox jurisdictions becoming members of the WCC]

“ORIGINAL SIN” AND THE MOTHER OF GOD

By a Priest of the Orthodox Church in America

First: The use of the term the stain of Original Sin is exclusive Roman Catholic Church terminology and is **not** an Orthodox term.

The Orthodox position is that we are all born into a sinful world made sinful by the Fall of Adam. No one is or ever has been conceived and born with a “stain” resulting from Adam’s sin. And, in her lifetime, the Blessed Virgin Mary did not sin by her own choice with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Because Roman Catholic doctrine teaches that all people bear the stain and guilt of original sin from the moment of their conception in the womb, the Roman Catholic Church had to devise a “Doctrine of Immaculate Conception” to confirm that the Holy Mother was sinless because, the Vatican rationalized, our Lord could not be born of someone sinful.

The immaculate conception doctrine makes her different from the rest of humankind; it makes her not fully human because she was not by her own choice sinless but by the will of God. If Mary were sinless by God’s choice, not hers, then by virtue of the fact that she was as fully human as all of humankind is and has been, then God could make us all sinless and take away the free will given to us by our being created in His image and likeness.

The following is from the book *Life of the Virgin Mary, The Theotokos* by Blessed John Maximovitch, published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CA:

The Heterodox Teaching of “Immaculate Conception” and “Original Sin”

“Saint Ambrose (339-397), Bishop of Milan, comments that, ‘Of all those born of women, there is not a single one who is perfectly holy, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ...’

“The Orthodox Church teaches that the Virgin Mary was conceived by Joachim’s seed and the period of gestation was nine months. None of the ancient holy Fathers (ed.—only the Roman Catholic Church) say that God in miraculous fashion purified the Virgin Mary while yet in St. Anna’s womb. Only Jesus Christ is completely pure of every sin, while all men, being born of Adam, have borne a flesh subject to the law of sin. Many have correctly indicated that the Virgin Mary, just as all men, endured a battle with sinfulness, but was victorious over temptations and was saved by her Divine Son.

“Blessed John Maximovitch (1896-1966) affirms that The Church teaches that “through the fall of Adam and Eve, all of the human race inherited death, becoming enslaved to the devil through the passions. The progeny of Adam and Eve are not guilty of their first parents’ tasting of the fruit; we are not being punished for this first sin or ‘original sin.’ If, for the sake of argument, we maintain the invalid heterodox

teaching that the Theotokos was preserved from this ‘original sin,’ that would make God unmerciful and unjust. If God preserved her, why then does He not purify all men? But then that would have meant saving men before their birth, apart from their will. This teaching would then deny all her virtues. After all, if Mary, even in the womb of Anna, when she could not even desire anything either good or evil, was preserved by God’s grace from every impurity, and then by that grace was preserved from sin even after her birth, then in what does her virtue consist? She would have been placed in the state of being unable to sin.

“The Virgin, as a true daughter of Adam and Eve, also inherited death. She was not in a state of never being able to die. Thus, St. John of Damascus writes on the occasion of her Dormition, ‘O pure Virgin, sprung from mortal loins, thine end was conformable to nature.’

Blessed Archbishop John continues to comment that the Virgin was not placed in the state of being unable to sin, but continued to take care for her salvation and overcame all temptations. The righteousness and sanctity of the Virgin Mary was manifested in the fact that she, being ‘human with passions—like us,’ so loved God and gave herself over to Him, that by her purity she was exalted above all other creatures. Mary was to become the Mother of God, the Theotokos, not because she was to give birth to divinity, but that through her the Word became true man, God-Man.

The last comment made by St. John is so important: ‘Mary was to become the Mother of God, the Theotokos, not because she was to give birth to divinity, but that through her the Word became true man, God-Man.’

If the Holy Virgin Mary’s human will was interfered with (ed.—as in Roman Catholic doctrine) she would not be totally human and therefore Jesus Christ would not be totally man (ed.—human) and totally God.”



It is good to be at peace with all, but [only] when they are of one mind with us as regards piety; for peace with that which is just and proper is a most excellent and profitable possession; but when it is with that which is evil or enslaving, then it is most disgraceful, and of all things the most shameful and harmful. For there is an evil concord and a good discord; there is a good severance, and an evil concurrence. And if friendship becomes a cause of perdition for some, then hatred becomes a virtue for them. Better is division for dispassion’s sake than concord effected for the passions’ sake.

Joseph Bryennios

[The teacher of Saint Mark Evgenicos, head of the Patriarchal Academy and its professor of scriptural interpretation—rigidly Orthodox and with no sympathy for the humanistic tendencies of western thought]

ON A MUCH LIGHTER SIDE...

“THE LIFE-CYCLE OF THE ORTHODOX CONVERT’S BEARD”

If you are a convert to the Orthodox Church my guess is you will probably be able to see traces of yourself in the following piece. It was sent to us by one of our associates and perhaps we identified with its content a little too much. A friend once said that “there is truth in every jest;” so let us relax for a minute, be willing to laugh at our self, and let us read on:

Stage 1 — An Inkling of an Idea

You have just attended your very first Liturgy, and you’re ready. You’ve bought every book in the parish’s book store and you’re prepared to arm up for what you’re going to tell your fundamentalist Baptist family when you decide to convert. And then, in the course of your reading, you notice—all these guys have really long beards and even longer hair. And you think, dare I? Dare I, who have never sported more than a 5:00 pm shadow, grow one of those monstrous manes?

Stage 2 — No Going Back

It’s been six months, and it’s your baptismal day. By now, you’ve got some healthy growth on your chin—a bit patchy in spots, but that’s OK. The important thing is that you’ve made your commitment, and you’re sticking to it. No going back. In fact, to bear eternal witness to your commitment to whiskers, you’ve chosen to be known forever after in the life of the Church as Onouphrios, and you’ve bought the full length icon of him, the one that shows the really long beard.

Stage 3 — Conundrum

You’re in year three of your Orthodoxy and your second year of seminary. It suddenly starts to dawn on you that the young lady you have your eye on for matushka-hood doesn’t seem to like long beards. You wonder, “what would St. Onouphrios think of me now?” and agonize as you find yourself wishing you’d chosen a baptismal name a little closer to the name mom and dad gave you—Dave. Your roommate, Barsanuphius, is of no help.

When you asked him if he chose his name because of the beard thing, he just rolled his eyes forbearingly and said with disdain, “I’m not named for that Barsanuphius. I’m named for Barsanuphius the Dwarf of Beloozersk,” and he pronounces it very precisely as “Varsanofyi,” just to emphasize the point. (His pre-conversion name was Donald, by the way, but he had it legally changed.)

Stage 4 — A Happy Solution

It’s your wedding day. The young lady in question had no problem with your beard. It was actually your 700-knot prayer rope that was the problem. She had just assumed you were going to be a monk. Once you finally got up the

courage to speak to her, all became clear, and you struck a bargain: your prayer rope will be no longer than 100 knots and you can grow your beard as long as you want. You’re in all your glory today, looking like Jeremiah Johnson, at your home parish of All Saints of Ascetic Feats, and Barsanuphius is your sponsor. (He’s driving everyone, even poor Father Zacharias, crazy with his “Varsanofyi” bit.) Your beloved, Hermione, has even sewn herself a traditional Russian wedding costume for the happy day. (She’s not Russian, but what the heck.)

All is well. Everyone is happy. Both your parents and your new in-laws are completely mystified, though, and they keep asking, “Who are Onouphrios and Hermione??? We thought we were coming to see Dave and Tina get married...”



In the hour in which we are tempted, we must be patience and pray. Temptation is a clever craftsman. He is able to make small things loom large. Temptation disquiets, saddens and creates external battles. He knows many arts. He brings man to doubt. For this reason, we have many shipwrecks. When we are beset by temptations, that is when the grace of God comes. When one undergoes temptation, he recognizes his weakness, is humbled and attracts the grace of God. Don’t let the winds of temptations affect you. They can do you know harm.

Often when someone throws a rock at a dog, rather than rushing at the person who threw the stone, the dog will run and bite the stone. We do the same thing. The tempter [i.e., the evil one] uses someone else to tempt us, either in word or deed, and, rather than deal with the tempter that threw the stone, we bite the rock—our fellow man, that the hater of the good used against us.

I was born to love people. It doesn’t concern me if he is a Turk, black, or white. I see in the face of each person the image of God. And for this image of God I am willing to sacrifice everything.

Ask you to put this order into practice: as much as you can, try to cultivate your love towards Christ’s own person. You must reach the point that whenever you hear His name mentioned, tears run from your eyes. Your hearts must be truly ablaze. Then He will be your teacher, your Guide, your Brother, your Father, your Elder...

Pay no attention to things earthly and passing. Be concerned about the union of your soul with God. ... You should be joyful! Jesus holds a sculptor’s chisel in His hands. He wants to make you into a statue for His heavenly palace.

Blessed Elder Amphilochios of Patmos (+1970)

Τι Είναι ἡ Νοερά καὶ Καρδιακὴ Προσευχὴ

Μοναχοῦ Ἀβραάμ Ἀγορευτοῦ.

Η μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἄνθρωπο φανερώνει κοινωνία μετὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἄρα εἶναι σὰν προσευχή. Ὁ ἁγῶνας γιὰ τὴν συνεχή ἐπικλησι τοῦ ἁγίου Ὄνοματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τὴν εὐχή «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησον με», ἀνανεώνει συνεχῶς στὸν ἄνθρωπο τὴν μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν κοινωνία μετὰ τὸν Θεό. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἔγραφε στοὺς Θεσσαλονικεῖς: «Ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε».

Μετὰ τὴ μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν προσευχή ὁ ἄνθρωπος φανερώνει τὴν ἀληθινὴ εὐγένεια τῆς φύσεώς του, πού εἶναι μεθόριο μεταξὺ ὄρατοῦ καὶ ἀοράτου κόσμου καὶ «ζῶον θεοῦμενον», ξεπερνᾷ τὴν φυσικὴ ἀναγκαιότητα, ἐκτείνει τὴν ὑπαρξί του μέχρι τὸν Θεό, αἰσθάνεται ἐλεύθερος ἀπὸ ὅ,τι τὸν κρατᾷ αἰχμάλωτο στὴ γῆ. Γιὰ νὰ εἶναι ὅμως ἡ προσευχὴ ἀληθινή, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι προσευχὴ τοῦ ὄλου ἀνθρώπου καὶ ὄχι μόνον τῶν χειλέων ἢ μόνον τοῦ νοῦ ἢ μόνον τῆς καρδιάς.

Τελεία προσευχὴ εἶναι ἡ νοερά καὶ συγχρόνως καρδιακὴ. Ὁ νοῦς προσεύχεται μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά, πού εἶναι τὸ κέντρο τῆς υπάρξεως. Δηλαδή ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ τὸ βάθος του καὶ τὸ κέντρο του προσεύχεται ἐκπληρώνοντας τὴν πρόσκλησι τοῦ Θεοῦ: «Ἀγαπήσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδιάς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς ἑαυτόν». Ὁλόκληρος ὁ ἄνθρωπος προσφέρεται στὸν Θεό. Γι' αὐτὴ τὴν προσευχὴ χρησιμοποιεῖται ἡ μονολόγιστος εὐχή «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησον με», πού μετὰ τὴν σύντομὴ ἐπίκλησι τῆς βοηθεῖ στὴν συγκέντρωσι τοῦ νοῦ καὶ στὸ βῦθισμα τοῦ νοῦ στὴν καρδιά.

Οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες, οἱ λεγόμενοι νηπτικοί, ἀπὸ τὴν πείρα τους ἔγραψαν γιὰ τὸν τρόπο καὶ τὴν μέθοδο αὐτῆς τῆς προσευχῆς. Ὑπάρχει μιὰ συλλογὴ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων, πού λέγεται «Φιλοκαλία». Καὶ ἡ λέξις φιλοκαλία εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὴ. Μετὰ τὴν νοερά καὶ καρδιακὴ προσευχὴ ὁ πιστὸς ἐνώνεται μετὰ τὸν Θεό, θεᾶται τὸν Θεόν, πού εἶναι ὅ,τι ὁμορφότερο ὑπάρχει στὸν κόσμος, τὸ ὑπέρτατον κάλλος.

Ἐπειδὴ ὑπάρχει ὁ κίνδυνος νὰ γίνῃ κάποια σύγχυσις μεταξὺ τῆς καρδιακῆς προσευχῆς καὶ τῶν διαφόρων τρόπων διαλογισμοῦ καὶ προσευχῆς, ὅπως ἀσκοῦνται στίς ἀνατολικὲς θρησκείες, νομίζω ὅτι πρέπει νὰ διευκρινίσω μερικὰ ζητήματα:

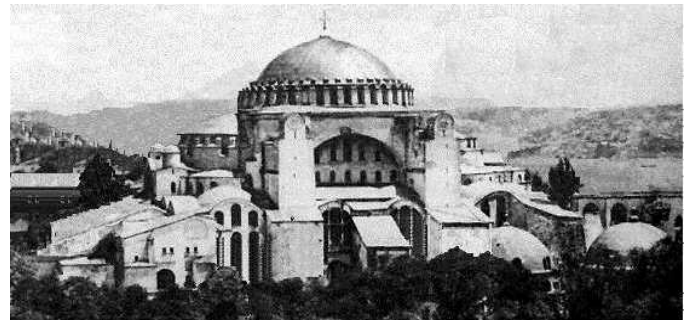
(α') Ὅχι μόνον ἡ μονολόγιστος εὐχή, τὸ «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησον με», ἀλλὰ καὶ κάθε προσευχὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὅπως ἡ θεμελιώδης θεοπαράδοτος κυριακὴ προσευχὴ τὸ «Πάτερ ἡμῶν» πρέπει νὰ εἶναι νοερά καὶ καρδιακὴ, δηλαδή νὰ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸ βαθύτερο εἶναι μας.

(β') Ἡ ἀπόκτησις τοῦ χαρίσματος τῆς ἀδιάλειπτου νοεράς καὶ καρδιακῆς προσευχῆς δὲν εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς Ὀρθοδόξους κυρίως ζήτημα μεθόδου καὶ τεχνικῆς, ἀλλὰ ζήτημα συντετριμμένης καρδιάς, δηλαδή καρδιάς πού μετανοεῖ, πονάει γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τῆς καὶ ταπεινώνεται. Χωρὶς αὐτὴ τὴν καρδιά καμμιά μέθοδος καὶ τεχνικὴ τῆς προσευχῆς, ὅπως ἡ χρησιμοποίησις τῆς εἰσπνοῆς καὶ ἐκπνοῆς, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ φέρῃ τὴν ἀληθινὴ προσευχὴ.

(γ') Ἡ καρδιακὴ καὶ νοερά προσευχὴ προϋποθέτει τὴν συμμετοχὴ μας στὴν ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, στὰ Μυστήριά της, τὴν τήρησι τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ὑπακοὴ σὲ πνευματικὸ πατέρα. Δὲν εἶναι δηλαδή μιὰ ἀτομικιστικὴ—ιδιωτικὴ προσέγγισις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία ὁ ταπεινὸς Χριστιανὸς λαμβάνει τὴν Χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ Χάρις ἐνεργεῖ μέσα του, μετὰ τὴν ἰδικὴ του βέβαια συνεργασία καὶ θέλησι, τὴν ἀληθινὴ προσευχὴ.

Τελειώνοντας τὸ θέμα τῆς προσευχῆς, θὰ ἤθελα νὰ εἰπῶ ὅτι ὁ σημερινὸς ἄνθρωπος ἔχει κατ' ἐξοχὴν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ, γιὰ νὰ μπορῇ νὰ μὴν ἀπορροφᾶται ἀπὸ τὸν σύγχρονο βαθύτατα ὑλιστικὸ τρόπο ζωῆς, ξεχνώντας τὴν θεοειδεῖα του, δηλαδή, τὴν θεϊκὴ καταγωγὴ καὶ τὸν θεϊκὸ προορισμὸ του. Ἀκόμη, γιὰ νὰ μπορῇ νὰ κρατᾷ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ του ἐνότητα, ἰσορροπία καὶ εἰρήνη μέσα στὴν φοβερὴ διασπαστικὴ ἀνισορροπία καὶ ἐξωστρέφεια τοῦ σύγχρονου κόσμου. Γιὰ νὰ μπορῇ, ἔχοντας συνεχή τὴν αἴσθησι τῆς παρουσίας καὶ προνοίας τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν ζωὴ του, νὰ μὴν «ἀγχώνεται», ἀπελπίζεται καὶ βιώνῃ τὸν κόσμον ὡς κενὸ καὶ μετὰ «μὴ-νόημα».

Μετὰ τὴν συνεχή ἐπίκλησι τοῦ γλυκύτατου καὶ ἁγίου Ὄνοματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ θὰ αἰσθάνεται τὸν Χριστὸ στὴν καρδιά του, θὰ ἀποφεύγῃ τὴν ἁμαρτία, θὰ καλλιεργῇ αἰσθήματα ἀγάπης γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Θὰ εἰρηνεῖ ὁ ἴδιος καὶ θὰ εἰρηνεῖ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοῦ περιβάλλοντός του. Μόνον πού ὁποῖος θέλει νὰ ἀσκήσῃ αὐτὴ τὴν καρδιακὴ καὶ νοερά προσευχὴ πρέπει νὰ ἔχη ἕναν ἔμπειρο πνευματικὸ ὁδηγὸ γιὰ νὰ μὴν πλανηθῇ.



Τὸ Καμίνι τῶν Θλίψεων

Τὸ καμίνι τῶν θλίψεων, μετάβαλέ το εἰς δρόσον Κύριε. Κύριε, ἀξίωσέ μας νὰ μὴν πτοοῦμεθα ἀπὸ τὰ πυρὰ τῶν δυσκολιῶν μας, ἀλλ' ἐν μέσῳ τῆς φλογός, ὡς στεκόμαστε καὶ ἐμεῖς ὅπως οἱ τρεῖς παῖδες ψάλλοντες ὁ τῶν Πατέρων ἡμῶν, Θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἶ.

Διήγησις περὶ Κατακρίσεως

Γέρων Πανάρετος Φιλοθεΐτης.

Ομακαρίτης πνευματικός ἀπὸ τῆ σκήτη τῶν Κανσοκαλυβίων, παπα-Νικόδημος, μοῦ διηγήθηκε τὴν ἀκόλουθη ἱστορία, παρμένη ἀπὸ πατερικὰ Ἁγιορείτικα χειρόγραφα.

Ἐνας πιστὸς Χριστιανός, πήγαινε ἐπὶ δεκαπέντε χρόνια στὸν πνευματικὸ του καὶ ἐξομολογοῦνταν τὶς ἀνθρώπινες ἀδυναμίες του. Μιὰ μέρα ὅμως, ὅπως συνήθιζε, πήγε στὸν πνευματικὸ του νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖ καὶ ἀνοίγοντας τὴν πόρτα τοῦ σπιτιοῦ του βρῆκε τὸν πνευματικὸ νὰ πορνεύει μὲ μία γυναῖκα. Ἀμέσως βγήκε ἔξω καὶ φεύγοντας εἶπε στὸν ἑαυτό του: «Ἄχ, τί ἐπαθα ἀλοίμονο σὲ μένα, ἐγὼ ἔχω τόσα χρόνια ποὺ ἐξομολογοῦμαι σ' αὐτόν, καὶ τώρα τί θὰ κάνω; Θὰ κολασθῶ; Διότι ὅσα ἀμαρτήματα καὶ ἂν μοῦ συγχώρησε, ἐφόσον εἶναι τόσον ἀμαρτωλὸς ἄνθρωπος, εἶναι, τί εἶναι; Εἶναι ὅλα ἀσυγχώρητα», ἔλεγε καὶ χτυπιόταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ τὸ κακὸ ποὺ τὸν βρῆκε καὶ δὲν ἤξερε τί πρέπει νὰ κάνει.

Στὸ δρόμο ποὺ ἔφευγε, δίψασε. Προχώρησε λίγο καὶ μπροστά του βρέθηκε ἕνα μικρὸ ρεματάκι, στὸ ὁποῖο ἔτρεχε γάργαρα καὶ πεντακάθαρο νερό. Ἐσκυψε καὶ ἤπιε. Ἦπιε τόσο ποὺ χόρτασε καὶ δὲν τοῦ ἔκανε καρδιά νὰ φύγει, ἀλλὰ ἤθελε νὰ πιεῖ καὶ ἄλλο ἀπὸ κεῖνο τὸ νεράκι. Σὲ μία στιγμή σκέφτηκε μὲ τὸ λογισμό του καὶ εἶπε: «Ἄν ἐδῶ χαμηλὰ στὸ ρέμα εἶναι τόσο καλὸ, τότε ὅσο πιὸ κοντὰ στὴν πηγὴ του, ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ποὺ βγαίνει, τόσο καλύτερο θὰ εἶναι». Καὶ μὲ τὴ σκέψη αὐτὴ ξεκίνησε νὰ βρεῖ τὴ πηγὴ τοῦ νεροῦ. Ὅταν ἔφτασε ὅμως ἐκεῖ, τί νὰ δεῖ; Βλέπει, τί βλέπει; Βλέπει τὸ νερὸ νὰ βγαίνει ἀπὸ ἕνα ψόφιο καὶ βρώμικο κουφάρι σκύλου, μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ σκυλιοῦ νὰ βγαίνει τὸ νερό! Τότε βαθιὰ ἀναστέναξε καὶ εἶπε: «Ἀλλοίμονο σὲ μένα τὸν ἄθλιο, μαγαρίστηκα ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἤπια ἀπὸ τὸ μολυσμένο αὐτὸ νερό, φαίνεται ὅ,τι εἶμαι πολὺ ἀμαρτωλὸς καὶ ἀκάθαρτος γιὰ νὰ μοῦ συμβοῦν αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα».

Στὴν μεγάλη αὐτὴ στενοχώρια ποὺ βρισκόταν, τοῦ παρουσιάστηκε ἄγγελος Κυρίου καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Γιατί ἀνθρώπε μου στενοχωριέσαι καὶ λυπῆσαι γιὰ τὰ πράγματα ποὺ σοῦ συμβαίνουν; Ὅταν ἤπιες τὸ νερὸ ἀπὸ τὸ ρεματάκι δὲν εὐχαριστήθηκες ποὺ βρῆκες πολὺ καθαρὸ καὶ δὲν τὸ χόρταινες νὰ πίνεις καὶ τώρα, ποὺ εἶδες τοῦτο ὅ,τι βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸ ἀκάθαρτο στόμα τοῦ σκυλιοῦ, λές ὅ,τι μολύνθηκες; Ἄν ἀγαπητέ μου, ὁ σκύλος εἶναι ψόφιος καὶ ἀκάθαρτος, μὴ λυπῆσαι γι' αὐτὸ ἐσύ, διότι τὸ νερὸ ποὺ ἤπιες ἐσύ κι ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ποὺ πίνει, μπορεῖ νὰ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸ ἀκάθαρτο στόμα τοῦ σκύλου, ἀλλὰ τὸ νερὸ ποὺ βγαίνει δὲν εἶναι δικό του, εἶναι δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶναι τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸ νερό.»

Καὶ ὁ ἅγιος ἄγγελος συνέχισε: «Ἐτσι καὶ ὁ πνευματικὸς σου ποὺ σὲ ἐξομολογοῦσε, ἡ συγχώρηση ποὺ σοῦ ἔδινε δὲν

ἦταν δική του, ἀλλὰ ἡ συγχώρηση εἶναι δωρεὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐκεῖνος τὴν δίνει, τὸ Πανάγιο Πνεῦμα τὴν χορηγεῖ σ' αὐτόν ποὺ καθαρὰ καὶ εἰλικρινὰ ἐξομολογεῖται τὶς ἀμαρτίες του καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες του. Μὲ τὴ διαφορὰ ὅτι, οἱ δωρεές καὶ τὰ χαρίσματα τοῦ Θεοῦ στοὺς ἀνθρώπους δίδονται μέσῳ τῆς ἱεροσύνης ἀπὸ τοὺς κανονικὰ χειροτονημένους καὶ ἔχοντας τὴν ἄδεια τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως καὶ τῆς ἀφέσεως τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν, ὅπως εἶπε ὁ Ἰδιος ὁ Δεσπότης Χριστὸς στοὺς ἁγίους Ἀποστόλους καὶ μαθητὰς Του: «Λάβετε Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον. Ἄν τινων ἀφίεντε τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν, ἀφίενται αὐτοῖς. Ἄν τινων κρατήτε, κεκράτηνται.» Ἐτσι λοιπὸν οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἀπόστολοι ἔδωκαν τὴν ἐξουσίαν αὐτὴν στοὺς ἐπίσκοπους καὶ διαδόχους αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκεῖνοι στοὺς κανονικὰ χειροτονηθέντας ἱερεῖς καὶ πνευματικούς. Ἐκ τοῦ λόγου τούτου καὶ διότι τελοῦν τὰ ἅγια Μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ ἱερεῖς εἶναι ἀνώτεροι κατὰ τὸ ἀξίωμα καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὸν τὸν βασιλέα καὶ ἀνώτατον ἄρχοντα τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἀνώτεροι εἶναι οἱ ἱερεῖς ἀπὸ ὅλους, διότι οἳτιδήποτε κι ἂν εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ στὸν κόσμον, τὰ κοσμικὰ ἀξιώματα, ἀπὸ τὸν ἱερέα καὶ τὸν πνευματικὸ θὰ λάβει τὴ συγχώρηση τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν του, διότι δὲν ὑπάρχει ἄλλος δρόμος· αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ Ἱερὰ Παράδοσις τῆς Ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας μας».

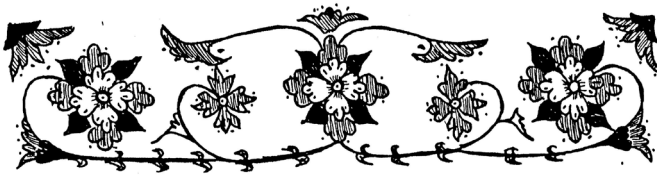
Καὶ τώρα, λέγει ὁ ἄγγελος: «Πήγαινε νὰ βάλεις μετάνοια καὶ νὰ ζητήσεις συγχώρηση ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ σου ποὺ τὸν εἶδες νὰ ἀμαρτάνει καὶ παρακάλεσέ τον νὰ σὲ συγχωρήσει γιὰ τὴν κατάκριση ποὺ σὲ βάρος του ἔκαμε. Ὅσο δὲ γιὰ τὴν ἀμαρτία ποὺ ἐκεῖνος ἔκανε, ὁ Θεὸς θὰ τὸν ἐξετάσει καὶ αὐτὸς μόνο θὰ τὸν κρίνει, διότι ἐσύ εἶδες αὐτόν νὰ κάνει τὴν ἀμαρτία, δὲν μπορεῖς ὅμως νὰ γνωρίζεις ἂν αὐτὸς μετανόησε, ἢ τὸν τρόπο τῆς μετανοίας του. Ἐτσι ἐσύ δὲν ἔχεις, ἐσύ μὲν ἔχεις τὴν ἀμαρτία τῆς κατακρίσεως, ἐκεῖνος δέ, ἂν μετανόησε θὰ τρυγήσει τοὺς καρποὺς τῆς μετανοίας καὶ τῆς διορθώσεώς του. Δὲν μποροῦμε λοιπὸν νὰ κρίνουμε κανέναν ἄνθρωπο».

Ὅταν ὁ ἄγγελος λοιπὸν τὰ εἶπε αὐτά, στὸν πιστὸ ἐκεῖνο Χριστιανό, ἔγινε ἄφαντος. Ὁ δὲ Χριστιανὸς σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ ἀγγέλου, γύρισε πίσω· πήγε στὸν πνευματικὸ του, στὸν ὁποῖο διηγήθηκε ὅλα ὅσα εἶδε καὶ ἄκουσε ἀπὸ τὸν ἄγγελο Κυρίου καὶ ἔβαλε μετάνοια καὶ ὅταν εἶπε τὰ διατρέξαντα στὸν πνευματικὸ, ὅπως τοῦ εἶπε ὁ ἄγγελος, ὁ πνευματικὸς μὲ δάκρυα στὰ ματιὰ μετανόησε, ἔκλαψε πικρὰ καὶ ζήτησε συγχώρηση ἀπὸ τὸν Πολυέλεο, Πολυεύσπλαχνο καὶ Πανάγαθο Θεὸ καὶ διόρθωσε τὰ κακῶς διαπραττόμενα πρὸς δόξα Θεοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς σωτηρία αὐτοῦ.

Ὅταν μοῦ διηγήθηκε αὐτὰ ὁ πνευματικὸς μου, παπα-Νικόδημος, συνέχισε τὸν λόγο του καὶ μὲ ἀγάπη μου εἶπε: «Γι' αὐτὸ ἀδελφέ μου, Χαράλαμπε, (αὐτὸ ἔλαβε χώρα τὸ 1934, ποὺ δὲν ἤμουνα ἀκόμη μοναχός, καὶ μ' ἔλεγε μὲ τὸ κατὰ κόσμον ὄνομά μου), δὲν ἔχουμε δικαίωμα ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ ἐξετάζουμε τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων. Ὅπως λέει καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «Σὺ τίς εἶ ὁ κρίνων,

ἀλλότριον ἰκέτην” (πρὸς Ῥωμαίους ἀναφέρεται αὐτό). Πολὺ δὲ περισσώτερο νὰ κρίνουμε τοὺς κληρικούς, τοὺς ἱερωμένους, τοὺς πνευματικούς, καὶ γενικὰ τοὺς ρασοφόρους, τοὺς ὁποίους σκληρότατα δοκιμάζει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ μὲ μεγάλη πονηρία καὶ μαεστρία πολεμεῖ ὁ διάβολος, ὅπως λέει ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός, “μὴ κρίνετε ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε, καὶ ἐν ᾧ κρίματι κρίνετε κριθήσετε, καὶ ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε μετρηθήσετε ὑμῖν!” Ἐμεῖς ὀφείλομε νὰ συγχωροῦμε τὰ σφάλματα τῶν ἄλλων καὶ νὰ μετανοοῦμε, νὰ κρίνουμε καὶ νὰ τιμωροῦμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας καὶ μόνον. Ἄν θέλουμε νὰ σωθοῦμε νὰ συγχωροῦμε τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ ἱεροῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ποὺ λέει: “Ἐὰν ἀφήνετε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν, ἀφήσει καὶ ὑμῖν ὁ Θεὸς τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν, κατὰ τὸ ἄφετε καὶ ἀφεθήσεται ὑμῖν.”»

Ναί, ἀδελφοί μου, ἡ κατάκρισις εἶναι μεγάλη ἁμαρτία καὶ δὲν πρέπει ποτὲ νὰ ἀσχολούμεθα μὲ τὰ ἐλαττώματα καὶ μὲ τὶς παραβάσεις τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων! Δὲν ἔχουμε καμιὰ δουλειὰ ἐμεῖς. Ὁ καθένας ὅ,τι κάνει τὸ κάνει γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του. Ἐμεῖς ὀφείλομε μόνο ὅ,τι βλέπουμε, ὅ,τι ἀκοῦμε νὰ συγχωροῦμε καὶ νὰ ἀγαποῦμε καὶ νὰ προσπαθοῦμε νὰ τοὺς βοηθοῦμε ὅσο εἶναι δυνατόν, ἀπὸ τὴ δική μας τὴν πλευρά.



Ἄν γι' αὐτὸ ἐγίνε γιὸς ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἄνθρωπος ὁ Θεὸς Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατέρα, γιὰ νὰ κἀνη δηλαδὴ θεοὺς καὶ παιδιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἄς πιστέψουμε πὼς θὰ φτάσουμε ἐκεῖ, πρὸ ψηλὰ ἀπ' ὅλους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, ὅπου τώρα εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός, σὰν κεφαλὴ ὅλου τοῦ σώματος (Κολ 1:18), κι ἔχει γίνε γιὰ χάρη μας πρόδρομὸς μας (Ἐβρ 6:20) πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα μὲ τὴ δική μας φύση. Γιατὶ στὴ σύναξη τῶν θεῶν, δηλαδὴ αὐτῶν ποὺ θὰ σωθοῦν, θὰ σταθῆ στὴ μέση ὁ Θεός (Ψαλμ 81:1), μοιράζοντας τὶς ἀμοιβὲς τῆς οὐράνιας μακαριότητος, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχη καμιὰ ἀπόστασι ἀνάμεσα σ' Αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄξιους.

Μερικοὶ λένε πὼς ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ τῶν ἀξίων στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Ἄλλοι πάλι, πὼς εἶναι ἡ ὁμοία μὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων κατάστασι τῶν σφζόμενων. Ἄλλοι, τέλος, πὼς εἶναι ἡ μορφή τῆς ἴδιας τῆς θεϊκῆς ὠραιότητος ἐκείνων ποὺ φόρεσαν «τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανοῦ» (Α' Κορ 15:49). Ἐγὼ πάντως νομίζω, πὼς καὶ οἱ τρεῖς αὐτὲς γνῶμες συμφωνοῦν μὲ τὴν ἀλήθεια. Γιατὶ σὲ ὅλους δίνεται ἡ μελλοντικὴ χάρη, ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴν ποιότητα καὶ τὴν ποσότητα τῆς δικαιοσύνης τους (δηλαδὴ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τους στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ).

Ἄγιου Μαξίμου

Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔχει Ἀγάπη...

Ἄγιου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου.

Δὲν ἀποστρέφεται ποτὲ κανέναν. Οὔτε μεγάλο. Οὔτε μικρό. Οὔτε φτωχό. Οὔτε πλούσιο.

Γίνεται γιὰ ὅλους τὸ ἀκάθαρτο σφουγγάρι, ποὺ ὅλα τὰ σκουπίζει (Α' Κορ. 4:13). Ὅλα τὰ σκεπάζει. Ὅλα τὰ ὑπομένει.

Δὲν ὑπερηφανεύεται ἐναντίον κάποιου. Δὲν ξιπάζεται. Κανένα δὲν κατακρίνει. Ἀλλὰ κι αὐτοὺς ποὺ κατακρίνουν, τοὺς ἀποφεύγει.

Δὲν σκέφτεται μὲ δόλο. Δὲν ἐξαπατᾷ τὸν ἀδελφὸ του.

Δὲν ζηλεύει. Δὲν φθονεῖ. Δὲν συκοφαντεῖ.

Δὲν χαίρεται μὲ τὰ σφάλματα τῶν ἄλλων.

Δὲν διασύρει αὐτὸν ποὺ ἁμάρτησε. Ἀλλὰ λυπᾶται μαζί του. Καὶ του, συμπαραστέκεται.

Δὲν ἀγνοεῖ τὸν ἀδελφὸ του, ὅταν βρίσκεται σὲ χάπια ἀνάγκη. Ἀλλὰ τὸν βοηθᾷ μὲ κάθε τρόπο. Καὶ ἐν ἀνάγκη πεθαίνει μαζί του.

Ἐκτελεῖ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ εἶναι μαθητὴς Του. Γιατὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ καλὸς μας Δεσπότης Χριστὸς εἶπε: «Ἀπὸ αὐτὸ θὰ μάθουν ὅλοι ὅτι εἴσθε μαθητὲς μου, ἐὰν ἔχετε ἀγάπη μεταξύ σας» (Ιω. 13:35).

Ἀντίθετα ἐκεῖνος ποὺ δὲν ἔχει ἀγάπη:

Θυμώνει εὐκολά. Ὀργίζεται. Μισεῖ. Χαίρεται μὲ τὴν ἀδικία τῶν ἄλλων.

Δὲν συμπάσχει μὲ αὐτὸν ποὺ ἁμάρτησε.

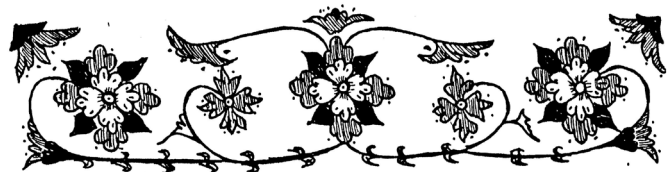
Δὲν ἀπλώνει τὸ χέρι του νὰ βοηθήσει αὐτὸν, ποὺ ἔπεσε.

Δὲν συμβουλεύει αὐτὸν, ποὺ παρασύρθηκε.

Δὲν στηρίζει αὐτὸν, ποὺ κλονίζεται.

Ἔτσι γίνεται φίλος τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ ἐφευρέτης κάθε πονηρίας.

Γίνεται ἐργάτης τῆς ὑπερηφάνειας καὶ σκευὸς τῆς ἀλαζονείας.



Οσκοπὸς μας δὲν εἶναι νὰ καταδικάζουμε τὸ κακό, ἀλλὰ νὰ τὸ διορθώνουμε. Μὲ τὴν καταδικὴ ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ νὰ χαθεῖ, μὲ τὴν κατανόησι καὶ βοήθεια θὰ σωθεῖ.

Τὸ κακό ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὶς κακὲς σκέψεις. Ὅταν πικραίνεσαι καὶ ἀγανακτεῖς, ἔστω μὲ τὴ σκέψη, χαλάς τὴν πνευματικὴ ἀτμόσφαιρα. Ἐμποδίζεις τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα νὰ ἐνεργήσει καὶ ἐπιτρέπεις στὸ διάβολο νὰ μεγαλώσει τὸ κακό. Ἐσὺ πάντοτε νὰ προσεύχεσαι, νὰ ἀγαπᾷς καὶ νὰ συγχωρεῖς, διώχνοντας ἀπὸ μέσα σου κάθε κακὸ λογισμό.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος (+1991)

Φοβερὰ Ὀπασία

Τὴν ὁποία εἶδεν ἓνας μοναχὸς ὀνομαζόμενος Γρηγόριος ὁ ὁποῖος γὰ ἓνα διάστημα ἦταν μαθητὴς τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου τοῦ Νέου ἐπὶ Βασιλέως Λέοντος τοῦ Σοφοῦ κατὰ τὸν 9ον αἰῶνα (ἀπὸ Συναϊτικο Χειρόγραφο τοῦ 15ου-16ου αἰῶνα).

Ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος ὁ νέος ἦταν πνευματικὸς Πατέρας τοῦ ὁσίου Γρηγορίου, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε ἐπίσης πολλὰ ἄλλα πνευματικὰ τέκνα μεταξὺ τῶν ὁποίων ἦταν καὶ μία εὐλαβέστατη γυναῖκα ὀνομαζόμενη Θεοδώρα ἡ ὁποία ὑπηρετοῦσε τὸν Ἅγιο Βασίλειο σὲ ὅλη τῆς τῆ ζωῆ. Ἐφθασε δὲ ὁ καιρὸς τοῦ θανάτου τῆς καὶ ἀπέθανεν ἐντὸς ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν.

Ἐγὼ δὲ (ὁ Γρηγόριος) εὐρισκόμενος σὲ ἀπορία ζητοῦσα νὰ μάθω καὶ ἐνοχλοῦσα τὸν Ἅγιο γιὰ νὰ μοῦ εἰπῆ ἐὰν ἐσώθη ἡ Θεοδώρα καὶ ποῦ εὐρίσκεται. Ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος μετὰ τίς πολλές μου ἐνοχλήσεις, μοῦ εἶπεν: «Τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε αὐτὴ τὴ νύχτα πορεύομαι πρὸς τὴν Θεοδώρα καὶ ἔλθε καὶ σὺ μαζί μου γιὰ νὰ τὴν ἰδῆς.»

Ἐγὼ ἀσπασθῆκα τὴν δεξιὰ του χεῖρα καὶ πορεύθηκα νὰ κοιμηθῶ. Καὶ γενόμενος σὲ ἔκσταση εὐρέθηκα σὲ ἓνα ἀνηφορικὸ καὶ στενὸ μέρος, καὶ ἐκεῖ βλέπω ὠραιότατα παλάτια ἐξαστράπτοντα καὶ κτυπόντας τὴν πόρτα παρουσιάσθησαν δυὸ γυναῖκες καὶ μοῦ λέγουν. Αὐτὰ τὰ παλάτια εἶναι τοῦ πατρὸς Βασιλείου ὁ ὁποῖος πρὶν ἀπὸ λίγο πέρασεν ἀπὸ ἐδῶ καὶ πῆγε νὰ ἰδῆ τὴν Θεοδώρα ἡ ὁποία βρίσκεται ἐδῶ.

Ἀκούοντας δὲ ἡ Θεοδώρα τὸ ὄνομά τῆς, ἔτρεξε στὴν πόρτα, μ' ἐνηγκαλίσθη καὶ μοῦ λέγει:

«ὦ τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε! Πῶς ἦλθες ἐδῶ; Μήπως ἀπέθανες καὶ ἦρθες ἐδῶ;»

Ἐγὼ τῆς ἀποκρίθηκα:

«Δὲν ἀπέθανα ἀλλὰ εὐρίσκομαι ἀκόμη στὸ σῶμα μου στὸν μάταιο ἐκεῖνο κόσμο. Οἱ εὐχὲς ὅμως τοῦ πνευματικοῦ μας Πατρὸς Βασιλείου μὲ ἔφεραν ἐδῶ νὰ σὲ δῶ ὅπου πολὺ ἐπιθυμοῦσα καὶ τὸν ἐνοχλοῦσα κάθε ἡμέρα γιὰ νὰ μάθω ποῦ εὐρίσκεσαι, καὶ ἐὰν ἐσώθης. Καὶ σὲ παρακαλῶ νὰ μοῦ πῆς περὶ τοῦ χωρισμοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, πόσους πόνους ἔχει καὶ πῶς ἐπέρασες ἀπὸ τὰ φοβερὰ τελῶνια τοῦ ἀέρος, καὶ τίς ἐξετάσεις τῶν πονηρῶν δαιμόνων. Διότι κι ἐγὼ μέλλω ἐντὸς ὀλίγου καὶ κάθε ἄνθρωπος στὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του νὰ διέλθωμεν.»

Καὶ ἀπεκρίθη ἡ Θεοδώρα καὶ τοῦ λέγει:

«ὦ! τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε πῶς θὰ σοῦ διηγηθῶ τὸν φόβο καὶ τὸν τρόμον ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας τοῦ χωρισμοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος; Πῶς θὰ σοῦ ἐξηγήσω τοὺς πόνους καὶ τίς ὁδύνες τοῦ χωρισμοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς; Σοῦ παριστάνω τέκνο μου νὰ τεθῆ ἄνθρωπος γυμνὸς ἐπάνω σὲ κάρβουνα καὶ νὰ διαλύεται ἕως ὅτου ἐξέλθῃ ἡ ψυχὴ του. Τόσον δριμεῖς καὶ ἀνυπόφοροι εἶναι οἱ πόνοι τοῦ χωρισμοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ ὅπως ἐγὼ· τοῦ δὲ δίκαιου τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε δὲν γνωρίζω.

Ὅταν βρισκόμουν στὸ κρεβάτι μου καὶ ψυχομαχοῦσα ἔβλεπα γύρω μου τὰ πονηρὰ πνεύματα τῶν δαιμόνων· ἄλλους μὲν σὰν μαύρους σκύλους, καὶ ἐγαύγιζαν, ἄλλους δὲ σὰν ταύρους μουγκρίζοντας καὶ λυσσόντας στρέφοντας τὰ ἄγρια καὶ ἄσχημα πρόσωπά τους κατ' ἀπάνω μου καὶ μὲ φοβέριζαν. Ἐγὼ δὲ ἔστρεφα τὰ μάτια μου σὲ ἄλλο μέρος γιὰ νὰ μὴν βλέπω τὴν ἄσχημη μορφή τους καὶ τὸν θόρυβο ποῦ ἔκαναν· ἀλλὰ ἦταν ἀδύνατο, τέκνο μου Γρηγόριε νὰ ἀποφύγω.

Καὶ ἐνθ' ἡμῶν σὲ τόσην στεναχώρια βλέπω ξαφνικὰ δυὸ νέους ἀστραπόμορφους μὲ χρυσὰ μαλλιά, καὶ στάθηκαν στὰ δεξιὰ τοῦ κρεβατιοῦ μου, καὶ ὁ ἓνας ἀπ' αὐτοὺς ἄρχισε νὰ φοβερίζει τοὺς φοβεροὺς ἐκείνους δαίμονες λέγοντας: «Φύγετε παμμίαιοι καὶ ἀγριοπρόσωποι διότι δὲν ἔχετε νὰ κερδήσετε τίποτε ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν ψυχὴ.»

Αὐτοὶ δὲ ἔφεραν τίς ἁμαρτίες μου ὅσας ἐποίησα ἀπὸ τὰ νιάτα μου, εἴτε σὲ λόγια, εἴτε σὲ πράξεις καὶ ἐφώναζαν ὅλα τ' ἁμαρτήματά μου, ἀκόμη καὶ ὅσα δὲν ἔπραξα· ἐγὼ δὲ μὲ φόβο καὶ τρόμο ἐπρόσμενα τὸ θάνατο καὶ ἐξαίφνης ἦλθεν ὁ θάνατος σὰν ἓνας νέος χονδρὸς καὶ ὀργισμένος, σὰν λιοντάρι, φορτωμένος διάφορα ἐργαλεῖα καὶ εἶπαν σ' αὐτὸν οἱ Ἄγγελοι· λῦσαι τίς ἀρθρώσεις τοῦ σώματος καὶ μὴν τῆς δώσης πολλοὺς πόνους διότι τ' ἁμαρτήματά τῆς εἶναι λίγα.

Τότε ἄρχισεν ἀπὸ τὰ πόδια καὶ ἔλυνε τίς ἀρθρώσεις τοῦ σώματός μου, καὶ τότε αἰσθανόμουν ὅτι νεκρωνόταν τὸ σῶμα μου, καὶ τελικὰ ὁ τύρρανος ἐκεῖνος γέμισε ἓνα ποτήρι μὲ πικρὸ περιεχόμενο, μοῦ τὸ πότισε καὶ εὐθὺς ἐξῆλθεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα μου, τότε τὴν παρέλαβαν οἱ δυὸ Ἄγγελοι καὶ ἐγὼ θαύμαζα γιὰ τὰ γινόμενα, διότι δὲν ἤξερα ὅτι συμβαίνουν αὐτὰ στὸν καιρὸ τοῦ θανάτου στὸν ταλαίπωρο ἄνθρωπον.

Καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἐξέταζαν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα ποῦ ἔκαμα στὴ ζωὴ μου, ἂν νήστευσα, ἂν πῆγαίνα ἐκκλησία καὶ ἂν στεκόμουν μὲ φόβο Θεοῦ, ἂν τάισα τοὺς πεινῶντες, ἂν ἐπισκέφθηκα ἀσθενεῖς, ἂν δεχόμουν ξένους στὸ σπίτι μου, ἂν ἔδωκα τὸ καλὸ παράδειγμα στοὺς ἄλλους, ἂν ὑπέμεινα βρισιές, ἂν ἀπέφευγα ὄρκους, ἂν δὲν βλασφημοῦσα, ἂν δὲν καλλοπιζόμουν, καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα, τὰ ἐζύγιζαν αὐτὰ μὲ τίς ἁμαρτίες μου· οἱ δὲ δαίμονες ἔτριζαν τὰ δόντια τους σὲ μένα καὶ ὀρμοῦσαν νὰ μὲ ἀρπάξουν ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν Ἀγγέλων, καὶ νὰ μὲ ρίξουν στὸν ἄχαρον Ἄδην.

Ξαφνικὰ ἦλθεν ὁ πνευματικὸς μου Πατέρας Βασίλειος καὶ εἶπε πρὸς τοὺς Ἀγγέλους: «Κύριοί μου ἐπειδὴ αὐτὴ ἡ ψυχὴ μὲ ὑπέρητησεν στὴ ζωὴ μου, παρακάλεσα τὸν Κύριον νὰ τὴν συγχωρήσῃ καὶ νὰ τὴ σώσῃ ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν δαιμόνων, καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι πετώντας ἀμέσως ἀνεβαίναμεν στὸν οὐρανὸ ἀνατολικὰ, καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας συναντήσαμεν:

1. Τελώνιον τῆς Καταλαλιᾶς

Ἐδῶ ὑπῆρχε μιὰ σὺναξις μαύρων, καὶ μᾶς σταμάτησαν, καὶ λυσσόντας σὰν σκύλλοι ζητοῦσαν νὰ μὲ ἀρπάξουν ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν Ἀγγέλων. Καὶ μάρτυς μου ὁ Κύριος τέκνον

μου Γρηγόριε, μοῦ ἐφάνερωσαν ὅσους κατέκρινα στή ζωή μου καί ὄχι μόνο τ' ἀληθινά ἀλλά μέ συκοφαντοῦσαν καί ἔλεγαν πολλὰ ψέματα ἐναντίον μου. Οἱ δὲ Ἄγγελοι καταφρονήσαντες αὐτούς, καί πετώντας τὶς πτέρυγές τους ἀνεβαίναμεν στὸν οὐρανό.

2. Τελώνιον τῆς Ὑβρεως

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας λίγο συνατήσαμε τὸ Τελώνιον τῆς ὕβρεως, καί ἐδῶ πολυαγωνιζόμενοι οἱ Ἄγγελοι, μέ τὶς εὐχές τοῦ Πατρός μας Βασιλείου, ἀνεχωρήσαμεν καί συνομιλοῦντες οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἔλεγον· ἀληθινά μεγάλην ὠφέλειαν βρήκε αὐτὴ ἡ ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιον Βασίλειον.

3. Τελώνιον τοῦ Φθόνου

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας ἐφθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τοῦ φθόνου, καί μὴ ἔχοντας τίποτα οἱ δαίμονες ἐναντίον μου ἐπεράσαμεν ἀνενόχλητοι· ἂν καί ἔτριζαν τὰ δόντια τους, οἱ ἀγριοπρόσωποι ἐκεῖνοι μαῦροι νὰ μέ ἀρπάζουν ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν Ἀγγέλων· καί ἔτσι περάσαμε τὸ Τελώνιον τοῦτο.

4. Τελώνιον τοῦ Ψεύδους

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας, σὲ πολλὸ ὕψος φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τοῦ ψεύδους ὅπου ἐκεῖ πολλὸ πλῆθος δαιμόνων, μέ ἄσχημα πρόσωπα, ἔτρεχαν κατ' ἀπάνω μου, κραυγάζοντας καί λυσσόντας ἔφεραν πολλὰ ἀποδείξεις, καί εἶχαν γραμμένα πολλὰς ἀνόητες λέξεις πού ἔλεγα στήν παιδική μου ἡλικία μέχρι καί τὰ πρόσωπα πού τὰ ἔλεγα καί ζητοῦσαν ἀπολογία ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀγγέλους. Καί οἱ Ἄγγελοι, πληρώσαντες ἀπὸ τὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου ἀναχωρήσαμεν.

5. Τελώνιον τοῦ Θυμοῦ καὶ τῆς Ὁργῆς

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας ἐφθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τοῦ θυμοῦ καὶ τῆς ὀργῆς, ὅπου ἐκεῖ πλῆθος μαῦρων λυσσώντας σὰν σκύλλοι δάγκωναν ὁ ἕνας τὸν ἄλλον καί κατατρώγονταν ἀναμεταξύ τους· καί σὰν ἀγριοχοῖροι ὀρμώντας ἐναντίων μου, ἔκαμναν τὰ σχήματα καί τὰ καμώματα πού ἔκανα ὅταν θυμωνόμουν καί ὅταν ἐκρατοῦσα ἔχθρα καί μνησικάκουν μέ κανένα· καί ἐδῶ πληρώνοντας ἀπὸ τὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου ἀναχωρήσαμεν.

6. Τελώνιον Ὑπερηφανείας

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας λίγον οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἐφθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς ὑπερηφανείας καί ψάχνοντας πολλὰ οἱ δαίμονες δὲν βρῆκαν τίποτα νὰ μέ κατηγορήσουν διότι ἤμουν φτωχὴ καί περνώντας ἀνενόχλητοι φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς βλασφημίας.

7. Τελώνιον τῆς Βλασφημίας

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς βλασφημίας, καί ἀμέσως ὅταν μᾶς εἶδαν οἱ δαίμονες ἔτρεξαν κατ' ἀπάνω μας τρίζοντας τὰ δόντια καί βλασφημοῦντες, ἐγὼ ἔτρεμα ἀπὸ τὸν φόβο μου καί μοῦ ἔλεγαν ὅτι βλασφήμησα τρεῖς φορές στή νεότητά μου· οἱ δὲ Ἄγγελοι ἔφεραν ἀπόδειξη ὅτι ἐξομολογήθηκα καί ἀνεχωρήσαμεν ἀφήνοντας τοὺς δαίμονες ἄπρακτους.

8. Τελώνιον τῆς Φλυαρίας καὶ Ἀστειολογίας

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ τελώνιον τῆς ἀστειολογίας καὶ φλυαρίας καί ζητοῦσαν οἱ δαίμονες νὰ

δώσω ἀπολογία γιὰ τὰ αἰσχρολόγια, τὶς ἀστειολογίες καί ἄσεμνα τραγούδια πού ἔλεγα στή νεότητά μου καί ἀποροῦσα πῶς τὰ θυμοῦνταν, ἐνῶ ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν πολυκαιρία τὰ ξέχασα· καί πληρώνοντας οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἀνεχωρήσαμεν.

9. Τελώνιον τοῦ Τόκου καὶ Δόλου

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τοῦ τόκου καί τοῦ δόλου πού ἐξετάζει τοὺς τοκογλύφους καί δολίους, καί χωρὶς νὰ βροῦν τίποτα οἱ δαίμονες νὰ ἀποδείξουν ἀναχωρήσαμεν.

10. Τελώνιον τῆς Ὀκνηρίας καὶ τοῦ Ὑπνου

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς ὀκνηρίας ὅπου οἱ δαίμονες μέ ἐξέτασαν ἂν κοιμόμουν πολὺ καί βαριόμουν νὰ σηκωθῶ νὰ προσευχηθῶ ἢ νὰ πάω στήν ἐκκλησία ἢ ἂν μποροῦσα νὰ κάμω κανένα καλὸ καί ἀμελοῦσα· καί χωρὶς νὰ βροῦν τίποτα ἀναχωρήσαμεν ἀνενόχλητοι.

11. Τελώνιον τῆς Φιλαργυρίας

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς φιλαργυρίας στὸ ὅποιο ὑπῆρχε πολὺ σκοτάδι καί ὀμίχλη· καί ἐξετάζοντας οἱ δαίμονες καί ἀφοῦ δὲν βρῆκαν τίποτα ἐπειδὴ ἤμουν φτωχὴ, φύγαμεν ἀνενόχλητοι.

12. Τελώνιον τῆς Μέθης

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς μέθης, καί ὀρμώντας οἱ δαίμονες σὰν λύκοι ἀρπακτικοὶ κατ' ἀπάνω μας, ἐξέταζαν τὸ κρασί πού ἤπια σ' ὅλη μου τὴ ζωή· καί μέ κατηγοροῦσαν ὅτι στὸ τάδε σπίτι ἤπιες τόσα ποτήρια, στὸν τάδε γάμον ἐμέθυσες καί ὅσα μοῦ ἔλεγαν ἦσαν ἀληθινά· καί πληρώνοντας οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἀναχωρήσαμεν καί ἀνεβαίνοντας οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἔλεγαν ἀναμεταξύ τους: «Μεγάλον κίνδυνον ἔχει ἡ ψυχὴ ἕως ὅτου περάσει τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τελώνια τοῦ ἀέρος». Καί ἐγὼ τοὺς λέγω: «Ναί, κύριοί μου, καί νομίζω πῶς κανεὶς ἀπὸ τοὺς ζωντανοὺς ἀνθρώπους δὲν θὰ γνωρίζῃ τὸ τί συμβαίνει μετὰ τὸν χωρισμὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοὺς δαίμονες τοῦ ἀέρος, καί ἀλλοίμονο στοὺς ἀμελεῖς τὸ τί τοὺς περιμένει». Καί οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἀποκρίθηκαν καί εἶπαν: «Οἱ ἅγιες Γραφές ἀναλαμβάνουν ὅλα αὐτά, ἀλλὰ οἱ ταλαίπωροι ἄνθρωποι σκοτισμένοι ἀπὸ τὴν πολυτέλεια, τροφές καί ἡδονές τοῦ κόσμου, τυφλώνονται καί δὲν πιστεύουν ὅτι θὰ πεθάνουν καί δὲν φροντίζουν νὰ κάμνουν καλὰ ἔργα γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τους· καί ἀλλοίμονο στοὺς ἀμελεῖς διότι τοὺς ἀρπάζουν οἱ δαίμονες καί τοὺς ρίπτουν στὸν σκοτεινὸν Ἄδην μέχρι τῆς κρίσεως ὅποτε θὰ δικασθοῦν καί θὰ ἀπολάβῃ ὁ κάθε ἕνας ὅτι ἐπραξε.»

13. Τελώνιον τῆς Μνησικακίας

Καί ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς μνησικακίας πού ἐξετάζει αὐτοὺς πού ἔχουν ἔχθρα, καί δὲν συγχωροῦν τοὺς ἀδελφούς τους. Καί ὀρμώντας οἱ δαίμονες κατ' ἀπάνω μου, ἐξέταζαν τὰ κατάστιχά τους, νὰ βροῦν κανένα πταισίμο νὰ μέ ἀρπάζουν· καί χωρὶς νὰ βροῦν φώναξαν σὰν λυσσασμένα σκυλιὰ ὅτι ξεχάσαμεν νὰ τὰ γράψουμεν, καί ἀναχωρήσαμεν ἀνεβαίνοντας, καί ρώτησα τοὺς Ἀγγέλους πῶς γνωρίζουν οἱ δαίμονες

τις ἁμαρτίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ μοῦ ἀποκρίθηκαν οἱ Ἄγγελοι: «Δὲν γνωρίζεις, ὅτι μετὰ τὸ βάπτισμα κάθε Χριστιανὸς λαμβάνει ἕναν Ἄγγελο σὰν φύλακα νὰ τὸν φυλάει, καὶ νὰ τὸν ὀδηγῇ στὸ καλὸ, καὶ νὰ γράφῃ τὰ καλὰ τοῦ ἔργα· ὁμοίως δὲ τὸν ἀκολουθῇ καὶ ἕνας διάβολος καὶ γράφῃ τὶς κακὲς του πράξεις, καὶ τὶς ἀναγγέλλει στὸ κάθε Τελώνιον ποῦ ἀνήκει ἡ ἁμαρτία καὶ γι' αὐτὸ γνωρίζουν οἱ δαίμονες, καὶ ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ χωρίσῃ ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἀνέρχεται στοὺς οὐρανοὺς τὴν ἐξετάζουν δαίμονες σὲ κάθε Τελώνιον καὶ τοῦτο γίνεται στοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους Χριστιανούς μόνο, στοὺς δὲ ἀπίστους καὶ ἀσεβεῖς δὲν ὑπάρχει καμιὰ ἐξέτασις.»

14. Τελώνιον τῆς Μαγείας καὶ Γοητείας

Ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς μαγείας καὶ γοητείας. Ἐδῶ οἱ δαίμονες ἦσαν σὰν ἄγρια ζῶα· ἄλλοι εἶχαν μορφή σκύλλου, ἄλλοι σὰν βόδια, ἄλλοι σὰν φίδια, μὲ ἄσχημη μορφή, ἀλλὰ μὲ θεῖαν χάριν ὅταν μὲ ἐξέτασαν δὲν βρῆκαν τίποτα, καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας ρώτησα τοὺς Ἄγγελους μὲ τί τρόπον μποροῦν νὰ σβήσουν ἀπὸ τὰ κατάστιχα τῶν δαιμόνων τὰ ἁμαρτήματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοί μου ἀποκρίθησαν: «Συγχωροῦνται τὰ ἁμαρτήματα ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος μετανοήσῃ καὶ ἐξομολογηθῇ στὸν πνευματικὸν καὶ κάμῃ τὸν κανόνα ποῦ τοῦ ἔβαλεν. Τότε ἐξαλείφονται τὰ ἁμαρτήματα ἀπὸ τὰ κατάστιχα τῶν δαιμόνων· καὶ λυσσώντας οἱ δαίμονες τοὺς πολεμοῦν γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ρίψουν σὲ νέα ἁμαρτήματα. Γι' αὐτὸ ἡ ἐξομολόγησις καὶ ἡ μετάνοια γίνονται αἰτίες νὰ συγχωρηθοῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νὰ περάσουν ἐλεύθερα τὰ ἐναέρια τελώνια. Ἀλλὰ πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι λέγουν ὅτι τὰ ἐξομολογοῦνται στὸν Θεὸ· καὶ ἄλλοι πάλι ζητοῦν νὰ εὔρουν πνευματικὸν συγκαταβατικὸν γιὰ νὰ ἀποφύγουν τὸν κανόνα· ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ δὲν εἶναι μετάνοια ἀλλὰ πονηρία καὶ ὁ Θεὸς οὐ μκκτηρίζεται. Καὶ ὅπως στὴν ἀσθένεια τοῦ σώματος ἐκλέγουμεν τὸν καλύτερον ἰατρὸν, ἔτσι πολὺ περισσότερο στὴν ἀσθένεια τῆς ἀθάνατης ψυχῆς νὰ ἐκλέγουμε τὸν θεοφοβούμενον καὶ αὐστηρὸν πνευματικὸν, καὶ νὰ τὸν ἔχει κανεὶς μέχρι τέλους τῆς ζωῆς· ἀλλιῶς πλανοῦνται οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ περάσουν τὰ τελώνια τοῦ ἀέρος.»

15. Τελώνιον τῆς Γαστριμαργίας καὶ Πολυφαγίας

Αὐτὰ καθὼς μοῦ ἔλεγον φθάσαμε στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς γαστριμαργίας καὶ πολυφαγίας, ὅπου οἱ δαίμονες ἦσαν πολὺ χονδροὶ σὰν τοὺς χοίρους, δυνατοὶ καὶ ἄγριοι, καὶ ἔτρεξαν κατ' ἄπάνω μου, γαυγίζοντας, καὶ μοῦ φανέρωσαν τὶς πολυφαγίαις ποῦ ἔκαμνα ἀπὸ μικρὴν ἡλικία μέχρι ποῦ γέρασα, καὶ ὅτι δὲν νῆστευα Τετάρτη καὶ Παρασκευὴ μέχρι καὶ τὶς Τεσσαρακοστὰς χωρὶς ἐγκράτεια· καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι φέρνοντας τὰ καλά μου ἔργα γιὰ πληρωμὴ ἀναχωρήσαμεν.

16. Τελώνιον τῆς Εἰδωλολατρίας

Καὶ φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας καὶ διαφόρων αἰρέσεων, καὶ χωρὶς νὰ βροῦν τίποτα οἱ δαίμονες ἀναχωρήσαμεν.

17. Τελώνιον τῆς Ἀρσενοκοιτίας

Καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς ἀρσενοκοιτίας· καὶ ὁ πρῶτος αὐτῶν καθόταν σὰν φοβερὸς δράκοντας ἀλλάζοντας μορφές, πότε σὰν ἀγριοχοῖρος, πότε σὰν ποντικός, πότε σὰν θηριόψαρο καὶ τριγύρω αὐτοῦ βρῶμα καὶ ἀνυπόφορη δυσσωδία καὶ ἐπλάγιαζε ἀσχημονώντας. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ δὲν βρῆκε τίποτα ἐναντίων μου, ἀναχωρήσαμεν, καὶ μοῦ ἔλεγον οἱ Ἄγγελοι ὅτι πολλοὶ φθάνουν μέχρι ἐδῶ ἀνεμπόδιστα, καὶ γιὰ τὴν αἰσχροὴν αὐτὴν πράξιν, καταγκρεμίζονται στὸν σκοτεινὸν καὶ ἄχαρον Ἄδην.

18. Τελώνιον τῶν Χρωματοπροσώπων

Καὶ μιλώντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τὸ ὁποῖον ἐξετάζει ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες, οἱ ὁποῖοι καλλωπίζουν τὰ πρόσωπά τους μὲ διάφορα χρώματα, καὶ μυρωδικὰ καὶ δὲν εὐχαριστοῦνται μὲ τὸ κάλλος ποῦ τοὺς ἔδωσεν ὁ Θεός. Ἐγὼ εἶχα χρωματισθῆ δυὸ φορὲς στὴ ζωὴ μου καὶ οἱ δαίμονες ἐξέταζαν νὰ μὲ κρατήσουν. Οἱ Ἄγγελοι ὁμῶς ἐπάλευαν μὲ πολὺν κόπον φέρνοντας τὶς καλὲς μου πράξεις, καὶ κερδίζοντας ἀναχωρήσαμεν.

19. Τελώνιον τῆς Μοιχείας

Ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς μοιχείας τὸ ὁποῖον ἐξετάζει τοὺς μοιχοὺς καὶ μοιχαλίδας· δηλαδὴ τοὺς παντρεμένους οἱ ὁποῖοι πηγαίνουν σὲ ξένες γυναῖκες καὶ μολύνουν τὸ στεφάνι τους. Ἐπίσης ἐδῶ στὸ τελώνιον αὐτὸ ἐξετάζονται καὶ οἱ παρὰ φύσιν πράξαντες μὲ τὶς γυναῖκες τους. Ἀλλὰ ἐπειδὴ ἐγὼ δὲν εἶχα εὐθύνη ἀπὸ αὐτὰ ἀναχωρήσαμεν χωρὶς πρόβλημα.

20. Τελώνιον τοῦ Φόνου καὶ τῆς Ἐκτρώσεως

Καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας φθάσαμεν στοὺς τελωνάρχες τοῦ φόνου οἱ ὁποῖοι ἐξετάζουν τοὺς φονιάδες, μέχρι καὶ τὶς γυναῖκες ποῦ ἀποβάλλουν ἀπὸ τὴν κοιλία τους βρέφη καὶ μέχρι καὶ αὐτοὺς ποῦ ἀποφεύγουν τὴν τεκνογονία· καὶ ἀπὸ ἐδῶ μὲ τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀναχωρήσαμεν χωρὶς πρόβλημα.

21. Τελώνιον τῆς Κλοπῆς

Καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας λίγο φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς κλοπῆς ποῦ ἐξετάζει τοὺς κλέφτες καὶ ἐξετάζοντάς με καλὰ οἱ δαίμονες δὲν βρῆκαν τίποτα καὶ ἀναχωρήσαμεν ἀνεμπόδιστα.

22. Τελώνιον τῆς Πορνείας

Καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας πολὺ ψηλὰ φθάσαμεν στὴν θύρα τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ, ὅπου βρίσκεται τὸ Τελώνιον τὸ ὁποῖον ἐξετάζει τοὺς πόρνους. Ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τους καθόταν σὲ ὑψηλὸ θρόνο καὶ φοροῦσεν φόρεμα ραντισμένο μὲ ἀφροὺς καὶ αἵματα κάθε ἀκαθαρσίας πλημμυρισμένο, τὸ ὁποῖον ἐγίνε αὐτὸ ἀπὸ τὶς ἀκαθαρσίες τῆς πορνείας. Καὶ ὀρμώντας οἱ δαίμονες κατ' ἄπάνω μου μὲ ἐκατηγοροῦσαν καὶ ἔλεγον πολλὰ ψέματα, καὶ ἐτόλμησαν νὰ μὲ ἀρπάξουν ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν Ἀγγέλων καὶ νὰ μὲ ρίψουν στὸν ἄχαρον Ἄδην. Οἱ δὲ Ἄγγελοι ἀντίλεγον σ' αὐτούς, ὅτι εἶχα ἐξομολογηθῆ καὶ παραίτησα ἀπὸ πολὺν καιρὸν αὐτά. Καὶ λέγοντας ψέματα οἱ δαίμονες ἔλεγον ὅτι δὲν τὰ ἐξομολογήθηκα, οὔτε κανόνα ἔλαβα

ἀπὸ πνευματικόν, καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἀναχώρησαν, τρίζοντας οἱ ἀκάθαρτοι δαίμονες τὰ δόντια τους. Καὶ προχωρώντας μοῦ λένε οἱ Ἄγγελοι ὅτι πολὺ λίγοι περνοῦν ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ τελώνιο. Οἱ περισσότεροι ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἔρχονται μέχρι ἐδῶ πέφτουν στὸν σκοτεινὸν καὶ ἄχαρον Ἄδην.

23. Τελώνιον τῆς Ἀσπλαχνίας

Καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας λίγο φθάσαμεν στὸ Τελώνιον τῆς ἀσπλαχνίας, τὸ ὁποῖο ἐξετάζη τοὺς σκληρόκαρδους καὶ ἀνελεήμονες καὶ ἐξετάζοντάς με οἱ δαίμονες καὶ χωρὶς νὰ με βροῦν ἀσπλαχνη δίοτι ἐλεοῦσα τοὺς φτωχοὺς, καὶ κατατροπιασθέντες οἱ δαίμονες, ἀναχωρήσαμεν ἀπ' αὐτούς.

Ἡ Πύλη τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ

Καὶ ἀνεβαίνοντας χαρούμενοι φθάσαμεν στὴν πύλη τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ, ἡ ὁποία ἀκτινοβολοῦσε καὶ ἔλαμπε σὰν καθαρὸ χρυσάφι καὶ εἶχεν ὑπερθαύμαστην ὠραιότητα, ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ γλῶσσα ἀνθρώπου νὰ τὴν διηγηθῆ. Ὁ θυρωρὸς ἦταν ἕνας ἀστραπόμορφος νέος μὲ χρυσὰ μαλλιά καὶ μᾶς δέχθηκε χαρούμενος δοξάζοντας τὸν Θεὸν δίοτι περάσαμε τὰ ἐναέρια τελώνια τῶν δαιμόνων.

Καὶ περνώντας τὴν πύλη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εἶδαμεν πλῆθος ἀστραπόμορφων νέων οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀκτινοβολοῦσαν σὰν τὸν ἥλιο καὶ χαίρονταν ὅλοι καὶ εὐφραίνονταν, γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία μου· ἐμεῖς πορευθήκαμεν μὲ ἀγαλλίαση καὶ χαρὰν ἀνεκλάλητον γιὰ προσκύνησιν τοῦ ἀστραπόμορφου θρόνου τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ Σωτῆρος Ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ εἶδαμεν σύννεφα ὄχι σὰν τὰ συνηθισμένα, τὰ ὁποῖα παραμέριζαν γιὰ νὰ περάσουμεν. Καὶ εἶδαμεν ἄλλο σύννεφο λευκὸ καὶ χρυσόμορφο ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἐξέρχονταν ἀστραπὲς καὶ παραμέρισε κι αὐτὸ ὅπως τὰ ἄλλα καὶ περνώντας αἰσθανθήκαμεν γλυκύτατην εὐωδία ἀπὸ τὸν θρόνον τοῦ ἀοράτου Θεοῦ. Καὶ εἶδαμεν στὸ ἄμεσον ὕψος ἀστραποβόλο τὸν θρόνον τοῦ Παντάνακτος Θεοῦ. Ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ χαρὰ τῶν δικαίων καὶ ἡ Αἰώνια ἀγαλλίαση. Κ' εἶδαμεν ἐκεῖ πλῆθος ἄπειρον ἀστραπόμορφων νέων, ποὺ φοροῦσαν πολῦτιμα φορέματα μὲ χρυσὲς ζῶνες.

Φθάσαμεν ἀπέναντι τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι ποὺ μὲ κρατοῦσαν ἄρχισαν νὰ ψάλλουν καὶ κλίνοντας τὰ γόνατα προσκυνήσαμεν τρεῖς φορές τὴν Παναγίαν Τριάδα, καὶ μαζὶ μὲ ἡμᾶς ὅλο τὸ πλῆθος τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀγγέλων ποὺ ἦσαν γύρω τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ εὐθέως ἀκούστηκε φωνὴ γλυκύτατη καὶ ἔλεγεν στοὺς Ἀγγέλους ὀδηγήστε τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτὴν πρῶτα στὸν Παράδεισον καὶ ἔπειτα στὰ καταχθόνια τοῦ Ἄδου καθὼς κάνετε σὲ ὅλες τὶς ψυχές. Καὶ ἔπειτα ἀναπαύσεται τὴν στὴν κατοικία τοῦ δούλου μου Βασιλείου ποὺ μὲ παρακάλεσεν.

Καὶ συνοδεύοντάς με οἱ Ἄγγελοι μὲ ἔφεραν στὸν Παράδεισον ὅπου εἶδα τὶς κατοικίες τῶν δικαίων ὅπου ἔλαμπαν σὰν ἀκτίνες τοῦ ἡλίου τῶν ὁποίων ἡ κατοικία ἐκάστου διέφερεν κάθε ἐνὸς ἀνάλογα τῶν ἔργων του. Ἐκεῖ εἶδαμεν τὸν κόλπον τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ὅπου ἀναπαύονται τὰ τέκνα τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων Χριστιανῶν, ὅσα ἐζήσαν στὸν κόσμον

ἀναμάρτητα. Ἐκεῖ ἀναπαύονται οἱ ψυχές τῶν Δώδεκα Πατριαρχῶν καὶ ὄλων τῶν Ἁγίων καὶ φαίνονταν σὰν νὰ ἦσαν μὲ σώματα, ἀλλὰ χέριν ἀνθρώπου δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τοὺς πιάσῃ.

Ὅταν ἐπισκεφθήκαμεν ὅλες τὶς κατοικίες τῶν Ἁγίων, οἱ Ἄγγελοι μὲ ἔφεραν στὶς φοβερὲς κολάσεις τοῦ Ἄδου ὅπου κατοικοῦν οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ· καὶ εἶδα τὶς σκοτεινὲς φυλακὲς ὅπου εἶναι κλεισμένες οἱ ψυχές τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θάλασσας καὶ σκεπάζονταν ἀπὸ τὴν μαύρην ὀμίχλη τοῦ θανάτου· καὶ ἐκεῖ ἀκούεται τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε τὸ οὐαὶ καὶ ἀλλοίμονο καὶ τοὺς κατατρώγει ἀσταμάτητα ὁ μολυσμὸς καὶ ἡ βρόμα.

Ἀφοῦ γυρίσαμεν ὅλες τὶς κολάσεις τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν, ὁ ἕνας Ἄγγελος μοῦ λέγει: «Θεοδώρα ξέρεις ὅτι σήμερον ὁ πνευματικὸς σου πατέρας Βασιλείος κάμνει τὸ τεσσαρακοστὸν σου μνημόσυνο στὴν γῆ;»

Καὶ λέγοντας αὐτὸ ὁ ἄγγελος μὲ ἄφησαν νὰ ἐμφανισθῶ στὴν πανευφρόσυνη κατοικία τοῦ Παραδείσου, ὅπου ἐδῶ βρίσκονται καὶ ἄλλες ψυχές τῶν πνευματικῶν τέκνων τοῦ πατρός μας Βασιλείου. Ἐκεῖ βρισκόταν ὠραιωτάτη τράπεζη ἀκτινοβολώντας διὰ τῶν πολῦτιμων λίθων ποὺ ἦταν στολισμένη, καὶ γεμάτη μὲ διάφορα ὠραιότατα ὀπωρικὰ ποὺ ἔτρωγαν ἄνθρωποι ἄυλοι χωρὶς παχιὰς σάρκες, καὶ ἔλαμπαν σὰν ἀκτίνες τοῦ ἡλίου τὰ πρόσωπά τους. Ἐκεῖ δὲν διακρίνονταν οἱ ἄνδρες ἀπὸ τὶς γυναῖκες. Ὁραιότατοι νέοι τοὺς κερνοῦσαν μὲ ροδοκόκκινο ποτὸ καὶ ὅσοι ἔπιναν χόρταναν ἀπὸ τὴν γλυκύτητα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Τότε ὁ Ἅγιος Βασιλείος διέταξε τὴν Θεοδώρα νὰ μὲ ὀδηγήσῃ νὰ ἰδῶ τὸ ὠραιότατο περιβόλι τῆς κατοικίας του. Καὶ ὀδηγώντας με ἡ Θεοδώρα φθάσαμεν στὸ περιβόλι τοῦ ὁποίου ἡ πόρτα καὶ τὰ ψηλὰ τεῖχη ἦσαν χρυσαφένια, τὸ ὁποῖον ἦταν γεμάτο ἀπὸ ποικιλόμορφα δέντρα, φορτωμένα ἀπὸ εὐγευστάτους καὶ ὠραιότατους καρπούς ἄφθαρτους καὶ ἀθάνατους· καὶ βλέποντας αὐτὰ ἐγὼ ἔμεινα ἐκστατικὸς, ἡ δὲ Θεοδώρα εἶπε: «Αὐτὰ ὅλα ποὺ βλέπεις τὰ ἐχάρισεν ὁ Πανάγαθος Θεὸς τοῦ πατέρα μας Βασιλείου, γιὰ τοὺς κόπους του καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴ του, γιὰ νὰ εὐφραίνεται καὶ νὰ ἀναπαύεται μὲ ὅλα τὰ σωσμένα πνευματικά του τέκνα. Φρόντισε καὶ σὺ τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε, ἕως ὅτου βρίσκεσαι στὸν προσωρινὸν κόσμον, νὰ κάμῃς τὶς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ νὰ ἔλθῃς καὶ σὺ ἐδῶ μέχρι τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία, ὅποτε ὁ Θεὸς ἔχει μεγαλύτερα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ ἐτοιμασμένα γι' αὐτούς ποὺ Τὸν Ἀγαποῦν.»

Ἐγὼ ψηλαφίζοντας τὸν ἑαυτὸ μου ἐὰν ἦμιον μὲ τὸ σῶμα, μοῦ φάνηκε σὰν νὰ ἔπιανα ἀκτίνες τοῦ ἡλίου, καὶ τότε ἦλθα στὸν ἑαυτὸ μου ἐλευθερωθεὶς ἀπὸ τὰ φοβερὰ καὶ ἐξάϊσια ἐκεῖνα πράγματα. Καὶ συλλογιζόμενος ὅλα αὐτὰ ἔλεγα: «Ἄραγε ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο τὰ εἶδα ὅλα αὐτά;» Καὶ σηκώθηκα καὶ ἐπορευθῆκα νὰ συναντήσω τὸν ἅγιον Γέροντά μου, καὶ βρίσκοντάς τον, ἔβαλα μετάνοια καὶ πῆρα τὴν εὐλογία του, καὶ μοῦ λέει: «Ἄραγε ξέρεις τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε,

ὅτι αὐτὴν τὴ νύκτα εἶμασταν μαζί στὰ οὐράνια καὶ αἰώνια σκηνώματα, ἐκεῖ πού βρίσκεται ἡ Θεοδώρα, καὶ τὴν εἶδες καὶ μιλήσατε μαζί κατὰ τὴν ἐπιθυμία σου, καὶ πήγατε μαζί στοῦ ωραιότατο περιβόλι, καὶ εἶδες τὰ πανεύουσμα ἐκεῖνα ἄνθη καὶ τοὺς ἀθανάτους ἐκείνους καρπούς, καὶ εἶδες τὰ ὀλόχρυσα ἐκεῖνα παλάτια αὐτὴν τὴ νύκτα, μὴν νομίσεις τέκνον μου ὅτι ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι ὄνειρο.»

Ἐγὼ ἀκούοντας αὐτὰ ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ ἁγίου Γέροντα καὶ ἐπιγείου ἀγγέλου λιποθύμησα καὶ ἔμεινα ἄφρονος γνωρίζοντας ὅλα αὐτὰ ὅτι ἔγιναν στ' ἀλήθεια.

Ἐπειτα ὅταν συνήλθα μοῦ λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος: «Καὶ σὺ τέκνον μου Γρηγόριε φρόντισε νὰ διέλθης τὴ ζωὴ σου μὲ ἀγαθοεργίες κατὰ τὶς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατό σου θὰ σὲ δεχθῶ στὶς αἰωνίους κατοικίες, τὶς ὁποῖες μοῦ ἐδώρησεν ὁ Κύριος διὰ τὴν πολλὴν του ἀγαθότητα. Διότι ἐγὼ θὰ φύγω σὲ λίγο ἀπὸ τὸν μάταιο αὐτὸν κόσμος, καὶ σὺ ὑστερότερα καὶ θὰ σὲ περιμένω ἐκεῖ στὰ αἰώνια, διότι καθὼς ὁ Κύριος μοῦ ἀπεκάλυψε θὰ διέλθης τὴν ζωὴ σου θεάρεστα. Πρόσεξε τέκνον μου μὴ φανερώσης σὲ κανέναν ὅσα εἶδες καὶ ἄκουσες ἐν ὄσφ ζω. Μετὰ ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατό μου γράψε τα αὐτὰ γιὰ ὠφέλεια τῶν Χριστιανῶν πού θὰ τὰ διαβάσουν.»



Ἑλληνες, ἐνωθεῖτε ἐναντίον τοῦ κοινοῦ ἐχθροῦ, ἐναντίον τοῦ μίσους, τῆς διχόνοιας καὶ τῆς διαίρεσης, πού εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος μας ὁ ἑαυτός.

Θεόδωρος Κολοκοτρώνης



Λένε ὅτι γιὰ πέντε αἰτίες παραχωρεῖ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ πολεμοῦμαστε ἀπὸ τοὺς δαίμονες.

Καὶ πρώτη εἶναι, λένε, ν' ἀποκτήσουμε τὴ διάκριση τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῆς κακίας, καθὼς μᾶς πολεμοῦν καὶ τοὺς πολεμᾶμε.

Δεύτερη, ν' ἀποκτήσουμε τὴν ἀρετὴ μὲ πόλεμο καὶ κόπο, κι ἔτσι νὰ τὴν ἔχουμε βέβαιη καὶ σταθερή.

Τρίτη, νὰ μὴν ὑψηλοφρονοῦμε, καθὼς προοδεύουμε στὴν ἀρετὴ, ἀλλὰ νὰ μάθουμε νὰ ταπεινοφρονοῦμε.

Τέταρτη, νὰ μισήσουμε τελείως τὴν κακία, ἀφοῦ τὴ γνωρίσουμε μὲ τὰ παθήματά μας.

Πέμπτη καὶ κυριότερη ἀπ' ὅλες, νὰ μὴν ξεχνᾶμε, ἀφοῦ ἀποκτήσουμε τὴν ἀπάθεια, οὔτε τὴ δικὴ μας ἀδυναμία οὔτε τὴ δύναμη Ἐκείνου πού μᾶς βοήθησε.

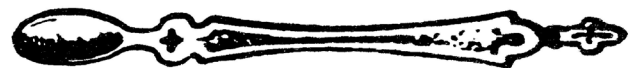
Ἁγίου Μαξίμου

Λογισμοὶ ἐπὶ Ἐνώσεως μὲ τὸν Παπικὸ Κλῆρο

ΠΗΓΗ: Περιοδικὸν «Παιδεία», Ἀπρίλιος 2008.

Μὲ πολλῶν αἰώνων διαιρεμένη καὶ κακοποιημένη δύναμη τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης, ἂν μιὰ «οἰκουμενικὴ» σύνοδος συμφωνοῦσε στὰ ἐπισημῶς ἐλάχιστα, πού χωρίζουν τὸν παπικὸ κλῆρο ἀπὸ τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία, καὶ ἀνακήρυττε «πανηγυρικὰ» μιὰ ἔνωση, ἢ ἴδια ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία θὰ εἶχε ὑποστῆ ἀκόμη ἓνα γερὸ πλήγμα, καὶ μᾶλλον ὀριστικό: ἰδεολογικὴ συγκόλληση μὲ τὸν παπικὸ κλῆρο καὶ στὴν οὐσία μηδενικὴ ἐνότητα μὲ τοὺς δυτικούς λαούς. Τὴν ἐνότητα πού ἔχει τὸ κοινὸ μας χάος, ἤδη σχεδὸν τέλεια, θὰ τὴν ἔχουμε ἐγγυημένη καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ὀρθόδοξο Κλῆρο, δηλαδὴ στὴν πιὸ ὑπουλὴ δυνατὴ ἐπιδείνωση τῆς κοινῆς πτώσης, ὥστε θὰ γνωρίσουμε καθολικῶς τὴν πιὸ μεγάλη διαφθορά. Ὅποιος ἐργάζεται ἐπάνω στὴ βάση μιᾶς δογματικῆς συμφωνίας, γιὰ τὴν ἐπίσημη ἔνωση τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας μὲ τὸν παπικὸ κλῆρο, ἐργάζεται γιὰ τὴν ὀριστικὴ καταρράκωση τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης.

Ἔτσι ὅπως εἶναι τὰ πράγματα, βοηθοῦμε τὴν ἐνότητα μὲ διάφορους τρόπους, ἐκτός ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπίσημη ἰδεολογικὴ τῆς ὀργάνωση. Ἐνῶ λοιπὸν χρειαζόμαστε ἐνότητα, ἢ ὁποῖα ἀναπτύσσεται φυσιολογικὰ καὶ αὐθόρμητα, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποῖα θὰ προκύψει κάποτε ἢ ἐπίσημη ἔνωση, τὸ ἀκριβῶς ἀντίστροφο καλλιεργοῦμε ἀπὸ καιρὸ. Οἱ ἐπίσημοι θεολογικοὶ διάλογοι καὶ ἡ ἐπίσημη ἔνωση εἶναι προοπτικὴ ἀρκετὰ μακρινὴ γιὰ νὰ μὴ τὴ σκεφτόμαστε οὔτε ἐμεῖς οὔτε πολλὲς γενιὲς μετὰ, ἀκόμη κι ἂν ὅλα ἐξελίσσονται μὲ τὸν καλύτερο δυνατὸ τρόπο. «Ἡ ἐνότητα στὴν πίστη πρέπει νὰ προηγηθεῖ τῆς μυστηριακῆς κοινωνίας», καὶ ἐνότητα πραγματικὴ στὴν πίστη εἶναι ἀδύνατη, ὅσο λείπουν οἱ ἀκόμα πιὸ ριζικὲς ἀπὸ τὸ δόγμα προϋποθέσεις τῆς μυστηριακῆς κοινωνίας, τὸ ὁποῖο ἀναφέρεται σὲ βαθειὲς πολιτισμικὲς διαστάσεις. Ἄν «ὄπου πρακτικὴ καὶ πεποιθήσεις πᾶνε μαζί, ἢ πρακτικὴ δὲν εἶναι προῖον τῶν πεποιθήσεων, παρὰ εἶναι καὶ οἱ δύο παροῦσες», ἢ ἐπιτεχνημένη, ἀσύμφωνη μὲ τὴν πράξη, συμφωνία στὶς πεποιθήσεις, ὀδηγεῖ στὴ συκοφαντία κάθε δυνατῆς πεποιθήσεως, ὑποσκάπτοντας ριζικὰ τὴν προηγούμενη καὶ ἐνδεχόμενη ἐνότητα σκέψης καὶ πράξης, ὁπότε καὶ τὴ δυνατότητα τῆς πράξης νὰ συγκροτεῖ πολιτισμικὴ πρόταση.



Τὰ Τρία Πλοκάμια τοῦ Διάβολου

Ο διάβολος ἔχει τρία πλοκάμια. Γιὰ τοὺς φτωχοὺς τὸν κομμουνισμό, γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς τὸν οἰκουμενισμό καὶ γιὰ τοὺς πλουσίους τὴν μασσωνία.

Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου
«Λόγοι Σοφίας καὶ Χάριτος»

FAR FROM THE PATH OF THE HOLY FATHERS

[RECALLING THE MEETING OF BARTHOLOMEW AND BENEDICT]

By Protopresbyter Theodoros Zisis, Professor of the Theological School of the Aristotelian Univ. of Thessaloniki, translated from the original by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

The God fearing members of our Lord's Church followed with bitterness and great sadness the events that took place during the meeting of Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Benedict in Constantinople. Among the many phone calls this author received from various metropolises and the Holy Mountain, one of them left special impression; it was the call received from a priest in Thessaloniki, spiritual father to many, who together with his large number of spiritual children informed us that he can find no rest as he sorrows and weeps because our beloved mother, our Holy Orthodoxy, has been raped and dishonored. A married clergy of the Holy Metropolis of Demetriathos and father of many children decided to discontinue commemorating his bishop who happens to be in full agreement with the Patriarch's actions; when I reminded him of the possible repercussions and punishment for doing so, he replied, "I prefer to till the fields as a simple farmer and hold onto my faith than to cooperate in its demolition and end up in hell together with the Patriarch and his Bishops."

I do not know if this simple priest had read the related writings of the Holy Fathers. What he said, though, expresses the timeless conscience of the Church as it relates to the faithful laity's position against bishops and presbyters, when the latter do not uphold the word of truth but instead strengthen heresy and deceit. There are a number of specific and related writings by the Holy Fathers, all of them contained now within our book "Bad Obedience and Holy Disobedience." We are reminded of the writings and position of that great warrior of Orthodoxy, St. Athanasios the Great, against the Arian heresies. He writes that in situations where the bishop or presbyter, the eyes of the Church, behave badly and cause the people to become scandalized, they must be expelled, even if this means that the faithful may end up without a shepherd.

It is preferred to gather in churches without heretical bishops and priests than to instead cast the faithful to hell, together with their heretical bishops and priests, where exactly the Jews of Christ's period ended up with their Chief Priests Annas and Caiaphas. "It is better to meet with them in a blessed home, than to be cast out with them, like Annas and Caiaphas, in the lake of fire." This is exactly what the Agiorite Hieromonk Gabriel did in our time, when, with his short and courageous Declaration and Confession, ceased to

commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew after his co-worship and common declaration with the previous Pope (a few year ago, during the latter's enthronement feast in Rome, on June 29, 2004, and the subsequent services within a newly constructed Orthodox church). Fr. Gabriel writes: "... so that it does not appear that with my silence I condone what goes on. I shall therefore not take part in the liturgical commemorations of the Ecumenical Patriarch's name and instead remain in my small cell, attending to my monastic duties, thus expressing my protest and until the holy community of the Holy Mountain take clear and appropriate position on the events happening these days."

The Drug of Ecumenism and Syncretism in Increasing Doses

There are many Orthodox people with a vigilant, alert and heightened awareness of the True Faith, whose voices, unfortunately, never reach the faithful at large. Orthodox Christians thus are often unaware of the wrongful stand by many of those holding "prestigious ecclesiastical positions" and who also claim to be baptized Orthodox Christians. For example, the clergy and theologians who (intentionally or otherwise), via their ecumenical actions, worship and sing praise to the beast of Revelation. These people unknowingly comprise the religious band of the antichrist and are helping level world religions and confessions, so that the multicultural and multi-religious model of the so called New Age be established all over the world. It is that same model that guided the world into the darkness and the corruption of the pre-Christian era; it is merely more advanced and further corrupted with age by the evil one. Thus, these same people have become instruments of the devil yet the mass media portrays them to all in quite an opposite manner, often characterizing their actions as saintly-like.

The evil one, through the deeds of Papism and Protestantism, continues to advance his work, intensifying the persecutory measures against Christ's holy name and de-Christianizing people, especially in the western and "civilized" world. God's truth is being altered and the faithful get separated away from the true knowledge of our God of the Gospel, with the lie of the new idolatry of multi-culturalism and syncretism (blending or fusion). The resultant slackening of the observance of the commandments guides the faithful, who now have this "untried mind," to be easily influenced by the "worldly honey of evil" to the perpetration of the most repugnant filth of Sodomy that is praised and practiced by even homosexual clergy! This is precisely just as the Holy Apostle Paul presents in the pre-Christian era, in the first chapter of his epistle to Romans, and it is to this era that the ecumenists seek to return us, the era of the so called New Age of syncretism and pan-religion.

No matter how many meetings occur between the Pope and the Orthodox Patriarchs, the only way of re-evange-

lizing the Christians is the return to Orthodoxy through repentance, in imitation of St. Peter's shedding of tears for denying Christ. These same tears have to be shed by the Pope for denying Holy Orthodoxy and the common Fathers and Saints of the first millennium. If he continues to selfishly insist upon the so called claim of primacy and his sole possession of the keys of the Kingdom through St. Peter (as he did in Constantinople during his secular meetings whereby his ambitions and continued quest for glory became rather evident), then the saying "shepherd my flock" does not apply to him; instead we need to loudly proclaim "get behind me Satan, for you do not attend to the things of God but of the people."

This is the climate of the so called New Age that is cultivated by the Papist and Protestant Ecumenism, which focuses on the long-term ambition of the Antichrist's one pan-religion. In this climate, our Lord and His Church are not proclaimed as the unique light and the only road to salvation; even worse, this evil concept (of salvations through other religions) now receives the concurrence of most of the Orthodox Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops. Should these unworthy shepherds of His flock be correct, we proclaim a lie each and every time we chant during our Holy Liturgy, after Holy Communion, that "We have seen the true light; we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshiping the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us."

Unfortunately the light emitted through the patriarchal Holy Liturgy during the Phanar liturgical co-celebration with the Pope, was not the true light, the true faith; it was instead the darkness and the deceit of heresies, of the filioque, of the primacy, of the unleavened bread, of the purgatory, of the created grace, of the distortion of all Sacraments. In the end it was representing the abyss of heresy and deceit established by the worldly church of the Vatican that succumbed to the temptations of the devil to obtain wealth and power, to become a worldly state and in essence to stop having any relationship with Christ and Christianity, according to Dostoyevsky.

And this darkness was transmitted all the way to various corners of the world, even where Orthodox missionaries struggle in His Name, for they are wondering how could they possibly convince people to become Orthodox and not Roman Catholics or how could they empower those that had become Catholic, who are very numerous in the missionary countries, to come to Orthodoxy? This is one of the many sorrowful results of displaying to the whole world pictures of co-worship and often co-celebration of the two "Christian Leaders," sharing embraces and co-blessing the faithful.

Many of us were astonishingly wondering how this can possibly be happening. Our astonishment is surely shared

with St. Paul, as we reminded ourselves of the 46th apostolic canon which clearly forbids us to recognize the Baptism and the Holy Communion of heretics. Again unfortunately, these of the heretics have been recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and several other Orthodox jurisdictions which silently allow even the sharing of the chalice. "Who is it that turns the light of communion into darkness? Or, transforms the salvific agreement with Christ to an agreement with Belial? Or who places the faithful among the unfaithful?" How can we possibly master the courage and audacity to address the newborn Christ and chant "Your birth Christ our God has brought forth the light of knowledge to the world" and, as the magi, worship him "as the sun of justice" and think that we have discovered our salvation in the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" that we declare in our Creed, i.e., in the Orthodox Church? How many Churches, how many faiths, how many baptisms exist; one, many, several? If His Truth of salvation is not found within the one and only Orthodox Baptism, can we then surmise that St. Paul erred when he proclaimed on our behalf "One Lord, one faith and one baptism?"

These questions, however, are presently not causing as many problems as the true magnitude of the heresy within the current situation has not been comprehended, at least not yet. People are unable to differentiate between correct and false, between truth and deceit. The drug of ecumenism, this new religion of the antichrist, the heresy of all heresies, this true pan-heresy (according to the St. Justin Popovitch), has been administered to the faithful in small doses over many years; it has been disguised in Orthodox-like manner through the deception of movements such as Unia, with falsely interpreted passages of the Holy Gospel and of the Church Fathers, and has progressively drugged the consciences of most people, even of a great number of the clergy as well as many Orthodox theologians. It has created an imaginary false state of peace and union, through the so called dialogue of love, where the faithful rest blissfully, unsuspectingly consuming through the media the dangerous drug of ecumenical heroin. The doses continuously become stronger. We have progressed from simple collaboration on social topics and the clear declarations of Orthodox representatives at the ecumenical conferences (that only the Orthodox Church is the true Church) to the current state of spiritual demise. We have been progressively observing the complete destruction of the holy canons, with common prayers in the eyes of the angelic hosts and the faithful. And now, we have reached the horrible travesty towards the Sacrament of Holy Communion, this mystery of total true union, during which we observe with great sorrow the liturgical embraces of the heretics, the supplications of our deacons on their behalf, and the chanting of the "Long Life" hymn for the Pope and his kind.

The Steps of Patriarch Athenagoras Are Not the Steps of the Apostles and of the Holy Fathers

Can one imagine St. Athanasios the Great having Arius sitting across from his throne, praying together and embracing each other during the “let us love one another” and the chanters chanting to Arius the “long life” hymn so that he may continue his heretical and destructive work? How does the icon that depicts St. Nicholas smacking and slapping Arius relate with the icon of the Patriarch embracing the pan-heretic Pope and believing his presence to be a blessing? Who is correct, St. Kosmas Aitolos cursing the Pope or the Patriarch praising and treating him like a brother bishop? Or, are the desert monks of Palestine with their leader, St. Savvas, correct for keeping the Church unblemished from the heresy of “Single Will” or the wretched and poor monk from the Holy Mountain who composed hymns and troparia to honor the visit of the heretic Pope at Phanar?

Do these Hagiorites have anything in common with the saintly Holy Mountain monks who were martyred because they opposed the papist Patriarch John Vekkos?

It is certain that St. Euphemia, whose incorrupt body lays within the patriarchal cathedral of St. George (and who “praised the Orthodox and tore down the false believers—the Monophysites”), this great Orthodox saint surely finds no joy but greatly sorrows with all of these events, as she is slowly withdrawing her saintly grace. The same is true with St. Gregory the theologian and St. John Chrysostom, whose relics were “venerated” by both the Patriarch and the Pope; they did not rejoice but sorrowed immensely.

The apostolic succession is not only dependant on historical succession to the thrones, but it is also succession on process and teaching, and as the saying goes, “be a process participant as we are a throne successor.” Succession ceases when the continuation of the truth of the Orthodox Faith breaks down. The only truth in the addresses and speeches of the Patriarch is that he follows in the steps of his predecessors Athenagoras and Demetrios. The history of the Church, however, does not start with Athenagoras; our Holy Orthodox Church has a history of over two thousand years of struggles against heresies and other religions; She also has a history of over 1,200 year of Patriarchs and confessors, archpriests, priests, monks, and lay people, all of them against Papism, from St. Photios the Great to Her present confessors. Of course, we the Orthodox faithful follow those that are acknowledged by the time-tested conscience of the Church, all those great saints and confessors, our Holy Orthodox Fathers; and we refuse to follow the steps of all those that are in heresy, including the Latin-leaning recent Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops. The steps of Athenagoras and Demetrios are unequivocally not the steps of the Apostles and the Fathers.

The Fence of Orthodoxy Collapses; Bishops Are not Communed or Commemorated

What is presented within this article is done so with full awareness of the current truly historical events as they are being made available in front of our eyes. We have become casual but sorrowful observers of the repeated negative and damaging actions and demonstrations against Orthodoxy. We are thus presenting this material in full consciousness of the responsibilities and consequences of our stand and our actions. We prefer to be persecuted and despised rather than to remain silent and less vocal than a fish, in front of the obvious assault upon the Orthodox Faith; we prefer association and friendship with our saints instead of cultivating a relationship and soliciting the sympathy of the Latins and the filo-Papists. We await and pray that the Orthodox camp becomes empowered with truly Orthodox bishops as well as those priests and monks that have become timid and wavered on issues that relate to our Faith. The truth though does not depend on numbers and money. The presence of great numbers in one camp or another has often strengthened the lie and presence of deceit.

We point out that the widely dispersed pictures on the Patriarchal meeting with the Pope, the many liturgical embraces and repeated good wishes, all these media-promoted events also awakened the conscience of many faithful Orthodox Christians. These people have clearly ascertained that the integrity of the truth is in great danger and that the bishops commemorated during that Liturgy in Phanar, those supposed guarantors of the union of faith, do not uphold the word of His Divine Truth, and are thus not in communion with the Saints whose relics were a few steps away. These bishops are in essence, un-communed, since they have chosen to be in communion with the un-communed. The responsibility is immense for anyone who stays silent when the Faith is in grave danger.

St. Gregory Palamas was criticized by his fellow monks for “abandoning the hesychasm” of his Holy Mountain monastery, his life of constant prayer and watchfulness, and instead selected to go to Thessaloniki to take on the struggle against the papist Varlaam and his Orthodox sympathizers. He considers the abdication of presenting the dogmatic teaching of the Church and the checking of heresy and deceit as unacceptable and characterizes it as “un-pious piety;” as he correctly points out, the Holy Orthodox Fathers did much more for even significantly lesser evils. True piety is not to follow those that destroy the fences thus allowing the heretics to enter; true piety is instead found among God-fearing Holy Orthodox Fathers. If one should overlook and underestimate or degrade the teachings of even one of the Orthodox Fathers, that person weakens the protective fence at that exact point, through which a crowd of wicked heretics will soon find access.

One sorrows just considering the Patriarchal position, as he expressed it, that (in his view) the Holy Fathers who have struggled against the Pope are “victims of the devil and worthy of the forgiveness and mercy of God.” If, however, St. Photios the Great, St. Gregory Palamas, St. Markos Evgenikos, St. Kosmas Aitolos, St. Nikothimos the Agiorite and all other saints who struggled and fought against the papist heresies are members and victims of the devil, we ought to cross them out from the list of Orthodox saints, cancel their feast days and associated divine services, and instead of calling for their intercessions and their help, we should perform memorial and thrice holy services so that God may forgive them.

In any event, St. Gregory Palamas informs us that “it is true piety to not doubt the God-bearing Fathers. Moreover, the theologies of the word spoken by the saints provide the rules of true piety and measure, each sealing and defining the true extension of piety, without neglecting and allowing for any opening through which the wickedness of the heretics could find great access.” The beloved saint likens those who keep silent and do not struggle against the heresies as a third type of Godlessness, the first two types being comprised of the ranks of the unbelievers and of the heretics. This assessment is truly plausible as well as reasonable when one reflects on the dignified statement and conclusion that silence clearly implies consent.

**Ignoring the Sacred Canons:
“The Guilty does not Guilt Make”**

We shall not proceed any further. We have decided, in view of the approaching Christmas season, to postpone the struggles and wait. Related unfortunate events, however, continue to take place, piety is demolished, the understanding of divine incarnation is voided and its salvific message is being resisted and / or altered. Christmas without true Christ and without true faith means absolutely nothing; it simply becomes the secular feast of material well being and bodily comforts which we are accustomed to observe in the west. In a few days, the ecumenical scene will be repeated in Rome, during the visit of other Orthodox dignitaries to the Vatican. We would like to mention the shattering miracle of St. Spyridon, the patron saint of Corfu, who expelled the Pope and sent him far away from his Orthodox Cathedral (and consequently from the Orthodox Church). Saint Athanasios of Paros has provided significant commentary as it relates to that miracle.

In continuation and with the help of God and the intercessions of all saintly strugglers against the Pope, the many saints who confessed the True Faith and were martyred, we shall comment on the theological and ecclesiological basis of the events in Phanar. Our commentary will be “following the Holy Fathers” and not “the steps” of Athenagoras and his predecessor Meletios Metaxakis. We shall show that, apart

from the usual co-prayers, during co-liturgical services, the chalice is shared in “ecumenical” liturgies and this fact is simply hidden from the general populous. This is not being shown “officially” because the ecumenical heroin has not yet drugged all the Orthodox people’s conscience; there are those Orthodox “fanatics” who refuse to be drugged and thus react accordingly.

It is incomprehensible to pursue the union with the heretics and in turn tear ourselves apart from our Orthodox brothers; we embrace the former and we excommunicate and punish the latter. We, the Orthodox faithful, choose to remain united with the established Church of the Saints, with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, under the protection of Her roof and as Her children. We accept all of Her dogmas, all of Her sacred canons, all Oecumenical and local Synods and we resist and renounce the numerous heresies of our times, new as well as old, among them the many that are the stepchildren of the Papists and Protestants.

Whoever justifies these heresies and their “mother churches” as expressing divinely inspired teachings, whoever recognizes the mysteries and the grace of the so called “sister churches,” whoever belittles and ridicules the One True Holy Orthodox Church by including Her among these other heresies of the so called churches, that person contributes to the tear and division among the Orthodox faithful and is thus, subject under the specific punishments of the holy canons. These canons are neither obsolete nor void. They were valid in the past, they are presently valid and they shall always be valid in the ages to come.

The true new age, the new creation, started with the divine incarnation, with the birth of Christ, and continues through the Holy Apostles and the Holy Orthodox Fathers. The Patriarchs and Bishops are starting nothing new—it is actually with their type of “age distinction” or “time differentiation” that they (willingly or otherwise) divide His Church, thus skillfully evading the consequences of continuity and identity.

Whoever dares to use at will and for their own self interest selected canons of the Church against all those who fight on behalf and confess true Orthodoxy, let them realize that which is quite obvious, that through everything they say and do, they are obviously guilty of contravening a number of canons. And apart of the saying “the guilty does not guilt make,” they risk in all those cases for which they enforce unjust decisions the danger of harming themselves in this life or (most importantly) the life after death.

We commemorate typically some canons that have been completely shred apart by the transgressor Patriarch and Bishops of our time:

- A Bishop or Presbyter or Deacon who merely co-celebrates with the heretics will be excommunicated, but if he permitted them to co-officiate as clerics, he shall be defrocked.

• A Bishop or a Presbyter who accepts the baptism of the heretics will be defrocked, for what accord could there be between Christ and Belial? Or what can a believer share with an unbeliever?

• For the heretics should not be allowed to enter the house of God, if they persist in heresy.

• Nor should anyone seek the blessing of the heretics and schismatics for it is nonsense and not a blessing.

• Do not congregate with the heretics and schismatics.”

• Espouse the sacred canons, heeding their full commandment, and keep them unblemished, as trumpeted by the Holy Spirit through the famous Apostles, as well as the Holy Ecumenical Synods and those locally assembled to pronounce similar commandments, and those of our Holy Fathers, for each and everyone was pronounced by the Holy Spirit, setting the responsibilities. Those that they anathematize, we also anathematize, and those they defrock we also defrock, and those they excommunicate, we excommunicate as well, and those that they punish, we also punish.



Unfortunately, in our days, there are many people who upset the Church. Of these, those that are educated have understood the dogmas with their minds and not with the spirit of the Holy Fathers. At the same time, those who are unlettered have grabbed hold of dogma with their teeth; which is why they grind their teeth when they speak about ecclesiastical topics. In this way, greater harm is caused by those in the Church than by those who battle it from without.

The soft life makes people useless. Without toil and struggle, sanctification does not come.

Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



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A VISION FROM THE DESERT

Source: “*The Ancient Fathers of The Desert.*”

A virgin, devoted to God, told the following story to her spiritual Father, and he wrote it down exactly as he heard it from her mouth, so that others might learn of it and benefit spiritually:

My parents, who brought me into the world, were completely different in character and took opposite directions in life.

My father was a very kind man, gentle, humble, lenient, unimaginably compassionate, prudent, and sober. His health was frail. As long as I can remember, most of the time I saw him sick in bed, pale and weak. He suffered, however, with admirable patience. Never did anyone hear him complain about his distressing illness.

In the short intervals during which he was well, he watched over his lands. The greater part of his profits he divided among the poor. With the remainder, he looked after his small family, that is, himself, my mother, and me. In addition to his other virtues, my kind father had also attained that of silence. He rarely spoke (many thought him to be dumb); and this, because he prayed continually to God with his mind and with his heart.

My mother, on the contrary, was a typical woman of the world. She passionately loved a good time, diversions, many ornaments, and clothing. She led such an extravagant life, that we always had economic worries. She fought and quarreled continuously at home and away from home. And so talkative and nosey was the poor woman, that she knew well all of the news in our small city and even anything that took place outside of it. She was so egotistical that she took care of herself first and her family afterwards. She showed not the slightest love for her husband and, with her obvious disaffection, his torments were thus ever greater. Yet, despite all of her faults and the incontinent life which she led, she had her health and a strong body. I do not remember her ever to have been ill.

While I was still a young girl, my father died after an agonizing illness. And something happened at his death that, indeed, left a lasting impression on me: There was such unprecedented bad weather, winds, rain, thunder and lightning, that it was impossible to get out to bury him. So, we kept the body unburied in our house for three days. Finally, two men from among our relatives were compelled, with great difficulty, to take the body to the cemetery and bury it in any way possible, since we could no longer endure seeing the corpse in the house. Since he did not even have a funeral, my father was scorned even at his death. Indeed, some evil neighbors, seeing such great misfortunes, spoke against him: “Who knows what sins he committed, since God will not even allow him to be buried?”

My mother, less hindered after the death of my father, succumbed to moral decline and made our house a place of de-

bauchery. But she did not live long. She died suddenly, having in the meantime wasted all that remained of my father's estate. Her friends, however, gave her a magnificent funeral. And the weather was wonderful. This I especially noticed.

Having passed the age of childhood, and the uneasiness of young womanhood having begun to take control of me, I found myself all alone in the world and in great perplexity as to what direction I should take. My thoughts tormented me. "I must, without fail, make it on my own in life, since I no longer have any guardians," I said to myself. "But what way shall I choose? I have before me different examples: that of my mother and that of my father. He was good, but unhappy. Persecuted in life and in death." It was impossible for me to get his unburied body out of my mind. "If he was pleasing God, why did God torment him so?" My mother had not led a moral life. I well understood that. However, she had as many goods as anyone could desire, wealth, comfort, and many friends, and she left the world happy, one might say.

The more I thought about the matter and made comparisons in my young mind, the more I turned away from misfortune to follow my mother's life. God, in his benevolence, however, showed mercy and guided me to the straight path in the following, unusual manner.

One night I fell into bed, occupied once more with the same thoughts. I had a revealing vision. I felt the door of my room open, and a young man with a luminous face and of unimaginable majesty entered. He came close to me. As though searching the most hidden things of my heart, he cast a piercing glance at me. "What are you thinking about?" he asked me in an unusually austere, but melodious voice.

I was surprised and became frightened. I tried hard to speak. He intervened: "Your thoughts were immediately revealed to me."

The more austere this unknown interrogator became, the more I was paralyzed by fear. Since he had received no reply, he revealed on his own the thoughts which were so tormenting me. He told me in detail every thought which had passed through my mind, and which only I knew, so that I could neither deny the thoughts nor offer excuses for them. So, I fell at his feet, as though condemned, and asked him, sobbing, to forgive me. He seemed to feel sorry for me, because he immediately changed his mien.

"Follow me," he commanded.

He took me by the hand and, like lightning, transported me to a boundless plain, filled with light and beauty. I will not attempt to describe it, for the indescribable is not describable.

Happy beings were serenely enjoying this supernatural beauty. Among them, I recognized my father. And he saw me. He came to me and took me in his arms. I felt such assurance and happiness there. I did not want to be separated from him ever again. I clasped onto him and asked him never to let me go.

"Keep me near you forever, kind father."

"What you ask for cannot be at this time." His voice became more serious.

"If you follow my steps, you will prepare a place for yourself here. It depends on what you desire." He looked at me with tenderness and gathered up my hair to wipe away my tears. My escort nodded to me to follow him again. But I did not want to leave my father's arms. So, he came and pulled me by the hand.

"You also need to see your mother," he said.

I followed him, sorrowful that he had separated me from my happiness. Now we descended. We went deeper and deeper to an unclean, dark, and dreary place. I lost my breath from the stench and my fear. Monstrous figures were roaming all about.

Anyone reading the writings of the Holy Fathers cannot but regret not possessing the knowledge of Greek, so as fully to savor their beauty. In this work (Ed., translation) we have before us charming, yet profound, anecdotes and deep spiritual advice. The holy men become all but personally known to us.

Mother Alexandra

[Abbess of the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration, formerly Her Highness, Illeana, Princess of Romania]

Unfortunate souls were being tormented without mercy by an inextinguishable flame. In their midst, I saw my mother, buried up to her neck in what appeared to me like foul-smelling lava. Her cries came forth heart-rendingly, her groans were uninterrupted, and the fearful gnashing of

her teeth tore my heart apart. She must have known me, because she broke out in uncontrolled lamentation.

"Woe is me, wretch that I am. Look what such little pleasure earned me: despair and torment without end." Desperate words! I was nearly mortified by my grief. My unfortunate mother turned and looked at me.

"Have pity, my child, on the one who gave birth to you and raised you," she began to cry desperately. She stretched out her hand, so that I could take her out of that grief.

What could I do? My soul was torn by sadness. I stretched out my hand, thinking that I could help her, who brought me into the world. I felt such pain at approaching the lava, that I broke into loud cries. I stirred up the entire neighborhood. Shortly, my house was full of people. They found me in a bad condition. Many thought I had lost my senses. It was impossible to explain what had happened to me. I showed them the frightful wound that was left on my hand by the fire, so that they would understand that I was suffering because of it. I remained in bed a long time, gravely ill. When, by the grace of God, I became well, without delay I followed my father's path; and I hope that, in His mercy, my Lord will save me and make me worthy to share in his happiness.

WHY ORTHODOXY DOES NOT PREACH “THE RAPTURE”

By Anthony M. Coniaris.

As I was driving one day I encountered a bumper sticker admonishing me: “WARNING! In the event of Rapture, this car will be driverless.”

The strange belief in the Rapture teaches that some day (sooner rather than later), without warning, born-again Christians will begin to float up from the freeway, abandoned vehicles careening wildly. There will be airliners in the sky suddenly with no one at the controls! Presumably, God is removing these favored ones from earth to spare them the tribulation of the Anti-Christ which the rest of us will have to endure.

Unfortunately the Rapture has been promoted widely by the Left Behind series of books that have sold over 70 million copies.

The Rapture represents a radical misinterpretation of Scripture. I remember watching “Sixty Minutes” and was appalled to hear the announcer say that “the Rapture is an unmistakably Christian doctrine.” It is not! It is a serious distortion of Scripture. It is astonishing that a belief so contrary to Scripture and the tradition of the Church could be propagated by so-called “Christians.”

According to the Bible and according to the belief not only of Orthodox Christians but also of the Roman Catholic and most Protestant “mainline churches,” the true Rapture will not be secret; it will be the great and very visible Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the world. That is the one and only “Rapture.” It will not be a separate, secret event but one that every eye shall see (1 Thess 4:16-17).

The word rapture is not found in Scripture but harkens to 1 Thess. 4:17 where St. Paul says that when the Lord comes again *we who are alive... shall be caught up... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. This being caught up... in the clouds—*arpagizometha* in Greek, is translated by some as “raptured.”* The word itself is not found in Orthodox theology.

The notion of a rapture in which Christ comes unseen to take believers away secretly, and only later comes back again for everyone else publicly—this whole teaching is quite novel. It was almost unheard of until John Nelson Darby formulated it in the 1800s as part of a new approach to the Bible, sometimes called “dispensationalism.”

The purpose of the “Rapture” is to “protect the elect” from the tribulations of the end times. Yet Jesus said nothing about sparing anyone from tribulation. In fact, He said, *In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.* Nowhere did Jesus ever say that He would return secretly to rapture the elect. Rather, He promised to be with His elect in all tribulations. *Lo, I am with you always.*

I will never leave you or forsake you. He even had something good to say about being persecuted: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 5:10).

Those who espouse the Rapture claim that Matthew 24:40-41 refers clearly to the rapture of the just, *Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.* The entire passage, however, refers to Christ’s second coming where He will judge the living and the dead and separate the just from the unjust.

Darby taught as dogma that when the Scriptures reveal that the Lord will reign on earth *for a thousand years* (Rev 20:4), this figure is to be taken literally, rather than as a symbol for eternity as we believe. The Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431 condemned as heresy this teaching which is called chiliasm (millenianism or 1000 years). In fact, the Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787 A.D.) in which the essential truths of the Christian faith were defined never mention a rapture. Yet evangelical Christians and Pentecostals keep using obscure passages of the book of Revelation which purport to give a detailed timetable of what will happen at the end of the world, despite the fact that Jesus Himself warned that no man knows *either the day or the hour when the Son of Man shall return.*

A major problem with the Rapture is that it ends up teaching not two but three comings of Jesus—first His birth in Bethlehem; second, His secret coming to snatch away (rapture) the “born-again;” and third, His coming at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead and to reign in glory. Yet only two not three comings of Christ are mentioned in the Bible. We have the clearest definition of this in the Nicene Creed when we confess that *...the Lord Jesus Christ... will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. His Kingdom will have no end... I expect the resurrection of the dead. And the life of the ages to come.* There is no mention of a “Rapture.”

As already stated, most Christians, Orthodox, Roman Catholics and Protestants do not believe in the Rapture. In fact, one Protestant pastor, John L. Gray, summarized magnificently what we Orthodox and most other Christians believe about the Rapture when he wrote these words:

“Though many believe and teach this ‘Pre-Tribulation Rapture’ theory, they erroneously do so, because neither Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, nor any of the other writers of the Bible taught this. Nor did the early church fathers, nor any others for many hundreds of years... Did you know that NONE of this was ever taught prior to 1812, and that all forms of Pre-Tribulation Rapture teaching were developed since that date? ... If I were to preach something, or believe something, supposedly from the Bible, but cannot find that ANYONE ELSE before 1812 ever believed it or

taught it, I would seriously question that it is based on the Bible.”

Thus the Rapture is foreign to the Bible and to the living tradition of the Church. It is what we call a heresy, a false teaching. False teachings, such as this, happen when people—like John Darby—believe that they have the right to interpret the Scriptures individually apart from the Living Body of Christ—the Church—where the Spirit of Truth abides and leads us to all truth.

I can think of no better words to conclude than those of Jesus when He speaks of the one and only “Rapture,” the Second Coming: *Be on guard. Be alert! You do not know when that time will come... keep watch... if he comes suddenly, do not let Him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch!* (Mk 13:32-37).



WITH GOD ALL THINGS ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

By St. Valentine Sventitsky (priest and new martyr, +1931), from his homilies on the Writings of St. John Climacus.

The Lord said to His disciples: *Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto me, and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:13-14).

And, *When the disciples were afrightened by the difficulty of the path of salvation and asked the Lord: “Who then can be saved?” Christ looked at them and said: “With men it is impossible but not with God, for with God all things are possible”* (Mk 10:27).

I am afraid that the reading of *The Ladder* of St. John will arouse this fear, this confusion. “Who can ascend the Ladder?” my spiritual children will ask. With men it is impossible; but not with God, for with God all things are possible.

Only by trusting in these words is it possible to enter upon the path of spiritual life. The Lord expects from us an effort according to our human strength, in measure of our human understanding; the rest is given to us by Divine grace, by God’s help.

For this reason, in approaching *The Ladder* of St. John, let us not be so presumptuous as to set ourselves the task of scaling its heights. The task of the ascetic is to labor his whole life for the Lord. Whatever fruits are produced, these are the result of God’s grace.

The first step of *The Ladder* demands from us a proper attitude towards “the world.” One must place it in opposition to the self, to draw a certain line of separation, to renounce it. The first word of St. John is “On Renunciation of the World,” while the next, the second step is “On Dispassion.”

“In the very beginning of our renunciation, it is certainly with labor and grief that we practice the virtues. But when we have made progress in them, we no longer feel sorrow, or we feel little sorrow. But as soon as our mortal mind is consumed and mastered by our zeal, we practice them with all joy and eagerness, with love and with divine fire.”

“We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God,” says the Apostle Paul. Certain trials await also those who enter the path of spiritual life. The control of worldly life upon us is too powerful for us to be able to sever the internal chains which bind us to the world, without pain, without regret, without sorrow. But the great experience of the ascetics instills in us a joyous courage. This experience speaks to us of what lies ahead, of what awaits us when we do not stop midway, when, having “made progress” and conquered “earthly wisdom,” we rise somewhat above worldly life. Then this spiritual struggle of renunciation will fill us with joy. Divine fire and fervor will take hold of us...

“Those who have really determined to serve Christ, with the help of spiritual fathers and their own self-knowledge, will strive before all else to choose a place, and a way of life, and a habitation, and exercises suitable for them. For community life is not for all, on account of covetousness (*Ed., inordinate desire of wealth or possessions*), as places of solitude are not for all, on account of anger. But each will consider what is most suited to his needs.”

This injunction of St John pertains not only to those who strive spiritually in monasticism, but pertains equally to us, people in the world. Those who traverse the path of spiritual life in the world, who renounce it inwardly, who do not leave for monasteries, deserts and reclusion, although under conditions of a worldly life, nevertheless must inevitably make even an outward change in their life. A specific external discipline of life is needed, which must be established by “self-knowledge,” but with the knowledge, counsel, and approval of a spiritual father.

“The man who really loves the Lord, who has made a real effort to find the future Kingdom, who is really pained by his sins, who is really mindful of eternal torment and judgment, who really lives in fear of his own departure, will not love.. anything at all on earth.”

And how could he love it? That heavenly Jerusalem, that eternal Kingdom—if it is revealed to the inner eyes—will immediately illumine the life in the world with a special radiance. That man will see how trifling and insubstantial are the temptations of the world; how vain the concerns. The temporal, the fleeting will become for him like a dream; how

terrible then will appear to him sins against the Lord! What great justice will he then be hold in the eternal torments awaiting those souls who have come to love the temporal and have renounced Christ! For the eternal, immortal human soul, which accumulates the temporal and perishable, itself plunges into the power of eternal death.

“The man who has come to hate the world has escaped sorrow. But he who has an attachment to anything visible is not yet delivered from grief. For how is it possible not to be sad at the loss of something we love?”

At first it appears that to renounce the world means to choose the way that knows no joy. Earthly happiness seems to him to be the only joy in life. But that is self-deceit. It is the devil’s delusion. What passes for worldly joy devastates the soul; it is the source of despondency, of disappointment and sadness.

“Let us pay close attention to ourselves so that we are not deceived into thinking that we are following the strait and narrow way, when in actual fact we are keeping to the wide and broad way. The following will show you what the narrow way means: mortification of the stomach, all-night standing, water in moderation, short rations of bread, the purifying draught of dishonor, sneers, derision, insults, the cutting off of one’s own will, patience in annoyances, murmuring endurance of scorn, disregard of insults, and the habit, when wronged, of bearing it sturdily; when slandered, of not being indignant; when humiliated, not to be angry; when condemned, to be humble. Blessed are they who follow the way we have just described, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Here St. John warns us against delusion. It may seem to a man that he has chosen for himself the narrow path, that he is not walking along the broad, worldly highway, down which walk the perishing multitudes. By distracting the inner concentration, the power of darkness leads him away from the true, narrow path of salvation.

“Pay heed to yourself” says St. John. “Pay heed, lest you succumb to this delusion. And here are the signs by which you might verify on which path it is you are walking: the narrow unto salvation, or wandering, rather, along the broad and spacious path to perdition. For, the outward signs: if you subdue your belly with fasting, if you are not lazy in rising for the nocturnal prayer, if you drink less water and do not think of clothing, if you are content to eat only bread—you are walking along the narrow path. While here are the inward signs: if you have cut off your own will, and patiently and cheerfully carry out obediences; if you bear dishonor, mockery, and offenses without murmuring; if you are not angered by slander and humble yourself when you are criticized—then you are going along the narrow path. It is difficult, truly this path is difficult But blessed are those who follow it, *for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven!*”

“Some people living carelessly in the world have asked me: ‘We have wives and are beset with social cares, and how can we lead the solitary life?’ I replied to them: ‘Do all the good you can; do not speak evil of anyone; do not steal from anyone; do not hate anyone; do not be absent from the divine services; be compassionate to the needy; do not offend anyone; do not wreck another man’s domestic happiness, and be content with what your own wives can give you. If you behave in this way, you will not be far from the Kingdom of Heaven.’ ”

This reply of St. John of *The Ladder* has a special significance in our days.

A desert-dweller of our time told me that a number of desert-dwellers had discussed the question of whether or not they should found a monastery for themselves. Afterwards, as he was ascending a mountain, he was granted a vision. An angel appeared to him and said, “This is not the time to build monasteries.”

This was told to me a few months before the war with the Germans.

“Not the time to build monasteries!” Truly this is so! It is time, however, to struggle in monastic asceticism! Today the outward form of monastic life is accessible to very few. And the spiritual life of Christians must now be conducted under the conditions of secular life. They are faced with the task of founding “invisible spiritual” monasteries with their lives primarily through the podvig (*Ed., ascetic struggle*) of prayer. Few today are able to live behind the stone walls of a monastery which set apart that vain world from this the Christian world which is of God But does this mean that there are no walls which can be built between that world and this?

The inner renunciation of the world—here is the foundation of this monastery within your homes. By prayer, by fighting with the passions, by a pure life, by cutting off one’s evil will, by ascetic struggle and labor for Christ—whole heartedly trusting in the help of God’s grace—raise up the walls of this monastery which is invisible to human eyes. Do not judge, do not lie, love your neighbor, quench all enmity in your hearts—and your inner life will become for you a monastery. Build these invisible spiritual monasteries. Enter therein, leaving behind the vanity of this world. The time for this has come, the favorable season of the Lord!

Amen!



No one can approach God without withdrawing from the world. By withdrawal I do not mean change of physical dwelling place, but withdrawal from worldly affairs. The virtue of withdrawal from the world consists in not occupying your mind with the world.

St. Isaac of Syria

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

From the spiritual journal of a monk of Optina Monastery in 19th century Russia.

We have been given an Apostolic command: *Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.* Christian love does not require that we entirely overlook the weaknesses of our brother; this would demand closing our eyes. But it does require that without good reason we should not pay much attention to the sins and weaknesses of our neighbor; that having such a strong inclination to notice the mistakes of our brother, we should rather have regard to his good qualities.

We should remember that from the very last, from the most wretched—to all appearances—of creatures, God can make for himself a vessel unto his glory. We must often bring to mind our own shortcomings. Finally, we should remember that true love covers everything, endures everything, even the worst offense. Love knows that disdain towards others expresses itself in harshness and pride which are opposed to the Spirit of God.

The grace of God does not despise what often appears to be wretched in the eyes of men. It is long-suffering because according to His unfathomable designs, God often brings good out of evil. Neither prideful aversion, nor excessive severity and impatience (shown to a man who has made some mistakes), are consistent with the activities of God's grace. No kind of human depravity, if it can thus be expressed, is surprising for grace, because everywhere outside of God it sees only utter wretchedness and sin.

Should we cut off or lessen our good disposition towards a man simply because he has become subject to certain weaknesses? We complain that we are forced to endure offenses from others, but do we ourselves not offend others? Seeing another's deficiencies we show our dissatisfaction; but are we ourselves really so perfect in everything? Would we not be terrified of all those whom we have offended at some time should come to us and demand satisfaction for these offenses?

Although it might seem that we are honest and just enough in everything, still God (Who knows our least and most hidden deeds) cannot but accuse our guilt before Him and perhaps before those same people whom we consider guilty before ourselves. And so, let us be careful lest God, on the day of the Universal Judgement, should ask of us why we were not merciful to our brethren when He has poured out upon us His mercy so abundantly.

The path of condescension to the weaknesses of one's neighbor has been indicated by our Lord Jesus Christ when He said: *Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart.* He instructs

us by His own example: He came down from heaven to earth, took up the weak and fragile body of man, and died on the Cross in order to accuse our pride. He Who is everything for us humbled Himself to the most shameful and cruel death; but we, who have no significance at all, wish to be everything; or at least we wish that people would ascribe to us what we do not have.

The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that He is meek and humble; it is enough for us to imitate His example. And who will refuse to follow Him? Could a sinner do this who by his ingratitude to the Lord, has already many times deserved to be struck by the lightning of Divine righteousness?

Humility is the fount of true meekness. Conversely, pride is always arrogant, impatient, irritated. A man who is inwardly conscious of his own weaknesses, willingly endures offenses from others. A man who thinks he has nothing good in himself is not offended if he must bear insults from others.

True Evangelical meekness is not simply the outcome of some natural meek qualities of the soul; it is the fruit of self-denial. The Lord Jesus Christ was meek and humble of heart. This means that humility is not determined only by a rational realization of one's sinfulness and unworthiness before God. Humility is a virtue and a feeling of the heart. It is the kind of self-debasement in which the will participates. This does not shame a man, but even pleases him because he sees in it a means to glorify God.

Humility is the heartfelt awareness of one's utter poverty before God. It consists in casting aside any reliance upon one's own natural strengths. It sees God as the only Physician able to heal the wounds of the soul. But to see the true state of one's soul and to fail into despair—this is not what it means to be humble. Despair is the fruit of pride. It is worse than pride itself.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth!



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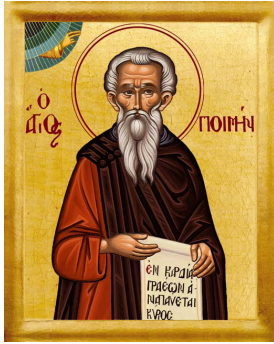
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HUMILITY IN OBEDIENCE

From An Athonite Gerontikon

Wondrous are the works of obedience and humility that lead a person to divine and glorious heights of honor and grace.

There was a monk of St. Anne's (on Holy Mountain), a vessel of grace, who was the first chanter at the Patriarchate. This monk went to the spiritual father of St. Anne's to make his confession and to ask his advice.

"What kind of work did you do?" Asked the spiritual father.

"I was the leading chanter at the Patriarchate, holy Father."

"If you want to be saved," the confessor said, "you will not tell anyone that you are a chanter, because here on the Holy Mountain there are many celebrations and you will be asked to go and chant, and so you will have no real chance to be a monk. I will put you under the obedience of a good father. You will only read well; you will never sing well. You will be out of tune and you will pretend that you are unable to read music."

"Let it be blessed, holy Father," said the novice who was then sent to a pious elder.

A considerable time went by before the spiritual confessor asked the elder, "How is everything going with the novice?"

"Good," he replied. "He is obedient. The only thing is that he cannot sing. But he does read very well."

The years went by. The spiritual father, who was clairvoyant, foresaw that the chanter who was in hiding was near his end. One St. Anne's feast day the central church was celebrating. The spiritual father had been appointed *typikaris* of the skete (monk responsible for keeping the order in the services). He ordered the chanter in hiding to prepare himself to sing the Cherubic Hymn for the Divine Liturgy.

The monk was sad, for he did not want to be revealed. It was such a grace for him not to be known, "to exist in secrecy." He pretended that he had forgotten the music with the passing of time. Even so, he obeyed his spiritual father and agreed to it.

When it was time for the Cherubic Hymn, the *typikaris* pulled the monk to where the chanters were. The others were sad, thinking that the *typikaris* had made a mistake. After they had heard the singing however, and the evident musical knowledge of this unknown nobleman and chanter, they said to each other, "And he, the blessed one,

was listening to us all this time and he said nothing!"

After the Liturgy ended, the father confessor took the monk with him to his hut. Two days later he fell ill and reposed in the Lord. No one would have known the victorious struggle of humility had the spiritual father not revealed it.



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 MYSTERY OF OUR LORD'S LOVING-KINDNESS

By St John of Kronstadt—A Sermon on the Nativity of Christ.

Great is the mystery of piety: God is manifested in the flesh.

(I Tim 3:16)

It is on this day that, throughout the entire inhabited world, the Holy Orthodox Church brings to our remembrance and observes that most majestic and sublime of mysteries: the Incarnation of God the-Word from a most pure virgin through an outpouring of, and an overshadowing by, God's Holy Spirit.

Wondrous, inexpressible, and awesome is this mystery, both for the exalted and all-contemplating celestial minds of those who dwell in the heavens: the ranks of the angels, and for the minds of men, enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Imagine: The unoriginate God from Whom everything received the commencement of its existence: the Angels, the human race, and the entire world, both visible and invisible, takes a beginning in His humanity. He, Whom the heavens cannot contain, is contained in a virginal womb. God becomes an infant and is borne upon the arms of a Mother. He, Who nourishes every breath, is nourished by His creation.

The science of astronomy has learned and affirms that, in the order of creation, our earth is but a barely-no-

ticeable point; that millions of planets around our own fill up the vastness of space. And, lo! This single point in the universe, this barely noticeable globe of God's creation, being inhabited by men, our earth has now been accounted worthy of the inexpressible honor of bearing upon itself God-in-the-Flesh.

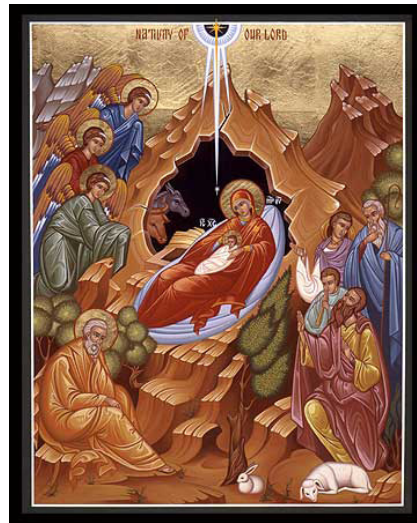
He is the God-Man Who did deign to dwell amongst men, to teach erring mankind the knowledge of God, to work innumerable miracles of good, to preach repentance and complete forgiveness of sins; to suffer and to

die as a holy Sacrifice for the sins of the world, to be resurrected through the power of Divinity from amongst the dead, having vanquished death, which is natural to all men, and to make a gift of resurrection to the entire human race.

Not a single one of the visible worlds, save the earth, has

been deemed worthy of this greatest of all honors: for it was only upon the earth that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of the heavenly Father, had a virgin mother, and He alone was her Son by way of humanity. Why was the earth given such preference? Why was it only on earth that God appeared in the flesh? This is a great Divine mystery, a mystery of immeasurable loving-kindness and of God's condescension to perishing mankind.

Thus, God did appear in the flesh: rejoice and be exceedingly glad, O earth; rejoice and celebrate, ye earth-born. The Creator Himself did come



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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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to you, in order to create you anew; to restore you, who were corrupted by transgressions. To you did He come: The almighty Physician Himself, powerful to treat all the inveterate afflictions of sin, in order that He might heal all the passions of the soul and all the infirmities of the body, all of which He truly did do, as we know from the Gospel and from the history of the Church.

Thus, greet Him joyfully, with pure minds and hearts, with bodies chaste and restrained by fasting and abstinence, which the Holy Church has thoughtfully instituted prior to this great feast in order to prepare us worthily to meet the Heavenly King, Who comes to us in order to abide in us.

He came to us with the mercy and good will of His heavenly Father, and from us He demands mercy toward our neighbors; He is the righteous King, and He demands of us all righteousness; for He, too, as a man, fulfilled all righteousness (Mt 3:15), showing us an example and providing us with grace and the strength to carry it out. He Himself did suffer for us, having borne the cross; and He taught us to deny ourselves, or our sins and our passions, and to follow after Him, doing what is holy out of reverence for God (2 Cor 7:1).

He came to heal our souls, ailing from sin, and commanded all to repent; let us ever, then, be earnestly contrite, correcting ourselves and striving toward holiness and perfection. The holy Angels, at the Nativity of the God-man, did declare peace unto the world; and unto men—the good will of the Heavenly Father. Let us then, ourselves, have within us a peaceful conscience, and let us be at peace with everyone, if possible. Be at peace and be holy with all, sayeth the apostle, for without this shall none see the Lord. Amen.

FROM THE EDITOR...

We humbly apologize for creating concern among some of our readers who took the time to write to us and remind us the difference between "rapture" and "rupture." It appears that our spell checker is an Orthodox one, as it refuses to acknowledge "rapture" and reverts to "rupture." Obviously, our assisting editors' lack of involvement in this last issue was rather impacting. Please forgive us...

As far as the November presidential election results, some of you wrote to us in dismay that Mr. Obama won so easily, expressing your concern about the state of our Nation's soul and displeasure for the election results. We continue to insist that our humble publication can not and will not engage in political matters. We are reminded by His Divine Word: *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.* (Rom. 13:1)

Mr. Obama is our President and he is in need of our prayers; especially in matters such as abortion, on which we know he is being misguided by those around him. Let us hope that our Lord will soften his heart and guide him to be a protector of His Innocents instead of allowing him to become a 21st century Herod.

We wish to convey a piece of history from the Greek periodical "Athonite Witness," found in one of their 1990 issues: "When the Emperor Fokas the Tyrant had taken over the reigns of Byzantium (602 AD), he inflicted upon his people several atrocities and massacres with the aid of the evil "Vonoso the Tormentor." During that same time, there was a certain pious monk in Constantinople, a holy man, who having much boldness towards God and as if he was being afflicted by Him, kept asking with great simplicity, "Lord, why did You give us such a king?" And then, after asking this for quite a few days, a voice from God came to him, which said: *Because I could find none worse...*"

A MIRACLE BY ST. NICHOLAS IN KIEV IN THE 1920S

Source: "Pravoslavnaya Russia" ("Orthodox Russia"), Issue no. 13, 1997, translated from the original Russian text by G. Sprukst.



It was nearly half a century ago that I first heard of this miracle wrought by St. Nicholas. Never had I chanced to read anything about it in the writings of the Church. I would not want this case of the saintly bishop's help to depart to my grave with me.

During the mid-1940s (I can not recall the exact date), I had to spend the night in the city of Munich in West Germany. The

city was in ruins after the war, and I would be forced to spend the night outside. Fortunately, there chanced to be a "Good Samaritan" church-house in the city, and I was provided with its address.

There were two of us in the room, myself, and a man unknown to me, some 40-45 years of age. We introduced ourselves, each to the other. I do not remember either his name or his surname—and they probably would not have been "real," anyway. We had to sleep on wooden benches and chairs. So, in order to pass the night more quickly, we fell to talking. I can't remember why, but my roommate, for some reason or other, asked me whether I was acquainted with the miracle of St. Nicholas that took place in Kiev in the 1920s. I did not know of it, and he related the following tale to me:

"In Kiev, at the northern section of the city, there dwelt an elderly widow with her son and daughter. The old woman dearly loved St. Nicholas and, in all cases of difficulty, would go to his church to pray before the image of the saintly bishop, always receiving consolation and the easing of her misfortune. Her son, seemingly a student, became an officer.

The governments of the city changed frequently: Whites, Reds, a Hetman, a Directory, Poles, Germans, etc. All former officers were arrested on the spot, and the old woman's son was among them. His sister rushed about from one "department" of the time to another. She ran her legs off, but achieved nothing. But the old woman ran off to St. Nicholas. Long did she pray before his icon; then she returned home, consoled—she was certain that the saintly bishop will help. She sat down to have a cup of tea, while her daughter's hands simply fell to her sides. "O, woe! Her brother had vanished!"

The son returned home at dawn of the following day, famished, beaten, dirty and weary. According to him, a large group of officers under a strong convoy of guards was

being led off to Pechersk. This is the hilly section of town, opposite from Podol, by the Kiev-Caves Lavra. There was a large hippodrome there, where horse races were held. Beyond it, there was a grove, and rampart-trenches which had been dug, as a defense against the Swedes. It was in that grove, by the rampart-trenches, that the shootings took place.

They had come up to the hippodrome when, suddenly, some little old man or other stepped out from around a corner. He approached the convoy commandant and asked: 'Where are you taking them?'

The commandant replied, rudely: 'To Dukhonin's H.Q.!' (which meant, in the jargon of the time, 'to be shot'). 'Go away, old man!'

The old man left, but, in doing so, he took the old woman's son by the hand and said: 'Let him go. I know him.'

Neither the commandant nor the escort-guards replied with even so much as a single word, nor did they hinder him. The little old man led the young fellow out around the corner saying, 'Go on home to your mother,' and vanished away somewhere.

The old woman was overjoyed and immediately took off to thank St. Nicholas. The son wanted to do nothing more than to lie down and have a good, long sleep, but his mother took him along with her to the church. He had probably been there on previous occasions, but had been little interested in anything.

The little old woman led him up to a huge image of the saintly bishop. The son turned ashen-pale and began to tremble. He could only whisper: 'Mother, dear, but that's the very same elder who led me to freedom...'

Wondrous is God in His Saints.



Who is the man who has never, by experience and contemplation, traversed the entire series of the titles and powers of Christ—both the lofty ones, which were originally His, and those more lowly ones that He assumed for our sake, namely: *God, the Son, the Image, the Word, the Wisdom, the Truth, the Light, the Life, the Power, the Vapor, the Emanation, the Effulgence, the Maker, the King, the Head, the Law, the Way, the Door, the Foundation, the Rock, the Pearl, the Peace, the Righteousness, the Sanctification, the Redemption, the Man, the Servant, the Shepherd, the Lamb, the High Priest, the Victim, the Firstborn before creation, the Firstborn from the dead, the Resurrection?* Who is the man, who harkens—but pays no heed—to these names, so pregnant with reality, and has never yet held communion with—nor been made a partaker of—the *Word*, in any of the real relations signified by each one of these names that He bears?

St. Gregory the Theologian

AN ABORTION SURVIVOR SPEAKS OUT

Testimony of abortion survivor Gianna Jessen before the Constitution Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, on April 22, 1996.

From The Editor: On April 6, 1977, 17-year old Tina entered the abortion clinic. After signing a few papers, she received a saline injection and was told to lie down in a large barrack-like room lined with beds. During the day, about 30 pregnant teenage girls went into labor-and delivered dead babies.

Meanwhile, Tina was still waiting for the contractions to start. The doctor called it a day, leaving a solitary nurse on duty. Close to midnight, Tina's water broke. She awoke the sleeping nurse and told her what had happened. "Okay," the nurse responded. "Go back and lie down." But something uncomfortable was happening. Tina felt the need to push, to expel this unknown substance. Tissue, the professionals called it. Fetal tissue.

By the time she got back to bed, the muscles in her abdomen were contracting incessantly. She had to push—and the nurse still had not responded to her second call. Reaching down, she felt the wet solid curve of a skull. It's a head! She thought. How can tissue have a head?

At that instant, a thin, penetrating wail pierced the quiet room, where earlier a roomful of women had delivered limp, lifeless fetuses. A baby girl was making a triumphant, indignant way into the world...



† † †
 My name is Gianna Jessen. I am 19 years of age. I am originally from California, but now reside in Franklin, Tennessee. I am adopted. I have cerebral palsy. My biological mother was 17 years old and seven and one-half months pregnant when she made the decision to have a saline abortion. I am the person she aborted. I lived instead of died.

Fortunately for me the abortionist was not in the clinic when I arrived alive, instead of dead, at 6:00 a.m. on the morning of April 6, 1977. I was early, my death was not expected to be seen until about 9 a.m., when he would probably be arriving for his office hours. I am sure I would not be here today if the abortionist would have been in the clinic as his job is to take life, not sustain it. Some have said I am a "botched abortion," a result of a job not well done.

There were many witnesses to my entry into this world. My biological mother and other young girls in the clinic, who also awaited the death of their babies, were the first to greet me. I am told this was a hysterical moment. Next was a staff nurse who apparently called emergency medical services and

had me transferred to a hospital. I remained in the hospital for almost three months. There was not much hope for me in the beginning. I weighed only two pounds. Today, babies smaller than I have survived.

A doctor once said I had a great will to live and that I fought for my life. I eventually was able to leave the hospital and be placed in foster care. I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a result of the abortion.

My foster mother was told that it was doubtful that I would ever crawl or walk. I could not sit up independently. Through the prayers and dedication of my foster mother, and later many other people, I eventually learned to sit up, crawl, then stand. I walked with leg braces and a walker shortly before I turned age four. I was legally adopted by my foster mother's daughter, Diana De Paul, a few months after I began to walk. The Department of Social Services would not release me any earlier for adoption.

I have continued in physical therapy for my disability, and after a total of four surgeries, I can now walk without assistance. It is not always easy. Sometimes I fall, but I have learned how to fall gracefully after falling for 19 years. I am happy to be alive. I almost died. Every day I thank God for life. I do not consider myself a by-product of conception, a clump of tissue, or any other of the titles given to a child in the womb. I do not consider any person conceived to be any of those things.

I have met other survivors of abortion. They are all thankful for life. Only a few months ago I met another saline abortion survivor. Her name is Sarah. She is two years old. Sarah also has cerebral palsy, but her diagnosis is not good. She is blind and has severe seizures. The abortionist, besides injecting the mother with saline, also injects the baby victims. Sarah was injected in the head. I saw the place on her head where this was done. When I speak, I speak not only for myself, but for the other survivors, like Sarah, and also for those who cannot yet speak ...

Today, a baby is a baby when convenient. It is tissue or otherwise when the time is not right. A baby is a baby when miscarriage takes place at two, three, four months. A baby is called a tissue or clumps of cells when an abortion takes place at two, three, four months. Why is that? I see no difference. What are you seeing? Many close their eyes...

The best thing I can show you to defend life is my life. It has been a great gift. Killing is not the answer to any question or situation. Show me how it is the answer.

There is a quote which is etched into the high ceilings of one of our state's capitol buildings. The quote says, "Whatever is morally wrong, is not politically correct." Abortion is morally wrong. Our country is shedding the blood of the innocent. America is killing its future.

All life is valuable. All life is a gift from our Creator. We must receive and cherish the gifts we are given. We must honor the right to life.

ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS MUST KNOW CHRIST!

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, from "The Orthodox Word," March-April, 1965.

One of the great Church Fathers of the 19th century, Bishop Ignatius played a very important role of being a spokesman for uncompromising Orthodox Christianity to the Russian intelligentsia, who had departed so far from Christian truth as to be incapable of distinguishing it from error.

Born in 1807, Bishop Ignatius attended military school but quite early felt drawn to the monastic life. Following a serious illness at the age of 20, he became a novice and established contact with the enlightened elder Leonid of the great Optina Hermitage. In 1831 he became a monk and was shortly thereafter ordained to the priesthood. At the unusually young age of 26 he was appointed abbot of a monastery near St. Petersburg, where he labored until 1857, when he was consecrated as bishop.

After only four years he retired to complete seclusion at a monastery, spending the last six years of his life corresponding with his many spiritual children and preparing for his death, which came in 1867.

The following letter offers a refreshing antidote to some of the confusion in our own day as well as in his.

† † †



St. Ignatius Brianchaninov
+April 30, 1867

Christians! You reason about salvation, yet you do not know what salvation is, why men are in need of it, and finally, you do not know Christ, the only means of our salvation. Here is the true teaching on this subject, the teaching of the Holy Ecumenical Church.

Salvation consists in the recovery of communion with God. This communion was lost by the whole human race when our ancestors fell into sin. The whole human race belongs to a category of doomed creatures. Damnation is the lot of all people, whether virtuous or evil-doers. We are conceived in iniquity and born in sin. "I will go down to my son mourning to hell" (Gen 37:35), said the holy patriarch

Jacob of himself and his holy son Joseph the chaste and fair. It is not only sinners who descended into hell at the end of their earthly pilgrimage, but the righteous men of the Old Testament as well. Such is the power of the good works of men; such is the worth of the virtues of our fallen nature!

In order to restore man's communion with God, in other words, for salvation, redemption was necessary. The redemption of the human race was accomplished not by an angel, not by an archangel, not by some other of the higher but still limited and created beings; it was accomplished by the infinite God Himself. Execution was the lot of the human race, commuted by His execution; the insufficiency of human merit was compensated by His endless worth. All feeble works of men, which lead to hell, are compensated by a single powerful good work: faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews asked the Lord: "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?" And the Lord answered them: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent" (Jn 6:29). One good work is necessary to us for salvation: faith; but faith is faith, and by faith alone, may we enter into communion with God, with the aid of the sacraments which He has granted to us.

You are quite wrong, then, if you think and say that good people among pagans and Moslems are saved, that is enter into communion with God. The Church has always acknowledged but one means to salvation: the Redeemer!

Christians! You must know Christ! You must realize that you do not know Him, that you deny Him if you acknowledge salvation possible without Him for any kind of good works. He who acknowledges salvation to be possible without Christ denies Christ, and perhaps without knowing it, falls into the grave sin of blasphemy. "We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law," says the holy Apostle Paul (Rom 3:28). "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:22-24). You reply: "The holy Apostle James without any question asks for good works; he teaches that faith without works is dead." But consider just what it is that the holy Apostle James asks for.

You will see that he, like all the Divinely-inspired writers of the Holy Scriptures, asks for works of faith, and not the good works of our fallen nature. He asks for living faith, confirmed by the works of the new man, and not the good works of fallen nature, which are repulsive to faith. He cites the conduct of the patriarch Abraham—a work in which the faith of that righteous man was revealed. This work consisted in offering as a sacrifice to God his only-begotten son. To slay one's son for sacrifice is not by any means a good work

according to human nature; it is, rather, a good work insofar as it fulfills a Divine command—it is a work of faith.

Look into the New Testament and into the Holy Scriptures in general, and you find that they ask for the fulfillment of God's commands, that this fulfillment is called works, that from this fulfillment of God's commands, faith in God becomes living, being active; without it, faith is dead, being deprived of any activity. And on the contrary, you will find that the good works of fallen nature, whether from feelings, from blood, from impulse, or from a tender sentiment of heart—are forbidden and rejected! And these are the same good works that please you in pagans and Moslems: for these, even if they involve the denial of Christ, you want to give them salvation! ...

The Gospel teaches us that by the fall we acquired a falsifying reason; that the reason of our fallen nature, no matter what its innate worth, no matter how well sharpened by worldly learning, retains the worth transmitted to it by the fall and remains a falsifying reason. We must reject it and commit ourselves to the guidance of faith; under such guidance, in due time, through much effort in piety, God will give to His true slave a reason of truth, or spiritual reason. This reason we can and must acknowledge as a sound reason; it is an informed faith, as the Apostle Paul excellently described it in the 11th chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews. The foundation of spiritual reasoning is God. Being founded on this hard rock, it does not waver nor fall. What you call sound reason, we Christians take to be a reason so infirm, so darkened and so far gone astray, that there can be no healing for it except by cutting it off, with the sword of faith, and renouncing all the learning that has gone into its formation. If we take it for a sound reason, basing ourselves on a foundation that is uncertain, tottering, indefinite, constantly changing, then it, being sound, will renounce Christ, too. This is proved by experience.

The Gospel—that is, the teaching of Christ, that is, the Holy Scriptures, that is, the Holy Ecumenical Church—has revealed to us all that man may know of the Divine mercy, which surpasses every kind of reasoning and all human apprehension, and is inaccessible to these. Vain is the trifling of the human mind when it seeks to define the indefinable God, when it seeks to explain the inexplicable, to submit to its own calculations... Whom?... God! Such an undertaking is a satanic one.

Oh, these people who call themselves Christians and do not know the teaching of Christ!... Does it follow from this that God is obliged to understand and feel as you understand and feel? Yet this is what you are demanding of God! What a foolish and prideful undertaking. Do not accuse the Church's judgment of a lack of common sense and humility—it is your own lack. She, the holy Church, merely follows unswervingly the Divine teaching on the

acts of God, revealed by God Himself. Her true children follow her obediently, scorning the puffed-reason that rises up against God. We believe that we can know about God only what God deigns to reveal to us. If there had been a different path to the knowledge of God, a path which our mind could have cleared for itself with its own powers, revelation would not have been given us. It was given because it was necessary for us.

Vain and deceitful, then, are the personal opinions and wanderings of the human mind. Do not think that such ignorance is a defect of small importance• It is not. Its consequences can be fatal, especially now when any number of books with a satanic teaching are circulating under a Christian title. In ignorance of true Christian teaching, just like that you can take a false, blasphemous idea for a true one, appropriate it to yourself, and together with it appropriate eternal damnation as well... Do not play with your salvation! Do not play with it, or you will weep forever.

Occupy yourself with the reading of the New Testament and the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church; study in the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church how to understand Scripture aright, study there what kind of living, what kind of thoughts and feelings are fitting for a Christian.



Once a man criticized Father Epiphanius, saying, "Father, you 'absolutize' the sacred Canons!"

In response the Elder said, "Can I, my child, not make them absolute, since they are fruits of the Holy Spirit? In the first Canon of the Seventh Oecumenical Council it is stated very clearly that the Holy Fathers who instituted the sacred Canons, as well as the Holy Apostles, 'all being illumined by one and the same Spirit,' ordained these beneficial things. So who am I to make them relative?"

"But, Father," said the man, "it is known that you are strictly attached to the faithful keeping of the sacred Canons for the solving of all ecclesiastical problems. Haven't you ever once regretted a position which you thus took?"

Father Epiphanius smiled and said, "No, my good child. Not even in thought. Never in my life did I need to repent because I took a position which the sacred Canons dictate. For all other things, we repent bitterly. But for the keeping of the Canons, no."

From *The Life & Teachings of Archimandrite Epiphanius Theodoropoulos* (+1989)

CONVERSING WITH OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL

Source: From an Orthodox pamphlet (original source: "Thoughts of a Christian Dedicated to the Guardian Angel").

I sense the greatest joy, says the Angel to my soul, when I see that you, my beloved brother, inspired by pure desires, unswervingly follow the path leading to heaven. Life is a brief arena; the earth is a dark cradle where a person—from the day of his birth until his death—suffers and lives on bread moistened with tears. How is that? You forget about heaven and cling to earthly vanities? You are captivated by the present moment? You give no thought to eternity? Let us suppose that Providence was pleased to grant you a hundred years of life. What does this number mean? In comparison with eternity it is a drop in a boundless ocean. And truly, your days pass rapidly and their end is soon to come. The last day is already not far off. But—what is saddest of all—you know neither the day nor the hour when the end of your earthly life will arrive. Death will come to you when you think not, and will cut the thread of your life just as an arrow shoots down a bird playing in the air. Nothing is as sure as death; nothing is so concealed from man as the hour of its appearance.

How many more years do you hope to live? Perhaps thirty? How about forty more years? You, of course, cannot say this with any certainty. But of the years remaining one will be the year of your death. Death watches over you along the course of your life, at that place where you do not expect it, like a murderer lying in wait in a desolate forest to fall upon a passerby; you will go by—and it will strike you in the heart. Why do you slumber and do not take any precautionary measures? Why do you not imitate the soldier who, although he does not see the enemy, does not slumber but stands guard at the gate to the city? He does not slumber so as not to be overtaken by a sudden attack on account of negligence. Don't you see with what frightful consequences this unknown threatens you for all your eternity? We have often seen that a man's life ends with a light movement of the air, a breath of cold wind, the setting of a sun's ray, a single drop of water. Our days, like a shadow, disappear, and glory fades like a flower of the field. And in this fleeting life you want to secure your hope and your happiness! You hope to erect a strong building on a foundation as unstable as a river! What could



so captivate and deceive you? The past grieves you with its memories, the present is heavy with misfortunes. Do you not see that those hopes which the future used to seduce you have disappeared like a shadow, and just as you drew near to them they dissipated like nocturnal visions upon your awakening? Lies, deceit, vanity, grief, physical ills—this is the life you love to such an extent that you forget about eternity! Unhappy is he who sacrifices the future to the present. Pitiable is that person who, instead of building himself a house in his homeland, builds it in a strange land and does not prepare anything for the homeland in which he is to dwell! How I suffer to see you earnestly busying yourself in seeking sensual and corruptible things, disdaining the good things of heaven; not only do you subject yourself to the danger of losing these good things, but you willingly strive towards eternal torment! So it is that a foolish man sells the kingdom of heaven, and he sells it for a momentary pleasure which the devil gives him, scoffing at his foolishness.

Sanctify my mind, O good one, and enlighten me, I pray thee, O holy Angel, and teach me to think always positively and profitably. Calm my heart from present disturbance, and strengthen me to be vigilant in good, O my Guardian, and guide me miraculously in quietness of life. Have compassion on me, O holy Angel of the Lord, my Guardian, and leave me not, impure as I am, but illumine me with Divine Light, and make me worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom. (Canon to the Guardian Angel)

When the Almighty sent me to guard over you, He named me Guardian of the Royal infant, who is destined at

some future time to rule together with his Father. I saw on this infant gold apparel adorned with precious stones, and on his head a brilliant crown: after all, are you not an heir of the heavenly Father and a co-heir with Jesus Christ? But alas! What misfortune! Soon I saw that my young royal son threw his clothing and his crown into the dirt, broke his scepter, offended his Father the King, and gave himself over to His enemy.

Son of the King Most High! Turn again your eyes to heaven, gaze upon your Heavenly Father, bend your knee before the throne of the Mother of God, look upon the glory of the Angels and that glory which is prepared for you. Cease, cease at last your foolish concerns over earthly vanities, and strive to be worthy of your high calling. You are called to reign—begin to reign over yourself, begin to govern your mind and your heart, show your firm authority over the

devil, over the world, over your passions. Are your powers growing weak in the battle? Remember that in heaven you will rest for all eternity. You ask: when will I take pleasure in this rest? Perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow; one thing alone is certain—it will be soon. Yet a little while and I shall accompany you to heaven.

Thus does a Guardian Angel converse with the soul of a man, and blessed is he who listens to the voice of God's messenger and calls out to him in prayer:

Guardian Angel! Rouse my heart with that divine fervor which inflamed the saints who endured all manner of torment and suffering and even death itself with joy. For this, O my holy Angel, remind me constantly of eternity. Remembrance of eternity is true wisdom, higher than any human wisdom. It awakens holy desires, enlightens the mind and strengthens spiritual vigor. But the devil hinders it from penetrating my soul, and when it has penetrated, the enemy tries to darken it. O Angel of God! Grant that the thought of eternity should always occupy my mind; then the pleasures and treasures of this world will not seduce me. I prefer sorrows and downfalls which enlighten and strengthen the soul with grace-filled power. I shall choose a humble life, far removed from the vanities of the world, where, in silence, eternity will be the subject of my thoughts. Here I shall use every moment of my brief existence to acquire those riches in which, together with you, I shall delight for all eternity.



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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 GIFTS OF THE MAGI

By Archbishop Innocent of Kherson.

And when they had opened their treasures they presented unto Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

[Mt 2:11]

Not without reason, my brethren, were there three gifts at the manger of Christ; three—no more, no less. Was this a sign of the Most Holy Trinity as the essence of the Godhead; or did it symbolize the triune nature of Christ's future ministry: prophetic, royal, priestly; or was it perhaps an expression of the three parts of the nature of man: spirit, soul, and body? We leave it up to your faith and reasoning to consider this question. Here our attention rests upon the gift-bearing magi.

One could say that these pilgrims of the Orient stood before the manger of Christ for all mankind. Their gifts represent symbolically all that we, followers of the Saviour, bring to Him. The gold signifies material gifts; the frankincense is for immaterial gifts, gifts of the spirit; and the myrrh represents those gifts that are at once both spiritual and material. There are, accordingly, persons who bring the Lord gold; there are those who bring frankincense; still others bring myrrh; lastly, some bring several gifts together. Who are these individuals? In examining this question, we shall see how we too, like the magi, can serve our Lord and Saviour. Who brings the Lord gold?

Gold is brought by those who, for the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbor, offer anything of their labors and possessions. For example, you bring gold to the Lord if you build, renew or adorn God's temple. Your gift pleases Him, for even though He sits now on the throne of glory, for the sake of our salvation He continues at the same time to appear in the manger as well. This manger is present in church upon the table of oblation, where at every Liturgy He is, as it were, born again so as to offer Himself anew as a sacrifice for our sins. How often He suffers want in this manger. Here He needs clothing and shelter, light and warmth. Therefore, if you do anything for the benefit of the church, your offering delights the Lord—as much as did the gift of the magi who brought Him gold.

How much of this gold is brought to the Lord? Oh, if we were to compare what is brought with that which is spent to answer the demands of the passions, for the satisfaction not only of our needs, but of our very whims—or even with that which is patently surrendered for the flesh and the world to consume—then it shall turn out to be the very smallest part. Before us a poor man shakes from bitter cold, hunger, and disease; we either rebuff him harshly or give him a measly pittance, and that same day we are ready to exhaust half our fortune in a senseless game, or to display Our munificent squandering at some gaudy spectacle.

Such is our gratitude to Him Who, being rich, for our salvation is this day embeggared, that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor 8:9).

Who brings the Lord frankincense? These are they who apply their abilities, knowledge, and talents to the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbors; for these are immaterial gifts of greater value than gold or silver. These are gifts which God gives to men but, they, also are—and should be made—men's gifts to God.

This costly frankincense is offered to the Lord by each one who, sparing not himself, serves his neighbor. Frankincense is offered to the Lord by that shepherd of the Church, who faithfully stands alert guarding souls and hearts against the confusions and temptations of the age, who ardently proclaims the ways of the Lord, who guides those who have lost their way, comforts those in despair, instructs all. Frankincense is brought to the Lord by that mother who does not rely upon servants, who does not spend time in idleness and vain amusements, but rather devotes her time and abilities to the rearing of her children in the fear of God, to nurturing in them the habit of self-denial, the spirit of meekness, of prayer, and of love for mankind.

Permeating the home, the fragrance of this frankincense is thereafter diffused everywhere by those who received in that home a pious upbringing. Frankincense is brought to the Lord by that artist who does not utilize his talents to pander to human lust in keeping with the spirit of the time, but rather, strives to turn all his creative powers into means of disseminating—with the refined and beautiful—what is True and good. This frankincense envelops many with its heavenly fragrance. And just as there is no one who does not possess abilities or talents of some kind, neither is there anyone who is unable to bring the Lord frankincense by using his abilities to the glory of God and the true profit of his neighbors.

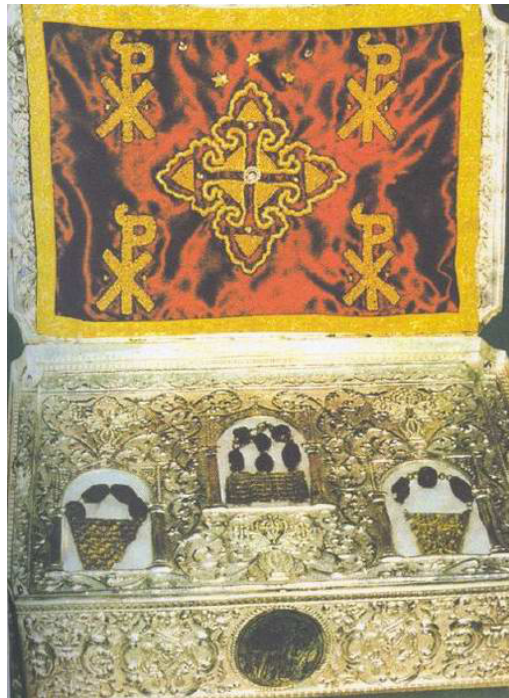
The third gift to the Lord from the magi was myrrh. This was the last gift and therefore more exalted than gold or even frankincense. What kind of gift is this, and why is it so important? Like frankincense, myrrh exudes a heavenly fragrance, but its distinguishing quality lies in its great bitterness; for this reason it represents our trials and sorrows, our tears and sufferings.

Now it is clear who brings to the Lord the gift of myrrh. They bring it these who patiently bear trials in life and suffer blamelessly without giving in to bleak despair, nor fainthearted complaining, nor useless sighing. Those who, in enduring their trials, are moved neither to prideful scorn towards others, nor to the desperate stifling in themselves of all human feeling, but to a lively hope in the living God—to the thought that through suffering he or she is cleansed from sins, made perfect in virtue, and, what is even more gladdening, made like unto their Saviour Who, died for them upon the Cross. Such endurance, in the spirit of faith and love, of the tribulations and sorrows of the age is also a gift to the Lord, a gift more precious than old and of a sweeter savor even than frankincense.

May all those who suffer cruelly hear this, and may they

come to fathom the advantage of their condition which is seemingly bitter, but actually not without its sweetness if only they consider their faith and the Cross of Christ. May they hasten to bring their myrrh to the Lord as a gift. Those who are satisfied in this world cannot do this; unacquainted with want, they seem to lack nothing; but they have no myrrh. Many of those who possess frankincense—that is, exceptional talents, also cannot do this: they have no heavy trials to bear, no myrrh. It is all with you, God's bloodless passion-bearers; you, who through no guilty act of your own—whether by the lot of your birth or by the perversity of circumstance, by human malice or by our corruptible physical nature—greet virtually every day, and also end it, with sighs; and who, it may be, this very morning greeted Christ's holy Feast day with tears. Those who look upon you disdain your hardship; you yourselves, per-

haps, stumble at times beneath the weight of earthly trial. But we, in the name of our Saviour, greet you with the precious likeness of His Cross! Cherish the precious myrrh which you have received as your portion; do not exchange it for frankincense, and even more guard against trading it for mere gold. And do not rob it of its heavenly fragrance by complaint or fainthearted murmuring. What is the use of complaining? The Lord sees everything without it. Each of your tears counts with Him, each of your sighs knows its weight—and in time you shall receive for all of these a hundredfold. Amen.



The Magi Gifts
One of the many Holy Mountain treasures—cherished at the Holy Monastery of St. Pavlos

I PLACE MYSELF IN THY HANDS, O LORD!

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "What Is the Spiritual Life and How to Attune Oneself to It" (herein he counsels a young woman on arranging her life).

May the mercy of God be upon you.

You are still burdened by worldly cares. Tell me, what is the cause of this? All is well with your life externally; inwardly you have examined and put things in order, and your decision has strengthened all this. So what cause is there to be upset? It is all the devil's work, straight from him. Nothing else.

And what else could it be? Do not think that you can determine the course of your life yourself, by your own strength and wisdom, even in accordance with what has been planned. Think about this, and if there is even a grain of truth in this, make haste to remedy it. With such an attitude there will be no end of confusion.

Let us, if you will, examine or mentally review all that was prescribed and all that you experienced inwardly, and how finally you came to a decision concerning your course of life, and direct this examination in such a way that there will come from it a firm resolve, to give your life over unconditionally into the hands of God. Then pray fervently, crying to the Lord from your heart: "I place myself in Thy hands, O Lord. Direct my life and all that touches upon it as it is pleasing to Thee. From henceforth I am relinquishing all care for myself, having only one concern, always to do what is pleasing in Thy sight."

Say it in this way and in very deed commit yourself entirely into God's hands, being anxious for nothing, peacefully accepting all situations—whether pleasant or unpleasant—as being deliberately arranged for you by God. Your only concern must be to act in all situations according to God's commandments. For you, this is the one thing needful.

As soon as you do this, there will be an end to all your unrest. Now you are concerned about yourself, and every situation you want to arrange and turn around according to your good pleasure. When everything doesn't go just so, you get upset that this isn't right or that's wrong. But when you give everything over to the Lord and accept all as coming from Him for your benefit, then you will be free from all earthly cares. You will look around only to see what lesson the Lord is sending so as to act in accordance with it. The commandments can be brought to bear on any situation. Do this and act in accord with the commandments, striving to please God rather than pushing to satisfy your own self-will. Think well on what I have said and make it your aim to attain such a state.

I pray that the Lord deliver you from that situation which you consider unpleasant, insofar, I would add, such deliverance is in keeping with God's will and for your salvation. Thus, first

and foremost, I pray that He will deliver you in His good time. Arm yourself with this faith and have patience. Just looking at the course of events, we see that they are constantly changing; nothing lasts. That which troubles you will likewise change. The days will come when you will breathe freely, and not only breathe, but like a butterfly flit from one flower to another; you need only patiently to await the trouble's end. The housewife puts the pie into the oven and does not remove it from there until she is sure it is properly baked. The Ruler of the world has placed you into the oven, and he is holding you there, waiting until you are done. Have patience and wait. As soon as you are baked through, you won't sit there an extra minute. You will be immediately taken out. If you try to break loose yourself, you will be like an underdone pie. Arm yourself with patience. I will add this: according to our faith, he who graciously endures various trials that come his way, accepting them as from the hand of the Lord, such a man partakes of martyrdom.

It is impossible to live without feelings, but to give oneself over to one's feelings is unlawful. They must be controlled and given proper direction. You are very impressionable and your heart rules your head. Act as I have already written you: first determine under what conditions certain feelings are aroused and then proceed by guarding yourself from any agitation of the heart, or by taking a firm hold upon your heart. This requires practice and with practice one can advance to complete control of oneself.

But everything comes from God. And one must run to Him. You write, however, that you don't pray. That is not smart! What did you do, enlist with the pagans? How can one not pray? Don't just read from the prayer book—tell Him in your own words what is on your heart, and ask for help: "Lord, you see what is bothering me—this and this... I cannot straighten myself out. Help me, O Merciful One!" And relate all the particulars of your need, asking for help in accordance with all this. This will be the most genuine prayer. You can always pray in your own words, not reading the written prayers, so long as you do not indulge in laziness.

But why do you listen to him who suggests that you stop praying? Or do you not realize that it is the enemy? It is obviously the enemy. He whispers into your ear: "Give it up;" and sometimes as though seizing the body itself, he hurriedly drags it into bed. These are all his tricks. But he is doing his business, trying to distract you from what is good. However, we must do our work, not abandoning it until we have finished. In this way I beg you to arm yourself with courage, and don't listen to the enemy, and don't pay any attention to his whisperings. Getting angry at the enemy is even better. He will immediately flee.

From all my heart I pray that you will at last be able to calm down.

May the Lord bless you!

THE TYRANNICAL KINGDOM OF ANTICHRIST

[AS DESCRIBED BY STS. DANIEL AND PAUL]

By St. Irenaeus, from "Against Heresies," Book V, Chap. XXV.

And not only by the particulars already mentioned, but also by means of the events which shall occur in the time of Antichrist is it shown that he, being an apostate and a robber, is anxious to be adored as God; and that, although a mere slave, he wishes himself to be proclaimed as a king. For he (Antichrist) being endued with all the power of the devil, shall come, not as a righteous king, nor as a legitimate king, [i.e., one] in subjection to God, but an impious, unjust, and lawless one; as an apostate, iniquitous and murderous; as a robber, concentrating in himself [all] satanic apostasy, and setting aside idols to persuade [men] that he himself is God, raising up himself as the only idol, having in himself the multifarious errors of the other idols.

This he does, in order that they who do [now] worship the devil by means of many abominations, may serve himself by this one idol, of whom the apostle thus speaks in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians: *Unless there shall come a falling away first, and the man of sin shall be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God.* The apostle therefore clearly points out his apostasy, and that he is lifted up above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, that is, above every idol, for these are indeed so called by men, but are not [really] gods; and that he will endeavour in a tyrannical manner to set himself forth as God.

Moreover, the apostle has also pointed out this which I have shown in many ways, that the temple in Jerusalem was made by the direction of the true God. For the apostle himself, speaking in his own person, distinctly called it the temple of God.

Now I have shown in the third book, that no one is termed God by the apostles when speaking for themselves, except Him who truly is God, the Father of our Lord, by whose directions the temple which is at Jerusalem was constructed for those purposes which I have already mentioned; in which [temple] the enemy shall sit, endeavouring to show himself as Christ, as the Lord also declares: *But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, which has been spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand), then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains; and he who is upon the house-top, let him not come down to take anything out of his house: for there shall then be great hardship, such*

as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be.

Daniel too, looking forward to the end of the last kingdom, i.e., the ten last kings, amongst whom the kingdom of those men shall be partitioned, and upon whom the son of perdition shall come, declares that ten horns shall spring from the beast, and that another little horn shall arise in the midst of them, and that three of the former shall be rooted up before his face.

He says: *And, behold, eyes were in this horn as the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things, and his look was more stout than his fellows. I was looking, and this horn made war against the saints, and prevailed against them, until the Ancient of days came and gave judgment to the saints of the most high God, and the time came, and the saints obtained the kingdom.*

Then, further on, in the interpretation of the vision, there was said to him: *"The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall excel all other kingdoms, and devour the whole earth, and tread it down, and cut it in pieces. And its ten horns are ten kings which shall arise; and after them shall arise another, who shall surpass in evil deeds all that were before him, and shall overthrow three kings; and he shall speak words against the most high God, and wear out the saints of the most high God, and shall purpose to change times and laws; and [everything] shall be given into his hand until a time of times and a half time, that is, for three years and six months, during which time, when he comes, he shall reign over the earth. Of whom also the Apostle Paul again, speaking in the second [Epistle] to the Thessalonians, and at the same time proclaiming the cause of his advent, thus says: *And then shall the wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the spirit of His mouth, and destroy by the presence of His coming; whose coming [i.e., the wicked one's] is after the working of Satan, in all power, and signs, and portents of lies, and with all deceivableness of wickedness for those who perish; because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And therefore God will send them the working of error, that they may believe a lie; that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but gave consent to iniquity.**

The Lord also spoke as follows to those who did not believe in Him: *I have come in my Father's name, and ye have not received Me: when another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive, calling Antichrist "the other," because he is alienated from the Lord. This is also the unjust judge, whom the Lord mentioned as one who feared not God, neither regarded man, to whom the widow fled in her forgetfulness of God—that is, the earthly Jerusalem—to be avenged of her adversary. Which also he shall do in the time of his kingdom: he shall remove his kingdom into that*

[city], and shall sit in the temple of God, leading astray those who worship him, as if he were Christ.

To this purpose Daniel says again: *And he shall desolate the holy place; and sin has been given for a sacrifice, and righteousness been cast away in the earth, and he has been active, and gone on prosperously.*

And the angel Gabriel, when explaining his vision, states with regard to this person: *“And towards the end of their kingdom a king of a most fierce countenance shall arise, one understanding [dark] questions, and exceedingly powerful, full of wonders; and he shall corrupt, direct, influence, and put strong men down, the holy people likewise; and his yoke shall be directed as a wreath [round their neck]; deceit shall be in his hand, and he shall be lifted up in his heart: he shall also ruin many by deceit, and lead many to perdition, bruising them in his hand like eggs.* And then he points out the time that his tyranny shall last, during which the saints shall be put to flight, they who offer a pure sacrifice unto God: *And in the midst of the week, he says, the sacrifice and the libation shall be taken away, and the abomination of desolation shall be brought into the temple: even unto the consummation of the time shall the desolation be complete.* Now three years and six months constitute the half-week.

From all these passages are revealed to us, not merely the particulars of the apostasy, and [the doings] of him who concentrates in himself every satanic error, but also, that there is one and the same God the Father, who was declared by the prophets, but made manifest by Christ. For if what Daniel prophesied concerning the end has been confirmed by the Lord, when He said, *When ye shall see the abomination of desolation, which has been spoken of by Daniel the prophet* (and the angel Gabriel gave the interpretation of the visions to Daniel, and he is the archangel of the Creator, who also proclaimed to Mary the visible coming and the incarnation of Christ), then one and the same God is most manifestly pointed out, who sent the prophets, and made promise of the Son, and called us into His knowledge.



**Christ is born; glorify Him!
Christ comes from Heaven; go to meet Him!
Christ is on earth; be exalted!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth!
And praise Him in gladness, O people;
for He has been glorified!**

HUMILITY: THE VIRTUE OF VIRTUES

From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim.

Intreat our Panagia that she grant me humility in all things, for it is a fundamental virtue, and without it the grace of the All-holy Spirit does not validate any of our work!

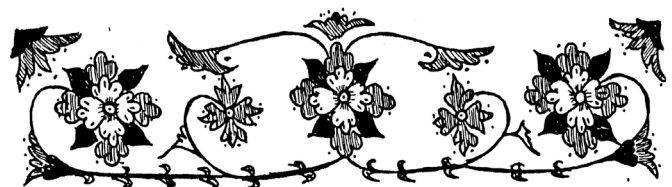
When the Archbishop of Alexandria, Theophilos, visited the fathers of Mount Nitria, he asked the Elder of the mountain, “What have you found, Father, more than us in this way of asceticism?” And the venerable one replied, “To reproach myself at all times.” “Truly,” replied Theophilos, “there is no shorter road to God than this!”

Didn’t Lucifer and Adam fall away from God through pride and rebellion? Wasn’t Adam saved by the humility of the Theotokos—*Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word* (Lk 1:38)—and the Son of God, Who was born of Her without change, Who taught and practiced extreme humility? He also said, *Learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* (Mt. 11:29).

Whenever a person looks upon himself with humble thoughts and self-reproach, he will see in his soul a sweet repose, peace, consolation, relief, and hope! While on the contrary, what shows him his pride of soul is restlessness, agitation, wrath, boasting, haughty tendencies, and so on.

Ah, how effortless the road of humility is! Even without laboring ascetically or enduring illness, a person with humility and self-reproach, along with thanksgiving to God, is able to reach spiritual heights and feel the gift of sonship! While on the contrary, toiling ascetically without realizing one’s own infirmity and weakness and wretchedness is a struggle without prizes, sweat without wages, a road without hope.

What a misfortune to struggle without profit! To cultivate without reaping! Why does this happen? Because the struggle was not lawful. *If someone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.* (2 Tim 2:5). Even in physical competitions an athlete is not crowned if he does not struggle lawfully.



**Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐξ Οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς ὑψώθητε.
Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ,
καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί·
ὅτι δεδόξασται**

Ὁ Λόγος Σὰρξ Ἐγένετο

Ἁγίου Συμεῶν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου: Βίβλος τῶν Ἠθικῶν, Λόγος Α', κεφάλαιο γ' «Περὶ τῆς τοῦ Λόγου Σαρκώσεως καὶ κατὰ τὴν τρόπον δι' ὑμᾶς ἐσαρκώθη».

Γιὰ νὰ προσεγγίσουμε τὴν σάρκωση τοῦ Λόγου καὶ τὴν ἀπόρρητη γέννησή του ἀπὸ τὴν ἀειπάρθενο Μαρία καὶ νὰ κατανοήσουμε καλὰ τὸ μυστήριό τῆς οικονομίας γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τοῦ γένους μας τὸ κρυμμένο πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων, θὰ μᾶς βοηθήσει ἡ ἐξῆς γνωστὴ εἰκόνα:

Κατὰ τὴν δημιουργία τῆς προμήτορος Εὕας ὁ Θεὸς πῆρε τὴν ἔμψυχη πλευρὰ τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ τὴν ὀλοκλήρωσε σὲ γυναῖκα. Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν ἐμφύσησε σ' αὐτὴν πνοὴ ζωῆς καθὼς καὶ στὸν Ἀδάμ, ἀλλὰ τὸ μέρος ποὺ ἔλαβε ἀπὸ τὴν σάρκα του τὸ τελειοποίησε σὲ ὀλόκληρο σῶμα γυναικός· τὴν δὲ ἀπαρχὴ τοῦ πνεύματος ποὺ ἔλαβε μαζί με τὴν ἔμψυχη σάρκα τὴν τελειοποίησε σὲ ψυχὴ ζωντανὴ δημιουργώντας με τὰ δυὸ μαζί ἓναν ἄλλον ἄνθρωπο. Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο ἀκριβῶς τρόπο ὁ πλαστοουργὸς καὶ κτίστης Θεὸς πῆρε ἀπὸ τὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο Μαρία ἔμψυχη σάρκα σὰν ζύμη καὶ μικρὴ ἀπαρχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ φύραμα τῆς φύσεώς μας, δηλαδή ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα μαζί, καὶ τὴν ἔνωσε με τὴν δική του ἀκατάληπτη καὶ ἀπρόσιτη Θεότητα. Ἡ μᾶλλον ἔνωσε πραγματικὰ ὅλη τὴν ὑπόστασι τῆς Θεότητός του με τὴν δική μας φύση, τὴν ἔσμιξε ἄμικτα μ' αὐτὴ καὶ τὴν ἔκανε ἅγιο ναὸ του. Ἔτσι ὁ ποιητὴς τοῦ Ἀδάμ ἔγινε ἀτρέπτως καὶ ἀναλλοιώτως τέλειος ἄνθρωπος.

Ὡστε ὅπως ἀκριβῶς ὁ Ἀδάμ με τὴν παράβαση ἔγινε ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς γεννήσεώς μας στὴν φθορὰ καὶ στὸν θάνατο, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ Θεὸς μας με τὴν ἐκπλήρωση κάθε δικαιοσύνης ἔγινε ἡ ἀπαρχὴ τῆς ἀναγεννήσεώς μας στὴν ἀφθαρσία καὶ τὴν ἀθανασία. Ἐπειδὴ λοιπὸν ὁ Χριστὸς ἔγινε τέλειος ἄνθρωπος κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα, ὁμοίος με μᾶς σὲ ὅλα ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, μᾶς μεταδίδει τὴν Θεότητά του λόγῳ τῆς πίστεως μας σ' αὐτὸν καὶ μᾶς καθιστὰ συγγενεῖς του κατὰ τὴν φύση καὶ τὴν οὐσία τῆς Θεότητάς του.

Πρόσεξε τὸ νέο καὶ παράδοξο μυστήριό: Ὁ Θεὸς Λόγος ἔλαβε ἀπὸ μας σάρκα, ποὺ δὲν εἶχε ἐκ φύσεως καὶ ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ δὲν ἦταν. Ἀπὸ τότε μεταδίδει στοὺς πιστοὺς τὴν Θεότητά του— τὴν ὁποία κανεὶς ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ἢ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δὲν εἶχε ἀποκτήσει—καὶ μ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο γίνονται θεοὶ κατὰ χάρι καὶ θέση, ποὺ δὲν ἦταν. Ἔτσι χαρίζει σ' αὐτοὺς τὴν ἐξουσία νὰ γίνονται τέκνα Θεοῦ (κατὰ Ἰωάννην 1:12) γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἔγιναν καὶ πάντοτε θὰ γίνονται καὶ ποτὲ δὲν θὰ πάψουν νὰ γίνονται.

Ὁ Θεὸς λοιπὸν τοῦ παντός με τὴν σωματικὴ του παρουσία στὴν γῆ ἦλθε γιὰ νὰ ἀναπλάσει καὶ νὰ ἀνακαινίσει τὸν

ἄνθρωπο καὶ νὰ εὐλογήσει ὅλη τὴν κτίσι ποὺ ἐπέσυρε ἐπάνω τῆς τὴν κατὰρα ἐξαιτίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Καὶ πρῶτα ζωοποίησε τὴν ψυχὴ ποὺ ἔλαβε καὶ ἀφθαρτώντας τὴν τὴν θέωσε, ἐνῶ τὸ ἄχραντο σῶμα του, ἂν καὶ τὸ θέωσε, ὁμως τὸ κρατοῦσε ἀκόμη φθαρτὸ καὶ ὑλικό. Μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἀνάστασή του συνανέστησε καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἀφθαρτο, πνευματικό, ὅλο θεῖο καὶ ἄυλο, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν συνέτριψε τίς σφραγίδες τοῦ μνήματος, εἰσερχόταν δὲ καὶ ἐξερχόταν ἐλεύθερα μέσα ἀπὸ τίς κλειστὲς πόρτες.

Ἀλλὰ γιὰτί μαζί με τὴν ψυχὴ δὲν ἔκανε ἀμέσως καὶ τὸ σῶμα πνευματικό καὶ ἀφθαρτο; Ἐπειδὴ καὶ ὁ Ἀδάμ τρώγοντας τὸν ἀπαγορευμένο καρπὸ εὐθύς μὲν με τὴν παράβαση πέθανε κατὰ τὴν ψυχὴ, ἐνῶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ὕστερα ἀπὸ πολλὰ χρόνια. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς πρῶτα ἀνέστησε καὶ ζωοποίησε τὴν ψυχὴ ποὺ τιμωρήθηκε με τὸ ἐπιτίμιο τοῦ θανάτου, ἔπειτα δὲ οἰκονόμησε νὰ ἀπολαύσει καὶ τὸ σῶμα τὴν ἀφθαρσία διὰ τῆς ἀναστάσεως, αὐτὸ ποὺ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου ἐπέστρεψε στὴν γῆ κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαία ἀπόφαση. Κι ὄχι μόνον αὐτὸ, ἀλλὰ κατέβηκε στὸν ἄδη ἐλευθερώνοντας ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ τίς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐκεῖ φυλακισμένων ἁγίων καὶ τίς κατέταξε σὲ τόπο ἀναπαύσεως καὶ ἀνεσπέρου φωτός. Τὰ σῶματά τους ὁμως δὲν τὰ ἀνέστησε, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἄφησε στοὺς τάφους μέχρι τὴν κοινὴ ἀνάστασι.

Τὸ μυστήριό λοιπὸν αὐτὸ ποὺ συντελέστηκε γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο με τὴν ἔνσαρκη οικονομία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦτο τὸ ἴδιο γινόταν καὶ σὲ κάθε ἅγιο καὶ γίνεται ἀδιαλείπτως μέχρι σήμερα σὲ κάθε πιστό. Γιατί λαμβάνοντας τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Δεσπότη καὶ Θεοῦ μας συμμετέχουμε στὴν θεότητά του, τρώγοντας δὲ τὴν πανάμωμο σάρκα του γινόμαστε ἀληθινὰ καὶ ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου σύσσωμοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ συγγενεῖς του, καθὼς καὶ αὐτὸς

ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος βεβαιώνει: «Εἴμαστε ὁστοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ ὀστά του καὶ σάρκα ἀπὸ τὴν σάρκα του» (Ἐφεσίους 5:30) καὶ ἄλλου: «ἀπὸ τὸν πλοῦτο τῆς θεότητός του ὅλοι ἐμεῖς λάβαμε ἀλλεπάλληλες δωρεές» (κατὰ Ἰωάννην 1:16 καὶ Κολασσαεῖς 2:9). Ἔτσι γινόμαστε κατὰ χάριν ὁμοιοὶ με τὸν φιλόανθρωπο Θεὸ καὶ Δεσπότη μας ἀνακαινισμένοι στὴν ψυχὴ, ἀφθαρτοὶ καὶ ἀναστημένοι ἀπὸ νεκροὶ ποὺ ἦμασταν.

Ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Θεός, ἀφοῦ εἰσηλθε στὰ σπλάγχνα τῆς Παναγίας Παρθένου καὶ ἔλαβε σάρκα ἀπ' αὐτὴν, γεννήθηκε, ὅπως εἴπαμε, τέλειος ἄνθρωπος καὶ τέλειος Θεὸς ἀσυγχύτως. Τὶ σημαντικότερο ἔγινε ποτὲ γιὰ μᾶς; Ὅλοι μας πιστεύουμε σ' αὐτὸν τὸν Υἱὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Υἱὸ τῆς ἀειπαρθένου καὶ Θεοτόκου Μαρίας καὶ γι' αὐτὸ δεχόμαστε τὸν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγῳ με ἐμπιστοσύνη. Ἄν τὸν ὁμολογοῦμε λοιπὸν καὶ μετανοοῦμε ἀπὸ τὰ βάρη τῆς ψυχῆς μας γιὰ τίς προηγούμενες ἁμαρτίες μας, τότε ὁ λόγος τῆς εὐσεβείας,



τὸν ὅποιο δεχόμεστε, γεννιέται μέσα μας σὰν σπόρος, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Πατρὸς εἰσηλθε στὴν γαστέρα τῆς Παρθένου. Θαύμασε τὸ μέγα τοῦτο καὶ ἐκπληκτικὸ μυστήριον καὶ δέξου τὸ μὲ κάθε πληροφορία καὶ πίστη.

Συλλαμβάνουμε λοιπὸν αὐτὸν τὸν Λόγο ὄχι σωματικά, ὅπως τὸν συνέλαβε ἡ Παρθένος καὶ Θεοτόκος, ἀλλὰ πνευματικά μὲν πραγματικά ὅμως. Καὶ ἔχουμε μέσα στὶς καρδιές μας αὐτὸν ποὺ τὸν ἴδιο ποὺ συνέλαβε καὶ ἡ Ἁγνή Παρθένος, ὅπως λέει ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος: «Ὁ Θεὸς ποὺ εἶπε νὰ λάμψει φῶς μέσα στὶς καρδιές μας πρὸς φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ» (Β΄ Κορινθίους 4:6), σὰν νὰ λέει: Αὐτὸς ὅλος γεννήθηκε ἀληθινὰ μέσα μας. Καὶ ὅτι εἶναι ἔτσι τὸ φανερῶναι μὲ ὅσα παραθέτει στὴν συνέχεια: «Ἐχουμε δὲ τὸν θησαυρὸν αὐτὸν μέσα σὲ πῆλινα σκευή» (Β΄ Κορινθίους 4:6), ὀνομάζοντας θησαυρὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Καὶ σὲ ἄλλο σημεῖο ὀνομάζει τὸ Πνεῦμα Κύριο: «Γιατί τὸ Πνεῦμα» λέει «εἶναι ὁ Κύριος» (Β΄ Κορινθίους 4:6), ὥστε ὅπου ἀκοῦς Υἱὸν Θεοῦ νὰ ἐννοεῖς μαζί καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα καὶ ἂν πάλι ἀκούσεις γιὰ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα νὰ ἐννοεῖς μαζί μὲ αὐτὸ καὶ τὸν Πατέρα, διδάσκοντάς σε παντοῦ τὸ ἀχώριστο καὶ ὁμοούσιον τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος.

Ἔτσι ὅταν πιστεύσουμε ὀλόψυχα καὶ μετανοήσουμε θερμὰ θὰ συλλάβουμε ὅπως εἰπώθηκε τὸν Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ στὶς καρδιές μας, καθὼς τὸν συνέλαβεν ἡ Παρθένος, προσφέροντάς του κι ἐμεῖς τὶς ψυχές μας παρθενικές καὶ ἄγνές. Καὶ ὅπως ἐκείνη δὲν τὴν κατέφλεξε τὸ πῦρ τῆς θεότητος, ἐπειδὴ ἦταν ἄγνη καὶ ὑπεράμωμη, ἔτσι οὔτε καὶ ἐμᾶς μας κατακαίει, ὅταν τοῦ προσφέρουμε τὶς καρδιές μας ἄγνές καὶ καθαρές, ἀλλὰ γίνεται ἐντὸς μας δροσιὰ ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ πηγὴ ὕδατος καὶ ρεῖθρον ἀθάνατης ζωῆς. Ὅτι δεχόμεστε καὶ ἐμεῖς παρόμοια τὸ ἄστεκτον πῦρ τῆς θεότητος, ἄκουσε τὸν Κύριο ποὺ τὸ λέει: «Πῦρ ἦλθα νὰ βάλω στὴν γῆ» (κατὰ Λουκᾶν 12:49). Τί ἄλλο ἐννοεῖ, παρὰ τὸ ὁμοούσιον πρὸς τὴν θεότητά του Πνεῦμα, μὲ τὸ ὅποιο συνεισέρχεται καὶ συνθεορεῖται μέσα μας καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Υἱὸς μαζί μὲ τὸν Πατέρα;

Ἐπειδὴ ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ μία φορὰ σαρκώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένον καὶ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ αὐτὴν σωματικά, ἀνέκφραστα δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ σαρκωθεῖ πάλι ἢ νὰ γεννηθεῖ σωματικά ἀπὸ τὸν καθένα ἀπὸ μᾶς. Μᾶς μεταδίδει γιὰ τροφὴ ἐκείνη τὴν ἄχραντη σάρκα ποὺ προσέλαβε ἀπὸ τὴν πανάχραντη Θεοτόκο, κατὰ τὴν σωματικὴ του γέννηση. Ἄν τὴν μεταλαμβάνουμε ἄξια, ἔχουμε μέσα μας ὅλον τὸν σαρκωθέντα Θεὸ καὶ Κύριό μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, αὐτὸν τὸν Υἱὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Υἱὸ τῆς Παρθένου τὸν καθημένο στὰ δεξιά τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος λέει: «ἐκεῖνος ποὺ τρώγει τὴν σάρκα μου καὶ πίνει τὸ αἷμα μου μένει μέσα μου καὶ ἐγὼ μέσα του» (κατὰ Ἰωάννη 6:56), χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ προέρχεται ἢ νὰ γεννιέται σωματικά ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς, ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ νὰ μᾶς ἀποχωρίζεται ποτέ. Διότι ἐμεῖς δὲν τὸν αἰσθανόμεστε σὰν σάρκα, ἂν καὶ βρίσκεται μέσα μας ὅπως ἀκριβῶς ἓνα βρέφος, ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχει ἀσωμάτως σὲ σῶμα, ἀναμιγνύμενος ἀνέκφραστα μὲ τὴν φύση μας καὶ τὴν οὐσία μας καὶ

θεοποιώντας μας, ἐπειδὴ γίναμε σύσσωμοι καὶ μὲ αὐτὸν δηλαδὴ σάρκα ἀπὸ τὴν σάρκα του καὶ ὄστουν ἀπὸ τὰ ὄστά του. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερο καὶ φρικτότερο μυστήριον τῆς ἀνέκφραστης οικονομίας καὶ συγκαταβάσεώς του, ποὺ δίσταζα νὰ τὸ γράψω καὶ ἔτρεμα νὰ τὸ ἐπιχειρήσω.

Ὁ Θεὸς ὅμως πάντοτε θέλει νὰ ἀποκαλύπτεται καὶ νὰ φανερῶνεται ἢ ἀγάπη τοῦ σ' ἐμᾶς, ὥστε καὶ ἐμεῖς κάποτε κατανοώντας τὴν μεγάλη του ἀγαθότητα καὶ αἰσθανόμενοι ντροπὴ νὰ προθυμοποιηθοῦμε νὰ τὸν ἀγαπήσουμε. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἐγὼ παρακινήθηκα ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ποὺ φωτίζει τὶς καρδιές μας καὶ σᾶς φανέρωσα αὐτὰ τὰ μυστήρια γραπτῶς, ὄχι γιὰ νὰ σᾶς ἀποδείξω ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ὁμοῖος μὲ αὐτὴν ποὺ γέννησε τὸν Κύριο—μὴ γένοιτο—αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀδύνατο. Διότι ἄλλη εἶναι ἡ ἔνσαρκε καὶ ἄφραστη γέννηση τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένον καὶ ἄλλη ποὺ συντελεῖται σὲ μᾶς πνευματικῶς. Ἐκείνη γεννώντας ἔνσαρκο τὸν Υἱὸ καὶ Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπεργάστηκε στὴν γῆ τὸ μυστήριόν της ἀναπλάσεως τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους μας καὶ τὴν σωτηρία ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Ἐνῶ αὐτὴ (ποὺ συντελεῖται σὲ μᾶς) γεννώντας ἐν Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι τὸν Λόγο τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀπεργάζεται ἀκατάπαυστα στὶς καρδιές μας τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἀνακαινίσεως τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχῶν καὶ τὴν κοινωνία καὶ ἔνωση μὲ τὸν Θεὸ Λόγο, αὐτὴν ὑπαινίσσεται καὶ τὸ θεῖο λόγιον: «Δι' αὐτοῦ συλλάβαμε καὶ ἐγεννήσαμε μὲ πόνο τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς σωτηρίας, τὸ ὅποιο κυοφορήσαμε πάνω στὴν γῆ» (Ἡσαΐας 26:18).

Λοιπὸν δὲν σᾶς φανέρωσα αὐτὰ τὰ μυστήρια γιὰ νὰ ἀποδείξω ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ νὰ γεννήσει τὸν Χριστὸ κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπο ποὺ τὸν γέννησε ἡ Παναγία, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ φανερωθεῖ ἡ ὑπεράπειρη καὶ γνήσια ἀγάπη τοῦ σ' ἐμᾶς καὶ ὅτι ἂν τὸ θέλουμε ὅλοι μποροῦμε νὰ γίνουμε μητέρα καὶ ἀδελφοί του κατὰ τὸν προαναφερόμενον τρόπο, καθὼς καὶ ὁ ἴδιος τὸ διακηρύττει: «Μητέρα μου καὶ ἀδελφοί μου εἶναι αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἀκοῦνε τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸν ἐκτελοῦν» (κατὰ Λουκᾶν 8:21). Ἔτσι θὰ γίνουμε ἴσοι μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς καὶ ἀποστόλους του, ὄχι κατὰ τὴν ἀξία, οὔτε κατὰ τὶς περιοδίες καὶ τοὺς κόπους ποὺ ὑπέφεραν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δωρεὰ τὴν ὅποια ἐξέχεε σ' ὅλους ποὺ τὸν πίστευαν καὶ τὸν ἀκολουθοῦσαν, χωρὶς νὰ στραφοῦν ποτέ πίσω.

Εἶδες πῶς ὅλους ἐκείνους ποὺ ἀκοῦνε καὶ πράττουν τὸν λόγο τοῦ τοῦ ἀνύψωσε στὴν ἀξία τῆς Μητέρας του καὶ τοὺς ἀποκαλεῖ ἀδελφοὺς καὶ συγγενεῖς του; Ὅμως μόνο ἐκείνη ὑπῆρξε ἡ κυρίως Μητέρα του, ἐπειδὴ ὅπως ἀνέφερα τὸν γέννησε ἀνεμηνεύτως καὶ χωρὶς ἄνδρα, ἐνῶ ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι τὸν συλλαμβάνουν καὶ τὸν κατέχουν κατὰ χάριν καὶ δωρεάν. Καὶ ἀπὸ μὲν τὴν ἄμωμη Μητέρα του δανείστηκε τὴν παναμώμητη σάρκα του καὶ σὲ ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς δώρισε τὴν θεότητα—ὦ τί παράξενη καὶ ἀσυνήθιστη συναλλαγή—ἐνῶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁγίους δὲν παίρνει σάρκα, ἀλλὰ ἀντίθετα αὐτὸς τοὺς μεταδίδει τὴν θεωμένη σάρκα του. Ἄς ἐξετάσουμε λοιπὸν τὸ βάθος αὐτοῦ τοῦ μυστηρίου.

Ἡ χάρι τοῦ Πνεύματος στὸν Χριστό, δηλαδὴ τὸ πῦρ τῆς

θεότητος, προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν θεία τοῦ φύση καὶ οὐσία. Ὅμως τὸ σῶμα του δὲν ἔχει τὴν ἴδια προέλευση, ἀλλὰ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν πάναγνη καὶ ἅγια σάρκα τῆς Θεοτόκου, τὴν ὁποία προσέλαβε κατὰ τὸ ἱερὸ λόγιον: «ὁ Λόγος ἔγινε σάρκα» (κατὰ Ἰωάννην 1:14). Ἐκτοτε ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀχράντου Παρθένου μεταδίδει στοὺς ἀγίους, ἀπὸ μὲν τὴν φύση καὶ τὴν οὐσία τοῦ συναϊδίου Πατρὸς του τὴν χάρι τοῦ Πνεύματος, δηλαδὴ τὴν θεότητα, καθὼς καὶ μέσῳ τοῦ προφήτη λέγει: «Θὰ συμβεῖ τοῦτο κατὰ τὶς ἐσχάτες ἡμέρες, θὰ ἐκχύσω ἀπὸ τὸ Πνεῦμα μου σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο» (Ἰωήλ 3:1), ἐννοώντας κάθε πιστό, ἀπὸ δὲ τὴν φύση καὶ οὐσία ἐκείνης ποὺ κυρίως καὶ ἀληθῶς τὸν γέννησε τὴν σάρκα, τὴν ὁποία ἔλαβε ἀπὸ αὐτή.

Καὶ ὅπως ἀπὸ τὴν πληρότητά του λάβαμε ὅλοι ἐμεῖς, ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς μεταλαμβάνουμε ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμωμη σάρκα τῆς Παναγίας Μητέρας του, τὴν ὁποία καὶ ἐκεῖνος προσέλαβε καὶ ὅπως ἔγινε υἱὸς καὶ Θεὸς τῆς ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ Θεὸς μας γενόμενος καὶ ἀδελφός μας, ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς καὶ ἐμεῖς—ὡ τί ἀνέκφραστη φιλανθρωπία—γινόμαστε υἱοὶ τῆς Θεοτόκου Μητέρας του καὶ ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐπειδὴ χάρι στὸν ὑπεράμωμο καὶ ὑπεράγνωστο γάμο ποὺ τελέστηκε μ' αὐτὴν καὶ σ' αὐτὴν γεννήθηκε ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸν πάλι ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι. Πράγματι, ὅπως ἀπὸ τὴν συνουσία καὶ τὴν σπορά τοῦ Ἀδάμ πρώτη ἡ Εὐὰ γέννησε καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκείνη καὶ μέσῳ ἐκείνης γεννήθηκαν ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ Θεοτόκος, ἀφοῦ δέχτηκε ἀντὶ σπορᾶς τὸν Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ συνέλαβε καὶ γέννησε μόνο τὸν πρὸ αἰῶνων μονογενῆ του Πατρὸς καὶ μετέπειτα σαρκωθέντα δικό της μονογενῆ. Καὶ μολοντί ἡ ἴδια ἔπαυε νὰ συλλαμβάνει καὶ νὰ γεννᾷ, ὁ Υἱὸς τῆς γέννησε καὶ γεννᾷ καθημερινὰ ὄσους πιστεύουν σ' αὐτὸν καὶ τηροῦν τὶς ἅγιες ἐντολές του. Ἀσφαλῶς ἔπρεπε ἡ πνευματικὴ μας ἀναγέννηση καὶ ἀνάπλαση νὰ γίνῃ διὰ τοῦ ἀντρός, δηλαδὴ τοῦ δευτέρου Ἀδάμ καὶ Θεοῦ, ἐπειδὴ ἡ γέννησή μας στὴν φθορὰ ἔγινε διὰ τῆς γυναικὸς Εὐᾶς.

Καὶ πρόσεχε τὴν ἀκρίβεια τοῦ λόγου: ἀνδρὸς θνητοῦ καὶ φθαρτοῦ ἡ σπορὰ φθαρτοῦς υἱοὺς καὶ θνητοὺς διὰ γυναικὸς γέννησε καὶ γεννᾷ: ἀθανάτου καὶ ἀφθάρτου Θεοῦ ὁ ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀφθαρτος Λόγος ἀθάνατα καὶ ἀφθαρτα τέκνα γέννησε καὶ διαρκῶς γεννᾷ, ἀφοῦ πρῶτα αὐτὸς γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένον ἐν ἀγίῳ Πνεύματι βεβαίως.

Γι' αὐτὸ λοιπὸν εἶναι δέσποινα καὶ βασίλισσα καὶ κυρία καὶ Μητέρα ὄλων τῶν ἁγίων ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐνῶ ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι εἶναι καὶ δοῦλοι τῆς ἀφοῦ εἶναι Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ παιδιὰ τῆς ἀφοῦ μεταλαμβάνουν ἀπὸ τὴν πανάχραντη σάρκα τοῦ Υἱοῦ τῆς. Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος: ἡ σάρκα τοῦ Υἱοῦ τῆς εἶναι σάρκα τῆς Θεοτόκου. Μεταλαμβάνοντας καὶ ἐμεῖς ἀπ' αὐτὴν τὴν θεωμένη σάρκα τοῦ Κυρίου, ὁμολογοῦμε καὶ πιστεύουμε ὅτι μεταλαμβάνουμε ζωὴν αἰώνια, ἐκτὸς ἂν ἀναξίως καὶ εἰς κατάκριμα μεταλαμβάνουμε.

Πράγματι ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι εἶναι συγγενεῖς πρὸς τὴν Παναγία Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ κατὰ τρεῖς τρόπους: Πρῶτον ἐπειδὴ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο πηλὸ μ' αὐτὴν καὶ τὴν ἴδια πνοή, δηλαδὴ τὴν ψυχὴ. Δεύτερον ἐπειδὴ ἔχουν κοινωνία καὶ

μετουσία μὲ αὐτὴν διὰ τῆς προσλήψεως τῆς σαρκὸς τῆς ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό. Καὶ τρίτον ἐπειδὴ, λόγῳ τῆς ἐν Πνεύματι ἀγιωσύνης ποὺ ἐνυπάρχει σὲ αὐτοὺς, καθένας συλλαμβάνει ἐντὸς του καὶ κατέχει τὸν Θεὸ τῶν ὄλων, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς καὶ ἐκείνη τὸν εἶχε ἐντὸς τῆς. Διότι ἂν καὶ τὸν γέννησε σωματικῶς, ὁμως πάντοτε τὸν εἶχε ὄλον καὶ πνευματικῶς μέσα της καὶ ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ τὸν ἔχει καὶ τώρα καὶ πάντοτε ἀχώριστον ἀπὸ αὐτήν.

Σ' αὐτὸν πρέπει ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος στοὺς αἰῶνες. Ἀμήν.



Μιά Ἑλληνορθόδοξη Μάννα

Δημήτρης Νατσιός, δάσκαλος, Κιλκίς.

Παρουσιάζω μία παραπομπὴ σὲ κάτι ἐκπληκτικὸ ποὺ εἶχα διαβάσει παλαιότερα σ' ἓνα περιοδικό. Εἶναι γραμμένο ἀπὸ ἑλληνομαθῆ Γερμανὸ συγγραφέα. Ἐνα εὐλαβικὸ μνημόσυνο στὶς μάνες τοῦ '40, στὶς Ἑλληνίδες, ποὺ ἀνέβαζαν πολεμοφόδια στὴν Πίνδο, γιὰ νὰ τὰ πᾶνε σὲ κάτι παιδιὰ ποὺ «τριγύριζαν πάνω στὸ χιόνι μὲ τὶς χλαῖνες κοκαλιασμένες», στὰ γνήσια παιδιὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος.

Γύρω στὸ 1952 ἐπισκέπτεται τὴν Κρήτη. Γράφει.

«Ἐνα σούρουπο, καθὼς ὁ ἥλιος βασιλεύει, πλησίασα τὸ γερμανικὸ νεκροταφεῖο. Ἦταν ἔρημο, μὲ μόνο σύντροφο τὶς τελευταῖες ἡλιαχτίδες. Ἐκανα ὁμως λάθος. Ὑπῆρχε ἐκεῖ μιὰ ζωντανὴ ψυχὴ, μιὰ μαυροφορεμένη ἡλικιωμένη γυναίκα. Μὲ μεγάλη μου ἐκπλήξη τὴν εἶδα ν' ἀνάβει κεριὰ στοὺς τάφους τῶν Γερμανῶν νεκρῶν τοῦ πολέμου καὶ νὰ πηγαίνει μεθοδικὰ ἀπὸ μνήμα σὲ μνήμα.

Τὴν πλησίασα καὶ τὴ ρώτησα:

- Εἶστε ἀπὸ δῶ;

- Μάλιστα

- Καὶ τότε γιατί τὸ κάνετε αὐτό; Οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ σκότωσαν Κρητικούς.

Καὶ ἡ ἀπάντηση μόνο στὴν Ἑλλάδα θὰ μπορούσε νὰ δοθεῖ.

- Παιδί μου, εἶπε, ἀπὸ τὴν προφορὰ σου, φαίνεσαι ξένος καὶ δὲν θὰ γνωρίζεις τί συνέβη ἐδῶ τὴν περίοδο 1941-1944. Ὁ ἄντρας μου σκοτώθηκε στὴ μάχη τῆς Κρήτης καὶ ἔμεινα μὲ τὸ μονάκριβο γιό μου. Μοῦ τὸν πῆραν οἱ Γερμανοὶ ὁμηρο τὸ 1943 καὶ πέθανε σὲ στρατόπεδο συγκέντρωσης στὸ Σαξενχάουζεν. Δὲν ξέρω ποῦ εἶναι θαμμένο τὸ παιδί μου. Ξέρω ὁμως πὼς ὅλα τοῦτα ἦταν παιδιὰ μίας κάποιας μάνας σὰν κι ἐμένα. Καὶ ἀνάβω καὶ στὴ μνήμη τους, ἐπειδὴ οἱ μάνες τους δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἔρθουν ἐδῶ κάτω. Σίγουρα μιὰ ἄλλη μάνα θὰ ἀνάβει τὸ καντήλι στὴ μνήμη τοῦ γιοῦ μου...»

Ποιός Είναι ο Πάπας Βενέδικτος 16^{ος};

Ιωάννη Κορναράκη, Έφημερις «Ορθόδοξος Τύπος», 6.7.2007.

Υστερα από την επίσκεψη του Πάπα Βενέδικτου 16^{ου} στο Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο, δημοσιογραφικές πληροφορίες αναφέρουν ότι ο Οικουμενικός Πατριάρχης κ. Βαρθολομαίος, σε μία προσπάθειά του να επιταχυνθούν οι διαδικασίες της ένωσης με την παπική εκκλησία, άπηύθυνε επιστολή στον Πάπα με την οποία τον καλεί να συναντηθούν στη Ραβέννα της Ιταλίας, κατά το προσεχές φθινόπωρο, προκειμένου να ήγηθούν από κοινού του θεολογικού διαλόγου, πού θα [έπαν]άρχισει εκεί.

Σύμφωνα με τις πληροφορίες αυτές, σκοπός του κ. Βαρθολομαίου είναι να εύρεθεί ένας τρόπος, ένα οικουμενικό (δηλ. οικουμενιστικό) εκκλησιαστικό διοικητικό σχήμα, το οποίο θα εγκρίνει εκάστοτε τη λειτουργία του παπικού πρωτείου. Μια οικουμενική σύνοδος θα έχει την αρμοδιότητα να αποφασίζει πότε το παπικό πρωτείο θα μπορεί να ενεργεί ως όργανο της οικουμενικής εκκλησίας (Ορθοδόξου και παπικής) και πότε όχι!

Όπως δήλωσε σχετικώς ο διαβιβαστής της πατριαρχικής επιστολής προς το Βατικανό, επίσκοπος Περγάμου Ιωάννης, σε Ίταλο δημοσιογράφο: «Δεν μπορούν να υπάρχουν παρεμβάσεις χωρίς απόφαση, πού να λαμβάνεται από κοινού με τους άλλους Έπισκόπους. Με δυο λόγια ο Έπίσκοπος της Ρώμης οφείλει να δρᾷ μαζί με τη σύνοδο».

Επομένως, έρωτᾷ ο ἐν λόγῳ δημοσιογράφος: «Ο ποντίφικας, όχι πλέον ως απόλυτος ἄρχων, ἀλλὰ σε συνεννόηση με ἕνα ἀντιπροσωπευτικό ὄργανο;».

«Ἀκριβῶς (ἀπαντᾷ ὁ Περγάμου). Εἶναι ἕνα οικουμενικό πρωτείο, πού δρᾷ πάντα ἀπό κοινού με τὴ σύνοδο!»

Καὶ συμπληρώνει: «Οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι εἶναι ἔτοιμοι νὰ δεχθῶν τὴν ἰδέα ἐνὸς οικουμενικοῦ πρωτείου. Σύμφωνα με τοὺς κανόνες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος Ρώμης εἶναι πρῶτος!»

Ἄν λοιπὸν τὸ σκεπτικὸ τῆς Πατριαρχικῆς ἐπιστολῆς πρὸς τὸν Πάπα εἶναι σὲ κύριες γραμμὲς ἡ συγκρότηση οικουμενικῆς ἐκκλησίας, με ὑψιστὸ ὄργανο συνοδικὴ ἐπιτροπὴ με ἐξουσία ἐγκρίσεως τῆς λειτουργίας τοῦ παπικοῦ πρωτείου ὡς οικουμενικοῦ, ἡ ὅλη ὑπόθεση μοιάζει με δονκιχωτικὸ μῦθο ἢ, τὸ χειρότερο, με ἔντεχνη ὑποδούλωση τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας στὸ παπικὸ πρωτείο, με τὴ μάσκα οικουμενικῆς συνόδου!

Διότι δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ φανταστῆ κανεὶς ποτὲ τὸν Πάπα ἐξαρτῶμενο, ὡς πρὸς τὴ χρῆση τοῦ ἐξουσιαστικοῦ πρωτείου του, ἀπὸ μία οικουμενικὴ ἀρχή, νὰ στερηθεῖ δηλ. τῆς ἀπόλυτης ἐξουσίας του, νὰ κάνει μία τέτοια χρῆση ἐντελῶς ἐλεύθερα καὶ μόνο κατὰ τὴ δικὴ του κρίση!

Ὅπως δὲποτε βέβαια τὸ πατριαρχικὸ ἐγχείρημα, ὅπως ἔχει σχεδιαστῆ, ἐμφανίζει τὸν κ. Βαρθολομαῖο καὶ τοὺς συμβούλους του νὰ εἶναι σίγουροι γιὰ τὴ συνεργασία τους

αὐτὴ με τὸν Πάπα, προκειμένου ἡ λειτουργία τοῦ πρωτείου του νὰ ὑπαχθεῖ ἐγκριτικῶς σὲ μιὰ οικουμενικὴ σύνοδο.

Ἀλλὰ μία τέτοια σιγουριά δείχνει εὐγλωττα ὅτι οἱ πρωτομάστορες τοῦ πατριαρχικοῦ ἐγχειρήματος δὲν γνωρίζουν τὸν Πάπα!

Ποιὸς εἶναι ἀλήθεια, ὁ Πάπας; Πόσο ἀξιόπιστος εἶναι στὶς ἐπικοινωνιακὲς σχέσεις του; Πόσο εἰλικρινὴς εἶναι στοὺς λόγους του; Ποιὰ εἰκόνα ἔχει δείξει, ὁ συγκεκριμένος Πάπας Βενέδικτος 16^{ος}, στὸν παγκόσμιον περίγυρο, κατὰ τὸ μικρὸ διάστημα τῆς θητείας του στὸν παπικὸ θρόνο;

Ἴδου λοιπὸν ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ Πάπας!

Ὁ πάπας Βενέδικτος ὁ 16^{ος} ἔχει δείξει πρὸς τὰ ἔξω τὸ κάτωθι προφίλ, τὸ ὁποῖο συνθέτουν κάποια σχετικὰ δημοσιεύματα.

Σὲ ἄρθρο δημοσιευμένο στὴν ἐφημερίδα «Καθημερινή», στὸ φύλλο τῆς Κυριακῆς 29 Ἀπριλίου 2007, με τίτλο: «Ὁ Ἄγνωστος Πάπας Βενέδικτος», τὸ ὁποῖο ἐλήφθη ἀπὸ τὴν διεθνῶς ἐγκριτὴ ἐφημερίδα «Herald Tribune», σκιαγραφεῖ βασικὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ τῆς νοοτροπίας καὶ τῆς ψυχολογίας τοῦ Πάπα, τὰ ὁποῖα τὸν παρουσιάζει ὡς ἄγνωστο, στὸ βαθμὸ πού «παραμένει αἰνιγματικὴ προσωπικότητα γιὰ τὴν παγκόσμια κοινὴ γνώμη»!

«Ἢδη, σημειώνεται στὸ ἐν λόγῳ ἄρθρο, ὅτι ἂν καὶ κλείνει δυὸ χρόνια στὸ παπικὸ ἀξίωμα, δὲν ἔχει καθιερωθεῖ στὴ συνείδηση τῶν πιστῶν, πράγμα τὸ ὁποῖο ἐπέτυχαν οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς προκατόχους του». Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ εὐρύτερο φάσμα τῆς πλανητικῆς σφαίρας, «βρίσκεται στὴ μέση του καταλόγου τῶν σεβασμίων προσωπικοτήτων τοῦ πλανήτη... στὴ Γερμανία ἀπ' ὅπου κατάγεται, οἱ δημοσκοπήσεις φέρουν τὸν Δάλαϊ Λάμα καὶ τὸν προπονητὴ τῆς ἐθνικῆς ὀμάδας ποδοσφαίρου, νὰ προηγῶνται τοῦ νέου ποντίφικα ὡς μοντέλα συμπεριφορᾶς καὶ θαυμαστῆς προσωπικότητας»!

Ὡς πρὸς τὸ αἰνιγματικὸ χαρακτῆρα τῆς προσωπικότητας τοῦ Πάπα, προστίθεται ὅτι: «Δὲν τίθεται ζήτημα ἂν ὁ Βενέδικτος εἶναι ἀρεστός, πλὴν ὁμως εἶναι σαφὲς ὅτι ἡ παγκόσμια κοινὴ γνώμη δυσκολεύεται νὰ κατανοήσῃ τὴν προσωπικότητά του»!

Ἐπὶ πλέον, ὁ συγγραφέας τοῦ ἐν λόγῳ ἁρθρου «Ὁ Ἄγνωστος Πάπας», David Gibson, ἐπισημαίνει ἕνα ἐξαιρετικῶς σημαντικὸ καὶ συγχρόνως κρίσιμο γιὰ κάθε ἐπικοινωνιακὴ σχέση τοῦ Ποντίφικα χαρακτηριστικὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς προσωπικότητός του, τὸ ὁποῖο σχετίζεται με τὴν ἀξιοπιστία τῶν λόγων του: «Ὁ κόσμος πείθεται ἀπὸ τὶς πράξεις πού ἔπονται τῆς ρητορικῆς καὶ μέχρι σήμερα οἱ πράξεις τοῦ Πάπα Βενέδικτου δὲν βρίσκονται σὲ ἄρμονία με τὰ λόγια του»!

Ἐξἄλλου, ἡ ἀσυμφωνία αὐτῆ λόγων καὶ πράξεων τοῦ Πάπα, ἔγινε ἀντιληπτὴ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψή του στὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο, κατὰ τὴν ἐπικοινωνία του με Τούρκους παράγοντες, γεγονός πού ἔγινε ἀφορμὴ νὰ χαρακτηρισεῖ ὁ Πάπας ὡς διπλωμάτης...

Ἡ ἐφημ. «Ἡμερησία» (2/3-12-06) ἔγραψε ὅτι ὁ Πάπας, κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψή του αὐτή, «ἐμφανίσθηκε ὡς διπλωμάτης ἐνωτικὸς καὶ συμφιλιωτικὸς». Διαψεύδοντας χιλιάδες ἐθνικιστές, ἀποκάλεσε τὴν Τουρκία «γέφυρα θρησκευτῶν». Ἐνῶ ὁμως, σημειώνει ὁ ἀρθρογράφος, «Ὁ Ποντίφικας μίλησε γιὰ ἀλληλεγγύη τῶν θρησκευτῶν, ἀπέφυγε νὰ ἀπευθύνει στοὺς μουσουλμάνους ἀνοιχτὴ πρόσκληση γιὰ διάλογο».

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἐφημ. «Συνάντηση» (1-12-06) δίνει ἔμφαση στὴ διπλωματικὴ πολιτικὴ τοῦ Πάπα, ὅταν γράφει: «Ὁ Πάπας πῆγε στὴν ἄρμενικὴ μητρόπολη τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Ἐκεῖ μὲ διπλωματικὴ γλῶσσα καὶ χωρὶς νὰ ἀναφέρει τὴ λέξη γενοκτονία, μίλησε γιὰ τὰ δεινὰ τῶν Ἀρμενίων στὴ διάρκεια τοῦ περασμένου αἰῶνα». Ἐπίσης καὶ ἡ ἐφημ. «Τὸ Ἔθνος» (1-12-06) ἀναφέρεται στὴ διπλωματικὴ συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ Πάπα στὸ Μπλὲ Τζαμί, σημειώνοντας ὅτι «Ὅταν ὁ Μουφτὴς τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, πού τὸν συνόδευε, εἶπε τώρα θὰ προσευχηθῶ, ὁ Πάπας, ὅπως μετέδωσαν τὰ ξένα πρακτορεῖα, ἔμεινε λίγο μὲ τὰ μάτια κλειστὰ καὶ τὰ χέρια σταυρωμένα στὸ στήθος, στὴ θέση προσευχῆς τῶν μουσουλμάνων, ἀλλὰ δὲν πέρασε τὰ χέρια πάνω στὸ πρόσωπό του, ὅπως ὀρίζει τὸ ἰσλαμικὸ τυπικόν».

Κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψή του, ἐν τούτοις, στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία, ὁ Πάπας, δὲν θέλησε νὰ προσευχηθεῖ χριστιανικῶς ἐνώπιον Τούρκων ἐπισήμων!

Ὡς πρὸς τὴν πραγματικὴ δὲ στάση τοῦ Πάπα ἀπέναντι τῶν λοιπῶν χριστιανῶν, ὁ Gibson, σημειώνει στὸ δικό του ἄρθρο, ὅτι ἡ ὁμιλία τοῦ Πάπα στὸ Regensburg (πού ἔθιξε τοὺς ἰσλαμιστές) ἦταν «μιά εὐθεία ἐπίθεση κατὰ τῶν μὴ καθολικῶν χριστιανῶν».

Ὡς γνωστόν, στὴν ὁμιλία αὐτή, ὁ Πάπας ἔθεσε στὸ περιθώριο τῶν ἐξελίξεων, μέσω τῶν ὁποίων ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς διαμορφώθηκε ὀριστικὰ στὴ Ρώμη, τὴν Ἀνατολικὴ Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ Ἀνατολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, κατὰ τὸν Πάπα, δὲν «ἐξελίχθηκε», γιὰ αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ ἀπλῶς μιὰ ἀρχαία μορφή χριστιανικῆς ἐκκλησίας.

Τέλος, ὁ Πάπας στὴν ὁμιλία του, κατὰ τὴν Θ. Λειτουργία, πού ἐτέλεσε στὴν Ἐφεσο, ἰσχυρίσθηκε ὅτι, κατ' αὐτόν, ὁ καλύτερος τρόπος γιὰ τὴν ἐπίτευξη τῆς ἐνότητος στὴν Ἐκκλησία, εἶναι ἡ μέθοδος τῆς Οὐνίας! Μὲ τὴ θέση του αὐτὴ ἀκυρώνει ἐκ τῶν προτέρων τὴ σημασία τοῦ θεολογικοῦ διαλόγου, γιὰ τὴν ἐνότητα τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν!

Ὁ πάπας, λοιπόν, Βενέδικτος 16^{ος} εἶναι καὶ παραμένει γιὰ τὴν παγκόσμια κοινότητα αἰνιγματικὴ προσωπικότητα. Εἶναι διπλωμάτης καὶ ἄρα ἀνειλικρινῆς καὶ ἀναξιόπιστος στὶς ἐπικοινωνιακὲς σχέσεις του καὶ στοὺς λόγους του, ἀφοῦ ἡ ρητορικὴ του δὲν ἐπιβεβαιώνεται ἀπὸ τίς πράξεις του.

Ἐπομένως, στὴ Ραβέννα, ἂν πραγματοποιηθεῖ ἡ συνάντηση τοῦ κ. Βαρθολομαίου μὲ τὸν Πάπα, δὲν θὰ

προκύψει τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα, πού ἀναμένει καὶ ἔχει σχεδιάσει ὁ Πατριάρχης μὲ τοὺς συμβούλους του.

Ὁ Πάπας ὅπου προσκαλεῖται, δὲν πηγαίνει γιὰ νὰ τὸν «χειρισθοῦν». Ἀντίθετα, ἂν ἔχει συμφέρον ἀπὸ μία τέτοια εὐκαιρία, θὰ προσέλθει, γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτύχει δικούς του σκοπούς. Ὁ Πάπας παντοῦ θέλει νὰ ἔχει «τὸ πάνω χέρι»! Τὸ αἴτημά του αὐτό, φανερό ἢ μυστικόν, θὰ τὸ πραγματοποιήσῃ ἢ ἀπόλυτη ἰσχὺς τοῦ ἐξουσιαστικοῦ του πρωτείου!

Στὴ Ραβέννα ὁ ἄγνωστος Πάπας θὰ χειρισθεῖ ἀνάλογα καὶ τὸν γνωστὸ κ. Βαρθολομαῖο...



Οἰκουμενισμὸς - Συγκρητισμὸς

Κατὰ τὸν ἀξιοσέβαστον καθηγητὴν τοῦ Κανονικοῦ Δικαίου κ. Κωνσταντῖνον Μουρατίδη «Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς - Συγκρητισμὸς δὲν εἶναι ἀπλῶς μιὰ αἵρεσις, ἀλλὰ παναίρεσις, διότι κατ' οὐσίαν ὀδηγεῖ εἰς τὴν ἄρνησιν τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ ὡς μοναδικῆς καὶ ἀποκλειστικῆς ἀπολύτου ἀληθείας ἐξ' ἀποκαλύψεως καὶ εἰς τὸ ὑποβιβασμὸν αὐτοῦ εἰς μιὰ μεταξὺ τῶν πολλῶν θρησκευτῶν ἢ τὴν πνευματικωτέραν καὶ σπουδαιωτέραν ἀλλὰ ὄχι τὴν μοναδική. Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς, ἄρα συγκρητισμὸς εἶναι ἡ μεγαλυτέρα ἀπειλή κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, διότι δι' αὐτῆς δὲν πλήσσει ἀπλῶς ἐν δόγμα ἢ μιὰ θεμελιώδης ἀλήθεια, ἀλλὰ σύμπασα συλλήβδην ἢ δογματικὴ καὶ κανονικὴ τάξις τῆς Ἁγίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἐκκλησίας».

«Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος» 20^{ῆς} Μαΐου 1970

«Οἰκουμενισμὸς - Συγκρητισμὸς»



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

Τους Ἔδειξε τὸν Οὐρανὸ καὶ Εἶπε: Νὰ ἡ Πατρίδα μου!

Τοῦ Τέως Ἐπισκόπου Φλωρίνης Ἀγιοστίμου Καντιώτη.

Λοιπὸν τί περιμένουμε; Μόνιμη κατοικία μας εἶναι ὁ οὐρανός. Δὲν πλαστήκαμε γιὰ τὰ ἐπίγεια καὶ μάταια, τὰ μικρὰ καὶ ἀσήμαντα, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὸν οὐρανὸ. Μιὰ ἀπόδειξη ἡ στάση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἐνῶ τὰ ζῶα περπατοῦν μὲ τὰ τέσσερα καὶ ἔχουν τὸ κεφάλι πρὸς τὰ κάτω, ὁ ἄνθρωπος στέκει ὀρθὸς κ' ἔχει τὸ κεφάλι ψηλά. Γιατί; Γιὰ νὰ βλέπει τὸν οὐρανὸ. Ἡ ὠραία ἀρχαία ἐλληνικὴ λέξις ἄνθρωπος σημαίνει αὐτὸν ποὺ βλέπει πρὸς τὰ ἄνω, πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸ.

Ρώτησαν κάποτε ἕνα φιλόσοφο:

- Ποιὰ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα σου;

Ἵλη μέρα τοὺς κούρασε λέγοντας:

- Περιμένετε.

Αὐτὸς ἤθελε νὰ νυχτώσει. Ὅταν βγήκαν τὰ ἄστρα, τοὺς ἔδειξε τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ εἶπε:

- Νὰ ἡ πατρίδα μου!...

Γιὰ ἐκεῖ εἴμαστε πλασμένοι. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τὰ μάτια τοῦ πρὸς τὰ πάνω, γιὰ νὰ βλέπει τὸ μεγαλεῖο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ λέει «Οἱ οὐρανοὶ διηγοῦνται δόξαν Θεοῦ, ποίησιν δὲ χειρῶν αὐτοῦ ἀναγγέλλει τὸ στερέωμα.» (Ψαλμ. 18:2).

Ἄλλ' ὅταν λέμε οὐρανὸ τί ἐννοοῦμε; Οὐρανὸς δὲν εἶναι μόνο αὐτὸς ποὺ βλέπουμε. Ὑπάρχει καὶ «ὁ οὐρανὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ» (Δευτ. 10:14, Ψαλμ. 67:34 καὶ 112:24, Σοφ. Σειρ. 16:18) ἢ «οἱ οὐρανοὶ τῶν οὐρανῶν» (Ψαλμ. 148:4). Ἕνας οὐρανὸς εἶναι ὁ γαλανὸς φυσικὸς οὐρανός, ὅπου ὑπάρχει ὁ ἥλιος, τὸ φεγγάρι, τὰ ἄστρα, οἱ κομήτες, οἱ γαλαξίες. Ἄλλ' αὐτὸς ὁ οὐρανὸς μιὰ μέρα θὰ σβῆσει. Ὑπάρχει ἕνας ἄλλος οὐρανὸς ἀθάνατος, μὲ κάλλος ἀπερίγραπτο. Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτός; Εἶναι ὁ πνευματικὸς οὐρανός, ὁ «τρίτος οὐρανός» ὅπου ἀνέβηκε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Β' Κορ. 12:2). Καὶ ὅπως στὸν φυσικὸ οὐρανὸ ὑπάρχει ἥλιος σελήνη ἄστρα, ἔτσι στὸν πνευματικὸ οὐρανὸ ὑπάρχει ἥλιος ἄδυτος, ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ὑπάρχει σελήνη-πανσέληνος, ἡ Παναγία μας, ὑπάρχουν ἀστέρια λαμπερά, οἱ ἅγιοι. Ἐκεῖ κατευθυνόμεθα, ἀδελφοί μου.

Ἀγαπητοί μου! Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία, ποὺ τελοῦμε, εἶναι μία ἀναπαράστασης ὄλου τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς Θείας Οἰκονομίας. Θυμούμεθα τὴ γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὴν εἴσοδο του στὸν κόσμον ὡς διδασκάλου, τὸ μυστικὸ δεῖπνο, τὴ σταυρικὴ θυσία, τὴν Ἀνάσταση, τέλος δὲ—σὲ κάθε Θεία Λειτουργία—καὶ τὴν ἀνάληψή του. Ποιὰ σημεῖα θυμίζουν τὴν ἀνάληψη; Ὅταν, μετὰ τὴ μεγάλη εἴσοδο καὶ τὸ Πιστεύω, ὁ Ἱερεὺς βγαίνει καὶ λέει «Ἄνω σχῶμεν τὰς

καρδίας».

Ἐκεῖ ἐννοεῖ τὸ ἐξῆς. Δὲν εἶναι πιά ὁ Χριστὸς στὸν κόσμον, εἶναι στὸν οὐρανὸ, λοιπὸν κ' ἐμεῖς ἐκεῖ πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε τὶς καρδιές μας. Κι ὅπως ὅταν ἔχουμε κάποιον δικό μας στὴν Αὐστραλία ἢ στὴν Ἀμερικὴ τὸν σκεπτόμεθα μέρα - νύχτα, ἔτσι καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸ ὅπου εἶναι ὁ Κύριός μας. «Ἡμῶν τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει» (Φιλ. 3:20). Πρὸς τὸ τέλος ἐπίσης τῆς λειτουργίας, μετὰ τὴ Θεία Κοινωνία, ὁ Ἱερεὺς λέει: «Υψώθητι ἐπὶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, ὁ Θεός, καὶ ἐπὶ πάσαν τὴν γῆν ἢ δόξα σου», ποὺ ἐννοεῖ πάλι τὴν ἀνάληψη.

Χρειαζόμαστε ἀπογείωσης. Νὰ ὑψωθοῦμε κ' ἐμεῖς «μὲ φτερά ἀετοῦ», νὰ πετάξουμε στὸν πνευματικὸ οὐρανὸ, γιατί «θὰ μᾶς φάει ὁ κάμπος», ὅπως λέει ἕνας ποιητῆς. Ἄλλοτε

μέσα στὶς φτωχικὲς καλύβες κατοικοῦσαν τίμιοι ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἐπίγειοι ἄγγελοι. Τώρα, μέσα στὰ πολυτελῆ μέγαρα κατοικοῦν ἄλογα ζῶα καὶ μοχθηροὶ δαίμονες. Ὁ χοῖρος ἔχει τὸ κεφάλι πρὸς τὰ κάτω, ἀγαπᾷ τὰ βελανίδια καὶ περιφρονεῖ τὰ διαμάντια, ὅπως εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς (βλ. Ματθ. 7:6). Τί θέλει; Λάσπη καὶ βρῶμα. Ἔτσι κ' ἐμεῖς περιφρονοῦμε τ' ἀνεκτίμητα λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ σὰν τὸ χοῖρο κινούμεθα μέσα στὸ βόρβορο τῆς ἠθικῆς ἀκαθαρσίας. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ χοῖρος μόνο μιὰ φορὰ βλέπει τὸν οὐρανὸ, ὅταν ὁ χασάπης τὸν ἀναποδογυρίζει γιὰ νὰ τὸν σφάζει, ἔτσι κι ὁ κτηνάνθρωπος. Ὅταν ἔρθει ὁ ἀρχάγγελος μὲ τὴ μάχαιρά του νὰ τὸν πάρει, τότε γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ὑψώνει τὸ νοῦ του καὶ βλέπει ὅτι πέρα ἀπὸ τὸ μάταιο τοῦτο κόσμον ὑπάρχει καὶ ἄλλη ζωὴ.

Ἀδελφοί μου, ὅσο εἶστε βέβαιοι ὅτι ὑπάρχει αὐτὸς ὁ κόσμος, τόσο νὰ εἶστε βέβαιοι ὅτι ὑπάρχει ὁ ἄλλος κόσμος. Σ' ἐκεῖνο τὸν κόσμον πηγαίνουμε. «Ἄνω σχῶμεν τὰς καρδίας».



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

Τέως Ἐπισκόπου Φλωρίνης Ἀγιοστίμου Καντιώτου

[Ἀπὸ τὸ φυλλάδιον «Σταχυολογήματα τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀγιοστίμου Καντιώτου» Ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη»]

Ἡ Κατάντια τῆς Ξεφτιλισμένης καὶ Διασυρμένης Κοινωνίας μας...

Ἀπὸ τὰ σχόλια μίας Ἑλληνορθόδοξης συνομιλίας στὸ Διαδίκτυο, σχετικά μὲ τὴν ὀργανωμένη κίνηση γιὰ τὴν νομιμοποίηση «γάμων» ὁμοφυλοφίλων στὴν Ελλάδα.

Ὁ Ἑλληνορθόδοξος λαὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν μας παρακολουθεῖ μὲ ὀδυνηρὴ κατάπληξη τὶς προσπάθειες κάποιων νὰ καταστρέψουν τὴ δομὴ τῆς κοινωνίας μας μὲ τὴ νομιμοποίηση τῆς ἀνωμαλίας. Ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ πετύχουν τὸ ἀδιανόητο, τοὺς γάμους μεταξὺ ὁμοφυλοφίλων! Ἐφτασαν στὸ σημεῖο νὰ λένε ὅτι στὸ νόμο γιὰ τὸν πολιτικὸ γάμο ἀναφέρονται «πρόσωπα» καὶ ὄχι ἄρρεν καὶ θῆλυ, ἐπομένως μποροῦν καὶ οἱ ὁμοφυλόφιλοι νὰ παντρεύονται!

Ἕνας ἄνδρας καὶ μία γυναίκα ἀποτελοῦν ἕνα φυσιολογικὸ ζευγάρι, ὅπως χιλιάδες χρόνια τὸ ξέρουμε ὅλοι. Ἔχει καμία ὁμοιότητα γάμου τὸ ζευγάρι αὐτό, μὲ τοὺς караγκιόζηδες τῶν ἀνώμαλων γάμων, ποὺ δῆθεν εἶναι κι αὐτοὶ τὸ ἴδιο; Οὐδεὶς θὰ μπορούσε νὰ φανταστεῖ ὅτι κάποιιο νοσηροὶ ἐγκέφαλοι θὰ προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ διαστρεβλώσουν τὸ αὐτονόητο.

Αὐτὸ ποὺ βλέπουμε σήμερα νὰ γίνεται στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἑλλάδα (ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν «μοντέρνα» Δύση) δὲν ἔχει προηγούμενο. Αὐτὸ τὸ ξεπούλημα θεσμῶν καὶ ἡθους ποὺ γίνεται ἀπὸ μερίδα πολιτικῶν ἀρχηγῶν καὶ κομμάτων στὴν προσπάθεια νὰ μαζέψουν ψήφους, καὶ ἀπὸ μερίδα δημοσιογράφων στὴν προσπάθεια νὰ φανοῦν «προοδευτικοί» τῆς κακιᾶς ὥρας, ἐξυψώνοντας ἄνομα καὶ διεστραμμένα πάθη καὶ κατηγορώντας ὄσους διαμαρτύρονται, εἶναι τὸ μεγάλο ἀνάθεμα ποὺ βάζουν πάνω στὶς ψυχές τους! Καὶ τὸ ὅποιο καὶ θὰ βροῦν μιὰ μέρα μπροστά τους, εἴτε τὸ θέλουν εἴτε δὲν τὸ θέλουν, εἴτε τοὺς ἀρέσει εἴτε δὲν τοὺς ἀρέσει, εἴτε πιστεύουν στὸν Χριστὸ εἴτε δὲν πιστεύουν...

Εἶναι οἱ ἴδιοι σχετικά ἄνθρωποι ποὺ κλαῖνε μὲ κροκοδειλία δάκρυα «γιὰ τοὺς κακοὺς παιδραστὲς καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἄθλια πορνογραφία ποὺ ἐκμαυλίζει τὰ παιδιά μας», καὶ γιὰ τὸ «βρωμερὸ Διαδίκτυο». Καὶ τώρα ἰδοῦ, ἔρχονται διὰ πλαγίου, ὑποστηρικτὲς αὐτῆς τῆς σαρκικῆς συναλλαγῆς καὶ πτώσεως...

Ἀλγεινὴ ἐντύπωση ἔκανε πρὶν λίγους μῆνες ἡ ἄρνηση τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἑλλάδος Ἱερωνύμου νὰ λάβει θέση, νὰ ἐκφράσει ἄποψη στὸ θέμα τοῦ «γάμου» τῶν ὁμοφυλοφίλων. Μεθαύριο, θὰ τοὺς δοῦμε νὰ μπαίνουν καὶ σὲ Ὁρθόδοξες Ἐκκλησίες γιὰ προσκύνημα καὶ γιὰ «χρυσὸ δοντάκι», στὸν Ναὸ δηλαδὴ τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ καταδικάζει ἀπερίφραστα τέτοια παρὰ φύσει πάθη...

Ἀλλὰ, δόξα τῷ Μεγαλοδύναμῳ ποὺ δὲν μᾶς ἐγκατέλειψε ἀκόμα, καὶ παρέχει γιὰ τὸν λαὸ Του μερικὲς φωνές τῶν ἐν ἔρημῳ βοώντων. Μὲ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πρὸς τὸ ἐκκλησίασμα, ὁ μητροπολίτης Θεσσαλονίκης κ. κ. Ἄνθιμος ἐμμένει στὶς ἀπόψεις τοῦ περὶ «πορνείας» γιὰ τὸ σύμφωνο συμβίωσης, καὶ περὶ «ἐξίωσης ἀνθρώπων καὶ ζώων» γιὰ τὸ ἐνδεχόμενο

ἐπέκτασής του καὶ στὰ ὁμόφυλα ζευγάρια. Κοινοποίησε τρισελίδο ἐνημερωτικὸ μήνυμα ποὺ ἀπευθύνεται πρὸς τὸν κλῆρο καὶ τὸν λαὸ τῆς μητρόπολός του, τὸ ὅποιο διαβάστηκε σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἐνοριακοὺς ναοὺς τὴν Κυριακὴ τῆς 8ῆς Ἰουνίου 2008, ἀλλὰ ἔχει ἀποδέκτες οὐσιαστικὰ τοὺς προαναφερόμενους.

Σὲ αὐτὸ ἐκφράζει τὶς ἀπόψεις τοῦ γιὰ τὰ «ἐπιζήμια καὶ ἀλλόκοτα», ὅπως τὰ χαρακτηρίζει, ἐγχειρήματα, παραθέτει σχετικά χωρία τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς, καταφέρεται ἐναντίον τοῦ τὸν ὑπουργοῦ Δικαιοσύνης Σωτ. Χατζηγάκη, ἐνῶ στέλνει τὸ μήνυμα πρὸς τὸν κ. Ἱερώνυμο πὼς ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔχει ἀρμοδιότητα καὶ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι αὐτὴ ποὺ θὰ ἔχει τὸν τελικὸ λόγο.

Γιὰ τὸ θέμα τῆς νόμιμης συμβίωσης ζευγαριῶν ὁμοφυλοφίλων, ὁ κ. Ἄνθιμος ἀναφέρει πὼς στὸ ἄκουσμά του «ἔφριξε ὁ κόσμος ποὺ κρατεῖ τὶς Ἑλληνικὲς παραδόσεις καὶ σέβεται τὴ διδασκαλία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὴν τήρηση τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ζωῆς τῶν πολιτῶν». Διερωτᾶται «Τόσο εὐκόλα καὶ ἀπερίσκεπτα ἀποφασίσαμε νὰ αὐτοκαταστραφοῦμε»; Καὶ προσθέτει πὼς πρόκειται γιὰ νομοθέτημα ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ διανοηθεῖ ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς, μὲ τὸ ὅποιο ὁ ἴδιος δὲν πρόκειται νὰ συμβιβαστεῖ ποτέ.

Παραθέτοντας χωρία τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς, ἀναφέρει πὼς «οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὀφείλουμε νὰ προσαρμοστοῦμε στὶς ἐπιταγὲς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ ὄχι νὰ προσαρμόσουμε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο στὰ πάθη μας», ἐνῶ καταγγέλλει εὐθέως τὸν ὑπουργὸ Δικαιοσύνης: «Λυπούμεθα βαθύτατα ὅτι ὁ ὑπουργὸς κ. Σωτ. Χατζηγάκης βάζει σὲ τέτοια δοκιμασία τὸν Ἑλληνικὸ λαό», τονίζει.

Ὁ μητροπολίτης Θεσσαλονίκης ξεκαθαρίζει στὴν ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πὼς ἡ Διαρκὴς Ἱερά Σύνοδος καὶ ἡ Ἱερά Σύνοδος τῆς Ἱεραρχίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος «ἔχουν ἀρμοδιότητα νὰ ἀποφασίσουν ὀριστικῶς γιὰ τὰ νομοθετήματα αὐτά», ἐνῶ στὸ τέλος ἐπικαλεῖται μέχρι καὶ τὸν ἰσλαμικὸ κίνδυνο.

«Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τὸ Ἰσλάμ ἔχει ἐγκατασταθεῖ σταθερὰ στὴν Εὐρώπη καὶ ἐμφανίζεται νὰ μένει ἀμετακίνητο σὲ θέματα ἠθικῆς ζωῆς καὶ κοινωνικῆς τάξεως, ὅπως τὰ ἔχουν ρυθμίσει στὸ ἥπιο Ἰσλάμ, ἐπιχειρεῖται μιὰ σκληρὴ ἐπίθεση ἐναντίον τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, μὲ στόχο τὴν πλήρη ἀποδυνάμωση καὶ διάλυση τοῦ εὐαγγελικοῦ θεμελίου, τὸ ὅποιο ἐπιδρᾷ ἐπὶ αἰῶνες στὴ ζωὴ τῶν χριστιανικῶν κοινωνιῶν», ὑποστηρίζει, καταλήγοντας ὅτι σὲ ὅλα αὐτὰ τὸ μόνο μέσο τακτικῆς εἶναι ἡ ἄμυνα καὶ ἡ ἀντίσταση τῶν κοινωνιῶν τῆς Εὐρώπης.

Μὲ ὅλα αὐτὰ ποὺ βλέπουμε, καὶ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ πιστέψουμε πὼς γίνονται στὴν Ἑλληνορθόδοξη Ἑλλάδα μας, διερωτόμαστε: Οἱ καπεταναῖοι καὶ ἄρματολοι ποὺ μας ἀπελευθέρωσαν ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους ἦσαν ἀνδροπρεπεῖς μὲ τιμὴ καὶ ἦθος; ἂν γνώριζαν ποῦ θὰ ἔφταναν οἱ μετέπειτα πολιτικοὶ τὴν χώρα αὐτή, ἄραγε θὰ ἔκαναν ἐκεῖνον τὸν αἱματοβαμμένο ἀγώνα;

Ἐξομολόγηση: Τὸ Σβηστήρι τοῦ Θεοῦ

ΠΗΓΗ: *Απὸ κείμενο Τερᾶς Μονῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας, Ἁγίου Ὁρους.*

Στὴν ζωὴ μας κάναμε πολλὰ λάθη. Κάναμε λάθη ὅταν ἤμασταν παιδιά, ὅταν γίναμε ἔφηβοι καὶ νέοι, ἀλλὰ πολὺ περισσότερο κάναμε λάθη καὶ ἀργότερα, ὅταν γίναμε γονεῖς. Ἡ ζωὴ μας εἶναι γεμάτη λάθη. Πολλὰ ἀπ’ αὐτὰ ἦταν ἀνώδυνα, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ’ αὐτὰ εἶχαν μεγάλες συνέπειες στὴ ζωὴ μας.

Ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι μόνο αὐτὰ τὰ λάθη ποὺ κάναμε. Κάναμε λάθη ἀπέναντι στοῦ Θεοῦ, οἱ περισσότεροι ἀποκοπήκαμε καὶ γυρίσαμε τὶς πλάτες σ’ Αὐτόν, νομίσαμε πὼς μακριὰ Του θὰ ἤμασταν εὐτυχημένοι. Κυνηγήσαμε τὴ χαρὰ καὶ τὴ εὐτυχία στὶς ἡδονές, στὴ σάρκα, στὸν κόσμο. Χαράξαμε μία ζωὴ ὑλιστικὴ, μὲ γλέντια, διασκεδάσεις, τζόγο καὶ εὐκολὴ ζωὴ, ρουφήσαμε τὴν ἁμαρτία μέχρι τελευταίας σταγόνας. Δοκιμάσαμε τὰ πάντα, καὶ ὅμως ἡ πίκρα εἶναι ἀπλωμένη στὴ ζωὴ μας, τὸ κενὸ ποὺ ὑπάρχει μέσα μας αὐξάνει καθημερινά. Νομίζουμε πὼς αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μοῖρα μας καὶ τὸ τέλος μας.

Ἀλλὰ μέσα σ’ αὐτὸ τὸ πυκνὸ σκοτάδι, ἕνα φῶς λάμπει, δὲν τὸ προσέξαμε, δὲν τὸ εἶδαμε. Εἶναι ὁ ἀστέρας ποὺ ὀδήγησε τοὺς μάγους στοῦ σπήλαιο τῆς Βηθλεέμ. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἀστέρι ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ ὀδηγῇ τοὺς ὁδοιπόρους τῆς ζωῆς σὲ ἐκεῖνον, στὸν ἕναν στοῦ μοναδικό, στὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό.

Ἀδελφέ μου, σκέψου γιὰ λίγο, μὴν ἀπογοητεύεσαι, μὴν ἀπελπίζεσαι, ὑπάρχει σωτηρία, ὑπάρχει Σωτήρας. Ὁ Κύριος τῆς ἀγάπης ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἀπέθανε γιὰ σένα, ἔχυσε τὸ αἷμα Του στοῦ Σταυροῦ γιὰ νὰ σοῦ χαρίσῃ σωτηρία, λύτρωσι, ἐλευθερία ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Ἰσως δὲν γνῶρισες, δὲν ἐνδιαφέρθηκες γι’ Αὐτόν. Αὐτὸς σὲ ἀγαπᾷ, σὲ ἀναζητᾷ, θέλει νὰ σὲ σώσῃ.

Γνωρίζεις ὅτι ὁ Κύριος ἔβαλε ἕνα σβηστήρι μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία Του, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ σβῆσῃ ὅλο τὸ παρελθόν σου, ὥστε νὰ μπορέσης ν’ ἀνοίξεις μία καινούρια σελίδα στὴ ζωὴ σου. Τὸ σβηστήρι αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ μετάνοια, εἶναι ἡ ἐξομολόγησι, εἶναι τὸ λουτρὸ τῆς ψυχῆς. Ἐὰν θέλῃς ν’ ἀλλάξῃ ἡ ζωὴ σου, ἐὰν θέλῃς νὰ νοιώσῃς χαρὰ καὶ εἰρήνη, πᾶρε τὴν ἀπόφασιν ν’ ἀλλάξῃς ζωὴ καὶ πορεία.

Ἡ ζωὴ ποὺ κάνεις θὰ σὲ ὀδηγήσῃ σὲ ἕνα θάνατο αἰώνιο· ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ σὲ καλεῖ, θέλει νὰ σὲ σώσῃ. Αὐτὸ ποὺ διαβάξεις αὐτὴ τὴν ὥρα εἶναι ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ· μὴ κλείσης τὴν καρδιά σου στὴ φωνὴ Του, ἔλα κοντὰ Του, πήγαινε νὰ βρῆς ἕνα πνευματικό, ἀνοίξε τὴν καρδιά σου στοῦ Θεοῦ, πὲς τὰ λάθη τῆς ζωῆς σου μὲ εἰλικρίνεια, μὲ ταπεινώσι, μὲ ἀληθινὴ μετάνοια, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς θὰ σὲ σώσῃ, θὰ σὲ ἀλλάξῃ, θὰ σὲ καταστήσῃ παιδί δικό του, θὰ σοῦ χαρίσῃ τὸ Πνεῦμα Του τὸ Ἅγιον, θὰ γίνῃς νέος ἄνθρωπος, καινὴ κτίσι, ἕνας νέος πολίτης τοῦ οὐρανοῦ!

Γελώντας μὲ τὰ Χάλια μας: Τὸ Μελόδραμα τῆς Ἐνορίας μας...

Ἐνας ἔβραϊος ἀποφάσισε νὰ γίνῃ χριστιανὸς καὶ θέλησε νὰ ἐξετάσει τὶς ἐκδοχὲς τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ γιὰ νὰ ἐπιλέξει. Βρίσκει λοιπὸν ἕναν Ὁρθόδοξο, ἕναν προτεστάντη κι ἕναν παπικό. Τοὺς λέει τὶς προθέσεις του κι ἐκεῖνοι συμφωνοῦν νὰ τὸν «ξεναγήσουν» στὶς ἐκκλησίες τους.

Πάει ὁ ἔβραϊος μὲ τὸν προτεστάντη μία Κυριακὴ, μπαίνει στοῦ ναοῦ καὶ βλέπει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τακτοποιημένους μὲ τὰ καλά τοὺς ροῦχα, ὁ καθένας στοῦ κάθισμά του, μπροστὰ ἀπὸ τὸν κάθε πιστὸ μία Καινὴ Διαθήκη, ἡ χορωδία νὰ λέει τοὺς ὕμνους ἀρμονικά, τὰ πάντα νὰ λάμπουν ἀπὸ καθαριότητα καὶ μετὰ τὸ τέλος ὅλοι του φέρθηκαν εὐγενικά μὲ πολὺ καλοὺς τρόπους.

Τὴν ἐπόμενη Κυριακὴ συνεννοήθηκε μὲ τὸν παπικό νὰ πάει στοῦ δικό του ναοῦ. Μπαίνει μέσα, πλένει τὰ χέρια, ρίχνει τὸ κέρμα ν’ ἀνάψει τὸ λαμπάκι ἀντὶ γιὰ κερί καὶ κάθεται. Οὔτε ἐκεῖ ὄρθιοι, ὅλοι στὰ καθίσματά τους μὲ τάξη καὶ ἀρμονία. Ἄκουσε καὶ τὴν ἐγκύκλιο τοῦ Πάπα, εἶδε καὶ τὶς φωτογραφίες του ποὺ δέσποζαν ἀκόμα καὶ ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ. Πέρασε ἡ ὥρα, τελείωσε ἡ λειτουργία, τὸν καλοδέχθηκαν, τὸν κέρασαν κι ἔφυγε.

Τὴν τρίτη Κυριακὴ κανόνισε νὰ πάει στὴν Ὁρθόδοξην Ἐκκλησία. Μπαίνει μέσα καὶ βλέπει ἄλλους νὰ μιλάνε μεταξύ τους, πολλοὺς ὄρθιους γιατί δὲν ἔφθαναν τὰ καθίσματα, τὴ νεωκόρο νὰ μαλώνει μὲ μία κυρία γιατί τῆς ἔσβησε γρήγορα τὸ κερί ποὺ ἄναψε, ἄκουγε τὰ μωρὰ νὰ τσιρίζουν καὶ νὰ μὴ τὰ παρατηρεῖ κανεὶς, ὁ παπὰς νὰ φωνάζει στὸν ψάλτη νὰ τελειώσῃ τὰ τεριρέμ, κλπ. Μόλις τελείωσε ἡ λειτουργία ἄρχισαν καὶ τὰ μνημόσυνα, ὅπου ἄλλοι ἔβγαιναν στὴν Ἐκκλησία κι ἄλλοι ἔμπαιναν, μὲ θόρυβο καὶ φασαρία..

Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος ἀπογοητεύτηκε ἀπὸ τὴν εἰκόνα ποὺ εἶδε ὁ προσήλυτος ἔβραϊος...

Τὴν ἐπόμενη ἑβδομάδα συναντήθηκαν ὅλοι γιὰ νὰ μάθουν τί ἀποφάσισε ὁ ἔβραϊος. Ὅταν βρέθηκαν ὅλοι μαζί τους λέει: «Στὴν προτεστάντικὴ ἐκκλησία εἶδα μεγάλη τάξη καὶ εὐγένεια. Στὴν παπικὴ εἶδα μεγάλη ἀφοσίωση στὸν πνευματικό σας ἀρχηγὸ καὶ τὶς ὁδηγίες τοῦ ἱερέα σας. Στὴν Ὁρθόδοξην ἐκκλησία εἶδα τέτοιο μπάχαλο ποὺ δὲν τὸ περιμένα!»

Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος σκυθρωπίασε ἀπογοητευμένος, ἐνῶ οἱ ἄλλοι δυὸ ἀναθάρρησαν.

Καὶ καταλήγει ὁ ἔβραϊος: «Θὰ γίνω Ὁρθόδοξος!»

«Μὰ πῶς;» ἀναρωτιοῦνται οἱ ἄλλοι.

«Ἀκοῦστε», τοὺς λέει ὁ ἔβραϊος. «Τὰ δικά σας δικαιολογοῦνται μὰ τὴν τάξη ποὺ ἔχει ὁ ἕνας καὶ τὴν πειθαρχία ποὺ ἔχει ὁ ἄλλος. Τούτου ἐδῶ—καὶ δείχνει τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο—δὲν δικαιολογεῖται ἀλλιῶς. Μὲ τέτοιο μπάχαλο μόνο ἂν ἔχεις τὸν Θεὸ μαζί σου διατηρεῖσαι 2000 χρόνια...»

ON EUTHANASIA

By Fr. Victor Potapov.

From the Editor: The demise of the "Right-to-Die" movement which sponsors euthanasia initiatives world-wide is far from ever becoming a reality. World-wide polls continue to unfortunately show persistent—although still conditional—support for what amounts to physician-assisted suicide.

Like abortion, euthanasia has become a great moral issue whose "resolution" will ultimately be determined at the ballot box and in the courts. As Orthodox Christians, it is imperative that we know precisely where we stand on these issues and why we never allow ourselves to inadvertently succumb to the powers of media persuasion with their subtle appeal to "compassion," "mercy," and "reasonableness."

In many ways, euthanasia has come to the fore as an extension of the abortion debate, but whereas we know that human life begins at conception, just when its earthly sojourn ends—or should end—is less clear in those increasing cases involving medical intervention. We must understand the difference between "active" and "passive" euthanasia, between extraordinary or "heroic" measures and ordinary means; we must understand the rationale behind the "quality of life" argument, and how the debate over euthanasia fits into the larger sphere of bioethics. Because of its multiple complexities and the gravity of this issue, and because it is bound to affect many of us directly, we have decided to print this article that is a very relevant exposition of the Ten Commandments.

† † †

Thou shalt not kill [Exod 20:13]

In all societies throughout the history of mankind an extraordinarily important significance has been attached to dying and death. For our forebears, who lived under the conditions of agricultural societies, death was in the nature of things and was accepted fatalistically. But with the development of contemporary societies the problem of dying acquired a new meaning: the achievements of medical science and technology now permit life to be prolonged. We do not simply live longer; we live much longer than our forebears. However, in the opinion of many, the additional years often turn out to be not at all the best time of life, but a "slow and steady advance into enemy country." For some this experience turns out to be unbearable.

In 1990, Americans were shaken by the following event: Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a retired pathologist, constructed and offered to interested persons a device which journalists christened "the suicide machine." At the request of a 54 year-old woman who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, he inserted into one of her veins a syringe connected to this machine. The patient pressed a button, a solution of potassium chlorate began to enter the vein, and within a few minutes her heart stopped.

In the Netherlands, the sick who experience unbearable sufferings can now ask a physician to help them die. If several physicians testify to the incurability of the illness, the sick person can receive a fatal injection. Opponents of such a kind of medical assistance point out that when such injections are used to execute the death sentence for criminals in American prisons they are frequently called "cruel and inhuman punishment."

Does a person have the right to end his life with dignity? Is it necessary to prolong a person's life when it is obvious that he has no chance to lead a "normal life"? Is it ethical to cut short the life of a hopelessly ill person in order to free him from unbearable torment and suffering? These and similar questions are very timely in our days, as life expectancy keeps increasing and mankind strives to better the quality of its earthly existence. Every physician and priest and each person, who to some extent or other has anything to do with the sick and dying, unavoidably will come up against these questions. What is the teaching of the Church concerning euthanasia (a Greek word, meaning "a good death")?

The Orthodox Church teaches that euthanasia is the deliberate cessation of human life, and, as such, must be condemned as murder. However, the headlong progress of contemporary medical technology and the various means of artificially sustaining life require that theologians make more precise the Church's approach to the problem of euthanasia "and the right of a person to put an end to his life."

Euthanasia is the act of painlessly killing hopelessly ill people. Proponents of euthanasia point out that the use of contemporary medicine and the means of treating the hopelessly ill does not lead to their recovery, but only agonizingly prolongs their dying. This in turn raises another moral question: Is it murder not to use the good things of contemporary medicine for prolonging the life of the hopelessly ill?

The Fathers of the Church teach that death is unnatural for man, because man was created not for death, but for life. Death, along with suffering and illness, which we talked about in our earlier catechetical discussions, occurs not according to God's will. Concerning this it says in the Book of Wisdom: For God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living.

For he created all things, that they might have their being: and the generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor the kingdom of death upon the earth. (Wis 1:13-14). And in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel we read: *For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.* (Ezek 18:32).

According to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, the meaning of Adam's sin is that man, who was created in the image and likeness of God and infused with breath by His Spirit, when he had appeared on the face of the earth, chose death instead of life, evil instead of righteousness. *Wherefore, as by one man*

(Adam) *sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned* (Rom 5:12), says the Apostle Paul. And having sinned, man brought death also to his children, who shared his nature and life.

Spiritual life for the Christian consists of dying with Christ to sin and the world and of passing with Him through the experience of bodily death in order to be resurrected in the Kingdom of God. Christians must transfigure their own death in the affirmation of life, meeting the tragedy of death with faith in the Lord and conquering, according to the words of the Apostle Paul, the last enemy – death: *The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.* (1 Cor 15:26). This conquering is by the power of one's faith: *I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* (Jn 11:25-26).

The deeply believing Christian must be ready to accept any death, for his faith in the Resurrection and in the infinite goodness of God are measured by his acceptance of death. A Christian is called to have “the remembrance of death,” that is, not to forget his mortality, and that the final triumph of light will appear only after the resurrection of the dead. But preparedness for death does not mean that earthly life loses its value. On the contrary, it remains the greatest good, and the Christian is called unto the fullness of the present life, in so far as he is able to fill up each moment of this life with the light of Christ's love.

It follows from this patristic presentation about life and death that a Christian is forbidden to participate in the deliberate cessation of the life of others, including also the hopelessly ill.

At the same time that the Church suffers together with people in extreme misfortune, She can by no means change her mission to preserve the sacred gift of life. The Church approves the use of various medicines and even narcotics to decrease the physical pain of the sufferer. In instances where it is completely evident that death is inescapable, and the person is spiritually prepared for death by means of confession and communion, the Church blesses that person to die, without the interference of various life-prolonging medical devices and drugs.

The Church tries to instill in the sufferer that his illness is caused by sin—not only his own, but also that of the whole world. If he bears his infirmity righteously, manfully and patiently, that is, with faith, hope and even joy, then he will become the greatest witness to God's salvation in this world. Nothing can compare with such patience, for the glorification of God in the midst of suffering and infirmity is the greatest of all offerings which a man can ever make from his life on earth.

All the saints suffered from some kind of bodily infirmity. And they all—even those who healed others by their prayers—

never asked healing for themselves. And the most obvious example is the example of Jesus Himself. Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, teaches the Apostle Peter in his First Epistle, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Pet 4:1-2). The Christian, according to the grace given him by the Lord, must spiritually accept participation in the sufferings of Christ.

At the same time that the Church blesses the hopelessly ill person to consciously prepare for death, not resorting to artificial means of supporting life, She decisively parts from those who consider that in all instances it is necessary, no matter what, to prolong the life of the dying by whatever means are available. In Her prayers “at the parting of the soul from the body,” the Church prays God to send to the hopelessly ill “a speedy and painless end,” believing that the prolonging of the life of the hopelessly ill enters into conflict with God's plan for that person.

One ought not to generalize about the Church's approach to this question. The problem of maintaining the life of the gravely ill needs an individualized approach, a careful and all-round discussion in each instance with the relatives of the ill person, his physician and spiritual father. Moreover, this discussion must be accompanied by prayer with the request for God's guidance.

The Church makes a precise differentiation between euthanasia and the decision not to use extraordinary means to maintain life in those instances when a person is hopelessly ill. The Church affirms the holiness of life, and it is the duty of each Christian in every way possible to protect life as a sacred gift of God. The sole form of “a good death,” from the Church's point of view, is the peaceful acceptance of the end of earthly life, enriched by faith and trust in God and the hope of resurrection in Christ.



Our life is a spiritual warfare with unseen evil spirits. They arouse us through our weaknesses and passions; they urge us to disobey the commandments of God. When we look with discernment, we will find that for every passion there is a cure—an opposing commandment. Therefore, the enemies of mankind try to keep us from this saving cure.

St. Macarius of Optina (+1860)

ON THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD

A Commentary on the Nativity Gospels, by Archbishop Averky.

Only two of the Evangelists tell us about the birth of Christ and the events surrounding it: St. Matthew and St. Luke. St. Matthew informs us concerning the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation to the righteous Joseph, the adoration of the wise men, the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt and the slaughter of the Bethlehem infants. St. Luke describes in greater detail the circumstances in which Christ the Saviour was born in Bethlehem and the adoration of the shepherds.

The Revelation of the Mystery of the Incarnation to the Righteous Joseph (Mt 1:18-25)

St. Matthew relates that soon after the betrothal of the Most Holy Virgin Mary to the aged Joseph, *before they came together*, that is, before the final conclusion of an actual marriage between them, it became clear to Joseph that Mary was found to be with child. Being a righteous man, that is on the one hand just and on the other merciful, Joseph did not wish to reveal before everyone her supposed sin, so as not to subject her to the shameful and cruel death accorded by the law of Moses (Deut 22:23-24). Instead, he decided to secretly release her from the betrothal without making known the reason for it. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and explained that He Who was to be born was *of the Holy Spirit*, and not the fruit of sin, as he mistakenly assumed. *And she shall bring forth a Son*, continued the angel, *and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins.*

In Hebrew the name *Jesus* is *Yeshua* and means *Saviour*. In order that Joseph not doubt the veracity of his words, the angel quoted the ancient prophecy of Isaiah which testifies that this great miracle or a seedless conception and the birth from a virgin of the Saviour of the world, was foreordained in the pre-eternal counsel of God: *A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son* (Isa 7:14). This is not to say that the prophecy was not fulfilled if the prophet said that *He shall be called Emmanuel*, and He Who was born of the Virgin was called Jesus. The name *Emmanuel* is not a proper name, but only symbolic. *Emmanuel* means *God is with us*. Thus, when this miraculous birth of the Child from the Virgin took place, the people would say: *God is with us*, for in Him God came down to earth and began to live among men. This was merely a prophetic indication of Christ's divinity, an indication that this miraculously conceived Infant would be not an ordinary man, but God. Convinced by the angel's words, Joseph *took unto him his wife*, that is, he renounced his intention to put her away from himself and left her to live in his home as a wife.

And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son. *Till, until*, this does not mean that after the birth of Jesus he *knew her* and began to live with her as a wife. St. John

Chrysostom rightly observes that it is incorrect to assume that such a righteous man as Joseph would decide to "know" the holy Virgin after she had so miraculously become a mother. In this case the word "till" can in no way be understood in the same way as it is interpreted by Protestants and other sectarians, who have no veneration for the Mother of God. These latter choose to believe that until the birth of Christ, Joseph did not know the Holy Virgin, but afterwards he did know her.

St. John Chrysostom states on the contrary, that Joseph never knew her. In the Holy Scripture this word is used for example, in the verse concerning the end of the Flood: a raven *went forth to and fro, till the waters were dried up from off the earth* (Gen 8:6), but ever afterwards it did not return. Or, for example, the words of the Lord: *Lo, I am with you always, even till the end of the world* (Mt 28:20); this, of course, does not mean, as the Blessed Theophilactos rightly observes, that after the end of the world Christ will no longer be with us. No! Then all the more will He be with us.

Here Christ is called the "firstborn" likewise not because after Him the Holy Virgin had more children, but only because He was the first to be born and also the only one.

In the Old Testament God commands that every first-born male child is to be dedicated to Him, regardless of whether or not there shall be other children. If in the Gospel there is made mention of *the brothers of Jesus Christ* (Mt 12:46; Jn 2:12; and others), this in no way means that He had brothers after the flesh. Holy Orthodox Tradition testifies that most likely these were the children of Joseph-the-Betrothed, from his first marriage.

The Time and Circumstances Surrounding the Birth of Christ (Lk 2:1-20)

The holy Evangelist Luke gives the most detailed account concerning the events associated with the Birth of Christ and the time that it took place. He refers the Birth of Christ to the census of all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. This census was conducted according to a decree of "Caesar Augustus," that is, the Roman Emperor Octavian upon whom the Roman Senate had conferred the title "Augustus," ("sacred,"). Unfortunately, the exact date of this census has not been preserved, but the time of the reign of Octavian Augustus, a well-known historical figure, gives us the possibility, at least to approximate, and with the help of other facts mentioned below, to calculate within a few years the year of Christ's birth.

It is customary we reckon dates "from the birth of Christ," a practice begun in the sixth century by the Roman monk Dionysius, called "the Lesser," who based his calculation on the supposition that the Lord Jesus Christ was born in the 754th year after the founding of Rome. This calculation, as was later shown by careful investigation, proved to be erroneous; Dionysius miscalculated by at least five years, indicating the year of Christ's birth later than it was in actuality. This Dio-

nysian era, at first assigned for use by the Church, from the 10th century, became widespread in Christian countries and accepted in civil dating systems, even though all chronologers today regard it as incorrect. The actual year of Christ's birth may be calculated more accurately on the basis of the following facts given in the Gospels:

(1) The time of the reign of Herod the Great. From Matthew 2:1-18 and Luke 1:5, it is perfectly clear that Christ was born during the reign of this Herod. Herod ruled from 714 until 750 (years from the founding of Rome). He died in 750, eight days before the Passover, soon after a lunar eclipse. But because, according to the calculation of astronomers, this eclipse occurred the night of the 13th-14th of March, 750, and the Jewish Passover that year fell on the 12th of April, it follows that Herod died in the beginning of April, 750 years from the foundation of Rome, that is, at least 4 years earlier than our era (i.e., at least 4 years earlier than that established by Dionysius).

(2) The national census, recorded in Luke 2:1-5, begun by an edicts of Augustus in 716, and was commenced for the Jews in the last years of Herod's reign. It was suspended upon Herod's death, then continued and was completed when Syria was ruled by Cyrenius, as recorded in Luke 2:2. The result of this census in Palestine was a popular uprising. Herod condemned its instigator to be burned March 12, 750. It is evident that this census must have begun shortly before this time.

(3) The reign of Tiberius Caesar, in the 15th year of which, according to the testimony of the Evangelist Luke (3:1), St. John the Baptist began to preach and the Lord Jesus Christ was 30 years old (Lk 3:23). Two years prior to his death in January 765, Augustus accepted Tiberius as a co-ruler. It follows that the 15th year of Tiberius' reign began in January, 779. According to the Evangelist Luke, the Lord Jesus was at that time *thirty years of age*; consequently, He was born in 749.

(4) Astronomical calculations show that the year of Christ's death on the Cross (which occurred according to the Gospel, in that year when the Jewish Passover began in the evening on Friday) could only have been in 783. At this time the Lord Jesus Christ was in His 34th year from birth; it therefore follows that He was born in the year 749 from the foundation of Rome.

Due to insufficiency of facts in the four Evangelists, one cannot determine precisely the day of Christ's Birth. The Eastern Church first celebrated this feast on the same day as Theophany under the general name, *Epiphany—The Appearance of God in the world*—on the 6th of January. In the Western Church, from ancient times, Christ's Nativity was celebrated on December 25th. From the end of the 4th century the Eastern Church also began to celebrate this feast on December 25th. This day was chosen for the celebration of Christ's Nativity for the following reasons:

It has been surmised that Zacharias was a high priest and that at the time the angel appeared to him, he was behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies where the high priest entered only once a year, on the day of purification. According to our calendar, this day falls on September 23, considered to be the day of the conception of the Forerunner. In the sixth month after this was the Annunciation to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, which began to be celebrated on the 25th day of March. And in nine months' time, that is, on December 25, the Lord Jesus Christ was born.

There are, however, no facts proving that Zacharias was a high priest. For this reason, it is more probable that the choice of day for celebrating the Birth of Christ had another, symbolic explanation. The ancients considered that Christ, like the second Adam, was conceived of the Holy Virgin at the time of the spring equinox, March 25, when, according to ancient tradition, the first Adam was also created. Christ was born—the Light of the world, the Sun of Righteousness nine months later, at the time of the winter solstice, when the day begins to lengthen and the night to shorten. By contrast, the conception of St. John the Baptist who was six months older than our Lord, is rightfully celebrated on September 23, at the time of the autumnal equinox, when the days begin to grow shorter. In this regard St. Athanasius points to the words of St. John the Baptist (Jn 3:30): *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

All had to go and register, every one into his own city. Roman politics always conformed to the customs of its subjects, and Jewish custom required that taxation be conducted by lineage, by family and tribe, for which reason everyone had to go to that town where there had lived the head of this lineage. Because Joseph was of the house of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem, the town of David's birth. Herein is seen God's wondrous providence: according to what was foretold by the holy prophet Micah (5:2), the Messiah was to be born in this town. Roman law required in subjugated countries, that women as well as men be subject to a head tax. In any case, it is not surprising that the Most Holy Virgin Mary in her condition accompanied the guardian of her virginity, the elderly Joseph, all the more so since she, knowing undoubtedly the prophecy of the holy Micah, could not help but see in the decree of taxation the action of God's Providence directing her to Bethlehem.

And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. The Evangelist emphasized the fact that the Holy Virgin herself swaddled her newborn Infant; this is to say, the birth was painless.

Due to the great number of travelers who had arrived earlier, and due to their poverty, the Holy Family was obliged to take lodging in a cave or grotto. Palestine had an abundance of such caves into which shepherds often herded their flocks in foul

weather. Here also was born the Divine Messiah, placed into a manger instead of a cradle, from His very birth taking upon Himself the cross of abasement and suffering for the redemption of mankind; thus, by His very birth giving us a lesson of humility, this highest of virtues which later He constantly taught to His followers. According to ancient tradition, at the time of the Saviour's birth, there stood by the manger an ox and a donkey, showing that *the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.* (Isa 1:3).

But it was not abasement alone that accompanied the birth and the entire earthly life of the Saviour, but also the reflection of His Divine glory. There were shepherds—perhaps those to whom the cave' belonged—who, thanks to the good weather, were spending the night in the fields. An angel of the Lord, shining with Divine glory, appeared and announced to them the *great joy* of the birth in the city of David of the Saviour *Who is Christ the Lord.*

Here it is important to note the angel's words, that this *great joy* was to be for *all people*, that is, that the Messiah came not for the Jews alone. And he conveyed the sign that the Holy Infant was to be found *wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.* And immediately, as though in confirmation of the angel's words, there appeared a multitude of the heavenly host, that is, a hundredfold of angels, singing Divine praise to the newly born God-Child—the Messiah: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!* [Ed., in several translations of the Scriptures, one finds the singing of angels to be the more accurate *Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will.*]

The *peace* brought to earth by the incarnate Son of God, must not be confused with an ordinary external human tranquility and well-being; this is the peace of conscience in the heart of a sinner, redeemed by Christ the Saviour; the peace of a conscience reconciled with God, with people, and with itself.

And in what measure this peace of God, which is above all *understanding* (Phil 4:7), dwells in the hearts of those who believe in Christ, so will the outer world become the inheritance of human life. The redemption manifested the full measure of greatness of God's good will, God's love towards men. For this reason the meaning of the angels' hymn is the following: *Worthily do the heavenly spirits praise God. For peace and salvation dwells upon earth, for mankind has been vouchsafed the special favor of God.*

The shepherds, being evidently righteous, immediately hastened to the place indicated by the angel. They were the first worthy to worship the newborn Infant-Christ. Wherever they went, they told of the joyous appearance of the angel and of the heavenly doxology, and all who heard them were amazed. The Most Holy Virgin Mary, with a feeling of deep humility, remembered all this, *and kept all these things in her heart.*

A DIALOGUE ON ATHEISM

From the book "From the Life and the Teaching of Father Epiphanius," by the Holy Monastery of the Theotokos (a men's monastery, located near the small town of Trizina, in Peloponnese, Greece).

One morning, the Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos was in a conversation with 2-3 visitors at his home. One of them was an ideological atheist and a communist. Suddenly, someone from outside came rushing in, and informed them that the city of Athens had been flooded with photographs of Mao Tse Tung, with the inscription "Glory to the great Mao." It was on the same day that the Chinese dictator had died.

Elder: That's the way things are, my child. Atheists do not exist. Only idolaters exist, who take down Christ from His throne and in His place they enthrone their own idols. We say: *Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.* They say: "Glory to the great Mao." You pick and choose which one you prefer.

Atheist: You also choose your drug, grandpa. The only difference is, that you call it Christ, others call it Allah, or Buddha, etc.

Elder: My child, Christ is not a drug. Christ is the Creator of the entire universe. He is the one Who governs everything wisely, from the multitudes of infinite galaxies, down to the minutest particles of the microcosm. He has given life to all of us. He is the One Who brought you into this world and has bestowed you with so much freedom, that you can actually doubt Him, and even deny Him.

Atheist: Grandpa, its your right to believe in all of those things. But that doesn't mean they are true. Do you have any proof?

Elder: You think all of this is just a fairy tale, don't you?

Atheist: Naturally.

Elder: Do you have any proof that it is a fairy tale? Can you prove that what I believe is false?

Atheist:

Elder: You didn't reply because you don't have any proof either. This means, you believe they are fairy tales. I spoke to you of believing, when I referred to God; you, however, although rejecting my belief, essentially believe in your faithlessness, since you cannot back it up with proofs either. However, I must tell you that my belief is not something "out of the blue;" There are certain supernatural events, upon which it is founded.

Atheist: Just a minute! Since we are talking about believing, what would you say to Muslims or Buddhists for example? Because they also talk about believing. And they too have high moral standards. Why is your belief better than theirs?

Elder: So! The criterion of the truth is supposedly judged by this question of yours? Because the truth is most certainly one; truths cannot be many in number. The thing is, who is the possessor of the truth? That is the major question. Hence,

it is not a matter of a better or worse belief. It is a matter of the only true belief!

I agree, that other beliefs also have moral teachings. Naturally, Christianity's moral teachings are incomparably superior. But, we do not believe in Christ because of His moral teachings. Or for His prompting to "Love one another," or for His sermons on peace and justice, freedom and equality. We believe in Christ, because His presence on earth was accompanied by supernatural events, which was a sign that He is God.

Atheist: Look, I also admit that Christ was an important philosopher and a great revolutionary, but let's not make Him a God now...

Elder: My dear child! All the great disbelievers in history were snagged by that detail. The fishbone that stuck in their throat, which they just couldn't swallow, was exactly that: That Christ is also God.

Many of them were willing to say to God: "Don't tell anyone that You are God incarnate; Just say that You're an ordinary human, and we shall be more than ready to deify you. Why do You want to be an incarnate God, and not a deified human? We are willing to glorify You, to proclaim You as the greatest among men, the holiest, the most ethical, the noblest, the unsurpassable, the one and only, the unprecedented... Isn't that enough for You ?

Ernest Renan—he was the head of the chorus of deniers—thunders out the following, with regard to Christ: "For tens of thousands of years, the world shall be uplifted through You," and "You are the cornerstone of mankind; if one were to wrench Your name away from this world, it would be like shattering its foundations" and "the aeons shall proclaim that amongst the sons of men, never was there born anyone that could surpass You." But this is where Renan and his likes stop. Their very next phrase is: "But a God, You are not!"

And those poor wretches cannot perceive that all of these things constitute an indescribable tragedy! Their dilemma is inevitably relentless: Either Christ is an incarnate God, in which case, He is indeed the most ethical, the holiest and noblest personage of mankind, or, He is not an incarnate God, in which case, He cannot possibly be any of these. In fact, if Christ is not God, then we are talking about the most horrible, the most atrocious and the most despicable existence in the history of mankind.

Atheist: What did you just say?

Elder: Exactly what you heard! It may be a weighty statement, but it is absolutely true. And I will tell you why. Let me ask: What did all the truly great men say about themselves, or what opinion did they have of themselves ?

The "wisest of all men," Socrates, proclaimed that "I came to know one thing: that I know nothing."

All the important men in the Old and New Testament, from Abraham and Moses, through to John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul, characterized themselves as "earth and ashes," "wretches," "monstrosities," etc.

But, strangely enough, Jesus' attitude is quite the opposite! And I say strangely enough, because it would have been natural and logical for Him to have a similar attitude. In fact, being far superior and surpassing all others, He should have had an even lower and humbler opinion of Himself. Ethically more perfect than any other, He should have surpassed everyone and anyone in self-reproach and humility, from the moment of the world's Creation to the end of Time.

But, the exact opposite is observed!

First of all, He proclaims that He is sinless: *Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?* (Jn 8:46). *Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.* (Jn 14:30)

He also pronounces very high ideas of Himself: *I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life* (Jn 8:12); *I am the way, the truth, and the life* (Jn 14:6).

But, apart from these, He also projects demands of absolute dedication to His Person. He even penetrates the holiest of man's relationships, and says: *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* (Mt 10:37). *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.* (Mt 10:35). He even demands a life and a death of martyrdom from His disciples: *They shall deliver you to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you shall be dragged before leaders and kings for My sake... And brother shall deliver his brother to death and the father his son, and the children shall revolt against their parents and shall put them to death... And you shall be hated by everyone, for my namesake... And he that shall endure to the end, he shall be saved... Do not fear those who destroy the body... Whomsoever shall deny Me before mankind, I too shall deny him... Whomsoever has forfeited his soul for My sake, shall recover it.* (Mt 10:17 onward)

And now I ask you: Has anyone ever dared to demand for himself the love of mankind, forsaking their very life? Has anyone ever dared to proclaim his absolute sinlessness? Has anyone ever dared to utter the words *I am the truth*? No-one, and nowhere! Only a God can do that. Can you imagine your Marx uttering things like that? They would take him for a lunatic and nobody would be willing to follow him!

Now, just consider, how many people sacrificed everything for Christ's sake, even their very life, having believed in the veracity of His words regarding Himself! If His proclamations about Himself were false, Jesus would have been the most despicable character in history, for having led so many people to such a huge sacrifice! What ordinary man—no matter how great, how important, how wise he may be—would deserve such a tremendous offer and sacrifice? Well? No-one! Not unless he were God!

In other words: Any ordinary man that would demand such a sacrifice from his followers would have been the most loath-

some person in history. Christ, however, both demanded it, and achieved it. Yet, despite this ‘achievement’, He was proclaimed by the very deniers of His divinity as the noblest and holiest figure in history.

So, either the deniers are being illogical when they proclaim this most loathsome figure as “holiest,” or, in order to avoid any illogicality, and to rationalize the co-existence of Christ’s demands and His holiness, they must concede to accepting that Christ continues to remain the noblest and holiest figure in mankind, but, only under the condition that He is also God! Otherwise, as we said, He would be, not the holiest, but the most loathsome figure in history, being the cause of the greatest sacrifice of all ages, and in the name of a lie! Thus, Christ’s divinity is proved by His very deniers, on the basis of those very characterizations of His person!

Atheist: What you just said is really very impressive, but it is nothing but speculation. Do you have any historical facts that would confirm His Divinity?

Elder: I told you at the beginning, that the proofs of His Divinity are the supernatural events that took place while He was here on earth. Christ did not rest on the proclamation of the above truths alone; He certified His statements with miracles as well. He made blind people see and cripples walk; He satisfied the hunger of five thousand men and manifold numbers of women and children with only two fish and five loaves of bread; He commanded the elements of nature and they obeyed; He resurrected the dead, amongst which was Lazarus, four days after his death. But the most astounding of all his miracles was His own Resurrection.

The entire edifice of Christianity is supported on the event of the Resurrection. This is not my speculation. The Apostle Paul said it: *And if Christ be not raised* (from the dead), *our faith would be vain.* (1 Cor 15:17). If Christ is not resurrected, then everything collapses. But Christ was resurrected, which means He is the Lord of life and death, therefore God.

Atheist: Did you see all of this? How can you believe it?

Elder: No, I didn’t see any of it, but others did: the Apostles. They in turn made this known to others, and they actually “signed” their testimony with their own blood. And, as everyone acknowledges, a testimony of one’s life is the supreme form of testimony.

Why don’t you likewise bring me someone, who will tell me that Marx died and was resurrected, and that he is willing to sacrifice his life in order to testify it? I, as an honest man, will believe him.

Atheist: I will tell you. Thousands of communists were tortured and died for their ideology. Why don’t you embrace communism in the same way?

Elder: You said it yourself. Communists died for their ideology. They didn’t die for real events. In an ideology, it is very easy for deception to seep through; and because it is a characteristic of the human soul to sacrifice itself for something it believes in, this explains why so many communists died

for their ideology. But that doesn’t compel us to accept this ideology as something true.

It is one thing to die for ideas, and another to die for events. The Apostles didn’t die for any ideas. Not even for the *love one another*, or any of the other moral teachings of Christianity. The Apostles died for their testimony of supernatural events. And when we say ‘event’, we mean that which is captured by our physical senses, and is comprehended through them.

The Apostles suffered martyrdom for *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.* (1 Jn 1:1).

Just like the clever speculation by Pascal, we say that one of the three following things happened to the Apostles: either they were deceived, or, they deceived us, or, they told us the truth.

Let’s take the first case. It is not possible for the Apostles to have been deceived, because everything that they reported was not reported to them by others. They themselves were eye and ear witnesses of all those things. Besides, none of them were imaginative characters, nor did they have any psychological inclination that made them accept the event of the Resurrection. Quite the contrary—they were terribly distrustful. The Gospels are extremely revealing, in their narrations of their spiritual dispositions: they even disbelieved the reassurances that some people had actually seen Him, resurrected.

And one other thing. What were the Apostles before Christ called them? Were they perhaps ambitious politicians or visionaries of philosophical and social systems, who were longing to conquer mankind and thus satisfy their fantasies? Not at all. They were illiterate fishermen. The only thing that interested them was to catch a few fish to feed their families. That is why, even after the Lord’s Crucifixion, and despite everything that they had heard and seen, they returned to their fishing boats and their nets. In other words, there was not a single trace of disposition in these men for the things that were to follow. It was only after the day of the Pentecost, *when they received strength from on high*, that they became the teachers of the universe.

Now the second case: Did they deceive us? Did they lie to us? But then, why would they deceive us? What would they gain by lying? Was it money? Was it status? Was it glory? For someone to tell a lie, he must be expecting some sort of gain. The Apostles though, by preaching Christ—and in fact Christ crucified and resurrected—the only things that they secured for themselves were hardships, labours, lashings, stonings, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, nakedness, attacks from robbers, beatings, incarcerations and finally, death. And all this, for a lie? It would be undoubtedly foolish for anyone to even consider it.

Consequently, the Apostles were neither deceived, nor did they deceive us. This leaves us with the third choice: that they told us the truth.

I should also stress something else here: The Evangelists are the only ones who recorded true historical events. They describe the events, and only the events. They do not resort to any personal judgments. They praise no-one, and they criticize no-one. They make no attempt to exaggerate an event, nor eliminate or underestimate another. They let the events speak for themselves.

Atheist: Are you excluding the possibility that in Christ's case, it was just an incident of apparent death? The other day, the newspapers had written about someone in India whom they buried and three days later they exhumed him and he was still alive.

Elder: My poor child! I will recall the words of the blessed Augustine again: "O faithless ones, you are not actually mistrustful; indeed, you are the most gullible of all. You accept the most improbable things, and the most irrational, the most contradictory, in order to deny a miracle!"

No, my child. It was not a case of apparent death with Christ. First of all, we have the testimony of the Roman centurion, who reassured Pilate that Christ's death was a certainty. Then, our Gospel informs us that on the same day of His Resurrection, the Lord was seen talking with two of His disciples, walking towards Emmaus, which was more than ten kilometers away from Jerusalem.

Can you imagine someone, who could go through all the tortures that Christ underwent, and three days after His "apparent death," spring back again? If anything, he would have to be fed chicken soup for forty days, in order to be able to open his eyes, let alone walk and talk as though nothing had happened!

As for the Hindu, bring him here to be flogged with a scourge—do you know what a scourge is? It is a whip, whose lashes each have a lead chunk or a piece of broken bone or sharp nails attached to their end—bring him here, so we can flog him, then force a crown of thorns on his head, crucify him, give him bile and vinegar to drink, then pierce his side with a spear, put him in a tomb, and then, if he comes back from the dead, then we can talk.

Atheist: Even so, but all the testimonies that you have invoked belong to Christ's Disciples. Is there any testimony on this matter, that doesn't come from the circle of His Disciples? Are there any historians for example, who can certify Christ's Resurrection? If so, then I will also believe what you say.

Elder: You poor child. You don't know what you're saying now. If there had been such historians who had witnessed Christ resurrected, they would have been compelled to believe in His Resurrection and would have recorded it as believers, in which case, you would again have rejected their testimony, just like you rejected Peter's testimony, John's testimony, etc. How can it be possible, for someone to actually witness the Resurrection and yet, NOT become a Christian? You are asking for a roasted fowl, on a waxen skewer, that also sings! It just can't be done.

I will remind you though—because you are asking for historians—of what I said earlier: that the only true historians are the Apostles.

Nevertheless, we do have testimony of the kind that you want; and it is by someone who didn't belong to the circle of His Disciples: it was Paul. Paul not only wasn't a Disciple of Christ, he actually persecuted Christ's Church relentlessly.

Atheist: They say that Paul suffered from sunstroke and that it was the cause of his hallucination.

Elder: My child, if Paul was hallucinating, the thing that would have come to the surface, would have been his subconscious. And in Paul's subconscious, the Patriarchs and the Prophets would have been top ranking. He would have hallucinated about Abraham, and Jacob and Moses, and not Jesus, whom he considered a rabble-rouser and a fraud!

Can you imagine a faithful old granny seeing Buddha or Jupiter in her dream or delirium? She would most probably see St. Nicholas or St. Barbara, because she believes in them.

One more thing. With Paul, we have—as Papini notes—the following miraculous phenomena: First of all, the abruptness of his conversion. Straight from faithlessness to faith, with no intermediate preparatory stage. Secondly, the steadfastness of his faith; no wavering, no doubts. And thirdly, his faith lasted for a whole lifetime. Do you believe that all these things can occur after a case of sunstroke? They can in no way be attributed to such a cause. If you can explain how, then explain it. If you can't, then you must admit the miracle. And you must know that for a man of his time, Paul was exceptionally well-educated. He was not your average little person, who was totally clueless.

I will also add something else. We today, my child, are living in an exceptional era. We are living the miracle of Christ's Church. When Christ said of His Church that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against Her* (Mt 16:18), His followers were very few in number. Almost two thousand years have passed, since that day. Empires vanished, philosophical systems were forgotten, world theories collapsed. But Christ's Church remains indestructible, despite the continuous and dramatic persecutions it has undergone. Isn't that a miracle?

And one final thing. In Luke's Gospel it says that when the Holy Mother visited Elizabeth (the Baptist's mother) after the Annunciation, she was greeted with the words: *Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.* (Lk 1:42). And the Holy Mother replied as follows: *And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.* (Lk 1:47-48).

What was the Holy Mother at that time? She was just an obscure daughter of Nazareth. How many knew her? And yet, since that day, empresses have been forgotten, distinguished women's names have been extinguished, the mothers and wives of great generals went into oblivion. Who remembers, or even knows, Napoleon's mother or Alexander the Great's

mother? Almost no-one. But, millions of lips across every length and breadth of the world, throughout the ages, venerate that humble daughter of Nazareth, the *more precious than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim*. Are we, or aren't we—the people of the twentieth century—living in this day and age the verification of those words of the Holy Mother?

The exact same things are observed in a “secondary” prophecy of Christ: While He was staying at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him and poured her expensive fragrant oil over His head. Christ commented: *Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.* (Mt 26:13). Now, how large was His circle of followers at the time, so that one could say that they outdid themselves in order that their Master's prophecy be fulfilled? Especially a prophecy such as this one, which, by today's world standards, is of no importance to most people.

Are they or aren't they miracles? If you can, explain them. But if you can't, then admit them as such.

Atheist: I have to admit that your arguments are pretty solid. But I would like to ask you one more thing: Don't you think that Christ left His work unfinished? That is, unless He deserted us. I can't imagine a God that would remain indifferent to mankind's suffering. We are down here toiling, while He, up there, remains apathetic.

Elder: No, my child. You aren't right. Christ did not leave His work unfinished. On the contrary, He is the one unique case in history where a person has the certainty that His mission was accomplished, and had nothing further to do or to say.

Even the greatest of philosophers, Socrates, who discussed and taught during his whole lifetime, and towards the end composed an intricate “Apology,” would have even more to say, if he had lived.

Only Christ—in the time bracket of three years—taught what He had to teach, did what He had to do, and finally said (on the Cross): *It is finished.* Another sample of His divine perfection and authority.

As for the abandonment that you mentioned, I can understand your concern. Without Christ, the world would be a theatre of insanity. Without Christ, you cannot explain anything: why are there sorrows, why injustices, why failures, why sicknesses, why, why, why... Thousands of monumental “why's.”

Try to understand. Man cannot approach all of these “why's” with his finite logic. It is only through Christ that everything can be explained. All these trials merely precondition us for eternity. Perhaps then, we might be honored by the Lord with a reply to some of those “why's.”

It might be worthwhile, if I read you a beautiful poem by Constantine Kallinikos' collection “Laurels and Myrtles,” with the title “Questions:”

I asked a desert father of seventy years,
 whose silver strands were blown by the wind:
 Tell me o father, why, on this earth,
 do the light and the dark inseparably move ?
 And why must they—like twins —together sprout:
 the thorn and the rose, the tear and the smile?
 Why, in the loveliest part of the woodland green
 have scorpions and vipers concealed their nests?
 Why must it be, that the tender bud,
 before unfolding its fragrant bloom,
 be struck by a worm in the heart of its stem,
 and left to die, like a shrivelled rag ?
 Why are the plow, the seed and the hands
 a must for the wheat, to become our bread?
 Why must everything useful, noble, divine
 always be purchased with tears and our blood,
 while selfishness ever rampantly reigns,
 and lewdness is swallowing up the world?
 And why, amongst such harmony around,
 must tumult and disorder find their way?
 The hermit replied, with his somber voice
 and right arm pointing to the sky,
 that there, beyond those clouds of gold,
 the Almighty weaves a tapestry divine.
 But since we are wanderers of the lower plane
 we see nothing but the knots and strings below,
 It is no wonder, why the mind sees wrong,
 when it should always be thankful and give praise:
 For the day will come, when Christians all,
 with souls that ride the skies with wings,
 will gaze atop God's tapestry and see
 how careful and orderly everything was!

My child, Christ never abandoned us. He is forever with us, as a helper and a supporter, until the end of time. But you will realize this, only when you become a conscientious member of His Church and be joined by Her Sacraments.



The soul must be constantly ready and alert and always in contact with the spiritual headquarters, that is, God. Only then it will feel secure, full of hope and joy.

When I was in the army, during the war, I was a radio operator. I noticed that we felt secure only when we communicated with the Army Division on an hourly basis. When our communication was limited to every two hours, we felt a little bit insecure; sometimes, when we could only be in touch with them twice a day, we felt uncomfortable, lonely and lost. The same thing applies to our prayer. The more we pray, the more secure we feel, on a spiritual basis, of course.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain

THE HOLY PROHET DANIEL ON THINGS TO COME

By St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XX, Ch. 23.

Daniel prophesies of the last judgment in such a way as to indicate that Antichrist shall first come, and to carry on his description to the eternal reign of the saints. For when in prophetic vision he had seen four beasts, signifying four kingdoms, and the fourth conquered by a certain king, who is recognized as Antichrist, and after this the eternal kingdom of the Son of man, that is to say, of Christ, he says, *My spirit was terrified, I Daniel in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me, etc.*

Some have interpreted these four kingdoms as signifying those of the Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans. They, who desire to understand the fitness of this interpretation, may read Jerome's book on Daniel, which is written with a sufficiency of care and erudition. But he who reads this passage, even half asleep, cannot fail to see that the kingdom of Antichrist shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church before the last judgment of God shall introduce the eternal reign of the saints. For it is patent from the context that the time, times, and half a time, means a year, and two years, and half a year, that is to say, three years and a half.

Sometimes in Scripture the same thing is indicated by months. For though the word times seems to be used here in the Latin indefinitely, that is only because the Latins have no dual, as the Greeks have, and as the Hebrews also are said to have. Times, therefore, is used for two times. As for the ten kings, whom, as it seems, Antichrist is to find in the person of ten individuals when he comes, I am afraid we may be deceived in this, and that he may come unexpectedly while there are not ten kings living in the Roman world. For what if this number ten signifies the whole number of kings who are to precede his coming, as totality is frequently symbolized by a thousand, or a hundred, or seven, or other numbers, which it is not necessary to recount?

In another place the same Daniel says, *And there shall be a time of trouble, such as was not since there was born a nation upon earth until that time: and in that time all Thy people which shall be found written in the book shall be delivered. And many of them that sleep in the mound of earth shall arise, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting confusion. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and many of the just as the stars for ever.*

This passage is very similar to the one we have quoted from the Gospel, at least so far as regards the resurrection of dead bodies. For those who are there said to be *in the graves* are here spoken of as *sleeping in the mound of earth*, or, as others

translate, *in the dust of earth*. There it is said, *They shall come forth*; so here, *They shall arise*. There, *They that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment*; here, *Some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting confusion*.

Neither is it to be supposed a difference, though in place of the expression in the Gospel, *All who are in their graves*, the prophet does not say *all*, but *many of them that sleep in the mound of earth*. For *many* is sometimes used in Scripture for all. Thus it was said to Abraham, *I have set thee as the father of many nations*, though in another place it was said to him, *In thy seed shall all nations be blessed*. Of such a resurrection it is said a little afterwards to the prophet himself, *And come thou and rest: for there is yet a day till the completion of the consummation; and thou shall rest, and rise in thy lot in the end of the days*.



ON ABORTION

Wherefore I beseech you, flee fornication... Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? Where there are many efforts at abortion? Where there is murder before the birth? For even the harlot you do not let continue a mere harlot, but make her a murderess also.

You see how drunkenness leads to prostitution, prostitution to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather to something even worse than murder. For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevents its being born.

Why then do you abuse the gift of God, and fight with His laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the chamber of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for childbearing unto slaughter? For with a view to drawing more money by being agreeable and an object of longing to her lovers, even this she is not backward to do, so heaping upon thy head a great pile of fire. For even if the daring deed be hers, yet the causing of it is yours.

St. John Chrysostom. *Homilies on Romans* 24



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HERRY CHRISTMAS

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“ANOTHER” SHALL COME IN HIS OWN NAME, HIM WILL YE RECEIVE...

Source: *Homilies Of St. John Chrysostom On The Gospel According To St. John, Excerpt From Homily XLI.*

I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him will ye receive.

[Jn 5:43]

Seest thou that He everywhere declareth that He hath been “sent,” that judgment hath been committed to Him by the Father, that He can do nothing of Himself, in order that He may cut off all excuse for their unfairness? But who is it that He here saith shall come “in His own name”?

He alludeth here to Antichrist, and putteth an incontrovertible proof of their unfairness. For if as loving God ye persecute Me, much more ought this to have taken place in the case of Antichrist. For he will neither say that he is sent by the Father, nor that he cometh according to his will, but in everything contrariwise, seizing like a tyrant what belongeth not to him, and asserting that he is the very God over all, as Paul saith, *Exalting himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, showing himself that he is God.* (2 Thess 2:4).

This is to ‘come in his own name.’ I do not so, but am come in the Name of My Father.” That they received not One who said that He was sent of God, was a sufficient proof that they loved not God; but now from the contrary of this fact, from their being about to receive Antichrist, He showeth their shamelessness. For

when they received not One who asserteth that He was sent by God, and are about to worship one who knoweth Him not, and who saith that he is God over all, it is clear that their persecution proceeded from malice and from hating God. On this account He putteth two reasons for His words; and first the kinder one, *That ye may be saved*; and, *That ye may have life*: and when they would have mocked at Him, He putteth the other which was more striking, showing that even although His hearers should not believe, yet that God was wont always to do His own works.

Now Paul speaking concerning Antichrist said prophetically, that *God shall send them strong delusion,--that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (2 Thess. 2:11-12). Christ said not, “*He shall come*”; but, “*if He come,*” from tenderness for His hearers; and because all their obstinacy was not yet complete. He was silent as to the reason of His coming; but Paul, for those who can understand, has particularly alluded to it. For it is he who taketh away all excuse from them.

Christ then putteth also the cause of their unbelief, saying, *How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?* (Jn 5:44)

Hence again He showeth that they looked not to the things of God, but that under this pretense they desired to gratify private feeling, and were so far from doing this on account of His glory, that they preferred honor from men to that which cometh from Him. How then were they likely to entertain such hostility towards Him for a kind of honor which they so despised, as to prefer to it the honor which cometh from men?